SHORT TITLE

MALCOLM LOWRY'S FICTION: THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST

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Under the Volcano and October Ferry to Gabriola: The Weight of the Past

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Doctor of Philosophy

With emphasis on Under the Volcano and October Ferry, this study explores the negative sense of the past evoked in Lowry's fiction. The opposition of past (despair) and future (hope) forms an underlying thematic context for his art. Through references to karma, Under the Volcano registers the need to free the future from the constraints of the past. From a Western perspective, the negative determinism of the past appears through allusions to the Freudian return of the repressed. Alcoholism also acts as a clinical metaphor for a regressive pattern of history. Marxism, promising transfiguration of the past in the future, exists only in weak counterpoint to the dominant view of history as a futile repetition of destructive events. Literary allusions, linking the past to the present, reinforce this pessimism. By contrast, the resolution of October Ferry is comic, not tragic: the past threatening to negate the future is apparently transcended.

THE PAST

Like a rotten old ladder
cast adrift from a dismantled sawmill
to float, shoulders awash, the rest
waterlogged, eaten by teredos,
barnacle encrusted, shellfish
clinging in blue gravelottes,
stinking, heavy with weeds, the strange life
of death and low tide, vermiculated,
helminthiatic,
seems my conscience -
hauled out now to dry in the sun,
leaning against nothing,
leading nowhere -
but to be put to use perhaps,
salvageable - to be graved,
up and down which
each night my
mind meaninglessly
climbs.

Malcolm Lowry

UNDER THE VOLCANO

AND

OCTOBER FERRY TO GABRIOLA:

THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST

BY

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Preface

This thesis examines several areas not yet fully explored by Lowry criticism. My study of the use of Indian traditions in Under the Volcano hopefully provides a new perspective on the novel. Such critics as Stephen Spender, Hilda Thomas, Anthony Kilgallin, and Perle Epstein have recognized the importance of Freud, alcoholism, and Marxism for an understanding of the book. However, their discussion of these elements (perhaps because of their very obviousness) has been largely in passing. In chapter three of my thesis, I focus on these areas and attempt to make explicit their artistic function in the novel. My consideration of allusions in Under the Volcano is heavily indebted to Lowry scholarship. My aims in discussing specific examples are three: to make a synthesis of existing critical understandings of their meanings, to offer my own insights, and to create a solid basis for a brief conclusion about the general function of allusions in the novel. Using Spender's analysis of Lowry's allusions as my basic premise, I try to show on the basis of textual evidence how their collective value is primarily as a technique of universalization through which the Consul becomes a figure emblematic of mankind. My chapter on the recently published October Ferry to Gabriola almost by definition breaks new grounds. It makes a tentative evaluation of the novel's artistic merit and analyzes the theme of the past in October Ferry. My thesis as a whole obtains its unity of approach from this perspective: the significance of the past in Lowry's fiction. His nearly obssesive concern with the past has long been noted. I attempt to systematically explore this fact by demonstrating how the concept of the past acts as an ordering thematic principle throughout Lowry's prose works, and especially in October Ferry and Under the Volcano.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of this study is to illuminate certain aspects of Malcolm Lowry's art by examining his pervasive concern with the past. In multiple forms, Lowry depicts the past as a constraint delimiting the present and threatening to negate the future. This theme achieves its fullest range of expression, intellectual and aesthetic, in Under the Volcano. An explication of how the diverse sources and techniques used by Lowry to register the past contribute to the novel's thematic richness is a primary intention of this thesis. Another part of this study attempts to delineate the similar - and yet divergent - sense of the past evoked in October Ferry to Gabriola. As a working hypothesis, both novels are considered autonomous literary artifacts,[1] with interpretation of meaning largely bounded by their textual circumferences; that is, emphasis is given to intrinsic values with only incidental reference made to Lowry's biography, and quotations from his Selected Letters

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[1] To consider October Ferry to Gabriola - a novel left unfinished at Lowry's death - as an autonomous work of art appears to be a dubious procedure. The element of artificiality inherent in this hypothesis is recognized and consideration is given to Lowry's projected design; nevertheless, this approach is adopted in the main as perhaps the most cogent method of revealing the high measure of completed artistry in October Ferry to Gabriola.

or from the earlier drafts of his novels[2] are not used to trace the creative growth of his work but merely to clarify meanings obscured in the published version. The undefended assumption motivating and justifying this study is that Malcolm Lowry is an artist of considerable stature whose language merits scrupulous attentiveness.

The discussion of Lowry's masterpiece, Under the Volcano, begins in chapter two of this thesis, with an attempt to sketch the influences of Indian traditions on the novel, an important factor virtually unexplored by literary critics.[3] As the bibliographic information on Lowry's readings in this area is both imprecise and fragmentary, portions of this section are necessarily speculative. After a brief historical survey of Hinduism and Buddhism in which their salient characteristics are set out, Lowry's artistic use of these religions is examined. A central tenet of Buddhism, which it shares with much of the

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[2]My examination of The Malcolm Lowry Papers has not been exhaustive by any means. I have looked at the various drafts which show the evolution of Under the Volcano from its initial short story form to the published novel, concentrating on chapters one and eight. My understanding of the growth of October Ferry is sketchy. The crucial working notes were scattered, and would have required considerably more time than I had available for a satisfactory appraisal.

[3]Aside from a few remarks about The Mahabharata, made by Anthony Kilgallin in his M.A. Thesis (see Works Cited), I have encountered no awareness of Lowry's use of Indian sources in Under the Volcano.

Hindu tradition, is the doctrine of the Karmic Wheel. This notion, it is argued, is central to the novel in both form and meaning, with the karmic theory of past actions providing one way of explicating the Consul's personal fate.[4]

In the next chapter there is a further exploration of Under the Volcano's multi-faceted presentation of the question of determinism. Tolstoy's theories of free will and necessity (quoted by the Consul) act as a philosophical preface to an analysis of deterministic features within the novel. Discussion of two interrelated aspects of determinism functioning on a personal level then follows. With the focus on the character of Geoffrey Firmin, a study is made of Lowry's use of alcoholism and Freud's Oedipal theory in the novel. In the second part of this chapter two conflicting ideas of determinism on a historical level are set out. First, there is a negative, compulsively

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[4]Buddhism and Hinduism are not, of course, the only spiritual references present in the universe of the novel. As Lowry has almost encyclopaedic aims in this regard, the Eastern strands ultimately should be seen as elements of a larger religious texture, in which Christianity and Judaism are especially prominent:

See Casari, L.E.R. "Malcolm Lowry's Drunken Comedy." Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Nebraska, 1967.
Kilgallin, Anthony R. "Faust and Under the Volcano." Can. Lit. 26: 43-54, Autumn 1965.
Schorer, Mark. "The Downward Flight of a Soul." N.Y. Herald-Tribune Book Review 23 Feb. 1947, p. 2.

And Epstein, Perle. The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969.

recurring pattern which metaphorically correlates with the Consul's individual cycle of despair. In counterpoint to this pessimistic vision of history is an affirmative order, represented by Hugh's espousal of Marxism. The claims of dialectical materialism for social transformation (tinged with illusion because of the novel's ironic diminution of Hugh) Lowry juxtaposes to the sterile repetition perceived by Geoffrey Firmin. In this conflict of perceptions between the two half-brothers the essential question is: can the past be transcended? On this point, the novel is equivocal but the thrust of its action tends to deride Hugh's hope and to confirm Geoffrey's despair.

Chapter four of my thesis is concerned with the link between the past and the present created by Lowry's extensive use of literary allusions in Under the Volcano. After some preliminary discussion, I accept as the basis for interpretation Stephen Spender's view that Lowry's allusions are used as a source of analogy in the novel. As a technique for imposing intellectual clarity on what appears to be a plethora of references, specific allusions occurring in the text are placed into approximate and quasi-arbitrary categories. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive; the allusions discussed are selective and intended as representative. The first group of references considered are those made to the mythological figures of the Greek underworld, such as Ixion, Sisyphus,

Tantalus, and Prometheus. Next, there is an examination of allusions to Greek literature, itself, with particular attention to Homer and Sophocles. I then consider a series of literary allusions which complement the references to classical works, taken from sources within the Christian tradition. An analysis follows of a group of literary works, alluded to in Under the Volcano, which share an orientation which could loosely be termed existential, primarily for the significance which they hold for the figure of the Consul. In the final category, I suggest that Conrad's Lord Jim and Cervantes' Don Quixote be considered as exemplifications of idealism, a notion crucial to the novel as a whole and to the character of Hugh in particular.

In the second part of chapter four there is a review of the allusions studied. Lowry's syncretic genius emerges with even greater clarity when the groupings of literary allusions are considered in their interrelationships with each other. The kinetic interaction between the set of classical and Christian allusions is a striking example of how Lowry unifies disparate sources to give intensity and nuance to a theme: eternal suffering as punishment for a crime. Despite the variety and chronological range of the works alluded to in the novel, a pattern of consistent darkness is evident. Through Geoffrey's consciousness, absorbing with dark selectivity those allusions which confirm his interior sense of doom, the

past is shaped into a mirror of his present despair. From the temporal correlation thus set up, the Consul's bleak perspective is corroborated and universalized, making his death explicable in terms of causal determinism.

The subject of chapter five is October Ferry to Gabriola. In the opening part I make an evaluation of the novel's literary worth. (None seemed necessary for Under the Volcano.) For this assessment, I have adopted conventional literary terms, such as plot, characterization, action, dialogue, and setting. The use of such standard critical assumptions about the novel form provides an inadequate means of approach to October Ferry to Gabriola. However, they do suggest the areas residing outside traditional genre notions where its unique merit can be located. The second part of this chapter traces Ethan's struggle to control the debilitating incursions from the past in the form of guilt which threatens to undermine him. I examine his need for a personal equilibrium with reference to his uncertain memories of the Peter Cordwainer incident and also to the loss of perspective implicit in advertising, the mass media, and urban life. This chapter concludes with a few tentative generalizations about his quest for a personal balance, interpretable on several levels, with some remarks about his apparent achievement of it.

Chapter six of this thesis briefly retraces the lines of argument developed earlier and then explores the relationship

between Under the Volcano and October Ferry to Gabriola, with emphasis on the contrasting fates of their protagonists.

Excluding these two novels, the remainder of this introduction will sketch Lowry's use of the past in his other published fiction.

Malcolm Lowry's first novel, Ultramarine, is an account of a young man's voyage to the Orient.[5] Critical judgment of this book has been for the most part negative, and Lowry, speaking of his "eccentric word-spinning, and labored phantasmagorias,"[6] came to share this view. Even though this novel was based upon autobiographical experience it is extremely derivative, depending heavily on Nordahl Grieg's The Ship Sails On. Debts to American literature are also conspicuous: Dana (adopted as the hero's name), Melville, O'Neill's The Long Voyage Home, and Conrad Aiken's Blue Voyage.[7] In Ultramarine

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[5]The order in which Lowry's works are discussed in this section is roughly chronological. Because Lowry worked on several projects at the same time and constantly revised (even published works) his output cannot be arranged in a neat sequential pattern. See Appendix for an approximate chronology of Lowry's fiction.

[6]Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, eds. Harvey Breit & Margerie B. Lowry (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1961), p. 80.

[7]For a study of literary sources used in Ultramarine, see Edmonds II, Dale Harlan. "Malcolm Lowry: A Study of his Life and Work." Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Texas, 1965. Part II, ch. 1. (Grieg's and Aiken's influence on Ultramarine is discussed pp. 123-28.)

Lowry's assimilative talents are undeveloped. Literary sources are not organically set into the text, and the result is a diffusion of artistic focus. Lowry's description of this novel as "paraphrase, plagiarism, or pastiche"[8] is unduly harsh but it does accurately indicate the failure of an integrative process, the lack of an ordering centre, which is Ultramarine's major weakness.

The novel exhibits an awareness of the past in three ways. First, the past enters the book, ineffectively it has been suggested, through allusions to previous voyages, fictional or real, which Dana Hilliot (or Lowry?) strains to identify with the protagonist's immediate voyage. Secondly, the past slides into Dana's consciousness through memories of Norway and England which usually include an etiolated girl called Janet. In contrast to Lowry's mature works such memories have little discernible effect on either the present condition or present action of his central character (if we except Dana's reluctance to join his shipmates in their visit to the brothels out of fidelity to the image of Janet). It is in a third guise that the past exists as an omnipresent reality in Ultramarine. Even though Dana's intention in undertaking the voyage is to experience life on board ship as a common crewman, he discovers abruptly that his family's social position in

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[8] Selected Letters, p. 16.

England isolates him from the other seamen. The crew's resentment of Dana is initiated prior to the ship's departure from Liverpool when he, wearing his blue suit, arrived in his guardian's car at the wharf where the ship was berthed. This incident ensures that Dana will be unable to leave behind in England the problem of class antagonisms. A specific element of his past life, his social status, alienates him from the rest of the crew. Because Dana views his acceptance by his shipmates as ratification of his manhood, his efforts to transcend his social position assume large thematic significance. His gaining of Andy's respect and friendship at the end of the novel represents an egalitarian transformation of the class distinctions which implicated him in the eyes of the crew, and a successful rite de passage. Curiously, in Lowry's best writing, it is the past in the form of allusions and memories that contributes most effectively to his works and, while remaining perceptive of class nuances, his sociological perspective merges into a more inclusive vision.

The next piece of long fiction that Lowry wrote was the novella, Lunar Caustic. It describes the brief stay of an alcoholic, William Plantagenet (an English jazz musician whose group has disbanded in New York), in an insane asylum. Perhaps the best access to this work is through an awareness

of Lowry's Dantean plans of writing "a trilogy entitled The Voyage That Never Ends ... with the Volcano as the first, infernal part, and a much amplified Lunar Caustic as the second, purgatorial part...."[9] Although these plans were unrealized the novella bears the imprint of this design. The title itself suggests Lowry's purgatorial intentions as lunar caustic is a painful medicine used by doctors to clear a baby's vision. Moreover, the setting is appropriate for Lowry's conception because, as L.E.R. Casari points out in "Malcolm Lowry's Drunken Divine Comedy," "the insane asylum is theoretically a place where a diseased man could be purged of his lunacy."[10] Casari argues that Lunar Caustic depicts a higher stage of spiritual development than Under the Volcano due to the fact that "unlike the Consul, ... Richard (sic) Plantagenet does not remain in the abyss, for he can feel love and compassion and expresses this in his relationship with Mr. Kalowsky and Garry."[11]

Whether or not this regeneration of Plantagenet takes place is open to interpretation. Lowry is very equivocal in his use of the clinical metaphor. In Plantagenet's interview with the psychiatrist, Dr. Claggart, the adequacy of such

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[9] Selected Letters, p. 63

[10] Casari, p. 282

[11] Casari, p. 38

categories as insane and sane is questioned, rendering dubious the clinical framework from which Plantagenet's putative cure would emerge. Lowry, through his protagonist, anticipates R.D. Laing's insight that "Madness need not be all breakdown. It may be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death."[12] Plantagenet sees in the stories of the boy Garry a creativity that is similar to that of Rimbaud and confronts the psychiatrist with the question: "Don't you see buried in all that wreckage his craving for freedom?"[13] Dr. Claggart effectively dismisses this question as a projection of Plantagenet's own neurotic concerns. In this stand-off the hospital's therapeutic potential is neither confirmed nor denied.

The ambivalence with which Lowry presents the insane asylum is illustrated by an image of a derelict coal barge which the patients can see through the barred windows:

> ... between the two wharves and fast against the poverty grass before the hospital lay the coal barge, sunken, abandoned, open, hull cracked, bollards adrift, tiller smashed, its hold still choked with coal dust, silt, and earth through which emerald shoots had sprouted. (LC 12)

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[12]R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 110

[13]Malcolm Lowry, Lunar Caustic, eds. Earle Birney & Margerie Lowry (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 57. (Further references to this work will appear in the text of the thesis as LC followed by the page number.)

The barge mirrors the patients' inner landscapes, Garry's especially. The sense of entropy which dominates most of the descriptive passage is counterpointed at the end by an image of renewal, "emerald shoots"; it is this ambiguous reality that Plantagenet sees in Garry (and in himself):

> "Garry sees disaster encompassing not only himself but the hospital, this land, the whole world...I don't know, it's funny how people want to create, and do, in spite of everything - order and chaos both." (LC 56)

The disaster which Garry sees encompassing the whole world is not dismissed by Lowry as a mere projection of a troubled psyche; the barge is not only a configuration of his interior world but also an object with physical existence in the external, sane world.

In Lunar Caustic the boundaries isolating the insane from the sane are blurred and shifting, with the hospital presented as a symbolic microcosm of the larger society's need for regeneration. This conflation severely undercuts the purgatorial impetus behind the clinical metaphor as it ironically implies that the normal world and the insane asylum are essentially identical. Thus, Plantagenet wonders "if the doctor ever asked himself what point there was in adjusting poor lunatics to a mischievous world over which merely more subtle lunatics exerted almost supreme hegemony, where neurotic behaviour was the rule" (LC 37). As a result

of this perspective, Plantagenet after leaving the hospital feels "no sense of release, only inquietude" (LC 73).

The ambiguities circumscribing the purification theme are made even more complex by repeated allusions to the works of Herman Melville. Lowry described an earlier draft of Lunar Caustic as "among other things, about a man's hysterical identification with Melville."[14] In his essay "Lowry's Purgatory," David Benham asserts that in this earlier draft (The Last Address) Lowry integrates his protagonist's experiences in the hospital "by relating them to the patterns of experience which Melville works out in Moby Dick and Billy Budd."[15] These books remain prominent in Lunar Caustic (an amalgam of The Last Address and a later draft) with Lowry demonstrating a fairly sophisticated control of the literary possibilities available through the use of allusion. Using Melville as his primary source, he creates a set of correspondences between art and life.

By choosing to name the psychiatrist Dr. Claggart, Lowry overtly hints that themes parallel to those of Billy Budd can be located in Lunar Caustic. In his interview with Dr. Claggart, Plantagenet is in one capacity acting as a surrogate figure for Garry who correlates with Billy Budd.

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[14] Selected Letters, pp. 24-25.

[15] David Benham, "Lowry's Purgatory," Can. Lit. 44: Spring 1970, p. 30.

Universal affection is accorded to both Garry ("Everyone's fond of him", LC 56) and Billy ("so popular with the men"[16]). Garry's volubility can be seen as a symmetrical reversal of Billy's speech impediment. The most significant parallel between the two characters is a spontaneous act of violence attributable to similar causes. Benham argues that "in each case the innocent and honest (Billy Budd, Lawhill, by extension, Garry) is accused by duplicity (the two Claggarts); the innocent is left literally or figuratively speechless, and can only express himself in violence."[17] In Garry's case he had cut a child's throat with a broken bottle because "'she chalked on the pavement that I and my mother and father were bad people who should be in hell'" (LC 30). In Melville's work, Billy responds to Claggart's charge of mutiny by killing him with a blow to the forehead. The quality which unites Garry and Billy is a destructive purity of innocence. Like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, they possess an ethical naiveté that is incompatible with social order and all three, in different ways, are removed from society.

The parallels between Melville's master-at-arms, John Claggart, and Lowry's psychiatrist, Dr. Claggart, are less noticeable. In fact, their personalities would seem to be

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[16] Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Foretopman, in Selected Writings of Herman Melville (New York: Modern Lib., 1952), p. 862.

[17] Benham, p. 37.

quite distinct. Melville, in Billy Budd, describes Claggart as an example of natural depravity, one whose moral perversion is not sensual in nature but "dominated by intellectuality."[18] This form of depravity, Melville asserts, "civilization...is auspicious to" as it "folds itself in the mantle of respectability."[19] Lowry's Dr. Claggart appears to lack the innate evil of his namesake but it is arguable that, in his official capacity, his actions, although stemming from benign motives, are the functional equivalent of the master-at-arms'. Parallel to Claggart's slander of Billy Budd is the psychiatrist's unwitting collaboration in the girl's slander of Garry ("who should be in hell") through his professional insistence that Garry remain in the insane asylum, a "doleful" place that is "the foul core" of the world (LC 37). The correspondence between the two Claggarts is strengthened by the respectability of their positions and by the detached intellectual cast of their minds. Moreover, Dr. Claggart's therapeutic intentions are as destructive of Garry's innocence as the master-at-arms' malignant intentions towards Billy Budd. The psychiatrist, acting out of a concern for Garry's adjustment to the real world, seeks to negate the infantile dream world, expressed through fables, in which Garry lives.

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[18] Billy Budd, p. 842.

[19] Billy Budd, p. 842.

In this respect Dr. Claggart functions analogously to the other Claggart: both are antithetical to a quality of Adamic innocence.[20]

The references to Billy Budd also have significance for the character of Plantagenet, due to his psychological kinship to Garry, but it is the pattern of allusions drawn from another work of Melville's, Moby Dick, that touches him most directly. Before Plantagenet's entrance into the hospital, he is "like Ahab stumbling from side to side on the careening bridge, 'feeling that he encompassed in his stare oceans from which might be revealed that phantom destroyer of himself'" (LC 10). On the opening page of Lunar Caustic, whose title suggests the novella's preoccupation with vision, Plantagenet is described as a man "looking for his sight" (LC 9). He is an Ahab without the lucidity of monomania, but, like Ahab, Plantagenet by committing himself to the insane asylum is prepared to risk self-annihilation in order to confront the mysteries of the universe. His initiation into the realm of madness, a symbolic rejection of logical restraints, is consistent with Ahab's claim that "Truth has no confines."[21] In this context Garry is associated with Pip

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[20] Dr. Claggart, in his placement of the need for social order before the value of the individual, is similar to Captain Vere. There is no indication, however, that the psychiatrist obtains Captain Vere's insight into the tragic nature of these opposing demands.

[21] Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1964), p. 221

who was "carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes."[22] This theme of the chaotic wisdom afforded by insanity is given an aesthetic extension in Lunar Caustic through Garry's identification with Rimbaud: ("Le poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens."[23]) In the insane asylum Plantagenet, perhaps in conscious imitation of Rimbaud's aesthetic doctrine, undergoes a disordering of experience in order to become a seer, although it should be noted that the phantasmagorias created by his delirium tremens anticipate this process. Unable to accept the validity of Dr. Claggart's categories of sane and unsane, real and unreal, he sees the ambiguities of the world through the image of Melville's white whale.

Prior to Plantagenet's interview with the psychiatrist, references to the Pequod and the white whale have occurred, giving the word "whiteness" in the following passage an allusive function:

> "I - what," said Plantagenet, looking round him, bewildered. He couldn't find the doctor among the phantoms, for the curtains, blowing in at that moment, made one whiteness with his robe. (LC 46)

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[22] Moby Dick, p. 530.

[23] Arthur Rimbaud by Enid Starkie (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 123.

Melville's comments in his chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale", are relevant here. In his meditation on the "colorless, all-color" nature of white, Melville asks

> Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?[24]

Lowry uses the malevolent connotations of whiteness set out by Melville to create an epiphanic moment in the doctor's office, with Plantagenet experiencing annihilation, "I - what", and the chaos of the universe (the psychiatrist, exemplar of rational order, vanishes). A few pages later Plantagenet re-experiences a feeling of disorientation, in a way that is somewhat analogous to Pip's "ringed horizon"[25] as "The Castaway": "the room, the whiteness, spun around him with a jagged dazzle; he closed his eyes a second: where was he?" (LC 49). It is significant that Plantagenet's sense of dislocation immediately follows Dr. Claggart's tacit defense of society's order and values.[26] Lowry, using the reader's

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[24] Moby Dick, p. 263.

[25] Moby Dick, p. 530.

[26] Dr. Claggart derisively parries the attack made by Plantagenet on his psychiatric approach with the remark: "The 'so-called' sane world, I suppose you think?" (LC 49). The complacent sureness with which Dr. Claggart distinguishes the sane and the insane contrasts with the sense of ambiguity expressed by Melville:

awareness of Melville's treatise on "whiteness," conveys an ambivalent attitude towards the white-robed psychiatrist, and towards the therapy he represents. Through covert allusions to Moby Dick, Lowry symbolically uses Plantagenet's physical response, vertigo, to communicate the baffling ambiguities which lay outside his narrow, clinical perspective.

All the scattered and elliptical allusions to the white whale coalesce near the end of Lunar Caustic with the appearance of "'that phantom destroyer of himself'" which Plantagenet-Ahab had searched for even before his admission to the insane asylum:

> A seaplane was gliding whitely past,
> and now it was turning, to Plantagenet
> suddenly it had the fins and flukes
> and blunt luminous head of a whale;
> now it roared straight at the window,
> straight at him. (LC 71)

The catastrophe which had been foreshadowed throughout the book occurs, not in the form of physical death but as a kind of psychic disintegration:

> Who in the rainbow can draw the line where
> the violet tint ends and the orange tint
> begins? Distinctly we see the difference
> of the colors, but where exactly does the
> one first blendingly enter into the other?
> So with sanity and insanity. In pronounced
> cases there is no question about them. But
> in some supposed cases, in various degrees
> supposedly less pronounced, to draw the exact
> line of demarkation few will undertake though
> for a fee some professional experts will.
> (Billy Budd, p. 871.)

> There was a furious crash of thunder and and simultaneously Plantagenet felt the impact of the plane, the whale, upon his mind. While metamorphosis nudged metamorphosis, a kind of order, still preserved within his consciousness, and enclosing this catastrophe, exploded itself into the age of Kalowsky again, and into the youth of Garry, who both now seemed to be spiralling away from him until they were lost, just as the seaplane was actually tilting away, swaying up to the smashed sky. But while that part of him only a moment before in possession of the whole, the ship, was turning over with disunion of hull and masts uprooted falling across her decks, another faction of his soul, relative to the ship but aware of these fantasies and simultaneities as it were from above, knew him to be screaming against the renewed thunder and saw the attendants closing in on him, yet saw him too, as the plane seethed away northwards like the disembodied shape of the very act of darkness itself, passing beyond the asylum walls melting like wax, and following in its wake, sailing on beyond the cold coast of the houses and the factory chimneys waving farewell - farewell -
> (LC 72)

Lowry's depiction of Plantagenet's collapse into madness contains the ambiguities which R.D. Laing would later articulate theoretically. The helplessness of insanity, represented by the "attendants," is counterbalanced by a cosmic perception, the explosion of temporal boundaries through Plantagenet's metamorphoses into Garry and Kalowsky. In terms of the Moby Dick parallelism, this passage dramatically shifts Plantagenet's identification from Ahab to Ishmael. The imagery of a ship "with disunion of hull and masts uprooted falling across her decks" evokes the destruction of the Pequod. As

the single character to be released from the hospital,[27] Plantagenet is, like Ishmael, the only person to survive the wreckage, and the consciousness from which the narrative must flow.

Melville is used by Lowry as a referential link to Plantagenet's past experiences, as well as to those of the hospital. Hearing a sidewheeler on the river, he remembers a trip that he took with his wife Ruth, from whom he is now separated, "to New Bedford, nearer to Herman Melville, ... taking them nearer to their own white whale, their own destruction" (LC 68).[28] Constant throughout Plantagenet's "tortured memories" (LC 39) of his personal past is the feeling of remorse. The psychiatrist, at one point in the novella, calls him Mr. Remorse, and the word itself is used repeatedly. The remorse which dominates Plantagenet's retrospective survey of his life receives an aesthetic justification in the context of the book's purgatorial theme, the repentance that must precede purification through suffering. The crucial question posed by Lowry is whether or not the past, even when viewed with remorse, is salvageable: "did there not exist in it [the past], quite apart from what

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[27]The passage quoted is Plantagenet's farewell, his "L'Envoi," to the insane asylum. In the sentence after this quotation, he is standing outside the hospital building.

[28]New Bedford is "the place from which Melville started his whaling voyage." Benham, p. 32.

details he accurately, remorsefully recalled of the criminal folly of his life, or the irreparable damage he had done, such a long weary heritage of unsalvageable aftermath ...(LC 40)?

Early in Lunar Caustic the cannibalistic nature of the past is registered by a film reference to a shark which "went on swallowing the live fish, even after it was dead (LC 22).[29] The past is seen as the inertia of existing reality operating in antagonism to potentialities of life; renewal means "the necessity of blasting away the past" (LC 57). Lowry is equivocal about Plantagenet's regeneration, salvage (Ishmael), or salvation (Dante). His ambiguous handling of the purgatorial theme is evident during the moment that he translates Plantagenet's remorse into a concrete, physical action intended to rectify the past:

> He began to think he saw some of his mistakes clearly. He had them all figured out. He even imagined himself expunging them by some heroic sacrifice.... It would free everyone-all the patients, all the parents, all the Ruths, it would free mankind; ah-he would strike his blow for right.
>
> Ennobled, he went to the washroom where he finished his bottle. Glancing round for somewhere to put it he noticed an obscene sketch of a girl chalked on the wall. For some reason, suddenly enraged, he hurled the bottle against this drawing, and ... it seemed to him

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[29] Hugh, in his argument with Geoffrey in chapter ten of Under the Volcano, cites this film image as a symbol of Nazism.

> that he had flung that bottle against all the indecency, the cruelty, the hideousness, the filth and injustice in the world. At the same time an atrocious vision of Garry flashed across his consciousness, and an atrocious fear. "It was only a little scratch," he had said. (LC 75-6)

As a blast against the past, Plantagenet's action is ludicrously ineffectual; more importantly, the image of Garry suggests an irrational violence in his act which would not ameliorate, but contribute to, the hideousness of the world. A more positive reading of his bottle-smashing would emphasize intention, a symbolic rejection functioning as a prelude to effective action, and the recognition (for which Garry has affirmative value) of "the necessity for change ..., for rebirth" (LC 52). Lunar Caustic concludes with Plantagenet "curled up like an embryo" (LC 76). Lowry, to the very end, remains ambiguous: does the foetal position represent regression or rebirth, submission to the past, or regeneration?

In a letter written in 1951, Lowry describes a work in progress as "a sort of Under Under the Volcano, ... tentatively it's called Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid ..."[30] An edited version of this novel was published posthumously in 1968.[31] Dark as the Grave, like so much of

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[30] Selected Letters, p. 267.

[31] Lowry, Malcolm. Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid, eds. Douglas Day & Margerie Lowry. Toronto: General Publ. Co., Ltd., 1968. (For purposes of reference this work will be designated DG.)

Lowry's writings, is an exploration of the voyage motif.[32] It is, on the most fundamental level, an account of an extended journey made by Sigbjørn Wilderness and his wife, Primrose, who fly from the Vancouver airport to Mexico City and then travel by bus to Cuernavaca and to their ultimate destination, Oaxaca. The overt reason given for the trip is Sigbjørn's desire to see again his friend, Juan Fernando Martinez, the prototype for a character in an unpublished novel set in Mexico and written by Sigbjørn called The Valley of the Shadow of Death. At Oaxaca he discovers that Martinez has been dead for six years. Autobiographical parallels to most of the details and incidents of the narrative (including Sigbjørn's attempted suicide) can be found in a trip from Vancouver to Mexico that Lowry made with his second wife in December of 1945. The extent of this parallelism is indicative of the novel's embryonic state, and justifies the reservations of critics, like George Woodcock[33], who maintain that artistic transformation has not taken place in Dark as the Grave. Perhaps because of this fact, Lowry's obsessive

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[32] The voyage motif, easily found in Ultramarine, "The Bravest Boat," "Through the Panama," and October Ferry to Gabriola, can also be located in Under the Volcano: Yvonne's arrival by plane, Hugh's departure for Spain aboard ship, and most importantly the bus ride to Tomalin.

[33] "There is too much talk about art, and too little art." George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1971), p. 69.

concern with the past appears in Dark as the Grave in a form that is almost schematic.

The novel's journey into the past is set out by a magnificent opening sentence (whose prose texture creates artistic expectations that are unfulfilled by the rest of the book):

> The sense of speed, of gigantic transition, of going southward, downward, over three countries, the tremendous mountain ranges, the sense at once of descent, tremendous regression, and of moving, not moving, but in another way dropping straight down the world, straight down the map, as of the imminence of something great, phenomenal, and yet the moving shadow of the plane below them, the eternal moving cross, less fleeting and more substantial than the dim shadow of the significance of what they were actually doing that Sigbjørn held in his mind: and yet it was possible only to focus on that shadow, and at that only for short periods: they were enclosed by the thing itself as by the huge bouncing machine with its vast monotonous purring, pouring din, in which they sat none too comfortably, Sigbjørn with his foot up embarrassedly, for he had taken his shoe off, a moving, deafening, continually renewed time-defeating destiny by which they were enclosed but of which they were able only to see the inside, for so to speak of the streamlined platinum-colored object itself they could only glimpse a wing, a propeller, through the small, foolish, narrow oblong windows.

This introductory sentence establishes Sigbjørn's tone of foreboding mingled with hope. The dangers of his impending encounter with the past, which are both spiritual ("descent"),

and psychological ("regression"), are counterbalanced by an image of affirmation, "the eternal moving cross." The crucifix seems to promise a mystical transcendence of earthbound temporal limits, some "time-defeating destiny." On the other hand, the image of the cross has potentially negative connotations, which imply that Sigbjørn, like the Consul, may not escape martyrdom. This implication is established early in the sentence by the phrase "dropping straight down" which, using the plane ride as metaphor, creates a sense of imminent catastrophe. The plane also objectively correlates Sigbjørn's alienation, of which his physical discomfort is symbolic. Enclosed within the plane, spatially removed from earthly contact, "able only to see the inside," his existential isolation from the universe is visually dramatized. "The small, foolish, narrow oblong window" indicates the distortions and limitations of the dangerously solipsistic perspective which accompanies Sigbjørn on his flight "smack into the past."

The intellectual tension latent in this theme is never created in Dark as the Grave. The potential excitement of a mind imprisoned in subjectivity wilfully confronting its past, risking "oblivion" (DG 3) for possible exorcism, is not generated. Lowry's failure to realize this theme artistically is due mainly to a sense of dicontinuity between Sigbjørn's consciousness, brooding on the dangers of the past,

and the past itself, whose destructiveness is not convincingly rendered. Unlike Under the Volcano, where Lowry finds in the Mexican setting images, episodes, and mythic configurations to correlate Geoffrey's feeling of doom, Dark as the Grave is without a tangible external pattern which would objectify and confirm Sigbjørn's forebodings. The result is that the latter's insistent dread appears spurious. Sigbjørn's portentous fears about "immolation in the depths of the past" (DG 91), "ghosts of old horrors" (DG 166), and being "inexorably drawn back in some fashion to that lowest ebb" (DG 77) suggest that his return to Mexico is a near suicidal gesture:

> It was as if the ghost of a man who had hanged himself had returned to the scene of his suicide....(DG 77)

As the past in which Sigbjørn fears immolation does not exist as a living entity (as it does in Under the Volcano), the darkness of his interior monologues seems vague, disconnected, and excessive. There is a disconcerting gap between internal and external as Sigbjørn's malignant past, represented by Mexico, is merely stated, never dramatized.

A major aspect of his confrontation with the past, his engagement with an unpublished novel written in Mexico, is also inadequately registered. Throughout Lowry's work an important part of his subject matter is literature. Usually this self-conscious literary interest takes the form

of allusions, most effectively in Under the Volcano, where they create a pattern of meaning that is analogous in function to the pattern of imagery that critics have found in Shakespeare's drama. In Dark as the Grave this literary awareness becomes an even more dominant concern. The novel's ordering design can be found in a notion that Lowry adapts from Ortega: "the best image for man himself is a novelist."[34] Sigbjørn is not only a character "setting out smack into the past"; he is also a novelist who "wrote a book about running into the past" (DG 153). To complete the parallelism between life and art, Sigbjørn is now living in the tower where one of the most important scenes of his book takes place, "a scene where my hero has to choose, to put it rather stupidly, between life and death" (DG 140). The interaction of art with life is brought into a sharper focus than is the case in Under the Volcano, with Lowry

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[34] Selected Letters, p. 331. The reasoning behind this viewpoint is contained in a passage from Ortega's Toward a Philosophy of History, which Lowry quotes in a letter written in 1950:

> "Life in the zoological sense consists of such actions as are necessary for existence in nature. But man manages things so that the claims of this life are reduced to a minimum. In this vacuum arising after he has left behind his animal life he devotes himself to a series of non-biological occupations which are not imposed by nature but invented by himself. This invented life - invented as a novel or a play is invented - man calls 'human life', well-being. Human life transcends the reality of nature. ... He makes it himself, beginning by inventing it. ... Is human life in its most human dimension a work of fiction? Is man a sort of novelist of himself ...?"
>
> (Selected Letters, p. 210)

combining in the single character of Sigbjørn a man who is striving to invent fictional order in his art, while at the same time engaged in creating a personal order in his life.

In the following passage a lyrical exposition of this theme is set out:

> he had suddenly a glimpse of a flowing like an eternal river; he seemed to see how life flowed into art: how art gives life a form and meaning and flows on into life, yet life has not stood still; that was what was always forgotten: how life transformed by art sought further meaning through art transformed by life... (DG 43)

George Woodcock, in his essay, "Art as the Writer's Mirror," argues that this quotation "illuminates the central action of the book, the seeking back through life to events and episodes that became the substance of a work of art."[35] That the aesthetic possibilities of this theme are not developed in Dark as the Grave is not due primarily to the incompleteness of the manuscript. Nor is the notion, borrowed from Ortega, of the writer as hero a faulty one; its potentialities are shown in Mann's "Death in Venice." The failure of the novel in this respect has its source in the relative scarcity of life portrayed throughout the book and in the inability to give a sense of autonomy to Sigbjørn's unpublished novel. The Valley of the Shadow of Death lacks the vivid reality that

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[35] "Art as the Writer's Mirror," p. 66.

it needs to sustain an interplay between life and art. It is of course a "shadow" of Under the Volcano, but the reader's tendency to give it solidity by identifying it with Lowry's masterpiece violates the fictional premise that Sigbjørn is the author. At this point Sigbjørn becomes Lowry and Dark as the Grave is reduced from literature to, what essentially it is, autobiography.

In Sigbjørn's flight into the past the antipodes of oblivion and exorcism act as psychic boundaries. This range of experiential possibility, that of life and death, is contained in the date, Dec. 7, 1945. It marks the midpoint of the trip from Vancouver to Mexico City, and for Sigbjørn, is the cause for both rejoicing and mourning. This date is the anniversary of his marriage and the anniversary of a friend's violent death.[36] Images of unbalance suggest themselves to Sigbjørn's consciousness as the rhythm of his life:

> All these little flights had something
> in common: and their rhythm had been
> something like this: starting with disaster,

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[36]Lowry uses anniversaries often in his fiction. They act as nodal points from which the memory can survey the past. The initial chapter of Under the Volcano takes place on the Day of the Dead, 1939, exactly one year to the day later than the events narrated in the rest of the novel. In October Ferry Ethan sets out on his journey on October 7, 1949, the centenary of Poe's death and the twentieth anniversary of Peter Cordwainer's death. June 27, 1951 is the time of "The Bravest Boat," precisely twenty-nine years since the toy boat was launched and seven years since the marriage of Astrid and Sigurd.

> reaction, determination to transcend disaster, success, failure; it had become effort, apparent success, something happens, failure. ... It was like the action of a pendulum, for each time the pendulum swung more violently on the one side or the other. (DG 169)

He describes his unstable condition by a quotation from Chaucer: "Al stereless ... am I, amid the sea, between windes two" (DG 11). Sigbjørn calls the forces which batter his identity "the subjective wind and the objective wind." Lowry's Dark as the Grave, like much of his later fiction, such as "Through the Panama" and October Ferry to Gabriola (both of which use the Chaucer quotation), is concerned with the question of equilibrium. In his "Preface" to Dark as the Grave Douglas Day quotes from a letter which reveals Lowry's intentions about this novel: "'We progress toward equilibrium this time instead of in the opposite direction....'"[37]

In Sigbjørn's movement toward equilibrium he must find his old self and come "face to face ... with everything that that self had imperfectly transcended" (DG 91). He must free himself of the past in order to leave the future open to affirmation, "just, as Nietzsche says, one stepped back to take a spring" (DG 39). The flight to Mexico is described as a "sort of ecdysis" (DG 36), an action of casting off or shedding a covering, in this case the oppressive covering of

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[37] Day, p. xiv.

the past. This idea of renewal by sloughing off the past is linked to the concept of death followed by rebirth imaged in the novel by the phoenix. Dark as the Grave, like Lunar Caustic, has as one of its prominent themes the possibility of regeneration.

Near the end of the novel Sigbjørn moves closer to a climactic encounter with the past in the form of John Stanford. "For reasons which Lowry never develops, Stanford represents for Sigbjørn his evil angel - a perfect antithesis to Juan Fernando," according to Douglas Day.[38] Before his meeting with Stanford, Sigbjørn's interior monologues anticipate, even desire, the catastrophe of the past. Out of a nostalgia for disaster he wishes to revive "the misery of remorse" and "that old consciousness of fatality" (DG 210). A certain inevitability accompanies this desire as he senses that "the past was keeping pace with him, he could not for a moment outdistance it" (DG 212). Then during the bus ride into Oaxaca (where two parallel roads perhaps merge) Sigbjørn experiences a sensation like the "time-defeating destiny" of the novel's opening sentence: "so that now past and present and future were one" (DG 214).

This moment heightens the novel's rising tension and prefigures the imminent climax of Sigbjørn's confrontation

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[38] Day, p. xx.

with Stanford. But, despite this careful preparation, when the narrator does encounter his evil angel, his nemesis is reduced to, in Day's words, "a banal old lecher, himself rather afraid of Sigbjørn, and thus no threat at all."[39] This is a critical failure of dramatic moment on Lowry's part (which could be ascribed to the provisionary nature of the text). The anti-climax of this scene with Stanford has a corrosive effect on the novel as a whole; this crucial flaw in dramatic structure invalidates much of the thematic intent of Dark as the Grave. Placed against this physical embodiment of the past, the dark forebodings of Sigbjørn's interior world appear paranoid. His "immolation in the past" is reduced to bathos.[40] With the malevolent reality of the past enervated, no meaningful exorcism or transcendence can take place.

Lowry, nevertheless, concludes the novel with such a notion. Sigbjørn, at the end of the book, finally makes an effort to find his friend, Juan Fernando, only to discover that he is dead. Instead of depression, Sigbjørn experiences

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[39] Day, p. xx.

[40] There is little textual evidence to suggest that Lowry -:for comic effect - consciously made Sigbjørn's encounter with Stanford anti-climactic. Clearly an ironic deflation of Sigbjørn's grim imaginings does occur but even after this incident his tone of serious risk remains unaltered. (A further irony?) If Lowry had wished to exploit the humour of this scene he would have been hindered by a formal constraint: Sigbjørn's narrative voice is effectively the only consciousness within the novel.

a feeling of affirmation. He sees in the figure of Juan Fernando the mystery of the cross which followed his plane south to Mexico, that of resurrection. His friend, to the "minds and hearts" of the Banco Ejidal employees, is "still so very much alive" (DG 239). Moreover, there is another sense of renewal evident in the countryside, and due to Juan Fernando's Banco Ejidal:

> And then a field of young, new wheat - pale green in contrast to the dark green alfalfa - and then a field of ripening wheat dimming to gold, then quince and peach orchards, young trees, obviously planted within the last ten years and blossoming .... (DG 255)

The beauty of this descriptive passage answers back to the opening pages of the novel; it represents, through the intermediary of Juan Fernando, the constellation Eridanus which Sigbjørn had hoped to see at the outset of the journey: the River of Death and Life. Having had the archetypal pattern of death and rebirth explicated positively by the figure of Juan Fernando, Sigbjørn can leave the past (Oaxaca) behind and return to his home at Eridanus.

A group of Lowry's stories, entitled Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, was published posthumously in 1961. In a letter (written in 1952) Lowry notes that "Hear Us ... seems to be shaping up less like an ordinary

book of tales than a sort of novel of an odd aeolian kind ..., i.e. it is more interrelated than it looks."[41] A sense of overarching design is apparent in the published version of this work. The individual stories are linked by recurring motifs (such as "Frère Jacques"), shared thematic concerns (alienation, for example), a common setting in many cases, and a restricted number of characters who reappear (or are referred to) throughout the tales. Further unity is given to the component pieces of Hear Us by a structural pattern that is circular in nature. With the opening story set in British Columbia, followed by an account of a sea voyage to Europe, which in turn is followed by three tales set in Italy, and then two concluding tales back in British Columbia again, the collective form of Hear Us is that of a single, continuous journey.

This short sequence opens with "The Bravest Boat," a piece which introduces the voyage motif that gives shape to the entire work. Sigurd Storlesen, as a boy of ten, had set adrift a toy boat south of Cape Flattery on June 27, 1922. This boat had wandered for twelve years and was finally discovered at low tide at Stanley Park beach by Astrid, a girl

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[41] Selected Letters, p. 320.

of seven. The time of the story is June 27, 1951. On this day Sigurd and Astrid walk together through Stanley Park celebrating in their memories the launching of the boat and their seventh wedding anniversary. The boat is their connective experience, the image of their union. It represents communication that, in defiance of all probability, attains success:

> Twelve years it had wandered. Through the tempests of winter, over sunny summer seas, what tide rips had caught it .... Perhaps it had rested, floating in a sheltered cove, where the killer whale smote, lashed, the deep clear water; ... only for the little boat to be thrown aground, catching the rainy afternoon sun, on cruel barnacled rocks by the waves, lying aground knocked from side to side in an inch of water like a live thing, or a poor tin can, pushed, pounded ashore ... until it was borne out to sea once more by the great brimming black tides of January....[42]

Through this chaos, "their little boat with its innocent message had been brought out of the past finally to safety and a home" (HU 27). By re-experiencing through memory the boat's safe passage, Sigurd and Astrid reconfirm the shared feeling that their union was preordained. Because of the astral (Astrid) suggestions of fate attached to the boat, they can find in their common past an ever-renewable metaphor of their present harmony. Here, Lowry shows a sense of fate,

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[42] Malcolm Lowry, Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1963), pp. 20-1. (HU will designate references to this work.)

which he locates in the past, operating positively. This use reveals the affirmative intentions underlying Hear Us, a work that Lowry described as a "Volcano in reverse, with a triumphant ending."[43]

The next story in this group, "Through the Panama," is a variation on the theme of successful passage introduced by "The Bravest Boat." It is, according to Lowry, "A story in the form of notes taken on going to Europe, partly on a ship in everything but final destress off the Azores; it reads something like The Crack-Up, like Alfred (sic) Gordon Pym, but instead of cracking the protagonist's fission begins to be healed."[44] In "Through the Panama" there is not an overriding concern with the past. Elements of it do enter the protagonist's consciousness during the voyage from Vancouver to England. He is drawn backwards in time by his "fear something will happen to house in our absence" (HU 31), and this impulse, enacted by the cyclical form of Hear Us, results in an eventual return to Eridanus (in "Gin and Goldenrod"). The past, in its cultural aspect, has large significance for "Through the Panama" as a mode of explication. As Lowry suggests in his letter, it has affinities to Poe's narrative of a sea voyage, Arthur Gordon Pym.[45] It is even

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[43] Selected Letters, p. 338.

[44] Selected Letters, p. 267.

[45] According to Edward H. Davidson, "the narrative of Pym slowly and carefully reveals to us the ways by which the assumed consistency, trustworthiness, the very reality of the

closer to Fitzgerald's The Crack-Up with its focus on the frustrated creative processes of a writer, Sigbjørn Wilderness again. Like Dark as the Grave, "Through the Panama" explores the idea of a "man not enmeshed by, but killed by his own book and the malign forces it arouses" (HU 38). With Fitzgerald as a pessimistic referent the question is asked, "How can the soul take this kind of battering and survive? It's a bit like the toy boat" (HU 40).

This simile, which directs the reader to the opening tale of Hear Us, implies that a triumphant ending is possible. Coleridge provides an allusive framework for this movement towards affirmation. His gloss to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is used by Lowry as marginalia in the story. Sigbjørn during his voyage, starting with a "desolate sense of alienation" (HU 31), undergoes a pattern of emotional transfiguration for which the Ancient Mariner acts as a model. He experiences death, first as a nightmare. Then as he passes through the locks of the Panama Canal, "the keys of the universe" (HU 55), Sigbjørn reads about the "fever" from which

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world and of men are capable, on the instant, of disintegrating, dissolving, or becoming a mere illusion."* In Lowry's story there is a similar probing of epistemological questions, as the following journal note indicates:

> it must be said somewhere that Martin had been on this planet for so long that he had almost tricked himself into believing he was a human being. (HU 86)

*"Introduction", Selected Writings of Edgar Allen Poe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), pp. xxii-iii.

"hundreds died" (HU 57) in their attempt to build the Canal. He vicariously experiences the feelings that the Ancient Mariner had when all of his fellow crew members dropped lifeless.[46] Sigbjørn, like the Ancient Mariner, overcomes "the insatiable albatross of self" (HU 31), and wins through to some notion of redemption (from what is unspecified but can be vaguely understood as alienation).

The climax of the voyage is a fierce storm which threatens to engulf the ship a few days before its ultimate arrival. Because "it is an electric welded ship," Sigbjørn fears that the "danger of breaking in two or cracking hull is very real" (HU 91). The threatened disintegration of the ship is clearly

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[46] In "Through the Panama," only a selective use of Coleridge's gloss is made. Moreover, even among these selections Lowry does not adhere to their relative order in Coleridge's poem, displacing them to contribute most effectively to the contexts of his story.

Lowry also takes information and excerpts from another book, a history of the Panama Canal, and places this material in the margin of tale. Because of the typographical layout, allusions from the two books cannot occur simultaneously, but must follow in linear fashion. As a result, the meanings stemming from their interaction are obscured, if not lost entirely. For example, a passage from the book on the Panama Canal is emphasized by italics, and yet its undoubted relevance to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is easily overlooked:

> "in mid-ocean the disbanded and half dead colonists passed a vessel westward bound going to their own relief" (HU 57)

In Coleridge's poem there is a parallel situation in which a ship promising hope, brings despair. This is, of course the skeleton ship holding Death and Life-in-Death. Earlier in the story Lowry alludes to this ship by quoting a gloss from Coleridge ("But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner," HU 53) opposite an image of a "burning ship." The joy, then horror of the half-dead crew in Coleridge's poem upon the ship's approach has marked similarities to the experience of the colonists, but Lowry's structural arrangement makes this correspondence ineffectual.

intended to act as a metaphor of Sigbjørn's possible collapse. The idea of "fissure" suggested by Poe's Roderick Usher (HU 90) and the idea of fragmentation implied by Fitzgerald's The Crack-Up (HU 31) give literary extension to this theme. Lowry recasts both of these allusive examples positively, foreshadowing Sigbjørn's eventual integration. In the case of Poe's tale, it is through reference to Epstein's film version, which has an "unspeakably happy ending," with "Usher reconciled with his wife in this life yet on another plane"(HU 90). The danger of cracking, that Fitzgerald's title portends, is countered by the Coleridge allusions. Sigbjørn's painful frustration with the creative process (cf. "Through utter drought all dumb we stood") is resolved symbolically by the example of the Ancient Mariner whose mesmerizing account of his experience teaches "love and reverence to all things" (HU 98). It is this gloss of Coleridge's, expressing the moral potential of language, that Lowry chooses for his last margin note to "Through the Panama," and by doing so, he prefigures Sigbjørn's recovery of his communicative powers. The safe arrival of the freighter in England lends weight to this feeling of resolution. Like the toy boat which carries a message of human contact through the chaos of the storm, the freighter arrives "still whole and unhurt" (HU 25).

The next story in Hear Us is called "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession."[47] It again presents the interior world of Sigbjørn Wilderness, an American writer in Rome on a Guggenheim Fellowship. This tale, the darkest one in the book, is concerned with the past in a manner that is close to morbidity. Sigbjørn visits the house where Keats died and takes notes on the relics that he finds there. Later, over his third grappa, he pulls out his notebook to add an impression of Keats's house and discovers some notes that he had made two years earlier in Richmond, Virginia at Poe's shrine. Sigbjørn rereads transcribed excerpts from letters written by Poe "in anguished and private desperation" (HU 106). He is struck by an almost occult correspondence between the letters of Keats and

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[47] It is not clear whether "Strange Comfort" takes place before or after "Through the Panama" which is set in 1947. A reference to Nabokov's Gogol* (HU 103), first published in 1944, provides a terminus a quo but does not solve the issue of priority. If "Strange Comfort" precedes in time the story that it structurally follows, added credence would be given to the hypothesis that Hear Us, like so much of Lowry's work, is a voyage into the past. There is some textual evidence to support such a view but as it is of a fragmentary nature, and as Lowry may well have done considerable revision before publishing the tales as a group, there is little point in exploring this hypothesis.

Textual Order	Setting in Time
"The Bravest Boat"	1951
"Through the Panama"	1947
"Strange Comfort"	?
"Elephant and Colosseum"	?
"Present Estate of Pompeii"	1948
"The Forest Path"	1939-(1949?)

*Vladimir Nabokov. Nikolai Gogol. New York: New Directions, 1944.

Poe, both artists expressing an anguished premonition of their early deaths:

> ...was it not as if Poe's cry from Baltimore, in a mysterious manner, in the manner that the octet of a sonnet, say, is answered by its sestet, had already been answered, seven years before, by Keat's cry from Rome....
> ...
> it was part of the same poem, the same story. (HU 110)

Sigbjørn then, in another notebook, finds the draft of a letter written by himself (but never sent) when he lived in Seattle. In it there is the phrase, "I fear a complete mental collapse" (HU 111). He associates this cry of pain with those contained in the letters of Keats and Poe. His self-identification with these two ill-fated poets is so total that he begins to cross out the draft of his letter so it won't be put "glass-encased, in a museum among his relics" (HU 112). Sigbjørn derives a "strange comfort" from his sense of communion with these two literary figures whose lives ended with a tragic abruptness. Lowry concludes this story on a note of macabre humour:

> Sigbjørn finished his fifth unregenerate grappa and suddenly gave a loud laugh, a laugh which, ...turned immediately into a prolonged - though on the whole relatively pleasurable - fit of coughing. (HU 113)

This final passage implies that Sigbjørn, like his Romantic exemplars will die an early death, either through alcoholism

like Poe or through tuberculosis like Keats.

The fourth story in Hear Us, "Elephant and Colosseum," explores for the third consecutive time a writer's psyche. Here, the subject is Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan, the author of a comic novel called Ark from Singapore. He is in Rome to see about an Italian translation of this book. His inability to contact his publishers heightens the sense of exile that he already has due to an ignorance of Italian. "For once in his life, Cosnahan had not only lost his sense of humor but felt really desperate" (HU 157). His increasing alienation is removed by "anagnorisis" (HU 167), a remarkable scene of recognition which leads to a comic reversal of his situation. At the zoo in Rome he encounters the elephant Rosemary who many years before had provided Cosnahan with a real life model for his book, Ark from Singapore. This moment of recognition is a comic realization of a romantic encounter, "like that felicitous meeting in Rome by the hero of a book he'd been reading with a girl named Rosemary" (HU 134). The elephant, "a creation that testified to the existence of almighty God, and His wide wild humor" (HU 161), restores Cosnahan's comic perspective on the universe. His meeting with Rosemary, the animal that he had transported from the Orient more than twenty years ago and later transmuted into fiction, also illustrates the kind of interplay

described in Dark as the Grave: "how life flowed into art: how art gives life a form and flows on into life, yet life has not stood still." Rosemary is no longer aboard ship or merely a personage in a novel, but a palpable, living elephant in Rome's zoo. And as such, she invokes Cosnahan's youthful and pleasant memories, dispelling the gloom that he was experiencing in Italy. "Elephant and Colosseum," like "The Bravest Boat," uses the past as a positive force that invests the present with a feeling of harmony and communion.

"Present Estate of Pompeii," the next piece in Hear Us, again describes a foreigner in Italy, this time Roderick McGregor Fairhaven, "the liberal-minded and progressive Scotch-Canadian schoolmaster" (HU 178). Like most of Lowry's characters, he suffers from the "migraine of alienation," "the malaise of travelers, even the sense of tragedy that must come over them sometimes at their lack of relation to their environment" (HU 177). As a tourist visiting Pompeii, his contemplation of the fragility and evanescence of civilization is being constantly interrupted by memories of Eridanus, where he can hear his "own real life plunging to its doom" (HU 177). Fairhaven's feeling of dispossession is roughly equivalent to Cosnahan's. Both feel their concern with the past (respectively, the ruins of Pompeii and a completed artifact) is somehow sterile, separating them

from "real life." Whereas Cosnahan finds ongoing life in Rome's zoo, Fairhaven finds no such resolution, although his name symbolically anticipates the triumphant conclusion to Hear Us (in "The Forest Path"), and presages a return to "real life" at Eridanus. "Present Estate of Pompeii" is a cautionary tale, ending with the tour guide's proud comment on Mount Vesuvius: "yesterday she give-a the beeg-a shake!" (HU 200). It suggests that the rubble of a past civilization exemplifies an omnipresent destructive force (like the chaotic ocean of "The Bravest Boat," the storm of "Through the Panama," and the tuberculosis of Keats in "Strange Comfort") always threatening to carry away "some precious part of man" (HU 199).

The penultimate story of Hear Us, "Gin and Goldenrod," returns (like Fairhaven's thoughts) to British Columbia for its setting. In this brief story the characters are, once more, Sigbjørn and his wife, Primrose. It describes a visit that they make to a bootlegger's house, where Sigbjørn pays for all the bottles of gin that he had drunk the previous Sunday, and the return to their home on the beach. The financial transaction can be viewed as a sorting out, and reckoning, of a past incident blanked out by alcohol (the theme of October Ferry in miniature). As Primrose informs her husband on the way home that she had retrieved a bottle of gin which he thought

was lost, there is a notion of salvage from the past: "a kind of hope began to bloom again" (HU 214). The goldenrod of the story's title also contributes to the regenerative theme, representing the element of growth, renewal, in nature that is the converse of its latent destructive capacity. Thus, "Gin and Goldenrod," with its ambiguous title, functions as a thematic bridge between "Present Estate of Pompeii" and "The Forest Path to the Spring."

In the concluding story to Hear Us, Lowry echoes motifs that have appeared throughout the circular voyage. There are hints of "The Bravest Boat" in references to the "Astra line" (HU 225) and "Wendigo" (HU 21, 243) and in the description of the shack as "brave against the elements, but at the mercy of the destroyer" (HU 232). An allusion to "the becalmed ship of the Ancient Mariner" (HU 257) in "The Forest Path" echoes the Coleridgean focus of "Through the Panama," with the phrase "we too had grown unselfish" (HU 245) asserting a triumph over the albatross of self. Lowry restates positively Sigbjørn's near suicidal frustration with the creative process by means of the protagonist of "The Forest Path." The latter, despite having lost his symphony in a fire, is still able to create an opera. A reference to "those old Romans" (HU 224) evokes the three stories of Hear Us which have an Italian setting. The

subject matter of "Elephant and Colosseum" recurs specifically in the question, "Now have you ever seen how an elephant was controocted? (sic)" (HU 224). The elemental destructive forces evoked by the ruins of Pompeii recur in the guise of fire in "The Forest Path": "the wreckage of a burned house" (HU 280). The narrator's courage to rebuild on the same spot, "right in the teeth of the terror of fire" (HU 280) recasts affirmatively the Pompeii theme, and answers indirectly Fairhaven's fear of dispossession. "The Forest Path" also discloses positive elements in "Gin and Goldenrod." By a reference to "goldenrod" (HU 228) it gives lyrical expansion to the creative natural forces that were implicit in the preceding story. At Eridanus ("the River of Death and the River of Life," (HU 226), the creative and destructive aspects of nature are fused by a perception of their interrelated pattern, a pattern whose impluse towards renewal offers man a meaningful analogue.

"The Forest Path," perhaps Lowry's finest work of short fiction, convincingly renders the achievement of such a renewal. The narrator gives up his "old life of the night" (HU 248) as a jazz musician to live in the wilderness of Eridanus. The past, as that which is to be transformed, exists as a major aspect of his movement towards regeneration. The narrator and his wife first come to Eridanus on their honeymoon, like "strangers from the cities" (HU 226). Their arrival, in early September, coincides with the outbreak of war, and they fear

their imminent separation. Ironically, the first indication of the narrator's renewal, the recovery of his physical well-being (mainly through rowing and swimming), increases the possibility of this separation, as he was rejected from military service on grounds of health. Thus, he considers his stay at Eridanus to be merely an "Intermezzo" (HU 230). They initially plan to remain only until the end of September, but "by the end of October the glorious Indian summer was still golden and by the middle of November we had decided to stay the winter" (HU 232). Soon after, the narrator realizes that the dark spectre of his old life will not be easily dispelled:

> One night, coming across the porch from the woodshed with a lantern in one hand and a load of wood under the other arm, I saw my shadow, gigantic, the logs of wood as big as a coffin, and this shadow seemed for a moment the glowering embodiment of all that threatened us; yes, even a projection of that dark chaotic side of myself, my ferocious destructive ignorance. (HU 233)

The ghost of his past self, which is not yet transcended, renders his present happiness vulnerable.

However, a page later his eventual renewal is clearly prefigured in a description of the mornings with his wife as "a continual sunrise of our life, a continual awakening. And it seemed to me that until I knew her I had lived my whole life in darkness." Largely through the tutelage of his wife,

his "destructive ignorance" begins to disappear. He becomes responsive to the rhythmic harmony surrounding him. A critical moment in this transformation occurs just after they were deprived of access to the creek from which they obtained their water, and their only barrel was broken:

> ...we had almost decided to leave for good when I caught sight of the cannister on the beach left by the receding tide. As I examined it the sun came half out, casting a pale silver light while the rain was still falling in the inlet and my wife was so entranced by the beauty of this that she ... began to explain about raindrops to me, exactly as if I were a child, while I listened, moved, and innocently as if I had never seen such a thing before, and indeed it seemed I never had.
>
> "You see, my true love, each is interlocked with other circles falling about it," she said. "Some are larger circles, expanding widely and engulfing others, some are weaker smaller circles that only seem to last a short while.... The rain itself is water from the sea, raised to heaven by the sun, transformed into clouds and falling again into the sea."
>
> Did I know this? I suppose so, something like it. But that the sea itself in turn was born of rain I hadn't known.
>
> (HU 239)

The sudden transmutation of despair into wonder in the mind of the narrator, taking its source from the patterns of nature, defines the upward impulse of "The Forest Path." The salvaged cannister, which he converts into a good, clean water container, becomes a symbol of his renewal. Its use and value, evident when Kristbjorg shows them a spring not a hundred yards from the house, demonstrates the potentiality for regeneration

within the narrator.

Even though the path to this spring becomes the means of ultimate affirmation on his part, it is also the place where he experiences almost total negativity, a violent, misanthropic hatred:

> It was not just ordinary hatred either, it was a virulent and murderous thing that throbbed through all my veins like a passion ... and it took in everyone in its sweep, everyone except my wife. (HU 243)

The causes of this intense hatred are vague. They are partly rooted in the opposition that Lowry sets up between the setting of Eridanus and the encroaching urban world. "The Forest Path" (like October Ferry to Gabriola) depicts the wilderness and the city as polar opposites: "it seemed that we were in heaven, and that the world outside - so portentous in its prescriptions for man of imaginary needs that were in reality his damnation - was hell" (HU 242-43). As a refugee from the city, the narrator is implicated in the destructive tendencies of that world, "in that hell of ugliness outside Eridanus" where "for the sake of making it a worse hell, men were killing each other" (HU 243). At the same time, Lowry unsentimentally links "the pattern of destruction" (HU 243) to nature, specifically the holocaust of a forest fire. Fortunately, the narrator's wife is exempt from his all-encompassing hatred, and she is able to reveal to him that this

destructive capacity of nature is only one facet of a more positive organic pattern. She teaches him not only "to know the stars in their courses and seasons" (HU 246), but also how to become "susceptible to these moods and changes and currents of nature, ... to its ceaseless rotting into humus of its fallen leaves and buds - nothing in nature suggested you died yourself more than that, I began to think - and burgeoning toward life" (HU 247). It is affirmation in this archetypal sense that the narrator discovers at Eridanus, the River of Death and the River of Life.

He somewhat complacently believes that he has escaped from the past in which the "only stars were neon lights" (HU 248). But he is still in the process of familiarizing himself with the setting of his new life, now experienced during the winter:

> The wintry landscape could be beautiful on these rare short days of sunlight and frostflowers, with crystal casing on the slender branches of birches and vine-leaved maples, diamond drops on the tassels of the spruces, and the bright frosted foliage of the evergreens. (HU 251)

In less benign moments, nature exhibits its elemental destructive power with

> the sea crashing and hissing inshore under the house, causing horrible commotions of logs, jarring thunders dithering the whole little shack ... then our boat hurling itself about down below would seem in jeopardy, at the same time there would be the sound of breaking branches in the forest, the great maple tree would seethe and roar, while the tossing floats squealed piteously, and the loops of Mauger's fishing nets hung on the porch would flap like mad ghosts....(HU 253)

The menacing force of nature is, on one level, a reminder of the dark tendencies within the narrator. This association is counterbalanced by nature in its regenerative aspect imaged most unambiguously in spring:

> The very quality of the light was different, the pale green, green and gold dappled light that comes when the leaves are very small, for later, in summer with the leaves full out, the green is darker and the path darker and deeply shady. But now there was this delicate light and greenness everywhere, the beauty of light on the feminine leaves of vine-leaved maples and the young leaves of the alders shining in sunlight like stars of dogwood blossoms, green overhead and underfoot where plants were rushing up and there were the little beginnings of wildflowers that would be, my wife said, spring beauties, starflowers, wild bleeding hearts, saxifrage and bronze bells. (HU 259)

It is through the dual meanings of spring, as the season of rebirth and as the water source from which life flows, that Lowry gives archetypal significance to his narrator's movement toward renewal.

With the arrival of spring at Eridanus the narrator's sense of regeneration appears triumphant. Lowry, however, insists on portraying the fragility - and shallowness - of his apparent transformation. One evening, while filling the cannister at the spring, he forgets to breathe the scents of evening: "the rich damp earth, myrtle and the first wild crabapple and wild cherry blossoms, all the wild scents of

spring, mingled with the smell of the sea and from the beach the salt smells, and the rasping iodine smell of seaweed" (HU 260). At the height of his seeming happiness, he is tempted to suicide by "an old frayed but strong rope" (HU 260) that he found on the path. Aghast at this impulse, he "reaved it up for use" (HU 260). This self-destructive urge, made concrete by the rope, implies the need for a more valid transmutation of the past, something that the narrator, with a certain amount of glibness, assumes to have occurred already.

This implication is substantiated by one of Lowry's most overt, and most effective symbols, a ladder salvaged from the beach:

> like this vermiculated old ladder, stinking with teredos and sea-worms, washed down from the sawmill, this sodden snag, half awash when I first saw it, is the past, up and down which one's mind every night meaninglessly climbs! (HU 261)

Through the ladder's identification with the past (cf. the epigraph to this thesis) Lowry symbolizes the process of regeneration which his protagonist must undergo. Recognizing that much of the ladder is still usable, the narrator hacks out the rotten wood, and "put[s] its frame to use" (HU 261) as steps leading from the porch to the forest path. At the same time, he realizes that "a ladder was a ladder, however transmuted, and the past remained" (HU 261). The once derelict

ladder symbolically affirms that the past should not be evaded but transformed, implicitly criticizing the complacent discontinuity earlier felt by the narrator between his past and present mode of life.

It is only through an encounter with a mountain lion on the path to the spring that he adequately comes to terms with his past.

> ... it was as though I had actually been on the lookout for something on the path that had seemed ready, on every side, to spring out of our paradise at us, that was nothing so much as the embodiment in some frightful animal form of those nameless somnambulisms, guilts, ghouls of past delirium, wounds to other souls and lives, ghosts of actions approximating to murder, even if not my own actions in this life, betrayals of self and I know not what, ready to leap out and destroy me, to destroy us, and our happiness, so that when, as if in answer to this, I saw a mere lion, how could I be afraid? And yet mysteriously the lion was all that too. (HU 263-64)

His fearless tone with the mountain lion, and his facing down of a threat of violence, represent a positive confrontation with the destructive ghosts of his past - in a way that is analogous to his hacking of the rotten wood out of the ladder as preparation for its use. This encounter also represents a more profound, almost mystical attunement to nature. The next evening that he sets out for water he is so deeply responsive to nature that the path seems to shrink mysteriously; he arrives home without remembering a single step he had taken. He cannot describe this sensation except in terms of a cliché,

"a 'great burden had been lifted off my soul'" (HU 268). This burden is principally the oppressive weight of the past, embodied in the mountain lion, which formerly threatened to crush his present happiness.

Having laid to rest the ghosts of old deliriums, he can creatively use his past. In adopting an artist figure as his protagonist, Lowry again gives expression to Ortega's notion that "a man's life is like a fiction that he makes up as he goes along" (HU 268). Drawing on his past life as a jazz musician, the narrator composes a symphony at Eridanus. After this work was destroyed by fire, he composes an opera which fuses his jazz background with what he had learned of "nature, and the tides and the sunrise" (HU 271). "And to do this, even before writing a note, it was necessary to face the past as far as possible without fear" (HU 279).

> This much I understood, and had understood that as a man I had become tyrannized by the past, and that it was my duty to transcend it in the present. Yet my new vocation was involved with using that past - for this was the underlying meaning of my symphony, even my opera... - with turning it into use for others. (HU 279)

"The Forest Path to the Spring," unlike Dark as the Grave, communicates effectively Ortega's idea about the parallelism between life and art. Lowry portrays a man engaged, as a musician, in the process of artistic transformation; at the same time, Lowry shows, with a cogency lacking in Dark as

the Grave, how this man creatively transmutes his past self.

Throughout "The Forest Path" Lowry provides a religious context for this process of transfiguration. There are references to "a Gothic cathedral" (HU 215), "a Shinto temple" (HU 232), and "a Greek temple" (HU 258). One of the most important mystical references in "The Forest Path" is Taoism. The significance of Eridanus, the River of Death and the River of Life, becomes clearer after the narrator quotes a passage from The Tao Teh Ching by Lao Tsze:

> ... here in the inlet there was neither sea nor river, but something compounded of both, in eternal movement, and eternal flux and change, as mysterious and multiform in its motion and being, and in the mind as the mind flowed with it, as was that other Eridanus, the constellation in the heavens, the starry river in the sky....
> ... at such a time of stillness, at the brief period of high tide before the ebb, it was like what I have learned the Chinese call the Tao..."that which is so still and yet passes on in constant flow, and in passing on, becomes remote, returns."
> (HU 234-35)

Several passages from the Tao have bearing on the narrator's spiritual growth. His encounter with the mountain lion has a close parallel in Lao Tsze's book:

> I understand that one whose life
> Is based on perfect good,
> Shall walk in safety through fierce strife,
> Or danger-haunted wood.

He does not fear the shining blade,
Nor the fierce beast of prey.[48]

His lack of despair when fire destroys his cabin and his symphony fulfils the words of the Tao: "To loss he is inviolate,/ And so he holds his place."[49] All of the suggestions of Taoism in the story are metaphorically united in the mystery of the shrinking path along which the narrator progresses towards an inner harmony and goodness (a literal translation of the Tao Teh Ching is the Royal Way to Virtue[50]).

It is also possible to view this movement in Christian terms. Lowry had intended that "The Forest Path," which ends Hear Us on a note of fulfilment, would become part of the concluding paradisal section of The Voyage That Never Ends. He describes it as a short novel "that brings the kind of majesty usually reserved for tragedy ... to bear on human integration...."[51] In a sense "The Forest Path," depicting the regeneration of its protagonist, is, in Lowry's Dantean framework, another statement of the purgatorial theme. For example, Lowry's description of a new house, built "on the

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[48]Lao Tsze, Tao Teh Ching, trans. Charles H. Mackintosh (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publ. House, 1971), pp. 50-51.

[49]Lao Tsze, p. 56.

[50]See Charles H. Mackintosh, "Foreward," Tao, pp. (4-5).

[51]Selected Letters, p. 266.

same spot as the old house, using the burned posts for part of our foundations that now, being charred, were not susceptible to rot" (HU 271), conveys the notion of cleansing, purgation. Nevertheless, it is the paradisal theme which most fully defines the meaning of "The Forest Path." The narrator's account of his personal renewal is retrospective. He is writing in the past tense, describing the process of transfiguration that he has undergone. Moreover, the anonymous voice of the narrator speaking from "today" (HU 218), for Lowry, is equivalent to a kind of timelessness. The mode of narration symbolizes a paradisal vantage point - looking backwards on purgation. Such phrases as "celestial range" (HU 215) and "angelic wings" (HU 216) which occur early in the story corroborate this perspective, and prepare for the later identification of Eridanus with Paradise.[52] Lowry reinforces this association by explicit allusions to "Paradise" (HU 228; 260, 261) and to "Eden" (HU 269). Through the wife's

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[52]Only after "The Forest Path" was "more or less finished" did Lowry find that his association of Eridanus with Dante's Paradiso had a mythological basis:

> Eridanus is what I call Dollarton here: called such after the constellation - the River of Youth and the River of Death. Reading Dante the other day I came to the conclusion that the celestial scenery of pine trees and mountains inlet and sea here must be extremely like that in Ravenna, where he died and wrote and got the inspiration for the last part of the Paradiso. Then I discovered that Eridanus in mythology among other things is the River Po and where the Po emerges to the sea is Ravenna.
>
> (Selected Letters, p.245)

longing for spring, Lowry conflates the organic pattern of Eridanus and Paradise: "She longed for it like a Christian for heaven..." (HU 247). Although theologically it is dubious, artistically this identification is credible. The final sentence (which echoes the beginning sentence), "Laughing we stooped down to the stream and drank" (HU 283), has both archetypal simplicity and paradisal connotations. With restrained lyricism, Lowry opens out in "The Forest Path to the Spring" a timeless, natural pattern of recurrence that contains an idea of mystical affirmation.

The narrator, tyrannized by a past which threatens to negate his future, frees himself from temporal constraints. By "using that past," in acts of creative transfiguration, its tyranny is broken. A recurring element of Lowry's artistic vision is the potentially destructive quality of the past. Two important exceptions to this generalization are the short pieces, "The Bravest Boat" and "Elephant and Colosseum." In the opening story of Hear Us O Lord the past (the incredible voyage of a toy boat) has a deterministic influence that is positive; it sustains the present harmony of Astrid and Sigurd. The past of "Elephant and Colosseum" also functions positively. In Rome Cosnahan meets Rosemary (the elephant that shared his voyage from Singapore many years before) who transforms his sense of dislocation into one of communion. More typically, the past in Lowry's writings

is equated with despair.

In Lunar Caustic this pessimistic attitude is imaged clearly by a shark which "went on swallowing the live fish even after it was dead." Here, Lowry's concept of time has similarities to Bergson's notion of duration, "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."[53] Lowry, however, does not share Bergson's belief in meliorism. The past of Lunar Caustic has no "élan vital"; on the contrary, the past is an inert weight which, unless blasted away, will impede Plantagenet's striving for life. Whereas the narrator of "The Forest Path to the Spring" triumphs over this threat, Plantagenet's future remains doubtful.

Under the Volcano is even bleaker than Lunar Caustic. In Lowry's version of the Inferno the weight of the past crushes the life out of the Consul. The Dantean trilogy of "The Forest Path to the Spring" (paradisal), Lunar Caustic (purgatorial), and Under the Volcano (infernal) registers differing engagements with the past: triumph, doubt, and despair. Lowry, in Under the Volcano, explores the destructive influence of the past on several planes. One of these, that of Eastern religious traditions, expresses the negative shaping force of the past by the idea of karma. References

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[53]Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: The Modern Lib., 1944), p. 7.

to Buddhism and Hinduism complement the extensive allusions to Western traditions in the novel. In the inclusive figure of Geoffrey Firmin, an Anglo-Indian, Lowry combines the two traditional worlds. Through this characterization, Under the Volcano presents a universal image of mankind stumbling under the burden of the past, closed off from the future by despair. Indian religious traditions give philosophical range to this pessimism.

CHAPTER II

UNDER THE VOLCANO AND INDIAN TRADITIONS

Among the heterogeneous collection of books in the Consul's library are three works that indicate the presence of Eastern traditions in Under the Volcano: the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, and the Mahabharata. Three distinct historical epochs of Hinduism, represented by these works, are reflected in the novel. Explicit mythological references are only the most obvious form of this influence. Certain philosophical assumptions latent in Under the Volcano, and even the cyclical structure of the novel itself, can be ascribed to Hinduism. One of its central tenets, the doctrine of the Karmic Wheel, which it shares with Buddhism, is of particular relevance to the Consul's fate.

I

Before examining Lowry's artistic use of the Indian tradition, a brief summary of its historical development would probably be helpful.[1] The Rig Veda, the major document of the

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[1]The following discussion is dependent inter alia on:

Aryans who invaded India from the northwest about 1500 B.C., is usually viewed as the earliest source of Hinduism.[2] Many deities appear in the Rig Veda, a collection of hymns in praise of the gods. Like the primitive Indo-European religion from which it is apparently derived (as the gods have mythological counterparts in Iran, Greece, and Rome), the Vedic religion is polytheistic. According to K.M. Sen, in his book Hinduism, "Most of the Vedic gods are taken from nature: the sun, the moon, fire, sky, storm, air, water, dawn, rain, and so on. Indra, the god of rain and thunder, seems to have enjoyed a greater importance than others."[3] Originally the god of storm, Indra later became a warrior-god. R.C. Zaehner

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Humphreys, Christmas. Buddhism. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962.

Rahula, Walpola. What the Buddha Taught. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959.

Ross, Nancy Wilson. Three Ways of Asian Wisdom. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968.

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Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. 1, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958.

Warren, Henry Clarke. Buddhism in Translations. New York: Atheneum, 1969.

Zaehner, R.C. Hinduism. London: Oxford Univ.Press, 1966.

[2]Recently, several historians have questioned this view, believing that the indigenous, pre-Aryan people contributed significantly to the development of Hinduism. See Zaehner, pp. 15-16, for example.

[3]Sen, p. 47.

(in a study also entitled Hinduism) argues that later still, Indra's "positive power in recreating order in a disordered world" is stressed.[4]

The Vedic gods, Agni and Soma, parallel Indra in conceptual growth. Both begin simply as representatives of a single physical element and through mythological accretions become identified with ideas which are highly complex and abstract. Agni, the deification of fire, does not undergo the anthropomorphic transformation of Indra. Nevertheless, through his personification of the sacrificial fire, Agni becomes endowed with a religious significance which extends beyond mere totemism. Through his three forms, terrestrial as fire, atmospheric as lightning, and celestial as the sun, Agni binds the human and divine worlds together. Zaehner writes that in the sacrificial fire of the priests, he "is the symbol both of the renewal of all things and of the interrelatedness of all things."[5] The god Soma, like Agni, has a naturalistic basis. Soma, according to the New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, "is first and foremost a plant, an essential part of the ancient sacrificial offerings. It is also the juice of the plant, obtained by squeezing it between two millstones. Then it is a golden nectar ... which symbolizes

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[4]Zaehner, p. 22.

[5]Zaehner, p. 20.

immortality and ensures victory over death to all who drink it."[6]

Two other important Vedic gods are derived from abstract notions of sky and space: Prajapati and Varuna. The latter deity becomes the administrator of cosmic law, regulating all activities of the world. Prajapati, Sen asserts, changes into "the one Lord of all creation, the force that runs the world."[7] In Sources of Indian Tradition it is claimed that fundamental to the Vedic religion is the belief that "the creation of the universe and the procreation of the human race were the result of a primeval sacrifice, namely of the self-immolation of a cosmic being."[8] A creation hymn of the Rig Veda (10.90) describes the sacrifice of this primal being, Purusha. In his self-immolation Purusha is associated with Agni, the sacrifice personified. To the ritualistic sacrifices performed on earth by the priests is given the cosmological significance of Purusha's primeval sacrifice. Vedic religion centres on the sacrificial act. It was believed that such acts, if correctly performed, would propitiate the gods upon whom human life depended.

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[6] New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1968), p. 331.

[7] Sen, p. 47

[8] Sources, p. 6.

In the historical development of Hinduism a second distinctive stage is marked by the Upanishads, most of which were composed about 800 B.C. or later. The books of the Upanishads have their origin in the Samhitas (a collection which includes the Rig Veda). Each Upanishad is attached to one of the Vedic Samhitas in the form of a speculative gloss.[9] In the Vedic age, the link between man as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm was sustained by ritual sacrifice; in the philosophical interpretations of the Upanishads, this correspondence attains the proportions of conscious intellectual definition. A unity that was once enacted is for the Upanishadic thinkers cognitively perceived and symbolically expressed. Although operating from diverse philosophical traditions, they share, in their search for a unifying principle, a common intellectual aim. From this effort, according to Sources in Indian Tradition, "results the most significant equation of the Upanishads: brahman = atman."[10] That is, the individual soul (atman) is identified with the ultimate reality underlying the universe (brahman).

The Maitri Upanishad describes the nature of brahman:

> There is a Spirit who is amongst the things of this world and yet he is above the things

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[9]The Upanishads are thus "the end of Veda (vedanta). Later philosophical schools of classical Hinduism which base their tenets on the authority of the Upanishads are therefore called Vedanta." Sources, p. 24.

[10]Sources, p. 25.

> of this world. He is clear and pure,
> in the peace of a void of vastness.
> He is beyond the life of the body and
> the mind, never-born, never-dying,
> everlasting, ever ONE in his own
> greatness. He is the Spirit whose
> power gives consciousness to the body....[11]

Brahman is both the source of all life and the condition to which all life aspires. The Maitri Upanishad contends that "in the beginning all was Brahman, ONE and infinite. ... Then from his infinite space new worlds arise and awake, a universe which is a vastness of thought. In the consciousness of brahman the universe is, and into him it returns."[12] A finite part of this Infinite Consciousness is the individual self, atman. Present within each separate and personal existence is a fragment of brahman. By recognizing atman, the divine element within the individual self, man can achieve ecstatic union with brahman, ultimate reality.

However, this process of reintegration into the whole is not easily achieved. A world of untruth, maya shrouds the ultimate truth, the essential identity of atman and brahman. Zaehner states that "but for the deceitful operation of maya - and in non-technical texts the ordinary meaning of maya is 'deceit' - all souls would realize that they are not many but one, and not one only, but the One without a second - Brahman -

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[11] The Upanishads, trans. Juan Mascaro (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 99.

[12] Upanishads, p. 101.

Atman."[13] Samkara, the most influential exponent of the Vedanta school, maintains the philosophical view (which Sen paraphrases) that "the world is only a manifestation of the Brahman. The world is neither real nor quite unreal; it is an appearance based on the existence of the Brahman. The precise relationship between the Brahman and the world is inexpressible and is sometimes referred to as maya."[14] The Katha Upanishad explains how existence in the context of the empirical "reality" of maya impedes a realization of the ultimate reality: "The Creator made the senses outward-going: they go to the world of matter outside, not to the Spirit within."[15]

In the realm of maya, man is subject to ignorance (avidya). Experiencing pleasurable sensations, he desires their repetition, attaching himself to the physical world, unaware of his beatific aspect. This process of attachment culminates in the illusion of a distinctive personal self. S. Radhakrishnan, a famous contemporary interpreter of Vedanta, contends that "the result of this separatist ego-sense, ahamkara, is failure to enter into harmony and unity with the universe. This failure expresses itself in physical suffering

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[13]Zaehner, p. 76.

[14]Sen, p. 83.

[15]Upanishads, p. 61.

and mental discord. Selfish desire is the badge of subjection or bondage."[16] Attachment to the material world through ignorance is not without serious repercussions, as it is a belief common to post-Vedic Hinduism that rebirth or reincarnation occurs after death. According to the Mundaka Upanishad, "A man whose mind wanders among desires, and is longing for objects of desire, goes again to life and death according to his desires."[17] The Svetasvatara Upanishad reiterates this notion: "The quality of the soul determines its future body.... Its thoughts and its actions can ... lead it to bondage, in life after life."[18] The consequence of not perceiving the ultimate reality beyond the veil of maya is suffering, the suffering inherent in an endlessly recurring cycle of death and rebirth.

The ceaseless turning of this Wheel of Life is governed by the inexorable law of karma, in which all actions are both the effect of a prior cause and, in themselves, the cause of future actions. Zaehner writes, "The whole process goes by the name of samsara, the 'course' or 'revolution' to which all phenomenal existence is subject to and conditioned by an endless causal past...."[19] The Upanishads assert that the

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[16]Radhakrishnan, ed. Robert A. McDermott (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p. 151.

[17]Upanishads, p. 81.

[18]Upanishads, p. 94.

[19]Zaehner, p. 4.

basis of this causation is ethical:

> According as a man acts and walks in the path of life, so he becomes. He that does good becomes good; he that does evil becomes evil. By pure actions he becomes pure; by evil actions he becomes evil.[20]

Thus, even though the present is commited by the past, the future remains free. For, as Radhakrishnan says, "if man is what he has made himself, he may make himself what he will. Even the soul in the lowest condition need not abandon all hope."[21]

From perpetual reincarnation, due to the bondage of karma, liberation (or moksha) is possible. In the Upanishads two means of attaining moksha are given: the way of action and the way of knowledge. Although, to a large extent, they are mutually dependent, the way of knowledge is considered the higher path. Pursuing the way of action a man can acquire merit, furthering his evolution towards ecstatic union with the timeless reality, brahman. A more immediate transcendence of earthly life is offered by the way of knowledge. This path involves a renunciation of the material world; a recognition of that particle of the transcendent Absolute present in the individual self. In the words of the Chandogya Upanishad, "There is a bridge between time and Eternity; and

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[20]Upanishads, p. 140.

[21]Radhakrishnan, p. 169.

this bridge is Atman, the Spirit of man."[22] In order to achieve moksha by this path, attachment to the material world must be relinquished. In the Upanishads the mind and the senses are viewed as the two principal, and interrelated, causes of the attachment that binds man to earthly life. Desiring the transient pleasures of the senses, "the soul of man is bound by pleasure and pain."[23] Ignorance, fostered by desire, does not allow man to perceive the Absolute beyond the veil of maya. Consequently, the Maitri Upanishad asserts that "Samsara, the transmigration of life, takes place in one's own mind."[24] But if the mind is the source of bondage, it is also the means of liberation. Meditation on atman can free man from perpetual reincarnation into a world of suffering and fear. The law of the Karmic Wheel cannot be characterized as negative; moksha, escape from its ceaseless turning, and ecstatic union with brahman is always possible. While the chain of causation is inexorable, it is at the same time, just: neither cruel nor merciful.

The third historical phase of Hinduism centres on the great Indian epic, the Mahabharata, which was probably written

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[22]Upanishads, p. 121.

[23]Upanishads, p. 86.

[24]Upanishads, p. 103.

between the fourth century and the second century B.C.[25] Its focal point is the tremendous war that took place in Northern India between the Kurus and the Pandavas. The epic narrates the early rivalry that existed between these two branches of the same family, a rivalry largely instigated by the jealous pride of one of the Kurus, Duryodhan. His enmity is shown during the coronation of Yudhisthira, the eldest of the five Pandava brothers. In the splendid palace built for the coronation, Duryodhan inveigles the new king into a game of dice, and Yudhisthira, an otherwise exemplary figure, gambles away his entire empire, his brothers, himself, and even his wife. As a result, the Pandavas are compelled to go into exile for twelve years and to remain incognito for an additional year. Having complied with these conditions, the Pandavas seek to have their kingdom restored by peaceful means. This just demand is refused by Duryodhan out of implacable hatred, and the great battle between the Kurus and the Pandavas ensues. At the end of eighteen days of fighting, all of the Kurus are dead, including Duryodhan who was their last survivor. Of the Pandavas only the five brothers, Krishna, and Satyaki remain; Yudhisthira regains his kingdom.

Although the main narrative thread of the epic ends

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[25]It is difficult to date the Mahabharata with precision, as it is the result "of the combined efforts of poets of many generations." Sen, p. 72.

here, several later incidents are described in detail. One such incident is the Sacrifice of the Horse, an ancient Hindu custom whereby a king exercised sovereignty over the surrounding land. Another is the retirement to the forest by the parents of Duryodhan and by Pritha (the mother of the Pandavas), where all three meet a holy death by fire. The epic concludes with an account of Yudhisthira's journey to the Himalayas. On hearing of Krishna's death, he sets out, accompanied by his brothers, and eventually ascends to heaven where he sees Krishna in his celestial form. The criterion of unity, by which Aristotle praises the works of Homer, is inapplicable to the Mahabharata. In this compendious work (judged by Sen to be "about seven times the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey put together"[26]), extended treatises on everything from ethics to polity can be found. Narration is frequently lost amongst numerous episodic and philosophical digressions. Zaehner asserts that in addition to relating a story, the Mahabharata "sums up within its vast bulk every shade and nuance of classical Hinduism."[27]

One strand of this religion predominates, that strand based on the epic's most influential text, the Bhagavad-Gita. It consists of a dialogue between Arjuna (one of Yudhisthira's brothers) and Krishna, an incarnation of the god Vishnu. In

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[26]Sen, p. 72.

[27]Zaehner, p. 8.

this philosophical discussion, which immediately precedes the great battle, Krishna (embodied as Arjuna's personal charioteer) elucidates thoughts new to Hinduism. The most important doctrine stems from the notion of the avatara, the Divine incarnation in human form. An outgrowth of this concept, largely absent from the Upanishads, is the emergence of the Bhakti cult, devotion to a personal god. To avoid reincarnation the Upanishads offer the ways of action and knowledge; the Bhagavad-Gita offers a third way, that of love, achieved through the worship of god's divine manifestation. A notion of redemption, somewhat parallel to Christian beliefs, is attributed to Krishna.[28]

The Gita, however, does not reject the way of action. Instead, it rejects only the attachment to the fruits of action which binds man to the Karmic Wheel. Unlike the Upanishads which stress renunciation of the phenomenal world,

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[28]See, for example, the following passage from the Gita:

> "Though a man be soiled,
> With the sins of a lifetime,
> Let him but love me,
> Rightly resolved,
> In utter devotion:
> I see no sinner,
> That man is holy.
> Holiness soon
> Shall refashion his nature
> To peace eternal...."

Bhagavad-Gita, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: New American Lib., 1951), pp. 84-85.

the Gita emphasizes man's need to fulfil social obligations before such an emancipation can occur. It is argued in Sources of Indian Tradition that whereas "the Upanishadic attitude toward life and society is fundamentally individualistic," the Gita teaches that "society can function properly only on the principle of the ethical interdependence of its various constituents."[29] The ideal of social integrity takes precedence over the ideal of moksha. By performing his own social duty the individual participates in the will of god. By following the code of human conduct explicated in the Gita, he can attain union with brahman. This union, which is the summum bonum of the Upanishads, is seen in the Gita as merely a penultimate step. The Gita teaches that the supreme ecstacy is a loving devotion to a personal god, for which the realization of brahman is a precondition. In the Gita, according to Zaehner, "God leads the souls not only to liberation, the 'state of Brahman' but also to participation in himself - he 'causes them to enter' him. He in return loves the soul and asks to be loved by it."[30] Thus, in contrast to the belief predominant in the Upanishads that only one being exists (pantheistic monism), strong monotheistic trends, based on the partial dualism of an individual soul and a personal god, emerge in the Gita.

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[29] Sources, pp. 275-76.

[30] Zaehner, p. 126.

In this third phase of Hinduism, there is a tendency, perhaps due to the rediscovery of Vedic traditions, to personify the formless Supreme of the Upanishads. The Absolute, brahman, becomes represented by a trinity of gods: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer. As Brahma is largely an artificial conception, lacking in popular appeal, the major division in Hinduism is between the worshippers of Vishnu and those of Siva. In contrast to the religion of Vishnu, based on loving devotion, that of Siva is founded on asceticism. And yet despite his ascetic nature and his destructive powers, the god Siva is also worshipped as the principle of generation in the form of the lingam (or phallus). As Zaehner points out, "Siva is the reconciliation of all opposites: therefore he is both creator and destroyer, terrible and mild, evil and good, male and female, eternal rest and ceaseless activity."[31] As the Lord of the Animals, he is associated with all created life, especially with the bull, Nandi. The cult of Siva took many forms. The scholar Giuseppe Tucci claims that one of the strongest sects, located in Kashmir, elaborated the doctrine that "karmic experience is never lost until all creatures have been carried back into the Absolute Consciousness identified with Siva."[32]

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[31]Zaehner, p. 85.

[32]Giuseppe Tucci, The Theory and Practice of the Mandala, trans. Alan Houghton Brodrick (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1969), p. 5.

This was an intuition analogous to that of Buddhism: no idea or act is ever lost. Born in the sixth century B.C., the Buddha developed the doctrine of karma in the sense of cause-effect "by which the past progresses towards Enlightenment or reunion with the whole." This conception, explicated by Christmas Humphreys in Buddhism, "is presented in the symbol of an everturning Wheel, the Wheel of Life (Samsara), which has twelve spokes, the twelve Nidanas or component factors in its ceaseless turning."[33] A passage from the Samyutta-Nikaya, reprinted by Henry Clarke Warren in Buddhism in Translations, enumerates the twelve spokes, showing their causal interconnection:

> On ignorance depends karma;
> On karma depends consciousness;
> On consciousness depends name and form;
> On name and form depend the six organs of sense;
> On the six organs of sense depends contact;
> On contact depends sensation;
> On sensation depends desire;
> On desire depends attachment;
> On attachment depends existence;
> On existence depends birth;
> On birth depends old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair.
> Thus does this entire aggregation of misery arise.[34]

With stark logic, birth is viewed as the immediate cause of death and the "entire aggregation of misery" inherent in life. From a larger perspective, the evident basis of causation

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[33]Humphreys, p. 97.

[34]Warren, p. 166.

which leads to misery is the initial spoke, ignorance.

According to Buddhism, the nature of phenomenal life is characterized by Three Signs of Being: impermanence, suffering, and the absence of an eternal individual soul. Impermanence (anicca) is the condition of the cyclical process; every form that comes into being passes through successive phases of growth, decay, and dissolution. The transitory nature of life leads to the omnipresence of suffering (dukkha). The Third Sign of Being is anatta: "nothing in existence has within it a permanent 'soul' or imperishable entity which distinguishes it from other forms of life."[35] The sense of an individual self is merely an illusion fostered by ignorance. To transcend phenomenal life (which is considered to be totally illusory, lacking even the quasi-reality ascribed to maya in Hinduism), the Buddha enunciated Four Noble Truths. They concern misery, the origin of misery, the cessation of misery, and the path leading to the cessation. If ignorance is dispelled, the desire which attaches man to the misery of earthly life can be removed; through Enlightenment the "individual" ceases to cling to his illusory personal self and attains a state existing beyond the Wheel of Life, Nirvana.

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[35]Humphreys, p. 85.

II

In Under the Volcano, Lowry artistically incorporates much of the Indian tradition which has been sketched. His primary interest in the Rig Veda appears to have been with the rich mythological possibilities which the Vedic gods provided. In chapter ten of the novel, the Consul expatiates on the Vedic religion, dwelling on the gods, Agni and Soma:

> And the Consul was talking about the Indo-Aryans, the Iranians and the sacred fire, Agni, called down from heaven, with his firesticks, by the priest. He was talking of soma, Amrita, the nectar of immortality, praised in one whole book of the Rig Veda-bhang, which was, perhaps, much the same thing as mescal itself.... The Consul was talking about the Vedic Gods, who were not properly anthropomorphised.... In any event the Consul, once more, was talking about the sacred fire, the sacrificial fire, of the stone soma press, the sacrifices of cakes and oxen and horses, the priest changing from the Veda, how the drinking rites, simple at first, became more and more complicated as time went on, the ritual having to be carried out with meticulous care, since one slip - tee hee! - would render the sacrifice invalid. Soma, bhang, mescal, ah yes, mescal, he was back upon that subject again....[36]

The identity, suggested by the Consul, between mescal and soma invests the alcoholism of Geoffrey Firmin with a significance extending beyond clinical terms of reference (unlike the case study approach of The Lost Weekend). In

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[36]Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), p. 307. All further references to this edition will appear in the text of my thesis as UV, followed by the page number.

a letter to Yvonne, the Consul explicitly avows a ritualistic basis for his alcoholism:

> You will think I am mad, but this is how I drink ... as if I were taking an eternal sacrament. (UV 40)

Through the identification of soma with mescal, Lowry is able to convey something that Yvonne could not comprehend, "the importance of a drunkard's life!" (UV 85).

The basis for such a claim is afforded by William James who remarked that drunken consciousness must be understood in the larger context of mystic consciousness. "The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour."[37] Laruelle paraphrases James, complaining to the Consul about the extraordinary allowances that have to be made "while what is mystical in you is being released" through alcohol (UV 218). Soma, as the sacramental link between man and god, mythologically embodies James's concept. A polymorphic deity, Soma is, according to Zaehner, sometimes "not only assimilated to a bull but itself becomes a bull,

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[37] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1961), p. 304. In a letter, Lowry refers to this quotation. "...William James if not Freud would certainly agree with me when I say that the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers." Selected Letters, p. 71.

and the descent into the milky waters of the vat is likened to the fertilization of a herd of cows."[38] At one point in the novel, after the Consul had drunk all the drinks in sight, a hallucination occurs which evokes Soma in his form as a celestial bull: "Suddenly about three hundred head of cattle, dead, frozen stiff in the postures of the living, sprang on the slope before the house, were gone" (UV 208-09). In contrast to the fertility ascribed to Soma, the procreative act of the Consul is represented as sterile, "dead"; this implication is reinforced by his earlier impotency with Yvonne.

Lowry remarks, in an authorial note to his poem, "Thirty-Five Mescals in Cuautla," that "Soma was mystically identified with the moon, who controls vegetation, and whose cup is ever filling and emptying, as he waxes and wanes."[39] Towards the end of Under the Volcano, by juxtaposing "the waning moon" (UV 327) with two nearly empty glasses of mescal, Lowry uses this aspect of the Soma myth to depict the waning life forces within the Consul and Yvonne, and to foreshadow their imminent deaths. The meaning of the Soma myth in the novel is ambiguous. While Soma, through its suggestion of

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[38] Zaehner, p. 21.

[39] Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Earle Birney (San Francisco, City Lights, 1962), p. 36.

mystical powers, lends stature to the Consul's drunkenness, it also functions as an ironic reference - particularly in relationship to the death of the Consul, who had noted earlier that soma is "the nectar of immortality." Thus, while Lowry's use of the Soma myth does give a certain spiritual potential to Geoffrey's alcoholism, it, at the same time, emphasizes through its allusive context the negative aspects of alcohol which lead to his downward movement in the novel.

Another Vedic god referred to in Under the Volcano is Agni, the deification of fire. As the sacrifice personified, Agni is identical with the world process expressed in the Rig Veda. In his association with Purusha, the primal being whose dismemberment and self-immolation is the basis for creation, he symbolizes the renewal of all things through sacrifice. Yvonne's death is not only an act of sati ("the immolation of wives" to which the Consul had alluded (UV 309)), but also an act of sacrifice explicable in terms of the Agni myth:

> ...she heard the wind and the rain rushing through the forest and saw the tremours of lightning shuddering through the heavens.... But the house was on fire, she saw it now from the forest, from the steps above, she heard the crackling, it was on fire, everything was burning ... the fire was spreading faster and faster, the walls with their millwheel reflections of sunlight on water were burning.... And leaving the burning dream Yvonne felt herself suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars.... (UV 335-36)

The description of Yvonne's ascent, which occurs after the fire, parallels that of the Rig Veda where "the soul of the dead is carried aloft by the fire-god, Agni, who consumes the material body at cremation, to the heavenly world...."[40] In the same way, the Consul's death in the barranca conforms to the conception of hell in the Rig Veda: "an 'abyss' below the three earths into which evildoers will be hurled."[41] Present in the description of Yvonne's death are the three aspects of Agni: "fire," "lightning," and "sunlight." Through his three forms Agni unites the tripartite division of the world into earth, atmosphere, and heaven. Because he binds the human and divine worlds together, Agni can act as the liaison between man and god. Yvonne's ascent can be interpreted as exemplifying the words of the Rig Veda: "O Agni, the sacrifice and ritual which you encompass on every side, that indeed goes to the gods."[42]

The Agni myth is relevant to one of the most crucial questions of Under the Volcano: what meaning, if any, should be given to Laruelle's burning of the Consul's unposted letter at the chronological end of the novel?

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[40]Zaehner, p. 57. Yvonne's ascent has multiple symbolic value. The origin of this idea, according to Lowry, is derived from Faust: "where Marguerite is hauled up to heaven on pulleys, while the devil hauls Faust down to hell." Selected Letters, p. 84.

[41]Zaehner, p. 57.

[42]Rig Veda, 1.1, Sources, p. 7.

> He was about to replace the crumpled letter in the book when, half absently, yet on a sudden definite impulse, he held it into the candle flame. The flare lit up the whole cantina with a burst of brilliance in which the figures at the bar - that he now saw included ... several women in mourning from the cemeteries ... - appeared, for an instant, frozen, a mural:... then M. Laruelle set the writhing mass in an ashtray, where [it became] ... a dead husk now, faintly crepitant ... (UV 41-42)

Laruelle's action is fraught with the same ambiguities which surround the Consul's death. Either it is an aberrant event of momentary interest, without ultimate significance ("a dead husk"), or it is resonant, "crepitant" with continuing meaning. The Agni myth supports the affirmation of the latter reading.

The New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology states that "in a funerary hymn Agni is requested to rewarm with his flames the immortal being which subsists in the dead man, and to lead him to the world of the Just."[43] Through its implication of renewal, the Agni myth coalesces with the Mexican Day of the Dead: "upon this one day in the year, the dead come to life" (UV 107). Laruelle, in this context, burns the letter as a sacramental act of renewal, analogous in form and intent to a Vedic ritual. His action also points to the sacrificial nature of the Consul's death. From a Western perspective the killing of Geoffrey has associations

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[43] Larousse, pp. 330-31.

with the martyrdom which inspires Christianity; from an Eastern perspective it has parallels to the primal sacrifice underlying the Vedic religion. The Mexican setting also makes it possible to view the Consul as the noble victim from which Aztec priests kindled the new fire to initiate a new cycle of life, after the preceding one had ended in total catastrophe.[44] Thus, even though his death is proleptic of man's almost universal fate in the approaching world war, it contains an element of affirmation.

With artistic reservations, Lowry suggests the efficacy of the Consul's sacrificial act. His death is the source of Laruelle's tentative affirmation one year later, as the counterpointing of two passages shows:

> M. Laruelle cast a more protracted glance over his shoulder. "Here, give me some of your poison." He leaned forward and took a sip of the Consul's tequila and remained bent over the thimble-shaped glass of terrors, a moment since brimming.
> "Like it?"
> "- like Oxygenée, and petrol ... If I ever start to drink that stuff, Geoffrey, you'll know I'm done for."
> "It's mescal with me ... Tequila, no, that is healthful.... But if I ever start to drink mescal again, I'm afraid, yes, that would be the end," the Consul said dreamily.
> -November 1938 (UV 215-16) (The first two ellipses are Lowry's)

> M. Laruelle hesitated: "Tequila," then corrected himself: "No, anis - anis, por favor, senor." -November 1939 (UV 26)

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[44] See William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (New York: The Modern Lib., n.d.), pp. 72-73.

Beneath Laruelle's instructions to the barman is an unstated and positive response to the Consul's death, a death attributable, on one level, to mescal. Laruelle's rejection of tequila, apparently trivial, is a symbolic commitment to life. The relationship between Hugh and Laruelle indicates more overtly the positive value of Geoffrey's sacrificial act. Their initial antipathy for each other is transmuted to affection and understanding, a process for which the murder of the Consul acts as the catalyst (see UV 8-9). The burning of the letter can be viewed as the hope that this sense of unity can be realized on a larger scale, averting the horrors of war exemplified by the Consul; that there will be a recognition of the interrelatedness of all things, symbolized by Agni. The fire, in the context of the Agni myth, suggests a possible purification ("'Agni shall purify everything which enters his flames'"[45]) that correlates with the Christian idea of a cleansing, pentecostal fire, providing the novel with a muted note of optimism.

One passage from Under the Volcano seems to be a crystallization of the religious doctrines enunciated in the Upanishads:

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[45] Larousse, p. 331.

> It was a phantom dance of souls, baffled by these deceptive blends, yet still seeking permanence in the midst of what was only perpetually evanescent, or eternally lost. Or it was a dance of the seeker and his goal, here pursuing still the gay colours he did not know he had assumed, there striving to identify the finer scene of which he might never realize he was already a part. (UV 286)

The "phantom dance of the souls" can be seen as the pursuit of brahman, the "permanence" shrouded by the "deceptive blends" of maya. Brahman is "the finer scene" beyond the "perpetually evanescent," the unending cycle of death and reincarnation. It can be attained by a recognition that one of its fragments, atman, is present with the individual. However, this realization of the essential identity of atman and brahman is impeded by the deception of maya, and the individual "might never realize he was already a part" of ultimate reality. That is, through ignorance, he might fail to perceive the central truth of the Upanishads: atman can enter into ecstatic union with brahman.

Throughout the novel there are suggestions of Upanishadic philosophy. For instance, repeated mention of deceptions, lies, illusions, and "mirages" (UV 4) loosely evokes the idea of maya. This concept appears more explicitly in the Consul's assumption that "the very material world" is "illusory" (UV 361). Later in Under the Volcano, a phrase contains an image of maya:

> the naked realities of the situation, like the spokes of a wheel, were blurred in motion.... (UV 236)

The wheel imagery, used frequently in the novel, suggests the Karmic Wheel, the recurring cycle of death and rebirth. In Yvonne's description of the bull fight, something close to perpetual reincarnation is seen as a condition of phenomenal existence:

> ... the bull was like a life; the important birth, the fair chance, the tentative, then assured, then half-despairing circulations of the ring... resignation, collapse: then another, more convulsive birth.... (UV 259-60)

Immediately before his death, the Consul hopefully envisions a liberation from the illusory entanglements of self; a transcendence of his separative ego-sense which prevents him from entering into harmony and unity with the universe;

> an infinite evolving and extension of boundaries, in which the spirit was an entity, perfect and whole. (UV 361)

In terms of Upanishadic thought, this mystical vision describes the reintegration of atman into brahman.

The mystical possibility of unity, central to the Upanishads, is a major theme of Under the Volcano. A sense of unity underlies the characterization. According to Lowry, "the four main characters are intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human

spirit...."[46] In the novel's opening paragraph, which describes Quauhnahuac, the four main characters are subtly linked:

> It is situated well south of the Tropic of Cancer, to be exact on the nineteenth parallel, in about the same latitude as the Revillagigedo Islands to the west in the Pacific, or very much further west, the southernmost tip of Hawaii - and as the port of Tzucox to the east on the Atlantic seaboard of Yucatan near the border of British Honduras, or very much farther east, the town of Juggernaut, in India, on the Bay of Bengal. (UV 3)

What appears to be merely a geographical description foreshadows, by the places connected by the same line of latitude, the interlinking of characters.[47] "The southernmost tip of Hawaii" evokes Yvonne's birthplace (UV 258). Through his Mayan idols (UV 10, 201), Laruelle is associated with "Yucatan." "India" is the place where Geoffrey and Hugh were born (UV 19). The town in India refers directly to Hugh, as he had cut "an old Parlophone rhythm classic (entitled, tersely, Juggernaut)" (UV 155). As well as suggesting a certain determinism in the interrelationships of the major characters, the global circle of latitude points to their potential unity.

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[46] Selected Letters, p. 60.

[47] The circle of latitude is analogous in function to the mandala, "a geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern." Tucci, p. 25.

In exploring why this unity was not achieved, it is germane to note that Lowry's use of the Upanishadic philosophy is derived, in part, from T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. In his essay, "Eliot, Joyce, and Lowry," Anthony Kilgallin argues that Lowry imitates many of the elements present in "What the Thunder Said": "drought, thunder, graves, bells, Christ, symbolism, Dantean quotations, a reference to Coriolanua," and others.[48] Kilgallin also contends that the novel's motif, "No se puede vivir sin amar" (one cannot live without love), plays "a role similar to that of 'Datta, dayadhvam, damyata,' the Hindu advice of The Waste Land."[49] The ethical duties heard in the voice of the thunder (for which Eliot cites the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, 5, 1, as his source)[50] have relevance to Under the Volcano, particularly "dayadhvam." In his explanation of this term, Radhakrishnan writes, "a forgiving attitude frees the individual.... It is by compassion... that we overcome the ravages of selfishness."[51] It is the Consul's inability to sympathize and to forgive that separates him from Yvonne and results in his death, confirming the motif, "No se puede vivir sin amar."

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[48]Anthony R. Kilgallin, "Eliot, Joyce & Lowry," Canadian Author and Bookman, 40: Winter 1965, p. 4.

[49]Kilgallin, p. 4.

[50]"Notes," Selected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p.73

[51]Radhakrishnan, p. 166.

In Lowry's novel, the ethical injunctions of the thunder fuse with the characteristics of "the Vedic storm-god Vindra" (UV 257), or Indra.[52] In terms of the waste land symbolism that Lowry appropriates from Jessie L. Weston, through Eliot[53], the thunder represents the regenerative power of water to overcome drought. As in the poem, Under the Volcano offers a clear analogy between physical and spiritual planes. However, in the novel, this analogy is complicated by the Vedic associations of Indra. As a result, Lowry's Indra does not possess the unambiguous ethical surety that Eliot ascribes to "What the Thunder Said." As wielder of the thunderbolt (vajra), Indra causes the thunder-claps which sound at Geoffrey's death and which panic the horse that will trample Yvonne. Here, in his association with the Consul's murder, which anticipates world war, Indra is present as god of battle. By his mythical ambivalence, Indra both substantiates the regenerative symbolism derived from Eliot, and refutes it violently, through his identification with war. (In a positive reading, hints of Indra, in his final mythical form might be discerned in the thunderclaps at

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[52] I assume "Vindra" is a misspelling of "Indra" (perhaps due to alliteration with "Vedic") as Vindra is listed neither by itself nor as an alternative name for Indra in The Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism, Vols. I-II, ed. Benjamin Walker.

[53] See Kilgallin's "Eliot, Joyce & Lowry" for discussion of Lowry's use of "the Fisher King" and drought imagery, pp. 3-4.

the end of chapter one: what Zaehner calls a "violent restoration of the cosmic order which has been temporarily disturbed."[54])

Despite this ambiguity, Lowry does use Indra to stress the value of the Upanishadic ideals which permeate Eliot's poem. It is possible to view the Consul's fate as due to a crucial failure to exercise "dayadhvam" in his relationship with Yvonne:

> "We're here together again, it's us. Can't you see that?" ... Then she was close to him, in his arms, but he was gazing over her head.
> "Yes, I can see," he said, ..."Only -"
> "I can never forgive you deeply enough": was that what was in his mind to add?
> (UV 197)

Counterpointing Geoffrey's aloofness is Yvonne's effort to re-establish their union. Her striving, expressed by her desire to restore broken fragments to "a single integrated rock" (UV 54-55), has mystical connotations. Within the context of the Upanishads, her ascent upwards upon death can be seen as a fulfilment of her striving towards a unity larger than self, the reintegration of atman and brahman. In a novel, which Lowry describes as "teetering between past and future - between despair (the past) and hope"[55], Yvonne

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[54]Zaehner, p. 23.

[55]Selected Letters, p. 81.

represents "the future" (UV 254). By contrast, the Consul is oriented to the past. He reflects "an attitude of passivity and acceptance that," according to Nancy Wilson Ross in Three Ways of Asian Wisdom, "remains basic to Hinduism"[56] to some degree:

> all the events of the day indeed had
> been as indifferent tufts of grass he
> had half-heartedly clutched at or
> stones loosened on his downward flight....
> (UV 362)

Unlike Yvonne (or Hugh), Geoffrey cannot grasp with any sense of conviction that, although the past is irrovocable, the future remains free. From an Upanishadic perspective, the Consul is shrouded in self-illusion, unable to envision either the possibility that "man ... might change the future" (UV 108), that is, liberate himself from the Karmic Wheel, or the possibility of reunion with Yvonne, symbolic of his potential unity in the Oneness of brahman.

The third historical phase of Hinduism is represented in Under the Volcano by allusions to the Mahabharata. Anthony Kilgallin, in his essay, "Eliot, Joyce and Lowry," writes that "In the opening of the fifth chapter Geoffrey mentally parallels the pilgrimage of Yudhisthira and his dog up the

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[56] Ross, p. 17.

heights of the Himalayas to the abode of God as it is related in the last part of the Mahabharata....[57] This dream vision of the Consul is ironically undercut at his death. He imagines himself ascending Popocatepetl (which has been previously identified with the Himalayas), only to find himself falling among the crumbling mountain; and "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (UV 375). Here, the journey of Yudhisthira commingles with a Mexican myth identified by Lewis Spence in his book, The Myths of Mexico and Peru: the dead person, "accompanied by the shade of his favorite dog ... passes between two lofty peaks, which may fall and crush him....[58]

Lowry's apocalyptic description, "the world itself was bursting, bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space" (UV 375), is consistent with descriptions of the present Kali age (or yuga), initiated, some believe, by the great Mahabharata War. The Matsya Purana sketches man's decline in the Kali age, when "the substance of the world-organism has deteriorated beyond salvage, and

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[57] "Eliot, Joyce & Lowry," p. 4.

[58] Lewis Spence, The Myths of Mexico and Peru (London: George Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1913), pp. 37-38. Lowry had read this book and incorporated several of its myths within the novel. See the Index to Perle Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), p. 241.

the universe is ripe for dissolution."[59] Through Prescott (see UV 100) Lowry is probably conscious of the parallels between Hindu cosmogony and "the Aztec system of four great cycles, at the end of which the world was destroyed [through periodical convulsions of nature], to be again regenerated."[60] The Consul exhibits the characteristics which typify the Kali yuga:

> The will to rise to supreme heights has failed; the bonds of sympathy and love have dissolved; narrow egotism rules.[61]

India's greatest epic may have suggested other details in Lowry's novel. The reference to "the ghosts of ruined gamblers" in the "palatial" hotel (UV 3-4) may be derived from the scene in which Yudhisthira gambles away his empire and is forced to leave his palace. Yvonne's death may be a partial conflation of two incidents from the concluding part of the Mahabharata, the horse sacrifice and the immolation by forest fire.

In Under the Volcano, Lowry is overtly concerned less with Vishnu (who appears in the epic as Krishna) than with his rival god, Siva, whose destructiveness is more appropriate

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[59] Ross, p. 66.

[60] Prescott, p. 692.

[61] Ross, p. 66.

to the novel's theme. There is an obscure reference to Krishna in the novel's opening paragraph which, instead of evoking his benign qualities, presages disaster. "Juggernaut" is English for Jagannath (a Krishna manifestation), whose festival is celebrated annually by Hindus; Ross states that it is "a dark word having its source in the reputed accidents and deaths caused by rolling wheels "of an immense wooden cart in which the god is carried."[62] Curiously enough, the most explicit allusion to Siva is to the god's positive aspect:

> "Nandi," the Consul ... muttered, peering sideways with one eye through cigarette smoke at the ring, "the bull. I christen him Nandi, vehicle of Siva, from whose hair the River Ganges flows...." (UV 257)

The myth to which the Consul refers is explained more fully in the New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology:

> When the gods consented to the descent of Ganga (the Ganges), the heavenly river, the weight of this mass of water would have engulfed the earth, if the god with the trident head had not offered himself to lessen the shock. Falling into his tangled hair, the heavenly Ganga wandered about the god's head for several years without finding an outlet. Finally Siva had to divide her into seven streams so that she could descend on earth without causing a catastrophe. As they fell the waters made a noise like thunder ... All creatures rejoiced.[63]

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[62] Ross, p. 50.

[63] Larousse, p. 374.

As the noise of thunder at the novel's end does not signify joy that a disaster has been averted, this myth functions ironically. Moreover, the seven streams of the Ganges can be placed in ironic association with the instrument of Yvonne's death: the horse branded with the number seven. The symbol of the volcano has been linked with the god in his destructive aspect, further associating Siva with the death of the Consul.[64]

The impending holocaust of World War II, described as "the blazing of ten million burning bodies" (UV 375), with its implication of cosmic dissolution, may also be linked to the god, Siva, who, according to Ross, carries "a tongue of flame, the element of the world's final destruction."[65] Not only does the destructive aspect of Siva contribute to

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[64] J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Lib., 1962), p. 342. Earlier, through his birthplace, Geoffrey has been linked to Siva as a flourishing Siva cult is located in Kashmir. This association is strengthened by an allusion to "Lalla Rookh's tomb" (UV 83), a probable reference to the famous (fourteenth century) Shaivite mystic, Lalla, whose songs are popular in Kashmir today. As a land of physiographical contrasts, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, Kashmir symbolically correlates the universality personified by the Consul. Sweeping down a pass in the Himalayas, a series of invaders entered Kashmir: the Aryans who brought the Vedic religion, the Greeks under Alexander (see UV 307), and the Moguls of Mohammedan faith (see "the Hamadan mosque," UV 307). The theme of invasion has parallels, on a historical level, with Mexico, which the Consul identifies with his birthplace ("Nanga Parbat might well have passed for old Popo," UV 83), and, on a personal level, with his own life ("all of you, Yvonne, Jacques, you, Hugh, trying to interfere with other people's lives, interfering, interfering," UV 312).

[65] Ross, p. 32.

the novel's pessimism, but, by the ambivalence which he embodies, Siva mythologically extends the tonal and philosophical ambiguities of Under the Volcano. As the reconciliator of opposites, principle of generation as well as destruction, he represents the ambivalent unity of all things. It is this complex identity, underlying the apparently opposite acts of love and death, that the Consul perceives when he is in bed with Maria:

> (... out of this suffering something must be born, and what would be born was his own death), for ah, how alike are the groans of love to those of the dying, how alike, those of love, to those of the dying.... (UV 349)

The unity which he discovers is the cosmic synthesis personified by the god Siva, "where life and death continually give birth to one another."[66]

The interrelation of life and death is an outgrowth of an assumption which pervades the novel, and is shared by post-Vedic Hinduism and Buddhism: the doctrine of the Karmic Wheel. In chapter seven of Under the Volcano it is pictured by a Ferris wheel:

> The Consul was gazing upward dreamily at the Ferris wheel near them, huge, but resembling an enormously magnified

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[66] Larousse, p. 374.

> child's structure of girders and angle brackets, nuts and bolts, in Meccano; ... the wheel of the law, rolling.... (UV 218)

The very name of the Ferris wheel, as Hilda Thomas perceptively notes, "by one of those curious coincidences of which Lowry was so much aware, suggests the iron wheel of fate...."[67] More specifically, as the italicized reference to the "wheel of the law, rolling" implies, it symbolizes the Karmic Wheel and, as Lowry indicates in a letter, the Buddhist wheel in particular: "this wheel is of course the Ferris wheel in the square, but it is, if you like, also many other things: it is Buddha's wheel of the law (see VII), it is eternity, it is the instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return, and it is the form of the book...."[68]

Much of the language used in chapter seven is suggestive of Buddhist terminology. The spurious suffering which Jacques attributes to the Consul (UV 219) is, within the context of Buddhism, the unnecessary misery of phenomenal life. It is unnecessary because man can "extricate" (UV 197, 204) himself from earthly sorrows by means of The Four Noble Truths. In the brief triumph of his relationship with Yvonne, the Consul senses the misery stemming from an attachment to the impermanence of earthly life (annicca):

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[67] Hilda L. Thomas, "Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: An Interpretation" (M.A. Thesis, Univ. of British Columbia, 1965), p. 24.

[68] Selected Letters, pp. 70-71.

> Far too soon it had begun to seem
> too much of a triumph, it had been
> too good, too horribly unimaginable
> to lose.... (UV 201)

To escape from the suffering inherent in phenomenal existence, the chain of causation, imaged by "a whole row of fettered babies" (UV 199), must be overcome. In the third of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, the means of doing so is stated: the elimination of desire, "the craving which supplies the binding force to hold men on the Wheel of Rebirth."[69]

The Consul undergoes a gradual renunciation, in which there is a waning of tanha, the desire binding him to physical life.[70]

> A desire to find her immediately ...
> seized him, and a desire, too, to
> lead immediately again a normal happy
> life with her ... the desire remained -
> like an echo of Yvonne's own ... But

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[69] Humphreys, p. 91.

[70] Earlier in this chapter, the basis for this renunciation is vividly and dramatically portrayed. On accidentally viewing Laruelle naked, the Consul experiences an intense revulsion for physical reality:

> ... that hideously elongated cucumiform bundle
> of blue nerves and gills ... How loathsome, how
> incredibly loathsome was reality. (UV 207)

In the life of Buddha, there is a parallel to this incident. The future Buddha feels a similar revulsion (which overcomes tanha and leads to his great renunciation) when he unexpectedly glimpses his sleeping harem:

> ... some with their bodies wet with trickling
> phlegm and spittle; some grinding their teeth...
> and some with their dresses fallen apart so as
> plainly to disclose their loathsome nakedness.
> Warren, pp. 60-61.

> the weight of a great hand seemed to be pressing his head down. The desire passed. At the same time, as though a cloud had come over the sun, the aspect of the fair had completely altered for him. ... the procession of queer pictures ... had suddenly become transcendentally awful and tragic, distant, transmuted, as it were some final impression on the sense of what the earth was like, carried over into an obscure region of death, a gathering thunder of immedicable sorrow.... (UV 214-15)

"The procession of queer pictures" mentioned in the quotation are part of a carrousel, painted on "the panels running entirely around the inner wheel that was set horizontally and attached to the top of the central revolving pillar" (UV 213 It is in these pictures, which present the spectacle of Samsara, that the Consul perceives "immedicable sorrow." This perception is identical with Buddha's First Noble Truth, sorrow (or dukkha) is omnipresent. The Buddhist telescoping of birth and death is given visual representation on one panel, in which the Consul thinks he sees Medea sacrificing her children. It is important to note that, simultaneously with his perception of the suffering inherent in the Wheel of Life (which becomes "distant"), his desire binding him to earthly life passes. By this renunciation, he is progressing on the path towards Enlightenment.

During his ride on a huge looping-the-loop machine, the Maquina infernal, the Consul symbolically realizes the

goal of Nirvana - the ceasing to be of his illusory self.[71] Having had several drinks of tequila, he is, as William James contends, "for the moment one with truth."[72] Through intoxication the Consul attains a state of consciousness which approximates Nirvana, described by Humphreys as "the spiritual counterpart of the hub of the revolving Wheel, where in the midst of motion there is peace."[73] The illusory personal self that separates him from the Whole is symbolically shed during his ride:

> Everything was falling out of his pockets, was being wrested from him, torn away, a fresh article at each whirling, sickening, plunging, retreating, unspeakable circuit, his notecase, pipe, keys, his dark glasses he had taken off, his small change he did not have time to imagine being pounced on by the children after all, he was being

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[71] Immediately preceding this ride, a passage points to the universal process of reincarnation from which the Consul wants to escape:

> Mysterious tents were shut up here, or lying collapsed, enfolded on themselves. They appeared almost human, the former kind awake, expectant; the latter with the wrinkled crumpled aspect of men asleep, but longing even in unconsciousness to stretch their limbs. Further on at the final frontiers of the fair, it was the day of the dead indeed. Here the tent booths and galleries seemed not so much asleep as lifeless, beyond hope of revival. Yet there were faint signs of life after all, he saw. (UV 220)

[72] James, p. 305.

[73] Humphreys, p. 100.

> emptied out, returned empty, his stick, his passport - had that been his passport?... What did it matter? Let it go! There was a kind of fierce delight in this final acceptance. Let everything go! Everything particularly that provided means of ingress or egress, went bond for, gave meaning or character, or purpose or identity to that frightful bloody nightmare he was forced to carry around with him everywhere upon his back, that went by the name of Geoffrey Firmin.... (UV 222-23)

Symbolic recognition is given to the Buddhist doctrine of anatta, that is, "nothing in existence has within it a permanent 'soul' or imperishable entity which distinguishes it from other forms of life."[74] By rejecting his false individual self, the Consul transcends the anxieties inherent in phenomenal life ("he was without physical fear of death" (UV 222)

Following the ride in the Maquina infernal, he views the world from a Nirvanic perspective, from the hub of a revolving wheel:

> On terra firma the world continued to spin madly round; houses, whirligigs, hotels, cathedrals, cantinas, volcanoes.... (UV 223)

It is, however, only for a moment that the Consul is "one with truth." His illusory personal identity is symbolically restored by the children who return his personal possessions. The desire binding him to the Wheel of Life reasserts itself

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[74] Humphreys, p. 85.

in his wish that "Yvonne and he should have had children" (UV 223). Also, it is significant in the light of James's thesis, that when "at last the earth stopped spinning with the motion of the Infernal Machine," "he was cold stone sober" (UV 224). When the Consul no longer feels the effect of alcohol, metaphorically, he ceases to have a Nirvanic perspective. Having momentarily achieved Enlightenment, he again falls under the sway of Samsara, which is depicted in all of its terrifying futility:

> A madman passed, wearing, in the manner of a lifebelt, an old bicycle tire. With a nervous movement he continually shifted the injured tread round his neck. He muttered to the Consul, but waiting neither for reply nor reward, took off the tire and flung it far ahead of him toward a booth, then followed unsteadily, stuffing something in his mouth from a tin bait jar. Picking up the tire he flung it far ahead again, repeating this process, to the irreducible logic of which he appeared eternally committed, until out of sight. (UV 224)

As Lowry explains in a letter, the madman futilely and endlessly throwing a bicycle tire in front of him is a projection "of the Consul and of the futility of his life...."[75] Specifically, in terms of Buddhism, the futility is that of the Karmic Wheel, the perpetual cycle of death and reincarnation.

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[75] Selected Letters, p. 78.

When Under the Volcano is seen as a whole, the distinctive feature of Indian thought, the belief in the Karmic Wheel, gains even greater prominence. Throughout the novel, wheel imagery is used continuously. The transition between chapters one (the present) and two (the past) is effected by an image of the Ferris wheel: "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel" (UV 42). This machine, which reappears intermittently during the book, is only the most obvious example of Lowry's wheel imagery. Other noticeable cases are the madman with his bicycle tire, the Maquina infernal, "Boys on roller skates, holding to the stays of the umbrella structure, were being whirled around" (UV 213), "the turning wrenched wheel of a boy's bicycle" (UV 280), the constellations going "round and round" (UV 335), and "the drunken madly revolving world" (UV 195).[76] Moreover, as Lowry claims, "The book should be seen as essentially trochal, I repeat, the form of it as a wheel so that, when you get to the end, if you have read carefully, you should want to turn back to the beginning again...."[77]

This emphasis on the wheel in Under the Volcano is

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[76]For additional examples of Lowry's wheel imagery, and an explication of its significance, see Hilda Thomas, "Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: An Interpretation," M.A. Thesis, Univ. of B.C., 1965, ch. 2, pp. 22-32.

[77]Selected Letters, p. 88

combined with numerous hints of reincarnation. Some examples have already been quoted: the dead tent booths, apparently "beyond hope of revival" (UV 220), exhibiting faint signs of life after all, and the collapsed bull who endures "another, more convulsive birth" (UV 260). The Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead ("upon this one day in the year the dead come to life," UV 107) gives further prominence to the idea of reincarnation. In his essay, "Faust and Under the Volcano," Kilgallin argues that "suggestions of a cyclical reincarnation are latent in Chapter One," citing Vigil's phrase, "all the dogs to shark" (UV 7) as an instance.[78] Lowry artistically combines the idea of reincarnation with the novel's wheel structure and imagery to represent the salient features of the Karmic Wheel.

If Under the Volcano is read cyclically, as Lowry recommends with the first chapter acting as prologue and epilogue, Geoffrey's death appears causally determined. Within the context of the Karmic Wheel, it can be viewed as the inevitable result of demeritorious karma. A famous example of the retribution of karma occurs in the well-known epic, The Ramayana (which Lowry had read).[79] It concerns a king, Dasa-ratha, who, in his youth, had accidentally

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[78]Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano," Can. Lit. 26: Autumn 1965, p. 53.

[79]See Epstein, p. 220.

killed a hermit's son and, as a consequence, dies of grief in his old age for the banishment of his own son. It is written in the Mahabharata that "Abstention from harming creatures is regarded as the foremost of all duties."[80] This duty, which Buddhism shares with Hinduism, the Consul (according to dark rumours about the German officers that he had put in the furnace) has violated utterly. Lowry contends that "you can even see the German submarine officers taking revenge on the Consul in the form of the sinarquistas and semi-fascist brutos at the end...."[81] It is perhaps significant that "Samaritan," the name of the ship in which Geoffrey had purportedly committed this atrocity, recurs at the moment that he is murdered: "Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt" (UV 375). Instead of being a random and purposeless event, the Consul's death (like Dasa-ratha's) is an act of retributive justice, punishment for a past crime. His death, if given the finality of a linear reading can be attributed to nemesis; within a cyclical reading it conforms to the inexorable pattern of karma, the ethical causation of the wheel of the law, rolling.

In accordance with Indian traditions, the dead Geoffrey Firmin in the ravine has divested himself of much demeritorious karma, and as a result, is now closer to the

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[80] Mahabharata, vol. XI, trans. Pratap Chandra Roy (Calcutta: Datta Bose & Co., 1919), p. 94.

[81] Selected Letters, p. 88

timeless reality of brahman or Nirvana. However, his last words, "this is a dingy way to die" (UV 373), are expressive of resignation tinged with self-pity, not Enlightenment. Within the context of Indian philosophy his death, an act of retributive justice, partially frees his future from the past. Unaware of the ethical causation underlying this murder, Geoffrey's response is one of diffident fatalism. With no perception of the potentiality for spiritual ascent latent in his death, liberation from phenomenal life is impossible. The hints at his reincarnation in chapter one of the novel suggest that the Consul is still condemned to the futile cyclical pattern of the Karmic Wheel, bound by a determinism that he cannot understand.

CHAPTER III

TOLSTOY'S "CIRCLE OF NECESSITY" AND UNDER THE VOLCANO

Universalizing the question of determinism in Under the Volcano, Lowry also poses it from a Western perspective by the Consul's allusion to "the philosophical section of War and Peace" (UV 82), complementing his use of Indian traditions. Although primarily interested in Tolstoy's philosophical ideas, Lowry does make a few explicit references to War and Peace qua novel, such as "Rostov's wolf hunt" (UV 229) and "that conversation with the volunteers in the train" (UV 311). However, this conversation, which reveals the shallowness of the volunteer's heroism, the Consul wrongly attributes to War and Peace; Hugh realizes that it comes from Tolstoy's other great work, "Anna Karenina" (UV 312).[1] In this latter novel, there are situational and linguistic parallels to Under the Volcano. Anna's guilty sense of doom - and the language in which she expresses it - seems to anticipate that of Geoffrey's: "I feel I'm flying headlong over some precipice, but ought not to save myself. And I can't."[2] Both characters, of course, do fall to their deaths.

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[1] See Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenin, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), pp. 809-11.

[2] Anna Karenin, p.453.

As a cuckold Geoffrey also has certain similarities to Anna's husband. In fact, one passage in Under the Volcano could be interpreted as a physical dramatization of Karenin's psychological condition:

> Now he experienced a sensation such as a man might feel who, quietly crossing a bridge over a chasm, suddenly discovers that the bridge is broken and the abyss yawns below. The abyss was real life; the bridge, that artificial existence Karenin had been leading.[3]
>
> It was on this bridge ... over the barranca, the deep ravine ...(,) the Consul ... leaning over ... drunk but collected, coherent, a little mad, a little impatient ..., ... had stood looking into an abyss. (UV 15-16, in partially rearranged order)

Even though the passages quoted tend to suggest that Lowry consciously imitates elements of Anna Karenin, his main interest in Tolstoy centres on the philosophical aspects of War and Peace.

Lowry, in his novel, makes use of the theoretical criteria that Tolstoy postulates in order that the relative proportion of free will and necessity can be judged. Towards the end of Under the Volcano the Consul expounds, in an acrimonious debate with Hugh, Tolstoy's theory of determinism:

> "When we have absolutely no understanding of the causes of an action ... the causes, whether vicious or virtuous or what not,

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[3] Anna Karenin, p. 159.

> we ascribe, according to Tolstoy, a greater element of free will to it. ... "'All cases without exception in which our conception of free will and necessity varies depend on three considerations'," the Consul said. "You can't get away from it. "Moreover, according to Tolstoy," he went on, "before we pass judgement on the thief - if thief he were - we would have to ask ourselves: what were his connections with other thieves, ties of family, his place in time, if we know even that, his relation to the external world, and to the consequences leading to the act...." (UV 308-09)

The Consul, by his direct quotation from Tolstoy, provides a standard against which the relative degree of freedom and necessity operant in his life, and the lives of the novel's other characters, can be assessed.

The first of Tolstoy's "three considerations" (referred to by the Consul) is "the relation of the man committing the act to the external world."[4] In this case, according to Tolstoy, the conception of necessity depends on the more or less clear idea we form of the definite position occupied by the man in relation to everything co-existing with him:

> ... if we perceive any connection between him and anything else, ... we perceive that every one of those circumstances has its influence on him, and controls at least one side of his activity. And the more we perceive of those influences, the greater

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[4] Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Lib., n.d.), p. 1127.

> our conception of the necessity to which he is subject.[5]

Such influences, which tend towards a diminished sense of freedom, are perceptible within Lowry's novel. For example, the Consul's alcoholism can be traced in part to the influence of external reality; it is partially explicable in terms of "family ties" (his adoptive brothers "drink seven pints in fourteen minutes," UV 20). Similarly, although more complexly, the argument which concludes chapter ten (causing Geoffrey to run to Parian and to his death) can be related to the nature of his "connection" with Yvonne and Hugh. Tolstoy argues that "It is this class of considerations that make it obvious to us that the drowning man is less free and more subject to necessity than a man standing on dry ground...."[6] At Parian, in the final chapter of Under the Volcano, Geoffrey is clearly in a position analogous to that of the drowning man. The increasing restraints placed upon his free will by the fascist police culminate with his death, an instance of total subjection of freedom by the external world.[7] The cumulative restrictions imposed by the outside world on the Consul's freedom of action, which

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[5] Tolstoy, p. 1127.

[6] Tolstoy, p. 1127.

[7] "To conceive a man having no freedom is impossible except as a man deprived of life." Tolstoy, p. 1124.

reach total necessity in the circumstances at Parian, give a sense of inevitability to his death.

His free will, when judged by Tolstoy's second consideration, his relation to time, is also minimal. "The variation in our conception of free will in this connection depends on the interval of time that has elapsed between the action and our criticism of it."[8] Tolstoy argues that "with a more remote event, we see its inevitable consequences, which prevent our conceiving of anything else as possible."[9] To conceive of an action as completely free, "one must conceive it in the present on the boundary between the past and the future, that is, outside time, which is impossible."[10] Thus, all actions are to some degree influenced by necessity; those which have taken place in the more remote past appear to have been more fully subject to necessity. In Under the Volcano time continually recoils from the present into the past in the form of memories, often in prolonged flashbacks. The form of the novel reinforces this temporal orientation. The opening chapter, set one year later than the remainder of the novel, places the main narration in the past. Because of this retrospective view, events appear more irrevocable,

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[8] Tolstoy, p. 1127.

[9] Tolstoy, p. 1128.

[10] Tolstoy, p. 1130.

and apparent free will is diminished.

Tolstoy's third consideration for judging the relative proportion of free will and necessity is "the degree to which we can apprehend that endless chain of causation demanded by the reason, in which every phenomenon comprehended, and so every act of man, must have its definite place, as a result of past and a cause of future acts."[11] The greater the understanding of the causes leading to an act, the greater is the necessity apparent in that act. As Lowry's novel provides details of earlier events in the lives of his characters, it is possible to view many of their actions as the result of past actions. The English novel as a _genre_ has consciously been concerned with causation on this level ever since Fielding's _Tom Jones_. In a less developed form, Lowry does exhibit something of Fielding's meticulous concern for plot, sketching an intricate chain of causation leading to the Consul's death. The fourth chapter of Lowry's novel opens with an italicized copy of the telegraph cable sent by Hugh to the _Daily Globe_. It describes the anti-Semitic campaign being carried out by the Mexican press with the active support of the German legation. After showing this telegram to Yvonne, Hugh slips it into the pocket of

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[11] Tolstoy, p. 1128. Logically, Tolstoy's third consideration subsumes the other two; the chain of causation is perceptible only insofar as reason can place action within the context of the external world and within a linear time scale (as the necessary distinction between cause and effect assumes a prior distinction of past from present).

the jacket which he had borrowed from Geoffrey. Later in the day, the Consul is now wearing this jacket, still containing the telegram. After his ride in the Maquina infernal, Geoffrey has returned to him by a little girl "some telegram of Hugh's" (UV 223). It is this document reporting on the Fascist tendencies in Mexico, along with Hugh's membership card in the "Federacion Anarquista Iberica" (UV 370), that the Chief of Rostrums finds in Geoffrey's jacket pocket at Parian. The Consul's subsequent death, due clearly to a case of mistaken identity, is not random; it is understandable in terms of cause and effect, a chain of causation.

When the novel as a genre shifted, as Leslie Fiedler asserts, "from a body of communal story to the mind of the individual,"[12] with character taking on new psychological complexities, causation became more difficult to trace, and it is within this modern tradition that Under the Volcano is largely written. The historical shift in the novel's emphasis to the mind of the individual was largely initiated by Henry James. He explored fully an artistic possibility which had been latent in Austen's Emma, the use of a character as a "sentient centre" through whose consciousness action could be refracted. In Under the Volcano, Lowry adopts this

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[12]Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev.ed. (New York: Dell Publ. Co., Inc., 1966), p. 40.

technique, using his four major characters as a multiple focus.[13] However, he imposes on the interior world of these characters a specific psychological model, that of Freud. As this model is relatively simple (at least in first principles) and as it is in itself deterministic, its combination with an artistic technique designed to amplify individual consciousness makes the actions of the characters in the novel, to a large degree, predictable. That is, by overtly presenting an inner life which is at the same time tightly delimited by Freudian theory, almost total comprehension of the relation between cause and effect is possible, thus restricting free will by Tolstoy's third consideration.

Judged by the three criteria which the Consul accepts from Tolstoy, Under the Volcano is weighted towards necessity. Nevertheless, as Tolstoy argues, because none of these relationships to the external world, to time, and to causation can ever be defined fully, "the circle of necessity is not

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[13]His use of several characters as "sentient centres" in the novel can be analyzed in terms of chapter assignments:

Geoffrey	III, V, VII, X, XII
Yvonne	II, IX, XI
Hugh	IV, VI, VIII
Jacques	I

This table is taken from Dale Edmonds, "Malcolm Lowry: A Study of his Life and Work" (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Texas, 1965), p. 190.

complete, and there is still a loophole for free will."[14] It is through the existence of this "loophole" that Lowry's novel maintains its dramatic tension: the Consul might avert his seemingly inevitable fate. However, two interrelated aspects of determinism that are cyclical in nature prevent the realization of this possibility.

A key image of Under the Volcano, related to the wheel in its thematic implications, is the circle. Following its neutral use in the novel's opening paragraph as the nineteenth parallel of latitude, the circle image soon develops ambiguity. Positively, it is symbolic of unity and affirmation, as in the description of Yvonne's ascent "through eddies of stars scattering aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water" (UV 336). But it is the negative aspects of the circle, represented by the "small fixed circle" (UV 278) of the bull ring, that Lowry emphasizes. In his characterization of the Consul, Lowry makes use of the cyclical patterns of alcoholism and Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex. These two forms of determinism on a personal level follow a compulsively repetitive pattern that could be described as a vicious circle. In the novel, this psychological pattern correlates metaphorically with a cyclical determinism on a historical level. Artistically opposed to this essentially negative view of history is an equally deterministic alternative, Marxism. It offers, in

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[14]Tolstoy, p. 1131.

Hugh's idealized vision, transcendence of the past and ethical progression. Under the Volcano tends to refute this optimistic alternative, and to confirm Geoffrey's view that history, in accordance with Tolstoy's "circle of necessity," follows a meaningless cyclical pattern.

IA

In what is clearly a commentary on his own condition, the Consul quotes Tolstoy on the lack of free will apparent in a drunkard:

> "The act of a madman or a drunkard, old bean," he said, "or of a man labouring under violent excitement seems less free and more inevitable to the one who knows the mental condition of the man who performed the action, and more free and less inevitable to the one who does not know it." (UV 308)

The reader is obviously in the former position with respect to the Consul's alcoholism. Consequently, his actions seem less free and more inevitable. According to modern psychiatry, the alcoholic conforms to deterministic pattern. A set of developmental trends are transformed into a recurring sequence of behaviour which forms a cyclical pattern. Robert P. Knight, whose analysis is quoted in the American Handbook of Psychiatry, argues that the alcoholic's demands for indulgence in the adult world are frustrated, and

> he reacts to the frustration with intolerable disappointment and rage. This reaction impels him to hostile acts and wishes against the thwarting individuals for which he then feels guilty and punishes himself masochistically. As reassurances against guilt feelings and fears of dangerously destructive masochism and reality consequences of his behaviour, he feels excessive need for affection and indulgence as proof of affection. Again, the excessive claims, doomed to frustration, arise, and the circle is complete. The use of alcohol as a pacifier for disappointment, and rage, as a potent means of carrying out hostile impulses to spite his parents and friends, as a method of securing gratification of the need for affection is now interweaving itself in the neurotic vicious circle.[15]

The actions of the Consul, who is trapped within this addictive cycle, follow a corresponding behavioural sequence.

Before adducing textual evidence to support this contention, an attempt to elucidate the causes of Geoffrey's alcoholism should be made. Fragments within the narrative of Under the Volcano provide the basis for such an etiology. His alcoholism is apparently without physiological basis. Dr. Guzman, who is portrayed as a reputable medical authority (in contrast to Dr. Vigil), said that there was nothing wrong with the Consul, and "never had been save that he wouldn't make up his mind to stop drinking" (UV 117). A partial explanation, which has already been discussed,[16]

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[15] American Handbook of Psychiatry, Vol.I, ed. Silvano Arieti (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 626-27.

[16] See above, pp.80, 102, 104.

is William James's association of alcoholism and mysticism. It is significant that James's analysis is alluded to in chapter seven since, in a letter, Lowry wrote that for the Consul's drunkness "no satisfactory etiology is ever given unless it is in VII."[17] From a standpoint more restrictively clinical than James, Stephen Spender argues that "the root cause of his drinking is loneliness."[18] He writes that

> the clinical history of the Consul's longing for companionship, fear of sex, deeply idealistic purtanism, rejection of the world, and suppressed homosexual tendency, is embedded in the narrative.[19]

Within this biographical setting, Geoffrey's alcoholism takes on a certain predictability. It appears to be an effect almost fully explainable in terms of prior causes.

This sense of the inevitable is strengthened when it is known that one of the principal etiological factors leading to alcoholism is childhood insecurity, especially that caused by maternal deprivation. In an essay entitled "Alcoholic Addiction and Personality (Nonpsychotic Conditions)," Israel Zwerling and Milton Rosenbaum put forward

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[17] Selected Letters, p. 75.

[18] Stephen Spender, "Introduction," Under the Volcano (New York: New American Lib., 1966), p. viii.

[19] Spender, p. ix.

the following argument:

> In essence, the alcoholic is seen as having been rendered vulnerable by early security-threatening experiences of deprivation, to addiction to a magical fluid which dispels tension and depression, relieves the sense of aloneness, places an instantaneously available source of pleasure at his disposal, permits the mastery and simultaneously the expression of unmanageable hostile feelings, and has a virtually built-in and guaranteed array of sufferings and punishments which serve both to appease the conscience mechanism and to feed back stress stimuli for continuing the cyclic addiction process.[20]

Geoffrey's childhood possesses an overabundance of "early security-threatening experiences of deprivation":

> His mother had died when he was a child, in Kashmir, and ... his father, who'd married again, had simply, yet scandalously, disappeared. ... Then, as if that were not enough, the stepmother died too, leaving the two children alone in India. (UV 19)

His susceptibility to alcoholism can be traced to this series of traumatic events, particularly to the loss of his mother; in The Disorganized Personality, George W. Kisker writes that "It has even been suggested by the psychoanalysts that alcohol is a symbolic substitute for the mother's milk."[21] It is at this point that the etiology of the Consul's

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[20] American Handbook of Psychiatry, Vol.I, pp. 627-28.

[21] George W. Kisker, The Disorganized Personality (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 251.

alcoholism converges with Freudian theories of infantile sexuality. Freud's hypothesis, that an oral phase initiates a child's sexual development, is elucidated by Robert A. Harper: "The first stage of sexuality, characteristic of the first year of the child's life, is the oral stage. During this phase the libidinal energy of the child is centered in the mouth and gratification is derived through this channel."[22] In an effort to recapture the feelings of security engendered by infantile orality,[23] Geoffrey turns to the substitute gratification of alcohol, and, by doing so, becomes subject to a cyclical addictive process.

The neurotic pattern of alcoholism (for which infantile sexuality may be a partial cause) is, later in the novel, overtly linked to a sexual experience. This association is indelibly made by an incident which occurred during the Consul's boyhood. Jacques Laruelle accidentally discovers Geoffrey attempting (for the first time it is implied) to have sexual relations with a girl. After this

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[22]Robert A. Harper, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy: 36 Systems (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 14.

[23]"The tyranny of these early events is enormous. Later experience in life can minimize but never nullify the meaning of a mother-child relation in which complete satisfaction of an instinct, hunger, only can occur through and is not distinguished from the perfection of a secure, mutually rewarding association." G. Lolli, quoted in American Handbook of Psychiatry, Vol. I, p. 627. (More recently, Bruno Bettelheim in The Children of the Dream (New York: Avon, 1970) has shown that the importance of "a mother-child relation" is minimal within certain societal frameworks.)

interruption,

> they all went to a tavern with some queer name, as "The Case is Altered." It was patently the first time the Consul had ever been into a bar on his own initiative; he ordered Johnny Walkers all round loudly, but the waiter, encountering the proprietor, refused to serve them and they were turned out as minors. Alas, their friendship did not for some reason survive these two sad, though doubtless providential, little frustrations. (UV 21)

The Consul is permanently shaped by what appear from Laruelle's detached perspective to be trivial frustrations. By his act of seeking "alcohol as a pacifier for disappointment," Geoffrey initiates a pattern which will recur throughout his life. Alcohol becomes a substitute not only for maternal affection but also for sexual gratification. His hostility towards Jacques, the source of his frustration, foreshadows the later hatred which he, as an alcoholic, will direct against the world of "thwarting individuals" who prevent him from obtaining unrealistic demands. This incident, through the psychological association of sexuality with alcohol, establishes the sequence of behaviour found in the addictive cycle as a paradigm governing the Consul's actions.

The operation of this paradigm is evident in his interaction with Yvonne. The cyclical pattern of his actions can be seen in the Consul's summary account of their marriage:

> Far too soon it had begun to seem too much of a triumph, it had been too good, too horribly unimaginable to lose, impossible finally to bear: it was as if it had become itself its own foreboding that it could not last, a foreboding that was like a presence too, turning his steps towards the taverns again. (UV 201)

The final word, "again," indicates that Geoffrey relapsed into alcoholism, which in effect frames his marital relations with Yvonne. With her, the Consul's excessive need for affection seems to be momentarily realizable, but this need, due to the unrealistic nature of his claims, is doomed to ultimate frustration, "turning his steps towards the taverns again." The marriage which was "impossible finally to bear" impels him to seek solace for disappointment in drink. It is crucial to realize that the Consul's relapse into alcoholism preceded Yvonne's infidelity, a fact which Laruelle (as a vocal projection of Geoffrey's own thoughts) points out:

> You deceive yourself. For instance that you're drowning your sorrows ... Because of Yvonne and me. But Yvonne knows. And so do I. And so do you. That Yvonne wouldn't have been aware. If you hadn't been so drunk all the time. To know what she was doing. Or care. (UV 219, Lowry's ellipse)

Once their marriage has failed, alcohol, as a sedative, also assuages his guilt, and reduces his masochistic tendencies (his spurious suffering, UV 219). More important,

it relieves the sense of aloneness created by the breakdown of his relationship with Yvonne, and places at his disposal "an instantaneously available source of pleasure" which is unobtainable for the Consul on an interpersonal level.

He is still entrapped within this addictive cycle when Yvonne returns to Mexico. The time that they spend together on their last day is framed (like their marriage) by the Consul's inebriation: on her arrival and just before his death, he is in a bar. On the morning of her return, the Consul's efforts to have sexual relations with Yvonne are frustrated, and, in a recurrence of the pattern set up in childhood, he alleviates his failure by alcohol:

> "Sorry, it isn't any good I'm afraid."
> The Consul shut the door behind him....
> And then the whiskey bottle: he drank
> fiercely from it. (UV 90)

However, this sequence is not merely a repetition of the earlier incident; it is causally connected with the previous failure.

Geoffrey's impotence with Yvonne can be attributed to Jacque's earlier intrusion, an intrusion repeated in Mexico when "he'd stumbled upon the Consul and Yvonne embracing" (UV 15). Later, during his sexual relations with Maria, the Consul is haunted by the possibility of yet another interruption: "thunder blew the door open, the face of M. Laruelle faded in the door" (UV 351). In

the present case, the Consul fears that Hugh will play the role of inadvertent voyeur:

> he was where he was, sweating now, glancing once - but never ceasing to play the prelude, the little one-fingered introduction to the unclassifiable composition that might still just follow - out of the window at the drive, fearful himself lest Hugh appear there, then he imagined he really saw him at the end of it coming through the gap, now that he distinctly heard his step in the gravel ... No one. But now, now he wanted to go, passionately he wanted to go ... to the cantina.... (UV 90, first ellipse Lowry's)

The fear of intrusion, which disrupts his lovemaking, is immediately followed by thoughts of the cantina. He is victimized by an associative process of ideas in which sexuality is displaced by alcohol. Moreover, physiologically as well as psychologically, his impotence may be causally related to alcohol, which (as modern psychiatry confirms) "provokes the desire but it takes away the performance."

Lowry, in his long letter to Jonathan Cape, writes that the "meanings of the Consul's impotence are practically inexhaustible."[24] Among other things, it carries enormous symbolic weight in terms of his relationship with Yvonne. The Consul's inability to achieve sexual consummation with her dramatically foreshadows his inability to regain the sense of personal unity which he had fleetingly shared with

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[24] Selected Letters, p. 73.

Yvonne. In addition, the memory of his sexual failure causally operates against their possible reunion. Later in the novel, for example, the Consul's desire to express the tenderness which he momentarily feels for Yvonne is involuntarily stifled: "he realised that without another drink shame for this morning would prevent his looking in her eyes" (UV 196). His sense of inadequacy is converted into hostile impulses which are directed against Yvonne. He experiences "this urgent desire to hurt, to provoke" (UV 198). Although, at this point in the novel, Geoffrey's hostility is not expressed openly, towards the end of the book these hostile impulses are no longer supressed. Having had several glasses of mescal, the Consul stridently attacks Yvonne and Hugh:

> "... even if Hugh makes the most of it again it won't be long, it won't be long, before he realises he's only one of the hundred or so other ninneyhammers with gills like codfish and veins like racehorses - prime as goats all of them, hot as monkeys, salt as wolves in pride! No, one will be enough." (UV 313)

The similes taken from Othello,[25] suggest that the major source of his hostility is jealousy. A fear of sexual inadequacy might also be a contributing factor, as the last phrase quoted contains the ambiguous suggestion that no one

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[25] Cf. "as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride," Othello, III, iii, 404-05.

will be enough.

Whatever the interpretation of his anger, the Consul's actions conform to the pattern of behaviour established by the addictive cycle. In the final rupture between Yvonne and himself, alcohol is used as a means of releasing hostility, and the cyclical pattern is completed when he runs to the Farolito to order mescal as reassurance against guilt feelings, and as symbolic gratification of his need for affection. Geoffrey compulsively oscillates between two alternatives: a social world of human interrelationships and a private world of alcohol. These polarities are explicitly formulated in his question,

> Could one be faithful to Yvonne and the Farolito both? (UV 201)

As the novel presents the two as mutually exclusive, the answer is negative. (The Consul's intermittent movement between these two alternatives is insufficient for reconciliation with Yvonne.) Trapped by this disjunction, his efforts to cope with the disappointments and frustrations of external reality become enfeebled, and he increasingly retreats into the security afforded by "a magical fluid," mescal.[26] The

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[26]The quality of tragic stature, which at times the Consul possesses, can be partially understood in this context. His alcoholism stems from a nonrecognition of the limits imposed on the individual by external reality. However, unlike the conventional tragic hero, the Consul, instead of acting to transcend those limits, passively escapes from them.

Consul's actions are confined by alcoholism to a recurring sequence of behaviour that is inimical to, and ultimately excludes, the possibilities of human contact represented by Yvonne. Imprisoned by this regressive need for alcohol, Geoffrey denies the potential future imaged by Yvonne, and submits to the demands of the past.

IB

In Under the Volcano, the Oedipal myth, and the psychological theory which Freud based upon it, constitute another form of determinism within the novel. Occasionally, Lowry's handling of the Oedipus complex is clumsy, particularly in chapter nine where, as Perle Epstein contends, he "indulges in some rather heavy-handed Freudianizing."[27] In this instance, Freudian theory seems to place unnecessarily crude limitations on characterization, limitations which are glaringly obvious in a prose style extraordinarily responsive to psychological nuances. Nevertheless, even (especially?) in its least subtle usage, the Oedipal theme receives partial artistic justification in the context of the determinism that pervades Under the Volcano. Lowry's use of the Oedipal myth is extensive. It is introduced by the novel's first epigraph,

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[27] Epstein, p. 158.

which is taken from Antigone. Hugh, describing the importance of the guitar in his early life, alludes to Antigone, saying that like "Oedipus' daughter it was my guide and prop" (UV 177). The myth is further associated with Hugh by the name of an old steamer which he had shipped on, the Oedipus Tyrannus (UV 165-68). The steamer "had a marked list to port, and, who knows, one to starboard as well" (UV 166). Its physical condition can be viewed as a metaphorical extension of the probable linguistic origin of the name, Oedipus: swollen or pierced foot. Similarly, the Consul's "limp" (UV 314), as Hilda Thomas argues[28], can be seen as related to the mark of lameness that identifies Oedipus. The Consul is linked most explicitly to the myth by a book which he glances at, Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale (UV 209), an adaptation of Sophocles's Oedipus Rex.[29] Cocteau's title reappears in the name of the huge looping-the-loop machine, the Maquina infernal. It provides a concrete image of the deterministic movement

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[28]Hilda Thomas, p. 52.

[29]The Consul opens Cocteau's play: "'the gods exist, they are the devil,' Baudelaire informed him" (UV 209). This quotation, the play's second epigraph, is incorrectly attributed to Baudelaire (who wrote the first one). It is in fact written by Cocteau himself. It is also mistranslated, as "Les dieux existent: c'est le diable" should read, "The gods exist; that's the devil of it."* The error may have been intentional on Lowry's part, as elsewhere in the novel he conveys the Consul's sense of impending doom by a mistranslation of a sign (UV 128).

*Jean Cocteau, The Infernal Machine, trans. Albert Bermel (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1963), p. 3 .

of Cocteau's play:

> Watch now, spectator. Before you is a fully wound machine. Slowly its spring will unwind the entire span of a human life. It is one of the most perfect machines devised by the infernal gods for the mathematical annihilation of a mortal.[30]

The analogy to a machine, by which Cocteau describes his play, is equally applicable to Under the Volcano: in both works, the entire span of a human life is mechanically unwound.

The sense of determinism which pervades the novel is derived, in large measure, from Lowry's use of Freud's psychological transfiguration of the Oedipal myth. In The Interpretation of Dreams Freud claims that

> If Oedipus Rex moves a modern audience no less than it did the contemporary Greek one, the explanation can only be that its effect does not lie in the contrast between destiny and human will, but is to be looked for in the particular nature of the material on which that contrast is exemplified.[31]

Freud theorizes that

> his destiny moves us only because it might have been ours - because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.[32]

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[30]Cocteau, p. 6.

[31]Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1965), pp. 295-96.

[32]Dreams, p. 296.

This interpretation of Sophocles's tragedy provides the basis for Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex. Its psychological dynamics are explained by Harper:

> Freud pointed out that the child in the Oedipal period of life becomes sexually interested in the parent of the opposite sex and develops a feeling of rivalry towards and a wish to displace the parent of the same sex. Soon learning that such sexual interest in the parent of the other sex is forbidden and feeling hate as well as love for the parent of the same sex, the child develops strong feelings of anxiety and guilt. Expecting punishment for his "criminal" desires, the male child fantasies becoming castrated.[33]

If the Oedipal conflict is unsuccessfully resolved, serious personality disturbances can occur. The individual becomes incapable of transferring his sexual impulses outside of the family, and, in the case of the male, he becomes fixated on his mother.

In Under the Volcano, the principal characters are subject to the dynamics of the Oedipal complex. Hugh, for example, wonders why he is "interested only in married women - why? - incapable finally of love altogether..." (UV 179). Yvonne's personality is even more obviously dominated by the Oedipal complex (or, more specifically, the Electra complex). Yvonne's recollections in chapter nine of her early life indicate clearly that her attachment to the Consul is based on her unresolved love for her father. In what is an obvious

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[33] Harper, p. 15.

parallel to Geoffrey's involvement in the Samaritan incident, Yvonne's father, Captain Constable, had the "besetting illusion ... that he'd been cashiered from the army; and everything started up to this imagined disgrace" (UV 260). Moreover, he, like the Consul, suffered from dementia that was "strictly alcoholic in character" (UV 260). The biographical parallelism is completed by the fact that Captain Constable had been American consul to Iquique (a town in Chile). The identification is so total that Yvonne finds the psychological explanation inescapable. But, even though she can intellectually comprehend her situation, she cannot escape the psychological constraints imposed by her early Oedipal experience.

> How many times in the misery of the last year had Yvonne not tried to free herself of her love for Geoffrey by rationalising it away, by analysing it away, by telling herself.... (UV 259)

Her return - which precipitates the tragedy - is motivated by this inexorable psychological reality.

The Consul's personality is also subject to demands of the Oedipal complex. He is compelled to search for a surrogate figure to replace his mother who had died when he was a child. This process is implied through the juxtaposition of his mother with his first love: "how sad, remote as the memory of first love, even of his mother's death, it seemed..."

(UV 339). The identification is made more obviously in the Terminal Cantina El Bosque, where Senora Gregorio appears unmistakably as a surrogate figure for Geoffrey's own mother:

> He held out his hand, then dropped it - Good God, what had come over him? For an instant he'd thought he was looking at his own mother. Now he found himself struggling with his tears, that he wanted to embrace Senora Gregorio, to cry like a child, to hide his face on her bosom. (UV 229)

A complementary interpretation of this scene can be based on Kisker's statement that "one of the major characteristics of the male alcoholic is his overdependence upon his mother and his strong attachment to mother figures."[34] Just before his death the Consul exhibits his recurring tendency to discover through hallucinations a lost maternal image:

> For he saw that the face of the reclining beggar was slowly changing to Senora Gregorio's, and now in turn to his mother's face, upon which appeared an expression of infinite pity and supplication. (UV 342)

Most importantly, in Geoffrey's mind Yvonne is also clearly associated with his mother:

> such desolation, such a desperate sense of abandonment, bereavement, as during this last year without Yvonne, he had never known in his life, unless it was when his mother died. (UV 197-98)

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[34]Kisker, p. 251.

For Geoffrey, like Yvonne, their marriage is a "marriage partly into the past" (UV 201).

In both cases, unmanageable Oedipal guilt results from the apparent realization of hostile wishes directed against the parent of the same sex: Geoffrey's father "disappears" and Yvonne's mother died when she was six (UV 258).[35] Freud, in his essay, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," writes that "it is a dangerous thing if reality fulfils such repressed wishes."[36] In Freudian terms, this translation of fantasy into reality represents parricide, "the principal and primal crime of humanity as well as of the individual."[37] To alleviate the tremendous guilt accruing from this act, the individual feels a need to masochistically punish himself. According to Freud, this guilt is converted into castration anxiety. In the description of the Consul's sexual intercourse with Maria, this specific fear is evoked by the adjective "crucified":

> (and it was this calamity he now, with
> Maria, penetrated, the only thing alive
> in him now this burning boiling crucified

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[35]Yvonne's age, at the time of her mother's death, places her in the Oedipal period, "usually thought of as extending from ages three to seven." Harper, p. 15. (No specific dates are given for Geoffrey's early life.)

[36]Character and Culture, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 284.

[37]"Dostoevsky and Parricide," Character and Culture, p. 281.

> evil organ - God is it possible to suffer more than this, out of this suffering something must be born, and what would be born was his own death) (UV 349)

The fact that Kashmir, the scene of his father's "disappearance," obtrudes into Geoffrey's consciousness just before the sexual act, lends support to this interpretation.

The quoted passage also reveals Geoffrey's anticipation of his own death. On the next page it is implied that he not only expects, but partly seeks the death which he is "half whispering to himself." This impulse can be attributed to the sense of guilt which underlies his castration anxiety. By his masochistic need for self-punishment, the Consul is, in Freudian theory, rendered vulnerable to Thanatos, the Death instinct. Lowry consciously used Freud's concept of Thanatos in Under the Volcano, stating that in chapter ten, "the opening train theme is related to Freudian death dreams."[38] The Consul, in seeking punishment ("I love hell," UV 314), finds expiation for the psychological crime of parricide in his death at Parian. Clearly associated with this fate, and less directly with Yvonne's, is the Oedipal complex. Their pet cat, named Oedipuss,[39] had died, and - with obvious foreshadowing - had

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[38] Selected Letters, p. 81.

[39] Later, on seeing Mr. Quincey's cat in the garden, the Consul alludes once more to their dead cat: "my-little-Oedipusspusspuss" (UV 134). In terms of this association, the incident in which Mr. Quincey's cat holds a live butterfly between her teeth is symbolic of both the danger of - and

"been thrown down the barranca" (UV 89). As discussion of the cat's death immediately precedes Geoffrey's impotency, Oedipal guilt is yet another explanation of his sexual failure with Yvonne. This incident, in which Eros fails, leaving its antagonist, Thanatos, unchecked, exemplifies the negative psychological determinism governing the Consul's actions. In bondage to his Oedipal past, to the tyranny of early events, Geoffrey is unable to reach either sexual consummation with Yvonne or the future that this would have represented.

II A

The two interrelated aspects of determinism operative in the Consul's personal life, alcoholism and the Oedipal conflict, function as metaphors of a larger social determinism.

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potential liberation from - destructive Oedipal forces:

> Finally the cat extended a preparate paw for the kill, opening her mouth, and the insect, whose wings had never ceased to beat, suddenly and marvellously flew out as, might indeed the human soul from the jaws of death....
> (UV 140)

As well as illustrating the epigraph from Goethe ("Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him we can save"), this passage symbolically implies that transcendence of the Oedipal situation is possible, a suggestion reinforced by Mexican mythology as the butterfly god is "the symbol of rebirth." Irene Nicholson, Mexican and Central American Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), p. 43.

By virtue of Geoffrey's dual role "as a private individual and as a public representative" (noted by Kilgallin[40]), there is mediation between the two levels. A private abdication of responsibility is correlated with an official one; Geoffrey is an ex-Consul. Moreover, the severance of Geoffrey's marital relations symbolically corresponds with the breakdown of diplomatic ties between nations.[41] On an individual level, the result is Geoffrey's death; on a historical level, the result is war. In addition, the pattern of cyclical regression, dominant in his personal life, is also exhibited on a wider scale within Under the Volcano. Describing the novel's unity of structure, Max-Pol Fouchet writes:

> Nous sommes ici dans un univers de retour cyclique. Tout événement s'y retrouve, s'y redit parce qu'il correspond à un archétype absolu, le reprend, le reproduit, le résonne.[42]

While structurally accurate, this description does not convey the negativity inherent in the cyclical return, where events, personal and historical, recur in a compulsive and destructive pattern.

The Consul's addictive cycle, for example, extends

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[40]"Faust and Under the Volcano," p. 50.

[41]For a discussion of the diplomatic manoeuvring which resulted from Mexico's expropriation of foreign oil companies, see Dale Edmonds, p. 215.

[42]Max-Pol Fouchet, "No se puede ...," Can. Lit., No.8 (Spring 1961), p. 26.

metaphorically to suggest a dark view of history:

> "What's the good? Just sobering him up for a day or two's not going to help. Good God, if our civilization were to sober up for a couple of days it'd die of remorse on the third -" (UV 117)

Hugh implies that civilization, faced with the intolerable nature of its historical reality, indulges in a form of escapism analogous to Geoffrey's retreat into alcoholism. Lowry, in a letter, insists on this correspondence:

> The drunkenness of the Consul is used on one plane to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during the war, or during the period immediately preceding it, which is almost the same thing, and what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind.[43]

A passage describing a drunken rider is particularly suggestive in the light of Lowry's remark:

> The horse reared wildly, rebellious - half fearful, half contemptuous, perhaps, of its rider - then it catapulted in the direction of the car: the man, who seemed to be falling straight backwards at first, miraculously saved himself only to slip to one side like a trick rider, regained the saddle, slid, slipped, fell backwards - just saving himself each time, but always with the reins, never with the pommel, holding them in one hand now, the stirrups still unrecovered as he furiously beat the horse's flanks with the machete he had withdrawn from a long curved scabbard. (UV 22)

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[43] Selected Letters, p. 66.

Laruelle identifies "this maniacal vision of senseless frenzy" (UV 23) with the Consul; it also, in terms of the universal implications suggested by Lowry, can be interpreted as a vision of history.

To alcohol as a metaphor of escapism is a corollary metaphor: alcohol as a means of releasing hostility. The destructive violence, represented by the "machete," is largely verbal in the Consul, but it is still analogous to the massive hatred released in war. The wild horse symbolizes what Lowry calls "the animal forces of nature,"[44] which, in ironic contrast to the novel's first epigraph, are not "tamed":

> Wonders are many, and none is more
> wonderful than man....
>
> ... he tames the horse of shaggy mane,
> he puts the yoke upon its neck....

In his essay, "Elements Towards a Spatial Reading of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano," Victor Doyen reveals the dramatic irony of Sophocles's epigraph, remarking that "in this novel the horse will not be tamed but released, and that precisely this act is the cause of both Geoffrey's and Yvonne's death..."[45] The drunken rider's tenuous and intermittent control of the horse, parallel to the Consul's fluctuating contact with reality,

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[44]Lowry uses this phrase to describe the fatal horse "which the Consul later lets loose." Selected Letters, p. 81.

[45]Victor Doyen, "Elements Towards a Spatial Reading of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano," ES, 50: 1969, p. 73.

is symbolic of civilization where historical reality results from an ambivalent process of escapism and destructive engagement. Later in the novel, the inner logic of this pattern is described by the Consul.

> "There must be calamity because otherwise the people who did the interfering would have to come back and cope with their responsibilities...." (UV 311)

Such a vision of history as a mixture of escapism and destruction correlates with the addictive cycle of the Consul's alcoholism.

Nevertheless, Lowry does not allow the reader to dismiss Geoffrey's pessimistic attitude towards history as a mere projection of his own situation:

> Read history. ... What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course? Like a barranca, a ravine, choked up with refuse, that winds through the ages, and peters out.... (UV 310)

> Countries, civilisations, empires, great hordes perish for no reason at all, and their soul and meaning with them.... (UV 310)

The Consul sets forth a fatalistic theory of history. In this respect he echoes Tolstoy who argues that, because the chain of causation can never be fully comprehended, "we are forced to fall back upon fatalism in history to explain irrational events...."[46] Unable to perceive a logical order in events,

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[46] War and Peace, p. 565.

the Consul sees only incoherence. He can attach no rational significance to history: events occur arbitrarily.

In the heated argument with Hugh (whom he suspects is resuming sexual relations with Yvonne), Geoffrey contradicts this fatalistic position. He argues that there is a discernible pattern to history, "a sort of determinism about the fate of nations" (UV 309). The Consul goads Hugh by citing examples to demonstrate that the "heroic" events which inspire his half-brother conform to a futile, recurring sequence.

> "Not long ago it was poor little defenceless Ethiopia. Before that, poor little defenceless Flanders. To say nothing of course of the poor little defenceless Belgian Congo. And tomorrow it will be poor little defenceless Latvia. Or Finland." (UV 310)
>
> "Just go back to Tolstoy's day...."
> "Then it was poor little defenceless Montenegro. Poor little defenceless Serbia. Or back a little farther still, Hugh, to your Shelley's, when it was poor little defenceless Greece - Cervantes! - As it will be again, of course. Or to Boswell's - poor little defenceless Corsica!" (UV 310)

In opposition to Hugh's championship of the Republican's cause, Geoffrey sees the Spanish Civil War as merely one of a series of meaningless, compulsively recurring wars which constitute the farce of history. With a pessimism not found in fatalism, which merely holds that events are random and incomprehensible, the Consul argues that history does have

an order: a consistently dark one. Contradicting Hugh's belief in historical progress, he posits the idea of regression, a pattern of universal recurrence whereby present events repeat the destructive futility of past events.

For this regressive movement of history, the Consul offers a Freudian explanation:

> "The dishonest mass rationalisation of motive, justification of the common pathological itch. Of the motives for interference; merely a passion for fatality half the time." (UV 311)

The "passion for fatality" is clearly a reference to Thanatos. Freud, in his essay "Reflections Upon War and Death," argues that the unceasing suppression of instincts leads to a condition of strain, and the inhibited instincts are perpetually ready "to break through to gratification at any suitable opportunity."[47] Granted this assumption, the attraction of war is clearly explicable:

> ... the greater units of humanity, the peoples and states, have mutually abrogated their moral restraints ... to permit themselves relief for a while from the heavy pressure of civilization and to grant a passing satisfaction to the instincts it holds in check.[48]

Even Hugh recognizes this susceptibility:

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[47] Character and Culture, p. 117.

[48] "Reflections," Character and Culture, p. 118

> Darkness, disaster! How the world fed on it. In the war to come correspondents would assume unheard-of importance, plunging through flame to feed the public its little gobbets of dehydrated excrement.[49] ... Hugh inclined his ear to the pulse of this world beating in that latticed throat, whose voice was now pretending to be horrified at the very thing by which it proposed to be engulfed the first moment it could be perfectly certain the engulfing process would last long enough. (UV 153-54)

The death wish, vividly portrayed by Hugh, suggests that the periodicity of war is due to the intermittent return of the repressed.

Freud, in an interchange of open letters with Albert Einstein entitled "Why War?," suggests how this destructive pattern can be altered:

> Our mythological theory of instincts makes it easy for us to find a formula for indirect methods of combating war. If willingness to engage in war is an effect of the destructive instinct, the most obvious plan will be to

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[49] Contained in Hugh's remarks is an insight which Marshall McLuhan would later develop:

> ... newsgathering agencies on a world scale ... enable the press of any nation to keep mobilized the passions of whole populations year after year until the moment comes for the blow. And it also requires a prolonged stirring of passions by means of the press and allied agencies to launch and to maintain a world war. ... And the press used as a means of thrill and excitement produces a general emotional situation which leads to a crescendo, and crescendo calls for a catharsis - a blood-bath.

The Mechanical Bride (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 7.

> bring Eros, its antagonist, into play against it. Anything that encourages the growth of emotional ties between men must operate against war.[50]

Significantly, a description of a cock fight in Under the Volcano links by a simile the contending instinctual needs of Eros and Thanatos, and equates the realization of the former with the nonfulfilment of the latter:

> ... the vicious little man-made battles, cruel and destructive, yet somehow bedraggledly inconclusive, each brief as some hideously mismanaged act of intercourse.... (UV 287)

In this context, Geoffrey's impotence, the failure of Eros on its most basic level, has wide implications. Hilda Thomas writes that "Lowry was familiar with Beyond the Pleasure Principle, and the struggle between love and death - the desire of the Consul for reunion with Yvonne against which is pitted his impulse to self-destruction - provides the dominant theme of Under the Volcano."[51] Geoffrey's failure to achieve such a reunion symbolizes the inadequacy of Eros to counter the force of Thanatos on a historical plane. The Consul's death, and the World War which it represents, can both be ascribed to the failure of love. The psychological framework, provided by Freud's theory of opposing instinctual demands, validates the novel's central theme: "No se puede vivir sin amar."

The Oedipal conflict, from which the antithesis of Eros and Thanatos emerges, was part of Lowry's earliest conception of Under the Volcano. The following passage (in essentially the same form) stood as the penultimate paragraph

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[50] Character and Culture, p. 144.

[51] Hilda Thomas, p. 14.

of his short story version:

> Bent double, groaning with the weight, an old lame Indian was carrying on his back, by means of a strap looped over his forehead, another poor Indian, yet older and more decrepit than himself. He carried the older man and his crutches, trembling in every limb under this weight of the past, he carried both their burdens. (UV 280)

Lowry's intentions concerning this quotation are made clear in a letter:

> The close of the chapter, with the Indian carrying his father, is a restatement and universalizing of the theme of humanity struggling on under the eternal weight of the past. But it is also Freudian (man eternally carrying the psychological burden of his father), Sophoclean, Oedipean, what have you, which relates the Indian to the Consul again.[52]

From a different perspective, the description of the Indian carrying another Indian on his back "by means of a strap looped over his forehead" parallels strikingly the Mayan depiction of time, personified by messengers carrying other messengers (all of whom signify numbers) on their backs to form a composite date.[53] Irene Nicholson in Mexican and Central

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[52] Selected Letters, p. 81.

[53] Explicit references to the Mayas in the novel can be found on pages 10, 81, and 201. When listing the months in the Mayan calendar, Geoffrey typically expresses his sense of doom by saying of the "unlucky Uayeb Period,"* "'I like that one most of all, the month that only lasts five days'" (UV 82).

*Victor W. von Hagen, World of the Maya (New York: New American Lib., 1960), p. 92.

American Mythology writes that "in hieroglyphs the messengers were represented carrying their burdens with the weight taken by a strap across the forehead...."[54] Victor W. Von Hagen states that "the Mayas believed that time was cyclical; that the same influence and thus the same consequences would be repeated in history."[55] That is, in Nicholson's phrase, "they saw history in terms of repetition."[56] In the novel, the Mayan concept of time further universalizes the obtrusive influence of the past. It combines with the compulsive pattern of alcoholism, the Freudian return of the repressed, and the doctrine of the Karmic Wheel, to suggest that a cyclical determinism underlies history. Their collective force in Under the Volcano is that of a structural paradigm, by which the domination of the past artistically (if not logically) closes Tolstoy's "circle of necessity."

II B

Juxtaposed to this regressive ordering of history in the novel is an alternative, Marxism. While equally deterministic, dialectical materialism offers a theory of progress

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[54]Nicholson, p. 44.

[55]von Hagen, p. 176.

[56]Nicholson, p. 44.

whereby the past is incorporated and transcended in the future. In its progression by evolutionary stages towards social unity, Marxism is, on a historical level, equivalent to the mystical ideals of the Upanishads. For Hugh, it is correlated with another religion, Christianity. Citing Arnold, he sees communism as "a spirit in the modern world playing a part analogous to that of Christianity in the old" (UV 304-05). Hugh is attracted to Marxism by this sense of revitalization:

> "Communism to me is not, essentially, whatever its present phase, a system at all. It is simply a new spirit, something which one day may or may not seem as natural as the air we breathe." (UV 304)

By its visionary methodology, Marxism opposes the cruel futility of history delineated by the Consul:

> "... Spaniard exploits Indian, then, when he had children, he exploited the half-breed, then the pure-blooded Mexican Spaniard, the criollo, then the mestizo exploits everybody, foreigners, Indians, and all. Then the Germans and Americans exploited him: now the final chapter, the exploitation of everybody by everybody else -" (UV 299-300)

Most importantly, through the proletariat's realization of solidarity, of class interests which supersede distinctions of nationality, communism envisions an end to man's recurring wars, and the establishment of an ultimate social harmony based upon economic equality.

The Marxist theory of history enters the novel principally through Hugh's interior monologues, which centre on the Spanish Civil War. As a journalist he had previously been in Spain during the fighting and, soon after Geoffrey's death, Hugh will set out with a cargo of T.N.T. which (if the blockade is successfully avoided) he will deliver to the hard-pressed Loyalists. Stephen Spender writes,

> The Spanish Civil War moves disturbingly through it [the novel] like a conscience, and there are pages haunted by the shadow of the evil of fascism. Hugh is to some extent a caricature of young English writers like the Cambridge undergraduate poet John Cornford [see UV 176], who was killed in the Spanish Civil War, and whom Lowry must have thought about with anguish.[57]

The Spanish Civil War is linked to Mexico by the figure of Juan Cerillo and "the first newsreels from the Spanish war, that have come back again" (UV 26) to the local cinema.

The Russian Revolution is also a significant Marxist source of reference in Under the Volcano. Hugh, for example, dreams of being awarded the star of Lenin by Stalin (UV 239). More obscurely, an allusion to "the White Russian Embassy in Zagreb in 1922" (UV 59) points to a civil war which - in contrast to Spain - the Communists won. And, the victorious general in that struggle, Trotsky, is now living in Mexico with Diego Rivera, whose paintings are mentioned in the

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[57] Spender, "Introduction," pp. xxi-xxii.

novel.[58] Moreover, as Kilgallin has noticed, Laruelle

> has been considering "making in France a modern film version of the Faustus story with some such character as Trotsky for its protagonist." Unrecognized by Laruelle, Geoffrey's life has been this very story; it is purposefully ironic that ten months later Trotsky is murdered in Mexico City, an exile with a short pointed beard like the Consul who, on the night of his death, is to be called "Trotsky".[59]

Lowry constructs a parallel between the Consul and Trotsky not on the grounds of common ideology (as the former mocks Hugh's Marxism) but on a shared quality of martyrdom.

These allusions to Marxism, while pervasive, are not, in the created reality of the novel, convincing as a theory of history. Communism is ironically diminished both by events and by its principal advocate, Hugh. The Marxist claim to historical inevitability is dramatically questioned by developments in the Spanish Civil War. This war (conceptually if not in actuality) represented the clash between totalitarian and socialist beliefs, with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany aiding the Nationalist army under General Franco while Russia, and individual leftists constituted into an International Brigade, extending help to the Republican side. On July 25,

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[58] See Under the Volcano, pp. 198, 204, and 211.

[59] "Faust and Under the Volcano," p. 44. I am not sure that Lowry is being "purposefully ironic" here. From one point of view, Laruelle has made this very film, using the Consul, a Trotsky figure, as his protagonist: "we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation." Selected Letters, p. 71.

1938, the Republican forces successfully crossed the Ebro river, penetrating deeply into territory held by the Nationalist army. However, Franco (with reinforcements brought from other sectors of the war) launched a counter-offensive which forced a gradual retreat of the Republican army and, by November 16, the last Republicans had recrossed to the left bank of the Ebro. During this battle, the biggest and bloodiest in the war, the Republic had, according to Hugh Thomas, "lost all its army in the north of Spain."[60] The Battle of Ebro, which is taking place during the same time as the narrative of Lowry's novel, is alluded to incessantly.[61] It prefigures the final collapse of the Republican army as, only two months later, the fall of Barcelona will in effect conclude the war with the victory of the Nationalist army. The impending defeat of the socialist forces in the Battle of Ebro (and in the war itself) undercuts the historical claims of Marxism.

Some of this disillusionment in Marxist ideology is evident in Hugh's bitter reference to

> the noble army of pimps and experts,
> who've already gone home to practice
> the little sneers with which they
> propose to discredit the whole thing -
> the first moment it becomes fashionable
> not to be a communist fence. (UV 102)

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[60] Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 704.

[61] See Under the Volcano, pp. 95, 97, 121, 151, 179, 187, 213, 232, 237.

What is exhibited here Oswald Spengler predicted in The Decline of the West: man's loss of "belief in theory of any kind and with it the sentimental optimism of an eighteenth century that imagined that unsatisfactory actualities could be improved by the application of concepts."[62] During his moments of doubt, Hugh's interior monologues begin to resemble the Consul's Tolstoyan arguments:

> Try persuading the world not to cut its throat for half a decade or more, like me, under one name or another, and it'll begin to dawn on you that even your behaviour's part of its plan. (UV 103)
>
> Consciously a man lives on his own account in freedom of will, but he serves as an unconscious instrument in bringing about the historical ends of humanity. (Tolstoy)[63]

This sense of futility and self-abnegation is only temporary, soon replaced by its obverse: Hugh's more customary mood of heroic self-conceptualization.

Hugh clings to "the sentimental optimism" behind Marxist theory. By doing so he becomes, in Spender's term, a "caricature." Laruelle's initial assessment of Hugh "as an irresponsible bore, a professional indoor Marxman" (UV 8) is

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[62] Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, abr. Helmut Werner (New York: Modern Lib., 1932), p. 390. See the references to Spengler (UV 100) and (what is perhaps an allusion to Spengler's title) Hugh's dream of steering "the world, out of the Western Ocean of its misery" (UV 104).

[63] War and Peace, p. 565.

incomplete and inaccurate; nevertheless, it describes his very real flaws. There is an undeniable element of romantic posturing to Hugh's character. His inclination towards self-dramatization is revealed by his cowboy outfit, including a "ten-gallon Stetson" (UV 95) and "his pistol in the checkered holster lazily slapping his thigh" (UV 94). This outfit illustrates the conflict between reality and fantasy that is typical of Hugh. An extension of this conflict is the discontinuity between his ideals and his actions. Hugh betrays his profession of brotherhood through his early anti-Semitism and, more graphically, by committing adultery with his half-brother's wife. In chapter eight, discontinuity between ideals and actions is exhibited most fully. Hugh's dreams of being named "Hero of the Soviet Republic" are contradicted by his failure to help the Indian dying by the roadside. In self-disgust, Hugh uses Marxist rhetoric to describe the old women who remained on the bus (my underlining):

> With what solidarity, sensing danger, they had clutched their baskets of poultry to them, when they stopped, or peered round to identify their property, then had sat, as now, motionless. (UV 248)

His self-mockery based upon a discrepancy between personal ideals and achievements extends ironically to suggest an incompatibility of Marxist theory with human reality.

Although momentarily practising "the little sneers" which he had earlier scorned, Hugh does not abandon Marx's optimistic vision of the future. By this commitment, he lends to the novel a quality of hope which is lacking in Geoffrey's acquiescent view of the world as irremediable. "Hugh, as advocate on a historical plane for the future, parallels Yvonne's role on a personal level: both counterpoint the Consul's despairing attachment to the past." Unlike the Consul, Hugh can posit and intellectually affirm a reality which transcends the present one. To borrow Marcuse's language, Hugh possesses the "other dimension," the capacity to imagine the future invoking "qualitative change, the negation of the present."[64] That is, he can see "the potentiality as historical possibility."[65] But it is just this perception on Hugh's part that leads to the ironic discontinuity between his ideals and his actions. Thus, it is important to recognize that, at the end of the novel, Hugh bridges this gap by his willingness "to sit on top of a shipload of dynamite bound for the hard-pressed Loyalist armies" (UV 152). His action suggests a meaningful integration, perhaps rooted in the experience of Yvonne's and Geoffrey's deaths, in which the ideal and the real become fused.

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[64] Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 97.

[65] Marcuse, p. 97.

However, Hugh's effort to implement qualitative change (by transporting dynamite) is a preordained failure, because, as he realizes, "the Loyalists had already lost" (UV 153). Therefore, his attachment to communism appears quixotic. The cognitive theories of dialectical materialism represent, in the novel, not so much potentialities as "illusions" (UV 9). As a historical means of social transformation and as a viable alternative to the closed universe of Under the Volcano, Marxism appears unrealistic. The despairing interpretation of history as the periodic recurrence of wars, enunciated by the Consul, seems more valid within the texture of a novel that emphasizes the past, rather than the future.

In his opposing characterizations of Geoffrey and Hugh, Lowry presents a series of antitheses: past/future, regression/progression, withdrawal/commitment, despair/hope, and, at the end of the novel, death/life. The dramatic counterpoint between the two half-brothers is founded on a common ground: both cannot accept existing reality as tolerable. Hugh's response to this condition is (with ironic qualifications) revolutionary, dreaming "of changing the world ... through his actions" (UV 9). By contrast, Geoffrey's attitude towards that world is one of passivity and withdrawal. The conflicting positions of the half-brothers represent a clash between hope and despair, an opposition that in turn reflects their respective commitments to the future and to the past. Hugh's optimism, expressed

through his attachment to the historical possibilities of Marxism, is ironically diminished. His dream of changing the world appears illusionary, not only because of events in Spain, but also because of his "realisation that in no essential sense had he escaped from his past life" (UV 162). In the novel his failure of self-transfiguration symbolizes the failure of Marxist social transcendence. The past from which war has always emerged seems unalterable, and the Consul's despairing passivity seems justified.

His withdrawal into alcoholism thus becomes a universal metaphor. The regressive and destructive pattern of his addiction, stemming from psychological constraints, acts as a paradigm of mankind relapsing inevitably into the cataclysm of world war. The addictive cycle fuses with Freud's theory of civilization as neurosis, which accounts for the impending war as the return of the repressed. The Consul's vulnerability to Thanatos is symbolic of man's historical need for war. Because Oedipal dynamics confine the novel's three principal characters, the myth of Thanatos has even fuller credence as a generic condition. In Geoffrey's case, the ascendency of the Death principle over its putative opponent Eros unambiguously reflects the world at large. The negative recurrences of history that he enunciates are confirmed by events, thus refuting Hugh's Marxist affirmation. This sterile cycle of history, for which alcoholism is the primary metaphor, has

parallels on a religious plane. From Geoffrey's perspective the Karmic Wheel of Buddhism holds no ethical meaning - even though his death is attributable to it. Hinduism and the Mexican religions, with their shared belief in a process of dissolution through successive cycles, act as analogues for both Geoffrey's and the world's descent into catastrophe. References to Christianity in Under the Volcano, Lowry's version of the Inferno, emphasize damnation. Hence, even the novel's eclectic allusions to religion only serve to reinforce the quality of doom which surrounds the exemplary figure of the Consul.

These spiritual references do, however, contain the possibility of affirmation, such as liberation from the Karmic Wheel, the generation of a new cosmos in Hindu and Aztec religions, and the opportunity for redemption in Christianity. But for the Consul these positive aspects are obscured by an inner despair. Lowry stresses this limitation of perception by his description of Yvonne's ascent to the heavens upon her death. Nevertheless, it is the Consul's sense of doom which is more appropriate for exemplifying a world about to destroy itself. His selective focus on the darker religious aspects is borne out by World War II. Through the prophetic fugure of the Consul, Lowry creates in Under the Volcano a feeling of sombre determinism - rooted in the past - which encompasses religion, history, and psychology.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING OF ALLUSIONS IN UNDER THE VOLCANO

Through literary and historical allusions, Lowry furthers the link between the past and the present. As Stephen Spender points out, Lowry's allusions are "used as metaphor, as analogy."[1] This usage, Spender argues, contrasts with that found in the works of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound:

> Their devices of symbolism and mythology, their attitude towards tradition, their detachment and irony, were all directed towards an ever greater objectivisation. In the consciousness of these poets and novelists there seems the map of an immense landscape with, on one side of a central divide, the order of the past, on the other, the chaos of the present.[2]

For Lowry, the past is not a source of retrievable order; it is merely a source of analogy.

This view, which Spender articulates, is the main premise of this chapter. However, while acknowledging the truth and value of his generalization, I think that the argument underlying it needs further explanation, and, in parts, qualification. Spender asserts that "the aim of writers

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[1]Spender, "Introduction," p. xi.

[2]Spender, p. x.

like Joyce and Eliot, whom he [Lowry] adored, dreaded, imitated, misunderstood, was to invent a modern 'objective' literature which was purged of autobiographic, subjective elements. Joyce, Eliot, and Pound aimed at writing which was 'an escape from,' not 'an expression of,' personality."[3] It should be recognized that the works of all these writers contain "autobiographic" elements. Richard Ellman convincingly demonstrates in his biography, James Joyce, that much of the immense detail of Ulysses can be located in the life of its author. Moreover, Joyce's tendency to attack former friends in the book for real or imagined affronts (such as his satire of Oliver St. John Gogarty as Buck Mulligan)[4] indicates a subjective motivation, if not actual bias. Eliot's writing, although less tangibly, also remains to some extent "an expression of personality." Edmund Wilson suggests that "he is in some ways a typical product of our New England civilization" and contends that the sterility of The Waste Land can be identified "as the sterility of the Puritan temperament."[5] In the case of Ezra Pound, the references in The Pisan Cantos to internment are clearly related to the poet's life. Pound, like Eliot and Joyce, only partially "purged" his writing of autobiographical elements.

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[3]Spender, p. x.

[4]See, for example, Richard Ellman, James Joyce (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 390.

[5]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), pp. 102, 105.

On the other hand, if "Lowry's approach to writing was autobiographical, personal, subjective,"[6] as Spender claims, it is important to realize that in the creation of Under the Volcano a decade was spent in transforming autobiography into literary artifact. Lowry, in common with the other writers, used irony as a technique for "objectifying" autobiographical fragments. His treatment of Hugh in the novel, a satire on one aspect of the author's youth, is analogous to Joyce's treatment of Stephen Daedelus (or Pound's sense of ironic distance in Hugh Selwyn Mauberly).

While directed most obviously against Hugh, irony in Under the Volcano is not limited to this single characterization. The Consul, who is sometimes too closely identified with Lowry, is very much subject to ironic diminution, as in the following passage:

> The Consul felt a pang. Ah, to have a horse, and gallop away, singing, away to someone you loved perhaps, into the heart of all the simplicity and peace in the world; was not that like the opportunity afforded man by life itself?
> (UV 213)

The full irony of this passage becomes evident later in the novel when the reader learns that this horse, far from bringing "peace," is associated with the violent deaths of its rider, Yvonne, and the Consul himself. Lowry's sense of objective distance from the character of Geoffrey is made clear by

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[6]Spender, p. x.

Conrad Aiken's information that the bitter exchange between Hugh and the Consul is "a verbatim report of an argument between Lowry and himself in Cuernavaca, with the positions reversed: what the Consul says, Aiken said."[7] In literary practice (as opposed to approach), with ironic displacement of autobiographical fragments, Lowry diverges little from Joyce, Eliot, and Pound, and existing differences are a question of degree rather than of kind. Irony is a pervasive and controlling force in Under the Volcano. As an artistic technique it functions as a philosophical statement, registering the hiatus between illusion and reality. In essence, the novel describes the ironic fulfilment of the Consul's wish: "come back to me, Yvonne, if for only a day" (UV 41). Spender's comment that in the works of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound "the poet himself wears an impersonal mask"[8] is, I think, equally applicable to Under the Volcano.

For Lowry, however, this use of irony is not combined with the attitude towards myth expressed by Eliot in an essay on Ulysses:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. ... It is simply a way of controlling, of

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[7]Richard Hauer Costa, "A Quest for Eridanus," Ph.D. Diss., Pardue Univ., 1969, p. 60.

[8]Spender, p. x.

> ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.[9]

Lowry did not share the assumption that the past had an order and significance which the present lacked, and which the artist could use to shape meaningfully contemporary life. Instead of temporally imposed distinctions of order and chaos, he saw an identity, a sameness of past and present. This view is reflected in the extensive use of allusions as a means of analogy to the past in Under the Volcano, a usage that differs sharply from that of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound.

A brief comparison of historical parallels in Lowry's novel with those of The Waste Land illustrates this fundamental difference of literary perspective. In "The Fire Sermon," for example, two sets of lovers, one contemporary and one historical, are juxtaposed. The former pair, a small house agent's clerk and a woman who smoothes her hair "with automatic hand," lifelessly perform the sexual act. By his description, Eliot conveys the emotional barrenness of this encounter: the man's response is one of patronizing smugness and the woman's, one of mechanical indifference. Several lines later, two earlier lovers are depicted:

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[9]T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Seon Givens (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1963), p. 201.

> Elizabeth and Leicester
> Beating oars
> The stern was formed
> A gilded shell
> Red and gold
> The brisk swell
> Rippled both shores
> Southwest wind
> Carried down stream
> The peal of bells
> White towers
>
> (11. 279-289)

Eliot invests these historical lovers with an aesthetic meaning absent from the other pair. Elizabeth and Leicester possess a lyric nobility which is more than a mere extension of social rank (although this aspect is important to Eliot). Their relationship possesses an order and beauty which qualitatively distinguishes it from the sordid and dreary interaction of the other - contemporary - pair. Past and present are counterpointed as two separate modes: positive and negative.

In Under the Volcano, historical allusions function differently. They imply not antithesis but identity. Such historical figures as Maximilian and Carlotta essentially correspond with Geoffrey and Yvonne. In fact, Laruelle, in the novel's opening chapter, unconsciously identifies these two pairs of lovers:

> ... how they must have loved this land,
> these two lonely empurpled exiles, human
> beings finally, lovers out of their element -
> their Eden, without either knowing quite
> why, beginning to turn under their noses
> into a prison and smell like a brewery,
> their only majesty at last that of tragedy.
> ... "It is our destiny to come here, Carlotta.
> Look at this rolling glorious country, its

> hills, its valleys, its volcanoes beautiful beyond belief. And to think that it is ours! Let us be good and constructive and make ourselves worthy of it!" Or there were ghosts quarrelling: "No, you loved yourself, you loved your misery more than I. You did this deliberately to us." ... And suddenly they were weeping together, passionately, as they stood.
>
> But it was the Consul's voice, not Maximilian's... (UV 14-15)

Despite distinctions of social rank, there is none of the tonal disparity expressed by Eliot: the voices of Maximilian and Geoffrey are not antiphonal; they are interchangeable. Their doomed lives reach a tragic climax in a common setting. Both are killed in Mexico as representatives of European powers because of local political passions they only partially comprehend. An admixture of nobility and impetuous folly leads to death in both instances.[10] Geoffrey ("our ruddy monarch," UV 96) and Maximilian (a human being finally) are unified by features of personality and experience which transcend demarcations of time or rank. In contrast to Eliot, Lowry assumes that the essential contours of the human condition are not variable with past and present. This attitude, which serves as a basis for analogy, underlies his use of allusions in most cases.

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[10] In addition to the correspondence between Maximilian and Geoffrey, there is an implied parallel between the reference to Carlotta's insanity (UV 14) and Yvonne's vision of the future which includes "a figure of a woman having hysterics, jerking like a puppet and banging her fists upon the ground" (UV 279).

I A

One of the most important sources of analogy in Under the Volcano is mythology. Figures taken from the Greek underworld are especially prominent. The barranca which gapes throughout the novel, and into which the Consul's dead body will be thrown, is explicitly identified with "Tartarus" (UV 313), the place of punishment in Hades's realm. This identification recurs in the final chapter, reinforcing the link between Tartarus and the Mexican setting:

> Popocatepetl towered through the window, its immense flanks partly hidden by rolling thunderheads; its peak blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead, the barranca... directly beneath it. Under the Volcano! It was not for nothing the ancients had placed Tartarus under Mt Aetna, nor within it, the monster Typhoeus, with his hundred heads and - relatively - fearful eyes and voices.[11] (UV 334)

This passage, which contains the only textual reference to the novel's title, suggests that the unifying concept of Under the Volcano is associated at least in part with the notion of

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[11]The allusion to Typhoeus, or Typhon, gives further mythological richness to the Consul's death which occurs later in this chapter. Robert Graves writes that Zeus "pursued Typhon with thunderbolts" and "ended the running fight by hurling Mount Aetna upon him, and fire belches from its cone to this day."* Details of this legendary battle are apparently echoed by Lowry. "Thunder growled outside the Farolito" (UV 359) and the Consul finds himself "falling, falling into the volcano... with this noise foisting lava in his ears ..." (UV 375).

*Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 134.

Tartarus. As the pagan version of hell, Tartarus correlates with, and universalizes, the Dantean intention voiced by Lowry in a letter: "the book was planned and still is a kind of Inferno."[12] In terms of characterization, the frequent allusions to the criminals of the Greek underworld give a particular kind of symbolic depth and meaning to the Consul's fate.

One of the most important figures in this regard is Sisyphus. In an essay entitled "The Myth of Sisyphus in Under the Volcano" Jim Barnes argues that "Geoffrey Firmin has his stone, which in at least one sense is all humanity, and in another more important sense is his own private hell of being. And this stone is forever tumbling, rolling, crashing back, back down into hell. In fact, this seems to be the pattern of the whole novel."[13] From this perspective, Barnes views the madman "eternally committed" (UV 224) to perpetually flinging an old bicycle tire as a Sisyphus figure: both are "eternally committed to an absurd task."[14] Both are reflections of the Consul.

Incidents within Geoffrey's life can be found which parallel the causes of Sisyphus's banishment to Tartarus.

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[12] Selected Letters, p. 67.

[13] Jim Barnes, "The Myth of Sisphus in Under the Volcano," PrS, 42 (1968), p. 342.

[14] Barnes, p. 344.

According to Robert Graves, one explanation of why Sisyphus was condemned to his futile labour was "because he had always lived by robbery and often murdered unsuspecting travellers."[15] Barnes notes that the Consul is accused of an analogous crime: in an armed ship, disguised as a merchant vessel, he captured and burned the officers of a German U-boat.[16] Another reason for Sisyphus's punishment, cited by Graves,[17] is his betrayal of Zeus's divine secrets. On a mystical plane, the Consul feels that he has committed a similar betrayal:

> Give me back my purity, the knowledge of the Mysteries, that I have betrayed and lost. (UV 289)

Furthermore, Lowry's description of the Consul's dying evokes Sisyphus's agonizing and futile labour:

> He was ... setting out with Hugh and Yvonne to climb Popocatepetl. ...Painfully he trudged the slope of the foothills towards Amecameca alone. ... He could go no farther. Exhausted, helpless, he sank to the ground. ... And now he had reached the summit. ... But there was nothing there: no peaks, no life, no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly: it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling too, whatever it was, collapsing.... (UV 374-75)

Like Sisyphus, who strenuously pushes his stone to the summit

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[15]Graves, vol. 1, p. 218.

[16]See Barnes, pp. 345-46.

[17]Graves, vol. 1, p. 218.

only to have it roll back down to the bottom, Geoffrey discovers that the peak which he has arduously climbed is "crumbling," "collapsing," and falls into the barranca (identified with Tartarus).[18]

On a more philosophical level, Geoffrey is very close to the absurd heroism that Albert Camus sees in the figure of Sisyphus.[19] In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus writes:

> If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him.... Sisyphus...knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory.[20]

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[18]Yvonne's death, when viewed in the context of the Geoffrey/Sisyphus identification, takes on further significance. According to Graves, Sisyphus's wife, Merope, "ashamed to find herself the only Pleiad with a husband in the Underworld - and a criminal too - deserted her six starry sisters in the night sky and has never been seen since."* Lowry recasts positively this episode in his description of Yvonne's ascent to the Pleiades:

> And leaving the burning dream Yvonne felt herself suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars, through eddies of stars scattering aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water, among which now appeared, like a flock of diamond birds flying softly and steadily towards Orion, the Pleiades...
> (UV 336; Lowry's ellipse)

*Graves, vol. 1, p. 218.

[19]Since an English translation of Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) did not appear until 1955, it is doubtful that Lowry was familiar with Camus's treatment of the Sisyphus myth at the time Under the Volcano was written.

[20]Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), pp. 89-90.

Camus's interpretation of Sisyphus is essentially the same as Spender's judgment of the Consul:

> ... the existence of the novel itself is the proof that after all Lowry/the Consul did achieve a triumph of consciousness expressed with the utmost lucidity.[21]

Both recognize in their lucidity that "Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth."[22] From this fidelity to existential reality comes Sisyphus's "silent joy"[23] and the Consul's "I love hell."

Another criminal from the Greek underworld is Tantalus. In an act similar to Geoffrey's betrayal of the mysteries, Tantalus stole the divine food from the Olympian banquet to share with his mortal friends. He then committed a second crime, cutting up his son Pelops and serving him to the gods as part of a stew. Graves writes that

> For these two crimes Tantalus was punished with the ruin of his kingdom and, after his death by Zeus's own hand, with eternal torment in the company of Ixion, Sisyphus, Tityus, the Danaids, and others. Now he hangs, perennially consumed by thirst and hunger, from the bough of a fruit-tree which leans over a marshy lake.[24]

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[21] Spender, "Introduction," p. xxv. I think that Spender's claim that the Consul "did achieve a triumph of consciousness" remains true even if Spender's close identification of Geoffrey with the author is rejected.

[22] Camus, p. 90.

[23] Camus, p. 91.

[24] Graves, vol. 2, p. 25.

As Barnes points out[25], Geoffrey alludes to the Tantalus myth at the bull-throwing:

> "See the old unhappy bull," the Consul was saying... "Waiting with a wild surmise for ropes that tantalize -" ... "Or waiting with seven - why not? - wild surmises, for the rope which tantalizes." (UV 273)

The frustration of the bull, entangled in ropes and goaded by spectators, is that of Tantalus. Both image the dilemma of the Consul. In his nightmare vision, Geoffrey suffers from the perennial thirst which consumes Tantalus:

> ... the lake was lapping, the lilacs were blowing, the chenars were budding, the mountains were glistening, the waterfalls were playing...and he was still thirsty. ... rain, that fell only on the mountains, did not assuage his thirst. ... He was lying face downward drinking from a lake that reflected the white-capped ranges.... Yet his thirst still remained unquenched. (UV 125)

This passage, by echoing Tantalus' punishment, conveys vividly the deceptive gap between desire and fruition which characterizes Geoffrey's relationship with Yvonne, and the novel as a whole.[26]

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[25]Barnes, pp. 347-48.

[26]Tantalus committed a third crime, theft aggravated by perjury, which might be linked to the Consul's possible perjury before the Board of Inquiry in the Samaritan incident. As punishment, "an enormous stone, a crag from Mount Sipylus, overhangs the tree and eternally threatens to crush Tantalus's skull" (Graves, vol. 2, p. 26). Moreover, "the rock poised over him in Tartarus, always about to fall, identifies him

In Under the Volcano, there is another Greek criminal whose myth gives further definition to the Consul's life. Prometheus, as David Markson has shown, enters the novel obscurely:

> Intaglioed in the maroon leather cover of the book was a golden faceless figurine also running, carrying a torch....(UV 34)[27]

Represented by the figurine is Prometheus stealing fire from the gods to give light to mankind. Hints of this crime are contained in such references as the candles of the mourners (UV 4), Laruelle's pocket torch (UV 12), and, most suggestively, in the letter burned in a candle flame:

> The flare lit up the whole cantina with a burst of brilliance in which the figures at the bar - that he now saw included besides the little children and the peasants who were quince or cactus farmers in loose white clothes and wide hats, several women in mourning from the cemeteries and dark-faced men in dark suits with open collars and their ties undone - appeared, for an instant, frozen, a mural.... (UV 41-42)

Prometheus (as well as Agni) is evoked by this pictorial synopsis

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with Sisyphus of Corinth..." (Graves, vol. 2, p. 29). This punishment, common to both Tantalus and Sisyphus, could be related in a generalized way to the Consul's sense of impending catastrophe, and specifically to his dying vision of a mountain collapsing about him.

[27]David Markson, "Malcolm Lowry: A Study of Theme and Symbol in Under the Volcano," M.A. Thesis, Columbia Univ., 1952, p. 26. (Markson identifies the edition with an intaglioed Prometheus as that of "The Modern Library.")

of mankind (children, peasants, farmers, women, men) suddenly illuminated by a sacrificial flame.

Explicit allusions to Prometheus occur later in the novel (see UV 202, 219). This myth is further adumbrated by an element of local colour, the xopilotes or vultures, which are reminders of Prometheus's punishment (a greedy vulture endlessly tore at his liver). Lowry remarks in a letter that the vultures "are more than merely cartoon birds: they are real in these parts ... they fly through the whole book and in XI become as it were archetypal, Promethean fowl."[28] Hilda Thomas notes[29] that Geoffrey is likened to Prometheus during his ride on the Maquina infernal:

> The Consul, like that poor fool who was bringing light to the world, was hung upside down over it.... (UV 222)

This identification with Prometheus correlates with Lowry's efforts to make Geoffrey a Christ figure. Pagan and Christian examples are used to imply the sacrificial nature of the Consul's death. Geoffrey, himself, mysteriously hints at such a purpose: "there are certain reasons too, to be revealed only at the day of reckoning, why you should not have stood in judgement upon me" (UV 78). In the impassioned, drunken speech, delivered just before his execution, Geoffrey aligns himself

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[28] Selected Letters, p. 79.

[29] Hilda Thomas, p. 38.

with mankind ("the poor ... the poor in spirit, old men carrying their fathers and philosophers weeping in the dust," UV 372) against authority. He exhibits the rebelliousness which makes the Prometheus myth so evocative.

The ambiguity of Prometheus, which appealed with such insistence to the Romantics, characterizes Geoffrey. In his preface to Prometheus Unbound, Shelley (UV 202, 204, 216) writes that "the only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan."[30] The Prometheus framed by Shelley, like Satan in Paradise Lost, defies an omnipotent god. But at the same time, Prometheus, who brought light to the world, is the champion of mankind. In Shelley's words, he is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."[31] From the perspective of Christian theology, Prometheus strangely fuses aspects of Satan with Christ. The Consul, accused of an act of Satanic evil (the Germans burned in the furnace) and at the same time identified with Christ, fits into the Romantic image of Prometheus. He is, as described by Laruelle in an earlier version of the novel, "the very shape and motion of the world's doom" and also "the living prophecy of its hope!"[32] His portentous ambiguity has parallels to

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[30]Percy Bysshe Shelley, Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson & G.M. Matthews (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 205.

[31]Shelley, p. 205.

[32]These quotations are taken from Under the Volcano (B), First Novel Version (The Malcolm Lowry Papers, Special Collections Division, The Library, The Univ. of British Columbia), Ch.1, p. 4.

Shelley's Prometheus, who embodies similar alternatives:

> I would fain
> Be what it is my destiny to be,
> The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
> Or sink into the original gulf of things.[33]

For the Consul, sinking into the abyss, it is the latter alternative. As an unfulfilled Promethean figure, Geoffrey is somewhat closer to the Hero of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound. But even here, the Consul's passivity clashes with what Nietzsche calls "the glory of activity which illuminates the Prometheus of Aeschylus."[34] Through allusion to the myth of Prometheus, Lowry counterpoints the Consul's despair, whose affirmation Aeschylus and Shelley demonstrate.

Associated with Prometheus is yet another denizen of Tartarus, Ixion. Projecting his own thoughts, Geoffrey imagines Laruelle's voice stating:

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[33] Prometheus Unbound, Poetical Works, ll. 815-18. One passage from Shelley's drama portrays vividly the nature of Geoffrey's world:

> terror, madness, crime, remorse,
> Which from the links of the great chain of things,
> To every thought within the mind of man
> Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels
> Under the load towards the pit of death;
> Abandoned hope, and love that turns to death.
> (ll. 19-24)

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," trans. Clifton P. Fadiman, in Philosophies of Art and Beauty, eds. Albert Hofstadter & Richard Kuhns (New York: The Modern Lib., 1964), p. 529.

> "Je crois que le vautour est doux à Prometheus
> et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers." (UV 219)

Ixion, like Prometheus, provides mythological commentary on the Consul's life. His crime was attempting to seduce Hera, the wife of Zeus. In Under the Volcano, the most obvious parallel is not Geoffrey, but Laruelle or Hugh, both of whom committed adultery with Yvonne. However, Ixion did not seduce the real Hera, but a false Hera, shaped by Zeus from the clouds.[35] He was too drunk to notice the deception. Geoffrey, who is drunk, is similarly deceived (albeit wilfully) with the prostitute Maria:

> Lightning silhouetted against the window a face, for a moment curiously like Yvonne's. "Quiere Maria," she volunteered again, and flinging her arms round his neck, drew him down to the bed. Her body was Yvonne's too, her legs, her breasts, her pounding passionate heart.... (UV 348-49)

Unable to consummate his sexual relation with Yvonne, Geoffrey finds delusive pleasure with a false Yvonne, Maria.

Ixion's punishment, bound "to a fiery wheel which rolled without cease through the sky,"[36] has significance both for

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[35]"The false Hera, afterwards called Nephele, bore Ixion the outcast child Centaurus...."* From this union a horse cult originated which attached itself to Ixion. This aspect of the Ixion legend provides a mythological configuration for the mystical interrelation of the fate of Geoffrey (and Yvonne) with the horse branded with the number seven.

*Graves, vol. 1, pp. 208-09.

[36]Graves, vol. 1, 208.

the Consul and the novel as a whole. The Maquina infernal and the Ferris wheel are visual analogues to Ixion's fate:

> The huge looping-the-loop machine ... in this dead section of the fair, suggested some huge evil spirit, screaming in its lonely hell, its limbs writhing... (my underlining, UV 221)

> The Ferris wheel came into view again, just the top, silently burning high on the hill....(UV 15)

The wheel burning on the hill evokes not only Ixion bound to a fiery wheel, but also certain homeopathic rituals described by Frazer[37]:

> ... Young people used to fasten a straw-man, representing Death, to a wheel, which they trundled to the top of a hill. Then setting fire to the figure they allowed it and the wheel to roll down the slope.[38]

> The custom of rolling a burning wheel down a hill, which is often observed at these ceremonies, fire-festivals, might well pass for an imitation of the sun's course in the sky....[39]

The vast cyclical pattern of Nature which is celebrated at the

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[37]This parallelism is noted by Graves. He asserts that an image of Ixion "shown spread-eagled to a fire-wheel ... recalls the burning wheels rolled downhill at European midsummer festivities, as a sign that the sun has reached its zenith and must now decline again until the winter solstice." (Graves, vol. 1, p. 209).

[38]Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, I vol., abr. ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1942), p. 331.

[39]Frazer, p. 643.

solar rituals is linked to the Ferris wheel, and, consequently, to the Day of the Dead festivities by an auditory mataphor which encompasses life ("singing") and death ("inaudible"):

> From the slowly revolving Ferris wheel, already lit up, in the square of Quauhnahuac ... the sound of human laughter rising from its bright gondolas and, again, that faint intoxication of voices singing, diminishing, dying in the wind, inaudible finally.
> (UV 10-11)

The "bright gondolas" symbolize the exhilaration of the fiesta, whose meaning is delineated by the Mexican poet, Octavio Paz. "Thanks to the fiesta the Mexican opens out, participates, communes with his fellows and with values that give meaning to his religious or political existence."[40] The affirmation of the Day of the Dead celebrations - epitomized by the children eating chocolate skulls - is not shared by the Consul who is alienated from the cycle of life and death which archetypally shapes the festive rituals. This overarching pattern is represented by Ixion, whose "fire-wheel is a symbol of the sun."[41]

While representing the affirmation of the solar ritual, Ixion also images the contrasting vacuity of the Consul's existence. Ixion can function in this dual rôle because, although the source of light, he, himself, is isolated from

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[40] Octavio Paz, "The Mexican Fiesta," Mexico and the Caribbean, ed. Lewis Hanke (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1959), p. 176.

[41] Graves, vol. 1, p. 219.

the rhythms of life which he sustains. Bound to his wheel, suffering agony, Ixion follows inexorably a sterile cycle which parodies the meaningful pattern of recurrence that he creates. Like Ixion, the Consul is severed from the organic continuity of Nature. His desire for children, a succeeding generation, is unfulfilled:

> "Where are the children I might have wanted? You may suppose I might have wanted them. Drowned. To the accompaniment of the rattling of a thousand douche bags." (UV 313)

For Geoffrey, the cycle governing his existence is barren and constrictive. Bound by the recurring pattern of his alcoholism, he experiences the reiterated meaninglessness of Ixion's punishment. The larger, fecundating cycle symbolized by the fiesta, and registered structurally in the novel, is inaccessible to the Consul, as it is for Ixion.

I B

Greek literature, to the extent that it can be distinguished from Greek myth, is also an important source of allusion in Under the Volcano. Lowry's use of Sophocles's Oedipus Rex has already been sketched.[42] He also alludes to

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[42] See above, pp. 129-132.

one of Sophocles's lesser known dramas, Philoctetes. According to myth, Heracles bequeathed his famous bow to Philoctetes as a reward for the latter's assistance during his funeral rites. When the Olympians assented to Heracles's deification, Hera transferred her animosity from Heracles to Philoctetes. She punished him with the bite of a Lemnian viper, a wound that did not heal. At the intervention of the god Heracles Philoctetes went to Troy where, in fulfilment of a prophecy, he killed Paris with the bow and brought victory to the Greeks. On his traumatic first voyage, Hugh signed on board the S.S. Philoctetes, realizing only later that "Philoctetes was a figure in Greek mythology - son of Poeas, friend of Heracles, and whose cross-bow proved almost as proud and unfortunate a possession as Hugh's guitar..." (UV 159). On one level this simile (which is repeated, UV 177) is apposite.

Hugh's skill on the guitar, like Philoctetes's legendary bow, is a source not of joy but of misery. "For it was due to a guitar he'd become a journalist, it was due to a guitar he had become a song-writer, it was largely owing to a guitar even ... that he had first gone to sea" (UV 155-56). In all three of these jobs Hugh was unhappy. He has just quit his job as newspaper correspondent since he now feels that "journalism equals intellectual male prostitution of speech and writing" (UV 100). His experience with song-writing was equally disillusioning. He not only narrowly avoids involvement in a

divorce scandal but also discovers "that the songs he'd published were nothing less than plagiarisms of two obscure American numbers" (UV 172). His first sea voyage is also a painful experience, because of his shipmates:

> They read his diary behind his back. They stole his money. They even stole his dungarees and made him buy them back again, on credit, since they had already virtually deprived themselves of his purchasing power. They hid his chipping hammers in his bunk and in his sea-bag. (UV 159-60)

For Hugh, suffering is interrelated with his pleasure in playing the guitar. On the evening that Yvonne and Geoffrey die, this association recurs; Hugh (who has not owned one in years) buys a guitar moments before their deaths. The misery that accompanies Hugh's skill with a guitar is analogous to an idea that Edmund Wilson, in The Wound and the Bow, sees as central to the Philoctetes myth: "the conception of superior strength as inseparable from disability,"[43] or "the idea that genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together."[44]

On another level, the simile between Hugh's guitar and Philoctetes's bow is ironic, parodying Hugh's need for self-dramatization. Later in the novel, Yvonne mockingly asks Hugh,

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[43] Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 235.

[44] The Wound and the Bow, p. 237.

"'What do you want a guitar for? Are you going to play the Internationale or something on it, on board your ship?'" (UV 327) In terms of the associations that Lowry has set up, Yvonne's question deflates Hugh's visions of heroic grandeur. Whereas Philoctetes, with his bow, won the Trojan war, Hugh, with his guitar, will arrive in Spain only to witness the final collapse of his side in the Spanish Civil War. Heracles, who acts as deus ex machina in Sophocles's version of the Philoctetes myth, is also an ironic referent in Under the Volcano for Hugh's character. As David Markson has shown,[45] chapter six of Lowry's novel contains several parallels to the Twelve Labours of Heracles, and this chapter is told from Hugh's point of view. Hugh's association with Heracles is exhibited most overtly in chapter nine[46] through a parody of Heracles's capture of the Cretan bull. He is (in Lowry's words) "somewhat preposterously subduing the bull"[47] in the Tomalin arena. The parallelism reveals Hugh's persistent illusions of heroism, which have just been undercut in the previous chapter by his failure to help the dying Indian. Although irony is the primary effect of the Heraclean allusions, they do reflect the optimism felt in Hugh's characterization. The deification which Heracles

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[45] David Markson, "Myth in Under the Volcano," PrS 37: 339-46, Winter 1963/1964.

[46] "This chapter was originally written ... through Hugh's eyes." Selected Letters, p. 79.

[47] Selected Letters, p. 81.

receives as the reward for his labours implies the affirmation Hugh continues to seek, just as the futile labours of the imprisoned Sisyphus convey (on one level of meaning) Geoffrey's hopelessness.

To return to the Philoctetes myth from which I have digressed, it is also possible to interpret Hugh's half-brother as a Philoctetes figure. Geoffrey and Hugh (respectively linked to Christ and Judas) are obviously complementary,[48] and if Hugh is a parody of Philoctetes, Geoffrey in a sense is Philoctetes. The combination of lucidity and alcoholism that defines Geoffrey's character is very close to Edmund Wilson's interpretation of Philoctetes, "the idea that genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together." In his play, Sophocles confines the setting to the island of Lemnos, with the dramatic focus on Philoctetes's reluctance to return to Troy. His refusal to leave the island - even though his festering sore will be healed - is seen by David Grene as

> the refusal of a man so wounded as to be unwilling to resume normal life itself because, with that life, will come new and unpredictable suffering. Better the old known pain, with the old known remedies, than the new hurt as unforeseeable as the future itself:

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[48] The two half-brothers are not simply counterparts; Lowry often uses Hugh as comic foil to Geoffrey.

> It is not the sting of wrongs past,
> but what I must look for in wrongs to come.[49]

Grene argues that while these fears are understandable, they are also "irreconcilable with the vital principle which in anyone's life involves change and risk."[50] The Consul, like Philoctetes, prefers to cling to "the old known pain" instead of risking inponderable future pain. This, I think, is one of the most important meanings behind the Consul's cry, "I love hell," and his paradoxical belief that "'le vatour est doux à Promethée et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers.'" It is, in part, this fear of unknown suffering which makes him reject the future at Eridanus that Yvonne envisions for them, and commits him to "the old known pain" of the past.

In Lowry's hands even such an affirmative figure as Odysseus contributes to the sense of tragic doom surrounding the Consul. Markson demonstrates[51] that extensive Homeric parallels occur in chapter ten of the novel, linking Geoffrey to Odysseus. Lowry's most abrupt departure from Homer is Yvonne's adultery which ironically contrasts with Penelope's fidelity. Joyce, of course, anticipates Lowry in this regard with his creation of Molly in Ulysses. It is instructive to

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[49] Sophocles II, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 200.

[50] Sophocles II, p. 200.

[51] Markson, "Myth in Under the Volcano," pp. 340-42.

note that the reaction of the protagonist to his wife's adultery differs considerably in the two works: in Ulysses there is an ultimate acceptance by Bloom of Molly's sexual infidelity, an acceptance which (in the eyes of many critics) contributes to Bloom's unique dignity. Literary conventions and social norms which treat the cuckold as a figure of derision and pity are present in Ulysses, but Bloom through his tolerant understanding transcends these stereotypes, and makes a reconciliation with the world that is admirable. By contrast, the Consul cannot accede to Yvonne's adultery. As a result, Under the Volcano presents a tragic counterpart to the comic vision of Ulysses. Despite Blazes Boylan, the marriage of Molly and Bloom continues to have stability, a certain order, and even human warmth; Yvonne's sexual relations with Laruelle mean the Consul's loss of these elements, and a metaphysical darkness that has similarities to Othello's. In terms of the Homeric parallels, Geoffrey is an Odysseus emotionally slaughtered by the suitors of an unfaithful Penelope.

I C

Complementing the extensive allusions to classical literature in Under the Volcano are literary references to several books written within the Christian tradition. Thematic

parallels to Milton's Paradise Lost are evident throughout the novel. Like the epic poem, Under the Volcano describes one of the central myths of Christianity, man's fall from grace. Mark Schorer argues that one of the novel's major themes is

> the sense of the past, of innocence and vanished pleasure, of wasted opportunity and unrelinquished memory, of Paradise Lost: "for long after Adam had left the garden the light in Adam's house burned on.[52]

A primary symbol of this theme, as Schorer demonstrates, is the garden -

> Geoffrey's own neglected garden, for example, where he hides his tequila and at the edge of which he drunkenly lectures his respectable neighbour on the true meaning of the expulsion from Paradise, from which he emerges presently to say, "Hi, Hugh, you old snake in the grass!" Then there is the sign which appears repeatedly, which seems to Geoffrey to have too many question marks and seems to say, in Spanish, "You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" Multiple other allusions to gardens and events within them come to a conclusion finally in references to certain public officials, especially "the Chief of Gardens," by the Fascists who decree Geoffrey's end.[53]

Perhaps the crucial difference between Milton's and Lowry's interpretation of man's loss of Paradise is that the latter

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[52]Schorer, p. 2.

[53]Schorer, p. 2.

views it as irrevocable. In Milton's theodicy, the doctrine of felix culpa (which holds that from Adam's disobedience "much more good thereof shall spring") promises a future in which "the earth/ shall all be Paradise." This hope of a regained Paradise, which sustains Adam and Eve after their expulsion from Eden, is given only to Yvonne in Under the Volcano. Geoffrey has no faith in her paradisal vision of a new home at Eridanus. He, unlike Adam, cannot forgive his wife's "wilful crime." Even though "The world was all before them," Geoffrey will not go "hand in hand" with Yvonne "to choose their place of rest":

> Yvonne laid her hand on his arm.
> (UV 196)
> ...
> "Momentito," he said, disengaging himself.
> (UV 198)

Without the motivating belief that their past happiness can be restored, Geoffrey accepts with indifference "his downward flight" (UV 362).

Lowry's use of the Faust myth is relevant in this context. Although references are made to both Marlowe's and Goethe's versions, the inexorable and the redemptive, the novel gives greater prominence to the Elizabethan play in which the damnation of Dr. Faustus is presented as inalterable.[54]

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[54]For a fuller discussion of Lowry's use of the Faust myth see Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano." (It is a significant coincidence in Western culture that two major novels,

This sense of damnation is corroborated and reinforced by the multiple allusions to Dante's Inferno, which are partially enumerated by Lowry in a letter:

> (Note: the book opens in the Casino de la Selva. Selva means wood and this strikes the opening chord of the Inferno - remember, the book was planned and still is a kind of Inferno, with Purgatorio and Paradiso to follow, the tragic protagonist in each, like Tchitchikov in Dead Souls, becoming slightly better - in the middle of our life ... in a dark wood, etc., this chord being struck again in VI, the middle and heart of the book where Hugh, in the middle of his life, recalls at the beginning of that chapter Dante's words: the chord is struck again remotely toward the end of VII where the Consul enters a gloomy cantina called El Bosque, which also means the wood (both of these places being by the way real, one here, the other in Oaxaca), while the chord is resolved in XI, in the chapter concerning Yvonne's death, where the wood becomes real, and dark.)[55]

Lowry in the same letter sketches some details of his projected Divine Comedy:

> a trilogy entitled The Voyage That Never Ends ... with the Volcano as the first, infernal part, a much amplified Lunar Caustic as the second, purgatorial part, and an enormous novel I was also working on called In Ballast to the White Sea (which I lost when my house burned down...) as the paradisal third part....[56]

Under the Volcano and Mann's Doctor Faustus, viewing modern man against the backdrop of the Second World War as Faustian, were published in the same year, 1947.)

[55] Selected Letters, p. 67.

[56] Selected Letters, p. 63.

As this projected trilogy was not completed (Lunar Caustic remained unamplified and In Ballast was never rewritten) it is difficult to gauge what meaning Under the Volcano would have as the first part of a whole concerned with "the battering the human spirit takes... in its ascent towards its true purpose."[57] In the larger context of The Voyage That Never Ends, it would probably appear less negative, as an initial stage in a progression towards ultimate affirmation. This speculation is consistent with a fact pointed out by L.E.R. Casari in "Malcolm Lowry's Drunken Divine Comedy": "The Consul ends up under the volcano, exactly at the point where Dante's pilgrim ends his pilgrimage through Hell - under the mountain of purgatory."[58] However, as Lowry's Dantean plans were realized only fragmentarily, Under the Volcano of necessity exists as an autonomous work. Effectively it is an Inferno closed off from Purgatorio and Paradiso. With the possibility of ascent through successive stages unregistered, the novel appears to confirm the Consul's sense of entrapment and perhaps renders his adjustment, "I love hell," more permanent and more sympathetic than it would have been in the completed trilogy.

The net effect of allusions to the Christian tradition within Under the Volcano is negative. Christianity itself appears oppressive in the novel. For example, a detail from

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[57] Selected Letters, p. 63.

[58] L.E.R. Casari, p. 269.

the Consul's early life, his attendance at "a strict Wesleyan school" (UV 18), partially accounts for his guilt-laden sexuality and for his sense of damnation. Lowry makes this latter connection explicit through Geoffrey's meditation on Goethe's famous church bell, the one which pursued the child truant from church:

> ... the awful bell would actually touch the doomed child with giant protruding tongue and hellish Wesleyan breath. (UV 74)

In its references to Christianity, the novel emphasizes the eternal suffering of Hell. Lowry alleviates this sense of doom through an identification of Geoffrey with Christ. At one point in the novel the Consul becomes aware of a man "nailing a board to the tree" (UV 349). This image anticipates Geoffrey's use of the word "crucified" (UV 349), and foreshadows his death.

In this context, Geoffrey's death becomes martyrdom, and his confused, dying speech ("'Only the poor, only through God, only the people you wipe your feet on, the poor in spirit...,'" UV 349) becomes a plea for Christian values. In terms of this identification, Hugh, because of his sexual betrayal of Geoffrey, becomes a Judas figure (e.g. UV 111). The meaning of these Biblical comparisons is ambiguous. Strangely, it is Hugh, linked to Judas, who seeks to "atone" (UV 152) for mankind. By this usage of "atone" Lowry stresses

the possibility for redemption already expressed by a title contained in one of the novel's epigraphs: Bunyan's Grace Abounding for the Chief of Sinners. Conversely, although Geoffrey is linked to Christ, his redemptive value is uncertain since his death unmistakably symbolizes the world war to come. Through this ambiguity the Consul embodies both mankind's destructive tendencies and a potential resolution of them. Although the downward, infernal movement of Geoffrey's life dominates Under the Volcano, his association with Christ provides an undertone of hope.

I D

Allusions to more recent literary works and figures also contribute to the novel's pervasive sense of doom. The reference to "the House of Usher" is a typical instance. David Markson shows how "almost every theme and symbol in the Poe tale, in the most precise terms, is repeated in Under the Volcano:

> First, the general tone and atmosphere of the two works is identical. But at the same time: Poe's narrator and Roderick Usher himself, childhood friends, have come together for the first time in years, as have Laruelle and Geoffrey; it is the same season of the year in both stories; the "haunted" palace in Poe equates precisely with the ruined palace of Maximilian in Lowry; the guitar ... serves as an identical symbol in both books. There is a painting of "hell" in each tale; the

> "mystic" books in Poe could be exchanged without notice for those in Lowry; Poe's Roderick, giving up his "soul", corresponds with exactitude to Geoffrey; the "fissure" on the house itself is easily equated to the symbolic "ravine" in Quauhnahuac; and the ultimate tragedy in both works is hauntingly similar.[59]

Poe, who reappears in Lowry's other works ("Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession" and October Ferry to Gabriola), is important both as a writer and as a biographical subject. His death which, according to legend, was due to alcohol has obvious similarities to the Consul's own. Biographies of other ill-fated writers appear explicitly in the novel:

> In November 1895, in convict dress, from two o'clock in the afternoon till half past, handcuffed, recognized, Oscar Wilde stood on the centre platform at Clapham Junction...(UV 87)

> "Percy Bysshe Shelley." The Consul leaned against the mirador beside Hugh. "Another fellow with ideas ... The story I like about Shelley is the one where he just let himself sink to the bottom of the sea - taking several books with him of course - and just stayed there, rather than admit he couldn't swim." (UV 204, Lowry's ellipse)

Such doomed artist figures clearly foreshadow Geoffrey's end - not only for the reader but also for Geoffrey himself:

> That fine droll courage of Shelley's; no, that was pride. And pride bade one go on, either to on and kill oneself, or "straighten out".... ... What if courage here implied admission

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[59] Markson, "Malcolm Lowry: A Study of Theme and Symbol in Under the Volcano," pp.26-27. For further discussion of the allusions to "The House of Usher," see Kilgallin,"The Use of Literary Sources for Theme and Style in Under the Volcano," pp. 25-26.

> of total defeat, admission that one couldn't swim.... (UV 204-05)

In addition, the references to Poe, Shelley, and Wilde also refract the novel's interest in the themes of the rebel and the criminal.

Speaking of the latter theme in "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Edmund Wilson writes that it concerns

> the deep entanglement and conflict of the bad and the good in one man. The subject of Edwin Drood is the subject of Poe's William Wilson, the subject of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the subject of Dorian Gray. It is also the subject of that greater work than any of these, Doestoevsky's (sic) Crime and Punishment.[60]

In chapter ten of Under the Volcano, there is an allusion to Svidrigailov, one of the principal characters in Crime and Punishment:

> The Consul sat, fully dressed however, not moving a muscle. Why was he here? Why was he always more or less, here [sitting on a toilet]? He would have been glad of a mirror, to ask himself that question. But there was no mirror. Nothing but stone. Perhaps there was no time either, in this stone retreat. Perhaps this was the eternity that he'd been making so much fuss about, eternity already, of the Svidrigailov variety, only instead of a bath-house in the country

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[60] Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow, p. 81. (It may not be coincidental that Lowry alludes to most of the works mentioned in this book: Scrooge (UV 224), Poe, Wilde, and Crime and Punishment (UV 294).

> full of spiders, here it turned out to be a stone monastic cell wherein sat - strange! - who but himself?
> "- Pulqueria -"[61] (UV 294-95)

In what is a close analogue to the Samaritan incident, Svidrigailov had criminal preceedings against him quashed in "a case of the most brutal, and so to speak, fantastic murder."[62] His suicide (with a revolver) also offers a parallel to the Consul's end; his death although not self-inflicted appears from one perspective equally sought. The central theme of Dostoevsky's novel, the criminal "himself feels the desire to be punished,"[63] is an important aspect of Lowry's book. The Consul's masochistic need for suffering is like that of another character in Crime and Punishment, the alcoholic Marmeladov, who states that "It is not happiness but sorrow that I seek. I drink, sir, that I may suffer, that I may suffer more and more!"[64] Raskolnikov, the novel's protagonist, confirms Geoffrey's experience that transgression of the laws of humanity is followed by a need for confession (see UV 33). Dostoevsky's novel, through those parallels, illuminates certain facets of

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[61] Lowry, attentive to the possibilities of local setting, gives an immediacy and depth to the Dostoevsky reference by the interjected word, "Pulqueria," "which is a kind of Mexican pub and also the name of Raskolnikov's mother." Selected Letters, p. 82.

[62] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), p. 313.

[63] Dostoyevsky, in a letter quoted by Magarshack, p. 13.

[64] Dostoyevsky, p. 32.

the Consul's personality, particularly his burden of guilt.

I E

Another important aspect of Under the Volcano is revealed by the frequent allusions to Don Quixote. Writing in The Necessary Angel, Wallace Stevens states:

> Don Quixote will make it imperative for him [the poet] to make a choice, to come to a decision regarding the imagination and reality; and he will find that it is not a choice of one over the other and not a decision that divides them, but something subtler, a recognition that here, too, as between these poles, the universal interdependence exists, and hence his choice and his decision must be that they are equal and inseparable.[65]

The Quixote allusions in Lowry's novel are most obviously attached to Hugh (and, by implication, to communism) who is unable to recognize the universal interdependence of imagination and reality. Like the Knight of the Rueful Aspect, his subjective reality is constantly at variance with external reality. More surprisingly, Laruelle is also associated with Quixote:

> M. Laruelle looked into the west; a knight of old, with tennis racket for shield and pocket torch for scrip, he dreamed a moment of battles the soul survived to wander there. (UV 12)

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[65]Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 24.

And, as Anthony Kilgallin shows, even the Consul is portrayed as a Quixotic figure, a resemblance that he is intermittently aware of:

> Geoffrey identifies himself with Quixote: "My mind, I repeat, must somehow, drugged though it is, like Don Quixote avoiding a town invested with his abhorrence because of his excesses there, take a clear cut around..." (UV 79) ... Finally, his failure to achieve intercourse with Yvonne is described in terms of Quixote's lance:
>
> > Ah none but he knew how beautiful it all was, the sunlight, sunlight, sunlight flooding the bar of El Puerto del Sol, flooding the watercress and oranges, or falling in a single golden line as if in the act of conceiving a God, falling like a lance straight into a block of ice -
> > "Sorry, it isn't any good I'm afraid." The Consul shut the door behind him and a small rain of plaster showered on his head. A Don Quixote fell from the wall. He picked up the sad straw knight. (UV 90)[66]

The references to Don Quixote which permeate the novel[67] extend beyond individual characterization; they become a thematic motif with philosophical value.

In effect, they pose again a fundamental question of Cervantes's book: are ennobling ideals compatible with reality or are such beliefs delusory? Allusions to Conrad's Lord Jim

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[66] Anthony Kilgallin, "The Use of Literary Sources for Theme and Style in Under the Volcano," pp. 37-38.

[67] For further allusions to Don Quixote (Cervantes, windmills, etc.) see UV 17, 33, 39, 109, 248, 281, 296, and 372.

(UV 33, 167) make this question even more insistent. Even though the ideal of self-conduct in which Jim believes has some convergence with reality (in contrast to Quixote's delusions) the result is, in both cases, personal disaster. With his idealized self-conception, Jim has strong affinities to the romantic posturings of Hugh. More interestingly, Laruelle views the Consul as

> a kind of more lachrymose pseudo "Lord Jim" ... whose life had become a quixotic oral fiction. Unlike "Jim" he had grown rather careless of his honour and the German officers were merely an excuse to buy another bottle of mescal. (UV 33)

The Consul does what Marlowe feared Jim would do: "he had taken to drink."[68] This same potentiality Lowry sees in Hugh, "a frustrated fellow whose frustrations might just as well have made him a drunk too, just like the Consul."[69] Thus, Hugh and Geoffrey, as complementary figures, present both the way chosen by Jim and the way he might have chosen. Both Don Quixote and Jim are significant models for Hugh's option. Neither figure suggests that his romantic belief "of changing the world ... through his actions" (UV 9) is a viable alternative to the Consul's despair. The references to Don Quixote, Lord Jim, and Heracles imply that nobility and heroism are

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[68] Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 161.

[69] Selected Letters, p. 75.

incommensurate with objective reality, and consequently, hopes for amelioration seem illusory. Under the Volcano, by these allusions, largely refutes Hugh's idealism and partially validates the Consul's despair.

II

On reviewing Lowry's use of allusions in Under the Volcano certain features gain clarity. A pattern of selectivity emerges. The allusions discussed (which are intended to be representative) have, despite their variegated range, a consistently dark effect. Sisyphus, Tantalus, Prometheus, and Ixion, whose mythological distinctions are carefully registered in the novel, collectively reiterate a single theme: eternal suffering as punishment for a crime. On the level of tragedy, Oedipus and Philoctetes reinforce this theme of inescapable suffering. Even in the few cases that Lowry alludes to works that are not intrinsically dark, he usually gives them a negative slant (just as Shakespeare wherever possible darkens his sources for King Lear). Thus even such an affirmative figure as Odysseus is used to communicate Geoffrey's tragic failure with Yvonne. Allusions to works written from a Christian perspective which contain the promise of redemption only reemphasize the theme of external punishment presented in the Greek myths (although, as explained, this may

be partially inadvertent in the case of the Inferno). Such doomed artists as Shelley, Poe, and Wilde, such doomed literary characters as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Roderick Usher, and Svidrigailov, and such doomed historical figures as Maximilian and Trotsky form an oppressive shaping presence in the novel, one which touches the Consul most directly.

It is in the artistic context of Geoffrey's characterization that the allusions of Under the Volcano have their greatest intelligibility. Here, they form a coherent pattern of meaning that is very much different from the pattern of allusions in The Waste Land, for example, a work written in a genre that can achieve unity without concern for characters. Under the Volcano also contrasts markedly in its use of allusions with the novel Ulysses. As Stuart Gilbert (James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study) makes clear, Homeric parallels provide Joyce with a systematic authorial design. The pattern of meaning formed by these allusions is external to the consciousness of Joyce's characters. Unlike Bloom, the Consul is fully aware of the allusions which have bearing on his character as they issue from his own mind. As Spender notes,

> Symbol and myth are used in Ulysses in order to absorb the characters at certain moments into a kind of cosmic consciousness. Lowry uses them with opposite effect in order to create the interior world of the Consul.[70]

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[70]Spender, p. xii.

By fusing a multiplicity of allusions together, Lowry assembles a composite portrait in the figure of Geoffrey, whose inner contradictions are consistent with psychological realism and expressive of mankind's conflicting tendencies.

Through the assimilative possibilities of allusions Lowry creates the universal character of the Consul, described by Laruelle in the first full-length version of the novel as the very shape and motion of the world's doom:

> "Supposing that all the horrors of today before they became part of our lives had convulsed upon themselves to create a soul, and then that soul had sought a body, and the only body it had found sufficiently photophotic sic for its purpose was the Consul's."[71]

In a book that is close to being an inversion of The Pilgrim's Progress, Lowry foreshadows through the Consul the world's imminent destruction. The prevailing tone of the novel, one of despair, is implicit in the title. The place where the prophetic figure of the Consul ends up, under the volcano, has become through classical and Christian allusions a synthesis of Tartarus and the Inferno. The Consul's fate symbolically anticipates the world's descent into hell. In his final version of Under the Volcano, Lowry also expresses Laruelle's countervailing impression of Geoffrey as "the living prophecy of its the world's hope." Through allusions to such

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[71]Under the Volcano (B), First Novel Version, p. 4.

sacrificial figures as Agni, Prometheus, and Christ, the Consul's death has possible redemptive significance. The spiritual resolution of Goethe's Faust and of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov strengthen this potentiality. Allusions to such ambiguous deities as Soma and Siva, whose regenerative aspects reflect the Consul's positive side, also contribute to this sense of hope. However, in a work conceived of as an Inferno, this hope exists only in muted counterpoint to Geoffrey's illustration of the novel's dominant theme, the world's plunge into the abyss of war.

It is crucial to realize that the Consul's downward flight, given universality through allusions, is also causally related to these allusions. In his interior world, they reflect Geoffrey's constricted view of himself in the present. The allusions not only express, but also further his sense of personal doom, effecting a breakdown of what Tolstoy terms "a consciousness of freedom." The literary and historical allusions through which Geoffrey links the past to the present confirm his sense of despair (just as Keats and Poe confirm Sigbjørn's morbid impulses in "Strange Comfort"). This process is analogous to King Lear where "the structure of the subplot duplicates and so of course clarifies and confirms that of the central story,"[72] in the words of Russell Fraser. Geoffrey's

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[72]Russell Fraser, "Introduction," King Lear (New York: New American Lib., 1963), p. xxiii.

consciousness shapes the past into a duplicate of his present depression. His tragic suffering appears predetermined because of this self-induced hopelessness. The dark mirror image that he makes of the past contains nothing to sustain a vision of the future.

CHAPTER V

OCTOBER FERRY TO GABRIOLA
AND
THE SENSE OF THE PAST

I

Many of the allusions found in Under the Volcano reappear in Lowry's most recently published novel, October Ferry to Gabriola. This book, edited from extant drafts, has a deceptively slender plot: Ethan Llewelyn, a lawyer, and his wife, Jacqueline, take a Greyhound bus from Victoria to Nanaimo and then a ferry from Nanaimo to Gabriola Island in search of a new home. In October Ferry, Lowry alludes again to Poe (repeatedly[1]), Dostoevsky, Dante[2], Bunyan, and such miscellaneous writers as Blake, Rousseau, William James, and Berkeley. The Faust myth recurs in October Ferry, "sold his soul to the devil that night" (OF 48), but the emphasis is

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[1] Malcolm Lowry, October Ferry to Gabriola, ed. Margerie Lowry (New York & Cleveland: World Publ. Co., 1970), pp. 22, 66, 68, 76, 136, "a barrel of amontillado" - 140, 146, 212, 215, 230, and 313. (Future references to this work will be placed in the text of my thesis, and designated by OF.)

[2] The shift in mood between Under the Volcano and October Ferry is demonstrated by Ethan's optimistic reading of Dante's Inferno: "If Francesca was a girl anything like you, I don't see that Paola can have had such a grim time after all." Cf. Inferno, Canto V.

now on Thomas Mann's version. Don Quixote also reappears. An echo of Lord Jim is present in a negation of Marlowe's favourite phrase, "he isn't one of us" (OF 43). A description of Oscar Wilde handcuffed at Clapham Junction (OF 28) is basically the same as the one in Under the Volcano. Cocteau's epigraph to The Infernal Machine (which the Consul mistranslates) is left untranslated in October Ferry, "'Les dieux existent, c'est le diable'" (OF 95). Also reappearing is the figure of Ixion. As Kilgallin notes, in "The Long Voyage Home," Ixion is used for both "Ethan's college and the neighbouring town from which the Llewelyns returned to find their home razed."[3] Even a filmic reference is repeated, the Student of Prague (UV 24, OF 27).[4] In other ways as well October Ferry contains

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[3]Anthony Kilgallin, "The Long Voyage Home," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p. 83.

[4]Cinema is an important element of October Ferry. Allusions to films abound.* Their pervasive influence appears disproportionate, on a realistic level, to the biographical facts of Ethan and Jacqueline who had merely belonged to a film society once (whereas its equally wide use in Under the Volcano is adequately justified by the involvement of Yvonne and Laruelle in movies as an actress and as a director).

*Outward Bound (OF 12)
Isn't Life Wonderful (OF 14)
Wuthering Heights (OF 19)
Intolerance, Way Down East (OF 36)
The Student of Prague (OF 27)
Looping the Loop (OF 61)
From Morn to Midnight (OF 116, 133)
The Wandering Jew (OF 118, 122, 128, & Chapter 20)
The Magnificent Ambersons (OF 127)
The Long Voyage Home (OF 225)
Mr. Blanding's Dream House (OF 225, 317)
The Fall of the House of Usher (OF 230)

In addition to the films themselves, various names associated with the cinema are mentioned: Douglas Fairbanks Jr., D.W. Griffith Werner Kraus, Claude Rains, Donald Duck, Dovjenko, & W.C. Fields.

hints of the earlier novel, such as "Popocatepetl" (OF 4) and "Not sozzled Samaritan," (OF 115).

The recurrence of allusions in the later work poses the aesthetic question of their appropriateness in a novel so different in tone from Under the Volcano. A book like Crime and Punishment is sufficiently malleable to fit either of Lowry's novels, with Raskolnikov's movement towards redemption evoking a theme prominent in October Ferry. Too many of the references, however, have no organic place in the more recent novel. The humiliation of Oscar Wilde at Clapham Junction, which elucidates the Consul's feeling of sexual criminality and which foreshadows his humiliating death, has no meaningful analogue in October Ferry. In contrast to the link between Geoffrey and Poe, which appears unforced, the correspondence between Ethan and Poe seems manipulated. Too many of the allusions in October Ferry remain unintegrated, textual excrescences whose purported meanings are uncorroborated by the fiction. In fairness to Lowry, it should be recognized that he himself was dissatisfied with this aspect of the novel. As Kilgallin mentions, "Where the allusions lie thickest, Lowry's manuscript marginalia comments honestly that the passage in point is far too done, too final and too psuedo-intellectual in its baffling purpose."[5]

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[5]Kilgallin, "The Long Voyage Home," p. 83.

Lowry's comments point to the provisional nature of the text; October Ferry was left incomplete at the author's death. Like the earlier posthumous novel, Dark as the Grave, its prose style is uneven. October Ferry does not fulfil the demands of characterization which (with the partial exception of Yvonne) are functionally realized in Under the Volcano. Ethan is the only character who approaches adequate definition, and even in this case there are crucial gaps (which may be due to the incompleteness of the manuscript). His wife, Jacqueline, lacks even the intermittent reality of Yvonne. A third character, the McCandless, "introduced in the early chapters, was meant to be enlarged upon and follow through the book" according to Margerie Lowry[6], but this plan was never fulfilled.

Besides giving only cursory attention to characterization in October Ferry, Lowry makes scant use of another feature usually considered essential to the novel: dialogue. When he does use dialogue, it usually sounds artificial. The following instance is, unfortunately, fairly typical:

> "Aedes flammantes vidivit!"
> The observation, breaking a silence that had fallen on them, came from one of the children....
> ..."I figure I got seventy-five - maybe seventy-four, no, I definitely got seventy-five out of a hundred and twenty-seven questions," the boy was saying. "Not good, but I'll pass Latin."
> Ethan turned to Jacqueline and whispered: "I've

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[6] Margerie Lowry, "Editor's Note," October Ferry, p. 336.

> not forgotten I was your twenty-third pupil but I learned that before I was ten," and then aloud to the boy, without knowing why he felt constrained to say this:
>
> "You might have got seventy-six, youngster, if you'd said vidit."
>
> ...
>
> ... when he heard the boy once more showing off to the girls with the words: "Ad morte eunti obviam factus sum," Ethan again interpolated, and with more acerbity:
>
> "You might have got seventy-seven if you said ad mortem ..." (OF 55-57)

This exchange is strained and ineffective. From a realistic standpoint, it is very improbable that a schoolboy in a relatively isolated part of British Columbia would study Latin, or that the exam would be out of one hundred and twenty-seven. More damagingly, Ethan's obtuse hectoring is markedly inconsistent with his character portrayal as a man of unusual insight and considerateness. The transparent purpose of this dialogue is a symbolic one. The Latin phrases, "Aedes flammantes vidit" and "Ad mortem eunti obviam factus sum," are clearly intended to evoke two traumatic memories of Ethan's past: his home (and birthplace) in Niagara-on-the-Lake which had burned to the ground, and Peter Cordwainer's death. As the exchange containing these phrases is unconvincing on a literal plane, its symbolic implications are starkly portentous and somewhat ludicrous.

Dialogue in Under the Volcano (which is also used sparingly) effects a more cogent juncture of the symbolic and unrealistic, as in the following example:

> Senora Gregorio took his hand and held it. "Life changes, you know," she said, gazing at him intently. "You can never drink of it. I think I see you with your esposa again soon."
> ...
> "Thank you."
> "Sank you."
> "Not sank you, Senora Gregorio, thank you."
> "Sank you." (UV 229-30)

In this exchange Lowry symbolically exploits a difficulty that a speaker of Spanish (a language without the "th" sound) encounters with English by substituting the words "drink" and "sank." (The former substitution could be questioned on linguistic grounds, but justified by associational psychology as Senora Gregorio runs a cantina.) By the mispronunciation of "think," "drink" becomes juxtaposed with the Consul's hope for reunion with his esposa, presenting the novel's dominant conflict in abbreviated form, and "sank" (for "thank") points to his tragic end in the abyss. This continuity between the literal and the symbolic is missing in the conversations of October Ferry, and in many cases the rupture is so striking that dialogue does not function adequately on either level.

These flaws in dialogue pose a less serious problem than the lack of action in October Ferry. Matthew Corrigan in "The Writer as Consciousness" states that "the action is missing to anneal the whole."[7] On the long bus ride to Gabriola

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[7]Matthew Corrigan, "The Writer as Consciousness," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p. 71.

no dramatic incidents occur. There is nothing comparable to the Indian dying by the wayside on the journey to Tomalin which crystallizes the meaning of Under the Volcano. On the ferry to Gabriola, something less dramatic but partly analogous does happen; a woman who has just had her teeth extracted requires medical aid. But this incident has no radiating thematic force. The nodal points of action which give meaning to Under the Volcano are absent from October Ferry. In Lowry's masterpiece a pattern of significance is created by the interfusion of acts past and present. By contrast, the action crucial to October Ferry is all remembered, no part of it being enacted in the present: Corrigan writes, "There is almost no active present tense in this work."[8] A contemplative mood replaces the dramatic thrust of Under the Volcano.

Although October Ferry has definite similarities to Under the Volcano, as a brief comparative study of allusions shows, it is probably even closer to the short story sequence, Hear Us O Lord, from which it emerged. Its closeness to what Lowry calls "its symphonically adjacent companions"[9] is indicated by the use of "Frère Jacques," a musical motif binding the short stories together. One of the epigraphs to October Ferry is found in "Through the Panama":

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[8] Corrigan, p. 76.

[9] Selected Letters, p. 338.

> Al stereless with-inne a boot
> am I
> A-mid the see, by-twixen windes
> two,
> That in contrarie standen
> ever-mo. (HU 87)

Characters in Hear Us O Lord, such as Roderick Fairhaven ("Present Estate of Pompeii") and Sigbjørn Wilderness ("Through the Panama" and "Gin and Goldenrod") are mentioned in the novel (OF 199), and conversely, the Llewelyns are referred to in "Present Estate of Pompeii." These incidental parallels grow out of a more essential link between the two books: the common setting of Eridanus. In both cases, it acts as the focus for the theme of dispossession, or in Roderick Fairhaven's words, the "migraine of alienation" (HU 177). In musical opposition to the beauty of Eridanus is Vancouver, with its "soulless behemoths"[10] of apartment buildings, forming "the industrial counterpoint" (HU 193). Most crucially, in terms of artistic structure October Ferry resembles the pieces of Hear Us O Lord, with their Chekhovian sense of mood and their absence of plot lines. Structurally, the novel retains features more typically associated with the short story, in contrast to Under the Volcano which also originated in this form.

The absence of traditional novel elements in October Ferry must be due, at least in part, to its incompleteness.

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[10]The phrase, "soulless behemoths," occurs both in the novel (OF 177) and in "The Bravest Boat" (HU 16).

With appropriate reservations, George Woodcock's assessment of Dark as the Grave can be usefully applied to October Ferry:

> ... we shall be a great deal nearer to reality if we drop on the author's behalf the pretence that this is a novel in any true sense, and regard it as a combination of travel narrative, spiritual autobiography and literary history, heightened here and there with exaggeration and a relatively slight measure of invention.[11]

Although October Ferry possesses a fictional autonomy which Dark as the Grave does not have, it shares to a lesser extent the other book's weaknesses: a sketchy plot, sparse action, weak dialogue, confusing allusions, and skimpy characterization.

However, October Ferry is much more than the document of an interrupted work in progress. While the flaws listed above set limits on October Ferry, they are in areas not central to Lowry's artistic vision. Conventional assumptions about the novel form have little relation to October Ferry.

To judge this work only by standard notions of character is to be unresponsive to the intentions and achievements of Lowry's art. In a reply to a publisher's reader who had criticized the weakness of characterization in Under the Volcano, Lowry wrote

> But I have not exactly attempted to draw characters in the normal sense - though s'welp me bob it's only Aristotle who thought character

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[11] George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p. 68.

> counted least. ... The truth is that the character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent, save with certain minor characters, the four main characters being intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit, and two of them, Hugh and the Consul, more obviously are. I suggest that here and there what may look like unsuccessful attempts at character drawing may only be the concrete bases to the creature's lives without which again the book could not be read at all.[12]

It is on this somewhat mystical plane that Lowry's "characters," aspects of the human spirit, receive their greatest intelligibility. Lowry, speaking of himself, contends that "the author's equipment, such as it is, is subjective rather than objective, a better equipment, in short, for a certain kind of poet than a novelist."[13]

A passage from October Ferry reveals his ability to articulate complex emotional nuances which lie outside and transcend the "realistic" social concerns usually bounding fictional forms; with a diction seemingly cluttered with Latinisms, deep and intense human feeling is registered in the sound of a train:

> And now as their bus trampled the highway again, through the forest across an intervening field, with a sudden noise of speeding wheels on iron, came an impassioned hullabaloo - that familiar barking drum-roll, swift harmonium-peddling sound as of violent accident in the organ aloft,

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[12] Selected Letters, p. 60.

[13] Selected Letters, p. 59.

> accompanied too by subterranean pertussal whoops, diatonic supplications, echoing of expiring concertinas - which was transforming itself, was transformed already, into that powerful protracted chord of the emotions known as nostalgia. The train was yelling insistently as a baby. To the other alarums was now added the frantic beating of a bell. At last the train seemed as if winding the whole pandemonium up and hurling it into space like a discus thrower. The wailing went bounding from mountain to mountain, slithering into silence. Eurydice! Eurydice! (OF 213)

This quality of perception, ostensibly Ethan's informing consciousness, is probably the novel's major strength.

Only rarely does Ethan as narrator lapse into clichés:

> Ethan couldn't believe that at bottom she had wanted anything "obvious" from "life" for the lack of which she was blaming him - why should she? - again the war had scarcely given them a chance at the "obvious," if a better chance than most - or that, as if overnight, she now found she "conformed." (OF 109)

Fortunately, such weaknesses are few. Ethan's mind is the only one presented through interior monologue in October Ferry, in contradistinction to Under the Volcano where a quartet of viewpoints is expressed internally. Although the use of Laruelle and Yvonne as sentient centres in Under the Volcano undoubtedly enriches the novel's meaning, their points of view are, in the main, subsidiary to the opposition of conflicting perceptions represented by Hugh and the Consul. Whereas from an artistic standpoint Hugh is a necessary

counterbalancing focus (and foil) to the Consul's bleakness, Ethan does not need such a contrapuntal voice as his movement is towards an equilibrium and integration which the Consul failed to achieve. Ethan's consciousness has sufficient intellectual and emotional scope to refract multiple aspects of the human spirit, giving a sense of visionary and experiential fullness to October Ferry.

Lowry's contention that his "equipment" is that of a poet rather than that of a novelist is borne out by his special talent for description revealed in October Ferry. His ability to render what is usually called "setting" is remarkable. The evocation of place in October Ferry, however, has a function different from the traditional purpose of "setting," the situation of action. Lowry's intentions are poetic, rather than novelistic, and action is only a minor artistic concern.[14] Here, the re-creation of place through

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[14]For this reason, I think that a comment on October Ferry such as "excessively redundant exposition is the worst flaw"* is not so much inaccurate as irrelevant. It presupposes certain conventions which are normally valid for the novel as a genre but which have little applicability to October Ferry. The term "exposition", the sketching in of necessary background information as a prelude to action, is virtually meaningless for a work which (in violation of classical dramatic lines) has meditation, not rising action, generated by the complicating circumstance. If any critical use is made of the word "exposition" it should be applied to October Ferry as a whole, which can be regarded in one sense as all exposition.

*Kilgallin, "The Long Voyage Home," p. 87.

language has a different function. Its aesthetic justification is to make external and concrete the conflicts of Ethan's interior world.

As with Under the Volcano, October Ferry presents the Dantean options of the infernal and the paradisal as specific locales. In place of Mexico, the latter novel substitutes Vancouver (the Enochvilleport of "The Bravest Boat") for hell; Eridanus is again identified with paradise:

> While beneath, good God, here was their city of "rosy metal of an unearthly hue" with a vengeance! In place of their well-behaved Meccano structure some lurid flickering City of Dis indeed, suffusing all the lowering sky westward with a bloodshot volcanic glare and firing the windows and mirrors of the little cabin, and, as now with the moon's arrival the wind began to blow strongly and steadily out of the refinery's quarter, from the southwest, overwhelming them from across the water with a new and deadlier assault of unique oil-smells, bringing on their gusts an added wild clamor, this time probably from the city too (though again seeming to suspire to (sic) the refinery alone), a tumult, steadily increasing in volume, like the plucked strings of a thousand Jew's harps, and the flexitone whinings of flailing metal, and a moaning rising to a pitch and then falling and dying to reascend again, surcharged now, in a lull of the wind, by those immediate coastwise concussions, zinzulations of shingle-mills, Byzantine warnings, chimes and chuffing of engines along the railway lines, wails of locomotive steam-whistles, and harmonium chords from diesels. (UV 159-160)

> Two years ago last spring, in May, the Llewelyns, having followed the path through the forest ("follow this trail through the bush until you see the light in the sky, then you'll see the cabin you folks are looking for, at the bottom of the steps," the old fisherman had instructed them), and there below them, beneath a wild cherry tree in full bloom,

> its chimney capped by a bucket, shingled roof needing repair, its strong cedar foundations standing right in the sea, for it was high tide, they saw, for the first time, their third house, their beloved cabin. It was shimmering, awash in light; the reflections of the sun on the water sent forever millwheel reflections sliding up and down its weathered silver cedar sides. They stood there, looking at one another, in the lightness, greenness, the heavenliness of the forest, and always this first glimpse of their house was to be associated too, perhaps from memories of the carillon-sounding Sunday mornings of Niagara-on-the-Lake, with the unearthly chiming of a church bell through the mist. Actually the sound in Eridanus came from a freight train walking along the embankment on the other side of the inlet, its warning bell... (OF 253)

Lowry's descriptive brilliance dramatizes (and objectifies) the novel's central theme: the destructive and affirmative impulses registered by the narrator's consciousness.

In assessing the literary value of October Ferry, the critic is faced with the unmanageable fact that it is incomplete. The difficulty this presents is illustrated by Lowry's intention of having Ethan defend "a man who (sic) he believed innocent only to discover later he was guilty of a monstrous and hideous murder."[15] This aspect of Ethan's life was never developed. What is surprising about the omission of such a crucial aspect is that the novel is not an aesthetic disaster. Although characterization is flawed, it is indicative of Lowry's art that the imaginative grasp of theme in October Ferry,

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[15] Margerie Lowry, "Editor's Note," p. 336

the opposition of the infernal and the paradisal, remains even with this omission aesthetically convincing. Analogous to the paintings of Renaissance Masters where the use of multi-layered composition is apparent only by their quality of luminosity, in Lowry's best works seemingly redundant examples give to theme a mythic resonance. Thus, numerous and diverse instances, related from multiple perspectives, provide the idea of "betrayal" in Under the Volcano with a thematic fullness. Lowry's unrealized aims for Ethan's character are not, therefore, felt as a gap because their fulfilment would only have reinforced and made more complex his sense of murderous complicity that is already adequately explained by Peter's suicide.

However, this kind of incompleteness may be the reason why Ethan's feelings of guilt, while motivated convincingly, lack the intense universality of the Consul's. If Lowry's projected intentions are disregarded, October Ferry will suffer in critical esteem, but not dramatically. Its weaknesses are trivialized by what Matthew Corrigan describes as "moments of lyric and philosophical grace that equal anything written in the twentieth century."[16] In the canon of Lowry's work, October Ferry will probably assume a place second only to Under the Volcano.

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[16]Corrigan, p. 71.

II

On the Llewelyns's journey towards Gabriola in search of a new home, "the glass windows by which they were enclosed were like many-faceted mirrors, reflecting all aspects of his life - _their_ life."[17] In a series of flashbacks, Ethan not only recalls, but also struggles to impose a retrospective order on his past. The refusal of the past to remain _passed_ immeasurably complicates his efforts to encompass, confine, and delimit:

> ...as abruptly as the machinery of a phonograph with self-changing records clashes into action, it was as though within him a totally different consciousness had taken over.... It was as if the mind of another person, coexisting with the first but utterly independent of it, had begun to work over much of the same material, but with what a different viewpoint! (_OF_ 209)

A heritage of misery shapes the early lives of both Ethan and Jacqueline. Ethan's childhood is shadowed by physical and psychological pain. He "was blind, or almost blind, from the age of eight or nine to thirteen or thereabouts" (_OF_ 20) with corneal ulceration. At school, "he'd been kept in a state of semistarvation, and was lucky if he saw an egg or a glass of milk in a month..." (_OF_ 22). Ethan's mother had died some years before. His father, "when Ethan was home for

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[17]Malcolm Lowry, "Working Notes (England)", _October Ferry_, Special Collections, U.B.C. Library, folder no. 17-13.

holidays ... beat him over his chilblains with a razor strop..." (OF 23). Jacqueline's past is, at least, equally melodramatic. Her "home life began by being plucked up as a baby on a January night from a freezing doorstep in Winnipeg..." (OF 28). McCandless, her biological father, adopted Jacqueline after her mother was found "hanging in a gas-filled flat" (OF 32). Ethan sees in these biographical details (which demand from the reader a wilful suspension of disbelief) "a certain hideous pattern in his life, a sort of curse" (OF 211). Their horrendous biographies lend pathos to Ethan's and Jacqueline's struggle against intense feelings of dislocation and "homelessness" (OF 37).

The burning of their home at Niagara-on-the-Lake and the threatened eviction from Eridanus is felt with traumatic intensity. For Ethan, the home at Eridanus represents a personal harmony and equilibrium never discovered before, one which is communicable only with reference to mystical experience:

> In fact he could sum up no better their life on the beach than to say it had been, in a manner, his cabbala, in the sense that, if he was not mistaken, that system might be regarded on one plane as a means less of accumulating than of divesting oneself - by arrangement, balancing them against their opposites - of unbalanced ideas: the mind, finally transcending both aspects, regains its lost equilibrium, or for the first time truly discovered it... (OF 169)

When Ethan is absent from Eridanus (during a brief stay in a Vancouver apartment), "it had not taken long for what had become so precariously balanced within himself to be overpoised again" (OF 185). What gives particular urgency to Ethan's fears of eviction is that "Ethan simply did not believe that the sort of conjunction of favoring yet opposing circumstances which had maintained Eridanus' existence in balance for so long could arise again, or be discovered elsewhere to have arisen" (OF 197). The loss of their home on the beach implies an irretrievable loss of equilibrium, and a return to a sense of rootlessness and displacement intolerably heightened by memories of a lost order.

Ethan's attempt to retain a measure of personal balance is exacerbated by another painful incident from his biography, an incident crucial to his self-definition. In an episode from his student days (parallel to one in Charlotte Haldane's quasi-biographical novel about Malcolm Lowry, I Bring Not Peace) a friend, Peter Cordwainer, had committed suicide after Ethan had drunkenly "told him to go ahead" (OF 214). Peter's death is a ravaging memory throughout the journey to Gabriola, which takes place on October seventh, "the anniversary of the day Peter had died, exactly twenty years ago" (OF 211). Unable to gauge the depth of his guilt, Ethan oscillates wildly between self-condemnation and protestations of innocence:

> "I accused myself, somewhat unnecessarily, they all said. Because the point was I didn't know. Or did I?..." (OF 215)

Blanked out by alcohol, the extent and nature of Ethan's responsibility for Peter's death is inaccessible by a simple act of remembrance on his part.

With the actual event occluded by a drunken haze, Ethan can only furtively guess at what happened. A retrospective evaluation in which remembered facts are dispassionately considered is impossible. Guilt is virtually his only link with the past. Unrestricted by any concrete boundaries, Ethan's sense of guilt is both subjective and fluctuating, at times reaching an infinite magnitude. To his conscious mind, the episode of Peter's suicide is inherently formless, an uncomprehended event receiving the successive shapes imposed by guilt. From this endless kinetic process, in which present feelings interact with a forever inscrutable past, no permanence emerges; apparent fixity and meaning is constantly dissolving. In his quest for personal equilibrium, Ethan is confronted with a logically insoluble dilemma: a prerequisite to self-definition in the present is the understanding of a past experience which is permanently unknowable.

The guilt, latent throughout the journey to Gabriola, is manifested dramatically when Ethan sees an advertisement for Mother Gettle's Soup, a product for which Peter's father was the advertising manager:

Mother Gettle's Kettle-Simmered Soup. M'mm, Good!

> It must have been there all the time of course, the advertisement staring him in the face; perhaps the mist had obscured it, or the high-piled timber on the open cars trundling by, while now there were some curiously meaningless empty cars that he could see right over; but he had been expecting it sometime or another all morning, but not this one, not the one with Cordwainer himself on it, not this comparatively rare one, showing a twenty times life-size cartoon of Peter, a lively, handsome, grinning youth of fifteen, gulping a great bowl of steaming soup and saying, "M'mm, Good!" (OF 208-09)

The omnipresent advertisements for Mother Gettle's Soup externalize Ethan's recurrent sense of guilt, and this particular one, in its facile glibness, parodies his superficial response towards Peter's threats of suicide.

As a symbolic reference this advertisement has a range of meanings extending beyond Ethan's momentary and individual failure to communicate with emotional adequacy. The contrived ecstasy seen in the Mother Gettle's Soup advertisement exemplifies the continuous and universal tendency of advertising to induce false emotions. For economic reasons, advertising does not seek to correlate language and reality; instead, it consciously exploits the commercial possibilities inherent in their disproportion. The loss of perspective which results (if the advertising is effective) is analogous to Ethan's confused response to Peter's situation. Ethan's words, "go ahead," are clearly disproportionate to human circumstances.

His use of language, judged on the level of feelings, is inadequate whereas the prose of advertising is invariably excessive, but both usages are linked by a parallel sense of emotional discontinuity.

The critical absence of perspective which preceded the suicide is, in Ethan's view, a cultural norm fostered by advertising and by that to which it is intimately related, the mass media:

> ... with Time and Life on the table with their bouncing advertisements of a bouncing life with Big Cousin that never was on land or sea, or if it was, in his opinion shouldn't be, haunting you each weekend, and criminal slanting of the news, which Jacqueline absorbed with guileless interest, as without knowing it, so increasingly did he, so that their conversation began unconsciously to reflect these opinions, or disgustingly react from them beyond all fairness and judgment.... (OF 181)

Ethan sees misjudgment as the inevitable consequence of the media's distortion of personal valuations. The sensationalism (and authoritarian stance) implicit in Ethan's misjudgment of Peter's threats is reflected, on a larger scale, in The Vancouver Evening Messenger (The Vancouver Sun?). In the interests of an enlarged readership, this newspaper instead of rendering the news from a balanced perspective, blatantly distorts it.

As a result Ethan's sweeping indictment of Vancouver "was based not so much upon his experience as on his personal

reactions to the current articles in that dreaded Vancouver Evening Messenger, with its eternal rapping and probings..." (OF 186). His personal sense of reality subverted by the newspaper, Ethan finds himself "reacting mostly to that which aroused his own venom, which, being aimed nowhere, or at an abstraction, ended only in poisoning himself" (OF 186). Throughout October Ferry the inexpressive language of the mass media is used as both metaphor and cause of alienation (with the potentialities of language as an instrument for human understanding acting as a largely unstated counterpoint).

Inferentially, the city and the newspaper are fused. One is the realization of the grotesque version of life propagated by the other. Both the form and content of the newspaper's headlines suggest the city's disregard for human nuances:

> CLEAN-UP OF VANCOUVER DEMANDED BY ANGRY CITIZENS, yelled the headlines. TREES, EYESORES, MUST GO. (OF 176)

The effect of this projected "urban renewal" in Vancouver is graphically presented. Lowry uses cannibalistic imagery to describe the destruction of old buildings, placing them in emotional contrast to the newly erected ones which are apparently designed to smother life:

> This was no bulldozer's job where the house-wreckers smashed the house to smithereens in one grunting blow: they were taking, torturing, the house to pieces, it seemed bit by bit. It was almost as if they meant to eat it; piling neatly its strips of

> white flesh to one side in the trampled garden, as though the house were a carcass they meant to carry away piecemeal and devour at their leisure. (OF 187)

> ... soulless Behemoths in the shape of hideous new apartment buildings, yet more deathscapes of the future. No longer was the milk delivered by a wagon and a good-luck white horse but in a vehicle resembling a mechanized death slab. And if there was some economic sense in this change, to regret which was sentimental, the same could scarcely be said of other changes. The fake modern buildings going up everywhere were proving far more deserving of literal cold-blooded condemnation than even were those they replaced. Their roofs leaked, their staircases collapsed, their toilets would not work. And besides a soul-destroying ugliness these new buildings all had in common, both within and without, was a curious-seeming out-of-dateness. Not in the sense that the steamboat Gothic houses could be said to be out of date. It was that those had the aspect of potential ruins, of a sort of rubble, even before they had been completed. (OF 177)

The Hell that was Mexico in Under the Volcano is transposed to Vancouver in October Ferry. The city becomes the embodiment of human disorder, disequilibrium physically realized. It objectively images both Ethan's individual biography (a dislocated childhood, the burning of his house, Peter's death) and the larger social pattern (advertising, Time, The Vancouver Evening Messenger). Living in Vancouver, "It had not taken long for what had become so precariously balanced within himself to be overpoised again" (OF 185). In Ethan's search for a personal equilibrium, Vancouver epitomizes the unbalance that he is struggling against.

The cabin by the sea in the wilderness of British Columbia represents a paradisal alternative to Vancouver:

> How close the stars as they rose over the mountains, and were reflected in the inlet, among the reflections of the pines. Yet of their names, their behavior, it came to him, he still knew nothing. He hadn't even known till Jacqueline told him that Eridanus was also the name of a constellation, far less that it was the river, in Virgil's Aeneid, which watered the Elysian Fields of the Earthly Paradise.... (OF 164)

There is a corollary to this depiction of Eridanus as "the Earthly Paradise." It is also a pastoral vision. Many characteristics of the genre as sketched by William Empson in Some Versions of Pastoral are contained in Lowry's description of rural life. Empson sees as a central idea of the pastoral the process of putting the complex into the simple, with the assumption "that you can say everything about complex people by a complete consideration of simple people.":[18]

> The simple man ... has better 'sense' than his betters and can say things more fundamentally true; he is 'in contact with nature', which the complex man needs to be...; he is in contact with the mysterious forces of our own nature...; he can speak the truth....[19]

At Eridanus, Ethan achieves "contact with nature," truly discovering an equilibrium by "divesting oneself" (OF 169),

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[18] William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 113.

[19] Empson, p. 18.

an imitation of the pastoral technique of resolving the complex within the simple. Moreover, in this process of clarification another key idea of the pastoral is exemplified; truth becomes recognizable. When Ethan reads Time and Life in the city, distortion of judgment occurs; "... in the country the magazines simply seemed a welcome weekly joke, to be treated in large with the same amused contempt that intelligent Russians presumably reserved for Pravda" (OF 181).

The simplicity found at Eridanus, in conformity with pastoral assumptions, results in truth and harmony. Lowry's pastoral idyll, however, is not presented as a self-enclosed world, existing in pristine isolation from city life. Using the oil refinery as a primary symbol, Lowry shows urban and technological reality in its most inimical forms continually encroaching upon, and disrupting, Ethan's pastoral vision:

> Their inlet they were so proud of had ... due to someone having opened the wrong valve of an oil barge moored at the refineries distantly visible citywards on that opposite bank,... become sleeked for miles with a vast scum of crude oil. ... Part of the trouble was the colossal stench arising from that oil slick at this stage of the tide. It was something that contrasted weirdly with the blasts of heavenly fragrance wafted, at the least shifting of the wind, from the forest - a contrast resembling and not less improbably than that between floating ambergris and its distillation in perfume. ...
>
> Every bit as peculiar, and twice as terrifying, as this olfactory contrast was that between the sense of relatively ineffable peace otherwise on their side of the inlet, a quiet broken only by the dripping of water from the trees, or the beginning notes of the western nightingale, and the unholy, plangent yet strident and everincreasing tumult now arising from the other side. (OF 156-58)

From this disruption of pastoral life, an eschatological opposition of heaven and hell emerges.

Through the juxtaposition of Vancouver and Eridanus, the urban and bucolic, Lowry gives mythic extension to contending aspects of Ethan's self. The antiphonal voices of city and wilderness externalize an inner conflict. Corresponding to the opposing ethical absolutes of heaven and hell are Ethen's two opposing notions of his responsibility for Peter's suicide: innocence and guilt ("Murderer!," OF 216). The opposition between the infernal city and the paradisal wilderness correlates with Ethan's sense of personal antinomies. The apparent intrusion of Vancouver, the infernal city, upon Eridanus, which has paradisal connotations of innocence, symbolically conveys Ethan's recurring tendency towards self-condemnation. Although Ethan's Paradise is given a precise geographical setting, it is (like Milton's Hell) primarily a state of mind, and, as such, it is vulnerable not only to the physical incursions of the city but also to incursions of consciousness. Ethan's lyrical evocation of Eridanus is abruptly dissipated by memories of the past:

> ... the white light on the sea these early October mornings, the clouds rolling away, the freshness, the newness, the sparkle and cleanliness - A longing for the pure intoxication of sobriety possessed him -
>
> STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!
>
> Mother Gettle's Kettle-Simmered Soup. M'mm, Good!
> (OF 208)

Without a personal equilibrium (consequent upon his inability to formulate an adequate self-definition) Ethan neurotically oscillates between two extremes of self-judgment, with the polarities given intensity and concreteness by the brilliance of Lowry's description of Vancouver and Eridanus.

The journey to Gabriola provides a literal framework for a quest motif, a motif explored on several planes of meaning in the novel. The voyage represents, on a psychological level, a search for the precarious balance of self which had become "over poised." Sociologically, it can be viewed as a quest for an alternative to the dehumanization of urban life. On a theological plane, the journey can be interpreted as an effort to regain Paradise lost. It is also, perhaps most significantly, an epistemological quest. For Ethan, the search for knowledge, rooted in the mystery of Peter's death, extends outwards to embrace the falsification of social reality imaged by various media, and recoils back to self, on a level of philosophical abstraction, in the form of solipsism.

Cinema is an informing metaphor for several aspects of this quest motif, particularly the epistemological one. For Ethan, on the bus ride to Nanaimo, "the landscape began to take on a sort of reality but it was not its own reality, but the reality of a landscape seen from a train window, in the

sunset, in a film. ... Now the only reality he could think of was the reality of his cabin" (OF 61). In fact, "Films had more reality to him than life until he had found his little house..." (OF 61). Lowry's intentions in this passage are clarified by his working notes, where cinematic reality is identified with the pallid, imitative reality found in Plato's cave:

> Plato's view was correct; and their cave, exactly resembling the cave he'd come out of originally, the cave cinema in Quadra Street. In a very real, hugely poignant sense, what they saw was still the shadows of people behind them, thrown on the wall in front of them, only it was a screen. Every time they came out, or had come out, released into the open air, with open eyes to the light, to return to Eridanus, there had been that feeling that this was reality....[20]

Threatened with eviction from their cabin, Ethan's sense of reality collapses. The journey towards Gabriola, punctuated by cinematic flashbacks (symbolizing the illusory reality to be dispelled) is a Platonic quest, at once both mystical and cognitive, "the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible."[21] Using films as an analogy, Lowry invests Ethan's literal movement with the epistemological meaning found in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Gabriola Island symbolically holding the promise of Absolute Reality.

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[20]Lowry, "Working Notes (England)," folder no. 17-13.

[21]Plato, The Republic, trans. F.M. Cornford (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1945), p. 231.

The concluding five chapters of October Ferry, narrating the actual voyage to the island, give prominence to the religious aspect of the quest motif. From a Dantean perspective, it is evident that Lowry again explores the theme of purgation:

> The pitching boat, its gunwale now above, now below, now rolling away from the clanking rising and falling landing stage, was scarcely more than a launch, had no discernible name, and had been newly painted yellow. Mingled with the smell of fresh paint a terrific cleanly harsh smell of salt and fish rose to their nostrils from the harbor. Taking things all in all Ethan reflected that they ought at this point to feel sick but the smell was so violent, as if everything putrefying had been purged out of it by the sea and wind, that instead they were exhilarated. (OF 285-86)

The pitching boat symbolically images Ethan's lack of equilibrium, his compulsive oscillations between innocence and guilt. The phrase, "a terrific cleanly harsh smell," suggests that his inner torment has led or will lead to some essential purification of this guilt. However, this feeling of regeneration, represented by the fresh paint, is immediately undercut by Ethan's recurring sense of criminality:

> Trespassers using this dock - the prisoner in the dock! - do so at their own risk. Smout Gabriola Ferry Ltd. (OF 286)

The sudden shifts to self-condemnation that typify Ethan's

thoughts throughout the day continue during the ferry ride. The purgatorial theme is furthered through an advertisement for the "Gabriola Convalescent Home" (OF 286). In response to Jacqueline's query, Ethan remarks, "One's glad to know people go there [i.e. to Gabriola Island] to recover from something" (OF 287). This concept, analogous to the hospital in Lunar Caustic, offers a literal framework for the idea of regeneration.

In the next chapter, "Outward Bound," the religious context becomes more overt. On board the ferry, Ethan is touched by the calm of a nun's gaze and wonders if he should accept his situation "as the working of a higher will, of God's will" (OF 295). At the same time, he has a feeling of being unworthy of receiving God's help, as he "had done his best to defend, from human law, those who had transgressed the divine" (OF 295). Ethan recalls a childhood prayer, and its implications of grace are made explicit in the word "good-bye," which meant "God be with you" (OF 296). Furthermore, Ethan notes that "to your Good-bye! an echo always seemed to answer 'Abye!' and abye was an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'to atone for!'" But it also meant "to endure" (OF 296). The second meaning of the word "abye" reflects the uncertainty Ethan has about his condition, that is, whether or not atonement is possible. This ambiguity extends to Gabriola Island, "half hidden ... by a pall of smoke" (OF 298). The source of the

fire (infernal or purgatorial?) is not immediately clear, but apparently is caused by "people burning rotten tree stumps off their lands" (OF 298). This image, with its sense of purification, is like that in "The Forest Path to the Spring" when the narrator hacks out the rotten wood from a salvaged ladder. Nevertheless, Ethen's mind returns yet again to a sense of damnation:

> Good-bye! And the echo comes Abye! ... Was the word in a dictionary? If so, some part of his documental mind informed him, it must be found next to the word "abyss." God help me! (Lowry's dots, OF 299)

Ethan's continuing sensation of guilt is verbalized in the next chapter, "The Perilous Chapel," when he impulsively accosts a priest with the words, "Pray for me, Father" (OF 303). In explanation, Ethan says, "I want to want to have faith" (OF 305). Because of his discussion with the priest, Ethan is supplied "with a measure of reassurance, indeed a kind of goal" (OF 306). In fact, he begins to have "an impression of self-mastery" (OF 307):

> ... for the first time in a long while he felt in tune with his destiny and that of the universe. The feeling was not unlike one of triumph.
> Ouch!
>
> "Hail to the sea gull, in the empyrean!
> Who man's head useth, as a spare latrine."

Lowry, with bawdy humour, ironically derides Ethan's sense of triumph. But, it is only moments later that Ethan performs a significant action (perhaps the book's only one in the present tense). To an old lady, whose mouth was bleeding because her teeth were removed earlier in the day, Ethan offers a drink of gin as an anesthetic. This incident, while ludicrous, does show elements of affirmation on Ethan's part; it loosely correlates with the Christian meaning of the good Samaritan, a meaning that is turned upside down in Under the Volcano.

In the final chapter of October Ferry, "Uberimae Fides," Ethan's purgatorial movement seems to near conclusion as the ferry approaches Gabriola Island. The chapter opens triumphantly with the news (in the dreaded Vancouver Evening Messenger) that the squatters at Eridanus will not be evicted immediately. This reprieve does not deter Ethan from his quest for a less vulnerable home, a new "Paradise" (OF 325). The name of their friend, Angela d'Arrivee (OF 328), suggests that Gabriola Island might be a Paradise regained. Lowry's book ends abruptly - before Ethan and his wife set foot upon Gabriola Island - leaving the success of their quest uncertain. The novel's tone is perhaps best expressed by an oxymoron, the ferry's "protracted chord of mournful triumph"(OF 332). While some ambivalence characterizes the resolution of October Ferry to Gabriola, the affirmative note predominates.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Tracing Lowry's preoccupation with the past throughout his writings demonstrates their essential unity, and justifies his insistence that individual works would organically contribute to a larger whole, the projected synthesis entitled The Voyage that Never Ends. An examination of Lowry's use of the past crystallizes a series of binary oppositions which provide the recurring thematic context for his art. With a near allegorical sense of opposites, a quality of perception unusual for twentieth century literature in general and the novel form in particular, Lowry gives visionary extension to the range of human experience. The past in its opposition to the future is correlated with a set of alternatives involving reality and illusion, despair and hope, and ultimately, death and life. By the relative weight accorded to these opposing terms Lowry would have been able to calibrate on his Dantean scale the placement of individual books within The Voyage that Never Ends, "the whole to concern the battering the human spirit takes (doubtless because it is overreaching itself) in its ascent towards its true purpose."[1]

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[1]While Lowry acknowledges the model of Dante for The Voyage that Never Ends, his descriptions of this work paraphrases Goethe's famous remark about Faust (used as the final epigraph to Under the Volcano):

"that a man striving upward continuously

Under the Volcano, "the first, infernal part," emphasizes the past as a source of despair, and as the initiating cause of death. Structurally, Lowry registers a sense of the past in the opening chapter which, besides introducing the major themes and characters, acts as a reprise. Through the retrospection of Jacques Laruelle the events of the previous year - the successive chapters - are summarized, and the meaning intrinsic in those events is, by analogy to the cinematic flashback, given clarity and definition. The formal design of the novel is at once regressive, moving backwards in time, and cyclical, returning to the present moment. This structural ambiguity is correlated with the thematic use of the Karmic Wheel. In its cyclical representation of the inexorable ethical demands of the past the karmic wheel relates character to structure in the novel. Under the Volcano presents the Wheel of Life (Samsara) revolving with dispassionate justice, with its central focus on the character of Geoffrey Firmin. Misunderstanding this universal law, the Consul's attitude towards it is unduly negative. Feeling trapped on the karmic wheel, he has any impulse towards spiritual affirmation undercut by a feeling of determinism.[2] Lowry also explicates the Consul's paralysis

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from grievous errors toward betterment
ought to be saved."*

*Goethe, recorded by Eckermann, "Introduction," Faust, trans. Peter Salm (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), p. xii.

[2]It should be noted that the structure of the novel is not identical to the Consul in this respect any more than Hamlet in its dramatic resolution is equivalent to the fate of its titular character; the movement of Under the Volcano as a whole

of will psychologically. The regressive and/or cyclical tendencies of the book's structural arrangement correlate with the etiology and dynamics of alcoholism. This pattern, reinforced by extensive references to Freudian theories of personality development, imbues the actions of the Consul with a sense of psychological determinism.

His personal loss of free will Lowry extrapolates to a historical level. In the characters of the two half-brothers, Geoffrey and Hugh, Lowry creates an intellectual polarity, which centres on differing notions of historical determinism. Here, the recurring antimonies of Lowry's art can be observed clearly. Geoffrey sees in the workings of history a sterile repetition of the past, evidence of man's compulsive need for regression to chaos and violence. For Hugh, on the other hand, history is a process of affirmation, with the sordid nature of the past moving towards a Marxist transcendence. Through the use of the past in the form of cultural history Lowry undermines such optimism. By literary allusions he sets up a framework which, like the imagery of Shakespeare's plays, coalesces disparate thematic elements and lends resonance to meanings operant on a literal level. Lowry's selective use of literary allusions tends as well to darken the already bleak universe in which his characters are located. This is particularly true

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is in much closer accord with the latent optimism of the Buddhist philosophy which, while recognizing that the past is irrevocable, argues that the future remains open.

for Geoffrey's doomed consciousness. In the case of Hugh the references to Don Quixote seem especially apt, with the result that the Marxism, which he espouses, loses credibility. The past in the guise of allusions has, for the most part, the effect of confirming Geoffrey's despairing view of history. The prevailing tone of Under the Volcano is much more closely aligned with Geoffrey's pessimistic interpretation of history as regression than with Hugh's positive (illusory?) view of the future.

All of the major characters in the novel are explicitly aware of the past.[3] Lowry enunciates the purgatorial theme of Under the Volcano mainly through Yvonne's thoughts. She, like Hugh, represents in the novel the hope for transfiguration. Yvonne, just prior to her arrival in Mexico imagines Quauhnahuac "purged, swept clean of the past, with Geoffrey here alone, ... in the flesh, redeemable, wanting her help" (UV 63). Like Bill Plantagenet in Lunar Caustic, she recognizes the need for renewal:

> "... let's start again really, Geoffrey, really and cleanly somewhere. It could be like a rebirth." (UV 277)

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[3] As a sentient centre in chapter one (and nowhere else), Laruelle's awareness of the past is qualitatively distinct from that of the other characters. His survey of the events of the previous Day of the Dead has a temporal detachment not shared by the others. Moreover, there is a certain artistic distance suggested by his role as film director ("we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation"*) which also isolates his interior view from the main action of the novel.

*Selected Letters, p. 71.

The setting she envisions for this rebirth is the same as that of "The Forest Path to the Spring," a shack standing between the forest and the sea. Yvonne's image of an idyllic future counterpoints Geoffrey's despairing commitment to the past. This discord of visions, which complements the opposition in historical perspectives between the half-brothers, reaches a moment of dramatic tension in chapter nine of Under the Volcano. With Yvonne acting as the sentient centre, the novel is now, according to Lowry, "Teetering between past and future - between despair (the past) and hope.... Shall the Consul, once more go forward and be reborn... or shall he sink back into degeneracy and Parian and extinction."[4] Yvonne's wish to redeem the Consul does not achieve fruition, and a partial explanation of her failure is that she, like Plantagenet who engages in a parallel task, has wavering faith in the possibility of such a regeneration:

> ... was one doomed? ... one could see oneself, or pretend to, as a small lone figure carrying the burden of those ancestors, ... in one's blood, a victim of dark forces - everybody was, it was inescapable! - misunderstood and tragic, yet at least with a will of your own! But what was the use of will if you had no faith? (UV 267-68)

Yvonne must transcend her own past before she can plausibly offer the Consul an image of renewal. Carrying the burden of

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[4] Selected Letters, p. 81.

her ancestors, she, like Geoffrey, is trembling under the weight of the past - symbolized at the chapter's end by an old lame Indian bearing an even older Indian on his back.

Hugh's optimism collapses intermittently under similar doubts. In despairing moments he thinks, "No: I am much afraid there is little enough in your past, which will come to your aid against the future" (UV 151). At other points in the novel Hugh experiences euphoria: "Judas had forgotten; nay, Judas had been, somehow, redeemed" (UV 122), but this feeling is transitory. He feels trapped by "the realisation that in no essential sense had he escaped from his past life" (UV 162). In this respect he is not the polar opposite of, but identical to his half-brother. However, in his refusal to acquiesce to his past, he contrasts sharply with the Consul. Whereas Geoffrey suffers from what Stephen Spender terms "acedia"[5] Hugh continues to strive for affirmation:

> Yet, the banality stood: that the past was irrevocably past. And conscience had been given man to regret it only in so far as that might change the future. For man, every man, Juan seemed to be telling him, even as Mexico, must ceaselessly struggle upward. (UV 108)

The last line quoted echoes Lowry's epigraph from Faust, a work in which Goeth demonstrates that there is always a chance for redemption. In secular terms, Hugh, with his hopes of changing

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[5]Spender, "Introduction," p. xxiv.

the world, clings to an analogous belief in renewal. His action of risking his life to bring munitions to the beleagured Loyalist army stems from such an affirmation which, despite the heavily ironic treatment of his character, the novel does not seek to discredit entirely.

Nevertheless, it is the figure of the Consul who dominates Under the Volcano. For him, the past is "that frightful bloody nightmare he was forced to carry around with him everywhere upon his back, that went by the name of Geoffrey Firmin" (UV 223). To understand the remarkable characterization of the Consul, it is useful to examine briefly the nature of Lowry's art. In an important respect Lowry is anachronistic. Evident in Under the Volcano is a consistent moral perspective that is absent from works such as Nostromo and Ulysses to which Lowry's novel has been compared. Under the Volcano has a closer kinship to nineteenth century writers like Melville, Hawthorne, and Dostoevsky. These writers, in conjunction with the epigraph from Bunyan, suggest Lowry's near allegorical tendencies. Even without a knowledge of the Puritan influence on Lowry's life, it is clear from his work that he possessed an artistic sensibility which could conceive of, and depict, with conviction the opposition of heaven and hell. Lowry's novel does not give unsceptical credence to Christian theology, but moral referents drawn from it exist as interpretative concepts crucial to the book's meaning. Even though Lowry uses political and psychological perspectives within the novel, Under the Volcano

implies that there is an irreducible component to man lying outside these categories, a component for which the most adequate description is the word "soul." Because of this concept Lowry is able to show in Geoffrey that quality which, according to Edith Hamilton, defines a tragic hero: "the suffering of a soul that can suffer greatly."[6]

In a letter, quoting the advice of Sean O'Faolain, Lowry writes that the novel "should reform itself by drawing upon its ancient Aeschylean and tragic heritage."[7] It is possible to consider Under the Volcano as an attempt along these lines. Lowry, in anachronistic fashion, retains an "awareness of a continuity between the human and the divine order,"[8] which George Steiner, in The Death of Tragedy, argues is an essential aspect of tragedy. His sense of cosmic interrelationship permits Lowry to create in the Consul a universal man in mystical contact with the rhythms of the universe. The Consul is not only in touch with the sustaining myths of contemporary man (Marx and Freud) but also susceptible to what Steiner calls "the alphabet of tragic drama - such concepts as grace and damnation, purgation and relapse, innocence and corruption through daemonic power."[9]

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[6]Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1942), p. 235.

[7]Selected Letters, p. 80.

[8]George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), p. 320.

[9]Steiner, p. 319.

Lowry's tragic intentions with regard to Under the Volcano are revealed through references to various Greek and Elizabethan models, and most suggestively by the following passage:

> Though tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless it seemed one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value and was not a mere misprint in a communiqué. (UV 5)

Because the fate of the Consul is endowed with a sense of larger referential value, his death takes on a significance that is ultimately tragic.

The sense of determinism associated with Geoffrey's death accords with Steiner's view that "Tragedy is irreparable."[10] Spengler, in a passage from The Decline of the West, elaborates on this idea, stressing the critical aspect of time:

> If in lieu of "direction" we say "irreversibility", if we let ourselves sink into the terrible meaning of those words "too late" wherewith we resign a fleeting bit of the present to the eternal past, we find the deep foundation of every tragic crisis. It is Time that is the tragic ....
> ... Western tragedy ... deals with the development of a whole life. Our tragedy arises from the feeling of an inexorable Logic of becoming ... the life of Lear matures inwardly toward a catastrophe....[11]

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[10] Steiner, p. 8.

[11] Oswald Spengler, "Tragedy: Classical vs. Western," Sophocles: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Thomas Woodward (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 21.

It is the shaping presence of the past towards a tragic incident that Lowry gives expression to in his novel, and at the moment of the Consul's death, there is an experience (as the author predicted) of "catharsis."[12]

October Ferry to Gabriola is equally concerned with the past. As Matthew Corrigan points out in "The Writer as Consciousness," "Most of the time we are delving so deeply into the past that its own past becomes significant."[13] A major theme of Under the Volcano recurs in October Ferry: the need to grapple with a past which threatens to destroy the future. October Ferry, however, in contrast to the other novel, fends off the destructive implications of the past. While reservations exist, it exhibits a fairly effective purgatorial movement. In the context of Lowry's purgatorial intentions, it is intermediary between Lunar Caustic, where the impulse towards renewal is left equivocal, and Dark as the Grave, where an almost unqualified transcendence is asserted. While the ending of October Ferry

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[12] Selected Letters, p. 85. It should be noted that a Buddhist interpretation of Under the Volcano - with the notion of precise justice - appears incompatible with the tragic view which demands that "We are punished far in excess of our guilt" (Steiner, p. 9). This conflict can be resolved by a consideration of endings. A linear reading of the novel, concluding with chapter twelve, is more propitious to tragedy, and a cyclical reading, concluding with chapter one, favours a Buddhist interpretation.

[13] Corrigan, p. 72.

does contain ambiguity, it presages the recovery of a paradisal setting, and the sense of harmony depicted in "The Forest Path to the Spring." Moreover, Ethan apparently comes to terms with the central, radiating incident of his past, the suicide of Peter Cordwainer. Because of his guilt, Ethan, like his namesake from Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand," feels isolated from the magnetic chain of humanity. The novel describes Ethan's striving towards a reintegration, a process that becomes virtually identical to regeneration. Whereas Under the Volcano counterpoints the striving of Hugh with the despair of Geoffrey, October Ferry locates both tendencies in the figure of Ethan.

In its relative emphasis, October Ferry is almost the exact opposite of Under the Volcano. Ethan's movement, with some ambivalence, is upwards; Geoffrey's, with perhaps a "hint of redemption,"[14] is downwards. The restoration of Ethan's personal equilibrium is foreshadowed by the novel's title, as the action of the novel takes place in October, under the astrological sign of Libra (OF 284), the balance or the scale. In contrast, Under the Volcano "takes place 'in Scorpio,'"[15] the most maleficent sign of the Zodiac. No less important for Lowry's purpose is the fact that the ruling planet Libra is Venus, the goddess of love. A central theme of Under the Volcano, "No se puede vivir sin amar" (one cannot live without love)

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[14] Selected Letters, p. 85.

[15] Selected Letters, p. 198.

is restated positively in October Ferry. Yvonne's infidelity can be seen as a primary cause of Geoffrey's death ("The goat means tragedy (tragedy-goat song) but goat-cabron-cuckold (the horns)).[16] In October Ferry it is Ethan's marriage that restores him to the magnetic chain of humanity, and prefigures a personal stability. The contrasting natures of Under the Volcano and October Ferry, one tragic and one comic, or in Lowry's Dantean scheme, the inferno and the purgatorio, are ultimately traceable to their differing engagements with the past.

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[16] Selected Letters, p. 198.

APPENDIX

A Chronological Sketch of Lowry's Published Fiction*

Ultramarine

1927 Notes taken on voyage to Orient
1930 "Port Swettenham," a short story later rewritten into ch. 5 of *Ultramarine*
1931 "Seductio ad Absurdum," earlier shorter version of ch. 4 of *Ultramarine*
1933 *Ultramarine*, London, Cape
1962 *Ultramarine*, rev. ed. incorporating changes made by Lowry

Lunar Caustic

1934 Notes taken during Lowry's stay in New York's Bellevue Mental Hospital
1936 "The Last Address," an early draft of *Lunar Caustic* accepted by (but not published) *Story* magazine
1940 "Swinging the Maelstrom," a revised draft of "The Last Address"
1956 French translation of "The Last Address" appears in *Esprit* (Paris)
1955-1957? Lowry reassembled and mixed "The Last Address" and "Swing the Maelstrom" under the title "Lunar Caustic"
1963 *Lunar Caustic* published in *Paris Review*, no. 29, 1963, eds. Margerie Lowry & Earle Birney

Under the Volcano

1936 Short story version
1941 Third draft of *Under the Volcano* refused by twelve publishers
1945 *Under the Volcano* finished (except for additions to galley proofs
1947 *Under the Volcano* published New York, Reynal & Hitchcock

Dark as the Grave

1945-1946 Notes taken on journey to Mexico
1947 "I've written the first of a first draft of *Dark Is* (*sic*) *the Grave* and have started on the second."
1952 "*Dark as the Grave* - 700 pages of notes and drafts - is deposited in the bank."
1968 *Dark as the Grave* published, eds. Douglas Day & Margerie Lowry, Toronto, General Publishing Co.

Hear Us O Lord

1947 Notes for "Through the Panama"
1948 "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession," "Elephant and Colosseum," "Present Estate of Pompeii" planned in Italy
1950-1954 stories written
1953 "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession" in New World Writing; French trans. of "The Bravest Boat" in Les Lettres Nouvelles
1954 "The Bravest Boat" in Partisan Review
1957 Lowry puts final touches on story sequence
1961 Hear Us O Lord published, ed. Margerie Lowry, New York & Philadelphia, Lippincott

October Ferry to Gabriola

1946 Notes taken on journey to Gabriola Island
1951 October Ferry to Gabriola in novella form
1953 October Ferry to Gabriola grown to novel size
1957 Lowry working on novel at his death
1970 October Ferry to Gabriola published, ed. Margerie Lowry, New York & Cleveland, The World Publishing Co.

*For the above information I am indebted to the works listed under Primary Sources in my WORKS CITED, to the Index to The Malcolm Lowry Papers, and most importantly, to the Malcolm Lowry Bibliography compiled by Earle Birney and Margerie Lowry (Can.Lit., no. 8 (Spring 1961), 81-88; no. 9 (Summer 1961), 80-84; no. 11 (Winter 1962), 90-95; and no. 19 (Winter 1964), 83-89), a study to which the reader is referred for more detailed information. (All quotations are taken from Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry.)

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