THE ECLECTIC VISION:

SYMBOLISM IN LOWRY'S UNDER THE VOLCANO

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SYMBOLISM IN MALCOLM LOWRY'S UNDER THE VOLCANO

By

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ABSTRACT

That an explication of symbolism in Under the Volcano is crucial to an understanding of Malcolm Lowry's masterwork remains uncontested. Although the conviction that the novel is founded upon an enormous variety of symbols drawn from an extensive and diverse list of literary sources and traditions is the subject of a consensus of critical opinion, the available critical work has tended to give but cursory attention to the detailed analysis and the relating of the many symbols.

In the examination of Lowry's use of a complex, striated, and endlessly reverberating matrix of symbols which provide the dynamic for the inexorable destruction of Goeffrey Firmin, ex British Consul in Mexico, the symbols are related to two basic "concepts", or overall thematic symbols. These "thematic symbols" are the wheel and the abyss, and this study thus falls naturally into two parts. The wheel provides an analogy for the malignant forces of "the gods", or the forces behind self-destruction, as the origins of Firmin's downfall are variously viewed. The abyss exists as the ultimate punishment for the Consul's condition, and, at a universal level, it is a symbol of twentieth-century dereliction both spiritual and physical, and of the punishment of the vast unspecified guilt of mankind as a whole.

Ultimately, all attempts to objectify the causes of Firmin's downfall, and to delude the self that the origins of tragedy are external are in fact mere projections of the chaos within onto the landscape and social environment. In addition, the attempt to portray an objective and realistic environment culminates simply in a symbolic representation of the mind's disorder, and Under the Volcano emerges as a symbolic landscape of the mind's divide. The symbolic effigies of the Consul's mind point not only towards his inexorable fate, but also imply origins in anxiety, fear, and guilt which demand analysis for a complete interpretation of the novel.

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PART I

SECTION 1

"Lowry and Symbolism"

> It is in and through symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being; those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognise symbolical worth, and prize it highest.
>
> - Carlyle.

Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano has proven an intellectual's delight for no reason more cogent than his use of a complex, striated, and endlessly reverberating matrix of symbols which provide the dynamic for the inexorable destruction of one Geoffrey Firmin, ex British Consul in Mexico. That an explication of the symbolism is crucial to an understanding of Lowry's masterwork remains uncontested. While much of the available critical work on Lowry has dealt in varying depth with the symbols in the novel, there has been a tendency to give but cursory attention to the relating of the many symbols, although the conviction that the novel is founded upon an enormous variety of symbols drawn from an extensive and diverse list of literary sources and traditions is the subject of a consensus of critical opinion. Alignments with figures such as Prometheus, Christ, Noah and T.S. Eliot's "Fisher King", and even quotations from works such as Dante's Inferno, Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, Marlowe's Faustus, Goethe's Faust and Sophocles' Oedipus Rex are incorporated into Under

the Volcano primarily in order that the meaning of the various symbols be amplified and that the symbols have universal significances as well as particular, contextual implications.

The three most meticulous analyses of symbolism in Lowry's novel are Lowry's Volcano, by David Markson, Lowry, by Anthony Kilgallin, and The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala, by Perle Epstein. Epstein's study is exhaustive in its detection of the cabbalistic underpinnings of Lowry's work, but the symbolism of the cabbala remains only a small part of the vast body of symbolic allusion incorporated into the novel. Such an esoteric study, by its very nature, neglects the eclectic nature of Lowry's vision which proliferates within the novel with possibly unparalleled fucundity. Furthermore, one contention of this thesis is that Lowry's use of symbolic allusion is at times wholly impressionistic, and on occasion based on an incomplete understanding of the source of that symbol. What becomes important to the author often seems to be the meaning he himself attributes to the symbol, rather than its original significance. Ultimately, in spite of the fact that they have produced valuable analyses, Epstein, Markson and Kilgallin have all produced "chapter - by - chapter" linear guides to Under the Volcano. This "linear" approach is essentially problematic in that the subtly varying use of each symbol is lost,as are the full ramifications of the accumulation of symbolic resonances. Hence,

many of the important echoings of the symbols, and the amplification of their meanings remain to be examined, and the relationship of this symbolic matrix to a constant dynamic in the novel which brings about the destruction of the Consul form the primary aims of this thesis.

The symbols examined are related to two basic "concepts" or overall thematic symbols, the wheel and the abyss, and thus the study falls naturally into two parts. The "wheel" provides an analogy for the malignant forces of "the gods", or the forces behind self-destruction, as the origins of Firmin's downfall are variously viewed. The Ferris Wheel in the novel is aligned with Cocteau's "Machine Infernale", a force for the destruction of mere mortals. In fact, the argument in favour of Firmin's death being a direct result of some mystical or divine intervention is superseded by the argument that Firmin's death is brought upon himself. Ultimately, all attempts to objectify the causes and the delusions that the origins of his tragedy are external are in fact mere projections of the chaos within onto the landscape and social environment. The symbols which are connected to Firmin's self-destructive impulse, and which spring from the novel's own unconscious exigesis, include the Ferris Wheel, the printer's flywheel, the "wheel of water", the scorpion (linked with suicide), the astrological sign of Scorpio (under which suicides are held to be committed), the cyclical structure of the novel itself, the horse, the

accusatory newspaper headlines, and the hands covered in blood. These symbols are not only linked with the origins of Firmin's destruction, but also they become indicators of the theme that life without loving is impossible. What ultimately unifies this array of symbols is that they are all part of a world which is viewed narcissistically, a world of which it is demanded that it should mirror the self. Hence the vision of the outside world is highly personalised, and the topography becomes an accurate rendition of the internal chaos and disintegration.

The other "concept", or major symbol to which another vast array of symbols give a complex meaning, is the abyss. The abyss exists as the ultimate punishment for the Consul's condition, and at a universal level, it is a symbol of twentieth-century dereliction both spiritual and physical. At one point in the novel, the ravine or "barranca" which continually reminds the Consul of the direction in which he is inexorably lurching, is actually called the "Malebolge", recalling Dante's Inferno. Dante's wood is also suggested by two of Firmin's regular haunts, "El Bosque" and the "Casino de la Selva". The two other much-frequented bars in the novel are "El Infierno" and the "Farolito", both of which are microcosmic representations of the nature of the fate which awaits Firmin. Other symbols which are connected to the notion of the abyss include the Qliphoth (or inverted Tree of Life), the "Hell Bunker", the vultures, goat, snake, the many

variations of the garden, Laruelle's towers, the symbolic renditions of drought, spiritual aridity and impotence (of which even the Consul's thirst may be a part), the volcanoes, and the allusions to those figures who have had to bear the consequences of immense mortal guilt such as Christ, Faustus and Prometheus.

The abyss - the Consul's final domain - is symbolic of punishment of guilt; on one level, the vast unspecified guilt of mankind as a whole, and on another, the somewhat vague guilt of the Consul himself. However, two features of the symbolism associated with Firmin's punishment become quite distinct. In the eviction of the Consul from his untended garden and his loveless existence, the fate which awaits him is a combination of the physical landmarks, manifested as towers of various kinds, and of the spiritual engulfment represented by ravines which threaten to close over him. This dichotomy of tower and abyss will be argued to represent a dualistic or split image of the female, who is seen as threatening either to impale or to engulf, an anxiety which is a major factor in the unconscious determination of the Consul's downfall.

It will be noted that all the symbols involved in this study are a physical part of the landscape and atmosphere of the Mexican setting. Not only are the symbols invested with a significance beyond their physical reality, but they become less material presences in the novel than effigies of the

Consul's mind and vision. Although the Consul suffers from alcoholism, as did Malcolm Lowry, the alcoholism proves to be only a secondary malady to the ailment of guilt and despair, and the hallucinations incurred by the mescaline ambience demonstrate the vast extent to which guilt and anxiety are urgently seeking release. Thus the hallucinatory material (at the end of the novel in particular) serves not as a verification of alcoholism, but as a revelation of the insuperable malaise behind which lies guilt. Furthermore, the attempt to portray an objective and realistic environment culminates simply in a symbolic representation of the mind's disorder. Under the Volcano emerges as a paradoxical attempt to impose order (by means of symbolic representation) on chaos. Lowry's strenuous attempts to contain and regulate his material, as evidenced by his lengthy (and invaluable) justification of the novel to Jonathan Cape, appear as a parallel endeavour to defend against artistic mayhem. Tony Bareham expresses a similar view when he says,

> The purpose of the symbols in his [Lowry's] always nearly - factual fiction is to give artistic coherence to these correspondences, to work a literary exorcism against the randomness of life as he saw it.[1]

Lowry himself quoted as part of his defence Baudelaire's "Life is a forest of symbols"[2] and in Under the Volcano, this is indeed how it appears to the Consul. However, the "forest of symbols" remains largely undeciphered

and undecipherable, if the notion that these symbols spring from an internal source and are part of a search for meaning which can only originate in an understanding and acceptance of unconscious material, is resented. Richard Ellman makes an interesting comparison in an introduction to Arthur Symon's The Symbolist Movement in Literature (a book which was to have influence on both T.S. Eliot and James Joyce),

> In 1899 two new books, one psychological and one literary, fastened on the word symbolism: Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, which appeared in Vienna in November, and Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature, published in September in London. Although unlike in method, both recorded the search for a psychic reality. Symons' book, like Freud's, gave a name to the preoccupation with modes of half-uttered or half-glimpsed meaning which, as we can see clearly enough now sixty years have passed, was a principal direction in modern thought.[3]

Above all, the concern of this thesis is to explicate Lowry's "half-uttered --- meaning" in terms of the referents of mythology, literary traditions and classics and of the paradigms which Lowry himself establishes within the novel. However, what finally evolves as a symbolic landscape of the mind is only fully explicated and unified by an examination of the fears and anxieties which lead to an "unconscious substitution of one image, idea or activity for another",[4] as Rycroft defines the psychoanalytic theory of symbolism.

NOTES

1. Tony Bareham, "Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano" in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics (Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1980), p. 101.

2. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 78.

3. Richard Ellman, "Introduction" to Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1958), p. vii.

4. Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 162.

SECTION 2

"Wheel as Structure"

> 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...[1]

The wheel in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano is a significant tool (as well as a symbol) in the ordering of the chaotic, hallucinatory visions of Geoffrey Firmin, and in depicting the political and geographical situation of Mexico, which Lowry said he "used as a analogue of the world itself",[2] and of a world in which "tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless."[3] Therefore, while the wheel as symbol is realised specifically on various levels within the novel, as the Ferris Wheel ("La Machine Infernale:), as the "wheel of water", as the swing of the Oliphoth (the inverted "Tree of Life") and as the printer's flywheel, the wheel also functions in an all-pervading manner in terms of the structure of the novel (or the ordering of chapters and events). As even the chaos of dream or nightmare operates within the confines of an often surprising degree of control (the control of the unconscious material which is seeking a means of expression), so the chaos of alcoholism is rendered within the exacting cyclical movement of the novel.

Lowry, then, in arguing what is essentially a romantic and tragic stance for his protagonist, is also setting a very systematic order on his material. From the outset, the author insists on the tragic downfall of the Consul, and this clearly meshes with the cyclical structure of the novel. This particular feature of the novel was entirely intentional. Lowry wrote of Chapter 8,

> Here the book, so to speak, goes into reverse - or, more strictly speaking, it begins to go downhill, though not, by any means, I hope, in the sense of deteriorating. Downhill (the first word), toward the abyss.[4]

Thus, by placing the chapter of significant descent into the abyss in a position of pivotal action close to the middle of the novel, Lowry knits the movement of the chapters with the fate of the Consul in an inextricable "conspiracy". This is the fall of the wheel. But even after the fall has been completely played out by the death of the Consul, Lowry intends that the reader return to the beginning of the novel to find out how the narrator has interpreted this death. Once again, there is the paradox of the same motions being made, but the journey undertaken being different. The reader will indeed return to the beginning, but the Sophocles quote "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man" (U.V., p. 7) is meant to have a cheering effect this time round (although it may, in retrospect, appear ironic). In his letter to Jonathan Cape, Lowry wrote,

> ...you should want to turn back to the beginning again, where it is not impossible, too, that your eye might alight once more on Sophocles' Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man - just to cheer you up.[5]

The point here is not whether it will cheer us up (for Lowry seems to claim a great deal more humour for Under the Volcano than it is possible to find). Instead, Lowry has contrived, through the structuring of the novel, that we will have returned, and we shall not undergo exactly the same experience, although we shall indeed go through the same motions.

This paradox leads to an interesting hypothesis. It is quite possible that the extraordinary coordination of the cyclical structure of the novel, and the manipulation of the act of reading, forces the critic to replicate the inherent cyclical structure in the critical act. In trying to deal with Under the Volcano, a novel about hallucinatory chaos, the critic is forced to re-enact in his analysis the author's ordering of this chaos. This relationship between informing vision (most of which must be derived from unconscious - or "latent" - material seeking gratification through artistic creation) and the reaction evoked in the reader and critic will require discussion later.

Although the wheel is much more, in its symbolisation of human futility, of a fate which moves relentlessly climaxing and falling away again as "the instrument of eternal recurrence"[6], and at the same time static, humanity sticking in its notorious

condition like a fly in amber, it is an essential structure for the novel in the spiritual, as well as physical, sense. From the first chapter onwards, instead of having a strong sense of impending disaster, it is intimated that the Consul will play out, to the very limits of appalling inevitability, the tragedy to which Laruelle and the narrator allude. Horrific as it is, the Consul will indeed decide to accept the very worst that fate might have in store for him, purely because he thinks that "no one could stop the machine" (U.V., p. 226). He accepts the "unspeakable circuit" (U.V., p. 226) as the reader knows he must, and the motion of the wheel is set not only in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense, too. The whole motion of the novel is now irretrievably set when he accepts the inevitability of his fate - "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" (U.V., p. 233) - and the very end of Chapter 7, from which this quote is taken, is the climax of the eternal cycle of horrific inevitablity, with Chapter 8 beginning "DOWNHILL ...." (U.V., p. 334).

Lowry himself pointed out that the twelve chapters of the novel were to be the twelve spokes of the wheel, "the motion of which is something like that, conceivably, of time itself".[7] In fact, the best analysis of the structuring of Under the Volcano has been provided by the author himself. Having been required to justify the length of the novel to his prospective publishers, Lowry was forced to produce what remains the most valuable explication of the structure to date.

> The twelve chapters should be considered as twelve blocks, to each of which I have devoted over a period of years a great deal of labour, and I hope to convince you that whatever cuts may be made, there must still be twelve chapters. Each chapter is a unity in itself and all are related and inter-related. Twelve is a universal unit. To say nothing of the twelve labours of Hercules, there are 12 hours in a day, and the book is concerned with a single day as well as, though very incidentally, with time: There are 12 months in a year, and the novel is enclosed by a year; while the deeply buried layer of the novel or poem that attaches itself to myth, does so to the Jewish Cabbala where the number 12 is of the highest symbolic importance. ...But also, because I have to have my 12: it is as if I hear a clock. Slowly striking midnight for Faust; as I think of the slow progression of chapters, I feel it destined to have 12 chapters and nothing more nor less will satisfy me.[8]

From such a justification, it is possible to divide the intentionally (and perhaps unexpectedly) great degree of control which Lowry exerts over the structure of a novel which must have twelve spokes to the wheel for such manifest reasons. It is obviously wise to take heed of such vehement assertions. Perhaps the very vehemence of Lowry's protestations may indeed indicate the great difficulty he experienced in containing hallucinatory chaos within the structure. There is, in Under the Volcano, a conflict between the chaos of the "soul" (of the unconscious material which is on the one hand repressed and on the other, clamours for gratification by expression) and the artistic process, in which there must be an assumption that the chaos (which is both theme and unconscious condition

informing the novel) can be mastered. As Norman Holland has said,

> Behind green spectacles the thinker
> will see but not be seen. Madness
> is outside, a cry in the street.
> Inside, all is rational, masterful.[9]

This perceptive comment is very relevant to the case of Lowry, since his artistic vision is based on an intensely individualistic and autobiographical body of material, much of which must have been chaos, and hence the triumph in any degree of authorial mastery is one of the most astonishing and outstanding achievements in literature. Indeed, Lowry's writing often seems a most remarkable illustration of Eliot's dictum, "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates".[10]

In the assertion that Lowry's ordering of the novel is cyclical, it has also been suggested that such a progression of the chapters is inextricably linked not only with the recurring symbol of the wheel in its various manifestations, but also that cyclical order is skillfully meshed with the thematic concerns or the content (the idea of concurrence) of Under the Volcano. While the novel, from Chapter 2 onwards, is, for the most part, in logical chronological order, the twelve chapters function as separate units within the whole, as well forming integral parts of it. In the attempt to make the chapters viable as - to some extent - discrete and independent units, it is possible to detect evidence of the difficulty the author experienced in ordering the condition of

alcoholism and disguising the cause of alcoholism. It is quite possible that, had Lowry been writing of a condition which did not impinge on the entire process of perception, forcing reality into the amoeba-like structures of hallucination, and threatening to make the novel totally amorphous and uncontainable, he would not have had to exercise the stringent measures, about which he was quite adamant, in order to contain it.

Evidence of Lowry's difficulty in containing his material lies, surprisingly, not in the long passages of the Consul's hallucinations (which are entirely credible, even in the way in which outside events sometimes intrude in a highly coincidental manner) but in the somewhat problematical Chapter 6. Lowry has already divulged a significant amount of biographical detail about Hugh, the Consul's younger brother, in Chapter 4. It is possible to argue that the reader now knows that Hugh is a young, revolutionary, romantic version of the Consul. In Chapter 4, Hugh thinks in a way which is highly reminiscent of the Consul:

> And yet I do not expect, ever in my life, to be happier than I am now. No peace I shall ever find but will be poisoned as these moments are poisoned - (U.V., p. 111).

Chapter 6 then becomes problematical in that it appears to contain a body of superfluous material. Hugh's biography is expanded in such a way that it becomes the biography of the Consul as a young man, or even autobiographical. The details are not disguised to any great extent and the narrative voice seems to alternate between the voice of Lowry, that of Hugh,

that of the Consul, and the interruptions of the radio. Where the thoughts of Hugh include "artists drinking themselves to death simply because their souls pined away" (U.V., p. 156), the voice of Hugh, with his penchant for romantic notions, is evident. However, when Hugh thinks "And how can I be escaping from myself when I am without a place on earth?" (U.V., p. 157) this is much closer to the despair and emptiness experienced by the Consul. Finally, Lowry's own love of jazz, and perhaps his own loss of this, seem to intrude:

> ...Hugh thought he heard Joe Venuti's violin suddenly, the joyous little lark of discursive melody soaring in some remote summer of its own above all this abyssal fury, ...and it was curious how much it hurt, as though this music, never outgrown, belonged irretrievably to that which had today been lost (U.V., p. 158).

The intrusion of such a large quantity of mainly autobiographical detail appears at best as a failure to suppress material which is of little relevance to the novel, and more relevant to the concerns of Mr. Lowry himself. It is not a failure of which Lowry is often guilty, as he seems to have been entirely conscious of his aims. But Chapter 6, at most, seems to result from the narcissistic assumption that the author's life has been so fascinating that it will expalin "the theme of man's guilt",[11] as Lowry claimed for this chapter. In succumbing momentarily to a preoccupation with self, Lowry puts stress on the novel's structure, and fails to live up to Eliot's edict of separating "the man who suffers" from "the mind which creates".

In linking the structure of Under the Volcano to the thematic content, some critics insist that the novel is structured according to "the infernal portion of a Dantesque triology".[12] While there are indisputable parallels, and while it is also true that Lowry had intended to write a Dantean triology, the other two sections of such an epic task were never fully realised and it appears unproductive and even well-nigh impossible to view Lowry's masterwork simply in terms of part of such an undertaking. Nor does such a view grasp the underlying principles of the novel which prevent the structure from being quite as straightforward as may have been suggested so far. The critic William H. New puts it thus:

> Basic to it [the novel] is the idea of simultaneity, of the fatality of coincidence and concurrent events. Hence what happens in one place and time may be unknown to an observer in another, yet he may equally as surely be involved in its ramifications as if he had ordered them directly. The artist, in his control tower, does order events, so that his reader might see a concurrence and appreciate its implications. That the reader is also involved in the ordering process, discovering patterns of which the author may have been unaware ... - are puzzles that return us to Lowry's concentric circles. In them, however, the principle of simultaneity finds an apposite metaphor.[13]

Such a perceptive comment represents a valuable recognition of Lowry's partiality for an art of complexity, towards "concurrent events" as well as sequential events, and towards a notion of fate which has much in common with "Papa Henry James ... and

his turn of the screw".[14] Such a vision entails a structure which, at the same time as being cyclical, also implies a labyrinth of fecund, tortuous, striated imagery. This more complex structural conception compares with the symbol of the Ferris Wheel; just as the Ferris Wheel swings each of its compartments, so the structure of the novel is, while cyclical, also much more complicated and the chapters, by analogy, could be viewed as "wheels within the wheel", as, to a certain extent, independently functioning segments.

Margerie Bonner Lowry gives an insight which corroberates New's idea of the "principle of simultaneity" and a view of the complexity in the structuring of Under the Volcano:

> His [Lowry's] astonishing awareness of the thickness of life, of the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and interrelated, causes him to write a symphony where anyone else would have written a sonata or at most a concerto, and this makes his work sometimes appear dispersed, whereas actually the form and context have arisen so inextricably one from the other that they cannot be dissociated.[15]

Where New speaks of "coincidence and concurrent events", Margerie Lowry speaks of "the layers...interlocking and interrelated". Where Margerie Lowry talks in terms of "form and context" being "inextricably" linked, it would appear that she is pointing to a structure (rather than a "form"[16]) which presents puzzles to the reader, landing him in the labyrinth of the ordering process.

Ultimately, it is possible to recognize in Lowry's cyclical structuring of Under the Volcano the rigorous means whereby chaos is contained. The chronological sequence, with the first chapter being both the last part of the cycle of events delineated in the next eleven chapters and the first part of a new, and even more insidious (but one presumes, less "tragic") cycle, follows the pattern of a wheel. Indeed, the cyclical structure, and the symbol of Ferris Wheel are inextricably linked in the destruction of the Consul.

Richard Hauer Costa points to Lowry's triumph in overcoming a tendency to neurotic egotism when he comments (with regard to Douglas Day's biography of Lowry),

> How a writer who normally could write about nothing but himself came to transcend the neuroses of his life and for once - it would never happen again - elevate the private to the Promethean is a progress that is not conveyed in even so superb a report.[17]

While the comment on Day's biography is accurate, it has been contended that Lowry betrays a tendency to narcissistic grandiosity in his difficulty in restraining himself from indulging his autobiographical whims. The real triumph lies more with Lowry's ordering of the Consul's hallucinating and catalytic experiences and with the structuring of the Mexican climate of disorder, without letting the novel succumb to the insidious undertow of twentieth-century world and spiritual chaos.

NOTES

1. Harvey Breit and Margerie B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 78.

2. Ibid., p. 92

3. Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p. 11. All future references to Under the Volcano will be included in the text, with the abbreviation (U.V.).

4. Breit, and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 88.

5. Ibid., p. 88.

6. Ibid., p. 71.

7. Ibid., p. 67.

8. Ibid., p. 65-66.

Two points in Lowry's commentary illustrate one of the main contentions of this thesis; that Lowry's use of symbolism is highly subjective, centering on the idea of the symbol (the significance of the impression created and the way in which it appealed to Lowry himself or might appeal to the reader) which is more important than adhering strictly to the various symbol systems. Thus, the "12 hours in a day" are the twelve hours in the Consul's day in Under the Volcano (seven in the morning to seven in the evening). This statement obviously happens to suit the author's numerology rather than adhere strictly to fact.

Another example of Lowry's impressionistic use of a concrete and well-documented symbol system is his remark that "the number 12 is of the highest symbolic importance in the Jewish Cabbala." Although the number 12 is of great mystical significance, particularly in alchemy, according to various explications of the Cabbala, the number 10 would appear to be of the highest symbolic significance, informing, as it does, the ordering of the complex images of God in the Sephirotic Tree.

9. Norman Holland, "Recovering 'The Purloined Letter'. Reading as a Personal Transaction", in Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., The Reader in the Text, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 358.

10. Muriel Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 5.

11. Breit, M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 75.

12. Carol Slade in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, (Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1980), p. 143.

13. William New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1971), p. 30.

14. Breit, M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 64.

15. Ibid., p. 421.

16. It appears likely that where Margerie Lowry writes of "form and context", the word "form" is being used in a fairly loose manner which may be taken as being at least related in some way to "Structure", as opposed to a common usage of form by the New Critics, who tend to see the "form" of a novel in terms of genre.

17. Richard Hauer Costa, "Under the Volcano: The Way it Was: A Thirty-Year Perspective" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1978), p. 40-41.

SECTION 3

"The Infernal Machine: An Indivisible Alliance"

Lowry, in addition to referring to the essential structure of Under the Volcano as "trochal", also consciously associated the major symbol of the novel, the Ferris Wheel, with the "Infernal Machine" (U.V., p. 227). The significance of this association cannot be doubted. Lowry went to see Jean Cocteau's play, The Infernal Machine twice in Paris, in May 1934,[1] and wrote to Clarisse Francillon, even in 1950, "I shall never forget the marvellous performance [of The Infernal Machine] as long as I live... And so you see his infernal machine comes back to torment the Consul in Chapter VII."[2]

Lowry also, in his famous letter to Jonathan Cape, said that Under the Volcano "can even be regarded as a sort of machine: it works too, believe me, as I have found out".[3] This statement parallels the words of The Voice (or "Fantome") in the prologue to Cocteau's play, which is a modern interpretation of the Oedipus myth:

> 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.[4]

In the appalling inevitability of the structural movement of Under the Volcano, the informing principle, which is realised as the Ferris wheel, is indeed that of the "Infernal Machine",

and it gives impetus to the horrific degradation and the destruction of the Consul, Geoffrey Firmin.

Before the second act of Cocteau's The Infernal Machine, the Voice announces,

> Spectators, let us imagine that we can wind back the last few minutes and relive them elsewhere. While the ghost of Laius tries to warn Jocasta on the ramparts of Thebes, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx on a hill that overlooks the city. The same trumpet - calls, the same cock - crows, the same moon, the same stars.[5]

Closely related to this dramatic device is Lowry's ending of his first chapter, which contains the first allusion to the Ferris Wheel:

> Suddenly from outside, a bell spoke out, then ceased abruptly: dolente ...dolore!
>
> Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel. (U.V., p. 47)

The bell intensifies the sense of impending doom and reinforces the movement from torment to an oppressive, threatening, relentless silence (a shift which is representative of Lowry's impressive technique in creating atmosphere in Under the Volcano). The final sentence of the chapter introduces the symbol of the Ferris Wheel, which, in revolving "backwards", is taking the reader back to the preceding year, the events of which start with Yvonne's return to the Consul in 1938 for what is, almost immediately, a disastrous reunion.

Chapter 1 is thus the epilogue to the novel, presenting a perspective, chronologically one year later, on the ensuing

events in the novel. In doing so, Lowry is most skillful in obscuring the exact nature of those events, in such a way that Chapter 1 does not negate the purpose of the following chapters, but rather, creates a strange tension between present and past. Having set the scene and betrayed the outcome, Lowry demands that the reader still await the full dimensions and ramifications of the ensuing tragedy.

Therefore, while Chapter 1 denies the reader a sense of impending tragedy, the Consul's fate is traced fully to its inevitable culmination. The reader still hopes against hope that the signals toward incontrovertible doom are false. Chapter 1 is, then, a preparation for this sense of dread, "a sense of dread at what had already occurred, a thing so shattering that it has left the survivors no peace during the intervening year".[6] Such a technique is parallel to Cocteau's device of "The Voice", which serves to intimate to the audience concurrent events. Similarly, in the first act of Cocteau's play, the ghost of Laius tries to warn the guards of the impending doom of Jocasta. However, the fate of Jocasta cannot be altered, for it is the edict of the "infernal gods", and the existence of the play in the first place necessitates the full unfolding of the tragedy.

Both Under the Volcano and The Infernal Machine are founded on very similar conceptions of Time and Fate, and the technical devices used to underscore the synchronicity of events also serve to intimate a collusion between time factors

and inevitable downfall. Chapter 1 of Under the Volcano is also prologue to the novel and as such introduces the novel's main concerns, and the alliance between the "past" and ensuing tragedy,

> ...the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself...the guilt in man, his remorse, with his ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past, and with his doom.[7]

The "weight of the past" can be seen as structurally significant in that Chapter 1 is, indeed, seen to strain under the burden of time, and give way to the events of the past before the chapter moves very far. The Consul's letter to Yvonne in this chapter also increases the tension between past and present, since it has been found by Laruelle in the "present", but provides an invaluable link in the chain of events past.

The letter contains several observations crucial to the novel, the first being that "Time is a fake healer anyhow" (U.V., p. 45). Time has failed in the past to heal the spiritual agonies of the Consul, and has similarly failed in the present to ameliorate the events of the "Day of the Dead" in 1938, from the point of view of Laruelle.Second, the letter represents "one of those meaningless correspondences that might be labelled: 'favourite trick of the gods'." (U.V., p. 22) Had Yvonne ever received it, the despair which the letter discloses might possibly have been alleviated, and the scene "wholly changed" (U.V., p. 46) as it indeed does after

Laruelle finishes reading.

By means of the technique of complicity between "bad timing" and existing circumstances, Lowry instigates a complex structure of "turns of the screw" for the "mathematical annihilation of a mortal". Every coincidence and concurrence is but a functional part of the Infernal Machine's diabolical purpose. The Ferris Wheel thus becomes, it is proposed, both vehicle of, and accessory in, the beautifully and horribly worked out destruction of a human life - that of Geoffrey Firmin, His Majesty's Consul, Mexico.

Of Lowry's perception of the operation of the "infernal gods", Douglas Day writes,

> The spring of the Infernal Machine is, of course, Time. It has taken the Consul forty-two years to prepare himself for his last twelve hours. The infernal gods have contributed to his preparation, by causing his mother to die, then by driving his father north from Srinagar into the Himalayas in search of Himavat, the Magic Mountain of Hindu mythology. They have brought him and his infant half-brother, Hugh, to England, for a series of surrogate parents, a childhoood and adolescence of loneliness and vulnerability. They have turned Geoffrey into a poet, a scholar, a war hero (and killer), and a drunkard; ....[8]

The influence of the "gods" is perhaps somewhat exaggerated by Day, in that it would appear from the above that the Consul has had absolutely no alternative to damnation. However, the crux of the matter is that Firmin, who has been offered the choice, has never actively desired his salvation. Man,

according to Lowry's vision, is essentially magnificent. As epigraphs for Under the Volcano, the author includes Sophocles' "yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come; ..." and Goethes' "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward...him we can save". But the Consul is aligned with the Bunyan epigraph "I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance". In refusing to embrace salvation, and even consciously hurtling towards the abyss, the Consul is, instead, rushing into the arms of the "infernal gods".

However, Cocteau's "gods" exhibit a certain intransigence, even a malevolent complicity, while Lowry's "gods" act merely on the Consul's indifference to deliverance, and his eternal procrastination. Anubis says to the Sphinx in The Infernal Machine,

> We have to be obedient. Mystery has its own mysteries, and there are gods above gods. We have ours, they have theirs. That is what's known as infinity.[9]

Of the fate of more mortals, Anubis has the following to say to the Sphinx,

> You have the assumed body of a girl. That is why you feel sympathy for your victims, but remember that they are nothing more than zeroes wiped from a slate, even though each zero may be an open mouth crying for help.[10]

Thus the adjunct of the Infernal Machine is, in the case of Cocteau's play, the Sphinx. The role of the Sphinx is ambiguous, since she tries to turn Oedipus away from incest,

saying "épousé une femme plus jeune que toi".[11] At the same time, she leads him to his fate, to his Nemesis. When she appears in the second act, she is premonitory of the mother, in the threat she represents, and in the fact that Oedipus conquers her, in a conquest which leads to his downfall.

In Under the Volcano, the Ferris Wheel acts as the Infernal Machine itself (the conspiracy between Time and Fate, and symbolic of the "bad timing" which would appear to be the twentieth-century condition). It is both symbol of the horrific force, of the repetition of the "Faustian" impulse, which hurtles Firmin into the abyss, and it is a catalyst in his doom, forcing the Consul to see that his view of the world is skewed. Again the idea of macrocosmic and microcosmic ailment and suffering pertains to the Ferris Wheel. At the macrocosmic level, the wheel is symbolic of the "drunken madly revolving world hurtling at 1.20 p.m. towards Hercules's Butterfly" (U.V., p. 198) and at the microcosmic level, of the madman endlessly throwing a bicycle tyre in front of him. Both levels are equally futile, treading circuitous routes according only to the vicissitudes of twentieth-century mutability, with the world behaving as the madman, who was "repeating this process to the irreducible logic of which he appeared eternally committed, until out of sight" (U.V., p. 227). Thus even a detail which Lowry ironically called "local colour heaped on in shovelfulls"[12] becomes an intrinsic part of the organic whole, a wheel within the cyclical unity of the novel.

As has been contended, Under the Volcano consists of wheels within wheels, all intricately buidling up a system of resonances for each other. Just as the Ferris Wheel swings each of its compartments, so individuals are buffeted about on earth by the gods. Again, as we may be suddenly swung upside down in the fairground, so, with a great lurch, we may be stood on our heads by the very events of life which may have appeared beneficial. (This is just the sickening lurch with which the Tree of Life swings upside down to become the Qliphoth, which Lowry used as "The Consul's spiritual domain".[13]) Thus the Ferris Wheel to use a slightly different perspective, is symbolic of lunging reversal, as well as the indivisible alliance between Time and Fate. Of the "luminous wheel" which appears at the end of Chapter 1, Lowry wrote,

> 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; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before ...[13]

If the Ferris wheel is the instrument of "eternal return", it is worth interrupting this with one interpretation of Cocteau's Infernal Machine. Wallace Fowlie writes, "The machine is behind everything, and the machine is true reality, carefully concealed in the dark."[14] "True reality", for Oedipus, is

the condition surrounding his birth, which Fowlie sees as demanding some kind of repetition, a wish which is gratified by the third act of the play, in which Oedipus relives the anxiety of his birth. According to Fowlie, "only incest will calm the anxiety".[15] Whether this is true or not, what remains important is that Fowlie also sees the Infernal Machine as the instrument of "eternal return" to the mother, in order to gratify unresolved Oedipal wishes.

Viewing the Ferris wheel in Under the Volcano in Lowry's own terms as the "instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return", there is evidence that there is a similar Oedipal phantasy operating in the novel. Yvonne's return to the Consul is unconsummated, and, although this is largely due to the Consul's alcoholic impotence, it is possibly also due to the Consul's idealistic perception of her. When he looks at Yvonne as she "settled herself on the daybed, crossing her unusually beautiful and aristocratic long legs" (U.V., p. 77), the Consul realises not only her sexual attractiveness, but betrays by the word "aristocratic" a sense of her remoteness. It is as if she is a beauty of the world that he, Geoffrey Firmin, is not destined to possess.

His failure in this respect forces him to espouse the opposite extreme in his mortification of the flesh by means of the prostitute, María. Interestingly, although María represents a deadly lust, she is condensation of both the whore figure and the remote Yvonne - "Her body was Yvonne's

too, her legs..." (U.V., p. 349). María is the instrument of eternal and calamitous return, the Consul's return to defilement and to his distorted drive for self-gratification by means of that return.

When the Consul is about to step onto the Ferris wheel ("MAQUINA INFERNAL") in Chapter 7, he views it in very similar terms to those used to describe sexual intercourse with María,

> Wild attraction. The huge looping-the - loop machine, empty, but going full blast over his head in this dead section of the fair, suggested some huge evil spirit, screaming in its lonely hell, its limbs writhing, smiting the air like flails of paddle-wheels ... his penalty for avoiding them was to be drawn inexorably, though with as much dignity as possible, into boarding the monster. ...After a while, with violent bewildering convulsions, the thing started to go. (U.V., p. 224-5)

The entire experience is demonic, and the language used to convey the horror of the "sickening sensation" calls up innumerable resonances. The Ferris wheel is undeniably a horrific sexual experiences for the Consul, with "its limbs writhing". Very close in nature to María - "a fiendish apparatus for calamitous sickening sensation" (U.V., p. 349) - the Ferris wheel moves in a "whirling, sickening, plunging, retreating, unspeakable circuit" (U.V., p. 225-6). In espousing the motion, the Consul thinks,

> What did it matter? Let it go! There was a fierce kind of 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 ... no one could stop the machine ... (U.V., p. 226).

The dynamism of the language of this passage in the short, cathartic phrases - "What did it matter? Let it go! ...Let everything go!" - increases the effect of the Consul's climax in succumbing to his imaginary guilt. His is an active rather than passive resignation, betraying a certain pleasure in wallowing in degradation and guilt and in triumphantly renouncing mortal aspiration - "Let it go!" He embraces an imaginary suffering, just as he wishes the gratification of being an archetypal martyr, with his Christ-figure phantasies (as exemplified by the melodramatic newspaper headlines he envisages for himself - "Firmin innocent, but bears guilt of world on shoulders" (U.V., p. 141). In the deviousness and private hell that can be attributed to lifelong alcoholism, (where "Paradise is an agony away, and hell is so handy"[16]) the Consul chooses to think that "no one could stop the machine" and to shout in his mescaline ambience "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there" (U.V., p. 316).

It must come as no surprise that the Consul then inflicts upon himself the last guilt of the novel, which is on the one level a credible guilt, but with his penchant for grandiosity and for the archetypal, it has, on another level, quite ridiculous ramifications, in keeping with Lowry's own

customary syphilophobia. The "frightful bloody fear he was forced to carry around with him everywhere" is carried into a more tangible reality. Firmin has been unfaithful to Yvonne (who, however, is now probably dead) and has risked contracting veneral disease from María.

In the act of intercourse with María, the Consul makes connections ~~not only~~ between his guilt about a supposed war crime against a number of German submarine officers (and which, the Consul would have us believe, may have been committed against Germany as a whole) and his guilt about being unfaithful to Yvonne (and, one may contend, against that better side of humanity that she symbolises). The Consul also links with this incident the notion of the scorpions (part of the Mexican environ), Scorpio (the sign under which suicides are destined to be committed) being, for the Consul, "my Zodiac Zone" (U.V., p. 207). Lowry has prepared the way for such an interpretation earlier in the novel, when the Consul says to Yvonne,

> 'A curious bird is the scorpion. He cares not for priest nor for poor peon...it's really a beautiful creature. Leave him be. He'll only sting himself to death anyway' (U.V., p. 191).

The Consul connects the scorpion stinging itself to death with the penetration of María, which he sees as bringing about his own destruction

> (and it was this calamity he now, with María, penetrated, the only thing alive in him now this

> burning boiling crucified evil organ...)...(and this calamity he was now penetrating, it was calamity, the calamity of his own life, the very essence of it he now penetrated, was penetrating, penetrated) (U.V., p. 350).

As an alcoholic, he injects himself with the evil which will bring about his downfall, and in union with María, he penetrates himself in the suicidal undertaking of the scorpion. Again, Firmin views his actions in archetypal terms, when he thinks of the "crucified evil organ". However, the guilt is not evoked only by his betrayal of Yvonne's gesture in returning to him and his own failrue to re-establish even the most vestigial relationship, but also by the fact that all physical contact he associates with dirt and degradation, with a mortification of the flesh - a "crucifixion".

In contrast, Yvonne, who also falls prey to the forces of Scorpio, seems purified by her dying visions of burning and fire. Although she dies under "Scorpio setting ..." (U.V., p. 322, p. 323), she escapes "the burning dream" (U.V., p. 337) and the forces controlling her life seem, although parallel in their operations to the Infernal Machine, essentially benevolent. As she walks towards her death, Yvonne contemplates "the luminous wheel of this galaxy" (U.V., p. 323) and wonders, "What force drives this sublime celestial machinery?" (U.V., p. 323).

Ultimately, Firmin's life is driven by an infernal complacency. He settles into a reactionary acceptance of the

indivisible alliance between Time and Fate, which is symbolised by the Ferris wheel. Firmin's self-destruction and martyr-phantasies seem to emanate from exterior pressures: the twentieth-century concatenation of loss of values, the oppressive despotism of scientific empiricism, and general external chaos. From just such a concatenation, two critics contend, came Jean Cocteau's addiction to opium. The journal of Cocteau's cure (Opium) is prefaced,

> Living in the twentieth century is so intolerably dull or exasperating for so many people that a great number of them, in the hope of creating escape, excitement or rest, force their body and soul into a monstrous union by taking drugs.[17]

An instrument of escape, any form of alcohol serves the Consul as opium did Cocteau, but of course, the instrument of escape from external chaos ironically becomes a means of inflicting similar chaos on the internal condition. However, this paradox being noted, both Cocteau and the Consul appear as victims of the twentieth-century conspiracy between "bad-timing" and "necessary" self-destruction, which are symbolised in Cocteau's play by the concept of a clockwork Infernal Machine, and in Under the Volcano, by the indivisible alliance between Time and Fate in the shape of the Ferris wheel.

NOTES

1. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 322.

2. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 192.

3. Ibid., p. 66.

4. Jean Cocteau, The Infernal Machine and other plays. trans. Albert Bermel (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1963), p. 6.

5. Ibid., p. 33.

6. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 63.

7. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 66.

8. Day, p. 323-4.

9. Jean Cocteau, The Infernal Machine and other plays, p. 35.

10. Ibid., p. 36.

11. Wallace Fowlie, Jean Cocteau: The History of a Poet's Age (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 70.

12. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 78.

13. Ibid., p. 71.

14. Fowlie, p. 69.

15. Ibid., p. 70.

16. Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism", in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p. 137.

17. M. Crosland & Sinclair Road, intro. in Jean Cocteau, Opium (London: Icon Books Ltd., 1957), p. 5.

SECTION 4

"Proliferating Manifestations of the Wheel"

Crucial to Lowry's use of the wheel in terms of structure and in terms of the Infernal Machine (which is the means of generating both themes and symbolism in Under the Volcano) is the informing vision of the author himself. Indeed, it is the Consul's own mind which dictates the various ramifications of the wheel and, it is contended, it is the narrator's psyche which acts as the hub of the wheel, as informant to his "grand design". Furthermore, the conception of the novel centres on the interrelationships between the informing vision of the specific mind rendered in the character of the Consul, and the proliferating manifestations of the wheel. The wheel is employed on many different layers in the novel, as setting (Mexico/the Ferris wheel), also as the symbolisations at every level (the Ferris wheel/"wheel of water"/the printer's flywheel), and the various manifestations of wheel symbolism are unified by the circuitous motion of the mind (which is most evident in the Consul and his compulsion to repeat the tragedies of the past). Essentially, this study attempts to relate symbolism to structure, to thematic concern, and ultimately to the awesome mind which could conceive of the ramifications of the character of the Consul, and of the grandiloquent and eclectic opus of a profoundly impressive novel.

The critical task is then rendered in terms of relating psyche to the artistic significations of that psyche. Section 2 examined the relationship between the mind and the cyclical structure of the novel, and concluded that such a structure is inextricably linked to a belief in coincidence and concurrence, and a desire for control over the hallucinatory experience of alcoholism and over world chaos. This desire for control relates the level of structure and setting to the workings of the Consul's psyche, and by extension, to Lowry's personal conscious and unconscious difficulties in the creative process.

Section 3 linked the thematic concern of the Consul's downfall to the impetus which effects this downfall, which is symbolised by the Ferris wheel/Infernal Machine. This major symbol of the pernicious alliance between Time and Fate is undoubtedly the product of a mind which envisioned such a concatenation, and a psyche which operated on the assumptions that external destructive forces combine with internal motives for the inescapable and necessary punishment of a vaguely specified guilt, a guilt both personal and universal.

This section turns to the other symbols which adhere to the pattern of the wheel (and also their symbolic progeny which reinforce the depiction of fateful events) and interprets each as auguries of the notion of the infernal conspiracy between external and internal determinants of the Consul's ill-starred extremity. Radiating outwards from the cyclical structure and vision of concurrence, the evidence of

wheel symbolism is undoubtedly the "wheel of water" motif, which recurs throughout Under the Volcano.

Lowry's conception of his masterwork is essentially poetic in several ways. Lowry himself said

> ---the main defect of Under the Volcano, from which the others spring, comes from something irremediable. It is 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. On the other hand I claim that just as a tailor will try to conceal the deformities of his client so I have tried, aware of this defect, to conceal in the Volcano as well as possible the deformities of my own mind, taking heart from the fact that since the conception of the whole thing was essentially poetical, perhaps these deformities don't matter so very much after all, even when they show![1]

In acknowledging his poetic proclivities, Lowry also recognizes that his novel is completely opposed to the novel of "pure reporting".[2] In his cinematic technique, and in the extensive passages of hallucination interrupted by reality, Lowry's representation of both exterior and interior domains is fragmented and stylised. However, it is contended that Lowry is indeed successful in disguising what the novel lacks in terms of an attempt at a more conventional objective reporting, and that the disguise is maintained by profoundly impressive interior monologues, by his rigorous attempts to structure and contain his exposition of the escalation of evil in the modern

world, and, above all, in the Lowrian labyrinth of symbolic interrelationships.

Of the fecundity of his symbolism, Lowry said in his Preface to the French translation of the novel,

> To begin with, his [my] very style may assume an embarrassing resemblance to that of the German writer Schopenhauer describes, who wished to express six things at the same time instead of discussing them one after the other.[3]

However, Lowry's modesty in fact points up his triumph in conveying such a sense of multiple significances, of ever-accumulating symbolic resonances. In the face of such proliferation, the critical task is unenviable, if fascinating, for a construct of such magnitude is undoubtedly the result of "the book---fast sinking into the action of the mind, and away from normal action".[4]

For the reader, however, the book radiates back outwards from the authorial psyche, from the hub of the wheel. Thus it is that, after perceiving the cyclical structure of the novel, and the condition of foreboding attached to the Ferris wheel, the "wheel of water" is immediately striking. This image first materialises in the novel in the powerful letter written by the Consul, and found after his death by Laruelle. The wash of the sea is given powerful resonances, and binds the novel to an other-worldly context, projecting the physical environment into a spiritual domain in this letter of human agony and despair. What is the most poignant is the Consul's vision of that which encompasses the greatest human desperation and degradation imaginable. The sparkling white,silver and gold

are repeated in a passage which comes very close to being a prose poem:

> ---to the north-east---lies a mass of almost pure-white clouds, suddenly, as by light in an albaster lamp, illumined from within by gold lightning---and then all at once a fishing-boat with tall gear comes running around the point like a white giraffe, very swift and stately, leaving directly behind it a long silver scalloped rim of wake---this scrolled silver rim---and now the lightning within the white clouds in deep water, as the fishing boat itself with a golden scroll of travelling light in its silver wake---and then again, within the white distant alabaster thunder-clouds beyond the mountains, the thunderless gold lightning---
>
> And as we stand looking all at once comes the wash of another unseen ship, like a great wheel, the vast spokes of the wheel whirling across the bay - (U.V., p. 43).

While this vision has tremendous beauty, it is not unequivocal in its reverberations. It shares with the entirety of Chapter 1 the ominous, brittle character of twentieth-century transience and mutability and partakes of the modern lack of context for the creation of the ideal. The poignancy of the scene is derived from the fact that it follows the dying of the soul. This "strange vista" (U.V., p. 42) is indeed "something like peace" (U.V., p. 42). But it is not actual peace, but rather the "cold jonquil beauty one rediscovers in death" (U.V., p. 47). While the fusion of beauty with the death of the soul is a Blakeian union, worthy of the great reconciler of antinomies himself, it is a tainted matrimony. The Consul

seems at moments to have the imaginative reach of Blake, but he refuses to grasp the nettle and act on his perceptions.

Finally, in this passage the Consul breaks his vision of a northern Eden when he sees the wash from the "unseen ship" and the wheel of this image prefigures the Ferris wheel at the end of Chapter 1, the "luminous wheel" previously discussed. A connection may be postulated between the ship's wake and the ominous powers of the Ferris wheel, since both adumbrate the forces that catch men up (and can impose the lunging reversals already indicated) and ferry them from one domain to another in an unending cycle.

The "wheel of water" reappears in a slightly altered form as Yvonne dies at the end of Chapter 11,

> And leaving the buring dream Yvonne felt herself suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars, through eddies of stars scattering aloft with even wider circlings like rings on water, among which now appeared, like a flock of diamond birds flying softly and steadily towards Orion, the Pleiades (U.V., p. 337).

The image of the "wheel of water" has been transformed into a cosmic symbol, and the image of the stars is immensely powerful and mysterious, in the best sense of the word. It is the climax of a magnificent passage in which Yvonne's life flashes in front of her, and there is an amazing cornucopia of images, drawn together from the whole novel into the blast of what is essentially a purging conflagration. In this whirling, eddying transformation, the merry-go-round becomes Ferris wheel becomes

stars becomes the rolling sea becomes the horse becomes once again the merry-go-round, while Yvonne's life is ebbing away, detail by detail.

Her death has been caused by the riderless horse with the number seven branded on it, which has been freed by the Consul and has appeared on several occasions throughout the novel. Each of the images which flash in front of Yvonne has thus a specific symbolic underpinning, but above all else, all the images are associated by form or by motion with the Lowrian wheel. They are all spokes radiating from the mind whose every emanation is founded on the intense belief in multiple significations and in concurrence. One last example which is intrinsic to the above rendering is that the scene starts with the words, "The sky was a sheet of white flame" (U.V., p. 335). On the one hand, this is a fire of purgation, hotter than red, a white purifying heat, but more sinister is the underlying autobiographical interpretation: the end of the passage rests on fire also, but one which appears to have been drawn from the fire at Dollarton, B.C. from which Lowry himself never recovered psychologically.

The transition from the "wheel of water" to the eddying stars has been prefigured in the novel by the opening of Chapter 11, "SUNSET. Eddies of green and orange birds scattered aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water" (U.V., p. 317). Eternally concerned with having his wheel (as well as his number 12!), Lowry superimposes it on the Mexican

landscape, on the astrological landscape, on the spiritual and premonitory landscape, for it is indeed the landscape of his mind. Having imposed it on the sea, he transfers the undulating and centripetal movement of the waves to the "green and orange birds", then to the stars, which he then compares to a "flock of diamond birds".

Again, the thunderstorm of the Consul's letter, which has initially only been presented alongside the "wheel of water", recurs in Chapter 11, "- The storm, that has already dispatched its outriders, must have been travelling in a circle: the real onset was yet to come." (U.V., p. 317). Apart from the fact that Lowry is employing the pathetic fallacy, the storm and the circle have become overlapping components of the Lowrian landscape such that the storm now shares the ominous aspects of the Infernal Machine, it is suggested: "the real onset was yet to come". Also of interest is that the storm is described as having "dispatched its outriders", which presents a doubly apposite metaphor, since the horse with its rider, and the riderless horse are crucial figures in Lowry's Mexican iconography. Is one of the dispatched "outriders" the force which, in the form of the riderless horse, pursues and kills Yvonne later in the chapter?

A further example of the wheel as the symbol around which all others cluster in Lowry's tortuous symbolic network is the printer's flywheel, which again occurs both at the beginning and the end of the novel. In Chapter 2,.the Consul

and Yvonne go forth into the streets from the cantina of their reunion:

> They emerged on the street again: when they had crossed it she was grateful for the excuse suggested by the printer's shop window for readjustment. ---there was something she hadn't seen before, which the Consul now pointed out with a murmur of 'Strange', peering closer: a photographic enlargement, purporting to show the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre, of a great rock split by forest fires. This curious, and curiously sad picture - to which the nature of the other exhibits lent an added ironic poignance - set behind and above the already spinning flywheel of the presses was called: La Despedida (U.V., p. 59).

The appearance of a photograph called "The Parting" at a time of reunion is typical of Lowry's use of a certain blend of irony and paradox. The irony lies in the fact that on a manifest level, the occasion is not a parting but instead, a reunion. But on a deeper level, this reunion is paradoxically already fated to be a final parting, one for which the diabolical forces of the Infernal Machine are "already spinning".

In addition, the force of the "already spinning flywheel" is connected to other symbolic ramifications of this ominous precursor of downfall. Attached to this particular wheel are the notions of the abyss (La Despedida) both physical and spiritual, the forest (which will later be seen to have Dantean reverberations), and of fire. All of these symbols find fuller expression later in the novel, and they are all connected in some way to the fates of the Consul and

of Yvonne. By connecting this variety of symbols to the force of the printer's flywheel, Lowry prefigures the much more precise matrix achieved by the end of the novel of an irrevocable destiny (where fire, the forest, and the abyss become the ultimate symbols of destruction). And it is here that the side of the rock inhabited by Geoffrey's persona responds, "That's all very well---but it happens to be your fault, and as for myself, I propose to disintegrate as I please!" (U.V., p. 60) The fire which as split the rock is adopted by the Consul as an excuse for refusing any hope of regeneration.

As the Consul trudges his weary - but highly aware - path to self-destruction in Chapter 12, he inspects the domain of his fate,

> It was a tremendous, an awful way down to the bottom. But it struck him he was not afraid to fall either. He traced mentally the barranca's circuitous abysmal path back---then saw himself standing again this morning with Yvonne outside the printer's shop, gazing at the picture of that other rock, La Despedida, the glacial rock crumbling among the wedding invitations in the shop window, the spinning flywheel behind (U.V., p. 340).

Having been given first Yvonne's perspective, then the Consul's, on the scene, the symbolic significance of each of the details, La Despedida and the printer's flywheel, is reinforced. In fact, this shop window appears as the microcosmic level of the Lowrian universe of the wheel and the abyss, the relationship

between which is reserved for later analysis. The perspectives of Yvonne and the Consul are not radically different in that both characters note the irony of a photograph of "The Parting" being juxtaposed with "wedding invitations". The similarity in viewpoint is an inescapable fact of the novel, which Lowry explained:

> 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.[5]

Whatever similarities may be inevitable, Yvonne suspects with horror that the divide is imminent, whereas the Consul accepts with dogged stoicism and without foreboding that the wheel of his life has turned very close to full circle. By the time the Consul gives his version, La Despedida is specifically related to the abyss into which he is destined to fall - the barranca - rather than the more general "split" or cleft with Yvonne fears.

Thus in the accumulating manifestations of the wheel, Lowry achieves a symbolic network of complex and macrocosmic dimensions by interrelating the microcosmic levels as exemplified by the variations and transformations of the "wheel of water" and the printer's flywheel. In attaching other emblematic figures from the Mexican environment, symbols of both spiritual and physical significance, often loosely to

begin with, Lowry achieves a matrix of details which collaborate in the fate of the Consul. Such a matrix of figures with independent, and yet also overlapping symbolic significances are the basis of "the agonies of the drunkard [which] find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers."[6]

All representations of the wheel, and the symbols which have been seen to pertain to this central notion, are representations of the "agonies", of the "forces" in man which cause him to be terrified of himself"[7], but also of "his ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past."[8] It has been argued that the wheel is the symbol used to illustrate both external and internal forces, but furthermore, that the wheel is the product of the fecund imagination which takes pleasure in interconnections and resonances, in the symbolic layering, and which ignores no opportunity to reinforce the symbolic network.

NOTES

1. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 59.

2. Ibid., p. 68.

3. Malcolm Lowry "Preface to a Novel" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979), p. 9.

4. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 73.

5. Ibid., p. 60.

6. Ibid., p. 71.

7. Ibid., p. 66.

8. Ibid., p. 66.

SECTION 5

"Psychoanalytic Implications of the Wheel"

> "Just because your soul is being
> torn to pieces doesn't mean that
> you stop analyzing the phenomena"
>
> - Charlie Citrine in Saul Bellow's
> Humboldt's Gift

Above all, the wheel in Under the Volcano is the mechanical agent for the shattering of the Consul's soul, for diabolical destruction of a mortal. It symbolises the appalling collaboration between Time and Fate, and the strange union of peace and damnation, the "coincidentia oppositorum"[1] (the basic symbolic actions illustrative of the union of opposites). The wheel has also been argued to be progeny of a psyche which deals in concurrence and horrific oncatenation. Ultimately every emanation or spoke of the wheel - structural or thematic or symbolic - is held in place by the hub, the Lowrian psyche.

Potentially, the informing psyche has even greater significance in the specific case of Lowry, simply because his work is generally agreed to be so highly autobiographical. That his work is indeed indivisible from biographical material is suggested by Lowry's claim that the four main characters in the novel are not individuals but "aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit."[2] Douglas Day believes that, like most visionary artists, Lowry,

> ---was acutely egocentric: his gaze was almost always inward, so much so that he was very nearly blind to the world outside - except in so far as it reflected his own thoughts and feelings. From time to time he would try mightily to focus on something outside himself - the world situation, friends, wives, the sound of a voice, the color of a sky - and hope that alcohol would help him get through such adventures. But, of course, it only helped him back inside himself, where an elusive inner Malcolm Lowry alternately laughed at and sorrowed with his brilliant, incompetent outer self. Such a man could write only about himself, which is precisely what Lowry did. It would be a cliché to say that he wrote "thinly veiled autobiographies"; but it would be the truth.[3]

The above coincides exactly with Richard Hauer Costa's remark about Under the Volcano being the one occasion on which Lowry "came to transcend the neuroses of his life".[4]

In fact, only by his diverse and highly creative symbolisations does Lowry transcend his deep concern with his inner self and his narcissism. Day strongly suggests Lowry's narcissism when he states that the author "was very nearly blind to the world outside - except in so far as it reflected his own thoughts and feelings". Furthermore, Day writes, "the Sterns remember that they often came upon him [Lowry] staring long and broodily in the mirror",[5] - an even more obvious manifestation of narcissism.

The vision of the external world only as it reflects the self is precisely the expectation of the narcissistic personality; that the world will indeed adopt postures which

reflect the self, and thus external reality is only tolerated to the extent that it is willing to make the necessary adaptations. In addition, Day remarks,

> Very rarely he tried to invent characters, but he did not know enough about any other human being to do this - --- - and so he would return to his only true interest: Malcolm Lowry. But he could never bring himself to face Malcolm Lowry completely, and so was unable to finish any of his self-portraits. (He regarded even Under the Volcano as incomplete.)[6]

In the above may be discerned the underlying trauma of the novelist - the extreme tension between the incessant concern with, and the unfortunate reality of the self. Such a tension is entirely internal, and absolutely central to the work - one which adds to the manifest reasons for Lowry's depictions of the internal landscape which is undoubtedly the authorial domain. Although hell may very well be all around, primarily, the much more insidious hell is the one within.

That hell is indeed within is evidenced by the Consul's letter,

> No, my secrets are of the grave and must be kept. And this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell.
>
> It is not Mexico of course but in the heart (U.V., p. 41-42).

The Consul's explorations of the depths are given Faustian and Dantean underpinnings, but it is not until the middle of the

novel that the Consul can acknowledge his domain, and make the strange union (prefigured by the "cold jonquil beauty" of the letter) between peace and damnation:

> Suddenly he felt something never felt before with such shocking certainty. It was that he was in hell himself. At the same time he became possessed of a curious calm (U.V., p. 203).

A few pages later, the COnsul says, "As for the demons, they were inside him as well as outside ---" (U.V., p. 208). From such evidence, Lowry's basic solipsism, his notion that he is central to his universe, the hub of the wheel of his existence - but an existence of incontravertible doom - can be seen as a sympathy-evoking gesture, an attempt to offset the less attractive aspects of narcissism.

Of the antagonism which narcissism is bound to evoke to some extent, Ronald Walker says, "Lowry was obviously a solipsistic writer given, with increasing frequency in later years, to observing himself in the act of observing himself."[7] Lowry appears to extend the statement of Charlie Citrine in Humboldt's Gift by holding that just because you're damned doesn't mean to say that you can't have a lot of fun in the process of analysing the phenomena. Indeed, the Consul pursues his quest for diabolical wisdom in an often hilarious manner, and when it is not so enjoyable, he at least has the gratification of exploring the full dimensions of the self-induced inevitability of his extremity.

It is argued that, in the portrayal of the internal landscape, the hell that is in the heart, Lowry, in spite of his stupendous solipsism, exercises what Day terms "preternatural self-awareness".[8] This unusual self-awareness is possibly exemplified by Firmin's general feeling of guilt, which is rendered into a supposed war-crime. Throughout the novel, the specific crime is ill-defined at best, but the war-crime does serve as an analogue for other "crimes", and for the guilt which is persistent in Firmin's mind. However, whether his crime exists or not, the fact remains that if it has been perpetrated, it has certainly been greatly exaggerated since that time, and what matters is that it represents merely a means of focusing feelings of guilt. Hence it is of no great import whether Firmin has committed the war-crime or not. The significance of the incident lies entirely with the fact that it has served Firmin as a focus for multifarious guilts. In a man for whom "the truth and his life had become a quixotic oral fiction" (U.V., p. 39), it is more viable to attach importance to whatever may be consistent in the underpinnings of self-accusatory material in the novel (or latent content), rather than to what Firmin professes to be the cause of his predicament (or manifest content).

In this particular assertion is found the inescapable necessity for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the symbolic exhumation already undertaken. It is contended that Under the Volcano rests, above all, on the execution of an internal

landscape, in which there is a tension between the narcissistic self, and the actual reality of self - the ineluctable conclusion to which a person of "preternatural self-awareness" must come. In Freud's paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction", he notes a similar tension as being crucial to the narcissistic personality.

Briefly summarising Freud's paper, he says "The libido withdrawn from the outer world has been directed on to the ego, giving rise to a state which we may call narcissism".[9] Freud distinguishes between two types of narcissism, the first being a natural stage of libidinal development, before there is any love-object, in which we all experience a state of being centre of the universe, of magical omnipotence, and we are "His Majesty the Baby".[10] However, this idyllic state is soon undermined by criticism:

> For that which prompted the person to form an ego-ideal, over which his conscience keeps guard, was the influence of parental criticism (conveyed to him by the medium of the voice), reinforced, as time went on, by those who trained and taught the child, and by all other persons of his environment - an indefinite host, too numerous to reckon (fellow-men, public opinion).[11]

It is worth noting at this point that Lowry himself must have been intensely aware of his parents' critical attitude towards him, for he was born into exactly the wrong household. The son of a successful businessman, he lived in an environment in which there was an absolute dearth of intellectual activity,

with parents who failed to give such pursuits any recognition. They were glad to surrender him to nannies, to public school, and later to entrust him to a series of guardians.[12] And the Consul himself is a nomadic figure, lacking the stability of family life and approbation, unable to be a part of the idiosyncratic Taskerson family, an orphan "who sometimes burst out crying if you mentioned in his presence the word 'father' or 'mother'" (U.V., p. 22).

In addition to the critical attitude of others, the personal critical judgement which is also awakened later is crucial in the formation of the narcissistic personality. At the stage of secondary narcissism, the subject

> ---is not willing to forego his narcissistic perfection in his childhood; and if, as he develops, he is distrubed by the admonitions of others and his own critical judgement is awakened, he seeks to recover the early perfection, thus wrested from him, in the form of an ego - ideal.[13]

Freud notes that what may be called conscience is crucial in "performing the task of seeing that narcissistic gratification is secured from the ego ideal",[14] [and that recognition] of such a force enables one to understand "delusions of observation".[15] Such delusions of being watched occur in a variety of illnesses (not just in paranoia), and patients suffering in this way complain that all their thoughts are known and their actions watched. They complain of "voices which characteristically speak to them in the third person".[16]

Evidence in the personality of the Consul of this aspect of the functioning of an over-active conscience is immediately available. It comes in the form of the Consul's "familiars", figures released by his drinking bouts. In Chapter 3, they interrupt the Consul's heavy drinking on several occasions, to reprimand him for his infernal inaction, for his repeated fateful oscillation,

> '- Have you forgotten the letters of Geoffrey Firmin - the letters she wrote until her heart broke --- she is weeping it is not for that alone you have done this to her you didn't you did ---'
>
> The Consul reached forward and absentmindedly managed a sip of whisky; the voice might have been either of his familiars --- (U.V., p. 96).

And there is evidence that the Consul is also persecuted by other voices: the reproachful newspaper headlines which proclaim his guilt -

> 'Firmin found guilty, acquitted, cries in box'. 'Firmin innocent but bears guilt of world on shoulders.' 'Body of Firmin found drunk in bunker' (U.V., p. 141).

Even Hugh suffers from a similar disorder, when a voice says to him, "Firmin, you are a poor sort of good man" (U.V., p. 111).

The artistic formulation of unconscious guilt and societal disorder takes the form of a poster for precisely the same film as had been playing in Quauhnahuac exactly one year before, on the day of the Consul's death, and which is playing again at the opening of the novel. Las Manos de Orlac for

Lowry meant,

> --- a preposterous mad---movie--- therein, Orlac was a great pianist who lost his hands in a railway accident, had the hands of a murderer grafted on by a "Mad Doctor", ever afterwards felt - no doubt because he'd played the Sleepwalker in Caligari too - impelled to commit murders; --- thematically speaking, though, the pelado in Chapter VIII - by extension the Consul, by extension M. Laruelle - gives the clue: the pelad's hands were convered with blood. So are man's.[17]

The poster operates as a similar reprimand to the Consul and to M. Laruelle, as a proclamation, specifically, of the Consul's supposed murders, and generally, of man's immeasurable, but paradoxically increasing guilt.

Interestingly, an identical notion of guilt is central to Lowry's other Mexican novel, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. Sigbjørn Wilderness, the main protagonist, makes a vehement denial of any degree of guilt whatsoever (a guilt of the same nature as the Consul's!) - "he had proposed crossing it [the border] to fight in a foreign war in which, incidentally, he had not finally participated in any capacity whatsoever;"[18] Methinks he doth protest too much! Wilderness fears, quite irrationally, that his sins will be uncovered even in the most mundane intercourse,

> ---he was very much afraid that he would be asked embarrassing questions, which was why he had to talk, to supply even symbolical answers to those questions in advance to forestall their being asked, such questions as: 'Were you in any of the services?'[19]

And, in this mammoth undertaking of paranoid concealment of imaginary guilts and dilemmas, exactly the same accusatory voice as operates in the case of the Consul constantly threatens to reveal Wilderness to the world, in a ballet or morality play which catalogues his sins:

> There was a dancer (a) ---as if perpetually contemplating a vast drop below him; there was a dancer (B), the fear of discovery, a jester - for even Sigbjørn could not bear that he be wholly serious, yet with an implacable mask who carried newspapers under his arm with such headlines as Wilderness's Works Written by Erikson, or Writer Confesses Old Murder or Wilderness Admitted Liar; there was (y) a grinning witless mask---the fear of disease; and dancer (z)---with Wilderness's own face streaming with blood, the fear of himself, and with his head turned always Dantesquely facing backward---[20]

It is significant that Sigbjørn should fear, first the abyss, second, that his writing will be discovered as total plagiarism (Lowry's own perpetual anxiety), third, venereal disease (a phobia also common to Lowry himself, to the Consul, and to Eugene Dana Hilliot, antagonist of Ultramarine) and fourth, a vast personal, unspecified, archetypal guilt (again, as in the Consul).

Also, what appears to matter even more than the guilt itself is that the sins might be found to have been committed. There exists an unusual combination of anxiety about being "found out" by society, and the lack of any imagined social restrictions and repercussions. The Consul knows that he is

heading towards the abyss, just as Sigbjørn knows that "he was using his wife's necessity --- as an excuse - for what, was it - what was it but death".[21] Although discovery at the hands of society is feared, punishment is already being administered, not by society, but by the super-ego. Thus what is depicted is the hell within, rather than society's penalties. This lack of attention to institutional structures and restrictions may, on the one hand, be accounted for by the inherent inability to actually see and comprehend the outside world. On the other hand, the fear that society will "find out" is an excellent example of the influence of "public opinion", to which Freud alludes.

This idea of "public opinion" is developed by Freud later in his paper on narcissism:

> The ego-ideal---not only binds the narcissistic libido, but also a considerable amount of the person's homosexual libido, which in this way becomes turned back into the ego. The dissatisfaction due to the non-fulfillment of this ideal liberates homosexual libido, which is transformed into sense of guilt (dread of community).[22]

Thus a "dread of the community" is manifested in Under the Volcano by three devices; by first, the familiars, demanding explanations and issuing constant reproaches, second, the newspaper headlines proclaiming the Consul's guilt, and third, the poster which serves as a general reproach to humanity, but which the Consul may invest with his own peculiar meaning.

Each of the devices act as symbolic indicators towards nemesis, but they are also examples of the way in which the Consul sees external reality as emblematic of his own internal predicament, a typically narcissistic gesture.

Freud makes several other observations which have direct relevance to the Consul's behavior. First, Freud says,

> He who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, which can only be replaced by his being loved. ---
>
> The realisation of impotence, of one's inability to love in consequence of mental or physical disorder, has an exceedingly lowering effect upon the self-regard.[23]

The idea of impotence is manifested on two levels in Under the Volcano, first, by the physical impotence of the Consul in Chapter 3, and second, by his dogged inaction, his refusal to do anything to ameliorate his condition. But without sexual intercourse (which is to be motivated by love) and without any attempt to avoid damnation, it is not possible to live (so the reader is meant to understand). Hence the Consul's fate is seen from yet another perspective as being inevitable. And sexual impotence is indeed directly related to the ability to love, with the portentous warning written on the wall outside the Consul's house: No se puede vivir sin amar" (U.V., p. 213) - one cannot live without loving. Not only does the Consul fail at eros, he also fails at agape, and this is taken one stage further by Day, who says, "It is

the logos --- that concerns us on a religious level."[24] The Consul knows that one only has to love God and desire his own salvation in order to be saved.

Since the Consul is impotent, and refuses to strive to avoid disaster, he is quite incapable of relinquishing part of his narcissism, and must take the consequences. But, as Freud states above, the realisation that this is the case also brings about the lowering of self-esteem. Thus it is that the Consul suffers from a strange tension (which has been mentioned earlier) between narcissistic concern with self and the expectation that the world will act accordingly, and the unfortunate reality of the self which means that it cannot be faced completely.

The final point in Freud's paper "On Narcissism" which has specific relevance to this study follows his explanation of the inverse relationship between the degree of physical suffering and the interest in love objects. Freud states that this may also be the relationship in cases of hypochondria, and,

> It is possible that for every such change in the erotogenicity of the organs there is a parallel change in the libidinal cathexis in the ego. In such factors may lie the explanation of what is at the bottom of hypochondria and what it is that can have upon the distribution of the libido the same effect as actual organic disease...[25]

The Consul suffers from a constant barrage of baffling maladies, and in attempting to escape the peril of his soul,

the remedy (alcohol) becomes a second malady. This vicious circle in turn makes the Consul impotent, physically and spiritually, so that there appears to be, as in Freud's statement, a direct correspondence between physical and psychical impotence.

In the light of this relationship, it is entirely appropriate that the Consul should muse, in Chapter 3,

> Regard: the plantains with their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death. You do not know how to love these things any longer (U.V., p. 70).

The "evil phallic death" is directly juxtaposed with the ability to love on the level of agape, and the relationship between the two levels of impotence is such that the Consul can no longer live. Moreover, the nature of the Consul's death, as well as having overtones of burning, is inextricably linked to his intercourse with Maria. It is indeed an "evil phallic death", where the "burning boiling crucified evil organ" (U.V., p. 350) only marginally outlasts the soul, and when both are infected, he may plunge down the abyss.

Freud's paper highlights connections and inter-relationships regarding the narcissistic personality which correspond to the specific case of the Consul in Under the Volcano and to authorial narcissism. By giving his own psyche the pivotal and omnipotent position of the wheel-hub, Lowry accentuates not only the Consul's dilemma, but the trauma of the narcissistic personality. Since in narcissism, all is

imagined to emanate from self as centre of the universe, the structure of the novel and the arrangement of the symbols within that structure become a means of reaffirmation of the individual's magical powers, and guard against the more deeply repressed self-loathing - the self-loathing which speaks to the Consul disguised as his "familiars". Ultimately, the wheel symbolism acts not only as a central means of artistic rendering, but also as a mask for auto-biographical detail, narcissistic concern with self, and immeasurable self-loathing.

NOTES

1. Rictor Norton, "The Turn of the Screw: Coincidentia Oppositorum" in American Imago, Vol. 28, Winter 1971, p. 373.

2. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 60.

3. Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. Edited by Douglas Day and Margerie Lowry; "Preface" by Douglas Day. (England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972). This reference is made to the "Preface", p. 6.

4. Richard Hauer Costa, "Under the Volcano - The Way it Was: A Thirty-year Perspective" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1978), p. 40.

5. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography (London: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1973), p. 69.

6. Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. Douglas Day "Preface", p. 7.

7. Ronald Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, p. 240.

8. Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. Douglas Day "Preface", p. 5.

9. Sigmund Freud, A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud, John Rickman, ed. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 106.

10. Ibid., p. 115.

11. Ibid., p. 118.

12. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography, p. 54-191.

13. Freud, p. 116.

14. Ibid., p. 117-8.

15. Ibid., p. 118.

16. Ibid., p. 118.

17. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 251.

18. Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. This and the following references are to the text., p. 22.

19. Ibid., p. 29.

20. Ibid., p. 31.

21. Ibid., p. 21.

22. Freud, p. 123.

23. Ibid., p. 120.

24. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography, p. 349.

25. Freud, p. 110

PART II

SECTION 6

"The Malebolge"

Parallel to a Mexico of which Lowry said, "It is paradisal: it is unquestionably infernal"[1] are the corresponding analogies (which exist within Under the Volcano) of joy and despair, nightmare and silence, heaven and hell, of concrete physical symbols of forest, garden, volcanoes and abyss, and of Lowry's personal sense of the polarities in his life between the awesome but infernal Mexico, and British Columbia as "an undiscovered, perhaps an undiscoverable paradise" (U.V., p. 354). Lowry's habitual, even obsessive reinforcement of his symbolic network, whereby any one symbol is perhaps more significant for its multiplicity of meanings, rather than for a simple primary meaning, has been evident in the analysis of the wheel symbolism. In the exploration of the technical ramifications of the abyss, a similar "proliferating" aspect of the symbol will again be seen as inherent in Lowry's writing.

While the abyss, like many of Lowry's symbols has, as pointed out by George Woodcock, a concrete existence within Under the Volcano as part of the Mexican topography (and must, of course, be essential to the "local colour heaped on in shovelfuls"[2]), it is also part of the landscape of the mind:

> The volcanoes, the neglected garden, the decaying palaces, the deep and dense barranca, are all more than features of a natural background. They reflect the Consul's inner condition - the own place of his mind - and in this way they force him into self-recognition and the reader into a dispassionate recognition of the Consul's condition. Yet at the same time they continue to be there objectively, just as Milton and Dante meant us to conceive of the physical features of Hell objectively, ---[3]

The abyss is both symptomatic of the Consul's "inner condition" and emblematic of his spiritual domain. As Woodcock also notes, there is also a Dantean parallel in that Lowry portrays "the physical features of Hell objectively". Furthermore, Hugh, in Chapter 4 actually refers to the ravine as the location of nemesis - the "Malebolge", one of Dante's circles of hell:

> 'I mean journalists, not goats. There's no punishment on earth fit for them. Only the Malebolge ... And here is the Malebolge.'
>
> The Malebolge was the barranca, the ravine which wound through the country, --- (U.V., p. 104).

The allusion made to Dante's Divine Comedy via the Malebolge is part of the Lowrian strategy which demands not only that his symbols have material embodiment within the environment, and many meanings on a conceptual level, but also that certain symbols be given an inter-textual reinforcement. Just as the wheel/Ferris Wheel has been seen to be directly related to Cocteau's "machine infernale", the abyss/barranca

is, in addition to other connotations, is related to Dante's "Malebolge". Although Carol Slade writes that "Lowry does not seem to have intended the barranca to represent that area [the "Malebolge"] of Dante's hell specifically, but rather hell in general"[4], there is enough evidence to suggest, on the contrary, that the "Malebolge" is relevant as the particular punishment of the Consul.

In Dante's Inferno, the "Malebolge" is the eighth circle of hell. It serves as the domain, or area of punishment, of soothsayers and necromancers. It is entirely appropriate that, in Hugh's view, journalists should be allotted the fate of the "Malebolge", and that those guilty of "intellectual male prostitution" (U.V., p. 104) be classed as "fortune tellers and diviners --- those who attempted by forbidden arts to look into the future"[5] and be doomed to continue in the Fourth Bolgia, with their heads twisted round on their bodies so that as they move forwards, they may only ever look backwards. Wallace Fowlie says of Canto XX,

> In Dante's scheme, soothsaying follows the prostitution of language, the speech of flatterers and seducers, and the prostitution of the Church in simony. Soothsaying is the prostitution of God's mind because God knows the future.[6]

Thus Hugh's interpretation of journalists as those indulging in "prostitution of speech and writing" (U.V., p. 104) is very close to Fowlie's evaluation of the sins of those inhabiting

the Fourth Bolgia.

The fate of these miscreants - including Tiresias, Amphareus, Eurypylus and Michael Scott - is told in Canto XX of the Inferno. The number of the canto is significant in that it is evoked by the cantina "Cerveceria XX", where Laruelle, in waiting for Dr. Vigil (Virgil being Dante's guide in the exploration of the underworld) thinks about the Consul, and comes upon the Consul's letter which reveals the various Faustian parallels.

That the Dantean parallel is intended is evidenced first by Hugh's reference to the "Malebolge", and also by Lowry's letter to Jonathan Cape, in which he makes several references to the Inferno. Under the Volcano, he said, was to be "the first infernal part"[7] of a "trilogy entitled The Voyage That Never Ends."[8] Furthermore, Lowry wrote,

> (Note: the book opens in the Casina 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 Paradise 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., etc., this chort 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 --- while the chord is resolved in XI, in the chapter concerning Yvonne's death, where the wood becomes real, and dark.)[9]

Thus not only the physical presence of the barranca - the "Malebolge" - but also that of the dark wood correspond directly to the Inferno, which opens,

> Midway in our life's journey, I
> went astray from the straight
> road and woke to find myself alone
> in a dark wood. ---[10]

The "dark wood" appears in several forms throughout the novel and much of the most significant action takes place in forests - the "antediluvian forest with ugly black stumps" (U.V., p. 23) near the "Hell Bunker" of Firmin's youth, the forest in which Yvonne is trampled to death, and the forest within the ravine into which Geoffrey is destined to fall.

In addition, the words "Midway in our life's journey" are picked up by Lowry when he says, "Hugh, in the middle of his life, recalls at the beginning of that Chapter [VI] Dante's words - the opening words of Canto I - "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/mi ritrovai ---".[11] Hugh, in his poorly defined idealism, is presented as a contrast to the Consul, as "an avatar of Dante".[12] He, not the Consul, is seeking the right path through the woods, in spite of his thwarted notions of paradigmatic suffering. When, as a youth, he discovered that the crew of the ramshackle old ship on which he was working did not dine merely at subsistence level, he was sorely disappointed - "Imagine the Sea Wolf sitting down to afternoon tea at four o'clock with tabnabs!" (U.V., p. 165). Again, Lowry writes of Hugh, "Still, he had to pretend to himself, poor fellow, there was something romantic in what he

had done" (U.V., p. 166).

However, despite his intensely romantic ideas, Hugh is indeed aligned with Dante's position (as protagonist) in the Inferno. He is about to head towards Vera Cruz (U.V., p. 106) - the True Cross - and it seems that, although his travels have been unproductive, spiritually, Hugh is redeemed by his remorse at this own idealism, and by his struggle towards some kind of restitution. The same is true of M. Laruelle, who one year later is also leaving Mexico for Vera Cruz, and who "like Hugh, too, ---did not know if his ship would ever reach port ..." (U.V., p. 15).

Hugh has aspirations to save the world, although his efforts in that direction always come to nothing. However, his striving is based on the model of Juan Cerillo:

> For man, every man, Juan seemed to be telling him, even as Mexico, must ceaselessly struggle upward. What was life but a warfare and a stranger's sojourn? Revolution rages too in the tierra caliente of each human soul. No peace but that must pay full toll to hell-) (U.V., p. 112).

Hugh is aligned also with the Goethe epigram, "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward...him we can save" (U.V., p. 7) when he thinks "every man --- must ceaselessly struggle upward". His position is undoubtedly romantic, which permits him, as George Steiner would suggest, to evade the tragic, placing Hugh in a "near-tragic" or "melodramatic" context.[13] However, it is the elements of struggle and remorse which

align Hugh with Dante as a "pilgrim journeying through the realms of the afterlife".[14]

The Consul, in contrast to Hugh, is seen in the light of the Dantean analogy, as "already a lost soul".[15] However, apart from the allustions which serve to intimate his damnation, there are very few references to the Inferno in connection with the Consul. The bells tolling "dolente...dolore!" (U.V., p. 47, p. 374), in remembrance of, and recognition of the inevitability of the Consul's death, however, are echoing the inscription over the Gates of Hell in Canto III of Dante's Inferno:

> Per me si va ne la citta dolente,
> per me si va ne l'etterno dolore,
>
> ---
>
> Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate. [16]

John Ciardi translates:

> I AM THE WAY INTO THE CITY OF WOE,
> I AM THE WAY TO A FORSAKEN PEOPLE.
>
> ---
>
> ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE.[17]

It is precisely the abandoning of hope - "I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance" (U.V., p. 7) - that moves the Consul in an incontravertible vicious circle towards the abyss. The Consul's failures are many, but all may be summarised as a fatalistic expectation of the worst which is so strong as to cause him to take action of a sort which will confirm his worst expectations. As Stephen Tift

writes,

> The Consul derives a certain comfort
> from the feeling that his suffering,
> life that of Prometheus, is inevitable.
> ---The Consul is happiest, perhaps,
> when he feels locked into his torment
> (for reasons less noble than those of
> Prometheus) ---[18]

No matter what failures, what reasons for his downfall may be postulated, it is certain that the calamity which awaits the Consul does so because his easiest option is to remain "locked into his torment", and acceptance of his tragic fate ushers in a guarantee of catastrophe. Apart from this - perhaps somewhat tenuous - connection with the Inferno, the only other reference occurs when the Consul arrives at the Terminal Cantina El Bosque, where he continues the opening of Canto I virtually where Hugh left off, thinking "...Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura - or selva?" (U.V., p. 228).

Returning to Hugh's relating of the barranca to the "Malebolge", it has been contended that he has been most perceptive in terming the "Malebolge" as domain of fortune tellers and diviners - as a suitable fate for journalists. Since the Consul, too, is hurtling towards the abyss until "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (U.V., p. 376), his fall must originate in a sin similar to that of journalists and of Dante's miscreants. First, the Consul is guilty in some way of inventing a self-fulfilling prophesy of punishment: Firmin lives on guilts which are merely the products of his own singular sophistry, a

"speculation in guilt which yields devastating dividends".[19] He lives on the dividends of this destructive prophecy in an inversion of the crime common to those in the Fourth Bolgia of the "Malebolge". As he dies, he sees himself as "the thief - yes the pilferer of meaningless muddled ideas out of which his rejection of life had grown" (U.V., p. 374).

In addition to his self-destructive sophistry, Firmin is guilty of abusing his occult powers. Lowry wrote,

> (Note: In the Cabbala, the misuse of magical powers is compared to drunkenness or the misuse of wine --- the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers. ---[20]

It will also be remembered that those who practised the forbidden arts are condemned to the Fourth Bolgia in Dante's Inferno. Thus the "Malebolge" finds a Cabbalistic parallel in the "abyss of husks and demons".[21] Tift says of the Consul,

> He knows that the infernal machine is a deserved nemesis, and that his rightful spiritual domain is the Qliphoth. Despite moments of penitence, he has developed a fatalistic relish for his climb up the inverted Tree toward the abyss, and he gives himself up to the infernal machine that encages him. ---[22]

In addition to his misuse of alcohol, there is some suggestion in Under the Volcano that Geoffrey Firmin has at his command certain occult powers, about which he is writing a book:

> Meantime do you see me as still working on the book, ---- my equilibrium, and my equilibrium is all, precarious - balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God? (U.V., p. 44).

The Consul views the subject matter of his book as a pushing beyond conventional knowledge, as being about "Secret Knowledge" (U.V., p. 45). The act of writing it, both as a literary problem, and as a psychical experiment, is potentially leading him on an "unretraceable path". Moreover, Firmin says of the act of writing,

> But it's amazing when you come to think of it how the human spirit seems to blossom in the shadow of the abattoir. How - to say nothing of all the poetry - not far enough below the stockyards to escape altogether the reek of the porter-house of tomorrow, people can be living in cellars the life of the old alchemists of Prague! Yes: living among the cohabitations of Faust himself, among the litharge and agate and hyacinth and pearls. ---from alcohol to alkahest. (U.V.p. 91).

The Consul identifies with th "old alchemists of Prague", those who are destined to experience both the lowest that life can offer materially, the "abattoir", and what Firmin might view as the highest, spiritually. However, in his alcoholic meanderings, he loses any idea of what his literary aims might be, but revealingly, makes a bridge "from alcohol to alkahest". Thus drunkenness and the occult are directly linked in the Consul's mind, and such ramifications add stature to his own

conception of the order of his fate. The fact that he may not be a mere drunkard, but that he might be pursuing visions accessible only through experience of the infernal adds great weight to his experiments, both alcoholic and occult.

It is contended that it is just this desire for a mysterious importance, for the affirmation of his mystical omnipotence which contributes to the Consul's downfall. The following exchange represents the kind of gratification he wants:

> 'Yes,' Hugh said, 'how much does he he really know about all his alchemy and cabbala business? How much does it mean to him?'
>
> 'That's just what I was going to ask you. I've never been able to find out -'
>
> 'Good lord, I don't know...' Hugh added with almost avuncular relish: 'Maybe he's a black magician!' (U.V., p. 122).

Furthermore, the Consul is quite open in his fantasies of this nature, saying "God, that the dream of dark magician in his visioned cage, even while his hand shakes in its last decay - that's the bit I like -were the true end of this so lousy world..." (U.V., p. 206). The phantasy is very close indeed to the Consul's view of his own mystery. But whether Firmin has any actual occult powers or not (within "fictional reality"), even his tampering with the black arts appears to be enough to destine him to end in the "Malebolge", and he is certainly guilty of misusing knowledge, if not psychic power.

Thus it becomes evident that there are clear Dantean underpinnings to both the figures of Hugh and the Consul, with Hugh as a voyaging pilgrim and the Consul as a sinner, a misuser of the black arts. Further parallels have been suggested by critics, such that Yvonne represents Dante's Beatrice.[23] However, she emerges as a figure much closer to Hugh, one who recognises the mistakes of hte past but for whom salvation is just within grasp. In a letter written to the Consul, she says,

> 'What is a lost soul? It is one that has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness of remembered ways -'
>
> 'You are walking on the edge, of an abyss where I may not follow. ---' (U.V., p. 346-7).

Yvonne recognises not only her own condition, but that of the Consul as well, and her words make recognisable allusion to Dante's "I went astray/from the straight road and woke to find myself/alone in a dark wood".

It is contended that Yvonne, rather than holding an idealised, virtually transcendental position within the novel, struggles with the chaos of contemporary life, seeing in the advanced stage of civilisation the chaos which masquerades an order. Geoffrey, on the other hand, in the midst of alcoholic ramblings, convinces himself of his "little vision of order" (U.V., p. 133). This dishonesty can be seen as evidence of the Consul's decision to remain within the chaos of the "dark wood". Yvonne may, like Hugh, have to travel through the

"dark wood", and to recognise the truth of Juan Cerillo's "NO peace but that must pay full toll to hell." But, unlike the Consul, Hugh has "the desire to be, to do, good, what was right" (U.V., p. 128) and Yvonne has "never given up, or ceased to hope, or to try, gropingly, to find a meaning, a pattern, an answer -" (U.V., p. 270).

Dr. Vigil is, by his very name, likely to be linked with Virgil, who leads Dante through the circles of hell. However, it is unlikely - taking into account Lowry's predilection for layer after layer of suptlety and complexity - that Dr. Vigil is anything quite as conspicuous as Carol Slade would suggest:

> Dr. Vigil (the name evokes Virgil and vigil) is a Dantean guide figure whose role as a potential savior for Geoffrey is symbolised by his immaculately white tennis clothes, his triangular racquet press which suggests the Trinity, and his comportment as an apostle.[24]

Rather, David Markson gives a view of Dr. Vigil which is discursive, and much closer to an appreciation of the nature of Under the Volcano. In Chapter 1, Dr. Vigil expresses concern for the Consul's "soul", an unusual realm for a medical doctor, and gives some indication of his position within the novel, and,

> Much later along --- the identity will pass beyond any realm of speculation when the doctor invites the Consul and others to Guanajuato and mention is made of the underground tomb still to be visited by tourists in that city, famous for its mummies - this then a very real "abyss" in which Vigil - Virgil will be offering to serve as a guide.

> Similarly, while drinking here from a bottle on whose lable "a florid demon brandished a pitchfork", when Vigil is described as having conjured a "flaring lighter out of his pocket so swiftly it seemed it must have been already ignited there, that he had drawn a flame out of himself," the gesture is certainly "hellish" -[25]

Dr. Vigil is indeed this more involved figure, dealing equally with children's disease and venereal disease, rather than a :savior" or an "apostle", a knight in shining armour. Perhaps Dr. Vigil in fact fulfills part of the central concern of the novel in that,in spite of his compassionate nature, he absolutely fails to alter the path of the Consul's life: in a world just before tragedy is replaced by total chaos, the ultimate dimension of tragedy is that the life of an individual cannot be touched by that of another. While hope does indeed reside in the individual (witness Hugh and Yvonee), it appears that in this last stage of the transition to the most advanced and penultimate stage of civilisation - where chaos masquerades as order - the individual can be responsible for only his own salvation, and not that of another. Hence Dr. Vigil cannot possibly be conceived of as a "savior", but, at best, a "guide" whose efforts are doomed to failure. The Consul's fate is to be alone in his predicament, to know the right path but not to take it: "right through hell there is a path --- and though I may not take it, sometimes lately in dreams I have been able to see it" (U.V. p. 42).

In the respect that the novel is concerned with a world of increasing disorder, the "Malebolge" then takes on additional symbolic significance as the direction towards which the world is heading:

> ---he was appraoching the little bridge over the barranca, the deep ravine. Half-way across the bridge he stopped --- It was too dark to see the bottom, but: here was finality indeed, and cleavage! Quauhnahuac was like the times in this respect, wherever you turned the abyss was waiting for you round the corner (U.V., p. 21).

This symbol of "the times" represents the first appearance of the abyss in Under the Volcano. M. Laruelle then traces the origins of his, and the Consul's, fascination with the barranca:

> It was on this bridge the Consul had once suggested to him he make a film about Atlantis ---
>
> Though it was not the first occasion the Consul and he had stood looking into an abyss. For there had always been ages ago - and how could one forget it? - the "Hell Bunker": and that other encounter there which seemed to bear some obscure relation to the later one in Maximilian's Palace ... (U.V., p. 21-22)

Again, Laruelle says,

> The Hell Bunker was a dreaded hazard ---It guarded the green in a sense, though at a great distance, being far below it and slightly to the left. The abyss yawned in such a position as to engulf the third shot of a player like Geoffrey --- Jacques and the Old Bean had often decided that the Hell Bunker would be a nice place to take a girl --- (U.V., P. 26).

The "Hell Bunker" is also described as lying "in the middle of the long sloping eighth fairway" (U.V., p. 26) which may be connected with Dante's eighth circle of hell - the "Malebolge". Later, Laruelle disturbs Geoffrey and a girl in the "Hell Bunker", in what he calls a "bizarre scene", and remembers "the awkward grotesque way the girl had scrambled to her feet" (U.V., p. 27). Although no exact description of what Laruelle saw is given, the Dantesque parallel may provide some insight; the Canto XVIII, Dante says of the inhabitants of the "Malebolge", "All of these sinners are naked."[26]

Ultimately, the "Malebolge" serves to point towards several Dantean parallels in Under the Volcano. As the fate of the Consul, it serves to explain his crime as corresponding in some way to that of those in the eighth cricle of Dante's hell, and his punishment as being appropriate to this crime. The "Malebolge" would also appear to overlap with the Cabbalistic idea of the Qliphoth - the abyss to which all perverted aspiration leads. Both the Qliphoth and the "Malebolge" are the ravines which serve to punish the misuse of occult knowledge and powers, and both may be seen on a universal level in terms of the yawning abyss which awaits the ultimate stage of civilisation.

Thus the "Malebolge" is also a symbolic warning of not only the depths to which an individual may sink in the pursuit of a knowledge outside the natural domain of a mortal, but also of the end of civilisations. The Consul says, in agreement

with Eliot's concept of historic relativism, "Can't you see there's a sort of determinism about the fate of nations? They all seem to get what they deserve in the long run" (U.V., p. 311). Although this statement also applies to the Consul, the notion of "deserving" - a somewhat moralistic idea when applied to a man gripped in the continual tragedies of alcoholism - is set against a fate which is not death, but a punishment in Dantean or Cabbalistic terms.

NOTES

1. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 67.

2. Ibid., p. 61.

3. George Woodcock, "The Own Place of the Mind: An Essay in Lowrian Topography", in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p. 118.

4. Carol Slade in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics., p. 145.

5. Dante Alihieri, The Inferno (a verse rendering for the modern reader), trans. John Ciardi (Scarborough, Ontario: The New American Library, Inc., 1954(, Canto XX, p. 174.

6. Wallace Fowlie, A Reading of Dante's Inferno, (London: University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1981), p. 133.

7. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 63.

8. Ibid., p. 63.

9. Ibid., p. 67.

10. Dante, The Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, Canto I, p. 28.

11. Dante Alighieri, Inferno, Italian text with trans. and notes by Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1969), p.2.

12. Stephen Tift, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p. 59.

13. Geroge Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 133.

14. Slade, p. 143.

15. Tift, p. 59.

16. Dante, Inferno, trans. Allan Gilbert, p. 18.

17. Dante, The Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, p. 42.

18. Tift, p. 60.

19. Ibid., p. 49.

20. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 71.

21. Tift, p. 56.

22. Ibid., p. 57.

23. Slade, p. 149.

24. Ibid., p. 147.

25. David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano (New York: Times Books, 1978), p. 20.

26. Dante, The Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, p. 158.

SECTION 7

"Domain of a Tragic Downfall"

> Each age has different tensions and terrors, but they open on the same abyss.
> - R. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy

While Lowry undoubtedly conceïved of Under the Volcano in terms of the tragedy of Geoffrey Firmin, it is perhaps difficult to evaluate what precisely would recommend the term "tragic" to both the author and his critics alike. In the analysis of Lowry's symbolism so far, it has been implicitly assumed that the novel is indeed a tragedy, but cohesive evidence to this end has not been presented in any direct manner. However - belief being no substitute for direct examination - several symbols such as the dog, the goat and the garden, serve to point the Consul in the direction of the both symbolic and literal abyss. In addition, the Consul is seen in terms of various archetypes of heroic stature - as Christ-figure, as an Adam who leaves the Garden of Eden of his own volition, as a Faustian figure, as Prometheus - who by the nature of their mythical heroic stature contribute to the notion of tragic downfall in the novel.

The underpinnings of certain of Lowry's symbols have been discussed in terms of models such as Dante's Inferno and Cocteau's La Machine Infernale. Other parallels with works

such as Joyce's Ulysses, T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland", Marlowe's Faustus and Goethe's Faust, and Sophocles' Oedipus Rex have also been included. Central to many of these works is the classical conception of a divine retribution which is impossible to reconcile with mortal notions of justice. This unbreachable gulf between destiny/fate and justice will be argued to be of great significance in the understanding of the idea of tragedy, and it is in this respect of man's incomprehension of a destiny which is to all intents so grievous, that Geoffrey Firmin may be seen as tragic.

Critics have tended to assume Geoffrey Firmin's tragedy to proceed from a failing in one of two areas, either from his undeniable alcoholism, or from his inability to love, which is manifested in his failure to re-establish his relationship with his ex-wife, Yvonne. However, Stephen Tift argues a less simplistic point of view, that the purpose which propels the Consul towards his fate and which is the "essence of the tragic definition of Under the Volcano"[1] originates in the fact that "the Consul dedicates himself to the tragic destiny which - he is convinced - is his."[2] Tift's evaluation provides a useful assimilation of the many factors in the Consul's downfall. The factors reveal his inner motives for pursuing the hell that is in the heart, and for his tragic oscillation on the brink of disaster which leads him to the symbol of perverted aspiration - the ironically named "Farolito" - which teeters on the edge of the barranca.

Furthermore, the parallel of the fall of man, which is symbolised by the numerous gardens in the novel,will be discussed. The overall Christ analogy, which is perhaps tenuously but quite insistently pursued throughout the novel, is also worth examining, despite its difficulties, since it implies some form of redemption, which George Steiner in The Death of Tragedy would insist is necessary to unequivocally complete tragedy. However, the idea of redemption is not introduced to indicate an escape from the bearing of the full cost of downfall. The full price for the act must be extorted; although remorse may be manifest, salvation is not achieved for the individual,but instead, on some mythical, universal level, mankind is free once again to start his choice, as in the Fisher King myth of "The Wasteland". But because the Consul's death is meant to be seen as the last true tragedy, ultimately the message of the novel is that civilisation must live through its ultimate stage of self-inflicted chaos before "the lands shall at least be set in order". Mankind must follow the Consul down the abyss in willful self-destruction, an act which is not tragic but simply part of the "fate of nations", in a death prefigured by that of the Consul.

That Lowry clearly belived that Under the Volcano was essentially tragic is evidenced by several passages in the novel itself, and the idea is established very early in the first chapter:

> What had happened just a year ago today seemed already to belong in different age. One would have

> thought the horrors of the present would have swallowed it up like a drop of water. It was no so. 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 some communiqué (U.V., p. 11).

The Consul's presence in the world has had significant impact. The tragedy of one Geoffrey Firmin, even in a world which has seen seen even less of Eden (and has instituted, insead, the atrocities of the most sophisticated self-destruction) has left a lasting mark on his environ, equally as it should have done on the soul of reader. Firmin's fate has been an "unassimialbe tragedy" (U.V., p. 14), a tragedy which still stands as a monument to humanity and despair in spite of the mass tragedy to follow.

Laruelle also comments at the beginning of the novel that "an eternity had been lived through" (U.V., p. 14) which reinforces the suggestion that the Consul's death had marked the end of the era. There is also the implication that in Mexico, where the landscape is universalised, "there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing" (U.V., p. 16) the land of the dead is also the land of "stony rubbish" from which the only possibility of regeneration may emanate.

However, in the assumptions by the critics that Lowry's novel does indeed constitute tragedy, there is never at any point any discussion of what is undeniably a problematic

term. Tragedy is even more difficult to apply in the context of the modern novel, and it would appear that as the artistic vision comes to rely on ambiguity, on dualities of nature and on deeper psychological insights into the "human condition", the viability of ideas such as hybris and hamartia decreases. Although both the notion of "pride" and of the "tragic flaw" still strike a chord in any audience, modern writers, for reasons social, philosophical and technological, appear to view such fundamental truths as too simplistic - or perhaps, too over-worked - to have any innovatory appeal.

Although certain critics may view Christian tragedy as being somewhat anomalous or paradoxical, implying, as it does, a redemption for the individual and an evasion of "paying full toll to hell", it is possible to view tragedy as not exclusively the domain of the plays of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides - of fifth-century Athens - and then Under the Volcano may initially be viewed as falling somewhere between the two categories of Classical and Christian tragedy. W.H. Auden distinguishes between the two tragic impulses as follows:

> ---first, Greek tragedy is the tragedy of necessity, i.e., the feeling aroused in the spectator is "What a pity it had to be this way"; Christian tragedy is the tragedy of possibility, "What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise"; secondly, the hubris which is the flaw in the Greek hero's character is the illusion of a man who knows himself strong

> and believes that nothing can shake that strength, while the corresponding sin of Pride is the illusion of a man who knows himself weak but believes he can by his own efforts transcend that weakness and become strong.[3]

In fact, the problem in identifying Under the Volcano as being tragic would appear to be Lowry's offsetting of the Greek against Christian tragedy. The Oedipus mythology and its concomitant symbolism - which has already been noted as being crucial to both structure and content of the novel - aligns Under the Volcano firmly with the Greek conception of "fate" and "the gods", while the recurrent Christian mythologies - the Dantean parallels, and the Consul as Christ-figure and as a recalcitrant Adam who finds the whole idea of the Garden of Eden unsatisfactory - provide a somewhat complex and even incongruous undertow of Christian tragedy.

In employing symbolism drawn from both orientations to tragedy, Lowry asks the reader to think both "What a pity it had to be this way", and "What a pity it was this way when it could have been otherwise", that is, that the reader should believe in the horrible and awesome inevitability of the Consul's fate, in the tragedy awaited from the outset of the novel, and also that the Consul thinks he has some choice in the outcome. This balancing act is extremely precarious, insisting as it does on the one hand on the "fictiveness" of the novel's world - which sets it within the realm of Classical tragedy - in which the reader is asked to suspend his disbelief

in, or skepticism of, an incontrovertible fate. On the other hand, Lowry insists on the "realism" of the novel, demanding that the reader partake of the Consul's fate and empathise with a situation where the right choice is so hard and "Hell is so handy". However, the matter of fate and free will is determined by yet another attitude to tragedy. The extent to which Under the Volcano may be claimed to be tragic may ultimately be decided by linking the Oedipal mythology and symbolism (the Infernal Machine) to unconscious Oedipal desires and these, placed in a Freudian context, will be seen in the next section of this chapter to place the novel firmly as traditional tragedy, since Freud's view of the human condition once more provided the appropriate climate for tragedy.

However, leaving Freud's interpretations aside for the moment, the definition of tragedy given by Stanley Hyman ~~is an appropriate basis as it~~ is an appropriate basis for discussion of the term, based as it is on the Aristotelian tradition:

> Out of the agon or dramatic conflict between the god in human form and his antagonists evolved the ethical concepts of hamartia or shortcoming, the tragic flaw; and hybris or pride, the imperfect insight into man's true stature in relation to destiny and the gods. These defects motivated the action, and for spectators in Aristotle's formulation the tragic action aroused pity and terror and symbolically purged them through catharsis. The moral

> ingredients of tragedy are thus: the flawed protagonist swollen with pride; peripeteia, the sudden pitiable and terrifying change in his fortunes; and a cathartic climax that --- has [been] called the "small moment", that desperate awaiting of the fateful outcome when all seems in doubt.[4]

In the many factors contributing to the Consul's downfall, may be found various manifestations of "humartia", including the two most favoured by the critics, his alcoholism and his "inability to love". For example, Douglas Day cites both factors as the cause of Geoffrey's malady:

> Though his alcoholism is bad indeed, it is not the worst of the Consul's problems - is, in fact, only a symptom of something far more dangerous. He is mad ---[5] He fancies that he is a black magician who has, though his drunkenness, lost his magical powers. ---But, on some saner level, he knows what ails him is not possession by demonic forces, but a radical inability to love - or, more accurately, since he does in fact love his wife and his half-brother - to manifest his love.[6]

Although these two examples may not initially be imagined to be of sufficient significance to constitute hamartia, they are both weighted down with such symbolic underpinnings that they appear to have this significance. For example, the Consul's alcoholism is linked with an abuse of occult powers, making him appear at times the powerful, if misguided, mystic - manqué, innovative, hilarious and articulate in his rhapsodic meanderings, rather than a tedious, if comic drunkard.

The Consul's inability to love has even more resounding ramifications. Like the abuse of mysticism, and of wine, the inability - or perhaps refusal-to love carries a severe spiritual penalty. It is literally the writing on the wall, with "No se puede vivir sin amar" being written on the tower of Laruelle's bizarre house. At this point, the inscription appears to taunt Geoffrey on Jacques Laruelle's behalf - for Jacques (and Hugh) has cuckolded him, and will remain alive at the end of the novel, in order that the action may complete a full cycle. Laruelle is still in love with Yvonne one year later at the beginning of the novel, but since she is now dead, he must, like Hugh, travel the right path to Vera Cruz in order to start anew. As he thinks of Yvonne, Laruelle imagines the voices of Maximilian and Carlotta, whose scene of tragic love had been Mexico. Thus reverberations are set up between the tragically impossible relationship of Geoffrey and Yvonne, and the love of Maximilian and Carlotta which was to end in tragedy. As Ronald Walker writes of the Consul, "Forced to choose between loving Yvonne and loving the spectacle of his own deterioration, he elects the latter."[7]

In addition to the factors already delineated - the theme of "No se puede vivir sin amar", the abuse of the occult, Geoffrey as cuckold and as dypsomaniac, unable to relinquish drink - the novel is worked around several other elements in the Consul's downfall. He has wronged his wife by his selfish,

mysterious and alcoholic behaviour, and he has wronged humanity in general, which is suggested by his "war crime". In many ways, he is not only a Christ-figure and an Adam, but also a contemporary archetype - his fall is symptomatic of that of twentieth-century civilisation. Geoffrey, like society, will perish merely by self-destruction, by the sophistry of obsolescence rather than for objective and rational reasons. He says, "Countries, civilizations, empires, great hordes perish for no reason at all, and their soul and meaning with them---" (U.V., p. 312) and his nihilism is a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Geoffrey Firmin also lacks any sense of social or political responsibility, although the novel is set within an explicit social culture and political régime. Ironically, the Consul's refusal to commit himself to action, or even remotely take a constructive interest in these aspects of his environment turns out to be on evasion which will very definitely catch up with him. He mocks his half-brother, Hugh for his

> "---desire to fight for fiddledeedee, for Timbuctu, for China, for hypocrisy, for bugger all, for any hokery pokery that a few moose-headed idiot sons choose to call freedom - of course there is nothing of the sort, really -" (U.V., p. 313).

And ironically, the Consul perishes at the hands of the Mexican fascists he refuses to fight and does not wish to acknowledge; he assumes as ever, that he has some kind of diplomatic immunity which permits him to live outside the

normal human code. In addition to the factors thus far delineated, the Consul has several unconscious motives which bring about his downfall, which will be discussed in the next section of this Chapter.

While certain of the elements in Aristotelian tragedy (as described by Hyman) may be found in Lowry's novel, the explanation of the dramatic level of Under the Volcano still appears incomplete. The protagonist is certainly flawed on many levels, and hybris in this instance may be the Consul's view of himself as a special case, not subject to normal human codes of responsibility, commitment and traditional modes of behaviour - his insight, or self-perception is skewed by his drive for alcoholic gratification, which in turn is motivated by unconscious wishes demanding gratification. Presumably, the peripeteia - "the sudden pitiable and terrifying change in his fortunes" - occurs when the reader becomes intensely aware of the fact that the Consul is antagonising the Mexican fascists and that his blithely playing with fire cannot but have a disastrous outcome. He brings about the climax willfully, knowing that accusing the police Chiefs of stealing the horse of an Indian they have killed, and that striking the police, while perhaps in the interests of retribution, is appallingly dangerous. The Consul's sudden interest in justice, and even in "freedom" comes far too late and springs from too individualistic a vision to be viewed as unmitigated altruism. It is not

because the Consul suddenly chooses to uphold justice that he must fulfil his destiny, but it is indeed this melodramatic gesture which brings about his death.

However, all these factors may or, indeed, may not be the components of tragedy as defined thus far. For example, Lowry wrote of Chapter 1,

> We now hear more of the Consul, his gallant war-record and of a crime crime he has possibly committed against some German submarine officers - whether he is really as much to blame as he tells himself, he is, in a sense, paid back in coin for it at the end of the book and you may say that here the Consul is merely being established in the Grecian manner as a fellow of some stature, so that his fall may be tragic: ---[8]

Lowry's attitude to the idea of the Consul as a tragic figure appears, from the above, slightly ambivalent and he does not offer his reader any definite guidance as to the dimensions of his creation. Furthermore, Douglas Day completely avoids speaking in terms of tragedy, saying of the Consul,

> He may think of himself as playing Hephaestus to Yvonne's promiscuous Aphrodite, or Prometheus, or Faust, or the failed Cabbalistic adept, or the guilty warrior; and he may posture about how much pleasure he derives from his torment; but actually - on the human level - he is only pathetic: a good man self-destroyed by his inability to overcome whatever it is that prohibits him from loving.[9]

Both Lowry himself and Douglas Day make the connection between the Consul and Greek tragedy, speaking of Firmin as being "established in the Grecian manner" and as "playing Hephaestus

--- or Prometheus", and both declare a certain ambivalence about the novels being seen as Aristotelian tragedy. Indeed, the Consul's veiw of the world appears too idiosyncratic, his personality altogether too flawed to be a tragic hero, although he is certainly of the requisite stature. Furthermore, his sudden interest in justice at the climax of the novel, is an anachronistic move, which, while in keeping with Firmin's alcoholic consciousness, throws some doubt on the moment of climax.

However, Northrop Frye explains the various movements of tragedy in terms of a cyclical pattern, and his contemporary analysis of tragedy gives a much more precise insight into the tragic nature of Under the Volcano. Two of the five stages in this cyclical process of the development of the tragic hero are appropriate to the mythologies and symbol systems employed in Lowry's novel:

> Thus the incongruous and the inevitable, which are combined in tragedy, separate into opposite poles of irony. At one pole is the inevitable irony of human life. ---The archetype of the inevitably ironic is Adam, human nature under sentence of death. At the other pole is the incongruous irony of human life, in which all attempts to transfer guilt to a victim give that victim something of the dignity of innocence. The archetype of the incongruously ironic is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society. Halfway between is the central figure of tragedy, who is human and yet of a heroic size which often

> has in it the suggestion of divinity. His archetype is Prometheus ---[10]

It becomes clear that Lowry's protagonist is involved in a form of tragedy which is both incongrous and inevitable, and that the novelst, in viewing the Consul as both Christ-figure, and an ungrateful Adam, attempts to incorporate both archetypes as distinguished above into the same figure. To impute both mortality and divinity in one utterly fallible human being is fundamentally problematic, and in all likelihood, the source of difficulty in discussing the Consul as a tragic hero. A resolution of this basic dichotomy will be postulated in the next section.

Lastly, Lowry seems to wish that the Consul also be seen as a Promethean figure, and while this may be possible on a symbolic level, difficulties arise in trying to reconcile archetypes of Christ, Adam, and Prometheus, with Faustian references thrown in for good measure! However, one credible explanation remains; that Lowry had a tendency to use whatever symbolic connotations suited his purposes and to discard whatever did not suit his highly impressionistic - but effective vision. As Stephen Spender writes in his introductory essay in the Lippincott Edition of Under the Volcano,

> Lowry has borrowed from Joyce, turned his symbolic devices upside down and used them for his own purposes either with audacious intelligence, or else from a kind of inspired misunderstanding ...[11]

It is clear that Lowry, in his use of an eclectic accumulation of symbols and systems, grasped whatever aspects suited his particular purpose, and that what Spender sees as either "audacious intelligence" or "inspired misunderstanding" applies not only to Lowry's borrowing from Joyce, but to his grasp and incorporation of all literary devices and traditions.

Northrop Frye further explains the development in the tragic impusle in a passage which has particular relevance to Lowry's masterwork:

> These references may help to explain something that might otherwise be a puzzling fact about modern literature. Irony descends from the low mimetic: it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it.[12]

The above statement helps to explain the fact that both realism and myth, rituals and the divine coexist in Lowry's novel. The author's attempt to keep the novel earthbound - on the level of the Consul's alcoholism, divorce and unemployment - is reinforced by plot and symbolic underpinnings, but more often, the realism of the novel is subjugated under a plot which has taken on much more significance than the realistic level might warrant. For example, in the case of the death of the Consul, the credibility of the situation is limited, but the symbolic implications are enormous.

First, the death of the Consul is given connotations of Christ descending into the abyss for the harrowing of hell. Second, the descent into the abyss is connected to Dante's "Malebolge", and to the domain of "husks and demons" which lies below the Qliphoth (the inverted Tree of Life). Third, the Consul's plunge into the ravine is also connected to Marlowe's Faustus, who says, "Then will I headlong fly into the earth" (quoted in Under the Volcano, p. 40) and who, like the Consul, "surfeits upon cursed necromancy".[13] Also, the Consul dies after the twelve hours of his day (7 a.m. - 7 p.m.), just as Faustus perishes at the twelfth hour, and the Consul thinks at midday of the Faustian magician in Shelley's Alastor: "Ah, that the dream of the dark magician in his visioned cave, even while his hand - that's the bit I like - shakes in its last decay, were the true end of this so lovely world" (U.V., p. 151). Furthermore, Anthony Kilgallin notes a universality in the death of the Consul, saying,

> Yet Geoffrey's death is fully in accord with Spengler's theory in The Decline of the West of the determinism of inevitable decline for the Faustian spirit of western man in the twentieth century, the death of modern man, as Jung put it, in search of his soul.[14]

Thus Northrop Frye's exposition of the development of tragedy is fully borne out by the case of Lowry's Under the Volcano. The novel is an interesting, if precariously executed, example of the amalgamation of realism, and of an historical mythic/symbolic accumulation or sedimentation, in which "sacrificial ritual" is suggested in the death of the Consul,

and the notion of "dying gods" suggested by the Christ-figure rendition of the harrowing of hell. Indeed, as Frye himself claims, such an explanation does show a trend in modern embodiments of tragedy, radiating from a realistic figure, out towards the Promethean and even the divine (as in Joyce's Ulysses). Such is Lowry's taste for an eclectic layering of traditions - from Greek to Christian to Romantic then Modern - that the perception demanded is not a particularly literal one (otherwise the entire conception may appear enormously problematic) but rather, one akin to Lowry's own impressionistic vision. However, Lowry's achievement was ultimately to "[lock] past andpresent together spatially in a timeless unity by transmuting the time world of history into the timeless world of myth, the common content of modern literature."[15]

NOTES

1. Stephen Tift, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p. 47.

2. Ibid., p. 47.

3. W.H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero: Contrast ing Captain Ahab's Doom and Its Classic Greek Prototype" in Robert Corrigan, ed., Tragedy: Vision and Form (California: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), p. 143-4.

4. Stanley Edgar Hyman, Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy" in Corrigan, ed., Tragedy: Vision and Form, p. 287-8.

5. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 335.

6. Ibid., p. 337.

7. Ronald Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 240.

8. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 70.

9. Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography, p. 338.

10. Northrop Frye, "Tragic Modes" in R.P. Draper, ed., Tragedy: Developments in Criticism (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980), p. 163.

11. Stephen Spender, "Introduction" to Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965), p. xiii.

12. Northrop Frye, "Tragic Modes" in R.P. Draper, ed., Tragedy: Developments in Criticism (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980), p. 163.

13. Anthony Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p. 29.

14. Ibid., p. 33.

15. Ibid., p. 37.

SECTION 8

"The Fall of Man"

Linked to the tragedy of Geoffrey Firmin, which must end in his descent into the ravine/abyss are several major symbols which recur throughout the novel. The first of these is the goat, which appears tangentially on the very first page of the novel. Lowry writes, "A fine American-style highway leads in from the north but is lost in its narrow streets and comes out a goat track" (U.V., p. 9). This description not only establishes Quaunahuac as the meeting of the two disparate environments of America and Mexico - in other words, as a plausible microcosm of twentieth-century contexts - but subtly introduces the idea that this is the habitat of the goat (and possibly, of the "goat-song", tragedy). Tenuous as this may seem, Lowry demonstrates here, as well as elsewhere, his preternatural awareness of the possibilities of every symbol, when, in a letter to Derek Pethick, he says, "The goat means tragedy (tragedy - goat song) but goat - cabron-cuckold (the horns)."[1]

Hence Lowry touches lightly on a note of tragedy from the very outset of the novel, which, by the opening of Chapter 3 has become "The tragedy, proclaimed ---" (U.V., p. 70). Lowry's subsequent integration of the symbol of the goat with the tragic theme is most interesting, in that the goat

symbolises one of the factors which propel the Consul towards an inevitable fate. The novelist employs all the traditional attributes of the goat symbol - as the object of sacrifice in Dionysian rituals, as a "standard occult symbol for the devil"[2] (the two horns, two ears and chin fitting into the corners of the pentagon of black magic), and as "cuckold"(the horns)".

Possibly the most significant appearance of the goat occurs in Chapter 4, when Hugh entertains thoughts of re-establishing his relationship with Yvonne and thus cuckolding Geoffrey again. However, the goat serves as a timely reminder of the impulse to lechery:

> Hugh glanced suspiciously at a billy goat which had been following them on their right along the gross margin between the road and a wire fence, and which now stood there motionless regarding them with patriarchal contempt. 'No, they're the lowest form of animal life, except possibly - look out! - my God, I knew it - 'The goat had charged --- 'Goats', he said, twisting Yvonne firmly out of his arms (U.V., pp. 104-5).

The goat has been attributed the somewhat unusual condition of "patriarchal contempt". Furthermore, the notion of the angered father is reinforced by a future appearance of the goat:

> Now there were some goats. Yvonne turned and smiled at him. But these goats were meek and sweet-looking, janging like bells. Father is waiting for you though. Father has not forgotten (U.V., p. 193).

The ominous note of "Father is waiting --- Father has not forgotten" is not given any other context but that of some connection with the goat, in that the goat has already been described as "patriarchal". The goat appears to induce feelings about wrong-doing. However, the implication is that the inducing of such feelings is merely wishful thinking - a desire for revenge on Hugh and, especially, Yvonne - on the part of the Consul. Hugh and Yvonne have denied him the chance to love; he can no longer love the unfaithful Yvonne, and without loving, the Consul must die. The contemptuous behaviour of Lowry's own father is evoked, a fear on Malcolm Lowry's part which is perhaps also betrayed when he writes "And that the Old Man found this out" (U.V., p. 138).

The fear of discovery runs throughout the novel, and occurs once more in conjunction with the goat, when Lowry writes of "---ancient Spanish surgeons, their goat faces rising queerly from ruffs resembling ectoplasm, roaring with laughter as they performed inquisitional operations" (U.V., p. 141). The idea of the inquisition is directly related to the Consul's alcoholic paranoia, when he imagines Dr. Vigil to have visted him,

> ---with the object, naturally, of spying upon him, of obtaining some information about him, some clue to the nature of what might all too conceivably be found within the pages of that accusing newspaper: 'Old Samaritan case to be reopened, Commander Firmin believed in Mexico.' 'Firmin found guilty, acquitted---' (U.V., pp. 140-1).

From his own deep-seated guilt, the Consul wishes Hugh and Yvonne to suffer for what he sees as a betrayal, and to suffer the "threat of exposure" (U.V., p. 176) which Lowry later attributes to Hugh. The notion of betrayal also points the Consul in the direction of disaster. Tift writes,

> The Consul sinks comfortably into the effortless inevitability of the betrayed man. He defines Christ by His betrayal - "and betrayed Christ into being" (pp. 286-7) [U.V., p. 288]. The Consul's betrayal, seen as part of a divine plan, makes things much easier for him.[3]

The Consul's resentment of Hugh is symbolised at another level by the snake in his garden/the Garden of Eden. Again, as in the example of the goat, the context of the snake may appear somewhat obscure, but the first appearance of the snake is a metaphorical or figurative one. In context, Mr. Quincey seems to malevolently fire the Consul's desire for revenge by not-so-innocently enquiring as to the whereabouts of Hugh, and then supplying an answer himself:

> ---'Your brother still here?'
> 'Brother? Oh. you mean Hugh ...No he's in Mexico City.'
> 'I think you'll find he's got back.' ---
> 'I think he went out with your wife,' the walnut grower added.
> 'Hullo-hullo-look -who-comes-hullo-my-little snake-in-the-grass-my-little-anguish-in-herba -' the Consul at this moment greeted Mr. Quincey's cat --- (U.V., p. 138)

The fact that the cat is connected with a snake, and with "anguish", and that it appears in context with Quincey's unpleasant insinuations, suggests that the Consul senses some

kind of shadow of betrayal in the abscence of Hugh and Yvonne, one which has caused great anguish in the past. David Markson notes that Lowry's punning reinforces the idea that the author intends a menacing note to be perceived in the cat:

> --- an actual pun on Virgil occurs here too, where another playful tag for the cat is "my-little-anguish-in-herba, "the original (in this instance from the First Eclogue) reading, "Latet anguis in herba" or "a snake lurks in the grass".[4]

When a snake literally appears in the garden, the Consul wonders,

> Where was his friend the snake now? Hiding up a pear tree probably. A snake that waited to drop rings on you: whore's shoes (U.V., p. 144).

The link between the snake and sexual misconduct -"whore's shoes" - is evident here, and the Consul's misgivings about the absence of Hugh and Yvonne are more openly demonstrated on their return, when the Consul shouts, "Hi there, Hugh, you old snake in the grass!" (U.V., p. 145). It is contended that the Consul sees Hugh as the reason for his expulsion from Eden, and if it is true that "One cannot live without loving", then Hugh is indeed responsible for the Consul's fate in that he denies the Consul this possibility. But it is just as true that the Consul, in his usual circuitous, self-deceiving manner, denies himself any hope because he thinks he has been denied the chance of love, and in living this "quixotic oral fiction", he chooses to incur what he himself

forces into being "ineluctable personal disaster" (U.V., p. 143).

Both the goat and the snake are instances of the subtle manner in which Lowry employs symbols and their contexts to point towards incontrovertable destiny at a personal level. The garden, on the other hand, lies literally on the edge of the abyss, and is symbolic of the ruined state of both the individual and the civilisation. The Consul's garden also borders on the public gardens, and additional gardens are evoked throughout the novel - that of Mr. Quincey, Maximilian's ruins, the Northern Paradise of Canada, and Hell's garden. Lowry himself wrote of Chapter 5,

> Here at all events the most important theme of the book appears: "Le gusta este jardin?" on the sign. The Consul slightly mistranslates this sign, but "You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" will have to stand (while we point out elsewhere that the real translation can be in a certain sense even more horrifying). The garden is the Garden of Eden, which he even discusses with Mr. Quincey. It is the world too. It also has all the cabbalistic attributes of "garden".[5]

Lowry, in his Preface to the French translation of Under the Volcano, explains the Cabbalistic allusion in greater detail:

> In the Jewish Cabbala the abuse of magic powers is compared to drunkenness or the abuse of wine, and is expressed, if I remember rightly, by the Hebrew word sod. Another attribution of the word sod signifies garden, or neglected garden, and the Cabbala itself is sometimes considered a garden (naturally similar to that where grew the tree of forbidden fruit which gave us the Knowledge of Good and Evil) with the

> Tree of Life planted in the middle. --- The allegory is that of the Garden of Eden, the garden representing the world from which we are now even a little more under threat of ejection than at the moment when I wrote this book.[6]

The Consul's garden is indeed neglected - a "jungle" (U.V., p. 136) - and the inhabitant "a forlorn and corrupted Adam, forced by a malevolent God to remain forever there, at the place of his sin."[7]

Geoffrey Firmin's garden is a place of lurking familiars, bottles of alcohol lying in ambush and waiting to tempt him, of snakes and spiders, and of guilt-provoking sinister omens, symbols pointing toward an inextricable doom. The recurring plantains -"emblematic --- of an evil phallic death" - are part of a generally malevolent plant-life,

> ---the tall exotic plants, livid and crepuscular ---perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst --- yet struggling to maintain some final attitude of potency, or of a collective desolate fecundity --- (U.V., p. 70).

Even these plants evoke fear in Firmin - he is reprimanded by an imaginary person at his side who says "You do not know how to love these things any longer" (U.V., p. 70) and it is true that he no longer knows how to love anything except cantinas. A few pages later, he proves to himself the impossibility of loving Yvonne, brought home not only by the fact that he much prefers the bottle, but also by his impotence. Like the plants, Firmin is suffering from "unnecessary thirst", and he is also "struggling --- to maintain some final attitude of potency."

The image of sterility, of both physical drought (in Mexico) and spirtual aridity (in Geoffrey and in twentieth-century society) is also recurrent in Under the Volcano, and suggests an affinity to T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". Markson considers that the person walking beside the Consul, "is possibly a first echo of Eliot --- "Who is the third who always walks beside you?" ---."[8]

The malevolent aspect of the plants is reiterated in Chapter 5:

> Whereas farther away, the superb plaintains flowering so finally and obscenely, the splendid trumpet vines, brave and stubborn pear trees, the papayas planted around the swimming-pool and beyond, the low white bungalow itself covered by bougainvillea --- (U.V., p. 131).

The bougainvillea is also destructive - "Yvonne's arms were full of bougainvillea --- 'careful Hugh, it's got spikes on it, and you have to look at everything carefully to be sure there're no spiders' ---" (U.V., pp. 144-5) - and the spikes/thorns have already been established symbolically in Chapter 3:

> Look up at that niche in the wall over there on the house where Christ is still, suffering, who would help you if you asked him: you cannot ask him. Consider the agony of the roses (U.V., p. 70)

The "agony of the roses" is, in this context, the crown of thorns, and yet it also, as noted by Markson, an echo of the Sermon on the Mount: "Consider the lilies of the field."[9] On the one hand, Lowry appears to argue that the Consul's

condition is martyrdom, to be crucified, and that he is essentially "the one with the blue eyes" (U.V., p. 34), "simpático" and he "once in this very bar [gave] all his money to a beggar taken by the police" (U.V., p. 37). On the other hand, in typical Lowry fashion, the Consul is "diabolical" (U.V., p. 33) and the guilty participant on board the ironically named Samaritan. Ultimately, Geoffrey Firmin must then be viewed as a generous character, who through self-deceptions and generally deceitful behaviour, and due to the fact that he "cannot ask" for help (i.e. he does not "desire deliverance"), must perish, but in doing so, leave a lasting impression on the world.

Reproach also issues from the sign in the public garden on which the Consul's garden also borders,

> ¿LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?
> ¿QUE ES SUYO?
> ¿EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN?
>
> The Consul stared back at the black words on the sign without moving. You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy! Simple words, simple and terrible words which one took to the very bottom of one's being, words which, perhaps a final judgement on one, were nevertheless unproductive of any emotion whatsoever --- (U.V., p. 132).

Lowry's use of mundane "Keep off the grass" warning is interesting in that it is attributed great symbolic weight. It is God's threat of eviction to Adam, and it is also a threat to the Consul that his destructive behaviour - self-destructive

and destructive of Yvonne - is liable to mean "eviction". The threat of punishment for his misdemeanour is the reason that the words hold such terror; it will be remembered that God - "The Old Man" - is a punitive figure, simply lying in wait to deal with an Adam who is "forced to go on living in the garden --- the poor fellow, who knows, secretly loathed the place! Simply hated it, and had done so all along" (U.V., p. 138).

Later, the Consul correctly translates the sign in the public garden:

> In the garden under the trees
> were doves and a small black goat,
> ¿Le gusta este jardín, que es suyo?
> ¿Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!
> Do you like this garden, the notice
> said, that is yours? See to it that
> your children do not destroy it!
>
> ...There were no children, however,
> in the garden; (U.V., p. 235)

The Consul's earlier mistranslation reveals a classic Freudian slip, in the original repression of the word "children". However, his increased intoxication allows the word "children" to surface, revealing the Consul's misgivings about his life, and, on a universal level, demonstrating a prophetic anxiety about twentieth-century civilisation. The reintroduction of the goat is also significant; as symbol of reproductive instinct, and of a malevolent, angry patriarch, it is interesting that Lowry should add another spy to the ambush in the garden. The goat is there, like the "Old Man", to ensure that the Consul behaves, to imply his failings, to

aggravate the "impotent terror" (U.V., p. 345) which rages in him and sends him to "an evil phallic death".

In addition, the mention of children suggests on a universal level the destructive impulse of the twentieth century, where children are being born into a world of nightmare and terror, only to exacerbate existing problems. Under the Volcano is indeed, as Lowry wrote, "a prophecy --- and a writing on the wall",[10] insinuating as it does in this case, that civilisation is becoming so self-destructive that an Edenic/Romantic innocence will be impossible to recapture, even momentarily.

Ultimately, the notice in the public garden constitutes "the most important theme of the book"[11] in Lowry's words to Jonathan Cape, and it introduces a talisman of self-loathing which becomes part of the multi-layered strategy of symbols and motifs signifying destruction. The garden becomes demonic in nature, an archetype which Lowry now employs in inverted ironic form. This inversion is carried further by the allusions to the Qliphoth, the inverted Tree of Life - where all aspiration is perverted into further collapse, into the despair of the Consul's recurring thought "The will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it" (U.V., p. 97). Doublas Day puts it thus:

> What had indicated fruition now indicates sterility; what had represented cleansing, now represents corruption, and what had symbolized the soul's striving upward toward salvation, now

> symbolises the descent into damnation. It is of a world turned upside down that Lowry writes.[12]

Even by the end of the novel, Geoffrey Firmin suffers this despair, the half-deception that,

> ---some reckless murderous power was drawing him on, forcing him, while he yet remained passionately aware of the all too possible consequences and somehow as innocently unconscious, to do without precaution or conscience what he would never be able to undo or gainsay, leading him irrestably out into the garden --- (U.V., p. 348).

He still rejects the idea of his entire complicity in his own downfall, preferring to believe in his innocence, and that he is possessed by some demonic force of external origins. In fact, the forces are all of his own unconscious creation, and, like the scorpion, which "not wanting to be saved had stung itself to death" (U.V., p. 339), he desires his self-punishment. However, he does not delude himself about the "consequences" of his life.

The Consul swings between the despair of destruction by demonic forces - where he repeats "Who can prevent?" (U.V., p. 347) - and another half deception, that even at the end of the novel, he can still prevent the horror which awaits him:

> So this was it, the final stupid unprophylactic rejection. He could prevent it even now. He would not prevent it. Yet perhaps his familiars, or one of his voices, might have some good advice: he looked about him,

> listening; erectis whoribus. No voices came (U.V., p. 349).

He cannot prevent his downfall, simply because, as he acknowledges, "He would not prevent it." He will not ask for deliverance and his fate is now sealed - "against Death shall he call for aid in vain." And his familiars have nothing to offer him, having become completely internalised by this stage in the novel - "no voices came." Having decided not to manifest themselves as external, hallucinatory phenomena, they have returned to their true state of internal phenomena, as integral parts of the psyche which proposes "erectis whoribus".

Even Mexico, which Lowry posited as "the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, or both at once,"[13] is conceived of as demonic as well. Mexico represents,

> ---the crossing of a highway, three civilizations; but beautiful, there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing as it happened to be, the beauty of Earthly Paradise itself (U.V., p. 16).

But Mexico is strictly a ruined paradise, and Maximilian's palace a foul-smelling pit, a "Malebolge" of the past:

> The broken pink pillars, in the half-light, might have been waiting to fall down on him: the pool, covered with green scum, its steps torn away and hanging by one rotting clamp, to close over his head. The shattered evil-smelling chapel, overgrown with weeds, the crumbling walls, splashed with urine, on which scorpions lurked - wrecked entablature, sad archivolt, slippery stones covered with excreta - this place where love had once brooded, seemed part of a nightmare. ---And yet, how they [Maximilian and Carlotta]

> must have loved this land, these
> two lonely empurpled exiles, human
> beings finally, lovers out of their
> element - their Eden, ---beginning
> to turn under their noses into a
> prison and smell like a brewery ---
> (U.V., p. 20).

The vision of decay, and of being buried alive in this spirtual holocaust, permeates the entire novel. The filth of urine and excreta is - symbolically speaking - the filth of Dante's "Malebolge", the domain of husks and demons.

Symbolically, at the foot of the garden lies the abyss, threatening to close over the head of M. Laruelle, to engulf Geoffrey, and all of civilisation. The barranca lies literally at the end of the Consul's garden, and bisects the public garden, awaiting the convenience of the Mexican police, and mass destruction. When the Consul considers the "pitfalls" (U.V., p. 134) of a visit to Parian, the barranca immediately suggests itself to him:

> Ah the frightful cleft, the
> eternal horror of opposites!
> Thou mighty gulf, insatiate
> cormorant, deride me not, though
> I seem petulant to fall into thy
> chops (U.V., p. 134).

It is significant that Lowry consistently prefigures the Consul's fate in his description of the ravine, so much so, in fact, that a symbolic landscape is powerfully evoked. On the level of the particular case of Geoffrey Firmin, his earthly domain is his ruined and befouled garden, and the particular is universalised by the alignment of Firmin's garden with the Garden of Eden after the Fall of Man, Firmin's notion of an Adam who loathes his habitat being viewed as the contamination.

On yet another level, Firmin's garden borders on the public garden, the sign threatening to punish misdemeanor with eviction, and is also related to Maximilian's ruined palance, the fatal ambience of Mexico, and the detritus of twentieth-century society. Lowry's vision thus constantly invites proliferating analogies of this nature, since the framework of so many quite disparate symbol - systems exists within the novel, although the novel survives to a great extent without necessarily demanding full explications of the underpinnings. As Lowry said of the more esoteric level, "I don't care whether the reader does or doesn't see it, but the meaning is there just the same ---"[14]

The fear of being incarcerated and trapped by the abyss is revealed early in the novel, when Laruelle thinks of "the dark waters rising outside to engulf his own zacuali, his useless tower against the coming of the second flood" (U.V., p. 35). The prophetic note of "the second flood" and the threat of engulfment are ominous, and yet there is in this a suggestion of another chance for mankind (as Noah was permitted to create a "second chance"), in spite of the conditions which threaten to sully and engulf. In addition, the "tower" becomes another element of the Lowrian symbolic landscape, Jacque's towers being "variants of the observation posts which everywhere commanded the valley in Quauhnahuac" (U.V., p. 198).

Laruelle's towered and turreted home is a neutral variant of the two other "observation posts", but it is a place where the Consul views the sun, symbolic of spiritual light: "But he had lost the sun" it was not his sun. Like the truth, it was well-nigh impossible to face; he did not want to go anywhere near it, least in its light, facing it" (U.V., pp. 208-9). It is a light which the Consul needs, "falling like a lance straight into a block of ice" (U.V., p. 95) both emotionally and spiritually, but, as with all his self-deceiving hopes, this aspiration is transmuted by his espousal of the ironically named "Farolito". This "lighthouse" is in fact a sordid, labyrinthine cantina/brothel, and the scenes of Firmin's downfall. The "Farolito" - of which Vigil says "es un infierno" (U.V., p. 151) - is symbolic of the COnsul's quest; "the lighthouse that invites the storm, and lights it!" (U.V., p. 203) as he muses while in Jacque's tower. But it is also symbolic of the Consul's other quest, for liquor and escape, and is symbolically poised on the edge of the abyss, a place where "life reached the bottom" (U.V., p. 204) next to "the enormous drop --- that suggested Kubla Khan" (U.V., p. 204). Finally, Perle Epstein considers the "Farolito" a "paradoxical center where light and dark meet and merge --- also an outgrowth of the tower symbol of the tarot."[15]

The symbolic counterparts of the "Farolito" are the volcanoes, Popocateperl and Ixtaccihuatl, which lie on the opposite side of the barranca. The volcanoes represent the

Northern Paradise of Canada, innocent aspiration, and the light which the Consul refuses to pursue:

> The sun shining brilliantly now on all the world before him; its rays picking out the timberline of Popocatepetl as its summit like a gigantic surfacing whale shuddered out of the clouds again, all this could not lift his spirit.(U.V., p. 80).

But it is certain that the volcanoes should be able to raise the Consul's spirit, and that they are symbolic of spiritual elevation and light, the ascent rather than descent into the abyss. Furthermore, the volcanoes on closer examination present anthropomorphic symbols of earthly and divine aspiration:

> But in the tragic Indian legend, Popocatepetl himself was strangely the dreamer: the fires of his warrior's love, never extinct in the poet's heart, burned eternally for Ixtaccihuatl, whom he had no sooner found than lost, and whom he guarded in her endless sleep ... (U.V., p. 319).

Symbolic of tragic love, the volcanoes are also allusions to the "mighty mountain Himavat" (U.V., p. 129), also capped by snow. The Consul's tragedy is that in beholding the volcanoes, and Himavat with "heaven aspiring heart" (U.V., p. 129), he cannot partake of this divine quenching of the spiritual drought he endures: "But this rain, that fell only on the mountains, did not assuage his thirst" (U.V., p. 129). Paradoxically, even the scavenging vultures - "Infernal bird of Prometheus" (U.V., p. 318) - are "capable of rising, like

this, above the storms, to heights shared only by the condor" (U.V., p. 318) while the Consul remains scourged by an unquenchable thirst, tied to his unearthly impulse toward downfall.

The factor in this symbolic landscape which prevents the Consul from achieving restitution is the ravine/barranca. While the abyss is undoubtedly symbolic of downfall, it is even possibly symbolic of the decision to choose the "Farolito" and the ensuing fate, of the schism between the horror of the knowledge of this fate and the self-deceptions which the Consul perpetrates. When the chance arises to accept Yvonne, it becomes obvious that the choice is indeed a self-deception, for Firmin cannot stop his drinking:

> Even though here was God's moment,
> the chance to agree, to produce the
> card, to change everything; or
> there was but a moment left...
> Too late. The Consul had controlled
> his tongue. But he felt his mind
> divide and rise, like the two
> halves of a counterpoised draw-bridge
> --- (U.V., p. 202).

The void between the Consul's fear of his fate, and his deeply-rooted impulse towards downfall is paralleled by the image of his mind which divides "like the two halves of a counterpoised draw-bridge". However, it is another of his self-deceptions to imagine that the two sides are "counterpoised": the occasions when both forces appear to be in any way balanced are strictly momentary. There should be no such thing as "Too late", but this is merely a transient sentiment in

Firmin, for his constant condition is such that has always been too late for Firmin. He has never craved deliverance as he does alcohol.

The image of the draw-bridge in the Consul's mind, of the right path over the chasm, indicates a psychological manifestation of the abyss, in addition to the ravine's physical and symbolic significances. This psychological ramification of the abyss will be explored in the psychoanalytic interpretation of the abyss, but it is worth noting that the symbol of the abyss is derived from the authorial psyche in a manner similar to the symbol of the wheel, which informs the structure of the novel, and proliferates in the landscape, with varying nuances of significance.

The complex network, or matrix of details - the goat, snake, "Farolito", volcanoes, and vultures - and inter-relating of these at a microcosmic level, and at the level of topographical depiction of Mexico, establish the forces which collaborate in the fate of the Consul. These details, often presented as polarities, creating a "Heaven and Hell" dichotomy, are adjuncts of the major symbolic features of the landscape - the gardens and the barranca/abyss - and are emblematic of the Consul's quest for spiritual light and his physical need for alcohol. Thus Lowry extends his creative faculties, with an appreciation of the need for consistent reinforcement of the symbolic network, in a manner which elevates the particular predicament of Geoffrey Firmin to a prophetic warning of the impending fate of twentieth century civilisation.

NOTES

1. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 95.

2. David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p. 95.

3. Stephen Tift, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p. 60.

4. Marson, p. 80.

5. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 74.

6. Malcolm Lowry, "Preface to a Novel" printed in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, pp. 13-14.

7. Douglas Day, "Of Tragic Joy" in Prairie Schooner, Vol. xxxvii, No. 4 (Winter 1963/64), p. 361.

8. Markson, p. 47.

9. Ibid., p. 47.

10. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 66.

11. Ibid., p. 74.

12. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry, A Biography, p. 330.

13. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 67.

14. Ibid., p. 86.

15. Perle Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969) p. 54.

SECTION 9

"A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of the Abyss"

----------I pass from light into
the kingdom of eternal night.

- Dante.

The symbol of the abyss in Lowry's Under the Volcano is undoubtedly emblematic of the domain of the soul which has been shattered by the mechanical agent of the "Infernal Machine", or Ferris Wheel. Although the abyss is given many symbolic connotations, being associated with Dante's "Malebolge", with the inverted Tree of Life (the Qliphoth), with a "world turned upside down", and with the chasm which prevents the COnsul from reaching the volcanoes, it is most significantly symbolic of the "mind's divide." The artistic rendering of this psychological chasm therefore takes on the form within the novel of the barranca, a physical barrier which is also a spiritual and psychical impediment emanating from the Consul himself.

In fact, while a wide variety of symbols have been examined and termed Lowry's "symbolic landscape", it is contended that this landscape is unified and given coherence only by the idea that it is a landscape which mirrors the condition of the mind. In "Psychoanalytic Implications of the Wheel", it has been contended that the expectation of the narcissistic personality is that the world will indeed adopt

postures with reflect the self, and the vision of external reality is transmuted by the expectation that it reflect this self. The evidence in Lowry's work that precisely this expectation is operating - that the outside world is only tolerated to the extent that it is willing to make the necessary adaptations - has been presented. Thus the ultimate step in the unifying process (i.e. in seeing the work as a "whole") is provided by a psychoanalytic approach to the work, which seeks to relate the psyche to the vision. Under the Volcano emerges as a superimposition (or "projection") onto the topography of that which the narcissistic mind wishes to see. However, it is worth also noting that this vision- which should act as a reaffirmation of the individual's magical omnipotent powers - instead reveals by its very manifestation as the wheel (a diabolical force) and the abyss (domain of husks and demons) the immense self-loathing with its concomitant wish for punishment, and also fear and anxiety about the horrific destiny of the Consul. It is therefore argued that the Consul's symbolic landscape betrays, particularly in the case of the abyss, a vision of the self which is a representation of the mind's disorders, and that the breakdown of the narcissistic belief in mystical powers leads to a "landscape of the mind" consisting of disparate symbols signalling imminent chaos.

Furthermore, the "drawbridge" which opens over the cleft in the mind becomes symbolic of the paradoxical problem

of ordering chaos and disintegration, a paradox which becomes increasingly problematic as the novel proceeds. The extended passages of hallucinatory experience and fragmentation which occur by Chapters 10, 11 and 12 are artistic analogues of the psychical loss of control. Yet this hallucination is self-induced, in the knowledge that "if I ever started to drink mescal again, I'm afraid, yes that would be the end" (U.V., p. 219), and the psychoanalytic critic may conclude that the Consul's foreknowledge of the consequences of each of his decisions represents an impetus towards the gratification of unconscious desires. It is with an exploration of such desires and their means of gratification that this section is concerned.

The question of the abyss as the domain of a tragic downfall (and also as punishment) has remained unresolved until this point simply because the formulations of "tragedy" examined have proved inadequate to a novel which shows an awareness not only of the historical traditions of tragedy, but also portrays total dissolution of all traditions. It will be recollected that Northrop Frye speaks of tragedy in terms of either the inevitably ironic (the fall of Adam and of mankind) or the incongruously ironic (Christ's exclusion from human society), irony descending from the "low mimetic". Whereas Frye concentrates on the "low mimetic" (an evocation of pathos "usually concentrated on a single character"[1]), it becomes evident in Lowry's novel that the mimetic - the

attempt to imitate in art some form of objective reality - is surrendered under the increasingly uncontrollable demands of unconscious material. This dissolution of the mimetic level in Under the VOlcano demands an alternate formulation of tragedy, in order to account for the stresses which the conventional delineations of tragedy - Greek Christian, Romantic and Modern - surffer in any attempt to explicate Lowry's novel.

An alternative insight into the tragic vision is provided by Stanley Hyman, in his article "Psychoanalysis and the the Climate of tragedy". Hyman's view is founded on the belief that,

> ---the writings of Sigmund Freud once again make a tragic view possible for the modern mind. Insofar as psychoanalysis is a branch of clinical psychology aimed at therapy, it is optimistic and meliorative ---. Insofar as it is a philosphic view of man and a body of speculative insights that can be turned on every area of culture (that is, what Freud called "applied psychoanalysis), it is gloomy, stoic and essentially tragic. Its basic recognition is the radical imperfectability of man, a concept it derives not from the Christian Fall, but from the Darwinian descent.[2]

While the full validation of a psychoanalytic approach to literature is not within the scope of this thesis, Hyman's view of Freud's work as a philosophical body which can be applied "to every area of culture" is vital in presenting part of the validation of such an application. In Hyman's terms,

the Consul's refusal to escape from the "gloomy, stoic, and essential tragic" (or, to employ symbolic analogies from Under the Volcano, from the "dark wood" and "Malebolge") is a representation of an individual's decision that has been distorted by the now uncontrollable undertow of the unconscious. The Consul cannot face the insidious but completely internal forces whic threaten to promote downfall, and he seeks escape in alcohol (as Dr. Vigil says, "Poor your friend he spend his money on earth in such continuous tragedies" (U.V., p. 11) and all that the labyrinthine "Farolito" implies.

Hyman then presents a psychoanalytic formulation of the tragic view in literary mythology:

> In terms of Greek tragedy, the Oedipus complex is another phrasing of hybris (of King Oedipus' own hybris, in fact), the child's swollen pride that he is a fitter mate for his mother than the tall stranger. Libido, the blind energy of sexual impulses is equivalent to the ancient Greek "wild Ate", the daughter of Zeus and Strife, the wrath or madness that seizes the hero and moves him to senseless violence, destruction, or self-destruction. Sublimation is the small moment, the reintroduction of possibility, the birth of art and all human culture out of filth.[3]

The origins of tragedy would appear to lie with the Oedipal desires that must be repressed, the incestuous wish that should find some channel of dissolution or sublimation in the natural cause of developing sexuality. Any residual, ungratified desires will call for the unpleasant, basic "filth" or

animality to be faced, rather than, as Hyman notes, for the complete "extirpation of animality:.[4] From the first major cultural embedding of the Oedipal conflicts in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, to Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, and Lowry's carefully disguised tragedy, it seems possible that the ultimate expression of man's anguish is located in the torture linked with the interaction with the family, and the breakdown of the family unit through basically sexual jealousies and sibling rivalries related to incestuous wishes. This view of tragedy might well have been espoused by Lowry, considering his eternal domestic upheavals and taking into account his great admiration for the plays of Eugene O'Neill, which were wrought from the unpleasant facts which nobody in the family wishes to acknowledge. And certainly, what tragic characters are faced with by the end of the action is a self-knowledge achieved at the price of ruin, and very often a knowledge which they have tried to evade in every way possible. George Steiner contends that "Tragic personages are educated by calamity and they reach fulfilment in death."[5] However, Steiner fails to note that the calamity may be common to all (that is, a univeral "imperfectability"), and that the "education" is very possibly one which is resented and one which will breed fear out of guilt, the instinct which Freud calls "Thanatos" (or death-instinct) which "may also turn into the destructive instinct when it is directed outward to the external world",[6] accounting for both self-destruction and destruction.[7]

The Consul's vision of the world has already been seen as an essentially narcissistic mask for anxieties and self-loathing. In fact his narcissism emerges as a control mechanism for anxieties: by only seeing in the world what he sees in himself, he avoids seeing in himself anything which he does not wish to see and gains gratifying reassurances of omnipotent, magical control of the situation. However, in spite of the immense achievements in controlling the undertow of undesireable factors, such reassurances ultimately succumb to the chaos beneath, the chaos which it has been argued, has demanded such rigorous control in terms of the structuring of Under the Volcano.

It becomes difficult to separate the mind of the author from that of the Consul/narrator, a difficulty which has been expressed by more than one critic. There is evidence that the Consul has spent many years in search of the father who "disappeared altogether" (this being, says Walker, the cause of the identification with William Blackstone, who had gone to live away from civilisation "among the Indians"[8]). It is also clear that Lowry, who had continually failed to gain any understanding from his father, also attached himself to surrogate fathers and, as in the case of Conrad Aiken, found excuse to behave contemptibly to him (possibly in an attempt to revenge himself on his father). The concerns of Geoffrey Firmin are indeed but "thinly veiled autobiographies" of Lowry himself, and when the conflicts

behind the vision of Under the Volcano are under discussion, it is difficult to avoid attributing them to Lowry. It is even possible to argue that while Under the Volcano is essentially the outpouring of the mind of the Consul, the "consular" function appears merely to be the deflection of outside opinion (which, it will be recalled, is a major concern in narcissism), or the "artistic" refraction of autobiographical material.

One major concern which lies behind the "thinly veiled autobiographies" is a feature of narcissism which has not been mentioned previously, but of which there would appear to be evidence in Under the Volcano. In what the Consul terms his "battle for the survival of the human consciousness" (U.V., p. 221), which would more probably be the Consul's battle for the survival of his own consciousness, the reality is that he is deceiving himself by universalising what is a much more immediate condition. By forcing thoughts on his own immediate problem into a universal malaise, he avoids having to face the enormity of his situation: by "elevating the private to the Promethean", the Consul escapes seriously considering his own ailment. This wish to merge with the universal level in an effort to escape the particular level is similar to the classic escape of Romanticism through a transcendental belief in Nature.

The Consul, in some ways, a romantic hero, as has been suggested earlier in this thesis, in that he is the subject of a work of feelings rather than of action. The landscape about him is employed as a stimulus for thought (but in Lowry's novel, the landscape also becomes a manifestation of internal chaos). The Consul is also a solitary figure, no longer a part of organised society, engaged in a quest for escape, an escape which is paralleled by the authorial divergence from inherited rules and imposed restrictions. M.H. Abrams notes that the "use of poetic symbolism deriving from a world view in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities"[9] is also characteristic of Romanticism, and this aspect of symbolism is crucial to Lowry's work. The view of the Consul as essentially a romantic hero provides a vital link to the unconscious level in the novel, in that Romanticism has been viewed psychoanalytically as a return to that initial stage of life when no distinction is made between self and the outside world (known as the "fusal" stage). Freud used the term the "oceanic experience" to describe this stage in experience when the infant at the breast makes no distinction between itself and the only world it then knows, its mother.

Evidence of the Consul's wish to return to this "fusal" or merging state exists within Under the Volcano. His identity dissipates into a spreading pool of experience, aided by alcohol,

> How indeed could he hope to find himself to begin again when, somewhere, perhaps, in one of those lost or broken bottles, in one of those glasses, lay, forever, the solitary clue to his identity. How could he go back and look now, scrabble among the broken glass, under the eternal bars, under the oceans? (U.V., p. 294)

The Consul merges with all the effects of his condition, the bottles, glasses, and bars, until to distinguish himself from his "stage props" becomes impossible, and he is left to quest deperately for a means of making this necessary division. The quest is so hopeless that he must "scrabble --- under oceans". However, this quest is also an excuse, an escape from having to make the distinction between his own condition and that of the world, and from having to take responsibility for himself.

At another point in the novel, the narrator significantly connects loss of identity with the barranca:

> The water on the turbulent upper level raced over an artificial falls beyond which, becoming a swift stream, it wound through thick jungle to spill down a much larger natural cascada out of sight. After that it dispersed, he recalled, lost its identity, dribbled at various places into the barranca (U.V., p. 286).

Thus Lowry reinforces the idea that the loss of identity will ultimately mean a fate connected to the barranca; after he too has "dispersed", the Consul will end in the abyss. By the end of the novel, the literal disintegration of the Consul's mind has been completed: "It was a fact that he was losing touch

with his situation... He was dissociated from himself" (U.V., p. 344). But instead of the narcissistic gratification that the loss of identity and dissipation should bring, the Consul has brought total chaos upon himself, "his own fruitless selfish ruin, now perhaps finally self-imposed" (U.V., p. 346).

In this atmosphere of chaos and disintegration, the abyss is to be the punishment which has been feared from the opening of the novel. The abyss is symbolic of engulfment, as discussed in Section 8, and this notion is prefigured by the Sophocles epigraph:

> WONDERS are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; --- (U.V., p. 7).

The threat of engulfment is linked to Geoffrey's attitude to women. He writes to Yvonne,

> I have been deliberately struggling against my love for you. I dare not submit to it. I have grasped at every root and branch which would help me across this abyss in my life by myself but I can deceive myself no longer (U.V., p. 43).

To submit to Yvonne's love would, in the Consul's mind, mean suffering engulfment and loss of identity, the "oceanic experience" which occurred with "Mummy", as he at one point calls Yvonne. Yvonne represents a chaste, virginal femininity, about which the Consul feels just as great ambivalence as he does about the prostitute, María.

Furthermore, when the Consul suffers an intense outburst of jealousy, he then views Yvonne as a whore, shouting at her (and Hugh), "What an uncommon time you two must have had, paddling palms and playing bubbies and titties all day long under cover of saving me ..." (U.V., p. 315). When he realises that he has confused the two images of virgin and whore, he cries, "Mummy, let me go back to the beautiful brothel!" (U.V., p. 315). Paradoxically, his intial view of María, the prostitute, is based on her likeness to Yvonne, although María then becomes "a fiendish apparatus for calamitous sickening sensation." The image of the female is obviously split into the two extreme polarities of virgin and prostitute in the mind of the Consul and this dichotomy is reflected in the recurring images of chapels and brothels which are also inherent in the novel. María represents the opposite of engulfment, that is, the "sickening sensation" which is penetration. In penetrating her, the Consul feels, too,that he is penetrating himself and committing suicide in the same manner as the scorpion. Thus the image of the woman is also split into the polarities of engulfment and penetration (by a "phallic" woman who threatens to castrate the male). Both figures are threatening to the Consul, causing enormous anxiety, fear, and impotence, and perhaps what is even more threatening is that the two images become confused in the Consul's disintegration.

The immense rage at women is also manifest in the Consul's recriminating outburst, and he reveals, too, a rage at his childlessness, saying to Yvonne,

> 'Where are the children I might have wanted? You may suppose I might have them. Drowned. To the accompaniment of the rattling of a thousand douche bags. ---You don't even need an illusion, though you do have some illusions unfortunately, to help you deny the only natural and good function you have. Though on second thoughts it might be better if women had no functions at all!' (U.V., p. 315)

By the end of the novel, the COnsul cannot even look at children, because they invoke a strong sense of his loss, and perhaps because the "Drowned" represent his lost identity, for which he must search "under the oceans". The intense sense of resentment and loss is expressed as a hatred of all women, and this hatred explains the confusing of the roles of Yvonne and María.

Moreover, the strong sense of loss (due to the Consul's childlessness) helps to explain the dualistic nature of Geoffrey Firmin's fears about his fate. There is consistent anxiety about the "evil phallic death", reflected in the landscape around him. He sees "superb plantains flowering so finally and obscenely" (U.V., p. 131), premonitory of his death in their finality. The Consul also talks in his drunken meanderings of "the erections of guns, disseminating death" (U.V., p. 211). again revealing the phallic nature of the oncoming destruction, ~~and destruction~~, and of "Rows of dead lamps like

erect snakes poised to strike" (U.V., p. 284). As he dies, the conversation of Yvonne and Hugh about the spikes on the bougainvillea comes flashing back to him, recalling the Christ-analogy of the thorns, all symbolic of impalement, and of undesired penetration. On the other hand, his ultimate fate is to be thrown into the barranca, but as he falls he imagines that he is "falling, falling into the volcano" (U.V., p. 375), only to find that it is not the volcano which has become his spirtual domain and resting-place, but that his fear of engulfment has been borne out.

Ultimately, the Consul's fate is not that of Empedocles, "magician and self-styled god among men"[10], who died by leaping into a volcano. Psychoanalytically, the control exerted by the narcissistic belief in magical omnipotence finally breaks down in the Consul's realisation that his is not the fate of the magician, but one even worse than that of "a man who has all the elements of the world (not to say the universe) against him".[11] As evidenced by this quote, Lowry wished the Consul to be seen as a black magician with the elements of the whole world against him, but the Consul's fate reveals him as neither a "magician", nor a victim of external elemental forces. Rather, he is the victim of his own insurgent unconscious fears.

The fate of the Consul is, then, quite different, and the meaning of the abyss on an unconscious level becomes vital to an understanding of Under the Volcano. The abyss

has been linked to the "Hell Bunker", of which Terence Bareham says,

> So, also Hell Bunker on Leasowe golf course where Geoffrey's first adolescent sexual humiliation takes place, is echoed later both in the equation Mexico = a cosmic golf course, which Geoffrey invents from Laruelle's tower, and in characteristic word-play golf = gouffre = gulf (p. 206) which again laps over onto other areas of meaning in the book ---[12]

The Consul has been observed in "sexual humiliation" by Laruelle, and according to Richard Hauer Costa, the "Hell Bunker" episode is the root of Firmin's "obscure sexual guilt".[13] It is possible that the phantasy underlying this episode is one of observing sexual intercourse, of spying. Freud termed the phantasy of observing parents in the act of intercourse (which to a child appears to be an act of violence) a "primal scene" phantasy. If the "Hell Bunker" does indeed constitute such a phantasy, then the Consul's "obscure sexual guilt" may be linked to a guilt about having observed a primal scene. Further evidence for this contention may be found in the fact that the Consul is ultimately accused of being "de espider --- a spider" (U.V., p. 371) - a spy - by the Mexican police. The Consul continually fears being "found out" and found guilty, and the informing vision behind the novel decides to punish him, appropriately, for "spying", a crime of which he is not guilty in the political sense, but about which there would appear to be guilt stemming from an occasion in the distant past.

The abyss/barranca then becomes connected to the scene of sexual humiliation, and to a primal scene phantasy, and thus the ravine becomes an appropriate punishment for "spying". The barranca is therefore feared because it is a place which evokes sexual guilt, but it may also be a reference to an archetypal, eternal feminine principle. Yvonne has previously been seen as wishing to save the "severed halves" (U.V., p. 59) of "La Despedida", the "cleft rock" (U.V., p. 60). This wish to integrate the two halves may in fact be a disguise of the Consul's own wish that women should have no purpose at all. Markson muses at the end of his study of Under the Volcano

> - In Chapter 1, Laruelle notices a poster of a German actress named Maria Landrock, and again thinks of her as "enigmatic". ---In what exact sense? (Nor do I find a listing of Maria Landrock in any volume on film.)[14]

The fact that Markson has been unable to trace the name to a real actress is evidence that the name is significant (the other actor mentioned in the novel is Peter Lorre, whose name would present little difficulty in tracing). It is possible that the "enigmatic" quality of Maria Landrock stems from a link with the wish to heal the cleft rock, and for women to have no sexual function, since Landrock plays the unfaithful wife in The Hands of Orlac, the film showing in Quauhnahuac during the novel. The fact that Maria Landrock plays an unfaithful

wife, and that Yvonne has also been unfaithful, would suggest the Consul's wish is indeed that the cleft be healed and that women have no function at all.

Thus the abyss appears as a feminine principle which is resented and even hated. On an unconscious level, the abyss is also symbolic of engulfment, and, finally, it is connected with a primal scene phantasy which threatens as punishment for having spied upon it, an "evil phallic death", or impalement. With this threat in mind, the Consul has difficulty, like the plants, in maintaining "some final attitude of potency, or of a collective desolate fecundity" (U.V., p. 70). Fecundity is "desolate" indeed, if everything is to be "Drowned" and washed away. Without the feminine reproductive function, the fear is that the then "integrated" rock will not only lack the feminine, passive function, but that it will become the active instrument of impalement, the "phallic" woman. The Farolito, standing on the edge of the abyss, which is the scene of what the Consul feels to be his having been penetrated (by María), then becomes symbolic of a phallic feminine principle, a tower which also threatens downfall.

Ultimately, it is contended that the fate of the Consul reveals a loss of control over the underlying dynamics of Lowry's Under the Volcano. The guilt which is revealed early on in the work by the "Hell Bunker" incident is linked with a family dynamic which involves a frustration of the

watching child (the child who, according to the delineation of the Oedipus complex, wishes to replace the father in his relationship with the mother). The frustration of the child's Oedipal desires is part of life's necessary imperfection, and in this light, "the gods", which bring about the destruction of Geoffrey Firmin are in fact were externalisations of the anxieties and the expectations of punishment which arise from this frustration. Roy Morrell, in "The Psychology of Tragic Pleasure" quotes Gilbert Murray as saying,

> In its primitive form, drama was doing beforehand the thing you longed or dreaded to do; doing afterwards the thing that lived in your mind and could not be exorcised.[15]

Indeed, Lowry's novel is undoubtedly based on an experience about which there is immense guilt and which cannot be "exorcised".

Finally, it is argued that Lowry's novel cannot be seen as "The Victory of Art Over Life",[16] since the tremendous stresses imposed by the unconscious material ultimately overtake the stringent controls exerted by the author, in a hallucinatory fragmentation of the personality which ends in destruction. Roy Morrell makes a statement relevant to the notion of controlling chaos, saying "If art is man's method of imposing a pattern on the disorderly material of life, Tragedy's function is to get under control life's most chaotic and difficult parts."[17] On one level, if the theme of the novel is the evolution of a twentieth-century Faustian instinct, then the death of the Consul/black magician will

effect a last purge before this self-destructive instinct becomes the universal condition of man. In this light, the death of the Consul is indeed tragic; and through his self-destruction he has won temporary restitution for mankind. However, it has been argued that on the level of the unconscious material within the novel, the Consul's guilts make him predisposed towards a self-fulfilling prophesy of punishment, and even the splitting of the image of the woman breaks down as a defence-mechanism when the polarities become confused. Finally, though, it must be noted that although the unconscious dynamics become uncontrollable, Lowry's "preternatural awareness" operates here as elsewhere. An early draft of Under the Volcano shows a clear conception of the hero, and although this passage was omitted by the final version, it strongly evidences the view of the Consul as suffering an inability to distinguish between self and the world - a "cosmic narcissism":

> It was as though the passionate narcissism which drinking and his almost purely oral response to life entailed had fixed his age at some time in the past, at the unidentifiable moment, perhaps, when his persistent objective self-weary of standing askance and watching his downfall, had silently withdrawn from him altogether, like a ship secretly leaving harbour at night.[18]

That the Consul's narcissism is so strongly endorsed by Lowry's own intentions may perhaps come as a surprise. However, the fact of Lowry's awareness of this feature operating in the Consul's personality demonstrates that the author/protagónist relationship, while largely autobiographical in nature, is not compeltely a mirroring process. Notwithstanding the fact that the protagonist is not absolutely identical to the author, it is still often difficult to distinguish between the emanations of the Consul's fragmented mind, and the authorial vision.

Although Firmin's death may be viewed on a universal level as a self-destruction which has won temporary restitution for mankind (before chaos becomes the inexorable condition of the world), this, too, is simply a way of elevating the very basic and earthbound weaknesses of alcoholism and self-loathing. Such a universalising vision is undoubtedly one of the many attempts to objectify the causes of destruction, and to convince the self that the origins of the tragedy are external. The entire examination of the symbolic landscape proves otherwise; the symbols which are connected to Firmin's self-destructive impulse spring from the unconscious. The malevolent landscape is not the cause of Geoffrey Firmin's downfall, but the symptom of his condition and the topographical symbols become a landscape of the mind, projections of the chaos within onto the landscape.

The symbolic effigies of the Consul's mind point not only towards his inexorable fate, but imply origins - the fears and anxieties - which demand analysis for a complete interpretation of Under the Volcano. "The hell that is in the heart" is in fact the very ancient history of the unconscious: Firmin's problems stem from the Oedipal problems which have been present from his early childhood and which, on a wider level, have always threatened civilisation with disruption and chaos. The Consul's adult life becomes a re-enactment of his own unresolved Oedipal desires, established by the highly stylised version of the phallic and engulfing landscape. The threats which in his quest for "escape" he must finally confront - the horrors of the "Farolito" and the barranca - can ultimately be seen as the punishments which are recognised in the Consul's unconscious as being appropriate to the misdemeanours; the guilt of one Geoffrey Firmin is manifested ubiquitously in a symbolic landscape of the mind's disorder and of the "mind's divide".

NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, "Tragic Modes" in R.P. Draper, ed., Tragedy: Developments in Criticism, p. 161.

2. Stanley Hyman, "Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy" in Corrigan, ed., Tragedy: Vision and Form, p. 290.

3. Ibid., p. 291.

4. Ibid., p. 290.

5. George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy, p. 169.

6. Hyman, p. 291.

7. If it is doubted that sexual jealousies, sibling rivalry, anxieties, fears and guilts might be viewed as the origins of human tragedy, it remains simply to respond as Freud did on one occasion. On being told that Jung was having greater success as a psychoanalyst in America by playing down sexuality, Freud objected by saying that "the more he sacrificed of the hard-won truths of psychoanalysis, the less resistance he would encounter. See Hyman, p. 293.

8. Ronald Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel, p. 257.

9. M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc., 1957) p. 106.

10. David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning, p. 166.

11. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 199.

12. Terence Bareham, "Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano", in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p. 107.

13. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry, p. 171.

14. Markson, p. 216.

15. Roy Morrell, "The Psychology of Tragic Pleasure", in Corrigan, ed., Tragedy: Vision and Form, p. 204.

16. Costa, p. 86.

17. Morrell, p. 204.

18. Muriel Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life, p. 7.

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