National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

Uncapping the Volcano: Malcolm Lowry, Literary Creativity, and Writer's Block

Struan Sinclair
Department of English
McGill University, Montreal
June, 1995

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

© Struan Sinclair 1995

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-07959-7

Canada

Contents

Abstract

Literary creativity and its shadow, the phenomenon popularly referred to as writer's block, have historically been accorded little attention by literary studies. In my thesis I seek to redress this oversight, illustrating my argument with reference to the creative life and works of Malcolm Lowry. I begin by arguing for a model of literary creativity that takes seriously the roles played by plans and intentions in motivating, sustaining and appropriately terminating literary creative action. I employ this model in order to provide a basis from which to clarify Lowry's own creative method.

I go on to rehearse and evaluate definitions and theories of writer's block from a variety of research paradigms. From these accounts I distill some important general features of writer's block. I argue that writer's block typically occurs as an intervention between stages of the literary creative process.

Finally, I return to detailed consideration of Lowry's creative method. I investigate three critical periods of writer's block in Lowry's later life and examine these interventions with reference to circumstantial, methodological and goal-based considerations. I conclude by drawing attention to the importance for literary studies of an accurate and comprehensive understanding of both literary creativity and writer's block.

Résumé

Historiquement, les études littéraires ont prêté peu d'attention aux problèmes de la créativité littéraire et de son ombre, ce phénomène communément appelé «la hantise de la page blanche». Dans ce mémoire, je cherche à redresser cet oublie en examinant la vie créatrice at l'oeuvre de Malcolm Lowry. Je commence en mettant de l'avant un modèle de la créativité littéraire qui prend au sérieux les rôles joués par la planification et les intentions dans la motivation, la poursuite, et la conclusion opportune de l'action créatrice littéraire. J'utilise ce modèle afin d'établir une base solide pour la clarification de la méthode créatrice propre à Malcolm Lowry.

Je poursuis avec une compte rendu et une évaluation des définitions et théories qu'offrent plusieurs différents paradigmes de recherches sur la hantise de la page blanche. Me basant sur ces études, je fais ressortir quelques éléments-clés du phénomène et je soutiens qu'il présente typiquement comme intervention entre les étapes du processus de la création littéraire.

Finalement, je retourne à une étude détaillée de la méthode créatrice de Lowry. Je regarde trois périodes critiques vers la fin de sa vie où Lowry a souffert de la hantise de la page blanche et j'examine ces interventions en tenant compte des questions de circonstances, de méthodologie et de but poursuivi. Je termine en constatant l'importance pour les études littéraires d'une compréhension juste et complète de la créativité littéraire, ainsi que de la hantise de la page blanche.

Notes on Abbreviations

Where possible, first editions of the major Lowry texts have been used. Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry is cited as SL. Manuscript material from the University of British Colombia Library, Special Collections and University Archives Division, Malcolm Lowry Collection, is indicated parenthetically by box and file number. The one exception is Lowry's 1951 "Work in Progress" statement, which is cited as "WP" followed by the page number. There have been no silent changes to the manuscript material.

Introduction

In November of 1954, with Malcolm locked in battle with the ever-expanding October Ferry to Gabriola, Margerie Lowry closed a letter to the editor Albert Erskine with the following few lines: "Malc is engaged in a life and death struggle with this bloody story, which seems to have become a novel, and he's determined to get through it this week before it kills us both." (3:5). This was no exaggeration; Lowry's difficulties with October Ferry were intimately linked to his increasingly desperate fight to regain control of his writing and his life. Without sufficient funds to continue to write unencumbered by financial considerations, unable to fulfil a crucial contract with Random House and deeply scarred by the collapse of his vast novel cycle "The Voyage That Never Ends," Lowry found himself drawing dangerously near an abyss of his own creation.

Already by the middle of 1954 it was obvious to the management at Random House that Lowry was a bad risk. A contract that stipulated three novels in three years seemed sheer folly where Lowry was concerned. After all, Lowry, was a notorious eccentric, alcoholic and loner whose two previous novels (Ultramarine and Under the Volcano) had taken respectively four and ten years to complete. At the same time, the Volcano had received critical raves from Paris to New York, and Lowry seemed poised on the edge of international celebrity. An emergency decision was called for, and in the end Random House decided to suspend Lowry's monthly payments. In typical Lowry fashion, the stipend intended to enable him at last to write trouble-free had exactly the opposite effect. Constantly aware of his obligations to Erskine and Random House, Lowry was barely capable of deciding which of his works to submit for consideration, let alone on the threshold of completing them.

Lowry's trials with Random House underscore the complexities of his life and, more importantly for my purposes here, of his creative method. More than any other writer of his stature Lowry is identified with a single work. This of course is his 1947 masterpiece Under the Volcano, a novel which still commands at most a cult following. With his death in 1957 Lowry passed into relative obscurity, and remains today "almost certainly the least-known of British literary geniuses" (Bowker 612). At the time of his death, Malcolm Lowry had published just two novels. Yet Lowry's extant literary corpus, comprising Ultramarine and Under the Volcano along with the posthumously published Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, October Ferry to Gabriola, Lunar Caustic and Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, is consistent with significant creative activity. Why then was Lowry unable to publish in his lifetime another novel after the Volcano--itself literally wrenched from his unwilling hands by friends and mentors?

Responses to this question run the gamut of informed guesswork to benign disinterest to wild speculation. An example of the former is offered by Sherrill Grace in her study of Malcolm Lowry entitled The Voyage That Never Ends. Working from a sophisticated account of Lowry's philosophical influences and obsessions, Grace proposes the image of the circle as an essential guiding symbol for Lowry's "perpetually Protean" fictional journey of discovery, spiritual revelation and self-knowledge (6). According to Grace, Lowry intended his personal metaphysics, culled from such sources as Samuel Coleridge and the mystical philosophers Ortega Y Gasset and P. D. Oupensky, to provide a unifying force sufficient to weld his disparate individual artistic achievements into a powerful "organic whole" (7). As a consequence, Lowry began to generate the grand

themes central to so much of his fiction: the eternal cycle of quest and return, the delicate balance between uncertain salvation and a beckoning hell, and the necessity to humans of syncopating their internal motions with universal rhythms. His lifelong concern with these themes had the advantage of raising Lowry's best work to a level of semantic and symbolic richness almost unsurpassed in fiction, and the disadvantage of legitimating his reluctance to complete local and larger instances of creative activity. Lowry believed sincerely that his own life and artistic development parallelled the mystical searches of his protagonists. While this precarious logic served to motivate and inform his evolving creative method, it was also, I shall contend, the locus of his later writer's block.

By any standard, Malcolm Lowry provides a remarkable focal point for an inquiry into the springs of human literary creativity: his profound and unsparing understanding of his own writerly strengths and weaknesses; his remarkable ear for the complexities of literary construction; and his consistently elegant, revelatory correspondence all serve to make him a uniquely valuable study in literary creative action.

In addition, Lowry's later writing is as much concerned with creative failure as with its progress. The mental and physical anguish that Lowry endured in the course of his writing is close to the heart of Dark as the Grave and many of the stories in Hear Us O Lord. In these works, a great deal of narrative attention centres on the difficulty of capturing important truths in the face of elusive, even frustrated creativity. As Lowry explained in a 1957 letter to his young friend and protégé David Markson, the problem with his own brand of creativity was its tendency to occur in flashes, "rarely lighting the

place you are working on sequentially: this means you have to turn desultoriness into a virtue, and it's sometimes hard to work dashing around picking up your charred smithereens or even bright illuminations and piecing them together, especially when they seem to mean bugger all" (3:11).

At this point, taking my cue from Lowry's preceding micro-account of creative process and blockage, I shall begin my own investigation. In what follows, I shall interweave two seemingly disparate threads into a unified argument, linking my models of creativity and writer's block to Lowry's own creative process. I shall trace the trajectory of his evolving creative method from his early days under the tutelage of Conrad Aiken to his last years in the English village of Ripe. In this manner I shall, looking backwards and forwards, Janus-fashion, illuminate the special case of Malcolm Lowry even as the fine-grained revelations emerging from this examination guide and refine my understanding of literary creativity and its shadow, the phenomenon popularly referred to as writer's block.

This paper consists of four chapters. In Chapter One, I shall provide a brief biographical introduction to Malcolm Lowry's life and works. I shall nuance this account by identifying what I take to be the four central features of his creative method; namely, the processes I call gathering, organization, inscription and revision. I shall then apply these terms in consideration of Lowry's development and refinement of the novels Ultramarine, Under the Volcano, October Ferry to Gabriola and Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid.

In Chapter Two, I shall introduce and describe in detail a moderate intentionalist account of literary creativity. As the sheer volume of research into creativity militates against my undertaking an exhaustive historical analysis here, I shall confine myself to setting forth a working model of literary creative action. I shall then refine this model with reference to Mary Shelley's composition of Frankenstein in order to provide a stable base from which to clarify the features specific to Lowry's particular creative method.

In Chapter Three, I shall rehearse and evaluate a number of divergent definitions and theories of writer's block. My sources for this discussion derive primarily from the psychoanalytic and the cognitivist research paradigms. From these accounts I shall distill some important general features of writing blocks and assemble a rough typology.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I shall return to detailed consideration of the creative life and work of Malcolm Lowry, in light of the theoretical insights of preceding chapters. I shall investigate three critical periods of writer's block in Lowry's later life, linking once again the theory to the case. I shall conclude with a brief recapitulation and evaluation of the scope and results of my investigation.

The reader will note that the following examination is necessarily circumscribed by considerations of length and density. For example, I shall not undertake to explain the structure of creative impulse, nor shall I perform comprehensive close readings of Lowry's novels. Thus, in a manner all too reminiscent of Lowry's fiction, even as this study represents the culmination of a long period of research, it ushers in a whole new set of, to my mind, equally compelling and urgent concerns. Nonetheless, let the voyage begin.

Chapter One

The Making of a Method: Lowry's Creative Process

> I am covered with shame that I have not replied to your earlier letter, but I have been working like hell and still am--and as Flaubert says--Is there no end to this murderous prose?
> - Malcolm Lowry

Malcolm Lowry lived to write. From his teenage years right up until his death, Lowry's various literary projects took precedence over virtually everything else in his life: his health, his income, his marriage and his sanity. And, not only did Lowry live to write, he also--particularly with the novels October Ferry to Gabriola and Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid along with the short-stories that comprise Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place--wrote in order to live, increasingly shifting the focus of his fiction to his own life and writing. As a careful reader of one of Lowry's later novels cannot fail to note, "Lowry lived in order to incorporate his experiences in literature and his most vivid experience was the act of writing" (Cross 92). This narrative self-reflexivity was a crucial component of Lowry's post-Volcano art, as he himself enthused in a letter written to his publisher, Albert Erskine, in 1949:

> I am absorbed in the new book [Dark as the Grave] to the extent of sometimes fifteen hours a day, and boy, it has some theme, being no less than the identification of a creator with his creation--Pirandello in reverse or, Six authors in search of his characters; or otherwise stated. Every Man his own Laocoon. Since the philosophical implications might prove fatal to myself, I have to preserve a certain detachment. (2:13)

Prophetically, it is in Dark as the Grave, a quintessentially self-reflexive novel, that Lowry's inability precisely to "preserve a certain detachment" emerges with full force.

Especially in Dark as the Grave and his other later works, Lowry's depictions of literary creativity in action are fraught with the tensions and difficulties endemic to literary creativity. Many Lowry protagonists were writers--for example Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan of "Elephant and Colosseum,"and Sigbjørn Wilderness of "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession" and Dark as the Grave--though rarely do we encounter them writing successfully. In fact, more often than not, Lowry's writers are either unable to write or deeply unhappy with what they previously have written.[1] Indeed, the cast of Lowry's fictional *doppelgangers*, insofar as their literary works are concerned, is a who's who of frustration and ironic despair. This is perhaps surprising in a writer who took his work, if not exactly his profession, as seriously as did Lowry. What went wrong with Lowry's fictional writers, and, by extension, with Lowry himself?

A partial answer is provided by William Hagen, who argues that, for Lowry, "writing involved tremendous personal sacrifice . . . compelling the writer to risk himself in the process of saving and composing his words" (3). Lowry's write-at-all-costs method derived from his view of the creative process as a tense, uncertain, shifting space in which a writer's capabilities and even sanity were tested by a relentless array of hostile forces. For Lowry, each new work was a battle fought on a new front, where one could simply not afford to rest or retrench so long as the work remained incomplete--and of course for Lowry it nearly always remained so.

Thus, I shall contend, was Lowry's conception of "The Voyage That Never Ends," reliant as it was on elastic and over-ambitious plans, insufficient preparation and a bevy of unhelpful personal and professional constraints, threatened from its very inception. I shall

argue further that, far from alleviating his writer's block, Lowry's copious notes and drafts for the various components of the "Voyage" actually contributed to his inability to achieve his short- and long-term writerly goals.

In making these claims I take a position somewhat outside the mainstream of Lowry scholarship, which, as exemplified by Sherrill Grace's work in The Voyage That Never Ends, takes Lowry's obsessive fascination with the image of the circle to be a powerful contributing factor to his literary style and voice and a potent influence in his best work. It is a fact of the matter that circles and circular motions were extraordinarily important as images and symbols within Lowry's metaphysics and fiction. However, given the extent to which Lowry's life bled into his fiction (and, more troubling for me, his fiction into his life), I shall contend that Lowry's circular metaphysics proved ultimately debilitating both to the consistency and the continuity of his art.

My account will therefore remain compatible with the prevailing wisdom among Lowry scholars that a) his life and fiction were closely intertwined and demonstrated mutual causal relations; and b) that Lowry's core philosophy of life and art led him to celebrate complexity, self-reflexivity and continuous circular patterns of death and rebirth. Where I break new ground is in demonstrating, via close examinations of Lowry's method and his writing blocks against a theoretical background, that certain of the writerly traits that made his best work so profound and enduring eventually silenced his creativity. In order to do so, I must first make sense of Lowry's writing habits and influences.

Therefore, in this chapter, I shall examine the key features of Lowry's particular creative method, which I shall position as a series of broadly distinct but narrowly overlapping horizontal stages.[2] I shall rely to a large extent on a combination of textual (correspondence and novels) and biographical evidence to support my various claims. Lowry himself seems to anticipate some of my concerns in this meditation on the tortures of creating meaningful literature from his posthumously-published Dark as the Grave:

> The author, while working, is like a man continually pushing his way through blinding smoke in an effort to rescue some precious objects from a burning building. How hopeless, how inexplicable the effort! For is not the building the work of art in question, long since perfect in the mind, and only rendered a vehicle of destruction by the effort to realize it, to transmute it upon paper? (154)

The short question is: what can we make of this passage in relation to Lowry's own creative goals and processes?

Beginnings:

Malcolm Lowry's literary career began in earnest at the age of fifteen. Shipped off to the Leys boarding school like his three brothers before him, the "cheerful, awkward, obsessive bookworm" quickly made a place for himself within the pages of the Leys Fortnightly, the school's faculty-run literary and current affairs journal (Bowker 24). As would prove to be the rule in his fiction, Lowry's first published stories drew heavily upon his experiences and the storehouse he was already compiling of borrowed styles and phrases. The young Lowry's efforts were, if somewhat rough and precocious, at least

promising enough to secure the attentions and encouragement of a literary-minded schoolmaster, the "small, scholarly reticent" (32) W. H. Balgarnie.[3] Balgarnie was instrumental in running some of Lowry's early stories in the Fortnightly, and also in securing his acerbic services as its resident sports reporter, a post that Lowry typically undertook to make his own, firing off sarcastic quasi-literary missives from the public-school playing fields of England to a not always receptive audience.

Even in his modest capacities as hockey reporter and occasional literary contributor, Lowry's wide reading and gift for language were already apparent in his mastery of "such humorous devices as hyperbole, ironic ornamentation affected pedantry and self-deflating pomposity" (34). Already too Lowry had selected the first of the figures who were to occupy with such effect his literary shrine: Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and, later, Edgar Allen Poe, and Eugene O'Neill. In his early writing (it seems unfair to call some of these stories and poems "schoolboy writing") Lowry payed homage to his favourite authors, mimicking their prose styles and rhythms with considerable accuracy and quoting lines and stanzas wholesale. This literary borrowing was not simply admiration manifesting itself in imitation, but was also symptomatic of the young Lowry's nascent fascination with the symbolic and referential possibilities of the well-placed allusion, later developed to such intricate effect in Under the Volcano.[4]

Adopting the *nom de plume* "Camel" (a simple play on his initials C. M. L.), Lowry continued to write throughout his public-school career, varying his increasingly sophisticated short stories with numerous poems and of course his merciless sports exclusives on behalf of the Leys hockey team. The best of these early works demonstrate

the young Lowry's emerging flair for quick material descriptions, imaginative verbal gestures and intelligent pastiche. The love of language for its own sake as much as for what it could *do* along with his unfortunate tendency towards plagiarism became central to Lowry's life and to his fiction. So too, of course, did alcohol.

In 1925, Lowry's alcoholism was still for the most part an emerging addiction. Even so, drinking held for him a unique pleasure, no doubt encouraged by the high incidence of alcohol and alcoholism in the lives and chief works of his favourite authors. As early as 1926 Lowry exploited alcohol drinking as an important prop in his story "Satan in a Barrel." In this short piece, Lowry's narrator, Judge Jeffreys, awaits his execution in the Tower of London while taking stock of his sinful life within the frame of a choice between a distant Heaven and a beckoning Hell. Not surprisingly, Jeffreys chooses hell, and as Gordon Bowker notes, here we are indeed in familiar territory:

> Here is a sense of Lowry himself speaking, through this fictional dream, with a voice of his own, echoing perhaps the incipient inner conflicts of the young Rabelasian toper. In this he prefigures an older Lowry, and the doomed Consul who sprang fully formed from his own alcoholic experiences. (43)

Lowry's use of alcohol as a primer for his creativity became a permanent fixture of his creative process.[5] This process was not yet mature, however. Although the Lowry of 1925 knew enough to *be able* to write, he had not yet learned *how* to write. It will therefore be useful to trace Lowry's literary development a little further, first through his years at sea, next during his tutelage under Conrad Aiken, and finally during his tenure at Cambridge University.

To the Sea:

On Friday March 13, 1927, Malcolm Lowry went to sea.[6] With this act, carefully planned and painstakingly if naïvely prepared for, his writing apprenticeship began in deadly earnest. Lowry's ship, the freighter *Oedipus Tyrannus*, left port amid a small scuffle of publicity in the local newspapers which was to cause no end of trouble amongst the ship's crew. Besides the regular assortment of firemen, deckhands, cooks and cabin boys and the rest of the petty aristocracy which made up a ship's crew in those days, Lowry's fellow passengers included the ghost of Melville himself, among sundry other authors. He travelled in good literary company, well aware that the experiences of a writer should include adventure, on a difficult journey that would last well over a year.

As it turned out, Lowry got more than he bargained for; the trip was both mentally and physically punishing. The crew of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, incensed at the newspaper stories that portrayed Lowry as the son of a rich man in search of adventure on the high seas, and angered at the thought that Lowry's pleasure jaunt was taking a job away from a man who both needed and deserved it more, treated him with contempt and made his life miserable for most of the trip with a deliberate viciousness detailed unsparingly in Ultramarine. From the beginning, Lowry's fabled physical clumsiness impeded his ability to perform his tasks as cabin boy with either efficiency or consistency. Already an accomplished drinker, he astonished the crew by the scale of his alcoholic binges in myriad shantytowns and bars. Finally, always syphilophobic, Lowry's enduring dread of this disease was only enhanced by the horrors he claimed to have experienced the South Sea brothels.[7] Still, Lowry's notebook filled rapidly, and he began to gain an ear for the

rhythms of speech and nature, two skills that would serve him well for the rest of his career. His first great trial successfully endured, Lowry was ready at last to return to England, and undertake, with the aid of much tutoring, his Cambridge entrance exams.

Tutorials:

It was in December of 1929 that Lowry discovered the poetry of the man who would be his most influential mentor and his most accomplished and resourceful psychological foe: the American poet, novelist and critic Conrad Aiken. Upon reading the first few pages of Aiken's Blue Voyage, Lowry wrote that the work "slammed down on my psyche" (Bowker 75). Aiken's dark, misogynistic and richly textured novel became a model for Lowry's own embryonic Ultramarine (so close in some parts that Aiken eventually dubbed it "Purple Passage"), and Lowry determined to get in touch with Aiken at the first opportunity. That chance came when, rejected by all of his preferred colleges at Cambridge, Lowry initiated one of the great correspondences in modern literature with the words: "I have lived nineteen years and all of them more or less badly" (Sugars 6). Aiken, always susceptible to flattery and cash, was quick to respond, agreeing to take Lowry on as a student for the summer. With his baffled parents' permission, Lowry began his apprenticeship, drunk and happy and thoroughly in his element such that Aiken could remark that none of the writers he had known, including Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, had been as "visibly or happily alight in genius" (Bowker 83).

Between working with Aiken and his growing immersion into the literary culture (most notably the journal Experiment and the salon run by Charlotte and J. B. S. Haldane)

of Cambridge, Lowry was able both to hone his craft and to forge lasting literary friendships with John Davenport, Martin Case and Gerald Noxon. He published more or less continuously in Experiment, submitting poems, short stories and re-worked chapters of Ultramarine. One such story was "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre," a longish piece which was essentially identical with the fourth chapter of Ultramarine. This piece (retitled as "Seductio Ad Absurdum") was eventually included in the anthology Best British Stories of 1931.[8] Though briefly elated by this success, a despondent Lowry soon made up his mind to leave Cambridge and go abroad once more. As he told Aiken, Lowry felt that he "must, and as soon as possible, identify a finer scene," in order to invest his writing with "identity through the sensation of actual experience" (Bowker 122). At the age of twenty-two Lowry set out for his second voyage "in ballast to the White Sea."[9] Upon his return, a tired but invigorated Lowry returned to Cambridge to finish his degree and embark on a new voyage that would take him all of his life, in turn ecstatic and soul-destroying. Thus, "taking auxiliary circumstances into account," Malcolm Lowry became a writer.

The Lowry saga continued, with its usual blend of twists and turns of fate and ever-accelerating personal and public dramas right up until the night of his mysterious death in 1957. However, because of the wide range of excellent biographical work undertaken by Lowry scholars over the last thirty years, I shall not attempt to condense the exceedingly complex story of his middle-to-later life into a few pages.[13] Rather, I shall trace his creative development under the general rubric of some key stages within Lowry's creative method. These stages I shall term, in the order in which they typically occurred in

Lowry's work, gathering, inscription, organization and revision.[14] Beneath these general headings, I shall identify and elaborate certain of the signal features of Lowry's creative method, some of these apparent at an early age and others developing fully only in his later career.[15]

Gathering: Ultramarine and October Ferry to Gabriola

Like many authors, Malcolm Lowry drew heavily on his own life and experiences for his writing. Unlike many authors, Lowry's reliance on the old adage "write what you know" led to closer and closer examinations of his life and psyche, leading in his later books to the virtual transcriptions of actual events so characteristic of Dark as the Grave and the as yet-unpublished "La Mordida." This is not to say that Lowry was unoriginal, or that he could not formulate a purely imaginative plot--he could. Rather, I mean here to underscore the role of preparation in Lowry's writing. When Lowry went anywhere, especially on a trip, it was his practice to bring along a notebook, quickly to be filled with his detailed impressions of places, people and his own physical and mental shifts along the way.[16] Lowry's remarkable memory allowed him to gather a wide range of data: chunks of text from literary works; unusual or suggestive vocabulary; a variety of arcane scientific and other information; sensations; signs and other everyday urban paraphernalia; descriptions of physical materials; and exact transcriptions of conversations; all of which he could deploy equally well as sophisticated window-dressing and intimate symbols.

Armed with this multitude of information, Lowry would generate an outline, often building each segment around a single event or theme. This core was then surrounded with

layer upon layer of materials drawn from his reserves, a process Sherrill Grace likens to architecture (4). The layer-by-layer project of recording his life in all of its psychic trauma, emotional detail, descriptive richness and symbolic reach, was one Lowry took very seriously. His fiction consequently embodies a density that points to its careful preparation. In writing broadly about his own experiences (eventually to an exhausting and obsessive degree), Lowry was able to refashion his life along the general lines proposed by his mentor Conrad Aiken[17] while shifting his focus from the more technical conventions of prose narrative onto the complex play of language, symbol and identity.

When Lowry began "absorbing" in preparation for a piece of writing, it was usually in response to an event with personal significance. Often, it was an experience that had symbolic resonance for Lowry; for example the burning down of his little beach house at Dollarton that figures so importantly in Dark as the Grave and October Ferry. In terms of idea-generation, the impetus for Lowry's fictions might derive from a single event or even the texture of an experience or a trip, so long as the idea had "legs;" that is, was sufficiently striking or layered to engage Lowry throughout his lengthy gestation period. For example, the central images motivating Lowry's initial conception of Under the Volcano--the Indian bleeding to death near the side of the road, the drunken thief fingering with a sly smile the coins he has plundered from the Indian's body--appear as brief notes in one of his Mexican journals. Also in the Volcano, the stern warning: "¿Le gusta este jardīn. Que es Suyo? ¡Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!"[18] so terrifyingly mis-translated by the Consul is the verbatim mistranslation of a tipsy Lowry, and the ominous and recurrent movie posters as well as the innuendo-ridden menu at the *farolito*

similarly were gathered and jotted down by Lowry in his travels. It took his remarkable memory and imagination to weave these seemingly disparate objects into the layered textual fabric that characterizes the completed Volcano.

If Under the Volcano was Lowry's sophisticated attempt to turn everyday experience into resonant symbol, then his first novel, Ultramarine was his attempt to, in the words of Muriel Bradbrook, cram "as much experience as he could muster" (41) into a slim book that traced its literary influences as surely as the tramp steamer *Oedipus Tyrannus* navigated the seamy shores of the South Pacific. Ultramarine, though published by a respectable London firm, was not a conspicuous success either in Britain or abroad, and Lowry himself was so ashamed of it that in later years he warned a young David Markson that Ultramarine was an "abortion . . . of no interest to you unless you want to hurt my feelings" (Bowker 485). Still, in writing his first novel Lowry utilized techniques and conventions that would serve him with varying degrees of success throughout his literary life. For example, the collage effect that Lowry was able to generate through a counterpoint of various voices, chunks of conversation and onomatopoeic references to the sounds of the ship is perhaps the chief strength of Ultramarine. He employed similar layering effects to great effect in the Volcano (for example in the scenes involving the sinister American, Weber) and October Ferry. This technique of multi-sensory collage is one of Lowry's hallmarks, and it is very much a part of even his early works.

In addition, Lowry's habit of writing from a series of notebooks, filled with scraps of ideas, sense-impressions, fragments of dialogue and other information began in earnest during his preparation for Ultramarine, and remained a cornerstone of his method until he

died. Beginning with Ultramarine, Lowry's standard advice to prospective authors commanded, in upper-case capitals, "Whatever you do, wherever you go, MAKE NOTES!" (Bowker 522).

Lowry perhaps interpreted his own advice too faithfully while composing Ultramarine; a novel that some critics felt tended towards too literal an imitation of life and, more damagingly for Lowry, too literal an imitation of other authors. On the one hand, as the reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement put it, "Ultramarine reads less as a novel than as the first expansion of short-hand notes taken with a view to making a novel," which of course it was, adding sarcastically that "If the art of writing is imitation the author has mastered it" (162). On the other, as Bowker observes, Lowry's "obsession with Aiken continued to inhibit the development of a personal style," with the consequence that his first novel was diffuse in its focus and narrative voice, being part-Lowry, part-Aiken, part-Melville and part-Grieg (113).

Although the instances of plagiarism in Ultramarine are considerably less invidious than its critics (and Lowry himself) admitted, the stigma powerfully affected Lowry for the rest of his life. It is difficult to capture the range of the trauma that Lowry experienced as a result of this obsession, but certainly in his later works he used literary allusion always self-consciously, such that what began as plagiarism soon became a stylish and erudite self-reflexivity. It became an article of faith with Lowry that no literary influence should seep into his work unrecognized or uncredited, with the consequence that his literary allusions were many and uneven, sometimes marvellously placed and effective, as in the

short story "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession," and sometimes ponderous and heavy-handed, as in much of Dark as the Grave.

By the time he settled down to work seriously on October Ferry Lowry had considerably refined his creative method. October Ferry held a special fascination for him and was written and re-written over the course of a decade. It was also the last of his novels, and became during the last five years of his life his "obsession and his only literary occupation" (Doyen 163). Typically, the manuscripts (edited by Margerie Lowry) published posthumously as October Ferry to Gabriola represent only a fraction of the mass of drafts, handwritten and typed, totalling more than 4,000 pages.

The saga of October Ferry began in 1946, when the Lowrys made a three-day trip to Gabriola, one of the larger of British Colombia's Gulf Islands. Lowry hated what he considered to be the suffocating cultural conservatism of Vancouver and longed to "buy an island: live half each year on it and work, and travel the other half." (SL 90). However, as Victor Doyen tells us, the trip was not merely a real-estate venture:

> As was their custom, the Lowrys used a small notebook during the trip. This document contains descriptions, memos and impressions registered while travelling. In Malcolm's hand we find descriptions of the view through the beer parlour windows . . . Later, on the ferry, he sketched the sunset over Nanaimo and the last rays of sunlight still touching Gabriola when the dock came nearer. On the boat, he copied text from signs and notices. (167)

Lowry gathered other information too: snatches of dialogue, short memos to himself and detailed renderings of his and Margie's walks along the beach. Already at this early stage

Lowry's writer's instincts had been roused, and he began "consciously collecting material for a story" (167). At the end of this first notebook, "we already find a first outline for a story, which is based on the actual experience" (168). Lowry's outline ran as follows:

(a) -the bus coming in - flashbacks to museum

(b) - Arrival in Nanaimo . . . - conversation at ticket window re impossibility of getting to Gabriola Island . . . We separate - she volunteers to go + find Higgs Ferry Co - while I go into the pub . . .

(c) - the wonderful scene in the pub - punctuated by her going out to telephone the lodge man . . .

Interestingly, Lowry's initial version of October Ferry, configured as a short story, consists of two parts, the first of which follows closely the outline of the notebook. This story "already contains the complete outer action and framework of the later novel" (169), leaving Lowry free to revise, refine and of course lengthen.

This pattern is typical of all of Lowry's creative efforts. A meticulous craftsman, he might spend months gathering material and psychological momentum for a story or novel, as in October Ferry, and he might then spend years wrestling with the organization of the wealth of raw experience and absorbed (or cannibalized) phrases and scenes into a coherent shape. After he had gathered adequate materials there tended to be a period of gestation, where Lowry might slowly develop ideas and characters to the point of organizing them into the form of a story, or, more often, a chapter for a novel. This process I shall refer to as organization.

Organization: Under the Volcano

In what does organization consist? Roughly, I take organization to refer to the extraordinarily complex and involved thinking with which Lowry invested the act of writing; an act itself powerfully inflected by the relationships between words, themes and plans. As we have seen from the example of October Ferry, Lowry's writing tended towards layering and thick description. He might write and rewrite entire passages dozens of times, sometimes editing but more often adding text. Thus was Lowry able to generate from simple stories immensely detailed fictions, revising these steadily as new elements were suggested by old, and image gave rise to image. A powerful illustration of Lowry's methods during organization, and their attendant advantages and disadvantages, is apparent in Margerie Lowry's spirited defence of Lowry's completed draft of the Volcano (then languishing in Jonathan Cape's offices) written to their agent Harold Matson:

> I have lived five years with this book in its present form; it has been as much a part of our lives as eating and breathing. I am not blind to Malcolm's faults as a writer. His astonishing awareness of the thickness of life, of the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and interrelated, causes him to write a symphony where anyone else would write a sonata or at most a concerto, and this makes his work sometimes appear dispersed, whereas actually the form and content have arisen so inextricably the one from the other that they cannot be disassociated. (SL 421)

The phenomenon Margie describes in the letter, the peculiar organicism of the several distinct but inter-woven layers of Under the Volcano, is a feature of the book many critics

and writers have commented on. Lowry himself believed the Volcano to be a work that succeeded on multiple levels at once, rewarding a plurality of readers and readings:

> The novel can be read simply as a story which you can skip if you want. It can be read as a story you will get more out of if you don't skip. It can be regarded as a kind of symphony, or in another way as a kind of opera--or even a horse opera. It is hot music, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce, and so forth. It is superficial, profound, entertaining and boring, according to taste. It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall. It can even be regarded as a sort of machine: it works, too, believe me, as I have found out. In case you think I mean it is everything but a novel I better say that after all it is intended to be and, though I say so myself, a deeply serious one too. (SL 66)

How was Lowry able to achieve such texture and richness? I have identified the first key feature of Lowry's creative method as gathering, an activity during which he filled notebooks and scratch-pads with descriptions, scenes, dialogue and various other impressions of his travels and thoughts and feelings on a variety of subjects. But like any good craftsperson, Lowry recognized the roughness of this raw material, and the second stage of his creative method employed a series of filters aimed at separating the more intriguing or suitable elements of his rough material from the sediments. For example, the progression of drafts of Volcano written between 1938 and 1947 show the distillation of dialogue (i.e., the exchange between Jaques Laurelle and Dr. Vigil that opens Chapter One) from elaborate wordy argument to sparse, brief and powerfully suggestive utterances. Once he had configured his filter to exclude or re-direct character dialogue

away from verbosity and towards a cleaner and more powerful interior voice, Lowry was able significantly to alter the "feel" of the book and effect a noticeable improvement.[19]

Of course, as anyone who has studied Lowry is painfully aware, Lowry's filters for optimizing levels of detail and density were hardly fine-grained, and his writing exemplifies his fictional double Sigbjørn Wilderness's principle that "it was much better to get too much in [to a novel] than to get too little out" (Dark as the Grave 155). Nonetheless, Lowry was not a writer who simply thought onto paper; rather he assembled his works on the basis of a wealth of raw materials and aided by a range of detailed plans.

As I pointed out above, the genesis of Lowry's creative organization typically involved a single image or event particularly apt for exploration in fiction; for example the profoundly unsettling images of the breakaway horse or the wounded Indian that underpinned the Volcano, or the dying sea-bird in Ultramarine. This central image, carefully tended by Lowry, steadily accrued symbolic power and range extending deep into the actions and consciousness of his characters. Around the centre, Lowry might improvise, like a jazz musician, playing off and through his chosen image or images, using a bewildering variety of narrative shifts and devices to build his "infernal machine." As Muriel Bradbrook notes,

> This method, where the author shifted about "like a xylophone player" reflected and sprang from Lowry's own shifts of mood, his mercurial temperament. Like the writer, [the reader] must feel the work shift and grow with his own life; the dynamic drive and rhythmic pulse of his own imagination should make it change, like the landscape of a rainy coast. (88)

In this manner, Lowry was able to organize and direct his raw materials along the lines of his guiding plans and intentions for the work. Like all writers, he planned as he wrote, and altered plans as he thought necessary. If the Volcano was assembled and made to work like an infernal machine, certainly October Ferry carried a gentler, more lyrical cargo.

Dictation/ Inscription: Dark as the Grave and Hear Us O Lord

Malcolm Lowry directed his creative energies towards the writing of his novels. As he wrote so memorably in his famous defence of the Volcano, "There are a thousand writers who can draw adequate characters till all is blue for one who can tell you something new about hell-fire, and I am telling you something new about hell-fire" (SL 80). Telling the world something new about hell-fire was not without its dangers, however. Richard Cross correctly notes that Lowry's involvement with the characters and themes of the Volcano was "so profound that many of the things he wrote in his later years are more in the nature of meditations on his magnum opus than works of fiction in their own right" (66). Many of these later works provide compelling testimony to what Lowry called "the bloody agony of the writer writing" (SL 339).

It is important to note that Lowry meant this "bloody agony" to include writing in its purely mechanical sense. For Lowry, writing often meant dictating to Margerie, who was then able to generate typed drafts with far greater speed and precision than he could manage on his own, at the same time obviating (in theory) the need for an intermediate rough draft that would simply require typing later on. These sessions of dictation were difficult and long; on several occasions during the composition of the Volcano the Lowrys

put in sixteen and eighteen hour days, working well into the night and rising early. In addition, Lowry often worked on several manuscripts at once, leaning knuckles-down over a series of tables in the large front room of their beach-house at Dollarton, pacing back and forth and pausing frequently to bark a sequence to Margerie, or scrawl a few lines himself. During one such lengthy period of dictation, Malcolm's hands were so encrusted with sores and callouses that a local doctor remarked with surprise that "These are anthropoid pads . . . the apes have these for leaning and dragging the backs of their hands on the ground. I have never seen callouses in this area before" (McNeill 103). Lowry, with his fine sense of irony, was proud of this condition, but soon a variety of ailments, including severe varicose veins, made sustained work impossible.

In addition to his penchant for extended writing periods, Lowry, as the poet Earle Birney has written, was

> A spree drinker, and a spree writer too. He did things in great bursts of activity of one sort or another, and he would build up a head of steam . . . He would do a little reading and the reading would start to get him thinking, and he'd begin to turn that reading into something he was writing. And he would start [writing] and he might go on then right through the evening and right on through the night, and he might still be working the next day. And if he ran out of paper then he would use anything in sight, and if there was nothing left, just because it was coming out of him, he would start writing over sideways on top of what he had already written, until he would collapse out of sheer exhaustion. (Bowker 458)

The exhausting, feverish quality of Lowry's writing was partially a result of his simultaneous composition of several drafts at once. This method also meant that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the drafts or the works from one another. During the composition of the "Voyage," Lowry's failing health and an often absent (due to a variety of illnesses) and recalcitrant Margerie, resulted in a noticeable deterioration in his inscription methods. Albert Erskine described the first three drafts of Dark as the Grave as "a formidable mess" just prior to suspending Lowry's contract. By the end of his life, Lowry was no longer physically capable of the marathon sessions typical of his composition of the Volcano. His methods of revision, however, had grown no less involved or complicated.

Revision: Under the Volcano and October Ferry

For Lowry, the process of creating a novel did not end with its first draft. As Grace suggests, Lowry "put a book together passage by passage almost as if it were a house on a pier," adding that "his work never seemed, to his eyes, complete" (4). In this way, Lowry worked constantly around the edges and within the hearts of his works, adding dialogue here, revealing an important symbolic connection there, inserting additional descriptive passages somewhere else. The cutting-and-pasting many writers associate with the final stages of a manuscript were for Lowry part and parcel of all and any writing. Revision was never merely a polishing procedure for Lowry, because as he "polished" one section he was likely to have introduced a whole additional one in passing,

leading to his poignant query concerning the completion of the Volcano: "How did I ever conspire to get it done? Yes -- how?" (3:1).

Lowry's propensity and stamina for revision are legendary. Under the Volcano alone took more than ten years from its inception to its release into the hands of publishers following sustained pressure by Gerald Noxon, Margerie and Erskine. For his part, Lowry did not feel that the Volcano was quite complete, conceding only that "it was as good as it could be made for the time being" (Day 370). Between the original version of 1936 and that rejected by various publishers in 1940, Lowry rewrote the Volcano several times. And between 1940 and the fourth draft of the novel in 1944, Lowry revised it in its entirety at least four times, and each chapter as many as six times, through "compulsive, dogged, inspired, exhaustive and exhausted revising and rewriting" (Asals 93). The massive undertaking represented by Lowry's decade-long revision of the Volcano, while certainly not unique in modern literature (recalling Joyce's famous remark that, as it had taken him eighteen years to complete Finnegan's Wake he did not see why it should not take eighteen years to read it), is characteristic of Lowry's tendency to pack ever more details and layers of language, meaning and symbol into his works until the structure could support the content. This facet of Lowry's method suggests that there is more than one possible level of revision, subject of course to the plans, goals and technical limitations of an author. These roughly correspond to what I have characterized above as filters of varying degrees of porousness, except that an author engaged in revision may, in addition to refining existing text, add new materials.

At their most basic, strategies of revision allow a writer to tie up loose ends in the manner of a sophisticated extended spell-checker configured to mark a range of problems on the level of syntax and narrative logic and continuity. For example, the re-organization of family relationships between the main characters of the Volcano, which saw Yvonne (formerly Priscilla) become the Consul's wife instead of his daughter and Hugh reappear as the Consul's half-brother instead of his son-in-law represent initial revision, changes that had to be made in order to facilitate larger shifts in the work's structure and meaning.

On another level, revision might tend to concentrate more on connotative textual features. Connotative factors, which I take to be the expressive layers of meaning below the merely denotative, might include the finer points of character relationships and interaction, the addition or refinement of dialogue and narration, the finalizing of relevant psychological details and built-in cues intended to evoke a range of reader-responses. For Lowry, revision almost always required the addition of materials consisting in extra layers of tightly-interwoven symbols and symbol structures. Touches like Lowry's late addition of materials relating to the Cabbala into Under the Volcano are representative of this level.

I would characterize the final level of revision as involving both polishing and exhaustion. Polishing, because literature like all art forms invariably has rough spots and disjunctions that must be streamlined, and exhaustion because completing revision often means running out of things to *do* to, or with, a text. To Lowry, a work was *always* a work in progress: dynamic, growing and very much of the moment. Because of this, his novels often shifted radically in both formal conception and specific content between drafts. As new ideas and themes became more important to him, Lowry followed them up

with revision upon revision, in a seemingly endless search not for an endpoint but rather for still more trajectories to follow. His revisions of Under the Volcano, temporally extended and sophisticated as they were, encapsulate perfectly this tendency.

Evolutionary and fascinating, Lowry's creative method stands as a complex and distinctive instance of literary creative activity. Though painstakingly documented by his biographers, critics and much of his fiction, most accounts of Lowry's writing method tend towards thin description; namely, what he did and at what time with what results. By contrast, in subsequent chapters, armed with a robust planning model of literary creative action, I aim to provide a correspondingly thicker description; namely of the plans and micro-processes that underpinned Lowry's creative method and its products. Elaboration of this facet of my examination will be the central focus of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Towards a Planning Model of Literary Creativity

> I can see something philosophically valuable in attempting to set down what actually happens in a novelist's mind when he conceives what he conceives to be the fanciful figure of a personage etc.--for this, the part that never gets written, with which is included the true impulses that made him novelist or a dramatist in the first place, and the modifications of life around him through his own eyes as those impulses were naturalized--would be the one true drama, and I hope to finish something of this sort one day.
>
> - Malcolm Lowry

> The layman who asks the writer how he gets his ideas seems to think that such ideas would be forcing themselves on a mind as idle as his own. But nothing is more evident to the artist than that he is working at his art, and the layman is not . . . To ask a poet to describe his creative process is to ask him to formulate a rule, or something that will do in place of a rule, by following which any idle ninny could make a poem. But writing poems is something idle ninnies cannot expect to do without forfeiting their idleness and their ninnyhood. A poet is not an idle ninny who just happens to own a sort of magical sausage-machine that he might lend (or of which he might deliver the patent) to his neighbour, like lending him a power mower. If there is a creative process it cannot be a substitute for intelligent work. It must be a way such work is done.
>
> - Francis Sparshott

Malcolm Lowry was, by all accounts, an extraordinarily creative writer. His gift for language remains unique, and in his complex fictional worlds of descent and despair, recovery and return, Lowry invested the banal evil of an alcoholic existence in Mexico (in Under the Volcano), a routine ferry crossing (October Ferry to Gabriola) and assorted other tales with unrivalled symbolic richness, lyrical passion and eloquence. Still, for all of his correspondence and perhaps in spite of the "Lowry Legend" that his life and work inspired, we know relatively little about the mechanics of Lowry's creative process; no more, at least, than we know about *any* writer's creative processes.

To make sense of Lowry's creative method and of his writer's block, it is necessary to understand first what writerly processes, general and unique, Lowry was exploiting successfully when he was able to write; and second what sorts of psychological checks and balances and material states of affairs obtained when he could not. Each of these

operations is of course considerably more complex and detailed than my wording suggests; still, I believe that a plausible working account of each may be judiciously assembled. To this end, in this chapter I shall proceed as follows: first I shall explore some of the difficulties inherent to defining general human creativity, and develop some guidelines informing the way we think about creative action broadly. Second, I shall rehearse a number of plausible statements on what constitutes the creative process. Third, I shall outline a generic model of creativity based on problem-solving models advanced by researchers from cognitive psychology and Artificial Intelligence. Finally, I shall introduce and refine an intentionalist model of creativity addressing the special case of literary works with reference to the genesis and revision of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. I shall be guided throughout by the intuition that an accurate and useful account of creativity must adopt as a first principle a planning view of human action. I shall contend that creative acts are, more often than not, *planned* acts and, further, that a moderate view of plans and intentions provides the best explanation for what distinguishes creative acts from non-creative acts, and creative acts from each other.

Creativity: Definitions and Processes

In his influential 1986 Actual Minds, Possible Worlds, the American psychologist Jerome Bruner maintains that:

> The poem in its own right can tell us much about the nature of mind, even if it fails to yield up the secret of its creation. Dostoevski's mystical genius, Joyce's treacherous ways with language, these can still be studied with profit, though we do

not know their inspiration. No literary sciences (any more than any natural sciences) can penetrate particular moments of inspired creation. (4)

Thus, in a single stroke, Bruner captures an important truth and furthers an enduring myth of human creativity; namely, the truth that creative products contain in themselves important clues to the structure of human cognition, desire, feeling and experience, and the myth that the motivations and processes underlying creative actions are somehow necessarily ephemeral, oblique and resistant to productive human inquiry. I wish to preserve both of Bruner's intuitions, the myth along with the truth, as invaluable guidelines both to why we are badly in need of a plausible, powerful and rational theory of literary creativity and to how we may go about developing such a theory. As a first step, I shall proffer some general observations concerning basic human creativity.

First, human creativity is a universal phenomenon transcending borders of culture, nation, gender, race, class and other social categories. Even so, as Teresa Amabile notes, specific creative acts are inextricably bound up with precisely these factors (66-85). Second, creativity need not arise out of an obvious practical personal or social need (Gardner 33-7).[19] Third, there are two distinct but related modes of creativity--everyday and exceptional--resulting in correspondingly ordinary and extraordinary innovations (Boden 134). Finally, creativity may be a property of either a process or a product (Battin et al. 110). These are the main points of consensus with respect to human creativity.

Still, any attempt to reconfigure a basic account of creativity as a formal definition is bound to encounter some thorny problems. For example, is creativity constituted, as Krystyna Zamiara puts it, "by a single general mechanism underlying all distinct creative

process," or a set of special cases linked to one another by the most cursory of shared components--or something in between (26)? Which is the crucial aspect of the creative process: the creative moment, the units comprising the creative act or the creative product?[20] A good definition of creativity requires not only an explanation of the term but an analysis of the condition or set of conditions that must obtain if an action or product is correctly to be called creative. As it stands, there is little in the body of mainstream creativity research that addresses with consistency and rigour any of these concerns.

Further, there is a sense in the literature on (especially artistic) creativity that certain aspects of the creative process--such as the precise nature of what is commonly called "inspiration"--fall beyond the scope of rational inquiry. As David Lamb notes, research into the phenomenon of human creativity has historically been in thrall to one or another enduring myths. Lamb describes one of these, the "Heroic theory," as follows:

> Heroic theories of creativity are held deeply in the popular image of scientific and artistic research. It is also part of the popular image that the mechanisms by means of which creative personalities generate their novel ideas are inexplicable. For it is widely held that the kernel of creative thinking is steeped in mystery and irrationality . . . that creative works are bizarre achievements accomplished by eccentric personalities in mysterious circumstances. (6-7)

The Heroic theory originates with the Platonic stipulation that nothing new may be brought into the world. Instead, poetry is achieved by the divine intervention of the Muses speaking through the passive artist. As latter-day critics have noted, this sheds no light on "*how* artistic creation occurs, since it does not explain how poetry was created by

the Muses before being transmitted through the poets to a human audience" (Battin et al. 111), but this weakness has not diminished the heroic theory's popular appeal.

In our own time, Romantic views of creativity have exerted a powerful influence on both writers and critics. Romantic views posit that creativity derives from pre- or unconscious forces (memories, associations, desires and so on) that supervene onto the conscious mind during creative action. This trance-like state resists conscious human guidance, which potentially constitutes a disastrous interruption. A classic instance of the Romantic model of creativity, what Zachary Leader calls "Romantic creation with a vengeance," is Samuel Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." In the preface to this well-known poem fragment, Coleridge writes that he composed the poem in a trance during which the images rose up before him "as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort" (qtd. in Leader 205).

Taking Coleridge's cue, literary critics tend to exclude the creative process from discussion as an unfortunate *a priori* fact of the matter irrelevant to explications of meaning and judgements of value. It is rare indeed to find literary criticism that theorizes adequately the literary creative process, contributing to Herbert Simon's conviction that:

> The subject of scientific discovery (and creativity generally) has been surrounded by dense mists of romanticism and downright know nothingism. Even well-informed persons, who do not believe that the stork brings babies, and are prepared to believe an empirical account of biological creation sometimes balk at natural explanations of the creation of new ideas. It appears that the human mind is the last bastion of vitalism. (226)

Since Simon's influential work, along with that of Alan Newall and others from the first vanguard of Artificial Intelligence, a small but fierce debate has raged within creativity research over whether human creativity is the exception or the rule. Experimental data tracking creative thinking in a wide range of tasks suggests that the capacity for creativity is general to human beings.[21] This is not to say that we inhabit a world of nascent geniuses in every creative domain, but rather that creative thinking and acting are natural facets of human thinking and acting. On the one hand, this universalist view of creativity effectively contests Romantic theories of inspiration and the psychopathology of genius; on the other it can as of yet tell us little about why and how some people are so much more creative--and effective at being creative--than others.

The Creative Process:

Exactly what constitutes the creative process remains the most controversial and uncharted aspect of contemporary exploration into human creativity. As Teresa Amabile and Elizabeth Tighe state flatly: "This is a question to which we currently have few answers" (17). Sylvano Arieti believes that "The creative process is a way of fulfilling the longing or search for a new object or state of experience that is not easily found or obtained" (6). Others feel that the initial creative impulse derives from the maker's desire to "capture and reveal the inaccessible essence of things" (Arnheim 62). Margaret Boden, for her part, favours a pragmatic, heuristic-centred, problem-solving approach (75).

There are some items within the creative process on which there is agreement however. For example, prevailing wisdom among theorists of creativity dictates that

creative action is initiated by the careful development of a problem under consideration. This "creative problem" in turn occasions the preparation stage, where materials and strategies for creative action are organized. Preparation is notable for making extensive use of "domain-relevant" skills, defined by Howard Gardner as conventions and techniques specific to a field of creative inquiry (38). The selection of domain-relevant skills depends on how structured a creative activity is and also on whether or not it is informed by a dominant school or paradigm (38). Thus ballet or physics, in virtue of their considerable technical complexity, specialized vocabulary and so forth might be considered high-structural activities, with finger-painting and archaeology being perhaps relatively less structured.[22] In addition, domain-relevant skills reflect the degree of expertise an agent has in a given creative endeavour. The excellent technical painter is better-equipped to treat a creative problem than is the rank amateur; better able to exploit existing painterly conventions and more likely to devise useful new ones, suggesting that domain-relevant skills are essential to both everyday and extraordinary creativity. In this vein, Francis Sparshott observes that:

> [The ability to seize on events and themes appropriate for poetry] has to be exactly what it is to be an experienced writer. To have experience is nothing more than to be able to recognize and exploit occasions for skill. It might be thought that what this describes is the practice of the unoriginal and uncreative writer, but it is not so. Even the most astonishing innovator astonishes in the sum of his work. (50)

A rigorous examination of the relationship of skills, in concert with a definition of the notoriously slippery and controversial concept of "talent," might go a long way towards illuminating the distinction between ordinary and exceptional creativity.

Whatever the result, all creativity is characterized by idea-generation, also called "brainstorming."[23] Idea-generation can occur in short bursts or be extended over long periods of time, allowing for reconsideration and even wholesale alteration. New ideas may significantly change the shape of the final product. Both the form and content of a creative work may diverge or expand well beyond the original set of creative plans. The potential for mutability as a regular feature of the creative process points to what Harry Frankfurt has identified as a key component of human intentionality; namely the purposive "guiding" function of the human agent engaged in intentional action (73).[24] This is in sharp contrast to Romantic views of individual creative agency as a subset of a larger, ephemeral entity. Whether it be God, the Muses or the unconscious, inspiration theories of creativity precisely militate, in one form or another, against the possibility of corrective adjustments performed by individual agents with their own sets of plans, goals, and intentions. If it can be shown that persons *can and do* exercise their capacities for adjustment during creative action, then inspiration theories are significantly weakened.

As ideas are generated and sub-generated, reconsidered and revised, creative activity draws toward completion. This final stage features the revision of ideas using domain-specific criteria. Creative revision depends on the validation of one's generated ideas against an evolving background of structural and social standards (Amabile & Tighe 17). In the revision process, plans, skills and experience once again play a vital role.

A Generic Model of Creativity:

In order to arrive at a suitable model for literary creativity it is necessary to compare and contrast the special case of literary creativity with more general conceptions of creative activity. The following is a simplified generic representation of perhaps the most common approach to creativity; namely, the problem-solving approach:[25]

1. Identify and isolate a problem.

2. Assemble materials and strategies for problem-solving using technical expertise.

3. Generate and sub-generate ideas based on procedures outlined in stages 1 and 2.

4. Review ideas relative to the domain. Complete product.

The first stage in this generic model assumes that creativity is a complex form of problem-solving in which generative rules and innovating heuristics are used to define a solution (Boden 75). These generative rules are at once pre-coded and productive. A productive generative system is one where universal rules are developed which allow for variations and/or imaginative substitutions (Currie 209). For example, human natural languages are conventionalized systems structured around grammatical rules capable of sponsoring virtually limitless innovations. Thus, the simple English sentence-order rule "subject-verb-object" can generate the phrase "The fish sits on the dish" as well as the intriguing variation "The eel plays on the Astroturf" and so on, *ad infinitum*.[26]

In the same manner, heuristics guide us through sets of possibilities for expression, speech action and so forth, effectively reorganizing our immediate mental space (Boden 75). An example of creative action so constituted might be the heuristic used by Susan prescribing that the initial red brush-stroke of her current abstract painting be balanced on

all sides. This choice may determine in large part how the painting turns out, defining the placement and range of colours, and opening and closing off whole areas of the canvas. A new heuristic may be developed and activated at any appropriate time; for example, Susan may decide on the basis of her perfectly balanced work that some of its colours must be muted in order to convey a certain mood. When Susan successfully concludes her painting, the creative problem addressed by her guiding heuristics is solved. This computational view of creativity has many of adherents, but there is a growing opposition as well, represented here by physicist Danah Zohar:

> More recently, the Artificial Intelligence lobby has adopted this same mechanistic [Behaviourist] model. According to AI, we are just like our word processors. It is as though we have so many silicon chips rattling around in our heads. Again, this is a very causal and determinist view of the human mind. It is a very non-creative view. AI can account for how we do rote activities, but it cannot account for how we ever do anything new. It can't account for the invention of new language or new concepts. My word processor never does anything that I don't tell it to do--except have accidents and breakdowns! It never comes up with anything positive that I haven't programmed into it. It can't create.[27] (206)

Zohar's intuition is a sound one, and points to an important flaw in the generic model; namely, that the term "problem" seems an insufficient description, let alone an explanation, for certain (i.e., artistic) modes of creativity. In their defence, the proponents of problem-solving approaches emphasize that the conceptual term "problem" is intended to

adapt equally well to either aesthetic or non-aesthetic creativity, and may include expressivity, desires, emotions, and reactions and so forth as potential variables.

Still, while the application of problem-solving heuristics speaks powerfully to certain aspects of creativity, it does not seem to address properly cases where a creative act takes place seemingly in the absence of a problem, or where the terms of the problem remain un-articulated and/or un-identifiable. After all, a problem typically is specified as an abnormal state of affairs requiring solution or redress. So construed, problems are the object of specialized techniques, rules and conventions aimed at their solution. A flat tire can be repaired by utilizing a substitute located in the trunk of one's car, an inaccurate equation can be reconfigured until its proof is equal to the original terms. By contrast, not all creativity admits of a distinct problem from which the creative process is at once derived and directed at solving. An etching may begin with a few lazy, abstracted movements of the hand. It may not be until the work is already in progress that the "problem" is recognized--if at all. In Artificial Intelligence systems, or general scientific experimental inquiry, research aims are usually stated in terms of hypotheses. A hypothesis predicts the measurable outcome of a process or event. But the properties of artistic products may or may not be measurable, and therefore may or may not be predictable. Particularly in writing, the problem (assuming there is one) motivating literary creative action may have virtually no bearing on the eventual product. As Arieti argues, "In the sciences the validity of a given problem situation depends entirely on the conditions inherent in the problem situation itself whereas in the arts there are as many possible ways of representing a given subject as there are outlooks and attitudes" (65).[28] If Arieti is

correct, then surely we err in describing a painting or sculpture or tone-poem as a problem; or, at least, as a *single* problem.

Or do we? According to pioneering creativity researcher Mikhail Csikeszentmihly, *all* creative activity is, inevitably:

> The process of solution to a problem. Although this "problem" is often not consciously formulated by the artist, it may be assumed that without some source of problematic feelings he would have nothing to do. It may be assumed further that if the artist begins a painting as a process of a personal discovery of an aesthetic problem, his works will be relatively more original than if he begins a painting to fit a standard aesthetic problem. (108)

Csikeszentmihly's claim notwithstanding, terms like "standard aesthetic problems" tend to emphasize rigid conceptions of artistic form even as they occlude the subtle distinctions of content, reference and symbol inherent in much artistic creativity.

For example, consider the case of William, who undertakes to write a sonnet in the Shakespearean form. In fact, he is aware both before and during his writing that he wishes to write a sonnet. That William addresses successfully the problem of writing a sonnet in no way accurately sums up the range of artistic concerns and options open to him during his writing nor exhaustively describes alternative problems that might play a simultaneous or supplementary role. During his composition William does not engage with a "research problem" as standardly conceived, because the formal properties of the sonnet do not fully comprise either his creative action or its results.

Along similar lines, a particularly damaging observation about the inadequacy of problem-solving approaches to creativity is registered by Mario Bunge, who takes issue with the idea that computers are capable of inventing new ideas and/or matter:

> The claim that it is possible to design creative computers amounts to the thesis that it is possible to formulate rules for inventing ideas. But the very idea of *ars inveniendi* is wrong because, by definition, an invention is not to be had by just applying a set of rules. Once an invention is in hand one may invent rules for applying it as a matter of routine . . . First the creation, then the routine. To attempt to reverse the process, or conflate the two stages, betrays poor logic. (304)

By universalizing creativity as the application of heuristics to a defined research problem, problem-solving models present an inadequate view of the creative artist as an obedient follower of codes that, if used correctly, virtually guarantee results. As Sparshott observes, this view cannot do justice to the artist "whose style determines a way of developing and changing his ways of proceeding themselves, who sees in the next occasion for his art not an opportunity to do what he knows how to do but an opportunity to do the next best thing" (52). Sparshott's intervention rests elegantly at the intersection of convention and innovation, where art generates new ways of art-making, always under the guidance of the artist, and involves, in Arieti's words, "not the mechanical application of prescribed techniques but the spontaneous solution" (65). Such a procedure has the

advantage of neither absolutely requiring nor excluding problem-solving techniques, depending instead on contextual goals, abilities, plans and intentions for guidance.

In fact, I would argue that the locus of creative action, at least from the point at which it becomes intentional action, lies in the guiding plans and intentions of the creative agent and the degree to which these affect motivation, procedure and product. As Zamiara notes, "Creative activities and their products and also receptive-interpretational activities are all intentional" (33).[29] It makes sense that the budding poet who intentionally writes an ode to a sunset on a warm July night has significantly divergent reasons and goals from the astronomer who intentionally charts gaseous activity on the same fading star.[30] Both the poet and the astronomer engage in intentional action. Therefore, it is not the *fact* but the *content* of their beliefs, desires, intentions and actions that distinguish the two very different actions. If, as I have suggested earlier, we are prepared to grant that the cognitive structure of creative actions is similar to human actions generally, then we must also grant that intentionality is an important feature of the creative process. On this basis I shall introduce my own model, specifically adapted to literary creativity.

An Intentionalist Model of Creativity:

The following model is based on a planning view of creativity. By planning I mean the roles played by plans and intentions in motivating, guiding and appropriately terminating creative action. As I have configured it, the model draws on research from the philosophy of psychology, cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and philosophical

theories of action, yielding seven ascending and interlocking horizontal stages each describing a part of the creative process:[31]

1. Recognize/ Identify an aesthetic or non-aesthetic creative motivator.

2. Develop a plan (derived from beliefs, desires and contexts) for writing.

3. Develop corresponding writerly intentions.

4. Organize domain-relevant skills, tools and information.

5. Generate, sub-generate and develop ideas in writing.

6. Revise and refine.

7. Suspend/complete, reassess and release.

With respect to the first stage of this model, I consider that plans and intentions are essential to structuring human creative activity. I wish to emphasize therefore that the creative motivator may be a reaction, a problem, an impulse, an emotion or any other state with propositional content capable of generating intentions. In this broad sense, the creative motivator in my model is capable of initiating research into the cure for a dangerous disease, a clever way to rig up a swing-set, the nostalgic post-divorce moonlight rendering of a poem cycle and so forth. The second and third steps of my revised model involve the active development of creative plans and intentions. I refer here to the role played by plans and intentions in motivating, guiding and appropriately terminating creative action. In taking plans and intentions to be primary in structuring creative activity I appeal to Michael Bratman's notion that human beings are planning agents, and as such possess both "the capacity to act purposively and the capacity to form

and execute plans" (2).[32] Plans aid in co-ordinating activity and serve also to inform and generate intentions. Intentions in turn function as "conduct-controlling pro-attitudes" directed always towards action (26). Intentions incorporate, where plans do not, a settling function. To intend to act is to be *motivated* to act, to have beliefs about *how* to act, and to be *settled* on acting accordingly. I shall expand upon the relationship between plans, intentions and literary creativity momentarily.

I have identified stage four as a procedure wherein materials and strategies suitable for creative action are organized (Amabile & Tighe 7). As noted previously, creative organization is notable for making extensive use of domain-relevant skills. Also, the gathering of materials required for creative action occurs during this period.

My fifth stage concerns idea-generation. Idea-generation may occur in short bursts or be extended over long periods of time, and reconsideration and other changes are usual features of this process. The form and content of a work may therefore diverge or expand well beyond the confines of the original problem on the basis of new plans as these are generated during creative activity.

Stage six is characterized by the revision and refinement of ideas using domain-specific criteria. Revision and refinement allow an artist to determine how best to balance novelty and effect in order to generate a product that is complete, displays either (or both) psychological or historical originality,[33] and is ready for release before some audience. In other words, creative works must be revised and assessed not only with

respect to their internal merit and coherence, but also on the basis of the formal, social, cultural and historical features that help structure paradigms of creative inquiry.[34]

This brings me to my final stage, consisting in the appropriate termination of creative activity relative to the full range of variables specific to the product and its creator. I consider that there are three possible outcomes of creative action: 1) satisfactory completion; 2) suspension of creative activity without satisfactory completion but with a plan for renewed activity; and 3) cessation of creative activity without any plan for its resumption. Taking these points in order, my criterion for satisfactory completion requires that the creative product be aligned (formally, thematically and so forth) with the guiding plans and intentions of its maker, ready for release.[35] Therefore, creative action is satisfactorily completed a) when relevant plans and goals have been satisfactorily met; or b) when an appropriate new plan is activated.[36] With respect to the second point, the temporary cessation of creative activity, whether due to blockage, time constraints or a variety of personal factors is a common occurrence, and will lead either to eventual completion or abandonment. The abandonment of a creative project also occurs often, perhaps more so for some than others. By my definition, a creative project, once abandoned, is unlikely to be recovered and completed. This does not mean the loss of all materials generated during the process; a blocked poet may attempt to break the blockage by re-ordering words and images in line with new themes and plans, for example.

Now that I have laid out the bare bones of my model of literary creative action, I would like to zero in on some of the key functions of plans and intentions in the

generation of literary works. First, as John Hayes and Linda Flowers point out, both "plans to do" (rhetorical plans) and "plans to say" (content-oriented and composing plans) help writers to invest their work with structure and meaning. Plans aid writers in shaping their central themes, organizing ideas and information and sustaining creative activity.

Second, plans allow for adjustment at any time during the creative process. As I noted earlier, Frankfurt conceives that a person's ability to perform a wide range of adjustments to his or her actions is a capacity unique to human agents. As members of the same class, creative actions admit of virtually the same sorts of desires, beliefs, intentions and corrective criticisms usual to human actions generally. In this manner, agents acting creatively routinely engage in a variety of adjustments during creative production--remember Susan, who painstakingly guides her brush in order to achieve precisely the desired placement, colour and texture.

Third, a planning approach is uniquely equipped to perform some important conceptual work in a model of literary creativity. Only with recourse to plans, goals and intentions may we accurately make the following distinctions: between creative and non-creative activities; between creative activities and non-intentional mental processes; between creative products and products of any other activity; and between creative products and any other side effect of the same activity (Zamiara 33).

After all, one does not create purely accidentally: Newton's famous headache may well have been the result of a fluke wind (or a mischievous apple tree-climber), but his weaving of disparate ideas, observations and hypotheses into a larger theory of gravity

required careful thought and lucid practical reasoning. This is not to say that all discoveries are spectacular examples of logically conceived and executed intentional actions; serendipity has certainly played a part in innovations in the arts as well as in the social and natural sciences--but rather that exploring new ideas and objects consistently is aided by plans and intentions. Thus, my model of creativity requires--fundamentally--a moderate intentionalism with respect to literary authorship and interpretation.

In making this claim I am persuaded by Paisley Livingston and Alfred Mele's discussion of moderate intentionalism in their article entitled "Intentions and Interpretations." For Livingston & Mele, moderate intentionalism relies upon a psychological realism about the existence of beliefs, desires, emotions and intentions as real-world phenomena, and not simply "useful fictions or spectators' constructions" (942). As an interpretative stance, moderate intentionalism holds that we can access at least some of an author's intentions some of the time, and that understanding these intentions can prove salutary in critical and theoretical practice.

As I demonstrated above, creativity may be motivated by a variety of mental states with propositional content stimulated either by external or internal events. Each of these motivators of creativity is in turn capable of sponsoring a plan the executive component of which is an intention or set of intentions to act. Insofar as creativity is active--and it is usually active--it is influenced by plans and intentions. Insofar as creativity is deliberate--and it is usually deliberate--it likewise involves plans and intentions.

Finally, if we allow that humans use plans and intentions in order to act creatively, then we must also agree that literary texts, as intentional artifacts, contain important clues to their author's own goals, plans and intentions. Such information may prove invaluable in generating interpretative inferences, descriptions of meaning and judgements of value. This is precisely the case, as I shall now argue, with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

Towards a Literary Model:

Both as a Gothic novel and as an index of modern myths--of creation, of birth, of the perils of scientific over-reaching--Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus remains a remarkably original and powerful creative achievement. And yet, as many readers of Frankenstein have no doubt wondered and as Shelley herself asks in her 1831 Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition, "How [was it that] I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?" (5).

How indeed? Well, according to the introduction--a story almost as well-known as that of Frankenstein itself--the literary Muse visits the young Mary Shelley during a dream, leaving the thinly-fleshed skeleton of a novel in its wake. Behind this fortuitous collision of imagination and inspiration we may glimpse the shadow of the Prometheus myth referred to in Shelley's sub-title: creativity, in the form of an illuminating fire, is conferred upon the worthy by a supernatural power. I propose that a closer reading of Shelley's introduction effectively debunks this Romantic myth, while at the same time making explicit what the novel only suggests: namely, that creativity, far from being the

chance convergence of breeding, genius and divine inspiration, functions instead via the intentional application of skill, effort and imagination. To buttress this claim, I shall now examine in detail the circumstances of Mary Shelley's composition of Frankenstein with reference to the model of literary creative action adduced above.

The main points of the familiar story outlined in the introduction are as follows: Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Dr. John Polidori held an impromptu ghost story contest, taken far less seriously by the poets than by Mary Shelley, who was determined to produce a tale that would "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror--one to make the reader dread to look around, and to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (7-8). Some days after the original contest, following a prolonged discussion between Percy and Polidori about the legendary (and apocryphal) re-animation experiments of Dr. Erasmus Darwin, Shelley spent a restless night in bed, drifting into unbearably vivid dreams:

> When I placed my head upon my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive visions that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw--with shut eyes but acute mental vision--I saw the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the workings of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, vital motion. Frightful must it be. (8)

When she awoke, Shelley recorded the dream in the hopes of contriving a ghost story "which would frighten my reader as I had been frightened that night!" (884), and Frankenstein subsequently was written and polished over a nine-month period.

These comprise the events described in the Author's Introduction. I shall preserve for the most part the general contents of this sequence while offering a somewhat different description of the underlying creative process to which it refers. First, Shelley scholars like Anne Mellor and Ellen Moers[37] have documented thoroughly the various autobiographical echoes in Frankenstein. Unsurprisingly, this evidence shows that the genesis of the novel was much more complex and temporally extended than Shelly claims. And the biographical data further suggests that key thematic elements of Frankenstein--the horrors of childbirth, the burdens of ambition, and so forth--relate directly to a series of personal conflicts that Shelley struggled with more or less continuously throughout her life. Remember, Shelley went to bed on that fateful night with ghost stories--and more particularly her desire to write one--very much on her mind: "I recurred to my ghost story,--my tiresome unlucky ghost story!" (884). Now, strictly speaking one cannot *intend* to dream--or at least cannot hold much hope of influencing the dream's content--but just prior to sleeping and dreaming Shelley recognized and clearly was concerned with a specific creative motivator: her desire to furnish her husband and his friends with a story--exactly in line with stage one of the aforementioned model of literary creative action. This immediate creative motivation, identified and placed against a background of relevant beliefs, sponsored the initial organization of emotions, images and

so on into an essentially coherent plan to write a work of fiction. Or, recalling Shelley's brief bout with writer's block, her plan (and corresponding intentions) to at least *try* to write. So stages two and three of my model hold.

Stage four was activated only after Shelley recognized the literary potential of her dream, and endeavours to make effective use of her domain-relevant skills. She organized relevant knowledge and imaginative materials to aid in her creative plans and intentional strategies; in the case of Frankenstein her remarkable command of the language of contemporary science and her adoption of the epistolary form as a structuring device for the story reflect domain-relevant skills. Also, she most likely gathered and employed physical items pertaining to a suitable writing environment at this point.

In accordance with my model's fifth stage, Shelley ordered the events of her dream as workable ideas and generated further chains of ideas on the level of plot construction and progression, word-play, and the development of characters and their attributes. As she wrote, her initial "vision" was modified, sometimes deepened and sometimes deleted altogether. For example, consider these two physical descriptions of the monster: the first appears in the Author's Introduction as an account of Shelley's original dream, in which the monster is described alternately as "the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out . . stirring with an uneasy, vital motion . . . the hideous corpse . . . the horrid thing with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes." (9). In the second, which I have excerpted from the published novel, Shelley's brief nightmare image is reconfigured as Dr. Frankenstein's recollection of his initial encounter with his hellish creation:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and his straight black lips. (56)

The similarities are there--the watery eyes, the corpse-like skin--but the second account is by far the richer; more detailed, more evocative and more powerful, the ideas bearing a recognizable resemblance to the original vision but showing significant refinement.

Finally, in line with stage seven, Shelley refined her ideas into a carefully structured novel notable for its complex concentric intermingling of past and present, as well as for its distinctive narrative voices. She revised and polished Frankenstein for almost a year before its release into publication, incorporating the suggestions of Percy Shelley along with her own editorial alterations. The final work has a consistency of theme and style and a command of phrase appropriate to someone who had clear goals concerning her creative project and who acted to achieve these with a minimum of digression.

Now, always mindful of standard anti-intentionalist objections, I must emphasize that my moderate intentionalist account does not require that each and every theme, reference or punctuation mark of Frankenstein hearken back to a specific (and easily accessible) plan or intention. Rather, I claim only that Shelley's novel was motivated,

guided and sustained by an evolving series of plans and corresponding intentions. As I have suggested above, examples of relevant plans are everywhere apparent in Shelley's design for Frankenstein, including of course her decision to commence writing it in the first place. Relevant intentions informed her choice of genre, and, on various levels and at various times, aspects of her novel's structure, plot, characterization, and even language. After all, given that Shelley intended Frankenstein to be a ghost story, certain formal and thematic decisions were necessary. By the time she began writing Frankenstein, Shelley had already read and absorbed the major Gothic novels by Radcliffe and Walpole. The Gothic tale of terror was an established, highly popular genre with some important conventions, including the use of first-person narration to promote a heightened sense of realism, and the investment of the Gothic landscape with a powerful allegorical presence--both of which devices are employed to great effect in Frankenstein. In addition, Shelley carefully incorporated formal aspects of Samuel Richardson's well-known epistolary novels Pamela and Clarissa into her own. These literary borrowings testify to Shelley's guiding plans and intentional choices, based on detailed consideration, with respect to key elements of narration, exposition and setting.

Similarly, once Shelley had generated initial plans concerning say, plot, theme, and characterization, many alternative choices had to be ruled out. This is because writerly action, like all creative action, expands and narrows the range of potential plans at many levels as it progresses. For example, it was inconceivable given Shelley's plans for Frankenstein that the monster become suddenly handsome, a Martian, or invisible halfway

through the book. Such decisions are influenced by the sets of beliefs, desires, and intentions with which the writer begins his or her exploration. Still, to allow that creativity is guided and sustained by intentions is not to rule out the contributions of impulse, or artistic vision or free and spontaneous ideas, but simply to ground these in a psychologically plausible context of beliefs, desires, intentions, plans and further goals.

Finally, literary creativity routinely exploits conventionalized intentional default settings specific to the creator and his or her social, linguistic, and other contexts (Mele 229). Thus, it was not necessary for Mary Shelley to remember each and every time she wrote it that an "h" follows "t" in the word *the*. This knowledge of grammar functions by default. Nor did Shelley re-create the character of Dr. Frankenstein each time she resumed writing; this too would have become a default process relating backwards to the Doctor's extant character attributes (material description, narrative voice, knowledge of the world etc.), and forwards to upcoming textual developments. These default processes highlight, ironically, the commonplace suspicion that a significant proportion of literary creativity is mechanical and formulaic. Such banal creative products may result from the need to meet a deadline, a commission, a personal quota and so on. Like everything else that is human, creative writing is not devoid of instrumental overtones, and this I think supports, rather than negates, the role played by plans and intentions in literary creativity.

In addition to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, itself exemplary of a carefully crafted and guided creative literary work, there is a wealth of evidence, anecdotal, biographical, experimental and theoretical, that strongly suggests that literary creativity is as a matter of

course intentional action guided by a variety of plans and intentions. To accept this commonsense premise, I have argued, does *not* require believing that we can access *all* of these intentions and plans, on *all* levels, *all* of the time. Rather, I am advocating that literary creativity be understood as following, sometimes securely, sometimes swerving, a path defined by an agent's goals, plans, intentions, skills and relevant environmental and socio-cultural contexts.

In --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade, Malcolm Cowley sketches a simple model for literary composition. It runs as follows:

> There would seem to be four stages in the composition of a story. First comes the germ of the story, then a period of more or less conscious meditation, then the first draft, and finally the revision, which may be simply 'pencil work,' as John O'Hara calls it--that is, minor changes in wording--or may lead to writing several drafts and what amounts to a new work. (180)

This model contains much of the information of my own in significantly fewer words. How does Cowley manage this? On the one hand, his model forsakes some of the precision and detail of my own. On the other--and this is crucial--Cowley is himself a writer, and is used to working with writers. He knows how they think, and how they work. In fact, his account as much as my own presupposes and depends on plans and intentions. Cowley's writer is no abstraction but a person whose work he might be required to edit. In this sense, it is Cowley's writer, Cowley's Lowry, who shall be my real-world benchmark in ensuing chapters.

To sum up, I have, in this chapter, worked through three separate but related questions: the main features involved in any creative process; the function of plans and intentions in literary creativity; and a case-study linking these two theoretical concerns. I have outlined and demonstrated a model which, if rough, at least points the way towards a more nuanced, rigorous, and sophisticated approach to literary creative action. In Chapter Three, I shall use this model as a basis from which to explicate the complex and under-researched phenomenon of writer's block.

Chapter Three

Writing and Writer's Block

> You don't know what it is to stay a whole day with your head in your hands trying to squeeze your unfortunate head so as to find a word.
>
> - Gustave Flaubert

> I sit down religiously every morning, I sit down for eight hours every day--and the sitting down is all. In the course of that working day of eight hours I write three sentences which I erase before leaving the table in despair. . . it takes all my resolution and power of self-control to refrain from butting my head against the wall. I want to howl and foam at the mouth, but I daren't do it for fear of waking the baby and alarming my wife.
>
> - Joseph Conrad

In 1948, from the heart of Italy, Margerie Lowry wrote to Albert Erskine with the depressing news that "Malcolm is losing his mind now it is going quickly so that one can see the change from week to week. He has periods of apparent calm and brilliance followed by periods of blackness. And he's becoming actively dangerous" (51:3). What Margerie did not tell Erskine, who was after all responsible for finalizing the details of the American launch of Under the Volcano, was that Malcolm was drinking again, and he had also virtually ceased to write. For Lowry it was one of the frequent and drawn-out experiences of writer's block that were to haunt his later days and so severely compromise the consistency of his mature work: between 1946, when the Volcano was submitted to publishers, and 1957, he was unable to complete another novel. Despite this eleven-year hiatus (which might easily have continued had he lived), specific mention of writer's block is entirely absent from the Lowrys' correspondence, although references by Lowry and others to his inability to write abound.

Why could neither Malcolm nor Margerie Lowry, consummate hypochondriacs both, recognize what anyone today might speedily if unhelpfully diagnose as writer's block, that bane of the literary artist from antiquity to present day? The simple answer is

that, however ancient the condition, the term "writer's block" is an artifact of the late twentieth-century, popularized in 1950 by the Viennese psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler. Agonized about by writers ranging from St. Augustine to Balzac to Tillie Olsen, even today there is a dearth of academic materials on writer's blocks outside of a very few books and several articles, typically found in journals devoted to the study of composition and rhetoric, psychotherapy or perceptual cognition. Still more surprisingly, given its historical importance, there has never been a book-length investigation--with the notable exception of Zachary Leader's 1991 Writer's Block--of the condition within the context of literary studies.[38] This professional oversight illustrates the disinclination of literary scholars to theorize rigorously the creative processes behind the texts which are their bread and butter, and simply reinforces the Romantic mystification of literary creativity. It is against this sparse backdrop that I shall delineate the structure and general processes of writer's block, linking my findings to the model for literary creativity sketched out in Chapter Two and prefiguring my discussion of Malcolm Lowry's own writing blocks in Chapter Four.

Before I begin my analysis however, it is worth taking seriously Leader's apt observation that writer's block among professional writers--those whose business it is to know how to write and to be very good at it--is significantly more complex a problem than blocking among other less specialized populations. For Leader, one of the weaknesses of the various accounts of writer's block posited by rhetoricians and cognitive scientists is their empiricist bias. For example, Mike Rose studies a range of college students over a

period of months, while John Hayes and Linda Flower similarly predicate their "protocol analyses" on a test-group of college students and professors and Lynn Bloom focuses exclusively on female graduate students--albeit from a range of academic disciplines--experiencing writing anxiety over their incomplete theses. Although Rose and Bloom also invoke well-known cases of literary blockage, I concede to Leader that important (though to my mind not incommensurable) differences obtain.

However, Leader goes a step further, arguing that cognitivist approaches to creative writing as well as to writing blocks are by definition inadequate. Leader's objections are premised on his claim that "By cognition is meant those aspects of mental life concerned with knowing, including perceiving, comparing, contrasting, remembering, reasoning, and judging. It is traditionally contrasted with willing and feeling" (16). But this patently misconstrues contemporary cognitive psychology and philosophy. How can we feel about that which we cannot perceive, or know about or believe? And what is will without a component of reason? In challenging cognitive views of writing Leader implies that creative writing, because it admits of an emotional component, cannot be a cognitive activity. At the same time, in advancing his psychoanalytic account of writer's block Leader makes extensive reference to cognitive properties like perception, wanting, believing, remembering and self-report. At bottom, therefore, Leader's brief objections to cognitive accounts of writer's block are too inconsistent to take seriously as an obstacle to my making use of such accounts here.[39] Before I do so, however, it will be useful to define in more substantial terms the phenomenon of writers block

Definitions of Writer's Block:

Although its symptoms have probably existed for as long as humans have been concerned with literary creation, there have been few attempts to provide concrete definitions for writer's block.[40] An exception is the American writer Tillie Olsen, who in Silences, uses the term "unnatural silences" to denote periods of writer's block specifically relating to the socially institutionalized silencing of women (6). For Olsen, unnatural silences follow from the "unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being," as distinct from the natural silence entailed by "that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow, gestation, in the natural cycle of creation" (6). Olsen stresses that writer's block follows as a consequence of external social pressures and constraints. For his part, Leader considers that blocks can result from external (social) as well as internal (usually Oedipal) forces.

By contrast, the classical psychoanalytic view, first instantiated in Bergler's The Writer and Psychoanalysis, configures the writer as both the site and the cause of writer's block. Bergler formulates writer's block as a "euphemism for sterility of productivity," claiming at the same time that "normal people just don't feel impelled to write" (Boice 184). The act of writing thus becomes fraught with pathological implications, and writer's block is viewed, with respect to one's psyche, as a positive relief. Bergler had a healthy contempt for writers and their mythologies, and yet his definition of writer's block echoes the Romantic myth which teaches that writers, divinely inspired, must pay the Muse with their youth, sanity and in some cases even their lives. In this sense, Bergler's formulation persists in naturalizing the popular view that writers are a breed apart whose unhealthy

craft will in time destroy them. In effect, Bergler countenances precisely the "unnatural silencing" so powerfully identified by Tillie Olsen.

Although variations on Bergler's formulation have had a significant influence on psychoanalytic as well as folk accounts of writer's block, there has recently been a series of moves by cognitive psychologists and researchers into rhetoric and composition aimed at better understanding the diverse processes and conditions huddled under the umbrella label of writer's block. Like the psychoanalytic paradigm, the cognitivist program is both descriptive and prescriptive: descriptive in its attempt to identify the causes and processes of writer's block; and prescriptive in trying to provide the means to overcome short-term blockages and lessening the damage caused by more severe blocks, in some cases encouraging more efficient and productive writing strategies. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that, in some well-known cases--for example that of the young author of Raintree County, Ross Lockridge[41]--a severe block can have profound consequences. A therapeutic component will therefore always be important to a comprehensive account of writer's block.

Within composition theory, consistently challenging research into writer's block has been conducted by Mike Rose, who in Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension, succinctly describes the condition as "an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment" (3). Rose further points out that:

> Blocking is not simply measured by the passage of time (for writers often spend productive time toying with ideas without putting pen to paper), but by the

> passage of time with limited productive involvement in the writing task . . . Blocking can be manifested in a variety of ways: some high-blockers [people who block frequently] produce only a few sentences; others produce many more, but these sentences will be false starts, repetitions, blind alleys, or disconnected fragments of discourse; still others produce a certain amount of satisfactory prose only to stop in mid-essay . . . blocking is a composing process dysfunction that is related to skill in complex, not simple ways. (3)

Rose's account of writer's block highlights several factors central to understanding the condition relative to literary composition: 1) the importance of domain-relevant skills; 2) the role played "commitment" in both initiating and sustaining writing; and 3) the sheer diversity among the apparent causes and symptoms experienced by different and differently blocked writers. Of these three points, the importance of skills and appropriate commitment to a professional writer particularly cannot be overstated.

Building on Rose's capsule definition, Donald Graves concentrates on the potential contributions of emotions to writing blocks. Graves posits that disruptive (usually negative) emotions such as anger or frustration can develop into a full-blown "writing anxiety" capable of neutralizing a writer's productivity (22).[42] Graves associates writing anxiety[43] with diffused attention, a reduction in the capacity of short-term memory to process information and finally a paralyzing fear. A person in the final stages of writing anxiety may either to rush to completion or even abandon a work-in-progress, despite his or her beliefs about the ultimate efficacy of such actions.

In addition to anxiety, Graves develops the term "underarousal" in order to account for the disinterest that can lead to premature suspension of creative activity (27). Graves' description of writing anxiety provides a convincing means of de-pathologizing writer's block by repositioning it as usual, treatable, and constituted in part by natural emotions. This view receives support from Sharon Kubasak, who feels that, "at its most positive, writer's block is regarded as a writers' space--a space which to be vital rather than lethal needs to be used and left behind" (372). The transient nature of Kubasak's "vital space" harmonizes with Rose's intuition that writer's block occurs over and above childhood trauma or the contemplation of ideas before writing as well as with Graves' understanding of writing anxiety: a writer who is using his or her "space" productively is presumably not anxious about the activity; it is when the space threatens to become "lethal" that anxieties--and blocks--set in.

Returning to the question of commitment, Daly points out that, upon a multi-dimensional view of the writing process, it is essential that a blocked writer "find some value in the activity" of writing (44). In Daly's parlance, "An individual's attitudes about writing are just as basic to successful writing as are his or here writing skills" (44). Here again we need to distinguish between a professional writer and someone to whom writing is an incidental activity occasioned by, for example, the need to fulfill the requirements for an introductory course in English Literature. Because the commitment of professional writers is presupposed by virtue of their trade, Leader contends that writer's block "need have nothing to do with lack of application. Nor need it 'really,' as

others suggest, be a sign of incompetence or lack of talent; after all, the term can hardly apply to those who do not know how to write" (16). However, *contre* Leader, it is hardly self-evident that professional writers are always already committed to that which they are trying to write, as well as the manner in which they are trying to write it. A writer's commitment to write a short story may differ significantly from his or her commitment to write a novel. It is possible, therefore, that the question of commitment is considerably more complex than at first it seems: not only must the writer be committed to his or her work, he or she must also have the *right sort* of commitment.

If I am correct about the subtle and fluctuating nature of a writer's commitment to a given work, then it becomes doubly important to take seriously the role of plans, intentions, capacities and skills naturally entailed by something like Rose's notion of commitment. Daly tells us that the range of dispositional attitudes a writer might hold prior to, during and following writerly activity in large part determines the progress and outcome of that activity (66). As various experimental and anecdotal evidence suggests, blockages can often appear most damagingly during composition, most probably as a consequence of premature writerly reflection leading to dissatisfaction with work-in-progress. These self-directed attributions exemplify a writerly dispositional attitude unfortunately located at the nexus of goals, plans, intentions and self-criticism. Beliefs about the utility of one's writing (personal, cultural and so forth) relative to other writers or to other potential activities also represent writerly dispositional attitudes relevant to the formation of writer's blocks

From the above, I wish to isolate several key concepts for further application to Lowry's writer's block. First, I wish to preserve Rose's two-fold capsule definition of writer's block as consisting in a) the possession of domain-relevant skills and b) a consistent commitment to writing. Second, Graves' belief in the potential of emotions to both guide and temporarily derail writerly activity is suggestive, and firmly in line with anecdotal evidence as well as with the more narrowly-focused empirical literature on writer's block. Third, I propose to consider writer's block as an intervention between stages of the literary creative process. I believe this last claim may be appropriately nuanced by way of further exploration into the causes and processes of writer's block, with reference to the two dominant paradigms that structure research in the field: the psychoanalytic and what I have termed the cognitivist approach.

Causes of Writer's Block:

There has been little energy exerted towards understanding what factors play a role in motivating and sustaining writer's block. I suspect that the main reasons for this inattention derive from the disinclination to delve into waters where others have failed to find success coupled with adherence to antiquated Heroic or Romantic accounts of creative causation and process. After all, if literary creativity depends upon an inspirational visit from the Muse, its premature cessation then follows logically from the Muse's retreat. Still, there is enough in the annals of literary criticism and composition theory to suggest that writer's block is very much the product of worldly forces.

As Leader rightly notes, the psychoanalytic tradition represents the dominant system for theorizing and treating writer's block. The psychoanalytic concern with writer's block begins with scattered references to creativity in Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams (among other writings). Leader's reading of Freud implies "a single blocking agent: the internalized image of the father or whatever 'part' stands for him," although it is possible "to discover in Freud's writings a second motivating force in art and literature and thus the possibility of a second source of blockage. This source is the death instinct" (34). Thus, the repressed drives that motivate all creativity can work to smother it as well, preventing "the blocked writer from releasing powerful instincts and wishes," and leaving writing to assume "the character of a dangerous transgression, one which, because the fantasies that motivate it are usually or ultimately Oedipal, is associated with the past" (37). But these are Leader's words, not Freud's, for "never in Freud's writings is this process fully anatomized . . . We must work from partial accounts" (37).

After Freud, the psychoanalytic interest in writing and writer's block continued in the work of Jung, who emphasized the "alien" nature of the artist's experience, followed by Bergler, Melanie Klein and the British Objects-Relations School. More recently, the psychoanalytical banner is carried by Robert Boice, Zachary Leader, Joyce McDougall, Elliot Schumann and, in a modified form, Victoria Nelson.[44] Not surprisingly, given their pedigree, psychoanalytic views of writer's block are heavily treatment-oriented, and typically privilege traumatic childhood experiences as being instrumental in forming the neuroses responsible for blockages. Because creative writing is the supervention of

unconscious process onto the conscious mind, the root cause of writer's block may be found only with recourse to the unconscious. In this vein, Edmund Bergler writes that:

> The adult writer's flow of words is a psychological substitute for the flow of milk he wanted and did not get, plus a recognition for all the guilt he subconsciously felt since his diaper days. Once the analyst has worked the anxious writer back to the point where he can endorse mother's product without fear, shame or remorse, it's simply a matter of putting a fresh sheet of paper into the machine and hitting the keys. (Boice 185)

Using a treatment based on this diagnosis (requiring writers to recapture the feeling of suckling at the mother's breast using suitable substitutes), Bergler claimed a success rate of 100% with his 36 patients, though he felt strongly that the successfully unblocked writer would "be a poor writer and be better suited to another pursuit" (185).[45]

Not quite the zealot that Bergler was, Robert Boice takes a very different tack in his historical treatment of psychoanalytical approaches to blocking. Citing a wide range of sources, he lists a number of factors with the potential to cause blockages, including: 1) anxiety resulting from the quick feedback possible with verbal discourse but difficult to achieve during writing (often cited in relation to Coleridge, whose conversational prowess outlived his degenerating writing skills); 2) perfectionism; 3) poor time management; and 4) impatience with rate of productivity or final results (184-90). Although dismissive of the heavy jargon typically employed by psychoanalysts to describe root causes of writer's block, Boice's own attempts at simplification result in a similarly reductive analysis. While

some of his suggestions are helpful in identifying poor writing habits, Boice fails to provide a compelling account of causation with respect to writer's block.

A folk-psychoanalytic analysis of writer's block is provided by Victoria Nelson, whose On Writer's Block is a curious compendium of quotations from literary sources blended unevenly with down-home wisdom, self-help manual optimism and unexpectedly shrewd insights. Drawing on a wide variety of theoretical and anecdotal materials, Nelson assembles an account of writing heavily indebted to "commonsense" principles such as: "one must love oneself to engage in the spontaneous playfulness of the creative act," and "writing . . . is an act requiring positive moral energy" (5). Although comparatively recent, Nelson's book has acquired something of the status of a classic, and is regularly consulted by blocked professional writers. It is therefore a book to take seriously as much for its usefulness as an index to popular conceptions of literary creativity and writer's block as for Nelson's detailed consideration of the roles of ambition, success, revision and other processes specific to the practice of literature that do not receive adequate attention from academic scholars working in the field.

For Nelson, "play" forms the basis of literary creativity. She takes play to be symbolically important as the time in most peoples' lives "when they threw themselves unselfconsciously and wholeheartedly into all manner of creative efforts" and when "they experienced no resistance to their play--only the intense, uncritical, unalloyed and ineffable pleasure of *homo faber*" (4). Nelson is careful to contrast play with the "analytical, ego-oriented thinking" she associates with adult society (4). This concept of play forms

the basis for her Romantic contention that creativity can best be explained as "forces that are inside us, forces that are truly gifts--ours by virtue of grace and not possession" (4-5).

Throughout her book, Nelson highlights the importance of spontaneous emotion and "letting go" to literary creativity. Not surprisingly, and fully in keeping with the psychoanalytical tradition, she feels that the overarching cause of writer's block is the repression of the playful child inside--i.e., the unconscious--by the watchful and ego-oriented adult controlling the conscious mind. For Nelson, as for (Leader's) Freud, writer's block is temporary and transient, the unnatural product of civilization and self-reflection, and Nelson's strategies for the removal of blocks tend to reflect her faith in the self-healing abilities of our unconscious: if you let it, inspiration will come.

Evident in all three preceding psychoanalytic theories of writer's block is the influence of the Romantic view of creativity, wherein the artist is the essentially passive conduit for powerful unconscious or otherworldly forces. In fact, Leader premises his study on the writing blocks of those giants of Romantic poetry William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. For Leader, Wordsworth was a victim of writer's block insofar as his poetry got progressively worse during the latter half of his life. Where Coleridge is concerned, Leader points out that fragments like the famed "Kubla Khan" demonstrate that Coleridge was unable to complete many of the works he began so promisingly, as evidenced by the infamous "Porlock incident."[46] In his study of Romantic creative dysfunction Leader adopts the psychoanalytic methodology of the British object-relations school, theorizing that writer's block is related to neuroses generated during infancy that

render the individual "incapable of balancing rival impulses towards fusion and separation, synthesis and analysis, placation and aggression" (qtd. in Kellman 284).

Particularly in his analysis of Wordsworth however, Leader fails to convince. After all, Wordsworth wrote continuously throughout his life. The decline in the quality of his later poetry may be due to writer's block, but it may just as easily be a function of the diminishing of skills as natural to writers as it is to, say, dancers. Leader may be correct to cite a qualitative component to writer's block, but it is simply not clear that Wordsworth, who after all was obsessed with the poetic possibilities of the creative process, is the most likely candidate for a qualitative block. At the very least then, Leader's account represents neither a comprehensive historical survey nor a series of consistent aesthetic claims. With respect to this first criticism, as Steven Kellman notes, Leader offers little in the way of explanation concerning "the suicides, alcoholics and recluses--e.g., Hart Crane, Malcolm Lowry and J. D. Salinger--who have created so much of modern literature" (284). As for the second, in persistently defending an outdated orthodoxy, Leader offers little more than an update of old psychoanalytical "truths" concerning literary creativity and blocks. In short, psychoanalytic theories appear inadequate to the task of explaining the causes and structure of writer's block. To whom, then, shall we turn for illumination?

Once again, I think the cognitivist approach provides at least some fruitful guidelines for understanding writer's block. With respect to causes of blocks, Mike Rose identifies a number of potential factors: 1) general or specific anxiety about writing; 2)

over-rigid rule structures; 3) misleading assumptions pertaining to composition; 4) premature editing operations; 5) conflicting rules, assumptions and plans; and 6) inappropriate or inadequately understood criteria for evaluation (4). Rose's list, though instructive, is by no means exhaustive; additional possible causes of writing blocks range from "writers' cramp" (Boice 182) to Sharon Kubasak's notion of emotional focus.[47] In making sense of the bewildering array of potential causes of writer's block, it is useful to take Kelly Shaver's cue that single events may admit simultaneously of multiple necessary or necessary and sufficient causes (47). Thus, any number of the above items, singly or in combination, may be necessary, sufficient, or necessary and sufficient to cause writer's block, suggesting that an examination of the phenomenon in anything more than a clinical setting must extend its focus beyond precise mechanisms of causality.

To this end, I shall now explore the sense in which writer's block acts as an intervention in much greater detail. In so doing, it is useful to consider once again the model of literary creativity detailed in the preceding chapter:

1. Recognize/ Identify an aesthetic or non-aesthetic creative motivator.
2. Develop a plan (derived from beliefs, desires and contexts) for writing.
3. Develop corresponding writerly intentions.
4. Organize and assemble domain-relevant skills, tools and information.
5. Generate, sub-generate and develop ideas in writing.
6. Revise and refine.
7. Suspend/complete, reassess and release.

Upon careful perusal, the processes captured by my model clearly are vulnerable to interventions of writer's block. For example, while I conceive of creative action as broadly horizontal in orientation, such that an agent may freely circle back to previous steps, or repeat others as his or her plans and goals require, each stage depends upon the preceding one in order to render the process coherent and complete. There is little to be gained from revising a text before its first word has been inscribed, nor do authors tend to seek higher-level skills between the completion and release of a completed work. My point here is that within the model (and, I believe, in practice) the balance maintained during literary creativity is delicate, such that any stage remains vulnerable to digression, suspension or even abandonment as a consequence of writer's block.

I have suggested above that writer's block is best described as an intervention that disrupts, temporarily or permanently, the creative writing process. Because an event as ordinary as say, a telephone call or power failure might conceivably constitute an intervention of writer's block, the *quality* of this disruption needs to be better defined. Perhaps certain sites may be plausibly ruled out; for example, it seems unlikely that writer's block intervenes between the creative motivation and idea generation stages. On the other hand, Virginia Woolf no doubt speaks for many writers when she describes a block at precisely this point: "I know the feeling now, when I can't spin a sentence and sit mumbling and turning; and nothing flits by my brain, which is as blank as a window" (121). So, to avoid leaving anything out I shall consider each stage of my model in turn, carefully marking those sites ripe for interventions of writing blocks.

Pre-Writing Blocks:

In their influential work on the functions of planning in composition,[48] Linda Flower and John Hayes undertake a series of protocol analyses in order better to understand the numerous and interrelated cognitive processes involved in writing. Arguing against the popular account of "writing as a series of tidy sequential steps," Flower and Hayes claim that: "A writer caught in the act of writing looks much more like a very busy switchboard operator trying to juggle a number of demands on her attention and constraints on what she can do" (33). Flower and Hayes's suggestive metaphor is intended to underscore the *complexity* of the writing process, and I would add, its susceptibility to interference.

For Flower and Hayes, good planning can go a long way towards good writing.[49] The various planning and organizational strategies that constitute "pre-writing" are essential to shaping composition (32). The first three steps of my model of literary creativity--recognizing a creative motivator, developing plans and finalizing appropriate corresponding intentions--are all pre-writing activities.[50] On one level, plans for a literary text may be simple, incorporating rough ideas concerning central images and symbols, topic, style or genre, intended audience, narrative progression and limits, character types and traits and so forth. On another, plans may be highly detailed and comprehensive; as Joseph Heller claims, "I get an opening line, and a concept of the book as a full, literary entity. It's all in my head before I even begin to write" (qtd. in Steinberg 161).

Many writers are not so fortunate as Heller, however, in being able to formulate a coherent vision of an intended work prior to its inception. Writerly plans may just as easily be tentative, and have little inertia. Or they may be rigid, providing an excess of inertia. Rigid plans, because they resist modification or revision (due to new information or other upstream changes), may lead quickly to dead ends. And plans may even be inappropriate, reflecting "a normally functional strategy used at the wrong place or time in the composing process" (Rose 6).

In fact, moving from plans to intentions itself involves uncertainty (in the form of potential revisions and reconsiderations), because intentions incorporate a settling function that plans lack. Clearly, a potential site for an intervention of writer's block exists in the gap between plans and intentions. Along these lines, Mike Rose cites writing anxiety, conflicts between rules, assumptions and plans and over-rigid rules as potential catalysts for blocking. All of these factors may influence a writer during pre-writing, as early as the initial planning stages. For example, writing anxiety can problematize the movement from plans to write to the generation of appropriate intentions, as Donald Newlove explains in the following description of his plans for a new novel:

> For three months I sat around a table and complained of my fears and paralysis. . . I'd explain carefully that my method of writing was to write a first draft in longhand, type that up, correct and retype it from start to finish, then again correct and totally retype it. Since the novel was set at NINE HUNDRED PAGES this meant when I'd done I'd have filled THIRTY-SIX HUNDRED PAGES with

my writing. This was daunting. The idea that I would have to fill 3600 pages with my imagination was a now a black mountain of work that had kept me stoned with weakness for three months. (qtd. in Nelson 45)

So ambitious are Newlove's plans for the novel, and so impossible do those ambitions appear to him, that he simply cannot generate an appropriate set of intentions to write the book. As will become clear in Chapter Four, Malcolm Lowry faced essentially the same problem with his plans for "The Voyage That Never Ends."

Organization:

The organization stage represents one important potential site for blockage. Barbara Tuchman, for one, recognizes that "writing blocks generally come from difficulty of organization" (qtd. in Murray 222). Flower and Hayes stress that human brain physiology requires that we are at best "serial processors," with the consequence that our ability to organize diverse plans and information streams is necessarily limited (30-34). Viable and productive organizational strategies are therefore crucial to consistently effective writing. Structurally, organization involves the selection and application of relevant knowledge--what Carl Bereiter calls a "genre scheme"--to one's writing task, in accordance with plans and intentions, where this scheme "consists, essentially, of the knowledge available for directing a certain kind of writing" (78). Examples of "available knowledge" might include sense impressions, descriptions, fragments of dialogue and other information as well as the experiences available to a writer as (a gendered, stratified

and so forth) member of a variety of knowledge-imparting communities. Finally, organization requires that a writer recognize, select and employ suitable modes of language and utterance in light of guiding plans: "In putting any particular expression together, one *selects* words and one *combines* them. *How* one selects and combines will depend on the uses one wishes to put an utterance" (Bruner 22).

Again, there is ample room for blockage within the organization stage. As Flower and Hayes observe:

> When confronting a new or complex issue, writers must often move from a rich array of unorganized, perhaps even contradictory perceptions, memories, and propositions to an integrated notion of just what it is they think about the topic . . . Much of the work of writing can be the task of transforming incoherent thought and loosely related pockets of information into a highly conceptualized and precisely related knowledge network. (34)

Not only must the creative writer develop this "highly conceptualized and precisely related knowledge network," he or she must do so in concert with relevant plans and intentions. And, for the professional writer, organization takes on additional layers: theme, language, voice and image and symbol structures, to name but a few, must be recognized, organized and woven into the work. Viewed in this light, Lowry's Under the Volcano becomes among its other outstanding qualities a remarkable achievement of organization of disparate and complex materials and goals.

Victoria Nelson is has in mind the extra levels of organization required (in theory) of professional writers when she remarks that "Notetaking is not the same thing as writing. Taking notes is a mechanical-analytical act, not a creative one, even when the notes do not detail hard data but the soaring of your imagination" (87). Nelson's point is not that fragments cannot represent literary creativity, but rather that the integration of creative materials is in itself creative. This observation has interesting ramifications for the later Lowry, who generated much of "La Mordida" and Dark as the Grave by simply transcribing verbatim notes from his and Margerie's travel journals.

Writing:

One aspect of literary creativity that is often omitted from technical discussions is the physical act of writing itself. Good ideas, coherent planning, motivated intentions, strong organization and assembly can still result in a blank page that seems to stretch on as far as the mind can travel. The classic writing-block scenario features a writer looking with increasing desperation at a blank piece of paper on the table or rolled into a typewriter--think of the long sequence devoted to the blocked John Turturro in the recent film Barton Fink. Is it possible that the act of writing--that is, the slow (about one-tenth the speed of speech) movement of a pen across paper or fingers over a keypad--can itself become the site for an intervention of writer's block?

In fact, many writers report severe blocks occurring at the writing stage. For example, Lowry developed a condition which, for long periods in his later life, made it

impossible to hold a pen even to mark an "x" on a cheque, let alone sit down to write. This specialized condition is, somewhat paradoxically, known as "writers' cramp," defined by Boice as a "paralytic condition in which the writer cannot move the writing arm while attempting to compose" (182). Arthritis and suspicion of new technologies make it extremely difficult for Henry Roth to use either a pen or a word processor. And, of course, Coleridge found a reluctant verse far easier to recite than to transcribe.

Suffice it to say at this point that, in most cases, the inability to fill a blank page is more often the consequence of misfiring in upstream processes than it is itself a factor in writer's block. In an important sense the physical act of writing completes the writing process; whether or not the resulting inscription or inscriptions are in line with a writer's overarching goals, plans, intentions and skills is a separate, if crucial, concern.

Revision:

Revision marks the point at which a writer begins refining and polishing what is supposed to be an essentially complete work. Yet, the revision stage is notoriously vulnerable to blockage, as demonstrated in the obsessive perfectionism considered to be at the root of Ralph Ellison's decades-long block. Why and how does revision present problems for the smooth completion of a work?

One reason might concern the alteration or updating of plans that tends to be a hall-mark of the revision process. Although fluidity is commonly cited as a feature of good planning, plans that are too open-ended can lead to a baffling array of alternatives.

Further, revision can lead to excessive distillation of text and phrase that takes on a localized urgency once disengaged from a work's larger themes, contexts and constraints. Under such circumstances, revisions that are concentrated at the level of say, words or sentences may result in the text becoming simply "an object to be refined" (Rose 104). A hyper-emphasis on textual refinement may dispose a writer to edit prematurely, potentially closing off the range of ideas, narrative routes and linguistic innovations. By contrast, excessive revision directed on drawing out or refining the meaning of a work may succeed only in opening up ever more new conceptual vistas. Any of these revision strategies can inadvertently contribute to blocking.

Also, as Nelson is quick to point out, revision characteristically involves self-criticism, potentially a dangerous tool, as Philip Roth memorably suggests in this short autobiographical passage from the Ghost Writer:

> I turn sentences around. That's my life. I write a sentence and then I turn it around. Then I look at it and I turn it around again. Then I have lunch. Then I come back in and write another sentence. Then I have tea and turn the new sentence around. Then I read the two sentences over and turn them both around. Then I lie down on my sofa and think. Then I get up and throw them out and start from the beginning. And if I knock off from this routine for as long as day, I'm frantic with boredom and a sense of waste. (qtd. in Nelson 13)

The experience that Roth outlines in this passage is consistent with Graves' emphasis on the importance of "flow" to successful writing.[51] For Graves, a "deep, flow-like

involvement in writing" (34) signals a state in which positive emotions contribute to successful writing and a general sense of well-being. By contrast, the interruption of flow, occasioned by premature editing, over-revision or a variety of other events may result in negative emotions, writer fatigue and even the cessation of creative activity.

In its most extreme manifestations, the tendency towards over-revision may be a consequence of unhealthy perfectionism on the part of the writer. Although "the impulse to perfect, like the impulse to postpone, is a natural part of the creative process" (Nelson 45), perfectionism is a two-edged sword, potentially serving to trap the writer and his or her work in an endless circle of frustrating revision.[52] With respect to the problem of revision, the following advice from Jose Luis Borges is instructive: "Perhaps in order to write a really great book you *must* be rather unaware of the fact. You can slave away at it and change every adjective to some other adjective, but perhaps you can write better if you leave the mistakes" (qtd. in Nelson 52).

Release and Reception:

One of the final sites for an intervention of writer's block may occur in the space between a completed creative action and a prospective new one. The reception of a creative product--either by oneself or by a larger audience--can in large part determine the plans and goals of ensuing works. Even the most persistent and self-deceived artist may think twice before composing a second opera based on the life of a tree-stump after the first one plays to critical disdain and empty houses. Conversely, a work that meets with a

high degree of success upon its release may sponsor similarly-structured works leading to redundancy--or it may be a hard act to follow in future creative projects.

There is insufficient space here to pursue in detail the effects of success upon subsequent creative activity, but I shall offer some tentative thoughts on the importance of this complicated cultural phenomenon to professional writers. Briefly, artistic success seems to invite three major responses from the professional writer: 1) complacency; 2) neutrality; and 3) renewed effort and innovation. Of these responses, 1) and 3) seem most likely to influence sustained future creativity negatively. Complacency can breed laziness that acts against new creativity and/or arrogance that can inflate ambitions to the point of a marked gap between goals and abilities. With respect to 3), undue emphasis on innovation and improvement may, as Rose notes, result in a "potential increase in anxiety" (104). Desiring continued artistic growth, the writer continues "to challenge himself--continues to face or invent assignments that test, for example, his existing strategies for complexity. He does not rely on the easy approach, the obvious composition solution, the already mastered pattern" (104). In Saul Bellow's caustically words, once party to the "major league atmosphere of success," a writer faces immense difficulties in fulfilling expectations of his or her promise (qtd. in Nelson 145). Certainly Balzac would agree:

> My poor young poet, I came to Paris, like you, full of illusions, impelled by the love of art, and by an unconquerable lust for glory . . . My lofty ideals--which I now have well under control--my first youthful enthusiasm--prevented me from seeing the workings of the social machinery; I was compelled to see it in the end

> by knocking against its wheels, knocking into its shafts, getting covered with its grease, and hearing the constant chatter of its fly-wheels . . . Outside the literary world there is no one who has the slightest idea of the terrible Odyssey by which writers reach what is called vogue, or fashion, or reputation, fame, celebrity, public favour . . . This fine thing reputation that is so much desired is nearly always crowned prostitution. (qtd. in Nelson 150)

This autobiographical passage from Lost Illusions seems appropriate testimony to Lowry's claim that "Success . . . is just like a great disaster." (Bowker 400).

Certainly, Lowry knew whereof he spoke. His own success forced him to devote precious writing time to distractions like interviews, literary lunches and financial and contractual concerns. More damagingly, the critical acclaim accorded Under the Volcano in the all-important American market pitched the expectations for Lowry's follow-up novel impossibly high. Ironically, one of the prime movers behind "The Voyage That Never Ends" was Lowry's desire to make good on his literary potential. In a 1950 letter to Matson, Lowry, picking up on the "fear that I am a one book author," exhorts his agent to remind prospective publishers that Under the Volcano "is part of a projected longer work containing 3 other novels, the whole to be called The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness or The Voyage That Never Ends--I'm not sure which" (2:15). Lowry was of course unable to complete in his lifetime any of the novels comprising the projected "Voyage" cycle. His difficulties with literary fame and fortune were therefore fortunately if undeservedly brief.

Other Considerations:

There remain numerous considerations relating to writer's block that I have left out of the preceding discussion: socio-cultural theories proposed by Tillie Olsen, for example, holding that certain populations--i.e., women--have a greater, because institutionalized, tendency to blockage. Doubtless there is truth to some of Olsen's claims, and her argument might fruitfully be extended to include members of other marginalized groups--gay, lesbian and First Nations writers, for example. Unfortunately, here is not the place to develop such an argument, for to bowdlerize in this case would lead only to a tragic under-apprehension of important truths.

Another consideration evident in both Rose's and Leader's accounts of writer's block concerns the viability of a typology of blocks. For his part, Leader distinguishes between internal, external and qualitative blocks. By "qualitative blockage" Leader means serious fluctuations in the standard of a writers' work:

> When we say someone cannot write we mean he or she is no good rather than unable to put words to paper. Nor is it immediately clear that only the second sort of inability is properly called a block. The later Wordsworth, it could be said, was blocked, though he wrote ceaselessly. (18)

Certainly, few writers can boast an *oeuvre* free from the peaks and troughs that are a feature of all artistic creativity. But it is quite another matter to hold, as Leader does, that below-standard writing denotes a writer's block. Writer's block, by definition, precisely is the *inability to write* in spite of talent, will and skills; it is *not* the inability to write *well.*

Writing below one's standards, I would argue, is neither a typical symptom nor an inevitable consequence of writer's block. Qualitative considerations seem to me to offer minimal utility in understanding writer's block.

Similarly, the psychoanalytic tradition, though adequately outlined, plays a minor role in my argument. Here I take my cue from Robert Boice that, as psychoanalysis is primarily a case-specific, treatment-oriented approach, its clinical intricacies (assuming that these exist) are unavoidably coarsened when extrapolated to general tenets. Further, my interest is in examining the structure and processes underlying both successful and unsuccessful writing strategies of planning agents, and psychoanalytical attempts to understand writing and writer's block--as I showed earlier with respect to the pioneering work of Bergler--typically reduce these activities to the status of unconscious pathologies.

Finally, in his introduction to Henry Roth's Shifting Landscapes, Leonard Michaels speaks powerfully of the roots of Roth's forty-year creative drought, citing the changing political landscape, and more particularly his involvement in American Communism, for effectively removing his best reasons to write: "When Roth's mystical state of mind, an aspect of his Judaic identity, lost out to Communism, he lost his art" (xxvii). I am sympathetic to the spirit of these claims, but remain unconvinced by them. To clarify, it is generally conceded that professional writers write because they have something of importance to say, and, further, conceive of a viable (choosing a language, genre, theme, voice and so on) means of saying it. My understanding of writer's block, following Rose, presupposes a strong commitment to write, and this in turn presupposes exactly the strong

reasons for writing that Roth seemed to lack. A writer who does not have an appropriate commitment to write cannot be said, having failed to write, to be a blocked writer. This is not to say that Roth was never a blocked writer--he obviously was, and very seriously blocked too--but rather to suggest the possibility that factors beyond commitment contributed, at various times and in various ways, to his various blocks.

At this point, I wish to carry many of the concepts outlined above into the next chapter, where I shall explore three main instances of Lowry's own writer's block with sustained reference to the theoretical frameworks developed here and in Chapter One. As I have emphasized throughout, thinking about writer's block is a relatively recent phenomenon, and remains even today an esoteric domain of inquiry. My own inquiry reflects this theoretical immaturity but, I think, promises much greater coherence in careful application to a real-world case. I shall therefore waste no time in setting up my analysis of Lowry's various encounters with writer's block.

Chapter Four

The Volcano Blocked

> Together, the withdrawal/return paradigm, circle symbolism, and "spatial form" provide a kind of *vade mecum* for Lowry's work, but they should not be seen as rules which delimit his vision so much as the elements in a literary enterprise which was evolving up to the time of his death. They are the means whereby he continued to explore the possibilities of his art and to deepen and refine his vision in the never-ending voyage of creation.
>
> - Sherrill Grace

> An organic work of art, having been conceived, must grow in the creator's mind, or proceed to perish.
>
> - Malcolm Lowry

Writer's block was a usual feature of Malcolm Lowry's literary life. Sometimes these episodes were minor and did not last long, temporary obstacles in the flow. This sort of block is captured nicely by Margerie's description of Lowry in the throes of composition: "Malc works on his new book and his sobs and groans and yowls are heartrending to hear at this stage" (3:12). At other times Lowry was so fraught with "the bloody agony of the writer writing"[53] that he was unable to put pen to paper long enough to sign his name to a cheque or a letter to be posted. From 1948 until his death in 1957, Lowry's blocks were more frequent, lasted longer, and were more debilitating. At various times and in various places Lowry's writing blocks impeded his ability to commence, sustain or complete either local or larger sequences of literary creative action. In the impossibly grand, constantly shifting and expanding web of writing that was to be "The Voyage That Never Ends," one can begin to recognize through the verbal smoke the increasingly frantic self-deceptions of a writer who no longer knew as surely as he once had what, why and how he was writing. Where Sherrill Grace valorizes the "Voyage" as Lowry's simultaneous exploration of "the possibilities of his art" and "the never-ending voyage of creation," I perceive evidence of his desperate attempts to revive and clarify his

own creative method. From the gap between Lowry's plans and his achievements for "Voyage" grew the abyss that helped to weaken so fatally both his art and his life.

Therefore, in this final chapter I shall focus on three critical periods of writing block in Lowry's life. In so doing I shall retain several of the key insights on the structure and process of writing and writer's block gleaned from preceding chapters, while introducing some important new concepts in order to amplify the claims I have laid out thus far. The first period of blockage I shall examine occurred over eighteen months between 1947-49. The second lasted more or less steadily from 1950-52; and the third began in 1954 and continued unabated through 1955.[54] In addition, Lowry worked only sporadically during the very last years of his life, but by this point his physical and mental health were so fragile and his relationship to Margerie so complicated that an adequate understanding of his writing processes and achievements is rendered difficult. I shall therefore confine myself to the periods I have listed, applying to each in turn some of the key features of literary creativity and writer's block outlined in Chapters Two and Three.

As I have suggested previously, following Leader's intuition that there are kinds of writing blocks that occur with sufficient consistency and frequency to be catalogued, blocked writers will typically display a number of non-exhaustive and non-exclusive characteristics. Along these lines I propose the following as three general types of writer's block: 1) circumstantial; 2) methodological and 3) goal-based. Circumstantial blocks, related to but not correspondent with Leader's "external block," result when local environmental, social, personal or other circumstances inhibit either the initiation or

maintenance of literary creative action. Again, related but not identical to Leader's "internal block," methodological blocks follow from weaknesses in a writer's creative method; for example, poor organization or insufficient or inappropriate skills. Finally, goal-based blocks derive from imbalances in a writer's structure of goals and planning. Interventions of any of these general types of writer's block may prevent the commencement of writerly activity, lead to its premature suspension, or problematize its appropriate termination.

With respect to Lowry, circumstantial, methodological and goal-based blocks all played a part in his continuous battles with writer's blocks, corresponding, sometimes singly and sometimes in combination, with the three periods I have chosen to examine. For example, over eighteen months between 1947 and 1949, Lowry, far from being in a position to suspend or appropriately terminate his literary creative action, went without producing so much as a line. How came Lowry, formerly a prolific writer during travel, to this sorry state of blockage?[55]

Abroad: 1947-49

In 1947, surprised and pleased by the success of Under the Volcano, Malcolm and Margerie Lowry embarked on a short tour in support of the new book, already the subject of considerable acclaim in the United States and greatly anticipated in France and Germany.[56] For Margerie it was a chance to discover a "larger scene," to play to perfection and in public at last her role of apprentice to the genius. For Lowry it was an

opportunity both to meet the literati (James Agee, Alfred Kazin, Dylan Thomas) he had admired from afar and to spend some rare time with Erskine and of course with Aiken. Also, the trip was intended to provide for both Lowrys a rest from the exhausting routine of dictation and revision to which they had become accustomed by July of 1947 when Lowry, "trying hard to get his teeth into a new novel," commenced working flat out on a rough draft for Dark as the Grave, and Margerie's duties accordingly were extended to include the correspondence, which had "become very nearly a full time job itself" (51:2).

Still, however necessary, travel held a down side for Lowry; namely, it meant having to leave the hard-won safety and tranquillity of Dollarton for the unfamiliar and threatening terrain of big-city parties and traffic--and the abundance of big-city bars. As Bowker notes, the Lowrys' ill-advised return to Mexico in 1946 had left a bitter taste:[57] "According to Margerie, Malcolm was keen to travel but did not want to leave Canada. Those who knew them both said it was Margerie who wanted to travel and that he preferred to stay in Eridanus, always fearful of leaving" (343). But the trip to New York was to be primarily a business one, and the financially strapped Lowrys could ill afford to turn down any opportunity for business.

Sadly, as documented by Bowker, Lowry's time in New York was a return to the alcoholic binges, erratic behaviour and mental instability that had characterized his pre-Dollarton existence. Returning alone to Vancouver, Lowry recovered sufficiently to complete his draft of Dark as the Grave. All was not well with Margerie, however, and in August she wrote with shrewd, if self-interested, perception of Lowry's condition that:

> He cannot stay always hidden in retreat in Dollarton, that is not meeting the problem. Or do I deceive myself? Is it my own passionate longing and need that I rationalize? If he stays in retreat he has failed to meet his enemy. . . he will have no material if he is always in retreat--but he *has* material now. More will only bewilder and confuse him. (Bowker 418)

Margerie's need to travel, to escape their Malcolm-centred life in Dollarton was (as they both knew full well) precisely incompatible with Lowry's own need to preserve the tranquillity and distance from his subjects--and from alcohol--that allowed for productive writing. Lowry's past had by this time become the sole wellspring for his creativity, and with Dark as the Grave, he was entering this dark and painful past full tilt, in spite of his fear that he might get "buried under its rather Pirandellian masonry" (419). An extended change of scene might provide the necessary distance required for his own excavation.

Eventually, ostensibly on the basis of a forthcoming French edition of the Volcano, the Lowrys set their sights on France. There, Lowry would be able (notwithstanding his poor French) to assist his translator Clarisse Francillon with the finer points of the book, while soaking up sun and inspiration and leaving Margerie free to sight-see and undertake some new writing herself. In preparation for the trip, Lowry worked nonstop on his new projects, declaring himself in "training like an Indian wrestler to get fit for his new book" (422). Packing spring clothes and a host of notebooks, scribbling pads and their current work--Lowry brought Dark as the Grave and Ultramarine-- the Lowrys set off for Paris and the good life abroad.

Over the ensuing two years, Lowry found himself in and out of hospital, continuously drunk, and utterly inattentive both to his own health and needs and to those of the people around him. In terms of creative productivity, Lowry was virtually barren. In fact, since landing in France more than a year before, Lowry had written "nothing more than a few scratchy notes and a handful of disjointed letters" (Bowker 452), leaving the manuscripts he had brought with him untouched.

What happened? Well, as Bowker tells us, Margerie felt that John Davenport's arrival was "where everything went wrong for them in Europe" (433). Davenport, a close university friend of Lowry's and a formidable drinker in his own right, soon drew a willing Lowry right back into their Cambridge life of drinking and carousing. By the end of Davenport's stay, the Lowrys, constantly and arguing, had been expelled from a number of *pensions* and hotels, and Lowry himself, trembling and hallucinating, was hospitalized at a local nunnery. Given the range and seriousness of his distractions, it is perhaps not surprising that Lowry was unable to write, to the extent that Francillon was enlisted by a desperate Margerie to be Lowry's salvation.[58]

Matters did not improve with the Lowrys' decision to abandon France for Italy in May of 1948. Already off the wagon and becoming increasingly aggressive, even violent, Lowry did not for the most part look favourably upon the scenery or cultural history of Italy, although he enjoyed visits to various literary landmarks[59] and, of course, inexpensive Italian wine. On reading Severn's account of Keats' last days at his house in the Piazza di Spagna, Lowry was duly impressed by the similarities between Keats and himself: where

Keats' "knowledge of internal anatomy" enabled him to chart the progress of his death with acuity, Lowry's knowledge of his "internal workings as a writer largely added to the torture of creating, yet it was only in creating that he had his being and could contain his sanity." (Bowker 441). On a more practical note, Lowry had written virtually nothing since leaving Dollarton, a state of affairs that increasingly concerned him.

The creative drought continued throughout the sojourn in Italy. A stopover in Naples left Lowry feeling still more rootless and disconnected. On May 28, Margerie wrote in her journal that "M[alcolm] is trying like hell--I am not trying as hard as I should be and this makes him worse. I worry because he's tight every night & all to pieces in morning" (7:12). On June 23, she wrote that Lowry had tried once again to get down "to work on U [Ultramarine] but can't," leaving him frustrated and angry and leading to another bout of drunkenness. So began the vicious circle of creative frustration and impotence characteristic of Lowry at the time: an attempt to write followed by frustration, which led almost inevitably to an alcoholic episode and further creative frustration. Upon returning to Paris, Lowry got worse; more frustrated, more violent, no less able to write.

A sampling of his correspondence from this period makes clear the extent to which he felt his powers to have diminished. For example, in the two letters to John Davenport written from onboard the *S. S. Brest* during November of 1947, Lowry abandons his usual verbal wit and complexity for arcane doggerel and brief updates. Then there is the letter to Albert Erskine from the summer of 1948, in which Lowry (barely) writes:

> I have to confess, however, that in spite of this comparatively lucid burst of correspondence that I am going steadily & even beautifully downhill: my memory misses beats at every moment, & my mornings are on all fours. Turning the whole business around in a nutshell I am only sober or merry in a whiskey bottle, & since whiskey is impossible to procure you can imagine how merry I am, & lucid, & by Christ I am lucid. And merry. But Jesus. The trouble is, apart from Self, that part (which) used to be called: consciousness. I have now reached a position where every night I write five novels in imagination, have total recall (whatever that means too) but am unable to write a word. I cannot explain in human terms the incredible effort it has cost me to write even this silly little note. (2:12)

This sad, ironic document survives as one of the very few pieces of writing of any kind that Lowry managed to complete during his eighteen-month stint in Europe.

It is clear from the accounts of Lowry's ill-fated 1947-48 European trip offered by his biographers, friends and colleagues that he did not write during this period.[60] Indeed, he *could not* write, because he was simply in no shape to do so. Lowry's creative method, as we have seen in Chapter One, required immense physical and emotional stamina, not to mention a head clear enough for the intricate verbal and symbolic constructions essential to his fiction. It was a permanent feature of Lowry's method that his best writing never occurred during an alcoholic frenzy of inspiration and transcription. That Lowry was aware of the limited efficacy of alcohol in his creative process is apparent in the alcoholic musings of his Haitian journals: "When you start putting your thoughts down again, that

means you are getting over your hangover. But by this time your thoughts are no (?!!!) Good. The brilliant wild thoughts and inspirations have gone" (6:59).

Remember, Lowry needed the quiet and isolation of Dollarton to complete the Volcano. Difficult journeys, once of paramount importance to Lowry's artistic development as well as a potent and recurring symbol in his fiction, were now becoming more trouble than they were worth. Trips remained a source of rough materials for Lowry, but at this point in his career and in his current work the last thing he required were more rough materials. Lacking his customary well-defined set of working plans, without a suitable place in which to work and stripped of Margerie's undivided attention, Lowry was lost. As though anticipating this crisis, a poignant passage from his Haitian journals reveals Lowry's sense that "You can create while you are travelling. But only in flashes. It is next to impossible to write even a preface. Can you write on the edge of the precipice? Can a writer write anything really great, finally, without a home?" (6:59).

Analysis of the Lowrys' 1947-49 European tour shows that by far the greatest factors in Lowry's eighteen-month block at that time were circumstantial in nature. Throughout the trip, Lowry was both physically and mentally unfit for serious writing. On the few occasions on their European journey when he *was* able to attempt to write seriously, Lowry found himself creatively blocked. This suggests that Lowry was particularly susceptible to interventions of writer's block between the pre-writing and writing stages during this period. Where pre-writing is concerned, we know that Lowry experienced difficulties in organizing materials as well as in generating ideas. As for the

actual writing, Lowry was unable to concentrate sufficiently on assembling his ideas into coherent text, much less to achieve a consistent rhythm suitable for exploring and developing his initial ideas, images and word combinations.

It is doubtful that Lowry, always more creative in his actual writing than in his plotting, character or idea-generation, wrote even one--let alone four or five--novels in his sleep. Still this claim does speak powerfully to Lowry's frustration at his inability a) to try to write and b) to write. There is an element of wish-fulfilment basic to Lowry's confused account; after all, while sleeping Lowry enjoyed a relatively solitary, undisturbed few hours, exactly the sort that best suited his creative method. His working life in Dollarton was organized on precisely the principles of solitude, concentration and intense bursts of activity. By contrast, Lowry's waking life during travel, complicated by a combination of external distractions and his own weaknesses of the will, was considerably less conducive to his literary goals. No wonder then, Lowry could not, and did not, "write a word."

In addition, recalling Graves' emphasis on the centrality of flow to successful creative action, Lowry's method was predicated on lengthy (fifteen hours at a time) sessions of writing at exceptionally high levels of intensity and concentration, extended over days or even weeks. This punishing schedule was partially the product of Lowry's verbosity (his first drafts of novels often hovered in the 400 page mark and only grew) but also was essential to his exhaustive preparation and attention to detail. Lowry was a writer who could easily spend hours perfecting a single sentence, so it was crucial that he be able to enter into the flow of his writing, to generate and sustain that all-important

rhythm. For Lowry, flow was paramount to effective writing, and explains in large part the pains he took in revision, where every word was guided into its proper place within the whole. Without time, solitude, appropriate plans or concentration, Lowry was simply unable to generate consistent flow during the course of his 1948-49 European trip.

Exactly what was the extent of Lowry's excesses during his trip abroad? As Lowry realized, in a letter to Clarisse Francillon written shortly after his return to Canada, the abyss was very near:

> For the last year I had averaged $2^{1/2}$ litres to 3 litres of red wine a day, to say nothing of the other drinks at bars and during my last 2 months in Paris this had increased to about 2 litres of rum per day. Even if it ended up by addling me completely I could not move or think without vast quantities of alcohol, without which, even for a few hours, it was an unimaginable torture . . . I have waited in vain for the shakes, in vain for the D.T.s, or even worse horrors. (SL 167)

Indeed, the "worse horrors" that Lowry feared duly revealed themselves. Soon after his return to Vancouver in 1949, Lowry visited a new doctor, C. G. McNeill, in search of treatment for his increasingly uncomfortable varicose veins. Following McNeill's examination, Lowry made a slurred attempt to explain his condition, telling the doctor that, although he was a writer, "I have to dictate. My wife takes down what I say . . . Most embarrassing. Sometimes I have been in places where I was supposed to sign my name and when I pick up the pen my mind goes completely blank . . . This has even

happened to me in the bank" (McNeill 103). What Lowry did not mention was that these incidents, once few and far between, were beginning to occur more and more frequently.

In addition to his deteriorating physical condition, Bowker notes further that, although he commenced work on Dark as the Grave almost immediately upon his return to Dollarton, Lowry's "creative flow had been seriously impaired since leaving for Europe fourteen months earlier" (453). Notwithstanding hard work and a renewed commitment to his writing, Lowry soon experienced another creative slump, this time as a direct consequence of the series of contract disputes and entanglements that left him, ironically, trapped by the very financial security that he had worked so hard to attain.[61]

The Voyage Begins: 1950-52

In 1950-51, through a convergence of difficult financial circumstances and some spectacularly over-ambitious and uncharacteristically foggy planning, Lowry embarked on the prophetically titled novel-cycle "The Voyage That Never Ends." In the late 1940s, Lowry found himself in the unenviable position of having created, in Under the Volcano, an exceptionally hard act to follow. Though the Volcano had received a cool commercial and critical reception in Canada and the United Kingdom, Lowry had been toasted throughout Europe and America and was within those markets considered a writer to watch, "a name to conjure with" (Bowker 455). By 1950, with no new book and no new publications save the odd short story or travel piece, Lowry understandably began to worry about being a "one-book author." In addition, his favourite publisher and close

friend Albert Erskine had left Reynal & Hitchcock, the firm that had published and retained the rights to the Volcano, and this left Lowry torn between what he considered to be his moral obligations to Erskine and his contractual ones to Reynal & Hitchcock. Never particularly savvy when it came to business, Lowry began to grow increasingly anxious about his literary prospects. Unfortunately, he chose this moment to announce his ambitious plans for "The Voyage That Never Ends."

Critical opinion on the subject of the "Voyage" is mixed. Bowker, though generally admiring of October Ferry, believes that "Whether 'The Voyage' belonged to a real or a fantasy world remains a matter for speculation" (613). For her part, Sherrill Grace, while admitting the weaknesses of Dark as the Grave and "La Mordida"[62] insists on the merits of the obscure "Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness" and, it seems, of the "Voyage" project on the whole. Other Lowry critics take various stances, often on a piece-by-piece basis, but very few seem to believe that the "Voyage" might indeed have ended. Even Grace admits that, "Incredible as it sounds, given the fact that Under the Volcano took ten years, he [Lowry] actually estimated that the entire "Voyage" might require five years to complete" (9). Indeed, following Grace's adherence to architectural metaphors when describing Lowry's creative method, it might be expedient to describe the "Voyage" as "Lowry's Folly;" grand, occasionally beautiful, but, because lacking either a coherent design or fully realized forms in its construction, more aesthetically fascinating than successful. Lowry, an astute self-critic, was not blind to these flaws. In an informal progress report submitted to Erskine, Lowry wrote that Dark as the Grave had assumed

the character of "a dark embittered toolshed I'm trying to find a way around in with a poor flashlight" (Bowker 456). This remark hints at Lowry's excitement and his emerging unease as he set off on his "Voyage," and realized perhaps that his compass was a little too worn and his ship too weathered for the journey he envisioned.

As Lowry writes in his "Work in Progress," he conceived of the "Voyage" as a grand integration of life, philosophy and art: "'The Voyage' of course is life itself, the meaning of which and purpose of man herein this author takes to be primarily (among other more pleasant factors) ordeal, a going through the hoop, an initiation, finally perhaps a doing of God's will" (3). Lowry had for a long time toyed with the notion of a novel-cycle, anchored by the Volcano, which might at once provide a conduit for his increasing interest in personal metafiction, and serve as a unifying vessel for all of his extant thematically related work, which, as it happened, was almost everything he had ever written.[63] For Lowry, who like Raymond Chandler was an inveterate recycler of materials and characters, "The Voyage That Never Ends" offered a valid and productive philosophical basis on which to premise his re-writings. Viewed in the context of his epic fictional rendering of the human spirit "in its ascent towards its true purpose" (Grace 6), Lowry's traditional literary obsessions with syphilis, alcohol and the fate of the author-trapped-in-his-own-book took on new significance. Lowry was no longer writing exclusively about himself, but rather, through his Everyman protagonist Sigbjørn Wilderness, about all of humanity. With his alternating egocentrism and humility, this new conception of the importance of his work proved highly compelling for Lowry.

Although he had lost the whole of "In Ballast to the White Sea" to fire[64] and was both publicly and privately embarrassed by the "twelfth rate and derivative and altogether unmentionable early novel" Ultramarine ("WP" 1), Lowry was unshakable in his belief that there was an important place for each work within the context of his opus. He tested the waters by proposing to Harold Matson a trilogy with the "Volcano as the first infernal part, a much amplified Lunar Caustic[65] as the second, purgatorial part, and an enormous novel I was also working on called "In Ballast to the White Sea" . . . as the paradisal third part" (SL 63). Typically, Lowry, always a little optimistic where his writing was concerned, neglected to explain just how and why he intended to reconstruct "In Ballast." This lost novel had a totemic power for Lowry however, and he may have felt that its inclusion would somehow guarantee the success of the "Voyage."

Nonetheless, it did not take long for Lowry's plans to change again. In the fall of 1951, he wrote Matson of an expanded "Voyage" consisting in six novels, including "a sort of Under- Under the Volcano." In addition, although the Volcano would remain central to the saga, it would now do so "only as a work of the imagination by the protagonist," the ubiquitous Sigbjørn Wilderness (SL 63). As Lowry happily informed Matson, "Some years back I was not equipped to tackle a task of this nature: now, it seems to me, I've gone through the necessary spiritual ordeals that have permitted me to see the truth of what I'm getting at and to see the whole business clearly" (267).

But, as soon became apparent, Lowry did not see the whole business very clearly at all. In fact, in November in 1951, he submitted a new 34 page outline and discussion of

the "Voyage" that contained an additional three novels: "The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness I, "Eridanus" (which soon became October Ferry to Gabriola), "The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness 2," and a mysterious "Untitled Sea Novel"--or Ultramarine in disguise. However confusing all of this was to Matson, and, later, to both Albert Erskine and Robert Giroux (who replaced Erskine as Lowry's Reynal & Hitchcock editor), Lowry was initially euphoric. As Grace tells us,

> Lowry held high hopes for his ambitious masterwork. The "Voyage" was to be an image of life, viewed as "primarily (among other more pleasant factors) ordeal, a going through the hoop an initiation, finally perhaps a doing of God's will" ("Work in Progress" 3) and a genuine portrayal of life in all its monotony and simple joy. It was to be many other things as well: a great love story, a quest for faith, and certainly Lowry's own testament to the wonder of man and universe. (9)

Lowry intended the "Voyage" to be the complete work of fiction, a vast saga capable of thrilling the reader even as it nourished the mind and soul.

Others were not so convinced. After the innovative but accessible Volcano Lowry moved further and further away from narrative realism, temporal coherence and character development in favour of what he considered to be a more nuanced and philosophically concerned vision of humanity as "constantly in flux, and constantly changing" (Grace 6). Irrespective of the correctness of his vision, Lowry's new kind of novel did not promise the sort of commercial success his publishers were interested in, and his successive and rambling letters of intent can have done nothing for their confidence in him. In addition,

against the express wishes of Erskine, Lowry had returned to his habit of submitting for reading and evaluation bits and pieces of manuscript, often with no discernible shape of its own or function in the larger work of which it was constituent. In a 1950 letter to Erskine Lowry comments ironically on this trend:

> My unposted Pantagruelian epistle is full of concern as to whether you'd like Gabriola serially. We have wonderfully happy memories of sending you installments. Only trouble is that, as she stands, I run into a veritable hurricane as early as about page 20, and am swept out of my course . . .before I manage to head her again. . .on about page 70, by which time she's lost most of her crew and is besides unrecognizable: that doesn't mean she's not going to get there, but as a sadder and wiser boat, I fear. (2:14)

Finally, the departure of Erskine for Random House left Lowry without the sympathetic ear he so desperately required from his editor; as Bowker tellingly observes, "what [Lowry] seems to have dreaded most was having no-one to whom he could confess his persistent doubts and fears about his writing" (496). All in all, 1950-51 did not auger well for Lowry--"It was three and a half years since the Volcano had been published and its sequel was stuck firmly on the rocks" (457).

Matters did not soon improve for Lowry. A combination of illnesses and financial uncertainty further eroded his self-confidence and productivity. And a new episode of writer's block had set in, a "log jam" that prevented the "Voyage" from being adequately outlined and blocked out. Lowry estimated that, actual writing aside, a

coherent outline alone might take "four solid months without doing anything else" (SL 245). By this time, although Lowry was galvanized by the prosects afforded by "Voyage," he also was becoming aware of some of the dangers inherent in the project, remarking that: "I ought to get down to it as soon as I can and think of nothing else for a long time if I'm ever going to finish it," noting also that "ideas seem to be escaping all the time" (245).

But the only means of ensuring that good ideas did not escape was to write them down, and mid-way through 1951, Lowry's writing once again foundered. He had returned to an old habit, born of frustration, of working simultaneously on several pieces, shuffling from manuscript to manuscript and pausing only to dictate rapidly to Margerie. He worked standing up, "moving between notes and drafts scattered around the shack--the working method somehow patterning Lowry's observed conversational style--shifting and moving off at tangents before returning to the mainstream" (Bowker 526). Predictably, this method led to significant overlaps and confusions between the ostensibly separate manuscripts, such that "no sooner had an idea coalesced into one shape, than, amoeba-like, Lowry began to transform it into another" (499). Although Lowry envisioned the integrated structure of "Voyage" precisely as a means of legitimating this interplay between constituent works, these works were themselves proving unable to bear the weight of the whole. Truthfully, Lowry finally had begun to achieve something of the "perpetually Protean" quality that he saw in life within his fiction; the trouble was, he was no longer in control of his work.

Nor was he in control of his literary destiny. Random House accepted Lowry (after his mutating descriptions of "Voyage" finally frightened off Reynal & Hitchcock), offering him a rich contract that called for three novels in three years.[66] The contract provided Lowry with a generous maintenance allowance intended to free him to work with full concentration and peace of mind. Soon, however, Lowry's fears about meeting the deadlines imposed by the contract began to obsess him: what if he couldn't complete the three novels in time? What if he could, but their quality suffered as a result? In the end, Lowry suggested a number of configurations to meet the conditions of a three-book deal, ranging from the obvious (Lunar Caustic, Hear Us O Lord and Dark as the Grave), to the bizarre (Lunar Caustic, the Lowrys' uncommissioned screenplay for Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night and a hodgepodge of poems to be published under the title. The Lighthouse Invites the Storm).

At first, Lowry's anxieties about his work in progress were greatly ameliorated by the long-term provisions of the Random House contract, which he rightly interpreted as a sign of Erskine's faith in his potential. And as 1952 rolled in, Lowry was "working flat out," notwithstanding the fact that, in good Lowry fashion, Hear Us O Lord, which "he had long ago said was all but finished, was, in good Parkinsonian style, expanding to fill the time available for its completion" (Bowker 511). Still, Lowry's confidence had been badly shaken and his writing correspondingly affected. Working late into the night and leaving Margerie to type up the notes, Lowry continued to write and revise multiple sections of several works at a time. This was in marked contrast to his habits during the

composition of the Volcano, when each chapter received systematic attention. Now, Lowry found that "any interruption could mean losing the thread that held the whole multi-layered contraption together" (526).

Clearly, working intensively on the "Voyage" posed serious difficulties for Lowry's increasingly fragile confidence. Beset by external complications arising from his various contract negotiations and machinations, and increasingly feeling the strains of Margerie's dissatisfaction, Lowry wrote little between the end of 1949 and 1952. More disturbingly, recalling Zachary Leader's thoughts on "qualitative blockage," he wrote nothing that approached the standards of the Volcano. That said, it is important to remember that the first drafts of Volcano in themselves lacked the complexity, completeness and beauty of the finished piece. As we have seen, Lowry's method required long periods of gestation leading to a number of drafts, followed by a series of detailed revisions which might male use of materials from several drafts at once. The process was painstaking, demanding, and heavily dependant on a nuanced set of plans and sub-plans. Critics like Asals and Grace, among others, have demonstrated compellingly that Lowry's best work--including the Volcano--was carefully considered right down to the punctuation: "His writing was never careless or hurried: he rewrote sentences and paragraphs many times, and marginal notes indicate that he had complicated reasons for every punctuation mark" (Grace 4).

Suddenly, with "The Voyage That Never Ends," Lowry was forced to work obsessively and comprehensively on not just one, but three and possibly seven or eight novels, often at the same time. Further, each novel had to be related to all of the others

but also be sufficiently distinct to stand on its own. Incidentally, this was a similar structural plan, albeit on a much larger scale, to the one Lowry utilized in constructing Hear Us O Lord. That volume, also somewhat protean in that its exact composition changed from day to day, was comprised of many fewer works, and of many fewer pages, than was intended that the "Voyage" should. And yet Lowry's anxieties concerning the precise nature and order of the contents of Hear Us O Lord were microcosmic of his concerns about the "Voyage." Plainly put, Lowry's plans for the "Voyage" were at best inconsistent, and at worst incoherent, and he was emphatically not a writer who could work easily or well in the face of uncertain plans. As Lowry himself noted with his usual slightly sad, slightly funny self-insight in a letter to Robert Giroux dated January 11 1952, "I perceive that I have too many ideas, and even if they are all good, they might as well be bad or non-existent unless I can choose between them" (3:1). In the end, Lowry was unable to discipline his many ideas, and as a result, the "Voyage" barely left the docks.

1954-55: The Voyage Halted

In the spring of 1955, the Lowrys left Dollarton forever; Lowry would never again see his beloved beach shack before his death in 1957. This final European trip came at the end of a calamitous period between Lowry and his publishers, which saw his payments suspended as it became clear that he would not come close to meeting his deadlines for the first installment of the "Voyage." Erskine's unfavourable reaction to October Ferry should have come as no surprise; he had warned Lowry all along that the manuscript fragments

that Lowry insisted on submitting for evaluation and approval were an insufficient return on the money and faith invested in him. In addition, Erskine made no secret of his reservations concerning the plot, scope and organization of the "Voyage," explaining to Lowry that he was unconvinced that "fiction about writing and writers and such"--the philosophical foundation for the entire "Voyage"--made for either compelling or interesting reading (1:21). And, true to his own prediction, when Erskine examined the first installments of October Ferry he thought it "the most tedious thing he had ever read" (Bowker 533). For his part, the Random House executive in charge of bookkeeping, pronounced Lowry's work in progress as "about as confused as anything can be," adding somewhat desperately, "what do you suggest we do now?" (533).

What Erskine and Random House finally did was release Lowry from his contract, removing the limits of a deadline and some of the pressure to perform that had rendered him so unproductive in recent months.[67] Under the terms of his release from the Random House contract, Lowry was financially independent again, and, in the words of Bowker, able "to openly abandon the 'Voyage That Never Ends'" (543). In a May 22, 1954 letter to Albert Erskine, Lowry stopped the clock on his contract and saved face by hinting that in the future the status of his work would remain a secret pending completion. In addition, Lowry told Erskine that any novels to be submitted in fulfilment of his contract, though certain to make the "last deadline," would fall "a little outside the general main scheme" (SL 372-3). Insofar as the "Voyage" was concerned, then, "the grand design was all but dead" (Bowker 543).

Finally, on August 30, 1954, the Lowrys left Dollarton for good, their friend Harvey Burt reporting that Lowry's last words upon leaving were: "I'm afraid, I don't think we'll ever come back here. I'm afraid to leave. I feel that we'll never come back" (Bowker 547).[68] Once again, Lowry was going abroad, bound for another grand European tour, and bound also, as it turned out, for another extended binge of drunken excess, mental and physical anguish, and bout after bout of writer's block.

It had perhaps never been worse for Lowry than it was for him in Italy that year. From the beginning, Lowry was unable to write anything more than "the occasional coherent letter" (Bowker 555). When he tried to continue work on October Ferry he was depressingly reminded of the idyllic Eridanus from which he and Margerie had exiled themselves, and grew despondent and unproductive. Even rising early did not provide its usual spark to his creativity. Eventually, Lowry's condition disintegrated to the point where, once again unable to hold a pen without shaking, he was unable to maintain even cursory correspondence. His repeated attempts to write to his Italian translator, Giorgio Monicelli, were painfully incoherent, and he complained continuously about a range of physical ailments, most tellingly about the difficulties he was having with his eyesight.

The metaphor of blindness proves richly suggestive of Lowry's growing fears concerning the erosion of his creative abilities, terrified as he was that with the deterioration of his powers his work might lose the visionary quality that made it so uniquely resonant and so perfectly suited to the breadth of his ideas. Suddenly, the author of that most cinematic and visually layered literary work, Under the Volcano, was having

trouble seeing. With his writing foundering, Lowry too began quickly to sink, confessing to Monicelli that: "I have tried ten times to write this letter & have not succeeded. I believe I am not going to succeed this time either too well but at least perhaps I can finish this sentence before my consciousness foils me again: which will be a sort of beginning, if not an end" (3:9). This bleak, scrawled passage was soon followed by another, even more despairing missive:

> This is written at 4:44 a.m., the dark night of the soul and the Farolito. It is not the letter I meant to write; in fact I have written hundreds to you all, but posted none. I cherish yours and Davida's splendid poem, please send more. My eyes are failing--can scarcely see under electric light at all,--hence this scrawl. By daylight I can see fairly well, intermittently! Which is something. I try to write, but the writing is mostly bad, so I tear it up (with the accent on the tear). (3:9)

It easy to see Lowry's penchant for melodrama creeping in here, but the fact remains that he had not written seriously--indeed, had not written at all--in months, and it would be many more before he was able to work again.

In all, it had been well over a year since Lowry "could no longer write--even a letter" (51:5). It was clear to Margerie that "Malcolm's genius must be saved, for if he should try and write again & couldn't, things could be even worse" (51:5). Margerie decided, on balance, that Malcolm required psychiatric help, and accordingly the Lowrys made for England and Harley Street in what was to be their last major journey together and Malcolm's last on earth.

What went wrong in 1954-55? How did Lowry, after working so hard on the various phases of the "Voyage," become blocked for more than a year? There are those who feel that October Ferry, originally a short-story component of Hear Us O Lord, outgrew itself too rapidly and to the exclusion of other, perhaps equally worthy works to the detriment of the entire project and of Lowry's writing generally. As Bowker caustically remarks, "If ever a novel murdered its author--'Joyced in his own petard,' as Lowry would have it--then October Ferry killed off the author of the 'Voyage'" (613). I think that perhaps Bowker overstates the case somewhat, but it is true that from the moment at which October Ferry seized his imagination, it became the only thing that Lowry could bear to work on. When he was unable to do so, his writer's block extended itself to all of his works in progress and prevented him from writing at all. His goals, first for the "Voyage" and later for October Ferry far exceeded his capabilities at the time. When he finally hit his stride with October Ferry, Lowry was once again on the road, and once again he was engulfed by the familiar chain of circumstances--absence of a conducive writing environment, a range of distractions and so forth--that had led time and time again to his creative silencing.

In addition, Lowry experienced from the "Voyage's" inception a marked distance, first between his goals and plans, and then between his plans and actual progress in writing for the project, exacerbated by the uncertainty so prominent in the aftermath of his contract suspension. Always a planner and careful builder, Lowey found himself in 1954 in the centre of a monumental architectural skeleton whose very bones were dissolving

before his eyes. With the termination letter from Erskine, tantamount to a rejection not only of his work but of himself, Lowry was forced to reconsider in detail the saga that was to have been his life's work--he had to alter substantially both his local and his more distant plans. This shift had to be major, for Lowry never did things by halves, and it had to be final, because Lowry was well aware of what completing a novel required of him. The extent of his investment in October Ferry, and the terror that lay in the gap between this still-nascent work and the more developed framework of the "Voyage" cannot be overestimated. Lowry in 1954-55 lacked the planning structure he required for his best work, and this left him particularly ill-equipped to work on October Ferry *en route*.

Also with respect to goal-based blocks, it is crucial to take seriously Lowry's seeming inability to *complete* his works. Certainly Lowry did not feel that he had exhausted the potential of the Volcano, feeling that it "was a cub that can still stand some licking" ("WP" 6). All of this attests to the danger inherent in Lowry's fascination with circles and journeys: outside of any spiritual or symbolic value such a mystical world-view held for Lowry it had the wonderfully comforting side-effect of legitimating his unwillingness to complete the"Voyage." If the "Voyage" was never to end, then why should he impose false endings on its constituent works? On this basis, Lowry revised and expanded October Ferry for ten years, employing few of the restrictions on form and length that he had used so effectively to circumscribe Volcano, itself a relatively compact book whose magnificent richness is achieved through breadth instead of length.

Lowry was never again the same person or writer he had been in Dollarton. Utterly possessed by October Ferry, Lowry could not bear to work on anything else, and writer's block proved more the rule than the exception. Although he occasionally wrote at a pitch and with a depth of purpose reminscent of his younger self, he was, in the main, unproductive and unhappy during his last years. Perhaps, in giving up the "Voyage," something deeper in Lowry gave up too. In a fascinating bit of marginalia concerning the Ripe journals, Sherrill Grace has written of Lowry that: "His notes are curiously detached . . . except when wistfulness gives way to a pointed frustration" (6:59).

In sum, it is clear that, as I have described them above, Lowry's writing blocks both mesh with standard definitions and suggest ways in which such definitions are inadequate to the task of explicating his own literary condition. Lowry's blocks were not a function of his lacking composition skills, as Mike Rose suggests, nor of psychanalytic crisis, as Zachary Leader argues. Rather, they resulted from and were sustained by a combination of writerly traits, and unfortunate material circumstances: alcoholism; recurring crises of confidence; inconsistent planning and organization strategies; a series of increasingly tense personal relationships and a host of circumstantial considerations. If this description sounds more like a recipe for soup than a sober and rigorous attempt to model a writer's mind, I offer the suggestion that sometimes what we take to be an accurate normative model may in fact be closer to nicely-presented soup. Either way, it is now time to move from descriptions to conclusions.

Conclusion

What happened to Malcolm Lowry? How did a writer with such prodigious talent and so bright a literary future destroy himself so spectacularly? These are the questions that press most closely on the mind of the Lowry scholar brought up in the age of sensation media Finally, though, these questions lie beyond the scope of my investigation.

The reader will remember that I began this paper by promising to illuminate those general psychological processes and material states of affairs that obtained a) when Lowry was able to write successfully, and b) when he was not. In outlining my methodology, I invoked the image of Janus to underscore its bipartite nature. Lowry, I claimed might provide an excellent test case for theoretical accounts of literary creativity and writer's block, even as careful consideration of such a powerful and well-documented real-world case might prove indispensable to understanding more clearly these very accounts. I shall now take a few lines to recapitulate the results of my undertaking.

In Chapter One, I traced some important features of Malcolm Lowry's evolving creative process. I followed his literary progress from grade school through his years at Cambridge University, all the while paying special attention to emerging trends in his creative method. Moving to a detailed analysis of this method, I isolated four central stages, which I identified as gathering, organization, inscription and revision. Like all gifted (and many not so gifted) artists, Lowry was also a craftsperson, and in practising the craft of writing he necessarily evolved and refined his methods and techniques. These creative methods, I argued, depended for their efficacy on Lowry's unique combination of exceptional language and memory skills, intense and prolonged concentration, meticulous filtering and organization of materials and ideas and dogged, exhaustive revision.

In Chapter Two, I set about challenging dominant Romantic explanations of creativity by outlining and refining a moderate planning model of literary creative action. Drawing on a wide range of contemporary research, I argued for an account of literary creativity that takes seriously the roles of goals, plans and intentions in the creative process. This planning model, I suggested, escapes at once the reliance upon supernatural causation intrinsic to Romantic views of creativity and the potential for reduction associated with many problem-solving approaches. Pursuant to developing my planning model, I sought support for it by appealing to the account of literary creativity proffered by Mary Shelley in her introduction to the 1831 edition of Frankenstein, showing how her surface description of events was in fact compatible with, though not inclusive of, my more detailed planning view. Taking my cue from Malcolm Cowley I concluded by pointing out the benefits of a moderate understanding of the roles played by plans and intentions in literary creativity particularly with respect to real-world cases. In this manner I laid the groundwork both for the ensuing theoretical discussion of writer's block in Chapter Three, and the extended discussion of Lowry's own blocks in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Three, I turned to a close examination of the phenomenon of writer's block. I began by tracing the origins of the term from its earliest psychoanalytic usage to the divergent accounts offered today from within both the psychoanalytic and (a variety of) cognitive research paradigms. Working with intuitions drawn predominantly from cognitivist accounts, I investigated some of the central causes, features and consequences associated with writer's block. I then assembled a rough typology of writing blocks in line

with recurring trends in the literature, on the basis of which I generated some initial connections between these general types and Lowry's own episodes of blockage.

Elaboration of the details of Lowry's various instances of writer's block occupied me in my final chapter. Preserving many of the insights gleaned from preceding chapters, I examined three major periods of writer's block in Lowry's life ranging from 1948 through 1955. I outlined the conditions in each period under which writer's block occurred, and further categorized each block as primarily circumstantial, organizational or goal-based. Guiding me throughout was my sense that, above all, writer's block is an intervention between stages of the literary creative process--a process always already fraught with a shifting array of technical, physical, emotional and other tensions and obstacles. As an aside, I noted that, given the range and seriousness of the difficulties entailed by Lowry's creative method, it was tempting to make his writer's block the rule and his successful writing the exception.

As I understand it, conclusions are intended to represent what are, at least currently, one's final thoughts on the subject under scrutiny. In this case, the elucidation of my own thoughts has proved almost as elusive, I am beginning to think, as words proved for Lowry. After all, consider the question that is the crux of my work here: why and how does a writer cease to be able to write? This is the sort of question, one feels, that is more rightfully the province of the experienced metaphysician than the callow student. It is exactly the sort of question, moreover, that has been so consistently ignored by literary studies that one feels that it is perhaps unanswerable.

Nonetheless, I shall attempt to distill some of my central arguments into digestible food for thought, and proffer some suggestions for further inquiry into the nature of literary creativity and writer's block. To begin, let me say that I am convinced that literary creativity is, at its very heart, a planning process. Immediately upon recognition of a creative motivator, each and every component of writerly activity--brainstorming, organization, transcription and revision and so on--is integrally aided by writerly plans and intentions. These may large, small, simple, complex, proximate, distant, good or bad. There is, to my mind, not a single powerful objection--up to and including the various relativist and/or anti-intentionalist challenges of poststructuralism--to a flexible, moderate planning model of literary creativity such as the one I have championed above. Although clearly I cannot consider the full range of such challenges at this point, I intend to do so in future work.

Next, what I take to be the subtle nature of writerly commitment has important implications both for understanding motivations to write and for generating preventative strategies or cures for writing blocks. A writer cannot, I argued, write in the absence of the right sort of commitment; nor can a writer without the right sort of commitment be said to suffer from writer's block. In concert with my planning view, a robust account of writerly commitment, may, as I demonstrated with respect to Lowry, offer a plausible explanation for fluctuations in a writer's quality and productivity. However prosaic, considerations of plans, goals, intentions, commitment and skill are of much greater importance to the theory and case of literary creativity and writer's block than are notions of inspiration, genius and the Muse.

Retuning to Lowry, few (certainly not his biographer Gordon Bowker) would argue for his mental stability during the last ten years of his life. Alcoholism aside, Lowry was an egocentric, obsessive, manipulative and wilful person. He was anti-social, but also an ardent performer who craved the spotlight in social situations. He was easily distracted, accident-prone, and at once abusive of others and all too willing to be abused himself. He was, in short, hardly the sort of person to whom life came easily, and he had to work as hard at writing as he did at life.

Circumstantial complications alone thus represented an enormous obstacle to the consistency of Lowry's writing. When we add to these considerations his proclivity for dramatically self-destructive behaviour, we may well agree with Gerald Noxon when he reflects that, on the whole: "We were lucky to get what we did; that in the Volcano, and in some of the shorter pieces, we had some masterly work which is in the great tradition of English writing and that we might easily have had none of it" (40). Here, Noxon instantiates a common theme within the Lowry legend: given the extremes of Lowry's strengths and weaknesses both as a person and a writer, his tragic decline was inevitable, and we should give thanks that he managed to write anything at all worth keeping.

I must say that I find this fatalistic view unconvincing. Notwithstanding his various neuroses and obsessions, Lowry was by any standard an exceptionally gifted and hardworking writer. That said, Lowry was never a particularly consistent writer, and in the end the several major weaknesses of his creative method began to outpace his error-correction abilities. For example, Lowry's writerly concentration was sporadic, if intense, and this became more pronounced with age and deteriorating health. In addition, his

tendency to look inside his own life and mind for fictional sources and characters, when that life and mind were as uneven and disturbed as his own, led Lowry to generate a heuristic of rigorous self-examination. His consequent fictional meditations had the effect of raising into relief his tics and flaws, leading not to resurrection in the manner of his story "Forest Path to the Spring" but rather towards the abyss of Under the Volcano.

Perhaps most damagingly, Lowry's favoured metaphysical image of endless journey through layer after layer of life naturalized his reluctance to complete his works. His adherence to strategies of endless revision and expansion in the name of philosophical orthodoxy, when combined with the weak planning and over-ambitious goals characteristic of his "Voyage" project, left Lowry in the impossible position of having to complete, in order to further his personal and professional ambitions and expectations, a literary project whose very nature strongly resisted completion. In this sense a nuanced consideration of Lowry's plans, goals, intentions and abilities during the last decade of his life is crucial to understanding his failure to complete another Under the Volcano.

Finally, as a postscript to each of the main components of my discussion thus far, I wish briefly to return to the problem of writerly commitment. In "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Harry Frankfurt argues for the centrality of second-order desires to the actions of free agents. Briefly, a person has a second-order desire when "he wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will" (16). I think Frankfurt's concept of second-order desires may prove salutary in application to the question of writerly commitment.

What I mean is this: it is plausible to suppose that when Lowry was blocked, he wanted to write. I hinted earlier that a writer may have differing commitments to write from work to work and indeed from day to day. I suggested further (somewhat elliptically) that a writerly commitment must be the *right sort* of commitment. Without exhaustively defining the parameters of the "right sort of commitment," I think that it is safe to say, following Frankfurt, that at the very least it include an appropriate second-order desire. Thus, when Lowry was committed to write, we may accurately say of him that he wanted to write; and we may say further that he *wanted* to want to write.

If this seems a little ornate, let me stress that I am interested only in making a single point. It is generally believed that writer's block may occur even when a writer has the strongest possible desire to write. Using Lowry as a signal case, I have demonstrated that, time and time again, his commitment to write was either inadequate given the full complexity of his writing plans and goals, or absent altogether. In employing the concept of second-order desires I hope to deepen significantly what it means for a writer to be committed to his or her work. In my view, the writer whose first- and second-order desires to write are incompatible or at odds will be more prone to blocks than the writer whose first- and second-order desires are in harmony. Only the latter may be said to hold the right sort of writerly commitment. So construed, I think that this tentative account of writerly commitment highlights the importance of plans to literary creativity, while also elucidating the sense in which writer's block functions as an intervention between the vulnerable stages of the literary creative process.

In sum, I believe that writer's block is an undeservedly under-researched phenomenon. Both as a fascinating window into the creative process and as a reminder of its frailty, writer's block affords the interested researcher a unique opportunity to analyze the springs and disruptions particular to the literary creative imagination. Clearly, the input of literary scholars would be invaluable to an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between writer's block and literary craft and tradition. That literary studies plays so minor a role within research into writer's block, given that the topic itself is precisely literary, I find both inexplicable and indefensible.

I am not sure if a better understanding of the causes and conditions of his own writer's block might have saved Malcolm Lowry. I am not even sure if the question is worth asking, given the theoretical autopsies entailed by its answer. I suspect that Lowry, notoriously dismissive of critics, would have been deeply suspicious of certain facets of my own examination. But then, Lowry was himself a brilliant and perceptive thinker and critic. And, like all good critics, he did not spare his own work. He was acutely sensitive to his own limitations as a writer: to his excessive verbal flourishes; to his idealism; and to his deficiencies in drawing fully dimensional characters. In spite of it all, Malcolm Lowry risked a great deal in his life and fiction in search of important truths about human consciousness, community and spirituality. He was, as much as any writer before or since, willing to descend deep into the detritus of the human condition in order to extract what he believed to be liberating visions. Lowry abhorred ignorance, and loved the light, however strong, cast by illuminating imagination. In this sense, I think he would have approved of the necessarily truncated story I have told here of his creative life and work.

Endnotes

Endnotes

[1] Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan of "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession" is profoundly alienated from the body of his work, and another Lowry double, Sigbjørn Wilderness, experiences similar anxieties throughout Dark as the Grave.

[3] By this I mean to emphasize that, while some stages in the process must naturally precede others, lateral movement between stages is a usual feature of literary creativity.

[4] Balgarnie later attained literary immortality as the "Mr. Chips" of James Hilton's series of novels of the same name. He was among the earliest of Lowry's string of older, male influences--and probably the most benign.

[5] For example the influence of P. D. Wodehouse on Lowry's "Travelling Light," and Eugene O'Neill's Anna Christie on "Rainy Night." More brazenly, Lowry's "Blue Bonnet" appeared in the Fortnightly with "apologies to Michael Arlen" (Bowker 41).

[7] Lowry's alcoholism is legendary. Still, when he needed to stay sober in order to write, Lowry was perfectly capable of doing so. For example, he was sober for the most part during his major overhaul of Under the Volcano in the early 1940s.

[8] Lowry's grandfather on his mother's side was a seaman. Lowry embroidered the stories of his grandfather's exploits considerably, and these became a major influence in his enduring love affair with the sea.

[9] There is some debate over whether or not Lowry himself engaged in sexual relations with prostitutes during his time at sea. Bowker thinks not, but Lowry told of an embarrassing sequence in which he was ridiculed by a prostitute for the size of his penis, an incident that he claimed left him partially impotent for the rest of his life.

[10] The inclusion of Lowry's piece resulted in the anthology's ban by British Libraries--predictably a source of much hilarity and pride for Lowry.

[11] In his preface to Smith's The Art of Malcolm Lowry, Russell Lowry is skeptical that the meeting with Grieg ever took place. It seems probable Russell is mistaken on this point, but his allegation speaks to the fragility of the Lowry legend's relation to the truth.

[12] Readers who desire a more comprehensive biographical discussion of Lowry's later life are advised to consult either Douglas Day's Malcolm Lowry or Gordon Bowker's longer, considerably more derailed Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry. The story of Lowry's life was in many ways one of his best novels.

[13] Although I have distinguished them for reasons of conceptua' simplicity, these four stages are in fact closely inter-related and in practice may overlap frequently.

[14] My intuition here is that, like any skill that is developed over time, Lowry's writing methods changed in varying degrees and with respect to various sub-skills

[15] Richard Hauer Costa calls this Lowry's "absorbative method" (72).

[16] Aiken was a proponent of ruthless fictional self-examination along psychoanalytic lines. An example is his autobiographical novel Ushant, where Lowry appears as the amiable, weak plagiarist Hambo.

[17] "Do you see this garden which is yours? See to it that your children do not destroy it!" This stern warning is mistranslated by Lowry's consul--and Lowry himself as: "Do you like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" (Costa 72)

[18] Cf. Asals' "Revision and Illusion in Under the Volcano."

[19] An observation lent credence by considering the varied roles that the arts and decorative crafts have played in virtually every human society.

[20] Historically, what has been called the romantic tradition (Lamb 8-10) accorded primacy to the creative moment, or the inspiration for creative products. In contrast, Artificial Intelligence research into creativity has tended to occlude the motivating factors and concentrate instead on the cognitive underpinnings of creative action, while social psychology and the philosophy of aesthetics have focused predominantly on the cultural reception and revision of creative products.

[21] Cf. Amabile's The Social Psychology of Creativity, and Marc H. Bornstein's "Developmental Psychology and the 'Creative Mind'" for discussions of developmental approaches to creativity.

[22] This is not to say that either is less difficult to master or less worthwhile. The level of structure of a given creative activity is linked to its built-in rules and conventions.

[23] The term "brainstorming" originates with Alex Osbourne in 1938. It is a technique for generating a large quantity of ideas while deferring judgement on their merit or relevance. Through a series of rules governing the composition and progress of a brainstorming group, the process is harnessed to specific, clearly-stated creative problems.

[24] Cf. Frankfurt's "The Problem of Action."

[25] Cf. Boden's The Creative Mind and I. C. Jarvie's "The Rationality of Creativity," each of whom advance theories of creativity based on a problem-solving approach.

[26] The flexibility built in to natural languages is reminiscent of processes of selection, negotiation and play inherent to much creative action.

[27] Zohar is disingenuous in comparing the ultra-high performance mainframes and computer modeling techniques used in AI research with her personal word-processor. She

also fails to take into account the capacity of these computers to generate their own "discoveries" based new heuristics that are sub-generated during search patterns. For example, Boden (1990) details the case of a computer program that discovered an extremely elegant non-Euclidean proof of the geometry of a triangle based on only a few programmer-specified heuristics.

[28] For example, artistic creativity would seem to allow for much greater expressivity and subjectivity than its counterpart in the hard sciences. However, scientific research is not always a process of more or less cut-and-dried examination of a problem according to strictly formulated and enforced rules and conventions. Much of the theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking's work is so abstract that confirmation for some of his major hypotheses is literally unimaginable (Morris 141), falling as they do outside the scope of defined conditions derived from an obvious research problem. There are to date no prescribed means of representing Hawking's theory of "imaginary time" (142), suggesting that general principles of creative motivation and process are not so universal as computational models would have us believe.

[29] Zamiara's statement is not, strictly speaking, true. Creative action is subject to the same rules as everyday action, and not all actions are intentional actions. The painter who accidentally knocks a can of paint onto her nightshirt while sleepwalking does not paint intentionally. At the point at which she forms creative intentions with respect to the nightshirt, say, deciding to remove the buttons, she begins to create intentionally.

[30] This is not to say that one practice is superior, or that a single agent is incapable of engaging in both forms of creativity.

[31] These stages are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, but may often overlap, repeat in a variety of combinations, and even be bypassed. For example, not every work of art requires or is subjected to revision.

[32] Cf. Bratman's Intention, Plans and Practical Reason, and Mele's Springs of Action.

[33] Cf. Boden's The Creative Mind. Boden considers that creative works may be either psychologically or historically creative (or both). The former is defined by the uniqueness of the creative product to the person who created it, while the latter attaches to its uniqueness period. Boden's distinction has important ramifications for the value attached to, as it were, the creativity of creativity, and its subsequent reception and utilization within society.

[34] Cf. Amabile's The Social Psychology of Creativity for an exhaustive and impressively argued discussion of social and environmental influences on creativity,.

[35] For the purposes of my argument, the maker of the work in question must consider it to be complete and ready for release before some audience.

[36] My main concern here is to underscore the necessity of completion as a criterion for successful creative activity. An artist's *oeuvre* cannot, after all, be composed exclusively of fragments and works-in-progress. A completed creative product will naturally reflect its maker's goals, skills and so forth better than will a fragment. Hence the question of gaps between creative plans and products assume a pivotal importance.

[37] Cf. Mellor's Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters and Moers' "Female Gothic."

[38] In fact, literary studies, a discipline which, though historically trading in the

minute of textual interpretation, has begun to move much further afield in the hopes of re-energizing itself, has refused to engage with writer's block, that perennial and career-ending concern of writers throughout the centuries.

[39] Leader claims that "Since Bergler's book [in 1950], only two others devoted to writer's block have appeared, excluding popular self-help manuals" (1). In fact, Mike Rose's excellent anthology When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems was published and widely reviewed in 1985, well before Leader's own book went to print. In addition, numerous articles and Ph.D. dissertations published in the period between 1975-90 appear also to have eluded Professor Leader's attentions.

[40] As Steven Kellman observes, "Words failed Dante and other visionaries as they sought to express the ineffable, and the Koran, acknowledging fallow seasons in every life, asks: 'Does there not pass over every man a space of time when his life is a blank?'" (283).

[41] Victoria Nelson cites Hemingway as a chronically blocked writer whose block had real implications in his suicide, and, in a separate chapter, describes the sad death of Lockridge, who, "unable to begin a new book and plagued by severe depression, took his own life after the publication of Raintree County" (63).

[42] Writing anxiety, or writing apprehension, is not a substitute for writer's block: as Rose notes, "writer's block is broader and subsumes writing apprehension as a possible cause of or reaction to blocking" (4).

[43] This is roughly analogous to the term "writing apprehension" utilized by John Daly in his article "Writing Apprehension" from Mike Rose's 1985 anthology When a

Writer Can't Write. Also see Lyn Bloom's piece in the same volume.

[44] Cf. Boice's "Psychotherapies for Writing Blocks," Leader's Writer's Block, McDougall's "Sexual Identity, Trauma and Creativity," Schumann's "A Writing Block Treated with Modern Psychoanalytic Interventions," and Nelson's On Writer's Block: A New Approach to Creativity.

[45] Leader feels, with respect to these remarks, that Bergler's view is "fair-minded, practical, and orthodox. It is also properly attentive to suffering, which may be no less severe for bad blocked writers than for good ones" (19).

[46] See the Appendix of Nelson's On Writer's Block for some poetic responses to the arrival of the man from Porlock. Zachary Leader believes the Porlock incident to be a transparent admission of writer's block by Coleridge--though as Jeremy Tambling points out, such view assumes that "a) the poem is unfinished, (b) that it would be possible to think of the concept of an ending to it, and (c) that we can discuss a text both from the standpoint of its completion or non-completion, which implies belief in a text's internal consistency and the sense that it is structured by continuity" (928).

[47] For Kubasak, emotion is the central well upon which "true" writing must draw; if the well is dry or the writer poorly focuses, "emotional atrophy can occur and, with this, the paralysis of feeling" (373).

[48] Cf. Hayes & Flower's A Process Model of Composition and "Identifying the Organization of the Writing Process," and Flower & Hayes' "The Dynamics of Composing: Making Plans and Juggling Constraints."

[49] Similar to Carl Bereiter's "high-level executive scheme" (78).

[50] This is not of course to say that these activities are necessarily exhausted by the

time writing commences. New plans and intentions may be generated at any point within the process, subject of course to the limits of the writer and his or her work.

[51] This is a specialized term used to signify the effortlessness of writing at one's highest creative pitch.

[52] Again, this has special resonance in the case of Lowry, who was loathe to cease revision on any of his works unless they were literally torn from his unwilling hands.

[53] This phrase is used by Lowry to describe his later work.

[54] Interestingly, as many critics have noted, these periods of writer's block coincide closely with absences from Dollarton.

[55] The rough notes for virtually all of his novels and many of his short stories were made during the course of his trips.

[56] For detailed discussions of the critical reception of Volcano, see Bowker 406-23 and Day 366-80.

[57] Detailed horrifyingly in Lowry's still-unpublished "La Mordida" ["The Bite"].

[58] "[Clarisse Francillon] asked if this [Lowry] was *le consul.* Indeed it was, she was told, and the novel was based on his life. While writing the book he had managed to stay sober, but now drink had overtaken him and he was unable to write. Helping with the translation could be his salvation" (Bowker 434).

[59] D. H. Lawrence's home in Rome and Keats' in Piazza di Spagna chief among these. The notes for the short stories "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession" and "Elephant and Colosseum" came directly out of Lowry's experiences in Italy.

[60] Cf. Clarisse Francillon's "My Friend Malcolm Lowry."

[61] Many of Lowry's short stories were written specifically with an eye to quick

publication and payment. Typically, Lowry's beliefs concerning the saleability of even his short "commercial" works were overly optimistic.

[62] Grace calls Dark As the Grave "the least successful of his posthumously published works" and consideres "La Mordida" to be "tedious" (63).

[63] The lone exception is Ultramarine, though Lowry repeatedly announced plans to revise this work in line with the themes and standards of the "Voyage."

[64] Opinions differ as to the merits of this lengthy lost work. Downie Kirk found "In Ballast" to contain some of Lowry's best writing, while Aiken loathed it. Given Lowry's descriptions of it, my own sense is that Aiken is closer to the mark here.

[65] This work, which Lowry thought of as a small masterpiece, was based on the same events and characters as "Swinging the Maelstrom" and "The Last Address." The key differences between the works concern the tenor of the writing and the radically differing moods of their respective endings. An amalgam of two of the three texts was eventually edited and published by Margerie Lowry. Lunar Caustic--in its original form--was published only in France.

[66] For details of this, for the times, extremely generous contract, see Bowker 508.

[67] Of course, the suspension of his contract was a typically Lowrian combination of farce, soap opera and genuine tragedy. For an accurate and painstaking discussion of these events in full see Bowker 530-40.

[68] Malcolm Cowley remembers that Lowry was "drinking in protest" (Bowker 549) against leaving British Colombia, and Aiken wrote caustically that "Malc is revenging himself by as it were drinking the Great Genius to Death. You see how it works? A fine drama, with Random House putting up the dibs" (551).

Works Cited

Works Cited

Amabile, Teresa M. The Social Psychology of Creativity. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983.

---. and Elizabeth Tighe. "Questions in Creativity." Creativity: The Reality Club 4. ed. John Brockman. New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Arieti, Sylvano. Creativity: The Magic Synthesis. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. Berkeley: U of California P, 1954.

Asals, Frederick. "Revision and Illusion in Under the Volcano." Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcom Lowry. Ed. Sherrill Grace. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1992. 93-111.

Battin, Margaret, et al., eds. Puzzles About Art: An Aesthetics Casebook. New York: St. Martin's, 1989.

Bereiter, Carl. "Development in Writing." Cognitive Processes in Writing. Ed. Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1980.

Bloom, Lynne Z. "Anxious Writers in Context: Graduate School and Beyond." When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 119-133

Boden, Margaret. The Creative Mind. Great Britain: Cardinal, 1990.

Boice, Robert. "Psychotherapies for Writing Blocks." When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 182-218

Bowker, Gordon. Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcom Lowry. Toronto: Random House, 1993.

Bradbrook, Muriel C. Malcom Lowry: His Art and Early Life. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974.

Bratman, Michael. Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reason. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.

Breit, Harvey and Margerie Bonner Lowry, eds. Selected Letters of Malcom Lowry. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965.

Bruner, Jerome. Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986.

Bunge, Mario. "Explaining Creativity." Creativity and Consciousness: Philosophical and Psychological Dimensions. Ed. Jerzy Brzeziński et al. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993.

Costa, Richard Hauer. "The Grisly Graphics of Malcolm Lowry." Apparently Incongruous Parts: The Worlds of Malcom Lowry. Ed. Paul Tiessen. New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1990.

Cowley, Malcolm. --And I Worked at the Writer's Trade: Chapters of Literary History, 1918-1978. New York: Penguin, 1979.

Cross, Richard K. Malcom Lowry: A Preface to His Fiction. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Currie, Gregory. "The Long Goodbye: The Imaginary Language of Film." British Journal of Aesthetics. 33 (1993): 207-219.

Daly, John A. "Writing Apprehension." When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 43-82.

Day, Douglas. Malcom Lowry. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.

Doyen, Victor. "From Innocent Story to Charon's Boat: Reading the "October Ferry" Manuscript." Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcom Lowry. Ed. Sherrill Grace. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1992. 163-208.

Francillon, Clarisse. "My Friend Malcolm Lowry." Malcom Lowry: Psalms and Songs. Ed. Margerie Lowey. New York: Meridian, 1975. 87-96.

Frankfurt, Harry G. "The Problem of Action." The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays. By Frankfurt. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.

---. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." Ibid.

Gardner, Howard. "Seven Creators of the Modern Era." Creativity: The Reality Club 4. Ed. John Brockman. New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Grace, Sherrill. The Voyage That Never Ends: Malcom Lowry's Fiction. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1982.

---. ed. Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcom Lowry. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1992.

Graves, Donald H. "Blocking and the Young Writer." When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 1-18.

Hagen, William H. "Creative Process in Under the Volcano. n.p. n.d. 1-16.

Hayes, John R. and Linda S. Flower. "Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes." Cognitive Processes in Writing. Ed. Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1980. 3-30.

---. The Dynamics of Composing: Making Plans and Juggling Constraints." Cognitive Processes in Writing. Ed. Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1980. 31-50.

---. A Process Model of Composition. Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon UP, 1979.

Jarvie, I. C. "The Rationality of Creativity." The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art. Ed. Denis Dutton and Michael Krausz. The Haugue: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981. 109-28.

Kellman, Steven. "Microchips off the Writer's Block." Gettysburg Review. 4.2 (1991): 283-91.

Krapchenko, Mikhail B. Artistic Creativity, Reality, and Man. Moscow: Raduga, 1986.

Kubasak, Sharon. "Doing the Limbo With Woolf and Nin: On Writer's Block." The Centennial Review. 32.4 (1988): 372-87.

Lamb, David. Discovery, Creativity and Problem-Solving. Aldershot: Avebury, 1991.

Leader, Zachary. Writer's Block. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991.

Livingston, Paisley and Alfred R. Mele. "Intention and Literature." Stanford French Review 16.2 (1992): 173-197.

---. Under the Volcano. New York: Signet, 1984.

---. Ultramarine: A Novel. New York: Penguin, 1987.

---. October Ferry to Gabriola. Ed. Margerie Lowry. New York: World, 1970.

---. Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid. Ed. Douglas Day and Margerie Lowry. Toronto: General, 1968.

---. Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place. Ed and comp. Margerie Lowry. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965.

---. "Henrik Ghostkeeper." Malcom Lowry: Psalms and Songs. Ed. Margerie Lowry. New York: Meridian, 1975. 202-27.

---. Lunar Caustic. Ed. Earle Birney and Margerie Lowry. London: Cape, 1968.

Lowry, Margerie, ed. Malcom Lowry: Psalms and Songs. New York: Meridian, 1975.

Lowry, Russell. "Malcolm: A Closer Look." The Art of Malcom Lowry. Ed. Anne Smith. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978. 9-29.

McDougall, Joyce. "Sexual Identity, Trauma and Creativity." Psychoanalytical Inquiry. 11.4 (1191): 559-581.

McNeill, C. G. "Malcom Lowry Visits the Doctor." Malcom Lowry: Psalms and Songs. Ed. Margerie Lowry. New York: Meridian, 1975. 102-05.

Mele, Alfred R. Springs of Action: Understanding Intentional Behaviour. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Mellor, Anne K. Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Michaels, Leonard. "The Long Comeback of Henry Roth: Some Call It Miraculous." New York Times Book Review 15 Aug. 1993, natl. ed.: 3

---. Introduction. Shifting Landscapes. By Henry Roth. New York: St. Martin's, 1987. 15-28.

Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic." The Endurance of *Frankenstein*. Ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979. 77-88.

Morris, Richard. "Inventing the Universe." Creativity: The Reality Club 4. Ed. John Brockman. New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Murray, Donald M. "The Essential Delay: When Writer's Block Isn't." When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 219-226

Nelson, Victoria. On Writers' Block: A New Approach to Creativity. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1993.

Noxon, Gerald. "In Connection With Malcolm Lowry." Apparently Incongruous Parts: The Worlds of Malcom Lowry. Ed. Paul Tiessen. New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1990. 31-41.

Olsen, Tillie. Silences. New York: Delta, 1978.

Rose, Mike. Writers' Block: The Cognitive Dimension. Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 1980.

---. ed. When A Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. New York: Guilford, 1985.

Roth, Henry. Shifting Landscapes. New York: St. Martin's, 1987.

Schumann, Elliot P. "A Writing Block Treated With Modern Psychoanalytic Interventions." Psychoanalytic Review. 68 (1991) 113-34.

Shaver, Kelly. The Attribution of Blame: Causality, Responsibility and Blameworthiness. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus. 3rd ed. 1831. Ed. and Introd. Maurice Hindle. New York: Penguin, 1992.

---. Introduction. Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus. 3rd ed. 1831. By Shelley. Ed. and Introd. Maurice Hindle. New York: Penguin, 1992. 5-10.

Simon, Herbert A. Models of Discovery. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977.

Smith, Anne, ed. The Art of Malcom Lowry. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978.

Sparshott, Francis E. "Every Horse Has a Mouth: A Personal poetics." The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art. Ed. Denis Dutton and Michael Krausz. The Haugue: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981. 47-74.

Steinberg, Erwin R. "A Garden of Opportunities and a Thicket of Dangers." Cognitive Processes in Writing. Ed. by Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1980.

Sugars, Cynthia C., ed. The Letters of Conrad Aiken and Malcom Lowry, 1929-1954. Toronto: ECW, 1992.

Tambling, Jeremy. Rev. of Writer's Block, by Zachary Leader. MLR. 88.4 (1993): 927-28.

Tiessen, Paul, ed. Apparently Incongruous Parts: The Worlds of Malcom Lowry. New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1990.

Zamiara, Krystyna. "The Psychological Approach to Creativity: A Critical Appraisal." Creativity and Consciousness: Philosophical and Psychological Dimensions. Ed. Jerzy Brzeziński et al. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993.

Zohar, Dana. "Creativity and the Quantum Self." Creativity: The Reality Club 4. Ed. John Brockman. New York: Touchstone, 1993.