

HELL IS WHERE THE HEART IS:
A STUDY OF SYMBOL, MYTH AND MOTIF IN THE
FICTION OF MALCOLM LOWRY

by

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ABSTRACT

In his projected cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends, Malcolm Lowry intended an investigation of the journey undertaken by man's unconscious as he struggles with his basic impulses towards love and destruction, and with his relationships with his fellow-man and God. Lowry designed his cycle of fiction with a structure parallel to that of Dante's Divine Comedy. While this study is also structured according to Lowry's Dantean concept, it does not simply analyse the references to Dante. Lowry's fiction is founded upon a vast and complex network of symbolic and mythic allusion, by which themes are underpinned on numerous levels. Allusions to this body of symbolic material - what is termed the "symbolic legacy" - are also incorporated into the motifs of the author's works. Thus Lowry's references are to no single tradition in literature; the symbols and myths are drawn from numerous sources including the Classical, Mystical/Cabbalistic, Christian and Romantic traditions, and from Modernist reworkings of these traditions.

This study, therefore, represents an analysis of the references employed by Lowry, and the relating of the various traditions which are used as sources of allusion. While Under the Volcano contains the fullest exposition of Lowry's symbolic patterning, other works contain further evidence of his endlessly reverberating matrix of symbols. The mythopoeic drive is so strong that often several versions of the same myth or symbol are worked into his fiction. This leads to a contradictory exposition of certain thematic concerns. The antitheses established are integral to Lowry's vision of a complex world in which "civilized" man is endangering both himself and his environment and for whom there exists both the possibility of accepting the downward spiral which has been history and, simultaneously, the means to redemption, according to what he aspires to most.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Page references for quotations from Malcolm Lowry's writings are taken from the editions listed below (except where otherwise indicated.) The following abbreviations have been used:

- U. Ultramarine (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1980)
- U.V. Under the Volcano (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.,
1980)
- H.U.O.L. Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place & Lunar
Caustic (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979)
- D.A.T.G. Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, ed.
Douglas Day and Margerie Lowry. (Middlesex: Penguin
Books Ltd., 1979)
- O.F. October Ferry to Gabriola, ed. Margerie Lowry.
(Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979)
- S.L. The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey
Breit and Margerie Lowry. (London: Jonathan Cape,
1967)

PART I: LOWRY AND SYMBOLISM

Chapter 1: "Introduction"

PART I: LOWRY AND SYMBOLISM
CHAPTER I

"Introduction"

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. 1

That the analysis of symbolism is crucial to an understanding of Malcolm Lowry's fiction remains uncontested; there is a consensus of critical opinion that his works are founded upon a proliferating variety of symbols drawn from an extensive and diverse array of sources and traditions. While valuable analyses of certain individual symbols exist, the relating of the many symbols, myths and motifs within a full-length study of Lowry's writings has yet to be undertaken.

The three most extensive analyses of symbolism in Lowry's masterwork, Under the Volcano, are Malcolm Lowry's Volcano by David Markson, Lowry, by Anthony Kilgallin, and The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry, by Perle Epstein. Epstein's study is exhaustive in its detection and analysis of the Cabbalistic underpinnings of Lowry's work. However, the symbolism associated with the Cabbala constitutes only a small part of the vast body of symbolic reference and allusion to mythology incorporated into Under the Volcano.

Such an esoteric study as Epstein's, by its very nature, tends to neglect the eclectic nature of Lowry's vision which proliferates within the novel with a fecundity possibly unparalleled in the English novel. Furthermore, one contention of this thesis will be that Lowry's use of 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 appears to be the meaning he himself attributes to a given symbol (a meaning transformed by his own creative interpretation),/

interpretation),/ rather than its original significance. Thus the allusive aspects of Lowry's works do not permit of a rigidly literal approach.

Ultimately, in spite of the fact that they have produced valuable analyses, Epstein, Markson and Kilgallin have all produced "chapter-by-chapter" guides to Under the Volcano (and Lowry's other fictional works, understandably and perhaps justifiably, have received only limited critical attention.) The "linear" approach to Lowry's Volcano 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.

Thus, many of the reverberations of the symbols and motifs, and the amplification of their meanings in Under the Volcano alone remain to be examined. The relationship of ever-changing constellations of symbols and motifs to a constant dynamic which brings about the destruction of the main protagonist, Geoffrey Firmin - that is, of Lowry's literary technique to his thematic concerns - will constitute a primary concern in this thesis.

The relationship between literary technique - in Lowry's case, the mythopoeic drive in particular - and content is the focus of a thesis in which the consistency of Lowry's symbolisations throughout his fiction will be of crucial importance. In fact, although Lowry's hitherto anachronistic position in the field of modern literature might be attributed to his predilection for amassing (and worse still, using) whatever arcane associations he fancied might enrich his work, "to express six things at the same time instead of discussing them one after the other", as he himself wrote, this thesis will argue a coherence and unity throughout his fiction. There is much evidence to suggest a considerable control of the artistic process (as Lowry himself claimed), particularly in Under the Volcano, and to suggest a consistency throughout his work which, if unorthodox, remains crucial to an awesome expression of man's ability to create his own incontrovertible destiny.

The overarching argument of this thesis, which encompasses considerations of Lowry's literary technique, his use of myth, symbolism and motif, and his thematic concerns is dictated to a great extent by Lowry's intentions:

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----

(S.L., p. 78)

Lowry's cyclical structure is a significant means of ordering the chaotic hallucinatory visions of Geoffrey Firmin; the movement of the chapters, or the structural dynamic, is linked with the fate of the Consul in an inextricable conspiracy between technique and theme. The Consul is representative of Man, who, like Ixion, is tied for eternity to a spinning infernal wheel. However, he is man after the Fall, and the wheel, as "instrument of eternal recurrence" (S.L., p.71), is a symbolisation of human futility, of the "unspeakable circuit" (U.V., p.226). Lowry not only invites the reader to join his protagonist on the journey on the "unspeakable circuit" and to continue the cyclical process by returning to the beginning of the novel, but also draws the reader into rejoining the consciousness which runs throughout his fiction in his projected cycle of fiction, The Voyage That Never Ends.

Lowry's fiction was intended to be brought under one overarching pattern paralleling Dante's Divine Comedy. This thesis is likewise structured according to the journey undertaken by the human consciousness in Lowry's fiction. However, when examining the progression from the Inferno, to the Purgatorio to Paradiso, it should be noted that Lowry's own intentions as to the precise position to be occupied by each work were never finalised. (Often the plans became less in keeping with artistic integrity and more directed by exigencies of work owed to his editor).

Instead of adhering rigidly to what might be ascertained/

ascertained/ as the author's intentions for his cycle of fiction (see Chapter 11), the chapters of this thesis proceed more in line with the progression employed by David Miller in his concise thematic investigation, Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends. Miller treats Ultramarine as the descent into Hell, Under the Volcano as the Inferno section, Lunar Caustic as the Purgatorio, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid (and La Mordida, which remains unpublished) as the ascent, the novella, The Forest Path to the Spring (and the remaining unpublished fragments of In Ballast to the White Sea, which was to have been replaced by Eridanus, which exists only in sketch form) as the Paradiso, and finally, October Ferry to Gabriola as evidence of the "never-ending voyage". The structure of this thesis varies little from the sections in Miller's study, apart from the fact that Lunar Caustic is discussed in Chapter 4, rather than later in the thesis, because it highlights the thematic and symbolic references to which Lowry constantly returns in his work.

While the overall pattern of the chapters of this thesis might suggest that Lowry's only source of symbolic allusion and patterning was the Divine Comedy, within the general sections of "The Descent", "Hell", and "Rebirth and Ascent", the dominant symbols chosen as chapter headings show that Lowry's sources were infinitely varied. As a generalisation, Lowry employed symbols from four specific areas in literature, drawing from the Classical, Christian and Romantic traditions, and from Modernist (including his own) reworkings of these traditions. The initial chapters are theoretical discussions of Lowry's use of what is termed the "symbolic legacy" (that body of symbols and mythology in existing literature), of the consistency of the author's symbolic patterning, evidence of which is to be found throughout Lowry's fiction (and also in his poetry), and of his relationship to his symbolism (his autobiographical intervention). The remaining chapters of this thesis are dictated not only by the overall Dantesque cycle, but also by individual symbols derived from the various literary traditions.

Following the more general discussions of Chapters 1 to 4 of this thesis, the remaining chapters are structured around particularly important symbols, symbols to which other symbols and mythological references are attached. Chapter 5, for example, discusses the wheel as instrument of fate, as mechanism of infernal gods (the malign creatures which operate in Cocteau's La Machine Infernale), as Ixion's wheel (a Classical reference), as eternal recurrence, as the structure of Under the Volcano, as the structure of Lowry's cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends, and, on a microcosmic level, as the proliferating images recurring throughout Under the Volcano in particular.

In fact, each of the major symbols chosen produces these proliferating images, and generates its own "matrix" of associated symbols and literary allusions. These constitute the main body of each of the chapters, and full discussion of them is reserved for later. However, as a guide, and in order to demonstrate the varied nature of the traditions from which Lowry draws, Chapter 6 turns to the "untended garden" - symbol of the Fall of Man - and this symbol of Christianity becomes the Garden of Eden, which is discussed in Chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 7 focusses on the abuse of alcohol, which is likened to the abuse of magical powers, and in Lowry's fiction involves the different versions of the Faust myth of Calderón de la Barca, Marlowe and Goethe. Since on one level, redemption via love is offered to Lowry's protagonists, the tradition from which the author draws here is essentially the Romantic one.

After the descent caused by the protagonists' abdication from responsibility for the world (and therefore the eviction from the Garden of Eden), by the rejection of the love of God, of one's fellow man and of the opposite sex, by the abuse of the creative impulse, all of which factors being exacerbated by the actions of malign gods, the main protagonists are in Hell (as, in all probability, is the reader too!) The "Farolito" of Chapter 8 is not merely a cantina of ill repute and scene/

scene/ of the Consul's nemesis; it is also a prison tower, a location of hell on earth, a tomb and a labyrinth. Chapter 8 discusses this hell on earth - a tower of Babel - and the associations of this symbol with the Christian tradition. Chapter 9 takes the protagonists into hell after life, and into an abyss akin to Dante's "Malebolge". The sojourn of the characters in this inner circle of hell is also a journey through the labyrinth towards Tartarus and a confrontation with the monster of the dark recesses of the psyche. Thus the journey is underpinned by both Classical and Christian traditions.

Part IV of the thesis discusses the re-emergence of the consciousness which runs throughout the cycle of Lowry's fiction from its sojourn in hell. The ascent of the human soul is attached symbolically to the purging blast of the fires of the volcano, and this has its origins in the poet Empedocles' casting himself into the crater of Aetna to bring about his own magical and inexplicable disappearance. The apocalyptic vision of the modern Holocaust, the trial by fire of the human soul, both discussed in Chapter 9, are transformed by the purging blast of hellfire into an ascent in the Christian and Classical traditions such that the soul is reborn, arising phoenix-like from the ashes of the past in Chapter 10.

However, Lowry's vision is nothing if not one of eternal recurrence, and the Eden attained on Earth, discussed in Chapter 11, is constantly under threat. The tides that carry man on his unending voyage in search of his soul are those derived from the dual impulses of love and death, and the human consciousness is ultimately seen as being cast adrift on the River Styx, between the shores of life and death.

A further argument to be maintained throughout the thesis arises from Lowry's use of more than one tradition of symbol and myth. His technique of layering one symbol system upon/

upon/ another, one version of a myth upon a different version means that apparent chasms open up when a definitive interpretation of his fiction is sought. For example, to refer to both Marlowe's and Goethe's versions of the Faust myth in Under the Volcano results in an inevitable discrepancy in what the reader interprets to be the fate of Geoffrey Firmin. The contention is that Lowry did not deem it necessary that the reader make a choice; instead, the reader should be able to conserve two seemingly antithetical viewpoints, or two antagonistic symbols, and to interpret the works by the tension maintained by this "antithetical vision". The task is no easy one, but the effect thereby produced is valuable in demolishing the polarised views of good and evil, of morality and of man's relationship to God, to himself, to other humans, and to love and death which produce the facile "answers" which the Twentieth Century appears to demand. Asking the questions about these universal and complex concerns in human life is to Lowry so vital that the admission of more than one interpretation, in fact the invitation to the reader to compare, and to participate in bridging the gulf between the polarities, and in conserving the tension the author has established, becomes the "meaning" of his texts.

As adjunct to the argument that Lowry intended to maintain a tension between the differing myths and symbol systems on which he drew, it is contended that what the author produces thereby is not only a history of literary traditions, but also a comparative history of myth, symbolism, tragedy and of the Fall of Man. The two arguments - first, that Lowry intended a tension to be maintained throughout the cycle of fiction works, and second, that the effect produced is one of constant comparative interpretation of the literary traditions from which he draws - account for what at first appears to be a technique of including anything which seemed to be particularly attractive to the author. Thus, while the novels do contain a highly varied and apparently eclectic collection of allusions and references, which will be examined in the course of this thesis, what is even more significant is Lowry's use of the "symbolic legacy" as a way of integrating and universalising human experience.

In addition, it is argued that Lowry's technique of layering different symbols and myths upon each other is not only a method of enforcing coherence and integrating his material, of ordering the anarchy and chaos of twentieth-century experience, but also a technique which renders the inner cosmos. . . . At one level, Lowry is concerned with realism in his fiction. The Mexico and Canada of which he writes are vivid places, and landscapes which exist. . . . Contrary to the beliefs of certain critics, the narrative lines are carefully constructed, and contrary to Lowry's own self-criticism, the main protagonists at least are full enough characters. However, having established the scaffolding of realistic setting and character motivation, Lowry's main concern lies elsewhere. He is interested in investigating the components of the human consciousness, or psyche which drive man towards love and death, hope and despair. Lowry seeks a "realism" beyond that of the concrete and empirical world, which is essentially transient, a realism in portraying the imagination, and the exterior landscape becomes subsumed under this quest. In rendering a vision of humanity which is spiritually accurate, and not just the factual representation of the concrete aspects of human life and suffering, Lowry finds the human imagination incapable of structuring other than a symbolic representation of the basis for the existence of mankind. Ultimately, what Lowry produces is a landscape of the mind, of the ideas and areas of concern which have engaged man throughout history, although a realistic structure and narrative level do exist.

Lowry's use of myth and symbolism is argued to be at variance with the Modernist return to mythology. For example, unlike Joyce in Ulysses, whose allusion is to one Classical myth, Lowry's construction of a sedimented pattern - a series of matrices - means that he involves a number of "systems", as has been indicated. Although Lowry was greatly worried by the only adverse criticism in the contemporary reception of Under the Volcano - that his novel was derivative of Ulysses² - in fact the proliferation of symbols drawn from an enormous number and variety of sources, and also symbols which he himself creates and then refers to in ensuing/

ensuing/ novels marks him out as a writer who certainly began with the impulses of the Modernist edicts, but took his lines of technical and philosophical investigation and extemporisation in many ways far beyond those of his contemporaries.

The fact that Lowry engaged in a Promethean battle to break new ground in the technique of fiction is not to claim that his achievements are of even and consistently substantial quality. However, there is strong evidence of a consistency in his approach to writing, seen at its best in the symbolic coherence which he was quite obviously in process of establishing throughout The Voyage That Never Ends. The fact that he only published two of his novels - his apprentice-novel, Ultramarine, which he later rejected and intended to rewrite for the purposes of his cycle, and his masterwork, Under the Volcano - means that the greater part of his oeuvre is of interest mainly to the Lowry critic. Works such as Dark as the Grave and October Ferry to Gabriola were edited into the form of novels and published posthumously. Although, for example, Dark as the Grave contains fine lyrical writing, and further evidence of a symbolic and mythological framework, in the form in which it is published, it fails to approach the magnificent qualities and mastery of Under the Volcano, which Lowry had worked and reworked over a period of ten years.

There is also a strong indication that Lowry searched in vain in later novels for new material of sufficient substance. Many critics have levelled this accusation at the later work, and indeed it does appear that for Lowry, the territory which he knew best was the hell he himself had suffered and inhabited. When the terrors of the alcoholic writer's labyrinth of torments abated, there was nothing that Lowry knew quite so well, or about which he could become quite so impassioned. While it would be unfair to dismiss his other works as but pale imitations of his own genius, Under the Volcano undoubtedly dominates his oeuvre, and tends therefore to demand most attention in the/

the/ ensuing analysis of his fiction. Again, since Lowry wrote what he knew best, the criticism of autobiographical intrusion is common, and cannot be ignored. There is an attempt to counter this criticism, while fully acknowledging that there are strong links between Lowry's life and the lives of his main protagonists, by demonstrating Lowry's ability to enforce a creative and artistic coherence in his material which differentiates it from autobiography.

Ultimately, though, there is evidence throughout Lowry's fiction of his mastery of fictional technique, and of his urge to experiment with literary traditions which establishes him as a major literary figure of the Twentieth Century. As critic of himself, as an innovator writing a literary "jazz opera" with extemporisations on the themes of damnation and redemption, as a writer examining the position of the tragic hero in the Twentieth Century with the intensity and profundity of vision of a modern Dostoevsky, and of course, as symboliser, Lowry is unparalleled.

The writer and critic, Milan Kundera, answers the commonplace contemporary belief that the European novel is in decay and has played itself out with the proposal that there are challenges still to be taken up in what he terms the "mausoleum of missed opportunities"³ of literature. He identifies four challenges in particular:

The challenge of play: Sterne's Tristram Shandy and Diderot's Jacques le fataliste are for me the two greatest novelistic works of the eighteenth century. These two novels are playful on a grandiose scale and reached pinnacles of unseriousness never scaled before, or since. ---

The challenge of dream: The slumber of the imagination in the nineteenth-century novel was suddenly interrupted by Franz Kafka, who achieved what the surrealists subsequently called for but never themselves brought into being: the fusion of dream and reality ---

The challenge of thought: Since Cervantes, the novel has tried to embody philosophical reflection. ---If the novel is considered to be an "investigation of existence", then the sense of this embodiment of philosophical reflection becomes clearer: ---

The challenge of time: The period of terminal paradoxes incites the novelist to abandon the Proustian limits to the question of time (restricted to personal memory), and to broaden the problem to include the enigma of collective time: the enigma of a Europe looking back on its own past, weighing up its history like an old man seeing his whole past life in the glance of a single moment.⁴

Although these are the challenges that Kundera identifies as the ones to which he personally responds, Lowry, too, is caught in the processes of rising to exactly these challenges. Lowry's sense of "play" makes the most welcome intrusion into material which otherwise would be unmatched in its bleakness and profound despair. The merging of dream and reality, of psyche and landscape, of mescaline ambience with memory and present events is a feature of Lowry's work. Lowry, of course, addresses himself forcefully to the "investigation of existence" - to man's relations with God, with himself, with others, and with love and death. He is interested, too, in the investigation of his craft, examining the position of the tragic hero in the Twentieth Century and the literary history of damnation and redemption; each of Lowry's protagonists is indeed "man in search of his soul". The quest takes the overriding consciousness beyond the time boundaries of the narrative lines within the novels. Although the events of Chapters 2 to 12 take place within the space of twelve hours of the Consul's life, framed by one year of Jacques Laruelle's life, Under the Volcano also spans the Consul's lifetime, literary cultural history, and the eternity of damnation. It is in the context of Lowry's pre-emptive responses to Kundera's challenges that this thesis pursues the novelist on his quest.

CHAPTER 1: NOTES

1. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus and Latter-Day Pamphlets
(London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), p.153.
2. Ronald Binns, Malcolm Lowry, Contemporary Writers Series
(London: Methuen & Co., 1984), p.17.
3. Milan Kundera, "The Novel and Europe" in The New York Review
(July 1984), p.18.
4. Ibid., p.18.

PART I: Chapter 2

"Lowry and the Symbolic Legacy"

PART I
CHAPTER 2
"Lowry and the Symbolic Legacy"

Life was a forest of symbols, was it, Baudelaire had said? But it occurred to him, even before the forest, if there were such a thing as "before" were there not still the symbols? Yes, before! Before you knew anything about life, you had the symbols. It was with the symbols that you started. From them you progressed to something else--- 1

That Lowry's fiction contains numerous symbols and orders of symbolism is easily stated, and unlikely to occasion lengthy critical debate. However, the statement gives rise to one of the most problematic questions when dealing with symbolism in the novel: what constitutes a symbol in prose writing. It appears to be such a fraught question that most critics have steered well clear, having the good judgement to apply themselves instead to the poetic symbol.

One of the few critics to confront the question of symbolism in fiction is William York Tindall, who makes a useful distinction between "sign" and "symbol", saying that in general, "a sign is an exact reference to something definite and a symbol an exact reference to something indefinite."² The generalisation is undoubtedly helpful, but, of course, it is the reference to the "indefinite" which causes more difficulties in the case of the symbol in the novel as opposed to the symbol in poetry. While Dante's "dark wood" can be identified as signifying a number of things, there are enough indications and underpinnings within the text to lead to a critical consensus. The "dark wood" does not refer to any single definite condition, but neither is it so elusive nor so "indefinite" as, for example, Lowry's "volcano", which appears to have resisted critical interpretation to a very great extent. If in poetry, a symbol may allude to a number of qualities and characteristics, the matter of the symbol in prose writing is vexed by the fact that it appears, perhaps/

perhaps/ because by its very nature the novel is unlikely to sustain the condensation of meaning intrinsic to poetry, that the symbol in fiction may allude to a greater number of not so apparent qualities and characteristics. The problem is, then, that the "meaning" of a symbol in prose writing expands outwards to such an extent that it becomes intangible and almost too indefinite. As Valéry wrote, only partly in jest, "Symbolism is the group of people who have believed that the word symbol had a meaning."³

Using the example of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's eyes in Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Tindall demonstrates the expansion of meaning which can be attributed to the symbol as opposed to the sign:

Dr. Eckleburg's eyes are a sign referring to Dr. Eckleburg and his business. As a symbol they suggest, to use Webster's word, more thoughts and feelings than we could state; for if we stated as many as we could - the wasteland, the suburb, the modern world, futility, or moral censure - some would be left over and some would remain unstateable.⁴

Again, after Tindall suggests the possible interpretations of the symbol, consistent with a view of it in context, what is most significant is that the reader is left to contend with the multiplicity of attributes, but also those aspects which seem to defy facile verbalisation, which "remain unstateable".

To emphasise the point, it is the "unstateable" references which attach to a given symbol which make the whole area of symbolism in the novel in particular a difficult one. Every symbol has what might be termed its "primary attribute" - its most obvious quality or association. For example, the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg primarily look down upon the landscape below, and a volcano is primarily fiery. At the next level, the symbol will have meanings associated to it by means of context, or of the repeated juxtapositions in which it is located throughout the rest of the text. Thus Tindall notes the "moral censure" suggested by Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's eyes; the eyes look critically upon the detritus of modern civilisation and thus suggest "futility" and "the wasteland".

In the case of Lowry's volcano symbol, the meanings at this next level already cause some confusion. Lowry's volcanoes are not only fiery, but also snow-capped. As is discussed at greater length later on, Geoffrey Firmin deludes himself as he dies; he imagines himself to be undergoing a spiritual ascent towards the cold, clear light at the peak of Himavat, whereas in fact, in spiritual terms it appears that he is dropping into the blast of the volcanic flames. In reality, the Consul is doing neither. He has been thrown ignominiously into the barranca, a ravine which is given connotations of Dante's "Malebolge", to join the rubbish and a dead dog in this Mexican waste disposal unit.

At this point, it is not certain whether Lowry intends the fate of the main protagonist of Under the Volcano to involve spiritual ascent or descent. Although many of the analogies built into the novel would suggest ultimate descent, the author himself makes it even more difficult to know the fate of Geoffrey Firmin by having written in his lengthy letter to Jonathan Cape that "there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old Consul at the end" (S.L., p.85). Whatever the fate of Geoffrey Firmin, ex-British Consul to Mexico, it is certain that this fate is bound up with the symbolic nature and qualities of the volcano. Of equal certainty is the fact that the volcano is symbolic of more than a chastening cold clarity - a stripping away of self-delusions, and of the blast of hell fire - a purging blast. The volcano symbol has elusive, ineffable and "indefinite" attributes which resist complete analysis.

Tindall's working definition of the literary symbol takes cognizance of what he terms the "indefinite" level of meaning. He writes,

Though definite in itself and generally containing a sign that may be identified, the symbol carries something indeterminate and, however we try, there is a residual mystery that escapes our intellects.₅

The literary symbol, an analogy for something unstated, consists of verbal elements that, going beyond reference and the limits of discourse, embodies and offers a complex of feeling and thought.⁶

Since the symbol is an "analogy" for something of many constituent qualities, it appears as a synthesis of attributes determinate and "indeterminate". The "indeterminate" level of meaning involves both "feeling and thought" as Tindall suggests, and at this level the symbol might also be described as being a moment of vision, allowing access to, and perception of, those constituents of the world which are essentially unknowable and usually beyond the domain of language.

Even before this level of "visionary" synthesis of the unknowable world, Lowry's symbols often seem oddly ambiguous. Returning to the example of the volcano symbol, it has been noted that there are references to both ice and fire, two opposing elements. While an effective symbol is unlikely to represent one thing, and one thing only (if it did, a neat sequence of one-to-one correspondences would present itself, and literary analysis would be infinitely less complex and more boring), it is usual for a symbol to refer to a particular category of qualities. Eyes are most likely to have something to do with vision, and likewise, volcanoes with fire. Most writers capitalise on this "primary association" because it is a way of ensuring that the reader gains a basic access to the symbol.

However, Lowry has alternative methods of trying to ensure a basic understanding of the symbol. Very often, he draws on a symbol or myth used in a number of (sometimes conflicting) traditions, with the intention that the reader will respond to at least one of the traditions. Since the literary traditions are at times at odds with one another (for example, the Faust themes in Calderón de la Barca, Marlowe and Goethe provide very different views of the destiny of the magician/chemist), Lowry's symbols themselves come to embody the conflicts of the source traditions. Thus the volcano, at one level associated with Aetna, Empedocles and Tartarus, is also associated with/

with/ "the mighty mountain Himavat" (U.V., p.129) and "promise of lightness --- certainty of brightness" (U.V., p. 129). The volcano as symbol incorporates the extreme antitheses of the darkest region of hell (Tartarus) and "promise of lightness", and of fire and ice.

These antitheses are in keeping with Lowry's vision of a complex world and of the tides of life which at once seem to drive us on towards our goal (yet also towards death) and to suck us back from that Paradise on Earth because this temporal paradise is inconsistent with the most basic human condition which is change and flux. This vision was determined to some extent by Lowry's own experience of his alcoholic hell, punctuated by finding his Northern Eden in which he was constantly under threat of eviction. As the critic, William New, points out, this vision was to have run throughout The Voyage that Never Ends:

[The books to be included in the cycle] were to explore as a whole the recurrent attempts of a writer to find paradise, his expulsions from it because of present realities and his mind's fragmenting memories, and his struggle back into stability nonetheless.⁷

As Lowry himself was borne upon tides which seemed to carry him both towards and away from his personal Eden, so his main protagonists are subject to such ambivalent forces, and the atmosphere of his novels, indeed his cycle of fiction, is characterised by symbols of the antithetical dynamics of hope and despair.

The "antithetical" nature of Lowry's symbols, along with the fact of the diversity of literary traditions from which they are drawn and the layering of one tradition upon another means that the analysis of the use of symbolism and myth in Lowry's fiction cannot follow one of the few critical paradigms available in this area. Edmund Wilson's Axel's Castle offers literary analysis of symbolism in the novels of Joyce, Proust and Gertrude Stein. Wilson's approach to Ulysses is systematic in its tracing of the Classical allusions Joyce intended.

Wilson writes,

We now follow Bloom's adventures on the day of June 16, 1904 --- Lotus eaters allure him; he is affrighted by Laestrygonians. He assists at the burial of an Elpenor and descends with him in imagination to the underworld; he suffers from the varying favour of an AEolus. He escapes by ruse from the ferocity of a Cyclops and he disengages himself through prudence from the maiden charms of a Nausicaa. And he emerges finally a man again from the brothel of a Circe who had transformed him into a swine.⁸

Although it might be possible to describe the Dantean journey undertaken by the consciousness which runs throughout Lowry's fiction, Lowry's fiction has such a complex of allusions that such a description would convey little of the thematic intricacies and of the mythopoeic impulses of his work. As soon as Lowry establishes one symbolic level as a means of emphasising a specific theme, his mind spins off to another symbol as a parallel means. An examination of one particular symbol-system is insufficient; while it is possible to see Joyce employing one dominant parallel, Lowry's mind produces a proliferating complex of allusion which is as a spider's web to the mind which insists on logical ordering and analysis.

As an initial example of Lowry's technique of layering one symbolic level upon an entirely different one, it is interesting to read David Markson's analysis of Chapter 10 of Under the Volcano:

The Laestrygonians - These are cannibals. Midway in the chapter the Consul and others eat live shellfish. "Now you see what sort of creatures we are... Eating things alive." Lest crustaceans don't count, there follows reference to the Nazi system "swallowing live struggling men and women".⁹

While Markson intends to trace the Homeric parallels in Chapter 10, he, too, is faced with the fact that an examination of one parallel in isolation is seldom adequate to Lowry's work. Thus reference is made by Markson to the close juxtaposition of another parallel which drives home the theme of the blood on the hands of modern Man; the modern figures in Lowry's novel are equally Homeric cannibals and perpetrators of para-Nazi crimes.

In fact, without even straying beyond the domain of the crustaceans, the hors d'oeuvres trigger further thematic associations. These are dealt with in greater detail later on, but at this point, some of the references generated by the repast serve to emphasise the point that Lowry is rarely found wanting as regards variety of analogies! The shrimps are "camarones" in Spanish, but as Geoffrey Firmin remarks pointedly to M. Laruelle, "Not camarones --- Cabrones. That's what the Mexicans call them. --- Cabrón. You too, perhaps ... Venus is a horned star." (U.V., p.220). Because of their name, the Consul is reminded of the fact that he is a "Cabrón" - a cuckold - and the frenzied rage which is the manifestation of his jealousy drives much of the narrative line in Under the Volcano.

Directing his rage outwards, the Consul tries to evoke a similar jealousy in M. Laruelle. Lowry employs the multiple meanings assigned to the shrimps to indicate that M. Laruelle has also been sexually involved with Yvonne, the Consul's returned ex-wife. The Consul, from a little garden where they have both been sitting watching Hugh and Yvonne - "the formidable couple" (U.V., p.216) - indicates that if Yvonne hasn't been faithful to him, neither has she been to Jacques Laruelle: they are both "Cabrones". The Consul's suggestion that "Venus - is a horned star" relates the unsuspecting shrimp to an even more important theme: that there is a fatal flaw in love which is betrayal, and has always been betrayal, since Eve and Adam, according to the Gospel of St. Geoffrey. Laruelle attempts to point out to Geoffrey that he is equally guilty; the alcoholic's every drink is a betrayal of the people who love him.

Having suggested the themes of betrayal and self-destruction, Lowry returns the Consul to his shrimps, and yet at the same time manages to emphasise the idea of self-destruction. Inviting Laruelle to join him in a shrimp, Firmin says, "Having a devilled scorpion --- a bedevilled cabrón." (U.V., p.221). Ironically, /

Ironically, / Laruelle is a "bedevilled cabrón, suffering the innuendoes of an alcoholic in an unpleasant frame of mind. The Consul himself might be seen as a "devilled scorpion", for he is certainly beset by his familiars, and, like the scorpion, he is attempting to poison himself to death. Thus the humble shrimp is associated with major themes of Under the Volcano; the themes of betrayal, wilful self-destruction, man's inhumanity to man, and the Fall of Man.

Ultimately, it is particularly difficult in the case of Lowry's fiction to maintain a technique of linear analysis and to produce a series of one-to-one correspondences between myth or symbol, and meaning; the meanings of a specific symbol evolve and are revealed in the course of each work (and sometimes in the course of his entire cycle) in juxtaposition with different themes at different times. In fact it is easier to produce such a series of correspondences when the symbols used are not of such vital importance to the themes of a novel. In pronouncing against the "one-to-one correspondence" analysis of symbolism, Saul Bellow emphasises that the best symbols are integral to their texts:

A true symbol is substantial, not accidental. You cannot avoid it, you cannot remove it. You can't take the handkerchief from "Othello", or the sea from "The Nigger of the Narcissus," or the disfigured feet from "Oedipus Rex". You can, however, read "Ulysses" without suspecting that wood shavings have to do with the Crucifixion or that the name Simon refers to the sin of Simony or that the hungers of the Dubliners at noon parallels that of the Laestrygonians. These are purely peripheral matters --- 10

Bellow highlights the dangers inherent in tracing symbolic patterning in literature; by confronting what are essentially only tangential and incidental meanings and significances, the critic may lose material of primary importance. This is the case assuming that the symbols are not such an integral part of the text and thematic meaning as they are in the first group of examples quoted by Bellow - the handkerchief, sea and disfigured feet, where the "substantial" nature of the symbols means that an analysis of them will inevitably include thematic and structural considerations.

Lowry's symbols and parallels with mythology are of Bellow's "substantial" quality. The symbols, myths and motifs which set up a complex of resonances throughout Lowry's works establish a framework on which themes, narrative structures and the philosophical discussion of ideas are pinned. The author's use of a variety of traditions as sources of symbol and myth facilitates the universalising of themes and the narrative, and means that a comparative discussion of ideas is possible. By his process of compulsive symbolic accretion (and by the active process of constantly accommodating the symbols which is induced in the reader), Lowry ensures that the reader will be coaxed into an understanding of his themes. There is no danger whatsoever that the subtleties and dignity of Lowry's work might be lost in the mire of symbolic exhumation, for the symbols, allusions to myth and motifs generated within Lowry's fiction are the very framework, the means not only of patterning but of ordering the external world and its mysteries.

Thus, since Lowry draws from several traditional sources of symbol - Classical, Alchemical/Cabbalistic, Christian, Romantic and modern reworkings of these sources - and does not restrict himself to any one source for each purpose, the layering of symbols, myth and motif upon each other becomes a process of symbolic accretion in which it is possible to view a history of symbolic and iconic thought. Interestingly, the alignments made have no intentionally hierarchical order of significance and no one tradition dominates as a source of symbolism or mythology, and this certainly helps Lowry to maintain the "historical overview" of his sources. The critic Makowiecki writes that, "no single analogy can be taken to represent the inner structure of the novel."¹¹ Thus, as Makowiecki warns, it is dangerous to allow of interpretations which make strenuous claims for understanding the novel in terms of a particular theme or motif.¹²

The diversity of Lowry's sources of symbolic and mythological

mythological/ material is quite astounding, he not only uses the sources as referents; but also achieves an integration of them. From Classical mythology, Lowry draws alignments with Oedipus, Prometheus, Ixion and Empedocles and Geoffrey Firmin in Under the Volcano is to suffer for his misdemeanours in like manner, with the Classical trappings of wheel, vultures and Tartarus threatening. Lowry not only incorporates the figures and symbols appropriate to each myth, he also conveys the essential climate of Classical tragedy in which the fate of the individual is predestined, with the motif "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" (U.V., p.217) and the atmosphere of brooding inevitability in which the Consul will not change his mind about wilful self-destruction, and where the towering, warning volcanoes seem to be moving closer and into sharper focus.

While Geoffrey is aligned with the ancient and fallen gods, he is equally positioned within the Christian world. Most importantly, the Consul is Man after the Fall, Adam sojourning in a modern and historically evil world. Lowry's technical innovation consists in harnessing the existing symbolism of Christian to his own individualistic and original ends. Geoffrey Firmin is a most strange Adam, drunk, in disarray (his fly undone) and rebelling against God in his retelling of the Eviction. His interpretation of the Fall of Man follows:

"--- What if Adam wasn't really banished from the place at all? --- What if his punishment really consisted, "the Consul continued with warmth, "in his having to go on living there, alone, of course - suffering, unseen, cut off from God ... Or perhaps," he added, in more cheerful vein, "perhaps Adam was the first property-owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cardenas, in fact - tee hee! - kicked him out. Eh? Yes, --- Yes indeed. Yes ... And of course the real reason for that punishment - his being forced to go on living in the garden, I mean, might well have been that the poor fellow, who knows, secretly loathed the place! Simply hated, and had done so all along. And that the Old Man found this out -" (U.V., pp.137-8)

In his retelling of the Fall (which, significantly, omits the concept of "forbidden fruit", although, ironically, the hypotheses are being put to Mr. Quincey, the walnut grower and the Consul /

Consul/ is searching in his jungle for alcohol which he desperately hopes he has had the foresight to hide there - his own brand of "forbidden fruit") Lowry demonstrates his wit and originality. There are also added dimensions established within the same passage in terms of the historical/economic context (the policies of Cardenas in Mexico), and the personal material (being "alone", "suffering" and "found out" as Firmin had been in his youth in the "Hell Bunker"), the modern context of Man evicted and "unseen, cut off from God" more than at any time in history. In Geoffrey Firmin's iconoclastic sophistry, Lowry demonstrates not only his ability to condense a great deal of highly significant material, but also his authorial capacity for a highly individualistic interpretation and use of traditional material.

Indeed, it should be stressed that Lowry's use of the sources of literary symbol and myth is always highly personalised by his drawing from a number of sources and imprinting his own eventual interpretation on them. Thus, for example, the volcano symbol does allude to AEtna and also has parallels with Himavat/ Himavant. The volcano also appears in the Faust myth, but although Lowry makes use of these basic and traditional attributes, the symbol is equally very much one which is quite unique to Under the Volcano in its specific meanings. While the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg are a "new" symbol, created by Scott Fitzgerald for Gatsby and not drawn from any particular tradition, Lowry's symbols are in general "old" symbols drawn from a number of traditions but often they are so transmuted by the layering process that they appear quite unique.

Not only are Lowry's symbols transfigured by his process of "sedimentation", they are also often the result of his own individualistic interpretation of the source traditions. The author's commentary in defence of the length of Under the Volcano illustrates the contention that his use of symbolism is individualistic and centres on his own idea of the symbol. The significance of the allusions and resonances created - and/

and/ the way in which these appealed to Lowry himself or might appeal to the reader - can be more important than a strict adherence to the existing traditions. Thus, the "12 hours in a day" (S.L. p.65) are the twelve hours in the Consul's day in Under the Volcano (seven in the morning to seven in the evening). Both numbers seven and twelve suit Lowry's own personal numerology more than anything else. Although Lowry claims that "the number 12 is of the highest symbolic importance in the Jewish Cabbala" (S.L., p.65) and certainly the number 12 is of great mystical significance in alchemy, according to various explications of the Cabbala, the number 10 would appear to be of higher symbolic significance, informing as it does the ordering of the complex images of God in the Sephirothic Tree. ¹³

However, if Lowry tends to transfigure known myths and symbols, most are still rooted in the Classical, "Mystical", Christian, Romantic and Modernist traditions. Unlike Fitzgerald, who creates a symbol which is unique and specific to his own work, Lowry usually employs symbols derived of the various traditions but which become specific to his works. Thus the Consul is not only aligned with Oedipus, Prometheus, Ixion and Empedocles in Classical mythology, but also with Adam, Christ, the Good Samaritan and Judas in the Christian tradition, with the Tarot "fool" and "hanging man", the Fisher King (a figure which becomes of vital importance in later novels), Everyman, Dante's "Virgil" as well as the alchemists and soothsayers lurking in the "Malebolge", Faust, Faustus, Cocteau's victim of malign gods, Don Quixote, the Ancient Mariner, Ahab, Peter Orlac and Maximilian. These are highly conflicting characters, but they have certain significant qualities when the group is taken as a whole. Many are questing, seeking either redemption or a knowledge beyond the normal domain of Man, others are paradigms for man's life, seeking either to set an example or to exonerate man's failings, while others are "Human Failing Incarnate" who must suffer for their flaws. Into this last category fall Hamlet and Othello, who also bear some relation to the Consul and his predicament.

The list of characters from the various traditions gives some indication of the tremendous range of alignments worked into Lowry's fiction. If the range appears to go from the extremes of the damned to the godlike, this is because this range is necessary to accommodate the themes which not only run throughout Under the Volcano, but throughout Lowry's cycle of fiction. In order to discuss the questions posed by his texts - about man's relationship to himself, to others and to God - Lowry incorporates "the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself" (S.L., p.66) and also the higher qualities of reasoning and integrity, into the consciousness which runs throughout his fiction, which is inevitably dominated by the mind of Geoffrey Firmin.

Similarly, the symbols Lowry develops in his fiction may appear equally contradictory when seen as indicators of Geoffrey Firmin's destiny. The symbols which occur throughout Lowry's fiction taken as a whole include the wheel, the dark wood/forest, volcano/mountain, spring/water, tower, labyrinth, minotaur, path, abyss/Malebolge, the Cross, phoenix, vultures, snake, ladder, goat, horse, dog, the wasteland and the garden. Again, a pattern emerges from the collection of symbols, and pairings of opposites such as vulture and phoenix, mountain and abyss, wasteland and garden, are intended to promote Lowry's thematic concerns. Indeed, Lowry wrote, "If I could only convey the effect of a man who was the very shape and motion of the world's doom --- but at the same time the living prophecy of its hope!"¹⁴ This statement confirms the contention that the apparent contradictions in the lists of character alignment and symbols are necessary to promote the thematic concern with a main protagonist who is intended to be damned and godlike at the same time.

It is the critic, Stefan Makowiecki, who, in his short but frequently insightful study, Malcolm Lowry and the Lyrical Convention of Fiction, draws attention to the importance of/

of/ coexisting polarities in Lowry's fiction. Makowiecki writes that,

The two antithetical notions - doom and hope - embodied in the figure of Geoffrey Firmin are not the only two polarities in the novel. A closer examination of all major symbols will show that duality and sometimes multiplicity of meanings is a very characteristic trait which has been observed by Lowry with the utmost persistence [sic] in order to support and emphasize the central paradox. 15

Thus Makowiecki notes that Lowry intended the conflicts between symbols and myths, and the conflicts within individual symbols as part of his literary technique. If Geoffrey Firmin is to oscillate between Heaven and Hell, so, too, must the symbols, mythical figures, myths and motifs which are associated with him.

Two aspects of the symbols which Lowry draws from existing traditions might be emphasised. First, many of the symbols - which often occur primarily in the actual landscape - exhibit different levels of meaning because they occur in various traditions. Thus the wheel is primarily the Ferris Wheel rotating over the festivities of the Mexican Day of the Dead. At this level, it is important because its action causes the Consul to lose his passport, making it impossible for him to prove his true identity to the Mexican fascist police at the end of the novel. But the wheel is also Ixion's wheel of fire, eternal recurrence, instrument of Cocteau's gods - the "Machine Infernale" - the structure of Under the Volcano, and again of The Voyage that Never Ends, and, according to the author himself, "it is Buddha's wheel of the law --- or --- the wheel of time whirling backwards." (S.L., pp. 70-1).

The second aspect to be observed in some of the major symbols is that of the "two antithetical notions" which may be contained within the same symbol. The example of the volcano has already been noted. A further example is the "Farolito" which draws Geoffrey inexorably towards his fate. In most ways, this cantina acts as a wreckers' beacon, and it is equally a labyrinth, a taste of hell on earth, a prison tower and a Tower of Babel./

It is certainly a Tartarus, and yet it is also "sanctuary" (U.V., p.339) to the Consul. The "Farolito" is "the Lighthouse that invites the storm, and lights it!" (U.V., p.203), an invitation to disaster and yet at the same time, a beacon offering safe passage. The antithesis established between the qualities of the disastrous wreckers' beacon and the glimpse of the True Light is consistent with the general contradictory dynamics which run throughout Lowry's fiction - the dynamics of ascent/descent, light/dark, hope/despair and salvation/damnation.

To maintain structures in fiction depending on the synthesis of opposing concepts makes heavy demands on the technique of the author. Richard Hauer Costa emphasises the difficulty of conserving the tension between knowledge and action thus:

F. Scott Fitzgerald once observed (in The Crackup) that the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. His own mental crackup occurred, he believed, at the point where he was no longer able to balance the conviction that all was hopeless with the determination - even the illusion - that one ought to make things otherwise.¹⁶

While Lowry was manifestly able "to hold two opposed ideas in the mind" as his use of myth and symbol demonstrates, it is quite possibly the Consul's alcoholic inability to maintain the illusions of marital happiness in the face of a much easier hopelessness that makes him hurtle towards his destiny. Geoffrey Firmin often exhibits a remarkable degree of self-knowledge, but will not act upon it, and wilfully refuses to "desire deliverance". Thus between darkness and light, hell and heaven, and all the other antithetical pairings which occur in Lowry's fiction, there must be the will to act, and for the Consul at least, "The will of man is unconquerable" (U.V., p.209).

Lowry, then superimposes his own pairing of symbols and concepts upon a framework of existing intellectual and literary tradition in order to produce a pattern of myth, symbol and motif which is inextricably linked with the thematic concerns in his/

his/ fiction. In many ways, this technique of patterning identifies him as a unique voice in literature, and yet his fiction does have an affinity with the work of other modern novelists drawing on the Symbolist mode. Melvin Friedman points to certain major concerns in the Symbolist novel;

--- the concern with form realised through sequences of consciousness, --- the relation between the characters and time, --- the concern with the relationship between art and life --- the way in which musical preoccupations, so important to Symbolist thinking about language and form, link the --- writers. 17

Friedman might well have been speaking of Lowry, who "was nothing if not a symbolizer", ¹⁸ and whose fiction shows that he shared these concerns.

First, then, Lowry's fiction demonstrates a "concern with form realised through sequences of consciousness". The form of Under the Volcano is cyclical, and the repetition in microcosm in Chapter 1 of the events of Chapters 2 - 12 provides evidence of a spiralling downwards (because of the intervening change in historical context). If Geoffrey Firmin has descended through the machinations of the Ferris Wheel into an inspired, sometimes amorphous dream in which the over-riding consciousness moves inexorably towards the abyss, Laruelle in Chapter 1 is equally stepping onto that same path towards what shows all the signs of being a very similar destiny. The parallel consciousness of Laruelle's journey recalls the events of the year before, prefigures the story about to unfold, and informs the structuring of the events of the novel. The "sequences of consciousness" in Chapter 1 - the thoughts and memories of Laruelle, and the Consul's letter which he finds - prefigure the atmosphere and consciousness which is to dominate the novel.

Indeed, while a narrative line is maintained by Lowry, the coherence of Under the Volcano is best promoted by the interior workings of the Consul's mind, be he face down in the middle of the road, hurled to extremity by the Ferris Wheel, or philosophising on the lavatory! However, the stream-of-consciousness/

consciousness/ writing in Lowry's fiction does not serve the same purposes as, for example, it serves in Joyce's writing. Although Lowry shares with Joyce and Eliot the preoccupation with myth and symbol, his aims are somewhat different, as Spender observes in his introduction to Under the Volcano:

--- Lowry's approach to writing was autobiographic, personal, subjective even, whereas the aim of writers like Joyce and Eliot, whom he adored, dreaded, imitated, misunderstood, was to invent a modern "objective" literature which was purged of autobiographic, subjective elements. 19

Certainly, Lowry is concerned with a more subjective view of the world, but after events have been filtered through the idiosyncratic and highly individualised consciousness of Geoffrey Firmin, and attached to numerous myths, symbols and motifs (a centripetal dynamic reflecting back to the inner recesses of the mind), this attachment to the symbolic tradition moves the concerns and themes back into the exterior world in a centrifugal movement towards universality.

Spender continues the distinctions between Lowry's work and that of the mainstream Modernists thus:

Symbol and myth are used in Ulysses in order to absorb the characters at certain moments into a kind of cosmic consciousness. Lowry uses them with opposite effect in order to create the interior world of the Consul. 20

While it is certainly true that Lowry's great concern is to delineate the workings of one individual mind, to the point where exterior reality is forced to accommodate the interior landscape (hence the symbols which are also landmarks and Mexican features - the barranca, the Farolito, and the volcanoes - have a personal message for Geoffrey Firmin as to the nature of his destiny), the move back outwards takes the Consul into a historical and cultural context, and this is not an insignificant level in Lowry's work. Thus, while Joyce demonstrates an interest in the workings of the human mind, Lowry focusses on the workings of an individual mind, certainly, but one operating within a vast intellectual and cultural landscape.

Thus the form of Lowry's work is dictated by workings of the main protagonist's mind, into whose thought are woven symbols, myths and motifs which are to shape his destiny. Indeed, in Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid, where the overall pattern is one of descent and then ascent (as opposed to the uncompromising descent of Geoffrey Firmin), the narrative consciousness seems to drop intimations of ascent into the thoughts of the main protagonist, Sigbjørn Wilderness. Consciously, Sigbjørn sees his return to Mexico as a descent into the past:

[he] --- began to go downstairs - it was much as if by so entering the past, he had stumbled into a labyrinth, with no thread to guide him, where the minotaur threatened at every step, and which was moreover a labyrinth that now at each turn led infallibly to a precipice, over which one might fall at any moment, at the bottom of which was an abyss. (D.A.T.G., p.97)

The form of the novel is then dictated by the series of excursions into the past (on which Sigbjørn is accompanied by his wife, Primrose) which are no mere day-trips but symbolic of imminent descent into the abyss. The heralds of downfall in Under the Volcano - the vultures - circle over their heads, but in contrast, in the dark recesses of Sigbjørn's mind, a phoenix is struggling to emerge:

"At Phoenix, Arizona - Phoenix - and had the phoenix clapped his wings? Daniel had written him - " (D.A.T.G., p. 65)

The premonition of rebirth is largely unconscious, but the seeds of salvation have been planted in Sigbjørn's thoughts, and the idea of ascent dictates the form of the novel.

Continuing the parallel with Friedman's analysis of the Symbolist novelists' concerns, Lowry also focusses on the "relation between characters and time". G.P. Jones, in an article entitled "Malcolm Lowry: Time and the Artist", writes,

Lowry is more disturbed than most authors by the parasitical nature of the creative process, by fiction's insatiable appetite for the past experience of its creator and by the temporal paradoxes it introduces into the writer's life as he relives the past in the fictional present of his artefacts. 21

Lowry parallels this statement very closely in the following extract:

Look, I have succeeded, I have transformed, single-handed, my life-in-death into life, nay what is more I am going to make that life-in-death pay for the future, in hard cash, I have come back to show you that not an hour, not a moment of my drunkenness, my continual death, was not worth it: there is no dross of even the worst of these hours, not a drop of mescal that I have not turned into pure gold, not a drink I have not made sing. (D.A.T.G., p.223)

What Sigbjørn Wilderness is saying is that he is determined to extort recompense for the "insatiable appetite" which his writing has for his own past sufferings; and he hopes that in that recompense, there will be an easing of the burden of the past. The sufferings of the temporal world will be transcended by his creative powers.

The above quote from Dark as the Grave highlights not only the temporal relationship between creator and creation, but also what Friedman terms the "relationship between art and life". The life of Sigbjørn in Mexico has become the art of Sigbjørn; the work which he refers back to is his novel, The Valley of the Shadow of Death. By Sigbjørn's account of this work, it bears a remarkable similarity to Under the Volcano which was in danger of being entitled, The Day of the Dead because two other books with "Volcano" in the title had been published in 1946 (S.L., p.114). Douglas Day also remembers that Under the Volcano was originally to have been called The Valley of the Shadow of Death ²². Sigbjørn's return to Mexico is providing the experiential material for his next novel, "Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid" (D.A.T.G., p.171) and Sigbjørn's experience is the subject of Lowry's novel of the/

the/ same title! Thus the art-life relationship, even at this simplest of levels, becomes an inextricable meshing of the two. "Fiction" and "reality" are so blurred that the two appear to merge, as Sigbjørn also suggests when he asks, "Who had said, Life is like anything, if you look at it like that?" (D.A.I.G., p. 136) Life may even be like Art, if you want to look it like that ...

Thus Lowry's fiction demonstrates a greater affinity with the tradition of the Symbolist novel, than with his Modernist influences. Further evidence of Lowry's concern with artistic technique and with the art and time/life relationship will be presented. What Lowry does share with Eliot and Joyce is the need to order the apparent chaos of the twentieth century, and he looks in similar directions for mythic and symbolic traditions which might provide analogies of the modern condition. What Lowry does thereafter bears no great similarity to the Modernists, although he may not be working in such diametric opposition to them as Spender suggests. Primarily, Lowry draws on a greater number of traditions and sources for his myths and symbols and then relates his motifs to these sources. The author's inclination to extract from the numerous and diverse sources, and the meanings engendered by these, the aspects of the various given "systems" which will advance his themes leads to the presence of apparently conflicting material in Lowry's fiction. Furthermore, the process of accretion, whereby symbols and "symbol-systems" are superimposed upon each other, results in a dualistic and even multiple appreciation of the world within the novel.

Where the mythological foundations of Lowry's fiction appear to contradict one another, this might instead be seen as the authorial synthesis of dualistic ideas. The aim to reconcile antithetical elements becomes clear in Dark as the Grave, the theme of which is not only descent, but also ascent. The novel presents numerous clear pairings, of church/brothel, garden/desert, fire/water, hope/despair, and butterfly/dog (the Fool in the Tarot having a butterfly leading him on towards temptation and a dog nipping his heels to warn him). Fernando - the "Friend" for/

for/ whom Sigbjørn is searching - is both a life and a death force, and the labyrinthine grave contains either an inescapable minotaur, Sigbjørn's nemesis, or the phoenix (which may arise from it). Although the elements of the pairings are present in Under the Volcano, they are not so clearly established as pairings at that stage, because the symbolisation must be weighted towards the downfall of the Consul.

Ultimately, even the downfall of the Consul is part of a dualistic concern with the plight of the individual (for example, the fates of Firmin and Sigbjørn) and with the destiny of humanity in a climate of "the universal drunkenness of war, of the period that precedes war." (S.L., p.66) In such a climate, the symbolic and mythological referents used by Lowry are analogies of the fallen individual, and for mankind in chaos. For this purpose, Lowry draws on Classical myth and tragedy, religious and Christian iconography, ancient Mexican tradition (the Mayan hell) and more recent Mexican history, mystical and Cabbalistic sources, Tarot and alchemy, and then on literary analogies including the Faust myth, Dante's Divine Comedy, the tragedies of Shakespeare, Gogol and Dostoevsky. There are also the more obscure and arcane references to Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, and to the Modernist sense of a fallen world (with references to the "wasteland" and the Fisher King myth). Another level of symbolisation is founded on contemporary referents of Lowry: the rise of Nazism, the Spanish Civil War, "The Hands of Orlac", and newspaper headlines proclaiming mass degeneration, depravity and guilt. At a final emotional level, Lowry creates his own personal imagery, specific to the novels, of fire and sterility, of the Farolito, of the vultures, pariah dogs, the Indian and the horse. The works of Malcolm Lowry constitute a "forest of symbols", indeed, with the books "written on numerous planes with provision made, it was my fond hope for almost every kind of reader." (S.L., p.66)

CHAPTER 2: NOTES

1. Malcolm Lowry in Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) p.273.
2. William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol, (Bloomington, U.S.A.: Indiana State University Press, 1974) p.6.
3. Paul Valéry in Jean Cassou, The Concise Encyclopedia of Symbolism (Hertfordshire: Omega Books Ltd., 1984) p.153.
4. Tindall, The Literary Symbol, p.6.
5. Ibid., p.11.
6. Ibid., p.p. 12-13.
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9. David Markson, "Myth in Under the Volcano" in Prairie Schooner (Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, Winter 1963/64) p.341.
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20. Ibid., p.XII.
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22. Day, "Preface" to Lowry, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, p.11.

PART I: Chapter 3

"Symbolic Patterning: Consistency to the
Point of Obsession"

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CHAPTER 3

"Symbolic Patterning: Consistency to the Point
of Obsession"

Lowry's prose cycle - The Voyage That Never Ends - was to have extended the thematic concerns of Under the Volcano, which was planned as the fulcrum of the cycle. The themes of Under the Volcano - man's relationship with himself, with "the forces --- which cause him to be terrified of himself" (S.L., p.66), with his fellow man, and with God - are influenced by the fact of the Consul's inability to love, his toiling under the apparently intolerable burden of the past, and his feelings of guilt. The predicament of the individual is reflected on a macrocosmic level by the rising level of man's inhumanity to man in the modern world. These same themes are central to the rest of the cycle, but the bias imposed by the informing consciousness (which is usually linked with that of the main protagonist) influences whether a particular work is part of a successful striving towards the Light, or of the descent into Darkness. Not only does Lowry maintain this thematic coherence in the parts of the cycle available, the consistency of the symbolisation in keeping with these thematic concerns demonstrates a powerful and almost obsessive control over his material which, with his usual reworkings would in all probability have become even greater had he lived.

Lowry planned a cycle which would constitute a modern prose parallel to Dante's Divine Comedy. While this remained the general intention, Lowry's specific intentions are not known for their clarity. From the evidence available, Lowry's first reference to such a sequence occurs in the defence of Under the Volcano to Jonathan Cape. The author writes,

I also rewrote The Last Address in 1940-41 and rechristened it Lunar Caustic, and conceived the idea of a trilogy entitled The Voyage That Never Ends for your firm (nothing less than a trilogy would do) with the Volcano as the first, infernal part, a much amplified Lunar Caustic as a second, purgatorial part, and an enormous novel I was also working on called In Ballast to the White Sea (which I lost when my house burned down as I believe I wrote you) as the paradisaical third part, the whole to concern the battering the human spirit takes (doubtless because it is overreaching itself ¹) in its ascent towards its true purpose.

(S.L., p.63)

Lowry's plan had at this point already been sabotaged by the loss of In Ballast to the White Sea, of which only a fragment of about nine pages remains. The notes for the expansion of Lunar Caustic were also lost in a fire (S.L., p.114) and the existing version of Lunar Caustic (published posthumously) has been reconstructed by Margerie Lowry and Earle Birney, who claim, "We have not added a line. Malcolm, of course, would then have rewritten, but who could do it as he would have?" ²

At this point, the complexity of Lowry's intentions intervenes:

As for me, I have a long short story more or less finished that is out of the Intermezzo part of the novel - this whole part will be called Eridanus. This part of the part is known as "The Forest Path to the Spring", and we aim to get it off when Malatesta ₃ is out of the way. (S.L., p.245)

"The Forest Path to the Spring" has again been published posthumously, and exists in the form of a twelve-part novella. Lowry's final reference to his sequence in the letters available concerns the lost manuscript of In Ballast:

Here is the plot of the book lost by fire. (In In Ballast to the White Sea - once the sort of Paradise of the trilogy of which the Volcano was the first or "Inferno" section - now incorporated hypothetically elsewhere in the whole bolus of 5 books - I think to be called The Voyage That Never Ends. ---

(S.L., p.255)

For Lowry, his "death by misadventure" ⁴ meant that his mammoth undertaking of writing much of the sequence, and integrating what he had already written into the sequence was indeed a creative "Voyage That Never Ends".

The "bolus of 5 books" to which Lowry referred is not described by Lowry elsewhere, and his precise intentions thus remain unclear to date. Nor has the matter been clarified to any great extent by Lowry scholars. Conrad Knickerbocker refers to The Voyage as "a sequence of seven novels",⁵ but fails to postulate what these might have been. However, David Miller in Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends suggests that Ultramarine would have represented "Initiation"⁶ a descent, Under the Volcano as Hell, Lunar Caustic as Purgatory, Dark as The Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid and La Mordida as second chances to transcend the Hell that is Mexico (or intimations of ascent and redemption), The Forest Path to the Spring as a Paradise, and October Ferry to Gabriola as an ending to the threat of eviction, but a new stage in the journey.

Whether Ultramarine would ultimately have become a part of the undertaking is open to debate; Lowry had often disinherited this his first novel, partly because of its highly derivative nature. It owed much to the Norwegian novelist Nordahl Grieg and to Conrad Aitken's Blue Voyage, in fact too much for Lowry's comfort. Ultramarine probably represented to Lowry the origins of the "lack of integrity" (S.L., p.64) to which he refers in the Jonathan Cape letter. Writing to Albert Erskine, his editor at Reynal and Hitchcock, Lowry says:

I'm very flattered you ask about Ultramarine.
I have a copy but I think the book, which set
out to be good, is an inexcusable mess of which
I've been very ashamed for 13 years. (S.L., p.113)

Five years later, he was no less embarrassed by an enquiry about the novel by David Markson, and wrote to him, "Don't even try to look for Ultramarine (the thought hurts my feelings) which is not worth reading and which I shall rewrite one day maybe." (S.L., p.269)

However, the suggestion that Lowry was going to rewrite his "bête noir" would be consistent with the idea that Ultramarine would have been integrated into The Voyage That Never Ends.

The edition of Ultramarine now available incorporates the changes made by Lowry since the first publication by Cape in/

in/ 1933. Written following Lowry's own voyage on board the Pyrrhus as a deck-hand, Ultramarine describes the initiation of its protagonist, Dana Hilliot into the world of men. David Miller writes:

The voyage on the Oedipus Tyrannus is likened several times to a descent from the naive faeryland of adolescent love into the circles of hell - of Dana's "proving" ---
And indeed, Dana's 'descent' prepares us for the infernal one of the Consul, who lives in an existential and spiritual hell. 7

The lasting value of Ultramarine, in terms of the purposes of this thesis, is the prefiguring of the themes and concerns which were to grip Lowry throughout the rest of his creative opus.

For example, the ship, the 'Oedipus Tyrannus' figures not only in Ultramarine, but also in Under the Volcano, as the ship on which Hugh serves his "true apprenticeship" to the sea:

When he returned to the Philoctetes a month later in Singapore he was a different man. He had dysentery. The Oedipus Tyrannus had not disappointed him. Her food was poor. No refrigeration, simply an icebox. And a chief steward (the dirty 'og) who sat all day in his cabin smoking cigarettes. (U.V., p.170)

For Lowry, the "Pyrrhus" had offered little corroboration of his romantic view of the sea, of experiences of privation, camaraderie and adventure:

--- on the Pyrrhus there was no fighting, whoring, or murdering going on in the "men's quarters", and precious little drinking. Worse, not only was the food not bad, it was positively delicious when compared with what The Leys had been offering him for the past four years. 8

And the "Oedipus Tyrannus" appears briefly in The Forest Path to the Spring as ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ ΤΥΡΑΝΝΟΣ (H.U.O.L., p.219) one of the freighters in the harbour.

Not only are the sea and the voyage recurrent images in Lowry's fiction (all of which was to be integrated as The Voyage That Never Ends), but the Oedipus myth forms the basis of the tragic element in the novels. Lowry's reference to Oedipus/

Oedipus/ (in a letter to David Markson) is oblique, masked by an artful patina of characteristic Lowrian wit:

Have you got your Cocteau's Machine Infernale well oiled? sleeping with Yeats under the bed? In Cocteau the Sphinx falls in love with Oedipus, and then eats him, I think; I forget but anyway it's mighty powerful stuff. ---

All the glory that was Greece overturned in this pulsating drama of a mother's love that triumphed even beyond the grave to give psychoanalysis its proudest name! THE STORY BEHIND THE FREUD LEGEND. ---

See the young Oedipus and the Lion-Faced Lady! See the Sphinx feeding! How the Young King saw the riddle of the Sphinx and what he did about it! HEAR THE FIRST AND MOST SEXUAL QUIZ ON EARTH! At all Vista-Vision Book Stores. (S.L., pp. 393-4)

However cleverly masked this reference to the Oedipus myth may be, it is possible to detect that it has significance to the author.

Indeed, the novel Under the Volcano started life as a short story - "Under the Volcano" - which centres on a somewhat incestuous relationship between Hugh and Yvonne, engaged to be married and the Consul, who is Yvonne's father in the short story version. The short story became the original version of Chapter VIII of Under the Volcano, and the relationships among the characters were altered to make Yvonne the Consul's wife, Hugh the Consul's half-brother, and Lowry introduced Laruelle, friend of the Consul's early years and brother in Faustian proclivities. In the novel, Yvonne is loved by all three men, and the fates of the characters are related to an incestuous tragedy. To the Consul, as to Oedipus, God is an unfriendly, even vengeful force. Where Oedipus says to Creon, "May God bless you for this - and be a friendlier/Guardian to you than he has been to me", the Consul's God issues punishment:

And of course the real reason for that punishment - his being forced to go on living in the garden, I mean, might well have been that the poor fellow, who knows, secretly loathed the place! Simply hated it, and had done so all along. And that the Old Man found this out - (U.V., pp. 137-8)

As the Consul is saying this, and referring to the punitive and authoritarian "Old Man" (God), the cat, which he calls "Oedipuss" is stalking him through the grass. This tragic mode (mitigated as above by Lowry's wit and punning) has been firmly established from the opening of Under the Volcano, with an epigraph from Sophocles' Antigone which includes the words, "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain." (U.V., p.7)

It is in Under the Volcano that Lowry finds a precise focus for his impulse towards a tragic mode, towards a fictional enterprise dealing with downfall and descent. While parts of his cycle deal with the rebirth of the human consciousness, Lowry's creative powers and symbolic texturing seem most powerful in hell, and the parts of the cycle dealing with the "ascent" are permeated by a nostalgia for the "good old hellish days" of suffering and torment. The emphasis on downfall in Under the Volcano is also suggested by the two other epigraphs: Bunyan's, "I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance", and Goethe's "Whosoever unceasingly strives upwards ... him can we save". (U.V., p.7) Geoffrey Firmin emerges as a character who does not desire his deliverance "with all his soul", nor does he "unceasingly strive upwards", and yet while damnation is so much more convenient, Geoffrey does engage in lengthy dispute with himself as to which route he is going to choose.

Geoffrey Firmin's tragedy presents a dichotomy to the reader. On the one hand, it would appear that right from the outset of the novel, the Consul must die in order to play out the context of inevitability which has been established. In other words, the Consul must play out his own tragedy of necessity. On the other hand, he continually debates the issue of his destiny with himself, and it appears that if he would only desire his deliverance "with all his soul" and "unceasingly strive upwards" he would be saved. In other words, it appears that he is free to choose his salvation.

The tension produced by these two conflicting views of tragedy - playing out one's destiny of necessity and choosing one's destiny of one's own free will - arises from Lowry's use of both Greek mythology and the Christian tradition. 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. 9

Thus the problem in identifying the tragic mode of Lowry's Under the Volcano arises from Lowry's offsetting of Greek against Christian tragedy. The Oedipus mythology, which is related to the Ferris Wheel as the ominous powers of Time and Fate (adumbrating forces that catch men up - and can impose lunging reversals, too - and ferry them from one domain to another in an unending cycle) aligns the events of Under the Volcano firmly with the Greek conceptions of "Fate" and "the gods". On the other hand, the recurrent Christian allusions - the Dantean parallels, the Consul as Christ-figure and as a recalcitrant Adam who finds the whole idea of the Garden of Eden unsatisfactory - provide a complex and apparently incongruous undertow of Christian tragedy.

In employing symbolism drawn from both orientations to tragedy, Lowry invites 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, the reader should believe in the awesome and appalling inevitability of the Consul's fate (the sense of incontrovertible doom established in Chapter I - "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" ¹⁰) which is the tragedy awaited from the outset of the novel. But the reader should believe, too, that the Consul thinks he has some choice in the outcome.

The balancing of the two perspectives on the Consul's fate 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".

In the concatenation of events which bring about the downfall of the Consul, two are most favoured by the critics: his alcoholism and his "inability to love". Douglas Day cites both factors as the cause of Firmin'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 --- 11

He fancies that he is a black magician who has, through 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. 12

These factors in the Consul's downfall are both weighted down with symbolic underpinnings to an extent which gives them, and Firmin, tragic dimensions. For example, the Consul's alcoholism is linked with an abuse of occult powers, and this abuse is in turn related to the Faust mythology, and to the inversion of the Tree of Life and the Cabbalistic idea of the Qliphoth, the abyss to which all perverted aspiration leads. In Dante's Inferno, the "Malebolge" is the eighth circle of Hell. It serves as the domain of soothsayers and necromancers - those who have abused their powers to look into the future. In this way, the Consul appears 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 have both 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".¹³

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 his first love, drink - Under the Volcano 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, as suggested by his "war-crime". In many ways he is not only an Adam and a Faustian figure, but also a contemporary archetype. His fall is symptomatic of that of twentieth-century society in the throes of transition to that most advanced and insidious stage of civilisation where chaos masquerades as order. Geoffrey Firmin, like society, will perish merely by self-destruction - by the sophistry of obsolescence - rather than by 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/

and/ his nihilism is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Geoffrey Firmin also lacks any sense of social or political responsibility, although the novel is set within an explicit social, cultural 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 an evasion which will very definitely catch up with him. He mocks half-brother, Hugh, for his,

"--- desire to fight for fiddlededee, 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.

The Consul is so overwhelmingly inward-looking, that the Mexican environment which the reader sees has been filtered by the strongly egotistical perceptions of the protagonist/narrator. Where politics, and the struggles of mankind are dismissed as "hypocrisy" and "hokery pokery", it is because the Consul at this point views his own personal freedom to be "bugger all". Likewise, the Mexican landscape is filtered and represented in terms of a symbolic matrix of Firmin's concerns. Thus the Ferris Wheel is a representation of the machinations of Time, Fate and punitive, quirky gods. The barranca/abyss serves as a constant reminder of punishment, and the various gardens likewise.

It is to this Mexican landscape, and to this context of downfall that Sigbjørn Wilderness returns in Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid. He is paying a visit to the hell that his protagonist in his novel The Valley of the Shadow of Death found in Mexico. Thus Sigbjørn is equipped with a similar intellectual and spiritual configuration to Geoffrey Firmin in Under the Volcano. His visit is one "of descent,/"

descent/, tremendous regression --- dropping straight down the world" (D.A.T.G., p.19), as Lowry establishes in the very first paragraph. And it is to the same symbolic configuration that he returns, to "the archetypal daemonic forms of abyss, labyrinth, burnt forest, monster, blighted garden, ruined castle, dark and ominous forces at work in an ancient and dangerous world."¹⁴

In many respects, the greater part of Dark as the Grave is highly repetitious. Sigbjørn and his wife, Primrose, take day excursions into the past that is constituted by the events of The Valley of the Shadow of Death/Under the Volcano, to the scenes of his, and the Consul's downfall - Oaxaca, the Farolito, Cuernavaca and Laruelle's tower house. For Sigbjørn, time has done little to heal the experiences of Mexico. Like the Consul, he still fears for his marriage, fears authority and fears Mexico. However, unlike the Consul who knows that "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain", Sigbjørn does not acknowledge a fear of death.

It requires Sigbjørn's return visit to the Malebolge, his entrance into the labyrinth, into the silence of the grave, to begin to understand that his search is not merely for his friend Juan Fernando Martinez (who has appeared in Under the Volcano):

Here, in this bed, he felt none of the strangeness of Mexico, the fear that passes all understanding, the fear that possesses one like a paralysis. It was silent and in this silence he felt safe. It was a silence like the silence of the dark grave itself. (D.A.T.G., p.215).

It is after this immersion in the horrors of his former life that Sigbjørn Wilderness sees that the true purpose of his attempt to find Juan Fernando is not merely sordid and terrible, and nor is his friend simply a life-force:

And of all of these things [friendship and love] Fernando was in some way the symbol. No one could be more alive or life-giving in spite of all than he was. Which made it all the more puzzling that what all these things were that he loved so much should also so obviously be death (D.A.T.G., p.235)

Although Sigbjørn has suspected that his return to Mexico is not merely to lay ghosts of the past to rest, but to join them, he finds that Fernando's legacy to his country promises rebirth to Sigbjørn, too.

For Juan Fernando has left a response to the question which is still appearing in front of Sigbjørn at the end of the novel: "¿Le gusta este jardín?" - "Do you like this garden?". And Sigbjørn finds that he does indeed like the garden created by Fernando's work for the Banco Ejidal:

Sigbjørn remembered eight years before the dreadful poverty of the villages --- This time he was conscious of a great change, directly the result of the work of the Bank. Everywhere one saw rich green fields, felt a sense of fruitfulness, and of the soil responding and of men living as they ought to live, in the wind and sun and close to the soil and loving the soil ---

And then a field of young, new wheat - pale green in contrast to the dark green of alfalfa - and then quince and peach orchards, young trees, obviously planted within the last ten years and blossoming - ... The Banco Ejidal had become a garden. (D.A.T.G., pp. 266-7)

It is this vision of a "Paradise" on earth which drags Dark as the Grave out of mere repetition of the Lowrian obsessions.

If, as Douglas Day grudgingly writes of Dark as the Grave, "We can lament its imperfect state, but we can also be glad to have it even as it is", ¹⁵ our lament is for the lack in the rendering of this "Paradise". Sigbjørn's final emergence into a world of hope is certainly lacking in the full Lowrian undertone of mythical and symbolic allusion. However, even from the novel as it stands (as a version spliced together by Marjerie Lowry and Douglas Day) two considerable strengths emerge. First, Sigbjørn's battle with the minotaur which is a part of himself is rendered with characteristic Lowrian mastery; the battle through Hell and back again demonstrates the author in his element, commanding galaxies of symbol and wit.

Second, even if the novel has not been subjected to the rigours of Lowrian symbolic alchemy to produce the complexity of layering which made Under the Volcano, the fine balancing of Sigbjørn's impulse towards death, and aspirations towards redemption/rebirth is extraordinary. Lowry maintains both the "daemonic" symbolism of Under the Volcano (to which he has added allusions to Roderick Usher, and Sigbjørn's novel, The Valley of the Shadow of Death for good measure!) and the symbolism which prefigures rebirth in Sigbjørn - the phoenix, the minotaur, a much stronger weighting of the Church, Cross, candle of hope and crown of thorns. The context of Dark as the Grave is overwhelmingly Christian - Sigbjørn at least tries constantly to pray - and, in line with the Under the Volcano epigraphs, Sigbjørn does eventually manifestly "desire his deliverance".

The critic, George Woodcock, also sees Dark as the Grave mainly in terms of the light it throws on Under the Volcano:

--- Dark as the Grave - one realises in the first twenty pages - is likely to be of interest only to Lowry cultists and to literary scholars ---
No-one who has not read Under the Volcano beforehand will be able to follow the innumerable and complex allusions to its episodes and characters which form part of the basic texture of Dark as the Grave. Indeed, that work as it now stands exists only in terms of its relationship to the earlier novel. 16

This thesis will suggest a somewhat greater value inherent in Dark as the Grave, and not simply a merit resulting from Lowry's "theme and variations" method of working within the continuum that was to be The Voyage That Never Ends. For the symbolism in Dark as the Grave which prefigures Sigbjørn's "rebirth", the symbolically rendered hope which alternately appears to be just outwith and just within his grasp, are perhaps more convincing representations of the impulse towards deliverance than Lowry achieves even in The Forest Path to the Spring and October Ferry to Gabriola.

Undoubtedly, though, the insight into Lowry's pairing of symbols which is to be gained in Dark as the Grave is of more value to the critic than the reader. For it is in Dark as the Grave that the pairing of polarised symbols becomes most evident, and this dualism is entirely appropriate to a work concerned with descent into the Inferno and rebirth into an Edenic world. Thus there is a clear pairing of desert and waterfall, vulture and phoenix, dog and butterfly, church and brothel, garden and abyss; the Styx is seen as symbolic of both youth and death, and Fernando is both a life-force and death instinct.

What emerges in Lowry's fiction is that he is never as comfortable as when he is writing in large measure of his own particular medium - the Hell that is in the heart, and the torment, the "battering the human spirit takes --- in its ascent towards its true purpose." (S.L., p.63) And La Mordida, a journal which is still in the process of being edited, would again have placed the protagonist in that Lowrian analogue of Hell, Mexico. La Mordida belongs with Dark as the Grave, in that they both sprang from Lowry's return to Mexico in 1945.

The hero of Lunar Caustic - William Plantagenet - is, like Geoffrey Firmin and Sigbjørn Wilderness, an alcoholic whose existence in the world is at best precarious. Lunar Caustic was to have been placed between Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave as a Purgatorio, and yet Plantagenet's "pilgrimage" into the chaos of New York, and the microcosmic representation of the city as a mental hospital, is a struggle in a Purgatory placed very much closer to Hell than to Paradise.

As he drinks himself into the very depths of a binge, Plantagenet is taunted by those deeply-rooted signals of a world in distress: "Tabloid headlines: Thousands collapse in Heat Wave. Hundreds Dead. Roosevelt Raps Warmongers. Civil War in Spain," (H.U.O.L., p.296) and the names of boats moored in a wharf, "Empty Pockets III", "Dunwoiken" and "Lovebird". (H.U.O.L., p.297) These signals point towards the recurrent/

recurrent/ concerns of Lowry's fiction, to the impending doom of the world, and the fate of the individual who is unloved and unable to love. And the chaos of New York is rendered precisely in terms of the Consul's - and Sigbjørn's abyss:

--- Like some cry of the imprisoned spirit of New York itself, that spirit haunting the abyss between Europe and America and brooding like futurity over the Western Ocean. (H.U.O.L., p.298)

And is towards a purgatory which is both hospital and prison which Plantagenet is drunkenly reeling.

As he enters the hospital, Plantagenet shouts out the purpose to his pilgrimage:

'Veut-on que je disparaisse, que je plonge, à la recherche de l'anneau ... I am sent to save my father, to find my son, to heal the eternal horror of three, to resolve the immedicable horror of opposites!' (H.U.O.L., p.296)

The relationships he establishes in the hospital are with two figures - Mr. Kalowsky and a young boy, Garry - who become 'father' and 'son' to him. Mr. Kalowsky is a senile old Jew, whose malaise seems to be no greater than the fact that he has lived too long, seen too much and that the mass of the years behind him threaten him. This idea recalls Sigbjørn and the Consul, toiling under the weight of the past, and for Mr. Kalowsky, as for the Consul, "Time is a fake healer anyhow". (U.V., p.45)

Garry has committed some horrible crime, but to Bill Plantagenet, he has the soul of a potential young Rimbaud, telling apposite tales of chaos and destruction. Although Garry is illiterate, and "apparently psychotic", ¹⁷ Plantagenet describes him to Dr. Claggart as follows:

'--- And all his stories are about things collapsing, falling apart. Don't you see buried in all that wreckage his craving for freedom?'

'His? Or yours?'

'It extends to the world - do I have to shriek at you? - that sense of decay, the necessity of blasting away the past, the feeling of vertige; of industriels, princes, sénats, périssez! ... Puissance, justice,/

justice,/ histoire! à bas, Ah passez républiques de
ce monde! Des empereurs, des régiments, des - I miss
my cue - des peuples, assez! ... Of course, in
Rimbaud's poem the expression is in nature, with
Garry it is degenerate --- (H.U.O.L., p.332)

The above extract recalls the Consul's outburst, where he mocks Hugh's participation in the struggle for freedom, dismissing politics and the struggles of mankind as "hypocrisy". But Dr. Claggart is right in suggesting that the "craving for freedom" might be that of Bill Plantagenet himself.

Bill Plantagenet's life becomes bound up with the lives of Garry and Mr. Kalowsky: "it was as if an obscure yet cogent necessity had arisen out of their meeting." (H.U.O.L., p.311) Later, as Plantagenet begins to make more clear-headed excursions out of delirium, he starts to acknowledge some feeling of responsibility and caring, saying of Garry:

'--- Christ! I feel about it as though I were his father ... It also seems strange to me that I should have to come all the way from England to a madhouse to find two people I really care about.'
(H.U.O.L., p.331)

In an environment which Plantagenet perceives to be one of enforced irresponsibility, he begins to understand that responsibility towards other human beings is of vital importance - a typically Lowrian paradox. Also, Plantagenet views Garry's tales of prophetic warning as attempts to order chaos, and the reconciling of these polarities constitutes another authorial concern.

Plantagenet carries this idea of responsibility towards others out into the world with him when he leaves the hospital:

He began to think he saw some of his mistakes clearly. He even imagined himself expunging them by some heroic sacrifice, that would not only justify him to Garry and Mr. Kalowsky, but would, in a fantastic sense, free them. Free them? It would free everyone - all the patients, all the parents, all the Ruths, it would free mankind; ah - he would strike his blow for the right.
(H.U.O.L., p.346)

But as soon as he has imagined hope for the hopeless of the world (amongst them patients like Garry and Mr. Kalowsky, and parents whom for Lowry were never the greatest repositories of hope!), he acknowledges fear:

At the same time an atrocious vision of Garry flashed across his consciousness, and an atrocious fear. 'It was only a little scratch', he had said. (H.U.O.L., p.346)

The 'little scratch' is Garry's account of some horrible crime on which (as in the case of the Consul) Lowry does not choose to elaborate. But it is sufficient that Garry is symbolic of creativity (artist-manqué)/crime, of hope and fear, in short, that he represents the focus of Plantagenet's task: "to resolve the immedicable horror of opposites." (H.U.O.L., p.296)

In the face of such fear, Plantagenet's response is - not uncharacteristically - to get even drunker than he already is, and to withdraw, in spite of his fine words about "heroic sacrifice":

But feeling he was being watched, even there, he moved later, drink in hand, to the very obscurest corner of the bar, where, curled up like an embryo, he could not be seen at all. (H.U.O.L., p.346)

If this is the resolution of opposites - a merging with the woodwork - then the insignificant curlicue which is William Plantagenet has succeeded in his task. Although this conclusion to the novel is somewhat of an anticlimax, Plantagenet has incorporated into his consciousness the same depths to which mankind may sink as Sigbjørn Wilderness perceives, and has the same concern with rebirth (but perhaps not to the same degree of intensity).

In his rendering of descent and despair, of hope and rebirth, Lowry's symbolism is consistent almost to the point of obsession. The garden, which plays such a crucial part in the evocations of the environments and internal landscapes of Firmin and Wilderness, is discovered by Plantagenet, too, as his alcoholic delirium, subsides. The hospital in which he finds himself is oscillating/

oscillating/ on the edge of the abyss, as is the Mexico of Geoffrey Firmin's mind. Plantagenet wonders about his hospital/prison, "by what miracle did it come about that compassion and love were here too?" (H.U.O.L., p.316) In the search for an understanding of the importance of love, compassion and responsibility towards others, and honesty in one's attitudes towards the past in particular, the three protagonists share a complex of symbols and mythology pointing towards descent and ascent in varying degrees. However the basic concerns are consistent: compare the "war crime" of the Consul who, "had already lost almost all capacity for telling the truth and his life had become a quixotic oral fiction," (U.V., p.39) with Sigbjørn's guilt about the war. Sigbjørn lives through most of Dark as the Grave, in paranoid fear that what everyone he would meet wanted to know was what he had done in the war:

Yet while he was glad that the man was interested in his life, since this was indeed interest in his work at one remove, nonetheless he was very much afraid that he would be asked embarrassing questions, which was why he had to talk, to supply even symbolic answers to those questions in advance to forestall their being asked, such questions as: 'Were you in any of the services?' (D.A.T.G., p.29)

Towards the end of the novel, he is asked the dreaded question by Stamford - whom he has fully expected to be his nemesis:

'Were you in any of the services yourself?' Stamford was asking.
'No'.
'What did you do?'
'Bugger all.'

(D.A.T.G., p.243)

Plantagenet, too, treats Dr. Claggart to a few home truths (but with some compassion for the conditions under which he must operate), demonstrating that he has at least managed to look outside himself for long enough to notice!

Thus the precarious path for Firmin, Sigbjørn Wilderness, and William Plantagenet is one on which crises involving the values of compassion, love, integrity, honesty and responsibility present themselves. The failure of the protagonists to acknowledge/

acknowledge/ these challenges - as manifested in the integration of environment, symbol, myth and motif - moves him a step closer to the abyss. Therefore, when Geoffrey Firmin cries out "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running. I'm almost back there already" (U.V., p.316) he is voluntarily choosing to give up responsibility even for himself. In the paragraphs immediately following the resigning of responsibility, the path he has chosen becomes quite clear in terms of Lowry's symbolic patterning:

He was running too, --- running towards the forest, which was growing darker and darker --- And since it was so good he would take the path to Parían, to the Farolito.
Before him the volcanoes, precipitous, seemed to have drawn nearer. They towered up over the jungle, into the lowering sky-massive interests moving up in the background. (U.V., p.316)

If the volcanoes are moving nearer the Consul, so, too, is the abyss (since they lie beyond the barranca). The symbolic matrix of volcanoes, abyss by implication, Farolito, Parían and "dark wood" is indeed "inviting the storm" which will bring about the downfall of Geoffrey Firmin.

Although Lowry's symbolisations and mythic underpinning of the novels are integrated and obsessively consistent, the proliferation of the basic "modes" of symbol - of, for example, abyss, wheel, garden and tower - within his fiction provides an infinity of renderings of the basic "modes", and of the more specific and "personalised" symbols which attach to them. For instance, the abyss is the domain of those who do not wish their salvation, who succumb to temptation, or even embrace it: "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there." The renderings of this chasm range from allusions to Dante's "Malebolge" to the ravine - the barranca - which waits, threateningly, for the Consul to make one final false step. The chasm exists within the Consul, too: "he felt his mind divide and rise, like the two halves of a counterpointed drawbridge," (U.V., p.202) which recalls the dangers of the distance between self-knowledge and action pinpointed by F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Crackup. The/

The/ chasm exists, too, within the Consul's memory:

Plock. The Golgotha Hole. High up, an eagle drove downwind in one. It had shown lack of imagination to build the local course back up there, remote from the barranca. Golf = gouffre = gulf. (U.V., p.206)

The image of the ravine is a vital component of the scene which Geoffrey and Yvonne see in a shop window, which also presents a microcosmic image of the entire novel:

In the window itself --- 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.

--- La Despedida, she [Yvonne] thought. The Parting! After the damp and detritus had done their work both severed halves of that blasted rock would crumble to earth. It was inevitable, so it said on the picture. (U.V., p.59)

In one photograph, seen in passing, are many of the components of the Mexican landscape which Lowry transmutes into symbols. The ravine is also equated with "The Parting" and it both recalls to Yvonne that she and Geoffrey are no longer married and prefigures their final parting in death at the end of the novel. The "already spinning flywheel" suggests the Ferris Wheel, that wheel of Fate which is indeed already in motion, and Geoffrey's fate is "inevitable". The "forest" suggests Dante's "dark wood" in which the Consul most certainly finds himself, while the "fires" are linked with the apocalyptic vision at the end of the novel. Thus not only is the photograph a detailed microcosmic image of the Mexican context, and of the symbols with which the Consul's destiny is linked, but it also encapsulates a grouping of symbols which runs throughout Lowry's fiction.

To highlight Lowry's repetition and variations of the central symbols in his fiction in this way makes the author's processes of symbolic accretion appear too insistent, even heavyhanded. Although similar analyses will inevitably become part of this/

this/ thesis - one of the primary contentions is, after all, the consistency of Lowry's symbolisations - it would be inaccurate if such a methodology were to suggest that Lowry's work can be clearly divided into separate "symbol systems" and treated accordingly. Central to his novels is the author's technique of weaving together and overlaying of both related and antithetical symbols, myths and motifs. Analysis of Lowry's fiction has presented many problems, not least because he was such an inveterate "putter-inner" - trying to express six things at the one time - and it requires well-nigh superhuman restraint to address one problem at a time when others seem to proliferate at every turn, and become equally worthy of critical attention. Thus, in the brief analysis of Lowry's use of the abyss, the quotes alone would demand discussion of the importance of "forest fires", which recur throughout the fiction, of Laruelle's memories of his summer holiday as a child with Geoffrey on the golf-course, of the significance of the word "inevitable" and of "the already spinning flywheel" which is a rendition of the Ferris Wheel/ Machine Infernale.

Ultimately, then, Lowry's variations on any one symbol move from the highly personalised symbols which take on significance in relation to Lowry's fiction in particular (such as the "barranca" and golf course, which are endowed with individualistic meanings as part of the author's symbolic and thematic network) to the universal and timeless symbols of the abyss, of Christianity (the "Malebolge"), of the Classical labyrinth, and of the alchemical/occult - the world of the Qliphoth. The author establishes the domain of downfall in terms of a synthesis of existing symbolic tradition on a number of levels. However, in doing so, and by his technique of employing a large number of symbolic and mythological referents and of counterpointing existing mythology and symbolism from the traditional to the arcane, Lowry is able to establish his own individualised paradigm, be it for damnation, or for redemption.

Lowry's fiction demonstrates him to be characteristically unconcerned that the traditional sources of symbol and myth, when combined, might produce a somewhat unmanageable tension between the viewpoints (particularly as regards conception of tragedy in different eras). While his main objective is the integration of the differing sources as a means of underscoring the universality of the human condition, he produces at the same time an insistent view of the profoundly complex nature of human life. Geoffrey Firmin, with all his failings in respect of values such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility, and with his resultant skewed and individualistic perception of the world, is both damned by his psychological past and by the workings of the "Machine Infernale", and yet still oscillating on the brink of the abyss. Likewise, the contemporary world, burdened by its history, by its belief in the recurring cycle of events which takes each civilization from birth to demise, may yet choose not to follow Firmin on his flight downwards. The symbolic levels which underpin what is fated and what is chosen contribute to a powerful vision which establishes Lowry as a master of symbolic tension in the modern novel.

CHAPTER 3: NOTES

1. Lowry's main protagonists are indeed "overreachers", seeking, with the help of alcohol and mysticism, knowledge beyond the domain prescribed to man. Lowry himself, with his plans for an ever-expanding cycle might be viewed as an "overreacher".
2. Conrad Knickerbocker, "Foreword: Malcolm Lowry and the Outer Circle of Hell" in Lowry, Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place & Lunar Caustic (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979) p.293.
3. Margerie Lowry was finishing writing The Castle of Malatesta at this time.
4. George Woodcock, "Biographical Note" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p.vii.
5. Conrad Knickerbocker, "Foreword: Malcolm Lowry and the Outer Circle of Hell", p.292.
6. David Miller, Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends (London: Enitharmon Press, 1976) p.19.
7. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
8. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.93.
9. W.H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero: Contrasting Captain Ahab's Doom and its Classic Greek Prototype" in Corrigan, ed., Tragedy: Vision and Form: (Calif: Chandler Pub. Co. 1965) pp.143-4.
10. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry, p.63.

11. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.335.
12. Ibid., p.337.
13. Ronald Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p.240.
14. Douglas Day, "Preface" to Lowry, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, p.13.
15. Ibid., p.18.
16. George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror", in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p.68.
17. David Miller, Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends, p.32.

PART I: Chapter 4

"The Visionary Fallacy: Symbolism
and the Man"

PART I
CHAPTER 4

"The Visionary Fallacy: Symbolism and the Man"

- William James if not Freud would certainly agree with me when I say that the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers --- mescal in Mexico is a hell of a drink --- But mescal is also a drug --- and the transcending of its effects is one of the well-known ordeals that occultists have to go through. It would appear that the Consul has fuddledly come to confuse the two, and he is perhaps not far wrong. (S.L., p.71)

At no point in his writings does Malcolm Lowry ever refer to Geoffrey Firmin, main protagonist in Under the Volcano, as an alcoholic! Lowry admits that the Consul might have needed to get "déalcoholisé" (U.V., p.10) but almost immediately, he introduces a note of justification for his character's drinking by having Dr. Vigil say that "Sickness is not only in body, but in that part used to be call: soul." (U.V., p.11) It is certainly valid to point up that "sickness of the soul" which was Lowry's view of the condition of modern man by portraying the symptomatic drinking of his main protagonist. And it is equally true that the "drunkenness of the Consul is used on one plane to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during the war" (S.L., p.66). But when all the grandiose mystic and transcendental claims have been made for the effects of alcohol on Geoffrey Firmin have been made and noted, the inescapable fact is that he is an alcoholic, with all the less pleasant aspects of the illness entailed.

It seems almost superfluous (since it is such a well-documented fact) to state that Malcolm Lowry, too, was an alcoholic. The primary significance of this fact is that the alcoholic writer writing about an alcoholic character (who bears a remarkable similarity to the alcoholic author) can make it very tempting for the reader and critic to assume that the one may be substituted for the other. Often the facts of Lowry's life and those of/

of/ his characters' lives coincide and the author/protagonist relationship appears even closer.

Lowry's fictional technique centres on the symbolic rendering of the internal conditions of his main protagonists, and the consistency of the thoughts of his characters appear very convincingly as emanations of a single consciousness. Not only are the four main characters of Under the Volcano - Geoffrey Firmin, his half-brother Hugh, friend Jacques Laruelle and ex-wife Yvonne - intended as "aspects of the same man" (S.L., p.60) but all the main protagonists in Lowry's fiction appear as manifestations of this single, all-embracing consciousness which has as its foundation an awareness of impending personal and world chaos. This dominating consciousness - which is argued to run throughout Lowry's cycle of fiction - is one of which Geoffrey Firmin, Sigbjørn Wilderness and William Plantagenet represent variations. To put this in terms of technique, the consistent configuration of symbol, myth and motif which represents authorial patterning within Lowry's fiction is a matrix within which individual characters are investigated and rendered. Ultimately, variations in the characters occur as a result of the weighting of damnation and rebirth; overall, the psychological and cultural components of these main protagonists is consistent, as comparison among the novels demonstrates.

In other words, the investigation of individual characters within Lowry's fiction returns us time and again to the overwhelmingly compulsive (and compelling) consciousness of the main protagonists. Analysis of the symbolic renderings of the characters points not only in the direction of the dominating consciousness of the relevant main protagonist, but reflects even further back into the mind of Mr. Lowry himself. In effect, what must be examined here is the extent to which the author distances himself from his characters. At times, the relationship can be uncomfortably close; by the end of Under the Volcano, for example, the hallucinatory material and mescaline ambience serve not merely as verification of Firmin's alcoholism, but more as a revelation of an insuperable malaise and chaos related/

related/ to the guilt of mankind and to that of the Consul, but also that - one suspects - of Malcolm Lowry himself.

The evidence for this major identification between Lowry and his main protagonists lies in no small part with the nature and consistency of Lowry's creative symbolisations. The consistency in the author's symbolic patterning has been outlined briefly in Chapter 3 in an attempt to build towards a view of a dominating consciousness within the novels. Here the aim is to relate this dominating consciousness to Lowry himself, noting the often very great similarities between the two, but also making necessary distinctions in some respects between artist and creation. Unlike other Modernists, Lowry had no great concern with the search for an objective voice in literature; nor is his work consonant with the purging of the subjective autobiographical aspects of the author from the text.

The evidence to be used in assessing the creator/creation relationship is drawn not only from the nature of the dominating consciousness in the texts, but inevitably, because of the shared alcoholic habits of author and character, and because both Lowry and Firmin (and other characters) subscribe to the same fallacious beliefs in the mystic and transcendental properties of alcohol, from the facts of Lowry's life. Embedded in Lowry's fiction are transmutations of his own experience. Just how close Lowry's life and writing come on occasions becomes clear in passages such as the following:

There was a dancer (a), alpha for acrophobia, the fear of heights, whose white mask was set in a fixed muted yell, as if perpetually contemplating a vast drop below him; there was a dancer (b), the fear of discovery, a jester --- yet with an implacable mask who carried newspapers under his arm with such headlines as Wilderness Works Written by Erikson; or Writer Confesses Old Murder, or Wilderness Admitted Liar; there was (y), a grinning witless mask, but more familiar than any of the others, the fear of disease; and dancer (z), with a mask that wept --- the fear of himself and with his head turned always Dantesquely backward, with a sombrero, and a bottle of mescal in his hand ---

(D.A.T.G., p.31)

Sigbjørn's thoughts reflect the personal concerns of Lowry himself. The author was constantly in fear of discovery as a plagiarist (Ultramarine having revealed affinities with Aiken's Blue Voyage). He was ever concerned about venereal disease (Day relates Lowry's "syphilophobia" to his Low Church fundamentalist upbringing¹). Lowry was tormented also by the fear of fire, which had destroyed the only manuscript of a near-completed novel, In Ballast to the White Sea, and was followed by two fires too close for comfort (one in a small house the Lowrys were about to rent near Oakville, the other next door to the cottage they rented instead in Niagara-on-the-Lake.²)

To take the above quote from Dark as the Grave is potentially unfair to Lowry, and may suggest that his fiction was an undigested mass of autobiographical intrusions. The danger in that kind of analysis is that the intense distillation of his work in symbol, myth and motif may be ignored in favour of Lowry autobiography/ Lowry protagonist correspondences. In this case, the rather undigested, subjective and non-distanced rendering of Sigbjørn's fears may arise precisely because Lowry did not superimpose the final authorial patterning on the novel (the novel having been "edited" by Margerie Lowry and Douglas Day). It should be remembered that in the case of Under the Volcano it had taken Lowry ten years to "give the book its freedom from him."³

On the other hand, the correspondences do undoubtedly exist, and, in Under the Volcano, there are similar fears, if more obliquely expressed by Geoffrey Firmin. (In fact "fire" was to represent part of the fire/water symbolic tension which recurs throughout the novels⁴). All these fears are consonant with those of the Consul, who sees with horror the barranca, the "vast drop below him", imagined newspaper headlines proclaiming his guilt to the world, and whose fate - as a supposed black magician who "surfeits upon cursed necromancy" (Inferno) - is to suffer for his misuse of knowledge in the "Dantesque" posture, always looking backwards into the past, tears running down his buttocks. In fact, Richard Hauer Costa sees the Consul's angst in terms of "the tyranny of the past"⁵. However, when we/

we/ finally tear ourselves away from the manifest correspondences - oblique or clearly revealed - between author and protagonist, the uniformity of consciousness and concerns within the novels would certainly have provided a consistent vision within which The Voyage That Never Ends could have operated.

Simply because we accept the close author/protagonists identification and can view the uniformity of consciousness as useful to Lowry's projected fictional cycle, does not mean that the problem of authorial distancing (or lack of objectivity and creative control) has been neatly resolved. It is a problem which all Lowry critics address to some extent, and has been at the root of the majority of unfavourable remarks about Lowry. Makowiecki summarises the objections:

If we interpret "Under the Volcano" as a psychological study, for example, Lowry's method of character drawing will often seem deplorable, the figures of Hugh or Yvonne superficial and unconvincing, and frequent use of coincidences - most implausible. --- the constant intrusion of Lowry's persona and a subjective autobiographical tendency of his writing will destroy or distort its total effect. As a matter of fact, the claim that Lowry's fiction is a thinly-veiled autobiography formed the grounds for the most frequent objections of Lowry's reviewers. Anyone who is acquainted with Lowry's life will have no trouble in confirming this view. --- From the point of view of Joycean "objective" attitude to writing, Lowry's subjectivism would have been an obvious fault; from the point of view of some other literary convention it might constitute a neutral or even highly functional element of the structure of the novel. 6

Makowiecki takes the consciousness present in Lowry's fiction to be an "intrusion", but it would certainly be possible to argue that the symbolisation and use of myth elevates this writing above the "subjective and autobiographical tendency." However, it is worth noting such comments - along with the fact that Mackowiecki has his own approach to countering them - since they occur with such regularity.

The origins of some of these claims lie in Douglas Day's biography of Lowry, although it would appear that Day did not/

not/ intend his comments to be taken as criticisms. Instead, the format of the biography would suggest Day's intention to be the presentation of psychoanalytical insights into Lowry, as revealed by the documentation he had brought together - including Lowry's writings. In a similar analysis, Day claims that 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 colour 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. 7

At one level, it is obviously true that Lowry wrote "only about himself" and certainly in his later works, there is strong evidence to suggest that he had run out of the basic raw experiential material for his writing and searched in vain for something to fire his imagination. However, if Lowry "was acutely egocentric" and only "wrote 'thinly veiled autobiographies'" one wonders precisely what Lowry was doing during the ten years of gestation that Under the Volcano demanded, if he was not in process of building in the allusions which place it firmly in the genre of fiction.

A most troublesome aspect of Day's methodology arises from this view of Lowry writing only what was inside him. Day not only employs this, but goes much further, looking directly to the fiction in order to find information about not only "Lowry the author", but also "Lowry the man". At one point in the biography, Day observes, "Indeed, if we are to gain any information about Lowry at Bellevue, it is to this Lunar Caustic complex that we must go." ⁸ It is certainly very tempting to use the autobiographical element of Lowry's writings as material for/

for/ a biography, but this technique ignores the possibility that Lowry might have imposed a literary transmutation of autobiographical material for the purposes of structuring a cohesive creative work.

Indeed, Day himself has noted that Lowry had a strong mythopoeic impulse with regard to the facts of his own life:

--- Lowry told Margerie that when the Queen Mary reached New York in the fall of 1934, and the Customs official asked him whether he had anything to declare, he had answered, "I don't know. Let's see." The official then opened Lowry's single, large trunk and found that it contained one old football boot and a battered copy of Moby Dick. The falsity of this anecdote cannot be proven, but one doubts it, somehow --- He did travel light, true enough; but the football-boot-and-Moby-Dick tale sounds ultimately like another instance of Lowry's nudging the legend along. 9

Lowry's own life takes on the appearance of being "a quixotic oral fiction", (U.V., p.39) at times, and it seems a little unwise to rely on his fiction for an accurate rendition of autobiographical detail to any great extent. The pictures of "Lowry the man" and "Lowry the author" are undoubtedly very similar, but there is evidence to demonstrate that the one cannot be taken for the other particularly when Lowry has subjected his materials to his rigorous symbolic and mythological sedimentation.

The distinction between Lowry as a man and the very consistent persona, the omnipresent consciousness of Lowry as an author within the fiction, is worth bearing in mind. Makowiecki elaborates on this point in his discussion of Dark As the Grave:

Although the novel is written in third person no reader will mistake it for traditional, impersonal, omniscient point of view. Sigbjørn, superficially one of the characters introduced externally by the author, is in fact a center of consciousness in the novel, an unacknowledged narrator in Booth's terminology. His role in the novel is active, in spite of the fact that as a lifelike figure he is entirely passive. Much has been said about the Lowry-Sigbjørn-Geoffrey relationship, about a close resemblance of Sigbjørn's story to Lowry's own life,/

life,/ but the real issue remains with Sigbjørn alone. He parallels Lowry not only because as a character he follows closely part of Lowry's own career, but mainly because he has been endowed with powers that are commonly reserved for the writers themselves. Thus Sigbjørn is not really a kind of substitute for Lowry-the-man, but rather an equivalent for Lowry-the-writer. A reader would probably recognize in Sigbjørn someone close to Booth's implied author, no matter whether he knew Lowry's biography and "Under the Volcano" or not. 10

The distinction which Makowiecki makes between "Lowry-the-man" and "Lowry-the-writer" provides a useful perspective on the rather vexed question of the author/character relationship in the fiction. Thus the all-pervading consciousness within the fiction is that of an "implied author" rather than "Lowry-the-man".

Makowiecki also points to Sigbjørn Wilderness as the "unacknowledged narrator" of Dark as the Grave, and to the parallel which has been drawn with Geoffrey Firmin in Under the Volcano. Indeed, Firmin could also be seen in terms of "unacknowledged narrator", bearing out the consciousness of the authorial persona. However, it has also been suggested that it is Jacques Laruelle who narrates Under the Volcano, so that it is in Laruelle's consciousness that "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel" (U.V., p.47) into the recesses of Laruelle's memory and past.

The objection to the suggestion that it is Laruelle's consciousness which is harnessed to the authorial persona in the narration of Under the Volcano might be that Jacques would lack the imaginative grasp to render the hallucinations of the Consul. And yet there is evidence to suggest that Jacques is about to tread the Infernal Machine towards the drunkenness and damnation which he is about to recall. Laruelle begins to think of the Consul and Yvonne in the Cervceria XX; it is in Canto XX of the Inferno that we find those punished for predicting future events by having their heads turned permanently backwards, weeping down their backs and condemned to see only what is behind them as they walk forwards (condemned to the/

the/ "tyranny of the past.") As he drinks, too, Laruelle begins to see the Consul's demons, "his hand trembled slightly over the bottle from whose label a florid demon brandished a pitchfork at him." (U.V., p.10). The Consul has seen this very demon in Chapter 12 of the novel: "on the label -- a devil brandished a pitchfork" (U.V., p.338). It could also be argued that Jacques has access to parts of the narrative line to which the Consul could not, as, for instance, in Chapter 11 in which Yvonne dies.

However, it is equally possible that both Laruelle and the Consul are the two dominating characters (out of the "four aspects of the human spirit") subsumed under the integrating authorial persona, and comprising the consciousness within the novel, the consciousness undergoing a season in hell. For hell is indeed Lowry's most comfortable medium as an author. It was also a familiar location to the man, and perhaps Lowry's greatest strength is in investigating the dark inner recesses of man, the hidden depths which are at least glimpsed and always suspected by us all.

Thus a further point arising from the relationship between Lowry and his characters is that Sigbjørn, Firmin and Plantagenet are placed in Lowry's over-riding medium: hell. In fact, Lowry never seems quite so prodigious - his mind radiating in every direction - and his imaginative reach never so great as when he is dealing in darkness. This darkness - no critic will ever forget - was shared by Lowry as a man; Lowry's letters give insight into the very real sufferings of the man, "Don't think I can go on. Where I am it is dark. Lost." (S.L., p.15) Again Lowry's mythopoeic impulse with reference to his perception of his own life may be noted; he could not have been unaware of the parallel with the opening of Dante's Inferno "Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself in a dark wood." ¹¹

Lowry never exhibits the same kind of imaginative grasp when rendering his version of Paradise. While the vision of Eridanus - his northern paradise - in, for example, The Forest Path to the Spring, is a lyrical evocation of the place, Dollarton,/

Dollarton, / B.C., in which he himself had found peace and some respite from his fears, ultimately this picture of a simple lifestyle, in harmony with the natural world is lacking. What it is lacking is the heavily laden - some might say overburdened - structure of analogies for the state of the protagonist, and for the state of the world, in the form of symbol, myth and motif.

For those who view Lowry's matrix of interconnected references as an overburdening of the themes of the novel, then The Forest Path will represent a welcome amelioration in the author's technique. However, for those who, like myself, view Lowry's technique of sedimentation as the source of his greatness, the less "chthonic" ¹² nature of The Forest Path leads to a less dense texture; the fewer symbolic analogies for what the author has to say lead us to conclude that there are either less things to say, or less ways in which to say them. To a certain extent, both conclusions are viable. There are indeed fewer things to say of happiness, without risking what will appear an unrealistic idyll, the more unrealistic because the world itself seems poised on the brink of the abyss, as Lowry has just finished telling us in Under the Volcano! To then place little oases of harmony amidst the chaos, with no communications between the two, is to be guilty of abandoning responsibility in the same way as Geoffrey Firmin chooses to dismiss the rest of the world as "bugger all". At this price, then, is paradise bought.

A parallel might be drawn with the problems presented by Milton's "God". His "Satan" is in many ways a more attractive figure, possibly because our human failings allow for a greater identification with him. Similarly, our failings - as both individuals and members of society - force us often to suspect that we (along with Geoffrey Firmin) are oscillating on the brink of the abyss. Furthermore, Lowry sees a profound interconnection between the failings of Firmin and the failings of society as a whole; "No se puede vivir sin amar" (U.V., p.213) - One cannot live without loving - is a theme which links the individual to the society, and to the society of other human beings. As Lowry said,

--- there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old Consul at the end, who realises that he is after all part of humanity: and indeed, as I have said before, what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind. (S.L., p.85)

Geoffrey Firmin, in the letter found by Laruelle, prefigures such a conclusion when he writes, "nothing can ever take the place of the unity we once knew and which Christ alone knows must still exist somewhere." (U.V., p.45) The lack of "unity", of caring for other individuals and other societies, is to bring about the Consul's downfall, and to place society itself on the brink of self-destruction: "Good God, if our civilization were to sober up for a couple of days, it'd die of remorse on the third -" (U.V., p.121) says Hugh. Geoffrey's fate is thus linked with a macrocosmic ailment.

In a fallen world - in danger of plummeting towards greater depths, and at an ever-increasing rate - we respond with greatest understanding to failings, and to malaise. We grow so cynical as to reject absolutely a major source of "redemptive" myth - the fairytales of our youth in which "they all lived happily ever after." Furthermore, the literary tradition in redemptive myth is not as strong as that in "the downward flight of the soul", and even Milton had substantially less to say in Paradise Regained than in Paradise Lost. The critic George Woodcock echoes such a view:

If we think of Under the Volcano as Lowry's Paradise Lost, "The Forest Path to the Spring" is his Paradise Regained, and it is appropriate that, like the original Paradise Regained, it should be both briefer and less dramatically striking than its Satanic counterpart. 13

And if Lowry's most powerful medium is hell - the hell that is "in the heart" (U.V., p.42) - we can recall the source of the title of Woodcock's essay, Milton's words: "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n." 14

Goethe's Faust, Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Dante's Inferno, the characters of Hamlet, Banquo and Macbeth - all literary analogies on which Lowry draws - point to an infinite variety of renditions of the hidden darkness within man. Gogol, Cocteau, John Clare, Eugene O'Neill and Dostoevsky provided further identifications for the author in "weaving fearful visions". (U.V., p.44) For Lowry, hell is where the heart is. He not only found the most sympathetic figures amongst the literary cartographers of the "downward flight", but in all probability would have found a less fertile tradition in the "beatific vision".

However, the tradition Lowry chose to use in rendering the paradisaical or transcendental vision was one which included figures such as Coleridge, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Charles Stansfeld-Jones (a cabbalist whose name in his professional capacity was Frater Achad) and Yeats. These were Lowry's "kindred spirits,"¹⁵ who sought to transcend the mundane world and to envision the ineffable. Along with Dylan Thomas and Jean Cocteau, these artists believed that the use of drink and/or drugs as an "anaesthetic for the mundane self"¹⁶ would free the consciousness from mortal considerations and elevate the vision to mystic, almost god-like proportions. Lowry's lifetime of prodigious drinking is never far from his critics' minds. This is partly due to the enormous impact of his drinking on his eventful (and often horrific) life, partly also because of the influence which his experiences with drink had on his work, and lastly because of the claims Lowry himself made about the importance of alcohol to his art.

Malcolm Lowry's alcoholic excesses and sufferings dominated his life, and his artistic vision. While his novels owe much to his experiences, this is not to say that his experiences were simply translated into fiction. Costa, in his article "The Victory of Art over Life" makes exactly this point,

Under the Volcano is the story of a possessed man that could only have been written by a possessed man. Yet the always lucid evocation of the Consul's agony is the product of an artist in control of his labyrinth. 17

This point is worth reiterating simply because Lowry critics (as we shall see) experience no small degree of difficulty in distinguishing between author and character, or, in this case, Lowry as alcoholic and Firmin as alcoholic.

Art Hill is one of the critics who fail to make adequate distinction between the writer and the character, simply because of the intrusive and dominating nature of Lowry's own experiences:

If you believe in heaven, be assured that Malcolm Lowry is there (and probably hates it). It is perhaps an unlikely destination for a man who occasionally sold his clothes to buy a drink, and wrote about people who might sell their souls for a dash of bitters. Lowry's principal - virtually his only - subject was his own mind and the demons that lived there. And mean, spiteful creatures they were! 18

While the demons which undoubtedly lurked at every turn in Lowry's life, also leap from the pages of his fiction, they are contained within a highly-wrought structure, and an ornate, rigorous symbolic patterning is imposed on them. It is thus unfair - if tempting - to leap from man to work, without considering the authorial persona adopted by Lowry within his work. This mitigating and subsuming consciousness should also remain distinct from Lowry's self-mythologising impulse as regards his own life.

In discussing the imposing of structure and patterning on the amorphous experience of alcoholism, Makowiecki makes a significant observation:

Coming back to Under the Volcano, we should realize that the Consul's thoughts are actually never rendered in a deformed language. If Lowry wants to present subconscious or hallucinatory states of the Consul's mind, it is done entirely by means of distinct visual or auditory images (see, for instance, Geoffrey's dream vision at the beginning of chapter V). 19

Even by Chapter 12, when the Consul has abandoned himself to alcohol completely - 'MESCAL' (U.V., p.338), the opening word of the chapter - the Consul's thoughts are rendered in the third person, and to a certain extent it is this which contributes to a coherent rendering of these last minutes of his alcoholism. Also, there is a strange symbolic coherence to the Consul's thoughts; even at this late stage he cannot prevent the world from taking on symbolic significance, however meaningless he might claim it to be. His familiars, too, are of a new breed. Instead of hearing the "specialist in casuistry" (U.V., p.73) urging him on to new and unscaled heights of drunkenness, Geoffrey now hears a voice which is strangely close a conscience and to a commentator on his condition: "'Alas', a voice seemed to be saying also in his ear, 'my poor little child, you do not feel any of these things really, only lost, only homeless.'" (U.V., p.354)

Even when the Consul has completely abandoned himself to alcohol, and to his fate, then, Lowry weaves into Firmin's thoughts the concerns which have dominated the entire novel. The presence of these concerns means that passages which are ostensibly about the Consul's descent into a world of hallucinations are strangely coherent in terms of the symbolic patterning. For instance:

- 'Do you remember tomorrow?' he read. No, he thought; the words sank like stones in his mind. - It was a fact that he was losing touch with his situation. .. He was dissociated from himself, and at the same time he saw this plainly, the shock of receiving the letters having in a sense waked him, if only, so to say, from one somnambulism into another; he was drunk, he was sober, he had a hangover, ---
(U.V., p.344)

The Consul is 'losing touch with his situation' not only because he is drinking now, or has been drinking all day, but because he appears to have been drinking all his life, and has abandoned himself to this situation, and to the thoughts it engenders. The situation the Consul then imagines in this 'dissociated' condition is not far from his own: a wife leaving her alcoholic husband:

--- and there is the note on the breakfast table. 'Forgive me for being hysterical yesterday, such an outburst was certainly not excused on any grounds of your having hurt me, don't forget to bring in the milk', beneath which he finds written, almost as an afterthought: 'Darling, we can't go on like this, it's too awful, I'm leaving -' and who, instead of perceiving the whole significance of this, remembers incongruously he told the barman at too great length last night how somebody's house burned down --- (U.V., p.345)

In the fragments which are released from the Consul's mind, we note the fear of his wife leaving him (the more intense because she would be entirely justified in doing so) and the fear of fire, and of the homelessness it would bring.

The above vision of fear is entirely coherent, but as it releases versions of Firmin's worst anxieties, so his guilt takes on its own self-dramatising character:

And encountering his accusing eyes in another mirror within the little room, the Consul had the queer passing feeling he'd risen in bed to do this, that he'd sprung up and must gibber 'Coriolanus is dead!' or 'muddle muddle muddle' or 'I think it was, Oh! Oh!' or something really senseless like 'buckets, buckets, millions of buckets in the soup!' and that he would now (though he was sitting quite calmly in the Farolito) relapse once more upon the pillows to watch, shaking in impotent terror at himself, the beards and eyes form in the curtains, or fill the space between the wardrobe and the ceiling, and hear, from the street, the soft padding of the eternal ghostly policeman outside - (U.V., p.345)

The 'eternal ghostly policeman' is the form which the Consul's dread of authority takes here. His dread is premonitory, for it is Fructuoso Sanabria (ironically, "fruitful wellbeing"), Chief of Gardens, the Chief of Municipality and the Chief of Rostrums who bring about Firmin's death, and control the stage which is Mexico.

In addition, the Consul's "impotent terror" reveals not only his actual impotence, but his refusal to act - "to take arms against a sea of troubles" - paralleled by the images and symbols of sterility and drought throughout the novel. He/

He/ is rendered impotent by alcoholism, and by the priority of the need for drink, and by the strange creatures which emerge from his mind to watch him and to lead him on to further debridation, the "beards and eyes... in the curtains". Thus even in the ostensibly 'nonsensical' world of alcoholic hallucination, there are symbolical meanings woven in; in a world which is a nightmare in itself, even nightmarish hallucinations have some kind of meaning to the Consul. He is scrabbling about in the detritus of the modern world and the chaos of his own mind for any kind of meaning at all (hence his allegiance to the 'black arts'). Because he has brought some of the chaos upon the world himself (his 'war crime' and his dismissal of political and social responsibility) and has failed to 'desire his deliverance' - "why have I ruined myself in this wilful manner?" (U.V., p.342) - any meaning he can salvage is not won by the aspiration towards light. He finds the fruits of perverted aspiration worthless: "he had become the pelado, the thief-yes, the pilferer of meaningless muddled ideas out of which his rejection of life had grown." (U.V., p.374)

Lowry, in the passage under analysis, has blended portrayals of nightmare and hallucination, such that the Consul's mind both portrays incoherence and reveals his anxieties. In this dream world, Firmin's "nonsense" is realistic: "muddle muddle muddle" and "buckets, buckets, millions of buckets in the soup!" Alethea Hayter, in her discussion of dreams, writes:

Meikle, who was so sure that he composed sublime poetry in his sleep, was cruelly disappointed when his wife recalled two lines which she had heard him say in his sleep

'By heaven, I'll wreak my woes
Upon the cowslip and the pale primrose.' 20

Hayter reasonably concludes in her study that drugs, like dreams can only operate upon what is in the mind anyway. Thus Firmin's mind, under the influence of drink, produces symbolic versions of his deepest anxieties: "he sat, quite calmly now, waiting for the object shaped like a dead man and which seemed to be lying flat on its back by his swimming pool, with a large sombrero/

sombrero/ over its face, to go away." (U.V., p.96) The "dead man" is not only a symbolic representation of fear, but also a premonition about the Consul's fate. It is an unconscious premonition on the part of the Consul. However, the authorial intention - clearly paralleled elsewhere in Lowry's fiction - is to keep on sowing the seeds of expectation of immanent chaos in the mind of the reader. Even in the subterfuge which was Lowry's pursuit of the "critic-proof" novel, the authorial consciousness tends to direct the reader to a specific set of expectations and conclusions. In effect, the structuring - in terms of cyclical form, symbolic patterning, repetition of motifs, and of prefiguring design - of the anarchic, uncontrollable condition of alcoholism (where time, like the hallucinating mind, ebbs and flows) represents a powerful mastery over notoriously difficult material.

In spite of the technical control exhibited in Lowry's work, critics have been rather too eager to accept the consciousness projected via the protagonists in the novels for Lowry himself, and to take his self-criticism at face value. Desperate to have his novel published intact, Lowry readily (even, understandably, too readily) conceded to certain criticisms of Under the Volcano in order, one suspects, to justify the strongest countering of more damaging criticisms. Thus, on the question of the "weakness of the character drawing", Lowry writes,

This is a valid criticism. But I have not exactly attempted to draw characters in the normal sense --- though I did go to incredible trouble to make my major characters seem adequate on the most superficial plane on which this book can be read. The truth is that the character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent ---

(S.L., p.60)

Certainly, Malcolm Lowry's concept of "characterisation" may not be an orthodox one, but the characters do emerge as "adequate". What the above passage indicates is the author's concern with producing something greater than a collection of cameos. Lowry is willing to concede that there are what appear to be flaws if the reader doesn't recognise the pursuit of higher aesthetic ideals (for example, the portrayal of human consciousness rather/

rather/ than of the individual mind!)

Thus, while the critic Art Hill notes that Lowry's main concern is not the portrayal of characters in a traditional way, he is too ready to accept Lowry's self-criticism. Hill writes,

It is important to mention here that Lowry was not able to create characters in the normal novelistic sense. All his major characters are versions of himself. This being true - conceded by critics and by Lowry himself - I shall not be reluctant to discuss the Consul as if he were Lowry --- 21

Art Hill may "not be reluctant to discuss the Consul as if he were Lowry "as, indeed, Douglas Day has not been reluctant to discuss Lowry as if he were Bill Plantagenet! However, more caution about assuming so great an author/ character identification may be called for. While Lowry's main protagonists are "versions of himself", the crucial word is "versions". It is well worth noting Lowry's demonstrable control over the versions he renders.

The critics who accept a very close author-character identification (because they accept the author's persona for the author himself) also tend to subscribe to that fictitious notion, which any self-mythologising artist is only too willing to promote, that the source of art lies in excess. Richard Hauer Costa has valid observations to make on the questions of alcoholic excess and control:

The cultists would have one believe that the life and works of writers like Lowry - the whole labyrinth of the addict - are evidence that only excess generates art. One of Lowry's misadventurous disciples, the late Conrad Knickerbocker, went so far as to declare that the controlled artist provides no clues to the mysteries of the creative imagination; that only the demonic had interest for him. Whatever academic claims to Lowry remains has been staked out by those whom Saul Bellow calls "deep readers of the world." Their industry was climaxed by Perle Epstein's recent line-by-line gloss of Under the Volcano as a Cabbalistic treasure trove.

The belief that "only excess generates art" might be termed the "visionary fallacy". If one is willing to believe that drink/

drink/ would elevate the vision to mystic and godlike proportions, and that from this would spring "art", then a redefinition of both art and creativity would be necessary. Certainly many of Lowry's kindred spirits waged this kind of self-destructive war of attrition upon themselves; Poe, Cocteau, Baudelaire, Dylan Thomas, De Quincey and Coleridge shared Lowry's taste for excess, and the tensions it wrought on their lives.

However, the life of the addicted artist is less glorious and less altruistic (did he drink only in the pursuit of art and the paradisaical vision?) than adherents to the "visionary fallacy" might admit. But the myth persists:

"I never thought of him [Lowry] as an 'alcoholic'" says Newton, "as the word is normally used. He seemed to me to be a self-destructive visionary, who used liquor the way some Romantic poets used drugs, as a kind of anaesthetic for the mundane self. When one was with him, one seemed to drink in the same way. Deep in his personality there was some kind of spiritual horror: he was very interested --- in magic, and I suspect had to some extent become a victim of malign spiritual forces. Certainly he thought this was the case --- His speech when he was drunk often had a kind of "prophetic" quality about it; and at these times his eyes would sparkle with an almost demonic glitter." 23

This is - no doubt - just what Lowry would have wanted his observers to think; and exactly what we should like to think of an alcoholic genius. The reality of Lowry's alcoholism may very well have been different: one senses that Newton has participated in, and succumbed to Lowry's mythopoesis with regard to his own life. Lowry undoubtedly suffered some deep spiritual horror, but alcoholism is alcoholism rather than prophetic vision:

When he [Lowry] was moving from exhilaration into tipsiness and into drunkenness, which was a fairly rapid process, there would be moments in it when he would really be at the top of his form. Then he would start some extremely interesting and complex sentence, and stop in the middle of it, because there was a word he couldn't get. After a while we'd carry on the conversation. He'd be extremely annoyed and I had to stop until he got this word, and got this sentence finished. Then he'd go on to a further stage. We no longer existed really. He'd needed us as an audience, /

audience,/ now he'd invented his own audience, and hallucination was beginning to take over --- very shortly after that he would pass out, often as stiff as a board. 24

Day's analysis of such evidence avoids attributing to this alcoholic behaviour any romantic notions of the visionary artist. He observes: "it would have to be taken as evidence of a deep-seated and advanced form of delusional psychoneurosis, freed and exacerbated by alcohol." 25

In Mexico, Lowry had repeatedly been picked up for drunkenness: "Borracho, borracho, borracho", said the sub-chief, slapping the file. "Here is your life" 26 However, Day views Lowry's alcoholism not as the primary condition in itself, but as symptomatic of something far deeper. Whatever the deeper root of the man's condition (and there is a matrix of many causes and possible causes, including a vast body of actual and perceived pain in his youth), this primary cause became transformed from neurotic pain to a psychosis which came to have an increasing grip on Lowry's life. 27 Furthermore, Day traces the condition of the man in later life to a "murky, inconclusive, but undoubtedly traumatic, event in Lowry's last Cambridge year." 28 This event was the suicide of a young undergraduate who pursued Lowry to the point where he swore to kill himself if Lowry did not respond to his advances. Lowry's solution to this threat was to go out to the pub; in his absence the young man did indeed commit suicide. 29

This incident was to manifest itself fairly consistently throughout Malcolm Lowry's life. He told the tale to Margerie on numerous occasions (although this in itself is not adequate evidence, as he was given to "quixotic" self-dramatisation). Day has traced versions of the event to an unpublished typescript, The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness, to typescript drafts of Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, to October Ferry to Gabriola to the few existing pages of In Ballast to the White Sea, and to Charlotte Haldane's novel, I Bring Not Peace. Day remarks on the psychological significance of the incident to Lowry himself (when the event reappeared in Lowry's life during a spell in/

in/ hospital in 1949):

--- it is curious that physical trauma, combined with alcohol and drugs, took Lowry so precisely back to his Cambridge years, to his happy recollections of James Travers, and to his darker memories of Charlotte Haldane, "Izzard", and the elusive Wensleydale. 30

"Wensleydale" is the fictional name for the figure who committed suicide, and for whose death Sigbjørn feels responsible. He reappears as Peter Cordwainer in October Ferry to Gabriola - an undergraduate provoked to suicide by Ethan Llewelyn, the main protagonist. Day observes about the Wensleydale figure, "that his death was extremely important, if not crucial, as a component of Lowry's psychic makeup for most of his adult life." 31

While Day noted the importance of the suicide to Lowry's life, he failed to find evidence for the existence of a single person who had been a friend of Lowry's and subsequently killed himself. Kilgallin suggests an undergraduate by the name of James Fitte:

--- he [Lowry] gave up dining in Hall because he could not go through the doors without seeing Fitte in his usual place, and therefore dreaded going to bed sober. This Macbeth-Banquo reincarnation --- [reappears] in Under the Volcano when murderous guilt casts out sleep. 32

Thus Kilgallin sees the incident as reinforcing Lowry's alcoholism and as providing the Macbeth motif for his fiction. Once again, the distinction between the man and the character appears blurred, but Kilgallin points simply to an unavoidable parallel rather than to a complete identification.

In an analysis which looks at the man, his fears - fears which are paralleled in his characters - the symbolisations of his authorial concerns, and the contributions myth, symbol and motif make to the themes in his fiction, the fears and anxieties revealed by the fiction may or may not be those of Lowry himself. There is ample evidence of artistic transformation of the basic material. Equally, there is no doubt that Lowry's own life was a continual source of material for his fiction, and that he viewed art as a means of propitiation:

I can never think of the peculiar circumstances under which the debt --- was accrued, without terror, inchoate flashes of nightmare - and perhaps this procrastination is due in a very small part to the fact that to pay the debt means writing about the circumstances and therefore remembering them. (S.L., p.9)

Again Lowry's highly subjective involvement with his art leads to the inevitable assumption that author and character cannot be separated. Lowry's sense that "to pay the debt means writing about the circumstances and therefore remembering them" and that he was himself being written tends to contribute to this assumption. Lowry's characters, too, participate in creating the fictional world of the novel; in particular, Firmin and Sigbjørn Wilderness are not mere actors on the novel's stage, but rather, part of a vast, integrating consciousness through which all events, conversations, allusions, symbolisations and scenes pass. Indeed, this does tend to bring them closer to the authorial persona - as Makowiecki" terms it, "the lyrical "I" of the author" ³³ - and inevitably closer to Lowry himself. Thus Costa claims, that "Geoffrey Firmin had to be a character of extraordinary shading and possibility to provide a repository for Lowry's megalomania." ³⁴

Costa, too, adheres to what has been termed the "visionary fallacy":

The Consul imbibes for positive reasons, too. His rationale is especially au courant for the 1970s. Drinking is a means of mystical release, of the sort of induced transcendental flights that are so commonly taken today. ³⁵

Alcohol undoubtedly provides release for the Consul from his overwhelming burden of guilt; the guilt which is both personal and symbolical of that of mankind. The reader should believe, too, that Geoffrey Firmin's drinking is of a visionary/mystical order - "from alcohol to alkahest" (U.V., p.91) - and that his rightful domain will be with those who have abused their mystical powers. As a fictional device, the Consul's alcoholism is therefore an entirely apposite metaphor for the abuse of power, /

power, / and the modern condition. However, it is contended that the belief in general that "drinking is a means of mystical release" at best neglects the realities of alcoholism.

The heavy emphasis on the value of the self and on authorial experience certainly suggests a very subjective literature.

Lowry wrote to Priscilla Woolfan, Margerie Lowry's sister:

What do you think of our living in M. Laruelle's house, and all by accident, the only one we could get-chevron-shaped windows and all: it gives us an odd feeling of living inside a book, a kind of intra-dimensional life. (S.L., p.53)

Thus Lowry's art seems not only to be intricately related to the man's life, but almost the progenitor of the man himself.

Kellman takes the argument still further:

I propose to define a sub-genre of the modern French, British and American novel which I call "the self-begetting novel." A fantasy of Narcissus become autogamous, the self-begetting novel --- projects the illusion of art creating itself. Truly samizdat, in the original sense of "self-publishing", it is an account, usually first-person, of the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading. Like an infinite recession of Chinese boxes, the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends. 36

While the Consul obviously cannot "take up his pen" to write the novel, the consciousness which is dominated by him, envelopes Jacques Laruelle to begin the novel, and to step once more onto the Infernal Machine. Indeed like the Chinese boxes, which Lowry even incorporates into Under the Volcano as a metaphor for the labyrinth of the Farolito - "The Consul carried another drink with Yvonne's letters into an inner room, one of the boxes in the Chinese puzzle" (U.V., p.344) - Lowry's fiction starts again where it ends. The fallen wheel of Under the Volcano is restarting, with Laruelle both as narrator/progenitor and as new victim of its machinations. At the same time, the wheel is turning back to the fate of its timeless occupant, the Consul/Everyman.

Sigbjørn Wilderness, too, is striving to raise a phoenix from the ashes of the experiences on which his last novel was founded, by re-entering the labyrinthine life he led at that time in real life, and as the starting point for a new novel. In his visit to Mexico which is the substance of Lowry's novel, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, he revisits the scenes of The Valley of the Shadow of Death (Sigbjørn's equivalent of Lowry's Under the Volcano). His life cannot progress - and neither can his art - without the further experience to be provided by these excursions into the past. Only by such immolation in the labyrinth which is the Mexico of the past can Sigbjørn partake of the cyclical flux which is both life and art:

This, all over again, was the beginning of a new life, and so far everything boded well. To a casual observer, these little trips on the side, visits, these little excursions, were simply trips, visits, excursions. But that morning, on this last day of the old year that had given birth to a new age, they had not appeared to him in this light. They were indeed like attempts, not only on their own part but on the part of their marriage, if such a union could be thought of as a sensate entity, since the catastrophe of the fire, to arise, to be reborn. --- Or it was like the tide at Eridanus. The farther it came in, the farther it went out. --- Nor was this symbolism, if one could call it such, confined to trips or excursions. The act of finishing The Valley of the Shadow of Death, after the fire, had been like that.

(D.A.T.G., pp. 180-1)

Thus Sigbjørn's life as man and artist is integrated into a quest which is indeed a "Voyage That Never Ends". Dark as the Grave demonstrates Lowry's clear concern with "the cycle of movement from life to literature [which] begins anew with each ending, which, itself a consummation, directs us back to the flux from which it arose."

Ultimately, the fiction of Malcolm Lowry is temptingly close in its concerns to the life of the author, and all scholars of his work have to acknowledge the relationship between the two. It is argued that distinguishing between the creator himself and the work of art is made even more difficult by two aspects of Lowry's work. First, the condition of alcoholism, shared/

shared/ by author and main protagonists could only have been rendered by the alcoholic. In the highly subjective world - both fictional and actual - of hallucination, which becomes an interior cosmos of the mind, the lurching perspective of the Consul is easily confounded with the "transcendental mysticism" - the arcane correspondences - of Lowry himself. To witness (with all the concomitant pain and tragi-comedy) the revealing of deep, insidious fears of Geoffrey Firmin, and to know at the same time that these anxieties are at no great remove from those of Lowry, invites inevitable comparisons. Furthermore, the consistency with which these fears and concerns are rendered (in terms of allusion) throughout Lowry's fiction might point towards the kind of overwhelming psychopathology which Day and Kilgallin suggest.

However, there is a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that the consistency in concerns (and symbolisations of these) - while undoubtedly integral to the authorial persona - reveals Lowry's impulse towards order and symmetry in his fiction. The cyclical structure of Under the Volcano demonstrates an ordering of what is essentially a chaotic body of material; the amorphous hallucinations which ebb and flow with the rhythm of every drink. Lowry asserts, "each chapter is a unity in itself and all are related and interrelated" (S.L., p.65) and indeed this is the case, as will be argued throughout this thesis.

The second aspect of Lowry's fiction which results in a blurring of the author/character distinction is the reflexiveness of the novel. Lowry is concerned with "man as a sort of novelist of himself", what Kellman would term an "autogenic" impulse. There is a strong sense of the character creating his own identity through art. Indeed, having already noted Lowry's own propensity to create his identity through art - feeling that he lived within his fiction - and his fostering of myth attaching to his life, the author is also "self-begetting" at times (or shows a desire to be so).

The character of the Consul provides a repository for the failings not only of an alcoholic individual, but of a reeling world. The setting, Mexico, unites the potentials of individual and world, being both paradisaical and infernal. However, the reader is increasingly convinced that the Mexico rendered in Under the Volcano is a symbolic landscape of the Consul's mind (while still being analogous to the universal condition). As the reader moves back from Mexico into the interior cosmos of Geoffrey Firmin, the nature of the novel changes such that additional levels of commentary on art, and discourse on the nature of tragedy are present. At this point, the discourse engendered may well be seen as that of Lowry himself, but it is more probably that of the authorial consciousness which dominates the novel.

At a universal level, Geoffrey Firmin may appear to suffer from the twentieth-century concatenation of loss of values, infernal complacency and an inability to reach out of isolation towards other human beings. However, what may be seen as general external chaos may equally be seen as representing the Consul's internal chaos. The abyss, possible final domain of the world, is one of the principal icons of the Consul's quest towards the infernal. As an effigy of Firmin's mind, it demonstrates that the internal cosmos of the Consul is a land frequented by Lowry himself. Thus the attempted distinction between the pattern of Firmin's life and that of Lowry himself may become blurred. Firmin is driven by the refusal to exercise choice, buffeted by the indivisible alliance between Time and Fate which is symbolised by the Ferris Wheel. Under the Volcano, claims Lowry, "can even be regarded as a sort of machine: it works too, believe me, as I have found out." (S.L., p.66) Lowry further emphasises the importance of such a concatenation of events to both his novel and himself by writing - in the "Preface" to the French edition of his novel - "it works, you may be sure, for I have discovered that to my own expense." 38

However, the autobiographical content becomes metamorphosed into a multi-levelled work of ever-proliferating meanings by the ten years of artistic rigour imposed on and invested in the novel. Lowry did not live to make this investment in his remaining fiction; many critics doubt whether he would have been successful in this had he lived. Conjecture about Lowry's life and art is endless simply because the two are undoubtedly related. But, as has been argued, the impulse towards the artist's creation of himself through his art - equally, transforming life into a novel - is not a feature restricted to the highly idiosyncratic Mr. Lowry. This aspect is in fact an important feature in modern literature; witness James Gatz's fathering of a new identity:

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people - his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island sprang from his platonic conception of himself. 39

This blurring of the distinction between art and reality finds resonance in Baudelaire's claim:

[Pure art is] ... a suggestive magic in which both subject and object, the world outside the artist and the artist himself are combined. 40

In Lowry's case, the combining of the symbolical setting of the novel in Mexico and the internal cosmos of the Consul produces an all-encompassing interior consciousness within Under the Volcano - a subsuming authorial persona which is, however, at one remove from Lowry himself.

CHAPTER 4: NOTES

1. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.25.
2. Ibid., pp. 300-303.
3. Ibid., p.471.
4. John Senior in The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (New York: Cornell University Press, 1959) p.28, points out that the symbol for fire in alchemy is a triangle, and for water, an inverted triangle. Their combination - a superimposition of the two triangular shapes - is represented by a Star of David. However Lowry maintains the dualism as a tension, rather than an integration.
5. Richard Hauer Costa, "Under the Volcano - The Way it Was: A Thirty-Year Perspective" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.29.
6. Stefan Makowiecki, Malcolm Lowry and The Lyrical Convention of Fiction, pp. 5-6.
7. Douglas Day, "Preface" to Lowry, Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid, pp. 6-7.
8. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.197.
9. Ibid., p.192.
10. Stefan Makowiecki, p.21.
11. Dante, The Inferno, translated by John Ciardi (New York: The New American Library Inc., 1954), Canto I, p.28.
12. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p. 332.

13. George Woodcock, "The Own Place of the Mind: An Essay in Lowrian Topography" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.128.
14. Ibid., p.112.
15. Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1973) p.225.
16. Ibid., p.59.
17. George Woodcock, p.118.
18. Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism" in Barry Wood, ed., Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, (Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1980) p.126.
19. Stefan Makowiecki, p.67.
20. Alethea Hayter, Opium and the Romantic Imagination (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) p.72.
21. Art Hill, p.131.
22. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1972) p.86.
23. Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.59.
24. Earle Birney, interviewed in B.B.C. "Portrait" in Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.418.
25. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.418.
26. Ibid., p.360.
27. Ibid., p.20, p.24, pp.29-30, pp.62-68, p.470.
28. Ibid., p.143.

29. Ibid., p.138.
30. Ibid., p.142.
31. Ibid., p.141.
32. Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.23.
33. Stefan Makowiecki, p.21.
34. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry, p.169.
35. Ibid., p.172.
36. Steven Kellman, The Self-Begetting Novel (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980) p.3.
37. Ibid., p.9.
38. Malcolm Lowry, "Preface" to the French edition of Under the Volcano in Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p.14.
39. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985) p.95.
40. Baudelaire, Oeuvres Complètes, ed., Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1968) p.231.

PART II: THE DESCENT

Chapter 5: "The Wheel of Fate"

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CHAPTER 5

"The Wheel of Fate"

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. 1

As M. Laruelle thinks back to the events of exactly one year before to the events of the Day of the Dead, November 1938, Under the Volcano moves back, cinematically, with the aid of the Ferris Wheel, which is equally instrument of the gods and the reel of the infernal film which will unfurl: "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel." (U.V., p.47) Again, this wheel is parallel to the movement of the novel, which is essentially cyclical. The fact that Jacques Laruelle opens the novel with the Consul's concerns - he, too, is travelling the weary path of alcoholic, "mystic manqué" and is nursing an ambition to film Faust - suggests that Jacques, too, is about to step onto this "machine". For Laruelle, too, is unable to feel remorse:

Nor had any remorse for the Consul's plight broken that other spell fifteen years later in Quauhnahuac! for that matter, M. Laruelle reflected, what had reunited the Consul and himself for a time, even after Yvonne left, was not, on either side, remorse. (U.V., p.18)

If Laruelle cannot feel remorse, neither can he feel any "responsibility" towards others. He is acutely aware that his love for Yvonne has been but brief respite from the sterility that is lovelessness: "It slaked no thirst to say what love was like which came too late". (U.V., p.16) Jacques knows his fate to be dictated by similar circumstances to those which brought about the death of Geoffrey Firmin. He loves no individual, and feels neither love nor responsibility towards the world. While the Consul has dismissed concern for the world as "hypocrisy", Jacques similarly abandons responsibility for the world: "He had few emotions about the war, save that it was bad. One side or the/

the/ other would win." (U.V., p.15) Laruelle's main concern, rather, is for the Mayan idols he cannot take with him when he leaves Mexico. Such is his response to the realisation of what is an impending chaos throughout the narration of the events of 1938.

In this way, Lowry establishes that the events of 1938 are part of an eternally recurring cycle. The interval between the day on which the Consul's fate is sealed, and the Day of the Dead, November 1939, may only be one year, but in that time, the impending self-destruction of the world has been ratified. Jacques thinks that "an eternity had been lived through." (U.V., p.14) Lowry demonstrates a constant concern to unite the universal level and individual level of action within the novel. In this instance, the dynamic which has brought about the destruction of Geoffrey Firmin is a machination which will also bring about Laruelle's fate. Equally, the self-destructive impulse of the penultimate stage of a civilisation is viewed in the context of an "eternity" of civilisations (for example, the Mayan society, now ruined) and is merely part of a recurring cycle. With the underpinnings of Classical and Christian tragedy, Lowry presents a view of the fin du siècle similar to the historic relativism of Eliot and Pound.

Lowry's concern with time is reflected in his own analysis of the structuring of Under the Volcano, the letter in defence of the novel (in the form in which he had finally submitted it to Cape, without the suggested revisions) which he wrote to Mr. Jonathan Cape. Lowry 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." (S.L., p.67) Lowry further expands on the symbolism of the wheel and its relationship to "time", saying of the "luminous" wheel which appears at the end of Chapter I and which takes Jacques back to the events of 1938:

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/

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 and Chapter II and in this sense, if we like, we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation. (S.L., pp.70-1)

Thus Lowry is entirely aware of the implications of the wheel in terms of its physical presence within the novel as the Ferris Wheel, as the form of the novel, as the cyclical nature of history and of time.

Of the most basic level at which the wheel functions - the cyclical structure of Under the Volcano itself - Lowry also wrote:

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 --- (S.L., p.88)

Lowry is thereby inviting every reader to partake of the cyclical structure of the novel. It is not until the reader returns to Laruelle's perspective on the events of the previous year that the full impact of the "trochal" nature of time, of history and of self-destruction can be appreciated. The author is sensible of the fact that such re-reading will deepen the reader's insight into the novel - as in poetry, meanings will thereby be generated - "new meanings will certainly reveal themselves if he reads this book again." (S.L., p.71) Again Lowry writes, "But poems often have to be read several times before their full meaning will reveal itself, explode in the mind." (S.L., p.59) While the "poetic" nature of Lowry's fiction will be reserved for discussion in Chapter 11, it is worth noting that the author insisted on close reading. In effect, Lowry's work demands a painstaking reconstruction of the links in his patchwork of myth, symbol and motif in a manner approximating to a replication of Lowry's meticulous construction of the novel.

Thus the author invites the reader to return to the first chapter of Under the Volcano, and to meditate - along with Jacques Laruelle - on the events of the Day of the Dead November 1938.

These events have taken up the remaining eleven chapters, and to Jacques in Chapter 1, they are one more component of the past. Indeed, Chapter 1 is dominated by the past; with the tragic events of the year before, with Jacques' boyhood friendship with Geoffrey Firmin, with the "antediluvian forest" (U.V., p.23) and the larger historical past of Mexico, and with the letter Jacques finds which reveals another chapter of the Consul's past.

The importance of the past is not limited to Under the Volcano; Sigbjørn Wilderness, too, is at times almost crushed by this burden:

--- now this beautiful trip was going into the immediate past; if only, starting now, he could build a life of such splendid memories for Primrose and himself; but now they were in the valley, and the past, symbolized by the mean little railroad that crossed so slowly and agonizingly the terrible cactus plain with its memories of heat and anguish and drunkenness, was running parallel, so that he was flooded with these memories of the past, the past was keeping pace with him, he could not for a moment outdistance it, it would follow him indeed all the way into the city of Oaxaca itself ...

(D.A.T.G., pp.223-4)

This is indeed close to Lowry's concern in Under the Volcano to portray man's "ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past." (S.L., p.66) Even on the very first page of the novel, Lowry establishes a Mexico of "desolate splendour" (U.V., p.9) in the "Hotel Casino de la Selva".

In fact, the opening of Under the Volcano may appear as a deceptively objective focussing on the setting of Mexico. We are taken through the geographical features of the landscape in what may appear as a slightly irrelevant travelogue. But if Lowry has to establish the volcanoes, valleys, tortuous and broken paths, "eighteen churches and fifty-seven cantinas", (U.V., p.9) he is also prefiguring the pairing of symbols which are the inner landscape of the Consul: volcano/abyss and church/cantina. And it is in the description of the hotel that Lowry moves from the banal tone of the travel brochure towards the inner dynamic of the authorial consciousness, in a paragraph/

paragraph/ in which the mention of past glory - "desolate splendour" - acts as a pivot between outer and inner landscape:

The Hotel Casino de la Selva stands on a slightly higher hill just outside the town, near the railway station. It is built far back from the main highway and surrounded by gardens and terraces which command a spacious view in every direction. Palatial, a certain air of desolate splendour pervades it. For it is no longer a Casino. You may not even dice for drinks in the bar. The ghosts of ruined gamblers haunt it. No one ever seems to swim in the magnificent Olympic pool. The springboards stand empty and mournful. Its jai-alai courts are grass-grown and deserted. Two tennis courts only are kept up in the season. (U.V., p.9)

And in this scene of ruined splendour, we are brought to two men - M. Laruelle and Dr. Arturo Díaz Vigil - sitting on the Day of the Dead, November 1939, reminiscing to the tune of the mourners, for whom "death --- is tragic and comic at once." ²

This blank and unemotional opening of Under the Volcano (which moves into the main dynamic with seemingly effortless precision) is reminiscent of E.M. Forster's A Passage to India, which opens:

Except for the Marabar Caves - and they are twenty miles off-the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. ³

Forster has placed the reader immediately into the locus of the novel - with even greater accuracy and significance than the reader can know, for the Marabar Caves, here seemingly dismissed as an aside, are crucial to the events of the novel. And Forster continues by presenting the origins of the tensions which erupt in this scenery:

So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. ⁴

Thus Foster indicates the Chandrapore of reality, washed by the mud of the Ganges, where the indigenous people neither thrive, nor is the value of their individual lives great. Nor do they perish, and on this "antediluvian" base of mud and life-force is founded another world, in which Chandrapore appears "a tropical pleasance , washed by a noble river." ⁵ In the very topography is to be found the tension which will break during the course of the novel.

The parallel drawn between the openings of Under the Volcano and A Passage to India is not a random one. When defending the opening of Volcano against the criticism of "longeurs", Lowry makes specific reference to Forster:

And how many books --- can you say --- that you were not, somewhere along the line the first time you read it, bored because you wanted to "get on." --- E.M. Forster, I think, says somewhere that it is more of a feat to get by with the end, and in the Volcano at least I claim I have done this; but without the beginning, or rather the first chapter, which as it were answers it, echoes back to it over the bridge of the intervening chapters, the end - and without it the book - would lose much of its meaning. (S.L., p.59)

Both Forster and Lowry open their novels in a way in which the reader may well be anxious to "get on", but neither waste any space whatsoever in homing in on the settings of their respective dramas. In the very topography - in the antediluvian slime - are to be found the origins of each drama and the elemental forces which will resonate throughout each novel. As Lowry says, "without the beginning --- the book would lose much of its meaning" and this holds true for Forster as well.

Thus, in the opening of Under the Volcano, the landscape helps to establish the "weight of the past", and this force is maintained at several levels throughout the first chapter.

Time itself is weighted according to the significance of events:

What had happened just a year ago today seemed already to belong in a different age. One would have thought the horrors of the present would have swallowed it up like a drop of water. It was not so. Though tragedy was in the/

the/ process of becoming unreal and meaningless
it seemed one was still permitted to remember the
days when an individual life held some value and
was not a mere misprint in a communiqué.

(U.V., p.11)

Thus the authorial persona has rapidly given way to the weight of the past, while the reader is given a strong sense of impending doom. Chapter 1, then, establishes "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."

(S.L., p.71)

The reader may still hope that the signals towards incontrovertible tragedy are false, but if Time has failed to ameliorate the events of the Day of the Dead 1938 (in itself an ominous date), and has brought wide-scale horror to the world, the narrative has yet more to add in the way of the weight of the past. Of Hugh, Geoffrey Firmin's younger brother, Laruelle thinks "grief and bewilderment at an unassimilable catastrophe had drawn them together." (U.V., p.14) While the reader awaits more news of this "unassimilable catastrophe", M. Laruelle makes a farewell visit to the ruins of Maximilian's palace:

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.

(U.V., p.20)

The excrescence is all that is left of the Palace of Maximilian and Carlotta, and their brief reign in Mexico: a ruined palace and untended garden. Significantly, too, this is the scene of love doomed to destruction, the ruins being ruled by ghosts, as at the Casino, of Maximilian, shot by the forces of Benito Juárez and of Carlotta, who went mad, and of "everyone who had ever lived there from Empress Elizabeth of Austria to the/

the/ Archduke Ferdinand [who] had met with a violent death."
(U.V., p.20) Laruelle hears the ghosts quarrelling, the voices transformed from those of Maximilian and Carlotta to those of the Consul and Yvonne. In this manner, Lowry presents signals towards tragedy, although the reader cannot know at this point just how significant the juxtaposition of the two sets of doomed lovers will be, nor can he know that Geoffrey and Yvonne will meet with "a violent death".

As he continues with his farewell journey through a landscape which is indistinguishable from the past (partly because it reflects the inner cosmos of the Consul - the past events which brought about his downfall - a consciousness now being taken over by Jacques), Laruelle comes upon the "barranca, the deep ravine" (U.V., p.21) and thinks "wherever you turned the abyss was waiting for you round the corner." (U.V., p.21) This serves the dual function of both intimating the threatening nature of the environment, and of taking Jacques' thoughts back to the "Hell Bunker" (U.V., p.22), the scene where the young Laruelle had accidentally discovered Geoffrey and a girl engaged in some unspecified adolescent sexual encounter. The incident is linked in some way with the origins of Geoffrey's drinking; they all go off to a bar which Laruelle remembers as being "The Case is Altered", where "it was patently the first time the Consul had ever been into a bar on his own initiative --- and they were turned out as minors." (U.V., p.27) Both incidents are significant: "Alas, their friendship did not for some reason survive these two sad, though doubtless providential, little frustrations." (U.V., p.27) And an analogous situation recurs in Chapter 3, when the Consul's response to Yvonne's return is impotence and a headlong dash to the whisky bottle.

The insidious signals towards tragedy continue, establishing at the same time the "slow melancholy tragic rhythm of Mexico itself." (S.L., p.58) All the intimations of doom are actually physically present in the Mexican environment, but they have been hoarded, too, in the internal cosmos of the authorial persona. For instance, Laruelle sees a poster /

poster/"6 y. 8.30. Las Manos De Orlac, con Peter Lorre." (U.V., p.30) This film had been playing exactly one year before, Yvonne first noticing the poster in the bar where she finds Geoffrey on her return. The poster, too, has ominous meaning for Laruelle:

Yet what a complicated endless tale it seemed to tell, of tyranny and sanctuary, that poster looming above him now, showing the murderer Orlac! An artist with a murderer's hands; that was the ticket, the hieroglyphic of the times. For really it was Germany itself that, in the gruesome degradation of a bad cartoon, stood over him. - Or was it, by some uncomfortable stretch of the imagination, M. Laruelle himself? (U.V., p.31)

This again intimates the possibility that M. Laruelle is becoming incorporated into the "endless tale", the infernal cycle which has brought about the destruction of the Consul.

Thus in a series of coincidences, Jacques Laruelle in Chapter 1 comes upon virtually all the components of the symbolic environment which have conspired to bring about the destruction of Geoffrey Firmin. All the effigies of the past are present: the ill-starved lovers, Maximilian and Carlotta, Geoffrey and Yvonne, the mythical Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the symbols of horse, lighthouse, tower, prison, Ferris wheel, abyss, crucifixion, vultures, and the mythical levels of Faust, Faustus, the eviction from Eden, and of Dante's Inferno (both the "Hotel Casino de la Selva" and the cantina "El Bosque" recall Dante's "dark wood" and first appear in Chapter 1).

Jacques attempts to dismiss lightheartedly the kind of coincidences which come to dominate the novel; a collusion between "the gods" (usually seen as malevolent manipulators!) in the form of Fate, and Time, in its habitual intrusion in terms of "bad timing". Such coincidences are usually for the worst, and hence it is more comfortable for Laruelle to view them as "meaningless", while knowing that this is one thing they are not:

Had his discovery of the Consul here in Quauhnahuac really been so extraordinary, the discovery that his old English playmate --- whom he hadn't seen for nearly a quarter of a century was actually living in his street, and had been, without his knowledge, for six weeks? Probably not; probably it was just one of those meaningless correspondences that might be labelled: 'favourite trick of the gods'. But how vividly, again, that old seaside holiday in England came back to him! (U.V., p.22)

And by exactly one of the "meaningless correspondences" which are dismissed as "favourite trick of the gods", Laruelle opens the book Elizabethan plays, loaned to him by the Consul - "I know, Jacques, you may never return the book," (U.V., p.23) - and reads:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And buried is Apollo's laurel bough.
That sometimes grew within this learned man,
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall -
(U.V., p.40)

Once more, Laruelle's attention has been caught by intimations of damnation and descent. At the same time as he puts the book down after reading these words, an unposted letter flutters from between its pages, a letter which is written by the Consul and gives insight into his spiritual torment. Therefore, Firmin, too, may have been doing a little background reading into his spiritual condition.

For the first time, the reader is presented with the spiritual agonies - in lyrical detail - of this ex-Consul, mystic manqué, alcoholic. The letter is addressed to Yvonne, in the knowledge that only she can transport him from the "eternal sorrow that never sleeps of great Mexico." (U.V., p.41) Like Faust, Geoffrey has written:

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. (U.V., pp. 41-2)

Ironically, this voice of the Consul speaks not just from the past, but from the grave, and Laruelle is given insight into/

into/ the fact that Geoffrey has been perfectly well aware of the source from which his redemption would come:

I have been deliberately struggling against my love for you. I dared 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. If I am to survive I need your help. Otherwise, sooner or later I shall fall.

(U.V., p.43)

The fact that Yvonne never received the letter is indeed (ironically) a "favourite trick of the gods"; had she ever read it, the despair which the letter discloses might possibly have been alleviated, and the scene as "wholly changed" (U.V., p.46) as Jacques perceives the cantina to be after reading the letter.

The Consul's letter also increases the tension between past and present; it has intruded into the novel's "present", but also provides an invaluable link in the chain of events past. The letter is also specifically related to the concept of time within the novel; it appears with precisely the type of inadvertently "bad timing" within the plot (that is, too late for Firmin himself, and probably too late for Laruelle, at whom the peasants are beginning to look with hostility) which will continue to plague Geoffrey throughout the novel. In terms of the unity of the novel, though, this letter is accurately positioned to present some of the concerns which will be counterpointed by myth, symbol and motif at every level of the work. It is structurally important, and after reading the novel once, the reader may return to find out just to what extent the Consul has been aware of his condition.

The letter makes several observations crucial to the novel, not least that "Time is a fake healer anyhow" (U.V., p.45). Time has failed to heal the spiritual agonies of the Consul, and the "severed halves" (U.V., p.59) of his relationship with Yvonne. It has failed to swallow up the events of 1938 "like a drop of water". (U.V., p.11) For time is indeed a "fake healer" when "Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth." (U.V., p.45) With poignant understanding, this the Consul also establishes in his letter. Time has not/

not/ healed Laruelle's pain, either. He, too, senses that redemption will only come from love:

A black storm breaking out of its season! That was what love was like, he thought; love which came too late. Only no sane calm succeeded it, as when the evening fragrance or slow sunlight and warmth returned to the surprised land! M. Laruelle hastened his steps still farther. And let such love strike you dumb, blind, mad, dead - your fate would not be altered by your simile. (U.V., p.16)

And since Yvonne's "departure" (as we know it to be in Chapter 1) Laruelle has not changed his fate: "He had made few friends. He had acquired a Mexican mistress with whom he quarrelled." (U.V., p.16)

If time has been a "fake healer" for both the Consul and Jacques, it has possibly even been a malevolent force, which will again perpetrate the drive towards damnation. The cyclical structure and time-scale of Under the Volcano is analogous to a view of the recurrent cycle of civilisations which grow, thrive, become corrupt and perish. Man, too, is perceived as having been invaded by an instinct towards self-destruction, and the insidious counterpoint between the affairs of the outside world and the internal cosmos tends to ensure that the vicious circle will not be broken by the redemptive force of man's love for his fellow man.

Thus the essential malaise which unites the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels of the novel is man's inability to love. In a world raging with the tempest of man's inhumanity to man, his essential "humanity" and awareness are utterly in doubt. In this context, when the Consul announces grandiosely his "battle for the survival of the human consciousness" (U.V., p.221) on one level, his battle is to avoid slipping into alcoholic unconsciousness, but at the same time, he is performing an archetypal ritual - where his drunkenness "is used on one place to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during war, or during the period immediately preceding it." (S.L., p.66) Indeed, it is in this respect that the Consul's fate "should/

"should/ be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind." (S.L., p.66).

The machinations of the force which is symbolised by the Ferris Wheel in Under the Volcano, and which is poised to bring about the downfall of the Consul, can thus be seen in terms of "Fate" - linked with the operation of the "infernal gods" - and "Time", which is propitious to damnation. Douglas Day writes,

The spring of the Infernal Machine is, of course, Time. It has taken the Consul forty-two years to prepare 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 in the Himalayas in search of Himavat, the Magic Mountain of the Hindu mythology. They have brought him and his infant half-brother, Hugh, to England, for a series of surrogate parents, a childhood and adolescence of loneliness and vulnerability. They have turned Geoffrey into a poet, a scholar, a war hero (and killer), and a drunkard, --- 6

Day suggests that the Consul has never had any alternative to damnation. On the Classical level of the novel this is quite true. Overall, Lowry establishes that the dice are loaded, that both Geoffrey and mankind in general are playing a game which is dangerous at best - since neither appears to actively desire their salvation, having been offered the choice - but in contemporary times the more dangerous as both labour under the tyranny of the past, as contrived by the "infernal gods". In fact, such is the weight of the past - and of civilisation's self-destructive impulse - that to "strive upwards" has become monumentally difficult. Hell has indeed become that much handier.

Man, according to Lowry's vision, however, is essentially magnificent, in that he has this choice to make and that "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man." In the epigraphs to the novel, Lowry also includes Sophocles' "yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come", and Goethe's "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him we can save." But the Consul is specifically aligned with the Bunyan epigraph, "I could not find all my soul that I did/

did/ desire deliverance." Geoffrey, too, is recalled in the words "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain." In refusing to embrace salvation, preferring instead "the atmosphere of the cantina enclosing him already with its certainty of sorrow and evil," (U.V., p.204) the Consul is, instead, rushing into the arms of the infernal gods and hurtling towards the abyss.

Lowry's "infernal gods" act on the Consul's indifference to deliverance, his eternal apathy, and his ability to reduce matters of importance to solipsistic word-spinning: "Nemesis, a pleasant ride," (U.V., p.192) as he so characteristically and wrongly says. "Pleasant," no; easier, possibly. And in the Consul's world, the infernal gods certainly have the upper hand, ensuring too, that mankind will "call for aid in vain against Death." Cocteau views the fate of man in a fallen world in essentially the same terms. In the Infernal Machine, Anubis dismisses the fate of mere mortals thus:

You have assumed the 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. 7

Indeed, the "open mouth crying for help" recalls the fate of mankind, "Only against Death shall he call for aid in vain."

In this manner, Lowry instigates a complex structure of "turns of the screw" for the "mathematical annihilation of a mortal". Every "untimely" coincidence and concurrence is but a functional part of the Infernal Machine's diabolical purpose. The Ferris wheel thus becomes, it is suggested, both vehicle of, and accessory in, the precisely and horribly worked out destruction of a human life - that of Geoffrey Firmin, His Majesty's Consul, Mexico.

Indeed, the Ferris wheel is both symbol of the horrific force - of the repetition of the "Faustian" impulse - which hurtles Firmin towards the abyss, and it is a catalyst in his doom, forcing him to see that his view of the world, and of his own condition, is skewed. The repetitiveness of our spiritual agony/

agony/ is continually manifested at both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels within Under the Volcano. 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 resonate with futility; both the world and the individual are 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" (S.L., p. 78) becomes an intrinsic part of the organic (and cyclical) whole, a wheel within the cyclical unity of the novel.

While the Ferris wheel is established as an important symbol within the novel, it is not until Chapter 7 that it is rendered with its full symbolic significances. Even the number seven had symbolic significance for Lowry:

Here we come to seven, the fateful, the magic, the lucky good-bad number --- My house burned down on June 7; when I returned to the burned site someone had branded, for some reason, the number 7 on a burned tree --- Boehme would support me when I speak of the passion of order even in the smallest things that exist in the universe; 7 too is the number on the horse that will kill Yvonne and 7 is the hour when the Consul will die - (S.L., p.77)

Thus the chapter is intended to be of importance in the course of events, and it is in this chapter that the Consul is confronted with the full horror of the wheel:

! BRAVA ATRACCION !
10 C. MAQUINA INFERNAL

he read, half struck by some coincidence in this. 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 paddlewheels. Obscured by a tree, he hadn't seen it before. (U.V., p.224)

This is the hellish instrument of Firmin's descent, revealed as a concrete component of the Mexican landscape. At the same time, the fact that the Ferris wheel is identified as the "MAQUINA INFERNAL" establishes the link with Jean Cocteau's "La Machine Infernale", instrument of intransigent and malevolent gods. Indeed, the above passage suggests that the wheel has been waiting, unseen until now by the Consul, to operate on his indifference to deliverance.

Indeed, this confrontation with the "machine" has been prefigured earlier in the fateful Chapter 7. This is the event which causes Geoffrey Firmin to be "half-struck by some coincidence", for the book, La Machine Infernale, has, by some "favourite trick of the gods", found itself in his hands:

The Consul finished the contents of the cocktail shaker and came downstairs quietly, picked up a paper-backed book lying on the table, sat down and opened it with a long sigh. It was Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale. 'Oui, mon enfant, mon petit enfant,' he read, 'les choses qui paraissent abominable aux humains, si tu savais, de l'endroit où j'habite, elles ont peu d'importance.' 'We might have a drink in the square,' he said, closing the book, then opening it again: sortes Shakespeareanae. 'The gods exist, they are the devil', Baudelaire informed him. (U.V., p.212)

Ironically, the quote beginning "Oui, mon enfant" is not taken from Cocteau's Machine Infernale, although it reflects the attitudes of Anubis and the Sphinx - that humans "are nothing more than zeroes wiped from a slate" - and that human concerns "ont peu d'importance", to the gods.

Ironically, too, the quote attributed to Baudelaire by Geoffrey, is the third epigraph to La Machine Infernale and is a quotation from Cocteau himself, "Les dieux existent: c'est le diable."⁸ Thus the gods which are perceived to be operating on Geoffrey Firmin are consistent with the diabolical creatures which are cranking the clockwork wheel of fate and of time in La Machine Infernale. Even Anubis and the Sphinx are - as intermediaries between higher orders of gods and man - subject to control and predestination. Anubis says:

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

When the Sphinx tries to rebel against the pattern set down for her (he who cannot answer her riddles must die; he who can, will kill her), her gesture is in vain. She has been tricked by the gods into thinking that she is free to act, whereas Anubis knows otherwise and actually says, "we're not free."

The failure of the Sphinx is "all part of the Plan, part of the well-oiled predestination of the cosmic machine." 10 Her freedom is an illusion, and this theory is developed at another level in terms of a theory of Time. As Anubis says, "le temps des hommes est de l'éternité pliée": "man's time is a fold of eternity." Man's freedom, in the face of an inexorable cosmic infinity, is an illusion. Landers puts it thus:

We feel that we are free because we feel that we can choose to perform any series of acts in any sequence. But if time itself is an illusion, there is in fact no sequence of moments and therefore no sequence of actions. The apparent pattern of separate events has existed from all eternity. 11

Essentially we cannot "choose to perform any series of acts in any sequence", for our decisions are made under the weight of the past. The past as a vital determinant is found in Sophocles - where the prophecy about Oedipus' fate has dominated the full span of his life: the weight of his past is insurmountable. Cocteau acknowledged Freud, as modern proponent of the weight of the patient's past (and of course, as founder of the Oedipus Complex, in which the response to past incestuous drives is crucial to the present psychological pathology). Jean Cocteau was to be fascinated throughout his life by the Oedipus myth, and introduced the "Infernal Machine" which would operate inexorably on the events of the past, in order that the "skeletons in the cupboard" of the past would come to dominate the present and the future.

In the face of such inexorable operations - where wayward gods refuse to overlook the importance of the past - the insignificant/

insignificant/ mortal who is the Consul has one response; one more drink - "We might have a drink in the square." What does it matter to Geoffrey Firmin whether he has another drink or not, considering that "The gods exist, they are the devil." For the gods do not neglect the past - Nemesis makes an appearance in La Machine Infernale - and in this respect they are diabolical, "they are the devil". At this level, then, the Consul's freedom to choose is questioned, and indeed his choice - if such it be - is dictated by the weight of the past, continually impinging on the present. Thus the unwinding of time in Under the Volcano is the unravelling of fate, the fate of the Consul, so burdened by the past - at the hands of cruel gods - that there is no escape, and that a choice to do so would be mere illusion.

Indeed, horrific as it seems, the Consul will 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) Counterpoised against this acceptance is Goethe's "Whosoever unceasingly strives upwards ... him we can save." This pairing of antithetical ideas - that he who strives upward can be saved, set against the Consul's fatalistic apathy - is fundamental to Lowry's vision. What the author appears to be saying is, "Because of the weight of the past, it will be impossible for him to make the right choice. If Geoffrey Firmin did not have that past, making the right choice would be infinitely easier." (However, on the Romantic level, the Consul is offered a chance of salvation). At the same time, in spite of having such pointers towards the appalling inevitability of Firmin's fate, Lowry contrives to make the reader hope against hope that the signals are to prove wrong; although the right choice is next to impossible, the Consul might find his way back to the "right path."

Lowry fully intended the Consul to be truly great - a Christ, Prometheus, even as a recalcitrant Adam - and truly awful at the same time, a Faust, Roderick Usher, Oedipus, who will not survive his experiences of Hell. Lowry desired "the effect of a man who was the very shape and motion of the world's doom ... but at the same time the living prophecy of its hope!"¹² A tension is maintained throughout the novel between "doom" and/

and/ "hope". The Consul 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. Furthermore, the whole motion of the novel is set when he accepts the inevitability of his fate: "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" (U.V., p.233) - the last words of Chapter 7, before Chapter 8 begins, "DOWNHILL". However, the descent of the Consul is not an unmitigated one: his ultimate fate, as will be argued later is to be thrown down the barranca, but this is fused with a vision of the ascent of the volcano.

At one level, the Consul's trip on the Ferris wheel plays a concrete part in his downfall; as he hurtles round, he is separated from all his possessions and the contents of his pockets. A child returns them to him, but his passport is not amongst the returned possessions. Characteristically, the Consul is able to rationalize the absence of the passport by deciding that he had not brought it out with him in the first place: "Well, definitely he could not have brought it." (U.V., p.226) The child hands back a cable from Hugh Firmin that the Consul does not remember having. This cable, along with Hugh's card "Federación Anarquista Ibérica, it said, Sr. Hugo Firmin" (U.V., p.370) is confiscated from the Consul by the Mexican police. Along with the absence of his passport - and Geoffrey's lies about his identity - the police take this as a political indictment of the Consul, and accordingly shoot him.

Thus at a concrete level, the Ferris wheel has been an accessory in the Consul's fate. At the same time, it is "the wheel of the law, rolling" (U.V., p.221) acting on a spiritual level:

The wretched children had spotted him again; and his penalty for avoiding them was to be drawn inexorably, though with as much dignity as possible, into boarding the monster. And now --- he was alone, in a little confession box. After a while, with violent bewildering convulsions, the thing started to go. The confession boxes, perched at the end of menacing steel cranks, zoomed upwards and heavily fell --- The Consul, like that poor fool who was bringing light to the world, was hung upside down over it, with only a scrap of woven wire between himself and death. (U.V., pp.224-5)

This passage operates on a number of levels. As the Ferris Wheel swings the Consul upside down - so that he sees the number 666, the number of the Beast in Revelations¹³ as 999 - so the Tree of Life is inverted to become the Qliphoth, to which all perverted aspiration leads. New also notes that the "Tree of Life --- figures on the card of the Lovers"¹⁴ in the Tarot; if this card is upside down, love will not prosper. On the level of the Tarot, New points out that "Geoffrey can at least momentarily be the Hanged Man too."¹⁵

The Consul is in effect pinioned to the wheel in the same way as Ixion was attached to a revolving infernal wheel for eternity. Ixion, too, had offended against a father-figure (killing him, like Oedipus, in this case to avoid paying bride-price to Eioneus), a threatening figure which recalls the spectre which tells the Consul "Father is waiting for you though. Father has not forgotten." (U.V., p.193) Such is the weight of the past, too, that "Father" seems unlikely ever to forget. Indeed, the burden of the past is immense, as Geoffrey thinks while he abandons himself completely to the Infernal Machine:

It could be difficult even for a Consul to be without a passport in Mexico. Ex-consul. What did it matter? Let it go! There was a kind of fierce delight in this final acceptance. Let everything go! Everything particularly that provided means of ingress or egress, went bond for, gave meaning or character, or purpose or identity to that frightful bloody nightmare he was forced to carry around with him everywhere upon his back, that went by the name of Geoffrey Firmin, late of His Majesty's Navy, later still of His Majesty's Consular Service, later still of - Suddenly it struck him --- that this would go on for ever; no one could stop the machine ...
It was over. (U.V., p.226)

What "is over" is the Consul's struggle at this point (and at the concrete level, which has become virtually subsidiary, the Consul's ride on the Ferris wheel is over). The main action is in the Consul's mind, and the wheel, as "the eternal return", takes his mind back to "that frightful bloody nightmare he was forced to carry around with him everywhere upon his back", a past of failure and of enormous, unspecified guilt. And, again/

again/ at a more concrete level, the Consul's hope of a future is "over", for, as he ironically notes "it could be difficult even for a Consul to be without a passport in Mexico" it will be even more difficult for an ex-Consul.

Thus the Consul thinks of what he has been in the past and is no longer, and yet, paradoxically, he feels himself to be in the grip of legacies of the past - of guilt - and "that this would go on for ever", that a cumulative burden would go on increasing. He would become more and more the plaything of time and the machine - "no one could stop the machine", and because of this, "It was over". No-one and nothing can change the past, and thus the struggle is over. However, his is an active resignation, in triumphantly renouncing mortal aspiration - "Let it go!" He embraces the idea of succumbing to his imaginary - or not so imaginary - guilt almost with gusto and relish.

The reference to "His Majesty's Navy" is to the incident in Firmin's past which Laruelle has introduced in Chapter 1, an incident for which Firmin "had received the British Distinguished Service Order or Cross" (U.V., p.38), but which had also involved the mysterious disappearance of some German officers. Laruelle thinks,

Something had happened to those German officers and what had happened was not pretty. They had, it was said, been kidnapped by the Samaritans' stokers and burned alive in the furnaces --- He [the Consul] had even been enormously funny about it. 'People simply did not go round', he said, 'putting Germans in furnaces .' It was only once or twice during those later months when drunk that to M. Laruelle's astonishment he suddenly began proclaiming not only his guilt in the matter but that he'd always suffered horribly on account of it. He went much further. No blame attached to the stokers. No question arose of any order given them. Flexing his muscles he sardonically announced the single-handed accomplishment himself of the deed. (U.V., pp. 38-9)

The actual truth of the situation is unclear; Laruelle questions the sudden swing from comic pastiche to unutterable blame, and even thinks, "the German officers were merely an excuse to buy /

buy/another bottle of mescal," (U.V., p.39) which the reader might also suspect.

However, the Consul has also been rendered - by means of allusion - in Christlike dimensions. He has half-glimpsed the man who carries planks of wood (his cross) on his back, he is ultimately an "hombre noble" (U.V., p.37) and is identified with the Indian who carries his father on his back:

Bent double, groaning with the weight, an old lame Indian was carrying on his back, by means of a strap looped over his forehead, another poor Indian, yet older and more decrepit than himself. He carried the older man and his crutches, trembling in every limb under this weight of the past, he carried both their burdens. (U.V., p.281)

The Consul's suffering is thus given archetypal dimensions: he, like the old man, and like Christ, is willing to shoulder his burden, that "nightmare he was forced to carry around with him everywhere upon his back." Likewise, in a grandiose gesture, he takes on the guilt of mankind, ensuring that "no blame attached to the stokers."

The gesture of the archetypal martyr is undercut by the melodramatic newspaper headlines the Consul envisages for himself - "Firmin innocent, but bears guilt of world on shoulders." (U.V., p.141) While the parallel with Christ is clear, the motives for this kind of self-aggrandisement might be questioned, and one might recall the rather baser suspicions of Laruelle, that such "suffering" might serve merely as an excuse for yet another drink. In the deviousness and private hell that can be attributed to lifelong alcoholism, it may be highly convenient for the Consul to think - or choose to think - that "no one could stop the machine now". The hell of alcoholism is very handy, particularly when you can rationalize yourself into a good excuse for a drink!

Indeed, alcohol provides the Consul with a highly convenient escape from the main business of his life - the hard tasks of upward striving and taking cognizance of the needs of others.

Ironically, his flight into the bottle is also a flight into his interior microcosm, which proves to be an escape of limited comfort; Geoffrey is always liable to come upon his own inner demons (projected onto the landscape!) which bear a curious resemblance to the demons he is trying to leave behind!

At a macrocosmic level, the flight of the Consul from his inadequacies and failings of the past is also the flight of mankind from a world which no longer seemed to have any knowledge of Eden. Lowry writes of a world in which "tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless", which has turned its values upside down, just as Geoffrey Firmin hangs upside down (and thus the higher he strives in this position, the lower he goes) and as the people in the film walk upside down: "On the screen, over which clambered an endless procession of torchlit shadows, hung, magically projected upside down, a faint apology for the suspended function." (U.V., p.32) Because of the twentieth-century loss of values - in a world which was "the drunken madly revolving world hurtling --- towards Hercules's Butterfly" and the abyss - man seems to be trapped in his own concerns, unable to look outwards to his fellow man. In short, mankind and the world are right on course for self-destruction in which "Countries, civilizations, empires, great hordes perish for no reason at all." (U.V., p. 312)

The condition of such a world is inextricably meshed with that of the Consul:

The drunkenness of the Consul is used on one plane to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during the war, or during the period immediately preceding it, which is almost the same thing ---
(S.L., p.66)

If "drunkenness" is the condition of both Firmin and the world, alcohol is equally - and paradoxically - the means of escape from this condition. Jean Cocteau's addiction has also been viewed as such an escape from this context:

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. 16

As an instrument of escape, any form of alcohol serves the Consul as opium did Cocteau, but the means of escape from external chaos ironically becomes a method of inflicting even more heightened chaos on the internal condition, and perpetuating an ever-downward spiral.

Thus the protagonists in the world of Lowry and of Cocteau become progenitors of their own self-destruction. The Consul actively pursues his self-destruction, like the scorpion of which he says "Leave him be. He'll only sting himself to death anyway." (U.V., p.191) As an alcoholic, Firmin actively imbibes the evil which will bring about his downfall. Parallel to this is his further mortification of the flesh:

(and it was this calamity he now, with Maria, 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)

In this sacrilegious crucifixion, Geoffrey Firmin inflicts "calamity" upon himself in the suicidal undertaking of the scorpion, in a climax of the slow, painstaking self-mortification of alcoholism. Indeed, this can be seen as a final attempt to "force --- body and soul into a monstrous union."

At the same time as he is suffering at his own hand, Geoffrey Firmin is suffering at the hands of wayward and irresponsible gods. At their most malign, they crank the immense mangle of Time - the Ferris wheel/"Machine Infernale" - allowing the Consul's fate to unwind under the thunderous weight of the past. Equally, on a religious (?) level, the Consul imagines his destiny to be controlled by force thus:

Yet who would ever have believed that some obscure man, sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts, was authoring their doom --- Or perhaps it was not a man at all, but a child, a little child, innocent as that other Geoffrey had been, who sat as up in an organ loft somewhere playing, pulling out all the stops at random, and kingdoms divided and fell, and abominations dropped from the sky - (U.V., pp.149-150)

Thus the Consul ultimately emerges as both the author of his own doom, and as the plaything of wayward gods, predestined - like the world itself - to suffer "abominations" under the virtually intolerable burden of the past.

In essence, the wheel is symbolic of the almost insupportable burden of the past. at the most obvious level, the wheel is manifested in Under the Volcano in terms of the narrative structure of the novel; this cyclical movement in turn parallels that of history, where civilisations rise, decline and fall into ruin simply to provide the sediment on which the process will begin and end all over again. In fact, Lowry parallels this process in his technique of symbolic accretion, whereby the classical mythology of Sophocles operates alongside Cocteau's Freudian "machine infernale". Inherently, there may be an element of comparative evaluation of modes of tragedy, but there is no specific judgement of the validity of any one civilisation, mode or symbol-system. What is of greater significance is the rhythmic sequence of rise and fall (predominantly, fall in the spiral downwards) in the history of the ages, in the twentieth-century ambience of decline, and in the individual tragedies of the novel's world.

Thus the wheel is also symbolic of the "favourite trick" of those malignant forces, the gods, and their cranking of the machine of fate. The Consul has taken his flight downward into the abyss; he has also done so in his capacity as repository for the inadequacies of mankind in the modern world. History on a macrocosmic level is repeating itself - the world which Firmin has left has turned towards war. After his flight downwards, too, (as a result of the conspiracy of the gods to match perfectly the elements of time and fate, as symbolised by the Ferris Wheel) Geoffrey is to be followed by another circuit of the spiral down towards chaos.

In this new circuit of the Ferris Wheel, the world is pursuing its infernal course through war, and - at the microcosmic level - Geoffrey Firmin's place as the individual in the downwards pursuit of his destiny is to be taken by Laruelle. The "outriders" of the storm - which had finally broken as Yvonne and Geoffrey/

Geoffrey/ were carried to their various fates - appear to have returned in Chapter 1: "He [Laruelle] watched the clouds: dark swift horses surging up the sky. A black storm breaking out of its season!" (U.V., p.16) The metaphor for the clouds is highly significant - the "dark swift horses" prefigure the horse (with a fateful number "7" branded on its rump) loosed by the Consul in Chapter 12, an action which finally prompts the "Chief of Rostrums" to fire his pistol, and which causes the freed horse to plunge into the forest where it tramples Yvonne to death in Chapter 11. The horse is stampeding towards her, too, because it is startled not only by the retort of the pistol, but also by the thunderclaps of the storm.

The storm in Chapter 1 not only prefigures the storm to come in 1938, but also repeats the conditions in real life in 1939 as Jacques is recalling the events of the previous year. In a further reference to the storm in Chapter 1, there is every indication that Laruelle is indeed to take the Consul's place in the new circuit of the downward spiral:

It was still raining, out of season, over Mexico, the dark waters rising outside to engulf his own zacuali in the Calle Nicaragua, his useless tower against the coming of the second flood.
(U.V., p.35)

With characteristic meticulousness, Lowry has worked further reference to the flood - presumably, the Flood - into the main substance of the novel. In Yvonne's absence, the Consul's house has fallen into disrepair, the garden untended. Geoffrey tells her:

'--- The house was broken into one night when I was out. And flood: the drains of Quauhnahuac visited us and left us with something that smelt like the Cosmic Egg till recently. Never mind though, maybe you can -"
(U.V., p.71)

Thus the Consul acknowledges that salvation - be it for house, garden or himself - lies with Yvonne. It lies also with his own will that this should be so, and such a desire for salvation he cannot find in himself.

The overall informing consciousness of the novel, then, is one which causes the narrative to take on a cyclical motion, whereby the Consul is compelled to repeat the alcoholic tragedies of the past. As an extension to this circuitous motion of the mind, Laruelle in Chapter 1 is poised ready to return to, and repeat, the tragedies of the Consul's past (these having become integral to his own past). In this respect, the Consul and Laruelle are not so much characters as components of a consistent, and profoundly compelling consciousness which is committed to a view of "eternal return", with the Ferris wheel acting as symbol and mechanism of this return.

If the hub of the wheel is taken to be the authorial consciousness, the consistency of Lowry's vision is demonstrated by a variety of manifestations of "wheels within the wheel" radiating outwards. In this way, the significance of the wheel is not simply related to the structure of the novel, to the thematic concern with the intrusion of the past into the present, to a view of the rise and fall of civilisations in terms of a cyclical historic relativism, and to a view of fate and the timely conspiracy of malicious gods as symbolised by Cocteau's "Machine Infernale" and the material presence of the Ferris wheel. Rather, there are in addition proliferating manifestations of the wheel which reinforce the depiction of fateful events, and which may be interpreted as auguries of the infernal conspiracy between the external and internal determinants of - and signals toward - the Consul's ill-starred extremity.

Thus, within the framework of the "temporal circle"¹⁷ the Ferris wheel is paralleled by supporting manifestations of the wheel. Chapter 1 of Under the Volcano establishes the "wheel of water", the wash of unseen factors which is liable to catch us up. The Consul's letter contains a vision of Eridanus - "somewhere far north" (U.V., p.42) - but even this vision, startling in its purity, is under threat of storm:

--- and you see the reflection of the remote white thunderclouds in the water, 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 beside it reflected from the cabin vanishes round the/

the/ headland, silence, and then again, within the white white distant alabaster thunderclouds beyond the mountains, the thunderless gold lightning in the blue evening, unearthly ...

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)

Not merely a paradisaical vision - recalling Lowry's own northern Eden, the bay at Dollarton, B.C. - this is the Consul's transient view of a future for himself and Yvonne: "right through hell there is a path, as Blake well knew." (U.V., p.42) 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).

Indeed, there is a fusion of death of the soul with beauty; the sparkling white, silver and gold scene is permeated by the ominous rhythms of the impending storm, and is set in the context of the Consul's suffering:

I think I know a good deal about physical suffering. But this is worst of all, to feel your soul dying. I wonder if it is because tonight my soul has really died that I feel at the moment something like peace. (U.V., p.42)

The approximation to peace - the "little dishonest vision of order" (U.V., p.133) - which the Consul feels appears symptomatic of a society dominated now more than ever by transience and mutability. While Geoffrey Firmin awaits his impending destiny - as the world itself prepares for war - there appears on both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels to be little context for a paradisaical vision. The scene is establishing poignantly that there might be so much to hope for, and so little room for choice, in view of the chaos which is threatening the Twentieth Century, and of the hallucinatory condition which erodes the Consul's desire for control and "order".

The Consul's vision of a "new life" is ambivalent not just because this paradise is "tormented" (U.V., p.43) by the ravages of the coming storm (recalling the storm which has broken over/

over/ Geoffrey and Yvonne, and which is about to break over Laruelle), but also because it appears as an elaboration of the Antigone 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 "power that crosses the white sea" is reflected in the "wheel of water" - "the wash of another unseen ship, like a great wheel, the vast spokes of the wheel whirling across the bay." Thus on this level, the forces impinging on the Consul's destiny are seen as elemental, and by analogy, the storm which is breaking - even in this vision of a northern Eden - is one "that threatens to engulf him". Geoffrey Firmin will be caught up in the "vast spokes" of the wheel of water and submit to its elemental forces, just as surely as he will "accept the unspeakable circuit" of the Ferris wheel on another level. While there is a "path under surges" - and one through hell, too - the Consul will not choose it. He has strayed from Dante's "straight road" and will not return to it.

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 appearance of the Ferris wheel - the "luminous wheel" - at the end of Chapter 1. It is suggested that there is a connection 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, transfigured, as Yvonne dies at the end of Chapter 11:

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

The image of the "wheel of water" has been transformed into a cosmic symbol, and Lowry achieves a fusion of heaven and earth, the stars with the sea beneath them. This is the climax of a magnificent passage in which Yvonne's life flashes in front of her in an amazing cornucopia of images drawn together from the whole novel into the blast of what is essentially a purging conflagration.

In fact, the wheel appears in numerous forms in Yvonne's whirling, eddying thoughts as she dies:

They were the cars at the fair that were whirling around her; no, they were the planets, while the sun stood, burning and spinning and glittering in the centre; here they came again, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto; but they were not planets, for it was not the merry-go-round at all, but the Ferris Wheel, they were constellations, in the hub of which, like a great cold eye, burned Polaris, and round and round it here they went --- or it was a mechanical horse on the merry-go-round, the carousel, but the carousel had stopped --- the fire was spreading faster and faster, the walls with their millwheel reflections of sunlight on water were burning --- (U.V., pp.335-6)

The merry-go-round becomes Ferris Wheel becomes the stars, the planets, carousel and finally "wheel of water" merged with the "luminous wheel" - the "millwheel reflections of sunlight on water --- burning." The "wheel of water" has appeared in very similar terms in Chapter 4 of Under the Volcano:

Out of the brewery itself, which at close quarters appeared quite different, more like a mill, sliced, oblong, which emitted a sudden mill-like clamour and on which flitted and slid millwheel-like reflections of sunlight on water, cast from a nearby stream... (U.V., p.116)

And this same image appears in Chapter 9:

--- then the millwheel reflections of sunlight on water, as Hugh described those on the Cervecería Quauhnahuac, only sliding down the front of their house, sliding, sliding, over the windows, the walls, the reflections that, above and behind the house turned the pine boughs into green chenille --- (U.V., p.271)

Such is Yvonne's dream of happiness in the future with Geoffrey Firmin. As Yvonne's life is ebbing away, detail by detail, Lowry achieves a fusion in his imagery such that heaven and earth, fire and water merge and take on each other's properties. Thus the conflagration - and reference to the fire at Dollarton, B.C. from which Lowry never recovered psychologically - is not portrayed merely in terms of the horror involved but also in terms of carrying Yvonne "home silently over the dark waters of Eridanus." (U.V., p.337).

Each of the images which flash in front of Yvonne has appeared several times in the course of the novel. Lowry himself specifically points out that "Yvonne's dying visions hark back to her first thoughts at the beginning of Chapter II." (S.L., p.84) Her final vision of a proliferation of wheels has been prefigured by her first glance at "the merry-go-rounds, the Ferris Wheel" (U.V., p.49) on her return to Quauhnahuac and the Consul. Even closer in its intrinsic relationship to Yvonne's final "burning dream" (U.V., p.337) is an earlier passage in Chapter 11:

And the earth itself still turning on its axis and revolving around the luminous wheel of this galaxy, the countless unmeasured jewelled wheels of countless unmeasured galaxies turning, turning majestically, into infinity, into eternity, through all of which all life ran on - all this, long after she herself was dead, men would still be reading in the night sky, and as the earth turned through those distant seasons, and they watched the constellations still rising, culminating, setting, to rise again - Aries, Taurus, Gemini, the Crab, Leo, Virgo, the Scales and the Scorpion, Capricorn the Sea-goat and Aquarius the Water-Bearer, Pisces, and once more, triumphantly, Aries! - would they not, too, still be asking the hopeless eternal question: to what end? What force drives this sublime celestial machinery?
(U.V., p.323)

Thus the "luminous wheel" emerges as the pattern of the cosmos, a system and motion operating towards infinity and eternity. The above images mesh with the final images of Chapter 11 and are associated by form or by motion with the Lowrian wheel, with the "sublime celestial machinery".

To Yvonne, the "force" that drives the "celestial machinery" is essentially mysterious and unknowable. Yet the "force" is drawing her up to the "beneficent Pleiades" (U.V., p.323), and the machinery which lifts her to her destiny - to home across "the dark waters of Eridanus" - is not the diabolical system which tempts and invites the Consul to his doom. Yet the "Infernal Machine" and the "sublime celestial machinery" are fused to become the cyclical pattern of the cosmos, driving temporality towards eternity.

The transition from the "wheel of water" to the eddying stars (U.V., p.337) 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 concurrence and cyclical repetition, the authorial consciousness superimposes the wheel on the Mexican landscape, on the astrological landscape and on the spiritual and premonitory landscape, for the entire motion of the novel is indeed operating in a landscape of the mind. The "wheel of water" which has originally been the wash of an "unseen ship" is transposed, transferring the undulating and centrifugal movement of the waves to the "green and orange birds", then to the stars. The stars are not just linked to the "rings on water", but to these exotic birds which open the chapter; the stars towards which Yvonne is drawn are "like a flock of diamond birds flying softly." (U.V., p.337)

The thunderstorm, too, which has appeared in the Antigone epigraph, in Chapter 1, and in the Consul's letter (in juxtaposition with the "wheel of water") is related to the cosmic force of the wheel. As part of this force, it, too has a cyclical motion: "- The storm, that had already dispatched its outriders, must have been travelling in a circle: the real onset was yet to come." (U.V., p.317) This is not merely the pathetic fallacy, occurring as the action of the novel comes to a head and as signal towards the final tragedies. The storm appears to act as catalyst, in very real collaboration with the cosmic forces at work. It "had already dispatched its outriders", one of the "dispatched outriders" presumably being the riderless horse, later freed by the Consul. Lowry's entire Mexican iconography appears to/

to/ participate in a very real way in the destruction of his characters. The storm has indeed travelled full circle, opening the novel, appearing in the Consul's letter, and returning to claim the victims of the cosmic forces.

A further recurring manifestation of the wheel, which augments the cluster around the major symbol in Lowry's symbolic network is the printer's flywheel, which occurs both at the beginning and at the end of the novel. In Chapter 2, the Consul and Yvonne go forth into the streets from the inevitable 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. The 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 characteristic of Lowrian irony, and also of his continual balancing of antithetical elements. The irony lies in the fact that manifestly, the occasion is not a parting, but instead, a reunion. On another level, this reunion is paradoxically already fated to be a final parting, one for which diabolical forces of the Infernal Machine are "already spinning".

The force of the "already spinning flywheel" is placed in context with other ominous precursors of downfall. Linked to the "flywheel" in the above passage are suggestions of the abyss (La Despedida) - both physical and spiritual - the forest (with its Dantean reverberations) and fire. All of these symbols find fuller expression later in the novel, and are connected to the fates of the Consul and of Yvonne. By linking this particular set of symbols to the force of the printer's flywheel, Lowry prefigures the much more precise matrix achieved by the end of/

of/ Under the Volcano of an irrevocable destiny where fire, the forest and the abyss become the ultimate symbols of destruction. And for all Yvonne's dreams of a haven in the north, and in spite of her genuine urge to bridge the gap between herself and the Consul, she intuits that the fire which has split the rock will be adopted by Geoffrey as an excuse for refusing any hope of regeneration:

She longed to heal the cleft rock. She was one of the rocks and she yearned to save the other, that both might be saved. By a superlucid effort she moved herself nearer it, poured out her pleas, her passionate tears, told all her forgiveness: the other rock stood unmoved. 'That's all very well', it said, 'but it happens to be your fault, and as for myself, I propose to disintegrate as I please!'
(U.V., p.60)

The Consul does indeed "propose to disintegrate as he pleases". In refusing Yvonne's help, which he well knows to be essential to his salvation - 'If I am to survive I need your help' (U.V., p.43) - Geoffrey is embracing his own destruction.

Thus Yvonne imagines the Consul's rejection of her, a rejection which is based not on ignorance but on the knowledge that "Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth" (U.V., p.45). As the Consul trudges his weary - but highly aware - path to self destruction in Chapter 12, he inspects the domain which is to be his destiny:

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. How long ago, how strange, how sad, remote --- like some poor sorrow, this time without effort, Yvonne left his mind again.
(U.V., p.340)

The fact that the reader has been given first Yvonne's, and then the Consul's perspective on the scene means that the symbolic significance of the details - La Despedida and the printer's/

printer's/ flywheel - is reinforced. In fact, this shop window appears as a microcosmic representation of the Lowrian universe of the wheel and the abyss.

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, noted by Lowry himself:

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. (S.L., p.60)

Thus Yvonne and the Consul emerge as variations of the thematic consciousness within the novel, rather than necessarily distinct characters. Pinioned to similar views of the world within a deterministic cosmos, and of the nature of salvation, Yvonne and Geoffrey vary only in their "desire for deliverance". While Yvonne suspects with horror that the divide is imminent, the Consul accepts with determined abandon that the wheel of his life has turned very close to full circle. By the time the Consul gives his version of the scene outside the printer's shop, La Despedida is specifically related to the abyss into which he is destined to fall - the barranca - rather than to the more general "split" or cleft in their relationship which Yvonne fears.

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, repetitions and transformations of the "wheel of water" and the printer's flywheel. Lowry attaches other emblematic figures from the Mexican environment, and these too - however minor they may appear to be - contribute to his system of cumulative symbolic resonances of the wheel. For example, what may appear as a little realistic local colour - or even "Mexican local colour heaped on in shovelfuls" (S.L., p.61) - is meticulously linked to the symbol of the wheel and to the novel's thematic concerns:

A madman passed, wearing, in the manner of a life-belt, an old bicycle tyre. With a nervous movement he continually shifted the injured tread round his neck.--- Picking up the tyre he flung it far ahead again, repeating this process, to the irreducible logic of which he appeared eternally committed, until out of sight. (U.V., p.227)

The madman is portrayed as being as committed to illogicality as the drunken, mad world in which he lives. For a moment, in the "looking-glass" world which holds hurtling towards war to be sanity, the only sane man is a madman, clinging already to his "life-belt" which is at the same time his perpetually turning wheel.

The bicycle wheel returns in Chapter 9, this time related specifically to the wheel of fate:

Their shadows crawled before them in the dust, slid down white thirsty walls of houses, were caught violently for a moment in an elliptical shade, the turning wrenched wheel of a boy's bicycle.

The spoked shadow of the wheel, enormous, insolent, swept away. (U.V., p.281)

As A.C. Nyland points out in "The Luminous Wheel: The Evolution of Malcolm Lowry's Style", the above "description is imagination coloring observation."¹⁸ We may be uncertain as to the concrete origin of this lengthening shadow of a spoked wheel - the previous reference to the "bicycle wheel" has been much more specific in terms of physical presence within the Mexican landscape - and yet this matters little. The "spoked shadow of the wheel" operates by this point in the novel within the context of a landscape of the mind. The matrix constructed within this interior landscape means that this shadow of a wheel recalls not only the madman with his bicycle tyre, and the "millwheel reflections" on the wall in Yvonne's dream, but also the Ferris Wheel ("enormous, insolent") which will keep on turning, regardless. For the cycles of change - of history and of civilisations - which leave man's condition essentially unchanged, Lowry found an apposite symbol in the "insolent" wheel, machine of the diabolical gods whose sole purpose appears to be to ensure that "time, that one had hoped to bemuse, would at any moment begin to glide after /

after/ you like a shark following a swimmer." (U.V., pp.191-192)

In his use of the symbol of the wheel, in all its manifestations, Lowry demonstrates consummate skill in his ability to effect transformations which relate the exterior landscape of Mexico via the authorial consciousness to create a matrix of symbols in the actual physical environment which seem as collaborators in Geoffrey Firmin's destruction. At the same time, the perspective on the landscape is rendered to a great extent via the Consul's mind (the dominating component of the authorial consciousness) such that what the reader is permitted to see has undergone transformation in a process of filtering through Firmin's mind. To a large extent, what Lowry finally achieves is a landscape of the mind - a topography of Mexico which accurately represents (particularly in the cases of features of great symbolic significance: wheel, abyss, tower, forest, volcanoes, water) Firmin's inner condition. External and interior landscapes are inextricably linked - sometimes virtually indistinguishable, as in the case of the "turning wrenched wheel" of the boy's bicycle - and are founded upon specific thematic convictions. In this case, the wheel relates to a view of the rise and decline of civilisations which is cyclical, a movement which operates under the immense burden of the past. As the past has been impossible to placate - even in the Classical tradition, where Oedipus cannot escape his destiny, and in Christianity where the drama of Adam and Eve ensured Man's eviction from the Garden of Eden - mankind and his civilisations are trapped in a spiral downwards toward chaos.

CHAPTER 5: NOTES

1. Jean Cocteau, The Infernal Machine and Other Plays (New York: New Directions Publishing Co., 1963) p.6.
2. Malcolm Lowry, "Garden of Ebla", United Nations World (IV, June 1940) p.46.
3. E.M. Forster, A Passage to India (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979) p.31.
4. Ibid., p.31.
5. Ibid., p.31.
6. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, pp. 323-4.
7. Jean Cocteau, p.36.
8. Baudelaire as noted by Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p. 187.
9. Jean Cocteau, p.35.
10. W.M. Landers, "Introduction" to Jean Cocteau, La Machine Infernale (London: Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1957) p.xxix.
11. Ibid., pp. xxix - xxx.
12. Malcolm Lowry in "Special Lowry Collection" at U.B.C. in Makowiecki, Malcolm Lowry and the Lyrical Convention of Fiction, p.53.
13. William H. New, Malcolm Lowry, p.37.
14. Ibid., p.36.
15. Ibid., p.36.

16. M. Crosland and Sinclair Road, "Introduction" to Jean Cocteau, Opium (London: Icon Books Ltd., 1957), p.5.
17. Stefan Makowiecki, Malcolm Lowry and the Lyrical Convention of Fiction, p.40.
18. A.C. Nyland, "The Luminous Wheel: The Evolution of Malcolm Lowry's style" in Margerie Lowry, ed., Malcolm Lowry: Psalms and Songs (New York: New American Library Inc., 1975), p.171.

PART II: Chapter 6.

"The Untended Garden"

PART II: THE DESCENT
CHAPTER 6
"The Untended Garden"

? LE GUSTE ESTE JARDIN ?
? QUE ES SUYO ?
! EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN !

The above motif recurs throughout Under the Volcano and is of vital significance to the novel not merely due to its allusion to the garden - Garden of Eden - and to the theme of eviction, but more importantly, because of the two translations made by the Consul of this motif. As Lowry establishes, even such an arcane motif as this warning has a physical presence within the Mexican topography. At the most basic level, this is a "Keep Off the Grass" type of sign, situated in the little public park bordering on Geoffrey Firmin's garden.

The sign first appears to Geoffrey, as he is pursued by the demons of the D.T.'s into his own garden in his search for a hidden bottle. In the midsts of the phantasmagoric hallucinations which ensue, Firmin catches sight of something new:

--- a sign, uprooted or new, whose oblong pallid face stared through the wire at him. ? Le gusta este jardín ? it asked ...

? 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, words which one took to the very bottom of one's being, words which, perhaps a final judgement on one --- (U.V., p.132)

The Consul's translation at this point is incorrect, but vital to the novel in establishing the theme of eviction, and in introducing this idea, Lowry is prefiguring Firmin's idiosyncratic discussion of Adam and Eve with the walnut grower Mr. Quincey.

Even the Consul's "mistranslation" is a valuable one, for it is indeed "a final judgement on one" - that is, on the individual, Geoffrey Firmin, and the world - that "We evict those who destroy!" Both the individual alcoholic, and the alcoholically insane world are pursuing self-destructive ends which, it is suggested, may lead to permanent eviction from the Garden of Eden and from Paradise. 'Why is it yours?' indicates wasted opportunity, a world and its inhabitants who simply do not stop to think about their fate, but instead continue to embrace the notion of an inevitable downward spiral.

The Consul's mistranslation correlates accurately, too, with Lowry's stated intentions in employing the untended garden as a symbol:

This novel then is concerned principally --- with the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself. It is also concerned with the guilt of man, with his remorse, with his ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past, and with his doom. The allegory is that of the Garden of Eden, the Garden representing the world, from which we ourselves run perhaps slightly more danger of being ejected than when I wrote the book. (S.L., p.66)

By means of the allegory of the Garden of Eden, Lowry also fully intended that Under the Volcano be "a prophecy, a political warning --- and a writing on the wall". (S.L., p.66) He even places a gold-leaf motif on the wall; written on Jacques Laruelle's tower are the words "No se puede vivir sin amar" (U.V., p.213) - "One cannot live without loving." This is a warning to the Consul, who loves neither his wife, nor his fellow man. For although the ghosts in the ruined remains of the Cortez Palace and its ruined garden start with the aims of Maximilian and Carlotta to create their Eden, they begin to quarrel:

And yet, how they must have loved this land, these two lonely empurpled exiles, human beings finally, lovers out of their element - their Eden --- their only majesty at last that of tragedy. Ghosts. Ghosts, as at the Casino, certainly lived here. And a ghost who still said: 'It is our destiny to come here, Carlotta. Look at this rolling glorious country, its hills, its valleys, its volcanoes beautiful beyond belief. And to think that it is ours! Let us be good and constructive and make ourselves worthy of it!' (U.V., p.20)

In effect, the ghosts undergo a subtle transmutation to become the ghosts of Geoffrey Firmin and Yvonne:

Or there were ghosts quarrelling: 'No, you loved yourself, you loved your misery more than I. You did this deliberately to us.' 'I?' 'You always had people to look after you, to love you, to use you, to lead you. You listened to everyone save me, who really loved you.' 'No, you're the only person I've ever loved.' 'Ever?' 'You loved only yourself.' ---

But it was the Consul's voice, not Maximilian's,
--- (U.V., pp. 20-21)

Even at the beginning of the passage, the "two lonely empurpled exiles" may equally well be the travel-weary Consul and Yvonne; for in this land of Mexico, they are endangered, and "purple" recurs throughout Lowry's work as a colour associated with not only authority (always perceived as a dangerous force), but also danger itself.

The resolution of Maximilian to tend their garden (that of the palace, and that of Mexico itself) - "Let us be good and constructive and make ourselves worthy of it!" - is one which is open to the Consul to make, and by extension, mankind himself should make such a decision to tend his garden, the world. But Geoffrey Firmin's garden is - literally - to remain as untended as it has been in Yvonne's absence. The point is clearly made that Yvonne is tender of the garden, and that her absence has led to disintegration. The Consul says:

'-- Though the garden's a rajah mess, I'm afraid. We've been virtually without a gardener at all for months. Hugh pulled up a few weeds. He cleaned out the swimming-pool too ... No. Skullduggery and suings for back wages have been my lot. And leaf-cutter ants, several species --- Never mind though, maybe you can -'

Yvonne disengaged her arm to lift a tentacle from a trumpet vine growing across the path.
(U.V., pp. 70-71)

Although Yvonne's return should mean that both the garden and Geoffrey's needs are tended, the quarrelling voices in the ruined gardens of Maximilian and Carlotta have already indicated that this may not be so. Firmin knows that "Love is the only thing/

thing/ which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth" (U.V., p.45) - reiterated throughout the novel via the motif "No se puede vivir sin amar" - and yet the voice of Yvonne, in an ultimate judgement of him, says "you loved your misery more than I --- You loved only yourself."

Indeed the Consul does embrace his alcoholic descent rather than grasp at the hope which Yvonne's return brings. Yvonne desperately wants to start anew, to heal the gulf between them, but senses from the outset of the novel that the Consul is fast drawing away from her, and from other people in a final rejection -

'God knows I've seen you like this before,' her thoughts were saying, her love was saying, through the gloom of the bar, 'too many times for it to be a surprise anyhow. You are denying me again. But this time there is a profound difference. This is like an ultimate denial - oh Geoffrey, why can't you turn back? Must you go on and on for ever into this stupid darkness, seeking it, even now, where I cannot reach you, ever on into the darkness of the sundering, of the severance! - Oh Geoffrey, why do you do it!' (U.V., p.54)

Yvonne's thoughts here appear as a reworking of part of the "ghost conversation" in Maximilian's palace, an expansion of the theme of denial and rejection established by Yvonne's ghost - "You listened to everyone save me, who really loved you." (U.V., p.20)

The Consul's response to Yvonne's thoughts is to think the very thoughts which would sadden her most:

'But look here, hang it all, it is not altogether darkness', the Consul seemed to be saying in reply to her --- 'you misunderstand me if you think it is altogether darkness I see, and if you insist on thinking so, how can I tell you why I do it? But if you look at that sunlight there, oh, then perhaps you'll get the answer, see, look at the way it falls through the window: what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning? --- All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster, is here, beyond those swinging doors --- (U.V., p.55)

At least, it is uncertain as to whether these are actually the Consul's thoughts on the matter, or are what Yvonne imagines his response to be. Lowry elegantly presents these thoughts as what Yvonne imagines to be Geoffrey's response; equally, this passage is an accurate rendition of the Consul's actual thoughts. But if we have not moved into the Consul's mind at this point, we feel that Yvonne has a very clear perception of the alcoholic's view of the world via the cantina. Paradoxically, she imagines him to say "you misunderstand me", while by these very thoughts she demonstrably has an excellent understanding of him. She intuits also his characteristic solipsism - "what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning?- - All mystery, all hope ---" - and imagines Geoffrey to be thinking in the way which she fears most.

In all likelihood, it is of no crucial importance to whom these thoughts are attributed, for Yvonne does emerge as being highly aware of the Consul's response to the world. Geoffrey's argument is ultimately false, but he is quite convincing in his rendition of the joys of his world, the cantina and the "hopeless joy" (U.V., p.55) of the peril in which alcohol puts one's soul. He is addicted to the mortal danger of his position, and his world is viewed in terms of this addiction. He positively delights in his self-destruction and even jokes about it:

Seated on a park bench under a tree in the square, his feet barely touching the ground, the little public scribe was already crashing away on a giant typewriter.

'I am taking the only way out, semicolon,' the Consul offered cheerfully and soberly in passing. 'Good-bye, full stop. Change of paragraph, change of chapter, change of worlds -'
(U.V., p.58)

For Yvonne, this is hardly a joke, for the pain of their severance is continually with her and has driven her back to partake of what she knows to be a joint destiny. The little gnostic public scribe is at one level author of the Consul's fate, cranking an "infernal machine", the "giant typewriter". Although we cannot see what he is typing, it is fairly certain that his version is at no great distance from the Consul's "joke".

Yvonne's sense of dread is further conveyed when she is confronted with the "writing on the wall" - the words on Jacques Laruelle's house. Paradoxically, this first allusion to the gold-leaf lettering does not reveal the crucial wording of the motif:

The Consul regarded her without expression as she stared up into the sun at the bizarre house opposite them near the head of their street, with two towers and a connecting catwalk over the ridgepole ---

'Yes, it's still there, it hasn't budged an inch,' he said, and now they had passed the house to their left with its inscription on the wall she didn't want to see and were walking down the Calle Nicaragua. (U.V., p.62)

Lowry is constructing his web of intrigue by deliberately failing to reveal the inscription, and contributing to the reader's expectation of horror by indicating that this is something Yvonne "didn't want to see".

The sense of the danger in which the Consul now lives is reinforced by the condition of his garden. The desolation and disintegration of his actual garden is clearly linked with his dangerous inner condition. Chapter 3 opens:

THE tragedy, proclaimed, as they made their way up the crescent of the drive, no less by the gaping potholes in it than by the tall exotic plants, livid and crepuscular through his dark glasses, perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst, staggering, it almost appeared, against one another, yet struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency, or of a collective desolate fecundity, the Consul thought distantly --- (U.V., p.70)

This is the Consul's untended garden. It is equally a projection of the Consul's inner condition on to his environment, for the quantity "perishing --- of unnecessary thirst, staggering, -- yet struggling --- to maintain some final attitude of potency" is equally the Consul himself. Or at least, this is the Consul's view of himself, because only he can see just how necessary the next drink is. At this point, the Consul's view of the outside world is in terms of a reflection of his inner world: "It is not Mexico, of course but in the heart." (U.V., p.42)

The Consul's view of his untended garden:

--- seemed to be reviewed and interpreted by a person walking at his side suffering for him and saying: 'Regard: see how strange, how sad, familiar things may be. Touch this tree, once your friend: alas, that that which you have known in the blood should ever seem so strange! 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 ---
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. All your love is the cantinas now: the feeble survival of a love of life now turned to poison, which only is not wholly poison, and poison has become your daily food, when in the tavern -' (U.V., p.70)

This is a powerful statement of Geoffrey Firmin's rejection - of hope, of love, of Yvonne, of the world as his garden. The passage represents an intricate embellishing of the motif "No se puede vivir sin amar" - the words on Laruelle's house which Yvonne "didn't want to see". Yvonne has turned away from the words in the knowledge of their truth, and in an anguished suspicion that Geoffrey will reject her for the cantinas.

Thus the Consul loves neither the gifts of nature, nor God, nor the world, nor Yvonne but only his "poison", in the inverted world he has constructed for himself. His garden is a desert and a wasteland, the plantains "once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death" as dry and sterile as Geoffrey himself. His "tragedy proclaimed" is that he loves nothing but his poison; the Consul in the course of Under the Volcano is to fail at eros, and equally at agape, as pointed out by Douglas Day.¹

At the level of narrative plot in the novel (not always the most obvious level, being as it is often concealed beyond the "interior cosmos" which dominates the work), it is the Consul's alcoholism which brings about his downfall. For instance, he is so drunk that he cannot remember whether he has brought his passport out with him, thus does not realize he has lost it on the Ferris Wheel. At a more spiritual level, the Consul's/

Consul's/ ability to love has been distorted into a love of his "poison" in the inverted world of his own interior chaos. This distortion Lowry viewed as an abuse of powers, and he related such an abuse to the Cabbala, the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life:

(Note: In the Cabbala, the misuse of magical powers is compared to drunkenness or the misuse of wine, and termed, if I remember rightly, in Hebrew sód, which gives us our parallel. There is a kind of attribute of the word sód also which implies garden or a neglected garden, I seem to recall too, for the Cabbala is sometimes considered as a garden itself, with the Tree of Life, which is related of course to that Tree the forbidden fruit of which gave one the knowledge of good and evil, and ourselves the legend of Adam and Eve, planted within it. Be these things as they may - and they are certainly at the root of most of our knowledge, the wisdom of our religious thought, and most of our inborn superstitions as to the origin of man - William James if not Freud would certainly agree with me when I say that the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers ---) (S.L., p.71)

Thus Lowry links the abuse of the alcohol - sód - to the "neglected garden" via the Cabbala. Even at the simplest level, the Consul's move into his own private interior cosmos (where he is in the grip of his own demons) is due to his drinking. When he then looks back out towards the world around him, his vision is simply in terms of his inner condition. The world around him adopts postures to conform to his inner turmoil, and thus Geoffrey Firmin's ability to love anything but alcohol is perverted - turned away from the "right path" - by his perceptions of the world as dictated by his alcoholism.

Because of this peculiar relationship between inner and outer worlds, Geoffrey views Yvonne's return largely in terms of the lamentable disruption it will cause in his drinking habits rather than in terms of the hope she represents. And the only solution to this problem is another drink:

'--- you want horribly to get drunk all over again don't you the whole trouble being as we see it that Yvonne's long-dreamed-of coming, alas but put away the anguish my boy there's nothing in it, '/

it'/ the voice gabbled on, 'has in itself created the most important situation in your life save one namely the far more important situation it in turn creates of your having to have five hundred drinks in order to deal with it,' --- (U.V., p.73)

Geoffrey Firmin's 'familiar' is correct in identifying this crucial moment of decision about whether to have another drink as "the most important situation in your life". After this passage, the familiars continue by suggesting Yvonne's "hostility" to his drinking, saying "you might as well in the face of such hostility might you not start now on the whisky instead of later ---" (U.V., p.74). Ironically, while this debate is taking place inside Geoffrey's head, Yvonne is urging him to have a drink. She is hardly as "hostile" as she is perceived (and probably has cause) to be. Ironically, too, the first familiar - arguing against the idea of a drink - has just returned to dissuade the Consul when Geoffrey finally hears Yvonne:

'I said three times,' Yvonne was laughing, 'for Pete's sake have a decent drink. You don't have to drink that stuff to impress me ... I'll just sit here and cheer.' (U.V., p.75)

Yvonne's generosity, the Consul's drive towards self-destruction and his better nature are ironically played off against one another.

Furthermore, one of the indicators as to the ruin of the Consul's garden is a bottle of alcohol, lying in ambush for him (U.V., p.132) hidden in his garden waiting for a moment of urgent need. This tequila momentarily ameliorates the Consul's sense of the disintegration of his own garden in comparison with the public garden and that of Mr. Quincey, both bordering on his. The relief his hidden bottle brings is indeed only temporary:

- and he had been observed too, by his neighbour Mr. Quincey, who was watering flowers in the shade of their common fence to the left beyond the briars - stood facing his bungalow once more. He felt hemmed in. Gone was the little dishonest vision of order. Over his house, above the spectres of neglect that now refused to disguise themselves, the tragic wings of untenable responsibilities hovered. (U.V., p.133)

The Consul cannot escape from the neglected state of his garden and the words of his own mistranslation of the sign in the public garden return to threaten him: "We evict those who destroy!"

Geoffrey Firmin hides, secretly admiring Mr. Quincey's garden, and becoming increasingly aware of his own "jungle", perched on the edge of the barranca:

'... I was just out inspecting my jungle, don't you know.'

'You are doing what?' Mr. Quincey glanced at him over the top of the watering-can as if to say: I have seen all this going on; I know all about it because I am God, and even when God was much older than you are he was nevertheless up at this time and fighting it, if necessary ---

'And I'm afraid it really is a jungle too', pursued the Consul, 'in fact I expect Rousseau to come riding out of it at any moment on a tiger.'

(U.V., p.136)

Quincey is identified with an authoritarian, superior, primitive God - "a quietly exacerbated sergeant-major" (U.V., p.139) - one who will "Evict Those Who Destroy". Mr. Quincey is witness not only to the condition of the Consul's garden, but also to the condition of the Consul himself.

The Consul's garden is also inhabited by a fruit tree "to which he had noticed clinging the sinister carapace of a seven-year locust" (U.V., p.134) - he is beset by signs of his descent, in this case, the calling-card of a Biblical plague. At this point, too, he remembers that he has seen a snake, and thus Firmin's garden is established, with fruit tree under siege, and snake lurking nearby, as a rather malevolent Garden of Eden.

In Mr. Quincey, Firmin sees "an opportunity to be brilliant" (U.V., p.133). The Consul's "brilliance" takes the form of his idiosyncratic reinterpretation of the legend of Adam and Eve:

'... Do you know, Quincey, I've often wondered whether there isn't more in the old legend of the Garden of Eden, and so on, than meets the eye. What if Adam wasn't really banished from the place at all? That is, in the sense we used to understand it-' --- 'What if his punishment really/

really/ consisted, ' the Consul continued with warmth, 'in his having to go on living there, along, of course - suffering, unseen, cut off from God ... Or perhaps', he added, 'in more cheerful vein, 'perhaps Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cárdenas, in fact - tee hee! - kicked him out. Eh? Yes,' --- 'for it's obvious to everyone these days - don't you think so, Quincey? - that the original sin was to be an owner of property..' --- 'Yes, indeed. Yes... And of course the real reason for that punishment - his being forced to go on living in the garden, I mean, might well have been that the poor fellow, who knows, secretly loathed the place! Simply hated it, and had done so all along. And that the Old Man found this out-' (U.V., pp.137-8)

The critic Anthony Kilgallin, points out that 'Geoffrey's Lost Paradise owes more to concepts of Eden in Shaw --- than to Milton's Fall' ¹. The Consul parodies the ennui expressed by Shaw's Adam in Back to Methuselah ².

The Consul's view of Adam's "punishment" is directly related to his own sufferings. In the absence of Yvonne, Firmin has remained in Mexico, "suffering, unseen, cut off from God." Like Shaw's Adam, the Consul longs for someone else to take over the responsibility of looking after the garden - the "untenable responsibilities" (U.V., p.133) to which he has referred earlier on in Chapter 5. He longs, like Shaw's Adam who cries "If only the care of this terrible garden may pass on to some other gardener!" for Yvonne to salvage his "jungle". He has abdicated from the responsibility of tending his own domain to such an extent that he "hadn't looked at [it] since the day Hugh arrived." (U.V., p.132) If he will not cultivate his own garden, neither will he strive for salvation, as Mr. Quincey indicates to him. Passing the responsibility for the tending of his garden over to Hugh or Yvonne is the symbolic analogue for the Consul's refusal to take responsibility for the destiny of his own soul.

Geoffrey Firmin's other theory of the reason for the "punishment" of Adam is that "the original sin was to be an owner of property." This theory presupposes that immediately Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, they had become sinners, obviating the need for the snake and the apple. The theory is an important one to Lowry's fiction, taken in its/

its/ entirety, recurring as it does in Dark As The Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, where Lowry uses an extended version of the garden symbol which is related more specifically to Mexico's political situation.

This second interpretation of the legend of Adam and Eve reiterates Geoffrey Firmin's view of an authoritarian, primitive God. In this case, Adam is not forced to continue living in the garden, but instead, "evicted" by the agrarian, God. In this version, Adam's "homelessness" is symbolic of the Consul's homelessness, for Geoffrey Firmin is a rootless character, having "entered the Diplomatic Service only for one reason and another to be kicked downwards into ever remoter consulships" (U.V., p.37) Like M.Laruelle, he feels "like a wanderer on another planet" (U.V., p.14) And like Adam, Firmin may "secretly loathe the place" which he now inhabits. For the Consul, Mexico represents a spiritual prison from which he cannot will escape; his eviction to this "remote" consulship is one which he is forced to live with.

Thus the Consul bears resemblance to both his versions of Adam - to the imprisoned man forced to continue living in Eden, and to the evicted man, victim of authority. Geoffrey Firmin is presented as "a forlorn and corrupted Adam, forced by a malevolent God to remain forever there, at the place of his sin." ³ The Consul's Adam feels guilt at his discontent with the Garden of Eden, as indicated by "And that the Old Man found this out." The Consul has, on another level, just been "found out" by Mr. Quincey; Geoffrey has been observed in his secret tryst with the tequila bottle hidden in the garden. And Mr. Quincey has already been identified with a reproachful authoritarian God the Father. Mr. Quincey (quince = apple) is cultivator of walnut trees, a "God-Father" to the Consul, planting the fruit (of knowledge?).

Equally, Mr. Quincey is sower of the seeds of despair, an inquisitor probing regions perhaps better left alone:

'Was it my imagination, or did I see your wife up there a while ago?' patiently said Mr Quincey.

'--- What?' the Consul exclaimed as the other repeated his question. 'In the garden? Yes - that is, no. How do you know? No, she's asleep as far as I -'

'Been away quite a time, hasn't she?' the other asked mildly, leaning forward so that he could see, more clearly, the Consul's bungalow. 'Your brother still here?'

'Brother? Oh, you mean Hugh ... No, he's in Mexico City.'

'I think you'll find he's got back.'

(U.V., p.138)

Mr. Quincey seems, in reality, neither "patient" nor "mild" - his questions are malicious. The Consul is patently unaware that Hugh and Yvonne have gone out together, leaving him alone. Quincey is not so innocent in his enquiries as "mild" might suggest; he knows that Hugh is "still here", although the Consul does not know this, so he hardly need ask.

In context, Mr. Quincey is firing the Consul's desire for revenge on Hugh and Yvonne for having had an affair in the past. This is hardly likely to be conducive to a successful reunion between Geoffrey and Yvonne. Because his attention has been drawn to it, the Consul senses the shadow of betrayal in the absence of Hugh and Yvonne. His response to Quincey's unpleasant insinuations implies this sense of betrayal - although on another level, his punning is the product of his tequila "brilliance":

'- 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 --- 'hello-pussy-my-little-Priapusspuss,- my-little-Oedipusspuss.' (U.V., p.138)

Geoffrey Firmin may appear simply (or not so simply) to be diverting attention away from the previous uncomfortable subject. But his reference to Oedipus (caught in a disastrous triangle) reveals that he is unable or unwilling to let the matter go himself.

In addition, the Consul's reference to the "little-snake-in-the-grass" is even more significant. David Markson explains Firmin's punning:

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

The pun of Virgil reinforces the suggestion of malign forces, the idea that the snake of the Garden of Eden has returned to menace the Consul. Thus there is a menacing note behind the Consul's punning; even in moments of humour, there seems little respite from the past.

The Consul's dissertation on the legend of Adam and Eve has been prompted by a garter snake (U.V., p.137) which he has seen either in his garden or in a hallucination. During the Consul's next excursion into the tequila bottle hidden in his garden, he wonders:

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

Thus Lowry completes the matrix which connects the events of the legend and the events of the present (or immediate past) and which relates the snake (past and present), the gardens (of Eden and of the Consul) and temptation/sexual misconduct. The elements of the matrix are unified by the revealing material often released by Firmin's excursions into a hallucinatory world; paradoxically, Lowry uses the opportunity provided by the move into the Consul's chaotic consciousness to release seemingly irrelevant material which turns out to represent a key to a set of symbols. That is, the emanations of chaos are often crucial to the reader's ordering process.

Thus the Consul reveals, through his punning on "horseshoes" - "whore's shoes"-his view of Yvonne, as determined by her past misconduct. Lowry has linked this part of the action of the immediate past of the novel skillfully to the actual presence of a snake in the garden and equally to the symbolic significance of the snake in the Garden of Eden. The Consul's misgivings about the absence of Hugh and Yvonne are more openly demonstrated/

demonstrated/ on their return, when the Consul shouts, "Hi there, Hugh, you old snake in the grass!" (U.V., p.145)

Indeed, Geoffrey Firmin's view of his half-brother, Hugh, is that he represents the origins of Yvonne's "temptation". The Consul sees Hugh as the reason for his expulsion from Eden - a paradise cultivated by his wife, Yvonne - or as the reason for Yvonne's having left him to suffer alone in his garden which is fast becoming a dangerous jungle. 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 to love. In living this "quixotic oral fiction", he chooses to incur what he himself dictates will be "ineluctable personal disaster." (U.V., p.143)

Furthermore, Yvonne's unfaithfulness may be linked back to another of the Consul's puns in his greeting to the cat. His pun "Priapusspuss" refers to Priapus, originally worshipped as a god of fertility (demanding the sacrifice of an ass, thought of as the embodiment of lust) and later adopted as the god of gardens.⁵ Yvonne has failed in her tending of the garden - the plants are now seen in terms of a "desolate fecundity" (U.V., p.70) and equally, Yvonne is guilty according to Geoffrey Firmin, of perverting her natural female function so that she, too, is a figure of "desolate fecundity."

Indeed, the Consul rages at Yvonne for their childlessness - '--- what have you ever done for anyone but yourself?' Must the Consul say this? He was saying, had said it: 'Where are the children I might have wanted? You may suppose I might have wanted them. Drowned. To the accompaniment of the rattling of a thousand douche bags. Mind you, you don't pretend to love "humanity", not a bit of it. 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., pp.314-5)

The Consul's rage at Yvonne is quite unwarranted; not only has she lost a child in the past, but, in the letters she has written/

written/ to Geoffrey, which by some unfortunate twist of fate he does not receive until he is about to die, she writes of her wish for a child. Although her wish to heal the rift between them, and to create new life predates the Consul's savage attack on her, ironically he does not know this until too late, when he is sitting awaiting death's call in the Farolito.

Here he reads,

'Oh Geoffrey, how bitterly I regret it now.
Why did we postpone it? Is it too late?
I want your children, soon, at once, I want
them. I want your life filling and stirring
me. I want your happiness beneath my heart
and your sorrows in my eyes and your peace
in the fingers of my hand -' (U.V., p.347)

This is the answer to the Consul's yearnings, but - in answer to Yvonne's question "Is it too late?" - it is indeed too late.

And because Yvonne has the sensitivity to understand the Consul's needs - that she should fulfil the "only natural and good function" that women have (a somewhat utilitarian viewpoint, demonstrating the Consul's complete inability to manifest his love) - the Consul dismisses her. He does not want her help, enjoying rejecting her as a punishment for her affairs with Hugh and Laruelle, and thus dismisses Yvonne's attempts to heal the cleft between them by thinking "Yvonne had certainly been reading something." (U.V., p.347) He cannot accept her help, preferring instead "his own fruitless selfish ruin, now perhaps finally self-imposed." (U.V., p.346)

Indeed, the Consul's childlessness is symbolic of the sterility of his life at every level. He knows that Yvonne has suffered greatly after the death of her child "strangely named Geoffrey too," (U.V., p.76) of meningitis. In fact, the funeral of a child on the Day of the Dead weaves in and out of the sphere of action of the central protagonists, providing a counterpoint and reminder of Yvonne's lost child. Chapter 2 - which commences the narrative of the events of the Day of the Dead 1938 - opens "... 'A CORPSE will be transported by express!' " (U.V., p.48) The little corpse serves as a constant reminder to the Consul of the "fruitlessness" of his marriage.

But the Consul is not satisfied that Yvonne has suffered enough (perhaps because he has decided, in some inner recess that he himself is going to suffer more, and that this in itself will bring more suffering upon Yvonne). In the inverted world of the Qliphoth, which Geoffrey has brought upon himself, suffering is ennobling:

And perhaps the soul thrived on its sufferings, and upon the sufferings he had inflicted on his wife her soul had not only thrived but flourished. Ah, and not only upon the sufferings he had inflicted. What of those for which the adulterous ghost named Cliff he imagined always as just a morning coat and a pair of striped pyjamas open at the front, had been responsible?

(U.V., p.76)

But suffering in itself - as the Consul refuses to accept - is not enough to ensure deliverance. The Consul has no specific aim or focus for his sufferings, apart from some vague notion that his appalling, incorrigible life may help mankind in general in some way, and expiate his own indeterminate sins. But he cannot reach out to help those around him, living as he does in his own nether regions of the Qliphoth where he imagines Yvonne to be flourishing under the dire conditions he has created for her.

Indeed, the Consul withdraws from his immediate surroundings, and rejects the people about him, preferring instead the inner cosmos of his condition. In this inner world, he has become increasingly guilty about his nebulous war-crime and this sense of increasing - if indeterminate - guilt leads him to think in terms of expiating the sins of all those under his command on the "Samaritan", and then of mankind as a whole. Thus the Consul sees himself in terms of a Christ-figure (importantly, there is a distinction between God the Father and God the Son maintained throughout Under the Volcano). Chapter 3 opens with Firmin's symbolic identification with Christ, where the "person walking at his side suffering for him" says "Consider the agony of the roses." (U.V., p.70) The "person walking at his side" implies equally Dante's "Virgil" - his guide through Hell - or, as Markson suggests, "is possibly a first echo of Eliot - "who is the third who always walks beside you?" - 6

Furthermore, the opening of Chapter 3 establishes the imagery of sterility - of both physical drought (in Mexico and in the Consul's garden) and spiritual aridity (in Geoffrey and in twentieth-century society) - which recurs throughout the novel, suggesting an affinity with Eliot's "The Waste Land". Kilgallin notes:

As a Fisher King, Geoffrey mirrors the land and its "staggering" plants that seem to be "struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency." 7

But in his travels as Fisher King, the Consul will move further away from, rather than closer to "setting his lands in order."

For the Consul, "setting his lands in order" involves loving those around him, and taking responsibility for his condition and his immediate environment. But Geoffrey has moved so far into the world of the Qliphoth - where the Tree of Life has become inverted, and thus where all aspiration leads further downwards - that his skewed vision of the world leads him to reject those around him, their efforts, and in short, hope. Still raging at Yvonne for her infidelities, the Consul says:

'True, I've been tempted to talk peace.
I've been beguiled by your offers of a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise. At least I suppose that's what you've been working around towards all day. But now I've made up my melodramatic little mind, what's left of it, just enough to make up. Cervantes! That far from wanting it, thank you very much, on the contrary, I choose - Tlax -'
(U.V., p.315)

The Consul recedes into uncontrollable drunkenness at this point, but finally emerges for long enough to finish his sentence: " 'Hell', he finished absurdly." (U.V., p.316) He cannot imagine that the "offers of a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise" are anything more than a good way for Yvonne and Hugh to camouflage their affair: "What an uncommon time you two must have had, padding palms and playing bubbies and titties all day under cover of saving me ... Jesus. Poor defenceless me." (U.V., p.315)

Thus again, the Consul's identification with Christ emerges:

"Jesus. Poor little defenceless me." The identification is mainly grounded in the idea of suffering, and thus the Consul feels himself to be accompanied by not only Dante's "Virgil", or Eliot's "third who always walks beside you", but also Christ:

--- walking at his side suffering for him and saying: '--- Look up at that niche in the wall over there 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 both the crown of thorns, and also - as noted by Markson - an echo of the Sermon on the Mount: "Consider the lilies of the field." ⁸

The thorns and the briars are to recur throughout the novel, particularly in Chapter 5, when the Consul has hidden his tequila bottle under the briars (U.V., p.136). The "agony of the roses" is thus the suffering and martyrdom of the Consul, on his road to the expiation of the sins of mankind or so he thinks. Additional details also point to this view of Geoffrey Firmin. Dr. Vigil, concerned about the Consul's drinking habits, visits him "and find if drinking have not killed you already." On the one hand, Dr. Vigil is a somewhat unsatisfactory correlative of Dante's guide; the Consul comes upon Dr. Vigil and Yvonne in the garden - "he'd stumbled on a 'situation'," (U.V., p.146) and therefore distrusts him. Geoffrey Firmin thinks:

In the final analysis there was no one you could trust to drink with you to the bottom of the bowl. A lonely thought. But of the doctor's generosity there was little doubt.
(U.V., p.147)

Indeed, the doctor is portrayed in dualistic terms not only by the Consul, but in terms of the entire novel, too. To Firmin, he is generous, but ultimately untrustworthy (the Consul trusts no-one in the novel, not even the purveyors of drink). And to the reader, too, Dr. Vigil is an enigmatic figure, specialising in "Indisposiciones nerviosas" (U.V., p.29) - nervous'complaints - on the one hand, and yet in the world of Mexican mingatorios - a labyrinthine world of husks and demons - he is a specialist in venereal diseases and sexual problems (U.V., p.352).

Possibly the Consul has need of Dr. Vigil in both his capacities (Firmin lives in continual fear of venereal disease), but he will not permit anyone to help him, preferring instead the company of his familiars. But Dr. Vigil is anxious to be of service, whether the Consul wishes it or no. As a drinker himself, he knows intuitively how to approach him:

'Senor Firmin, por favor, I am sorry, but I must comport myself here like,' he looked round him again, catching his breath, 'like an apostle. You mean, senor,' he went on more evenly, 'that you are feeling fine this morning, quite like the cat's pyjamas.'
(U.V., p.142)

Dr. Vigil can appeal to the Consul's sense of the camaraderie of the fine fellowship of drunks - thus on one level, he must hide his drinking from Mr. Quincey and "comport" himself "like an apostle." On another level, this is a further reference to the Consul as Christ-figure, with his inadequate "apostle", Dr. Vigil.

From the Consul's point of view, Dr. Vigil's inadequacy is his interest in Yvonne. The Consul feels betrayed by all around him - by Hugh, Laruelle, and Vigil and also by Yvonne. He rages at Yvonne for their childlessness, half-masking a profound sense of loss and sorrow: "Yvonne and he should have had children, would have had children, could have had children, should have..." (U.V., p.227) Yvonne, too, has desired this way of healing their relationship; her letters are an echo of the Consul's litany. The Consul's rage at her, when he declares "it might be better if women had no functions at all" (U.V., p.315) is also faintly echoed by Yvonne when she thinks of her father's family:

The Constables, a mistake on the part of nature, were dying out. In fact, nature meant to wipe them out, having no further use for what was not self-evolving. The secret of their meaning, if any, had been lost.
(U.V., p.265)

Yvonne fails to produce a successor to the Constable line, and thus nature, having meant to wipe out the Constables for not being "self-evolving", succeeds.

The Consul views Yvonne very much in terms of her reproductive and nurturing functions; she is to return to him to tend his literal garden, to nurture the "garden" of his soul by giving him a child. Yvonne, too, is struggling to find the "secret of their meaning" in "the darkness of a world without meaning, a world without aim - the best for less" (U.V., p.267). Of her thwarted ambitions as a Hollywood actress, Yvonne thinks (or is made to think, according to the demands of the authorial consciousness which tends to take over and encompass the thoughts of the characters):

For her ambitions as an actress had always been somewhat spurious: they suffered in some sense from the dislocations of the functions - she saw this - of womanhood itself. (U.V., p.266)

The notion of "the dislocations of the functions --- of womanhood" is echoed again in Hugh's thoughts:

- Women of medium height, slenderly built, mostly divorced, passionate but envious of the male - angel to him as he is bright or dark, yet unconscious destructive succubus of his ambitions - American women with that rather graceful swift way of walking, with the clean scrubbed tanned faces of children --- the slim brown hands that do not rock the cradle --- (U.V., p.191)

Ostensibly, Hugh is thinking about women in general, but of course, his meditations apply directly to Yvonne, whom he resents as much as he is attracted to her. For her double sin of having both a career and "hands that do not rock the cradle", Yvonne is to be punished, "doomed to an endless succession of tragedies-- [which] were just frankly meaningless." (U.V., p.269)

After her unsuccessful return to Hollywood, Yvonne's life takes a new and significant turn:

She saw it, and at the same time, now it was all quite hopeless (and now that she had, after everything, outgrown Hollywood), saw that she might under other conditions have become a really first-rate, even a great artist. For that matter what was she if not that now (if greatly directed) as she walked or drove furiously through her anguish and all the red lights, seeing, as might/

might/ the Consul, the sign in the Town House window, "Informal Dancing in the Zebra Room" turn 'Infernal' --- And it was this, it was all this that had perhaps helped to make meeting Jacques Laruelle in Quauhnahuac such a shattering and ominous thing in her life. It was not merely that they had the Consul in common --- (U.V., p.266)

Yvonne has rushed headlong - through the warning "red lights" or equally into a red light district - into the world of the Qliphoth, where "Informal" becomes "Infernal". The new danger involves Laruelle, and thus Yvonne is set on the path to repeated infidelities.

If Laruelle and Yvonne "had the Consul in common", then ironically, the danger now becomes that all the central characters - Laruelle, Geoffrey Firmin and Hugh, with Dr. Vigil waiting to make his move! - have Yvonne in common. Hugh's position in this rankles most with the Consul, for he has tried to do well by Hugh in a way that he has not tried to give Yvonne anything. The Consul has tried to be a father to Hugh:

Mind you I have perhaps acted as a father: but you were only an infant then --- However all this may be --- I ought to point out in no uncertain terms that I never dreamed for a moment such a thing as did happen would or could happen. That I had forfeited Yvonne's trust did not necessarily mean she had forfeited mine, of which one had a rather different conception. And that I trusted you goes without saying --- there are certain reasons, too, to be revealed only at the day of reckoning, why you should not have stood in judgement upon me. Yet I am afraid - are you listening, Hugh? - that long before that day what you did impulsively and have tried to forget in the cruel abstraction of youth will begin to strike you in a new and darker light. (U.V., p.83)

This vital meditation emerges from a Consul who is lying face downwards on the Calle Nicaragua. Geoffrey Firmin's drunkenness allows him to reveal a clear ambivalence towards Hugh, and to introduce a note of betrayal which is much more specific than Yvonne's betrayal of their marriage by having left him alone in Mexico.

Not only does the Consul see Hugh as having betrayed him (because of Hugh's affair with Yvonne), but Hugh himself finds focus for his own guilt feelings in that figure of betrayal, Judas. Hugh's guilt is as burdensome to him as the Consul's guilt is to him, and his life is similarly tainted:

Another thought struck Hugh. 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)

He is happy to be out riding with Yvonne, and yet this is "poisoned" by the fact that Yvonne has returned to Geoffrey, and her return triggers off Hugh's guilt. Hugh, too, is pursued by the poster for Las Manos de Orlac con Peter Lorre - again, a method of focussing his own guilt feelings, since he, too, sees the outside world in terms of his own internal condition. Hugh's interpretation of the film is not strictly accurate - "It's all about a pianist who has a sense of guilt because he thinks his hands are a murderer's or something and keeps washing the blood off them." (U.V., p.114) But even if his synopsis is not accurate - the pianist has been given the hands of a murderer after a car accident, and the washing owes more to Lady Macbeth than to the film - the significance which Hugh attaches to the film is vital. The insupportable burden of guilt is thus a characteristic which Hugh shares with the Consul - further evidence for the central characters being components of the novel's composite consciousness.

Hugh's thoughts on the film trigger the analogy with Judas:

Christ, how marvellous this was, or rather Christ, how he wanted to be deceived about it, as must have Judas, he thought - and here it was again, damn it - if ever Judas had a horse, or borrowed, stole one more likely --- how splendid it all might be had I only not betrayed that man last night, even though I know perfectly well I was going to, how good indeed, if only it had not happened though, if only it were not so absolutely necessary to go out and hang oneself -

And here indeed it was again, the temptation, the cowardly, the future - corruptive serpent:---
(U.V., p.115)

Hugh then sees a dead garter snake, and the symbolic identifications associated with him are brought together into a typical Lowrian matrix within a very short space. Hugh is a betrayer, a Judas, a thief (of Yvonne), the "Hanged Man" and the Consul's "old snake in the grass" (U.V., p.145). Furthermore, his symbolic status is firmly attached to the Mexican environment - of thieves and snakes, and of impinging threats - such that the novel does not appear to operate in two distinct worlds of imagination and reality, but instead, takes form within a world which moves with remarkable ease between the two until the two seem unified: Hugh's thoughts in this case appear to overlap with the action of the environment outside and the "future-corruptive serpent" appears as a dead garter snake in front of him.

However, in spite of the fact that Hugh has betrayed the Consul, his revolutionary zeal demonstrates his attempt to take some responsibility for the condition of mankind. Although he thinks in very similar terms to Geoffrey, Hugh's escape is not into the bottle, but into political convictions founded on hope, and on the struggle which the Consul would rather take as being finished before he has to make any effort. Thus Hugh echoes the Goethe epigraph, "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him we can save," although he is fully aware of twentieth-century man's self-destructive impulses, as this shows:

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)

Thus Hugh fully understands the self-destructive impulse - where it is "so absolutely necessary to go out and hang oneself" - but refuses to abandon himself to it. He chooses instead to do battle with the spiral downwards, rather than submit to being the "Hanged Man" in a world upside down.

The Consul, on the other hand, has long been of the opinion that in such general decline, the only way for the individual is down, and the only amelioration possible is alcohol. Yvonne finds a fragment of a poem towards the end of the novel:

Some years ago he started to escape
... has been ... escaping ever since
Not knowing his pursuers gave up hope
Of seeing him (dance) at the end of a rope
(U.V., p.331)

Thus the symbol of the "Hanged Man" recurs throughout the novel. While it is associated with the Consul, Hugh has also made an identification with this symbol. However, Hugh's "struggle upward", and the picture of hope which he imagines for Geoffrey and Yvonne show Hugh in terms of a redemptive mythology:

The woods will be wet. And occasionally a tree will come crashing down. And sometimes there will be a fog and that fog will freeze. Then your whole forest will become a crystal forest. The ice crystals on the twigs will grow like leaves. Then pretty soon you'll be seeing the jack-in-the-pulpits and then it will be spring.

They were galloping --- Judas had forgotten; nay, Judas had been, somehow, redeemed.
(U.V., p.126)

Although he has been tempted to re-establish his former relationship with Yvonne, Hugh - on learning that she has returned to Mexico for Geoffrey - has sufficient generosity of spirit to imagine happiness for the woman he wants with someone else. By this vision of a Northern Eden - for the "poor foundered soul/who once fled north ..." (U.V., p.331) - "Judas" is "redeemed." Dale Edmonds in "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the 'Immediate Level'" does not agree with this stance, but argues,

In the light of the love and kindness the Consul has shown for Hugh in the past, Hugh's adultery with Yvonne and his thoughtless usurpation of her on the day of the Consul's great need strike the reader as unforgivable. 9

It is possible, instead, that the Consul sees Hugh's behaviour as unforgivable, but that the reader is meant to see the mitigating factors which leave Hugh alive at the end of the novel, on course for Vera Cruz, and the Consul dead at the bottom of the abyss. Thus Hugh's destiny is Vera Cruz (U.V., p.15) - the "true cross" - in spite of the fact that as characters, he and Geoffrey are very closely related in many ways.

Laruelle, too, has been involved with Yvonne, and here imagines that he will follow Hugh to his destiny (although there are many other pointers to a quite different fate):

However he had acquired a certain identity with Hugh. Like Hugh he was going to Vera Cruz; and like Hugh too, he did not know if his ship would ever reach port ... (U.V., p.15)

The Consul's attitude to Laruelle's betrayal is couched in very similar terms to the meditation he has had face downwards on the Calle Nicaragua (directed at Hugh). It is similarly oblique, accusatory, reproachful and in both cases the Consul implies that both men will suffer more than they imagine for their sins. However, Geoffrey Firmin's words to Laruelle are mysterious and ambiguous because they appear so early on in the novel that no specific connection to Laruelle's sin can be made (although the context of the ruined garden does give some indication).

Laruelle remembers:

In the Consul's garden they drifted gloomily up and down among the roses and the plumbago and the waxplants 'like delapidated préservatifs', the Consul had remarked with a diabolical look at him, a look at the same time almost official, that seemed now to have said: 'I know, Jacques, you may never return the book but suppose I lend it to you precisely for that reason, that some day you may be sorry you did not. Oh, I shall forgive you then, but will you be able to forgive yourself? Not merely for not having returned it, but because the book will by then have become an emblem of what even now it is impossible to return.' (U.V., p.33)

In this opening chapter of Under the Volcano, it is impossible to understand the symbolic significance of the book to the Consul, and the reader can appreciate only that it is a volume of Elizabethan plays which includes Faustus. The Consul's "magnanimity" in saying that he will be able to forgive Laruelle is counterbalanced by the insidious expectation that Jacques will suffer and be unable to forgive himself his sins. The juxtaposition with the untended garden, and, more importantly, with the "delapidated préservatifs" signals the general nature of Laruelle's sins. But once again, it is only on the reader's returning to the beginning of the novel, that the volume of plays can be understood as being "emblematic" of Yvonne's integrity.

Again, an antithetical portrait of the Consul is being maintained with Lowry's consummate skill. The Consul is "diabolical" and at the same time "official" - although it is quite possible to argue that within the Lowrian sphere, the two are virtually synonymous, authority being regarded with characteristic horror. He and Laruelle know precisely what uncomfortable topic they are covering, and yet the Consul will not confront the issue openly, preferring instead this sly and "diabolical" approach. At the same time, he is capable of forgiving Laruelle, at face value a Christian gesture, leaving room for the identification with Christ.

But in the Consul's forgiveness, there is a very un-Christian pleasure in the pain and guilt which he expects will follow Laruelle. Jacques can do little to expiate his sins in the midst of the spurious logic Geoffrey Firmin has constructed around him. If the book becomes "an emblem of what even now it is impossible to return", the Consul is certain to have the gratification of Jacques' being completely unable to make reparations for the situation, and, according to Firmin's logic, Jacques is therefore bound to suffer for sins which the Consul has made impossible to expiate. Unalloyed Christian forgiveness would surely mean that repentance would bring expiation, and thus the Consul's "magnanimity" is questionable, to say the least, in that he does not allow this of Laruelle. Similarly, he has imagined Hugh suffering saying in his imagined accusation, "What you did impulsively and have tried to forget in the cruel abstraction of youth will begin to strike you in a new and darker light."

Since Hugh himself has made the identification with Judas, then by extension, Laruelle plays a similar part to the Consul's position as Christ-figure. Not surprisingly, the identification is not unambivalent. On the one hand, Geoffrey Firmin is "the one with the blue eyes" (U.V., p.34) and he "once in this very bar [gave] all his money to a beggar taken by the police." (U.V., p.37) Yvonne, too, intuitively senses Geoffrey's destiny in terms of martyrdom and seeing it in the landscape, thinks, "the two paths, stretched out before her on either side like the arms - the oddly dislocated thought struck her - of a man being crucified" (U.V., p.319).

On the other hand, the Consul has been the guilty participant on board the ironically named "Samaritan", and yet, at the same time, he chooses to answer for the deeds of his crew and is thus both decorated and court-martialled for the incident (U.V.,p.39). The name of the Consul's ship introduces a theme central to the novel - the test of love for one's fellow man (agape) parallel to the Good Samaritan parable. In fact, the original version of Under the Volcano - the short story of the same title - centred on the incident which was later to become Chapter 8 of the novel. On the way to Tomalín, Hugh catches sight of a man - apparently asleep - lying by the road:

There appeared now, standing alone in a sort of rubbish heap where this grass margin stopped, opposite a detour, a stoneyside cross. Beneath it lay a milk bottle, a funnel, a sock, and part of an old suitcase.

And now, farther back still, in the road, Hugh saw the man again. His face covered by a wide hat, he was lying peacefully on his back with his arms stretched out towards this wayside cross, in whose shadow, twenty feet away, he might have found a grassy bed. Nearby stood a horse meekly cropping the hedge. (U.V., p.244)

The bus stops and Hugh, Yvonne, the Consul and two "male passengers" get out, leaving a stoical group of old women on the bus. Yvonne has to return immediately to the bus, because she "can't stand the sight of blood." Possibly, Lowry intended to reinforce the picture of her never being there when most needed; she has left the Consul alone in Mexico for over a year, she and Hugh have been out riding earlier while the Consul faces his untended garden and suffers the temptation of the hidden tequila bottle, and now she is again withdrawing from the scene.

Equally, Yvonne's withdrawal may simply be a convenient way of leaving Hugh and the Consul to respond to the dying man's needs. Both wait for each other to make a move or, preferably, for one of the other passengers to do something:

As nobody made any move at all, Hugh grew impatient. He shifted from foot to foot. He looked at the Consul expectantly --- the Consul seemed lost in reflection. Suddenly Hugh stepped forward impulsively and bent over the Indian ---

'You can't touch him - it's the law', said the Consul sharply, who looked now as though he would like to get as far from the scene as possible, if necessary even by means of the Indian's horse. 'For his protection. Actually it's a sensible law. Otherwise you might become an accessory after the fact.'

The Indian's breathing sounded like the sea dragging itself down a stone beach. (U.V., p.245)

Hugh finally tries to make the man more comfortable, but not before the pelado on the bus has intervened. (Later it emerges that the pelado has stolen the dying man's money while taking off his hat to see how badly injured he is.)

Hugh, although hesitant, instinctively wants to help the Indian, despite the Consul's warnings about not touching him. The Consul, on the other hand, hides behind obeying the law of the land as an excuse for doing nothing. He tells Hugh to do nothing for the "protection" of the Indian, but the very fact that he prevents Hugh from acting at that moment means that the pelado can step in quickly and steal the Indian's money. But even more than "protecting" the Indian, the law "protects" the Consul from having to act, for he is given the excuse of avoiding becoming "an accessory after the fact". Since Hugh later acts in the full knowledge that he is in danger of becoming this, quite obviously he is able to put into perspective the demands of humanity - helping a man whose "breathing sounded like the sea dragging itself down a stone beach" - as opposed to the demands of the law.

The scene is crucial in presenting two antithetical responses from two components of the novel's composite consciousness. The Consul hides behind the excuse of obeying the law; Hugh is momentarily deflected from action by the Consul's advice. Hugh's response is humanitarian:

'But the man may be dy-' Hugh muttered to Geoffrey.

'God, I feel terrible', the Consul replied, though it was a fact that he was about to take some action, when the pelado anticipated him:--

(U.V., p.246)

It certainly is a fact that the Consul is always "about to take some action", but events usually intervene throughout the novel to ensure that the only action he takes is to lurch from one drink to the next. The Consul's response - 'God, I feel terrible'- is intrinsically selfish and underlines a persistent dichotomy in the novel, the wide gap between selfless and selfish love. Yvonne even refers to "unselfish love" (U.V., p.270) as a faith within the context of a meaningless world. The Consul's stance, on the other hand, is essentially selfish, since he refuses all help from those who love him simply because they make demands upon him at the same time. While others are delighted to take responsibility for him, the Consul wants total acceptance and no demands made of him, no judgement of his behaviour.

However, in this situation, Hugh is reintegrated into the general inaction:

There was no limit to their ingenuity. Though the most potent and final obstacle to doing anything about the Indian was this discovery that it wasn't one's own business, but someone else's. And looking round him, Hugh saw that this too was just what everyone else was arguing. It is not my business, but, as it were, yours, they all said, as they shook their heads, and no, not yours either, but someone else's, their objections becoming more and more involved, more and more theoretical, till at last the discussion began to take a political turn. (U.V., p.248)

The Consul has sounded the note for general inaction, and everyone has been drawn into discussion as a good excuse for delaying action. Discussions move off the matter in hand, taking a "political turn". Thus Lowry indicates that the general lack of any individual feeling of responsibility which so easily becomes a collective lack of responsibility pertains not only to this specific situation, but to twentieth-century society in general.

Lowry fully intended the interpretation of such a specific scene to be symbolic of mankind's situation, writing: *

The scene is Mexico, the meeting place, according to some, of mankind itself, pyre of Bierce and springboard of Hart Crane, the age-old arena of racial and political conflicts of every/

every/ nature, and where a colorful native people of genius have a religion that we can roughly describe as one of death, so that it is a good place, at least as good as Lancashire or Yorkshire, to set our drama of a man's struggle between the powers of darkness and light. Its geographical remoteness from us, as well as the closeness of its problems to our own, will assist the tragedy each in its own way. We can see it as the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, or both at once.
(S.L., p.67)

Thus the collective non-responsibility of a few people standing by some remote Mexican road as an Indian lies dying may be taken as the collective lack of responsibility on the part of nations, as the world hurtles downwards. Individuals and societies alike (particularly in the time of movement towards war) are unprepared to even consider a responsibility toward, and love for, one's fellow man. Amidst the detritus of twentieth-century society, the good Samaritan has been lost, and in the novel, the parallel situation is that of the dying Indian, lying by the roadside, near a stone cross surrounded by rubbish, whom nobody will take the initial step to help.

The Consul's dying thoughts echo the message of the incident in Chapter 8:

He could go no farther. Exhausted, helpless, he sank to the ground. No one would help him even if they could. Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt.
(U.V., p.375)

No "good Samaritan" will halt, partly because the Consul himself would do nothing for the dying Indian in Chapter 8, and partly because he has fallen - literally and spiritually - so far that no-one can reach him now. In this way, Geoffrey Firmin has been pursued by one of the signals toward his own death (i.e. the sight of the dead Indian) to an appropriate - if mildly ironic - resolution of this particular theme.

In the face of such an uncaring world, Hugh understands the "expressionless" stoicism of the old women who stay on the bus, doing nothing about the Indian:

And yet, in these old women, it was as if, through the various tragedies of Mexican history, pity, the impulse to approach, and terror, the impulse to escape (as one had learned at college), having replaced it, had finally been reconciled by prudence, the conviction it is better to stay where you are. (U.V., p.251)

Each of the responses to the incident is thus located specifically within the range of dramatis personae; Hugh feels pity and, with his characteristic zeal, is willing to risk his personal safety in order to help the Indian. The Consul hides his repeated "impulse to escape" behind the mask of his consular knowledge of the Mexican authorities. Yvonne returns to sit with the Mexican women, who with stoical "prudence" do not try to alter the fate of the Indian.

Furthermore, each of the responses to the dying Indian provides an analogue for the collective response of man towards fellow man in the modern world, where mankind is seen to have abdicated from the responsibility of tending its garden, the world. Later in the novel, long after the Consul has failed to help the Indian and thus reinforced his travels "DOWNWARDS" (the opening word of Chapter 8), he says:

'But on the contrary,' ---'we do want to do good, to help, to be brothers in distress. We will even condescend to be crucified, on certain terms. And are, for that matter, regularly, every twenty years or so. But to an Englishman it's such terribly bad form to be a bona-fide martyr. We may respect with one part of our minds the integrity, say, of men like Gandhi, or Nehru. We may even recognize that their selflessness, by example, might save us. But in our hearts we cry "Throw the bloody little man in the river". Or "Set Barabbas free!" --- (U.V., p.329)

The Consul is so immersed in alcohol, in his own descent, and in the inverted world of the Qliphoth, that he denies true altruism: "We will even condescend to be crucified, on certain terms" [Emphasis my own]. He views martyrdom as a form of "bargaining" and the cyclical impulse to war springs from the same origins - the desire for gain. While we may be able to appreciate "integrity"/

"integrity"/ and "selflessness", says Geoffrey Firmin, these qualities are too firmly rooted in baser human impulses; we are driven essentially by selfishness and thoughts of gain.

However, the Consul's view of human life is clearly a view of his own personal hell, a vision infected by his own disorder. His vision is obscured by the creatures of his imagination, and he is so weighed down by this that the human evil, which is released as a series of malicious creatures, is seen by the Consul as far exceeding any innate human goodness. The balance between innate benevolence and malevolence (as regards the character of the Consul) is clearly expressed in Chapter 5, where Firmin says of Mr. Quincey's cat, "She thinks I'm a tree with a bird in it." (U.V., p.138) But the Consul is no such innocuous thing, for he is soon invaded by his creatures:

A caterpillar started to wriggle toward him, peering this way and that, with interrogatory antennae. A large cricket, with polished fuselage, clung to the curtain, swaying it slightly and cleaning its face like a cat, its eyes on stalks appearing to revolve in its head. He turned, expecting the caterpillar to be much nearer, but it too had turned, just slightly shifting its moorings. Now a scorpion was moving slowly across towards him. Suddenly the Consul rose, trembling in every limb. But it wasn't the scorpion he cared about. It was that, all at once, the thin shadows of isolated nails, the stains of murdered mosquitoes, the very scars and cracks of the wall, had begun to swarm, so that, wherever he looked, another insect was born, wriggling instantly towards his heart. It was as if, and this was what was most appalling, the whole insect world had somehow moved nearer and now as closing, rushing in upon him. For a moment the bottle of tequila at the bottom of the garden gleamed on his soul, then the Consul stumbled into his bedroom. (U.V., p.152)

Lowry has convincingly moved the Consul into a world of husks and demons, where "realistic" time and place are distorted by Firmin's perceptions. The external world of caterpillar, cricket and scorpion is multiplied into a veritable army of insects which invade the Consul's interior cosmos. The swarming and multiplication of these creatures is at the same time an effect of alcohol on the Consul and an emanation from his own (semi?) "consciousness". Thus the Consul is invaded by his own creations or the creations of the tequila bottle.

Instead of being a "tree with a bird in it", the Consul inhabits the world of the Qliphoth, where his attempts to grow upwards become a downward growth, infected with insects. In effect, he has been invaded by the maggots of the grave before death; equally this is an intimation of the fragmented world of husks and demons which he is destined to inhabit. He recedes from the external world, hearing only fragments, voices of the people who have tried to reach out to him - of his "conscience familiar", of Dr. Vigil, Abraham Taskerson, Mr. Quincey, his mother, and Yvonne (U.V., p.153).

But the Consul cannot be helped by any of these characters; in the treacherous world of the Qliphoth, he feels betrayed by everyone around him. The idea of betrayal is what links Firmin with Christ, a point which Stephen Tiffit has made as follows:

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). The Consul's betrayal, seen as part of a divine plan, makes things easier for him. 10

Thus Firmin, in his own eyes, is a victim of betrayal by Yvonne, by Hugh and by Laruelle; betrayal, indeed, by any person who tried to come close to him. This he uses as an excuse to do nothing when confronted with the dying Indian, escaping behind a consular mask instead. In the peculiarly antithetical world of Under the Volcano, the Consul may be identified with Christ, yet he is not a good Samaritan; Laruelle on the other hand, is seen as having betrayed the Consul, and yet will "play the Good Samaritan" (U.V., p.67). Hugh, too, is seen as a Judas, also as "incapable finally of love altogether" (U.V., p.182) and yet he has tried to help the Consul, and tries to help the Indian, and mankind alike.

Indeed, it is rather the Consul himself who is "incapable finally of love altogether". This is emphasised by the interruption of Geoffrey's sexual advances towards Yvonne by thoughts of the cantina; after he admits defeat, he chooses whisky over his medicinal strychnine (which he claims is an aphrodisiac, too) and addresses the whisky: "I love you, he murmured, gripping/

gripping/ the bottle with both hands as he replaced it on the tray." (U.V., p.95) The Consul is then pursued by this unsuccessful attempt into his garden, where his intricate theories of Adam and Eve are somewhat ironically undercut by his (still) open fly.

Yvonne fails the Consul in two ways. First, every drink that she refuses is taken by Firmin to be a rejection. As Stephen Tiffit points out:

The Consul requires a lover who will demonstrate absolute acceptance of him whatever he does, one "who, upon that last and final green, though I hole out in four, accepts my ten and three score ... Though I have more." (p. 203) 11

But no-one could give him this totally uncritical support and love - except, perhaps, children:

Children, he thought, how charming they were at heart. The very same kids who had besieged him for money, had now brought him back even the smallest of his small change and then, touched by his embarrassment, had scurried away without waiting for a reward. (U.V., p.227)

Possibly what charms Firmin most is that the children act without any thought of their own gain, and they cannot know of his condition, but are still willing to offer what little help they can.

Yvonne's second failure - in the eyes of the Consul - is her refusal to produce the children which would unite them (and, perhaps, from the Consul's more selfish point of view, who would demonstrate absolute acceptance). This theme is linked with the Consul's second - and correct - translation of the sign in the public gardens:

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; just a man sitting alone on a stone bench. This man was apparently the devil himself ---
(U.V., p.235)

There are no children, just as Firmin has no children. At the same time the "children" could equally be the inhabitants of the earth (or of the Mexican "Eden" or "meeting place---of mankind") who appear bent (dare one say, hell bent?) on self-destruction, and this impulse towards descent - the spiral downwards - is fully investigated in the character of the Consul.

As Lowry himself pointed out with reference to this re-translation, "the real translation can be in a certain sense even more horrifying" (S.L., p.74). Just as the Consul cannot, or will not, stop drinking and destroying not only his own life, but also the lives of those around him, so the inhabitants of the world, it is suggested, will continue on an inexorable spiral downwards to ruin. The overall suggestion, then, is that if we cannot overcome the self-seeking and selfish drive within personal relationships, we cannot expect any more than ruin as a society: "who indeed even now could prevent?" (U.V., p.348).

And the answer is "Yvonne", for Lowry sees an healing force in unselfish love. The Consul, on the other hand, expects from Yvonne uncritical devotion, a mother, a lover, and a daughter:

Ah, if Yvonne, if only as a daughter, who would understand and comfort him, could only be at his side now. Even if but to lead him by the hand, drunkenly homeward through the stone fields, the forests - not interfering of course with his occasional pulls at the bottle, and ah, those burning draughts in loneliness, he would miss them, wherever he was going, they were perhaps the happiest things his life had known! - as he had seen the Indian children lead their fathers home on Sundays. (U.V., p.361)

The Consul expects to be able to take, and not to have to give in return; indeed, a sense of irony lies behind the aside "not interfering of course with his occasional pulls at the bottle." Even with Yvonne beside him, the Consul clings to his essential "loneliness", to being a man apart - adrift - in a fragmented world. He refuses to relinquish his alcoholic condition, perhaps for fear that nothing - no other love, no children - will take its place in his life, and certainly because he knows no other means of escape.

Indeed, Geoffrey Firmin can see no escape from his earthly domain - his ruined and befouled garden, in which, like Adam, he is destined to remain, despite "hating it". The Consul's domain is also one of death; he will leave no children, no life force behind him - no children to tend the garden of the world, and none to destroy it, either. Furthermore, unlike the zealous Hugh, he will take no steps to prevent others from self-destruction, or from suffering. He is no good Samaritan, and yet, paradoxically, in his death is our salvation, for the self-seeking of Geoffrey Firmin which is at the same time his self-destruction points toward the danger for the modern world. Because the Consul demonstrates so poignantly man's limitations (which he, in his skewed vision, sees as dominating man's behaviour) - his selfishness, self-seeking, his inability to love, and to care for his fellow man - he is, in his descent and his own ruin, paradoxically showing the way upwards for mankind. The spirit of Geoffrey Firmin is of sufficient stature to see that beyond the "stone fields" lie the "forests" of a Northern Eden. Within the mixed symbolism of Malcolm Lowry, there is a regenerative possibility for the recalcitrant Adam to set his lands in order, like the Fisher King, even if he chooses not to do so.

CHAPTER 6: NOTES

1. Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.170.
2. George Bernard Shaw, Back to Methuselah, (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1930) pp. 12-13.
ADAM: If only there may be an end some day, and yet no end! If only I can be relieved of the horror of having to endure myself for ever! If only the care of this terrible garden may pass on to some other gardener. If only the sentinel set by the Voice can be relieved! If only the rest and sleep that enable me to bear it from day to day could grow after many days into an eternal rest, an eternal sleep, then I could face my days, however long they may last. Only there must be some end, some end: I am not strong enough to bear eternity.
3. Douglas Day, "Of Tragic Joy" in Prairie Schooner, Vol. XXXVII, No. 4 (Winter 1963/64), p.361.
4. David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano (New York: Times Books Ltd., 1978), p.80.
5. M. Cary et al, eds., The Oxford Classical Dictionary (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p.729.
6. David Markson, p.47.
7. Tony Kilgallin, p.162.
8. David Markson, p.47.
9. Dale Edmonds, "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the 'Immediate Level' " in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p.94.

10. Stephen Tifft, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.60.
11. Ibid., p.50.

PART II: Chapter 7

" From Alcohol to Alkahest"

PART II: THE DESCENT
CHAPTER 7
"From Alcohol to Alkahest"

"I think, mi amigo, sickness is not only in body but in that part used to be call: soul." (U.V., p.148)

The salutary words of Dr. Vigil - repeated not only throughout Under the Volcano but also in Dark as the Grave - establish the Consul's malady (and, again, that of Sigbjørn Wilderness) as no mere alcoholism. Indeed, alcoholism is intended to appear as but a secondary symptom of a much more fundamental malaise - the self-seeking, and selfishness, manifested in the inability to love, and the inability to care for one's fellow-man which lead to the self-destructive behaviour of Geoffrey Firmin. The fundamental malaise is not limited to the Consul alone; he is Everyman, and thus on one level, the indicator marking the ebb in the affairs of mankind.

Thus the Consul's alcoholism is symptomatic of the limitations and failures in certain very important respects of modern man. His condition, too, is linked with a final spiritual failing - the seeking of forbidden knowledge, an act which Lowry identified as part of the concept of "overreaching" (S.L., p.63). In Under the Volcano, this quest for forbidden knowledge is symbolised by the Consul's experiments with the occult, and he not only pursues this interest, but is guilty of abusing his occult powers. Lowry writes,

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.
(S.L., p.71)

Mysticism and the use of alcohol are in many ways inextricably linked; traditionally, the pursuit of visionary heights of transcendant perceptions has relied on the use of alcohol or drugs. The Consul relies on mescal, for which Lowry claimed mor than hallucinogenic qualities, writing, "But mescal is also/

also/ a drug which is taken in the form of mescaline, and the transcendence of its effects is one of the best-known experiments among occultists." ¹

The "agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers" points directly towards one of the crucial themes of Under the Volcano, the myth of Faust, in whose steps Geoffrey is to follow. In justifying his numerologically significant twelve chapters, Lowry writes "It is as if I heard a clock sounding midnight for Faust." ² However, the Consul's fate is not linked simply to the fateful hour; his destiny is a much more complex reworking of the modern Faust story, which involves allusions, certainly, to Goethe's Faust, but also to Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and to Calderón (Pedro Calderón de la Barca - possibly specifically, to El Mágico Prodigioso).

Lowry establishes one Faust paradigm immediately, in the Goethe epigraph "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him can we save." But the Consul's position is not so clear-cut; his salvation depends on so much - on the past (which is unmitigatedly burdensome and cannot be altered), on his skewed perceptions of the people around him (he cannot know his thoughts to be trustworthy or otherwise) and on his occasional relish of his own downfall, his certainty of ruin. As in the Bunyan epigraph, Geoffrey Firmin ultimately thinks within himself: "I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance." Thus a tension is established between the possibility of redemption offered to Goethe's Faust, and the eternal Hell which must be endured by Marlowe's unrepentant Faustus.

A counterpointing of both versions of the myth occurs in Under the Volcano. Even in Chapter 1, where resolutions of many of the strands of the novel are offered, there are allusions to both versions, although it must be said that the weighting is very much in favour of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, in which there is a sense of horror at the final arrival at his inevitable destiny. In this chapter, Sr. Bustamente hands the volume of Elizabethan plays, originally lent to M. Laruelle by the Consul, back to M. Laruelle. Jacques borrowed the book "because for some time he had been carrying at the back of his mind the/

the/ notion of making in France a modern film version of the Faustus story." (U.V., p.33)

The volume falls open, and M. Laruelle's eyes light upon the following words:

Then will I headlong fly into the earth:
Earth, gape! it will not harbour me! (U.V., p.40)

But Laruelle is mistaken: he sits,

--- oblivious of his surroundings, gazing at the words that seemed to have the power of carrying his own mind downward into a gulf, as in fulfilment on his own spirit of the threat Marlowe's Faustus had cast at his despair. Only Faustus had not said quite that ---
(U.V., p.40)

Indeed, Laruelle has misread the text, which should read,

Then will I headlong run into the earth.
Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me. 3

Perhaps Lowry is informing us that Laruelle is as mistaken in his hopes of escape as Faustus is, for Laruelle thinks that "Under the circumstances to run was not so bad as to fly." (U.V., p.40).

However, a minor semantic debate is unlikely to change Laruelle's direction; and if this direction is downwards, it matters little whether he "runs" or "flies". But the two words are important to the thematic content of the novel, for the word "fly" recalls the inscription on Faustus' arm: "Homo fuge! Whither should I fly?"⁴ The word "fly" is even suggested by the name of the Consul's brand of cigarettes, "Alas" (U.V., p.52), meaning wings. As the devil on the label of the tequila bottle suddenly seems to leap out at the drinker as a salutary warning, so the brand name of the cigarettes seems to have a way of appearing at times of greatest symbolic impact -

By his watch it was a quarter to eleven. But the clock hadn't finished: it struck twice more, two wirs, tragic notes: bing-bong: whirring. The emptiness in the air after filled with whispers: alas, alas. Wings, it really meant. (U.V., p.140-141)

For the Consul, as for Faustus, time's wingèd chariot is relentless; each man has his allotted span (for the Consul, twelve hours, for Faustus, twenty four years) and the motion of that infernal machine which is time is precise and inexorable. If Laruelle thinks that the word "fly" is wrong when applied to the damned, he might do well to remember, tempus fugit.

Anthony Kilgallin, in an excellent article, "Faust and Under the Volcano," suggests that the correct word, "run", is linked to a subsequent fragment in the novel: "This simple slip is intensified when, several pages later, we hear the line, "where I come from they don't run." ⁵Kilgallin points out that the speaker is Weber, a witness to Geoffrey's murder. ⁶ Although the overheard fragment of Weber's speech appears to be of no great significance, the reiteration of the word "run" demonstrates Lowry's meticulous attention to detail. And the fragment assumes greater importance when viewed in conjunction with the Consul's final rejection of those who are trying to help him -

'I love hell. I can't wait to get back there.
In fact I'm running. I'm almost back there
already.'

He was running too, --- (U.V., p.316)

Thus in the course of Under the Volcano, the Consul is established as a Faustian figure, hurtling towards his destiny, a destiny contained even in the smallest of words, in "fly" and in "run".

The movement of both the Consul and Faustus towards a fixed point in time, which makes them both unnaturally aware of the passing hours is another theme which is maintained throughout Under the Volcano. The Consul senses a message in the clock striking - "alas, alas" - a message of doom, of something escaping him which is ultimately life itself. Indeed, the Consul's life on his last day is framed by a reminder of time: "suddenly from outside, a bell spoke out, then ceased abruptly: dolente ... dolore!" (U.V., p.47) As the Consul is thrown down the barranca, he hears the bell again: "A bell spoke out: Dolente ... dolore!" (U.V., p.374) The notes struck by the bell recall the words at the entrance to Dante's "Malebolge"; a more detailed/

detailed/ analysis of this alignment is reserved for discussion in Chapter 9.

However, the significance of the first occurrence of the tolling bell is not limited to the Dantean allusion, nor to the insistent and inexorable workings of Time. The bell is also artifact of excommunication, and the book and candle also appear on the last page of Chapter 1, as the volume of Elizabethan plays, and the candles which have been used to light the cantina during a power failure, which are still burning along with the now restored electric lights. Kilgallin explains,

Faustus exclaims, "How! bell, book, and candle - candle, book, and bell -/Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell." Bell, book, and candle is the old ceremony of major excommunication. The bell announced this to all; the book represented authority; while the candle was believed to symbolize the possibility that the ban might be lifted by the repentance and amendment of its victim for, just as the candle was used and extinguished, so the excommunication itself might be. 7

Thus, by the skillful inclusion of the three symbolic appurtenances of excommunication, Lowry suggests the downward flight of a soul without leading the reader to any precise conclusions before the action of the novel begins. The author is treading the narrative tightrope between prefiguring the concerns of the entire novel, and creating suspense, anticipation - possibly even apprehension - in the reader and betraying the subsequent action, thereby negating the reader's task.

Kilgallin's explanation raises a further issue. He demonstrates excommunication to be not as final as might be thought, saying, rather, that the candle symbolizes a redemptive possibility. Even for Faustus, who loves and seeks knowledge more than God, there is the possibility of repentance and redemption right up until the last moments of his life. As the Good Angel says, from the outset of the play, "Never too late, if Faustus will repent."⁸ The light which symbolises hope has figured earlier in Chapter 1. M. Laruelle watches a car move, " --- past the Consul's house, where there would be a light in the window [he] didn't want to see - for long after Adam had left the garden the light in Adam's house burned on -" (U.V., p.28).

On one level this light which is still burning is a painful reminder to Laruelle of the events of the preceding year, events which have not decreased in importance. But the light is a reminder, too, of the Consul's predicament, of the "continuous tragedies" (U.V., p.11) of choosing liquor over love. For the Consul, the right choice is very hard, particularly when his perceptions dictate that he see those who would help him as implicated in betrayal.

Marlowe's Faustus, too, finds himself utterly alone when offered the possibility of salvation through repentance; his angels, Good and Bad, leave him to a speech opening, "My heart is hardened, I cannot repent." ⁹ The Good Angel does not return to intervene, leaving Faustus instead in the hands of Mephistophilis. Goethe's Faust, on the other hand, is offered salvation through love of another human. Kilgallin expresses it thus:

Marlowe's Faustus loved knowledge and power more than he did Christ, while Goethe's Faust would have reached the same tragic end were it not for the love of Margareta who brings him salvation. Geoffrey's fate fluctuates between these two poles. His potential saviour, Yvonne, first dreamed of making a new start with Geoffrey in British Columbia --- 10

In noting that "Geoffrey's fate fluctuates" between that of Marlowe's Faustus and that of Goethe's Faust, Kilgallin touches on a critical problem in Lowry's fiction - particularly in Under the Volcano - that of his use of myths which do not necessarily mesh with one another. If Geoffrey is to be aligned with Faustus, then his fate is death, and damnation. But instead, the Consul is offered salvation through Yvonne. Faustus wilfully refuses to repent; equally, Geoffrey willfully refuses to love Yvonne - "I have been deliberately struggling against my love for you," (U.V., p.43) he writes in the unsent letter. The Consul is offered Faust's chance of salvation through love, but loves his poison more, and must share with Faustus the fruits of "Secret Knowledge".

Indeed, the Consul's having been offered salvation through both repentance and love means that his rejection of love and his refusal to stop pursuing his "Secret Knowledge" represent/

represent/ a double sin - the sins of both Faust and Faustus.
Geoffrey is damned because he can neither love Yvonne nor God.
Marlowe's Faustus says,

----- and see where God
Stretcheth out his arm and bends his ireful brows.
Mountains and hill, come, come, and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God! 11

- and thus he sees in his surroundings a manifestation of a
wrathful God. Geoffrey, too, sees nature as containing God's
anger, as a juxtaposition of two comments on the sunflower in
his garden demonstrates -

'I have another enemy round the back you can't
see. A sunflower. I know it watches me and
I know it hates me.' (U.V., p.148)

'And do you see that sunflower looking in through
the bedroom window? It stares into my room all
day.'

'Stares. Fiercely. All day. Like God!'
(U.V., p.183)

The juxtaposition of the Consul's comments on the sunflower
demonstrates that he not only imagines God "staring fiercely"
at him, but "hating" him, too. He senses this omnipresent
force, and, like Faustus, wants to escape, to be hidden "from
the heavy wrath of God."

This punitive, watchful and wrathful God is God the Father -
an authoritarian patriarch in the face of whom the Consul cannot
repent. The split between an irate and punitive God and the
sufferings of Christ is, as has already been suggested, quite
identifiable in Under the Volcano. The wrathful patriarch
appears in a number of forms; at one level, it is suggested
by the recurring snippet of a news broadcast, the motif "Es
inevitable la muerte del Papa" (U.V., p.233). Geoffrey himself
can identify with the feeling of impending death, but on the
whole, he does not identify with any father-figure, except in
the respect that he has been "like a father" to Hugh. Otherwise,
Geoffrey is a manifestation of a sterile world, as characterised
by his continual "drought" - "Might a soul bathe there and be
clean or slake its drought?" (U.V., p.78) - and by his childlessness.

However, Hugh refers to the Consul as "Papa" (U.V., p.121). In Hugh's mind, the "patriarch" is not without ominous overtones, and the notion of the angered father is reinforced by the appearance of a "billy" goat. Hugh and Yvonne have felt drawn to one another once more, and this goat serves as a timely reminder, a warning against adultery -

Hugh glanced suspiciously at a billy goat which had been following them on their right along the grass 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.103-104)

The goat views Hugh's attempts to re-establish his relationship with Yvonne with "patriarchal contempt". The goat is on one level the presence of Geoffrey Firmin, or rather, the presence of Hugh's guilt about having cuckolded the Consul. As a symbol of the Consul as cuckold, the goat is entirely apposite - being a "billy goat", it does, of course, have horns, the traditional symbol of the cuckold.

Lowry demonstrates his characteristic awareness of the possibilities of the goat as symbol when he informs Derek Pethick in a letter that "The goat means tragedy (tragedy - goat-song) but goat - cabron - cuckold (the horns)." (S.L., p.95) Thus the second paragraph of Lowry's opening to the novel contains an allusion to this symbol, and thus, covertly, to what Lowry conceived of as the ensuing tragedy. He 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) The description not only establishes Quauhnahuac as the meeting of the two disparate environments of America and Mexico - in other words, as a plausible microcosm of twentieth-century contexts - but almost imperceptibly introduces the idea that this is the habitat of the goat, and of the "goat-song", tragedy.

By the opening of Chapter 3, the main themes of the novel have emerged, and the action has become part of "THE tragedy,/"

tragedy,/ proclaimed---" (U.V., p.70). Lowry's subsequent integration of the symbol of the goat with the tragic theme is thus achieved when a goat literally appears, to cause Hugh to "twist" Yvonne out of his arms, and to remind the reader of at least one reason for the Consul's tragedy - Yvonne's infidelities. The goat is symbolic of the cuckold, and is employed with its traditional attributes as the object of sacrifice in Dionysian rituals, and as "standard occult symbol for the devil" ¹² - the two horns, two ears and chin (pointed beard?) fitting into the corners of the pentagram associated with black magic.

The goat re-appears and its ominous symbolic attributes are reinforced. Yvonne, Hugh and the Consul pass a boy driving cattle:

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

However "sweet-looking" the goats may be, their significance cannot be other than insidious and thus they call up Yvonne's guilt, as a complement to Hugh's anxiety under the "patriarchal contempt" of the previous goat. For both Hugh and Yvonne are later subjected to the Consul's reproaches and contempt when he declares,

'Of course I see the romantic predicament you two are in. But even if Hugh makes the most of it again it won't be long, it won't be long, before he realizes he's only one of the hundred or so other ninney-hammers with gills like codfish and veins like racehorses - prime as goats all of them, hot as monkeys, salt as wolves in pride! No, one will be enough ..." (U.V., p.315)

In his rage, the Consul incorporates Iago's words to Othello, and in effect, he is translating his own fate in terms of tragedy by so doing. Stephen Tifft, in his article, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano", interprets the Consul's remarks as Geoffrey playing the parts of Iago and Othello "simultaneously." ¹³ Indeed, the Consul's/

Consul's/ rage is part of a self-constructed trap. He imagines Yvonne and Hugh to be betraying him yet again, and their sexual betrayal means that the Consul thinks they have denied him the chance to love; he can no longer love the unfaithful Yvonne, and without loving, Geoffrey Firmin must die.

Therefore, although Hugh and Yvonne feel guilty about their behaviour towards "Papa" Firmin - and, ironically the recurring news "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" suggests a further alignment with the Pope - the Consul, on the other hand, feels himself to be subjugated under a similar authoritarian force. Indeed, it is this force which occasions the Consul his "premature suffering" - the force which is vigilant not least in his own garden in the form of the tyrannical sunflower, and in the form of the reminder of guilt, "Father is waiting --- Father has not forgotten." Under the immense burden of past guilt, the Consul attempts to find his escape, yet at the same time fears the uncovering of his sins, as he demonstrates when he conjectures about Adam, "And that the Old Man found this out" (U.V., p.138). In this case, the "Old Man" is God the Father, ever-watchful and punitive, too, in the face of whom, the Consul must plead, like Marlowe's Faustus, "My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!"¹⁴

Indeed, the Consul's fear of discovery runs throughout the novel. At an immediate level, Geoffrey as alcoholic cannot but fear that he will be caught in a surreptitious tryst with a hidden tequila bottle or with someone else's half-finished drink. His fear correlates with that of Hugh and Yvonne, whose tryst comes under the "patriarchial" glare of the goat. The Consul demonstrates his alcoholic paranoia when he imagines Dr. Vigil to have visited him,

--- with the object, naturally, of spying upon him, of obtaining some information about him, some clue to the nature of which 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, cries in box.' 'Firmin innocent, but bears guilt of world on shoulders.' 'Body of Firmin found drunk in bunker.' (U.V., p.140-1)

The first thought the Consul has had is that Vigil is checking up on his drinking, in spite of the fact that Geoffrey could equally well call on Vigil's fellow feeling, for he too has been exceedingly drunk the night before. For different reasons, Vigil, too, is worried about being seen drinking. Dr. Vigil remarks that he must "comport" himself "like an apostle" (U.V., p.142) and interestingly, he makes the same observation to Laruelle in Chapter 1, saying "---we doctors must comport ourselves like apostles." (U.V., p.10).

But in spite of knowing that Dr. Vigil is more sympathetic to his alcoholism than Hugh or Yvonne, the Consul immediately jumps to the conclusion that the doctor is looking for a key to his past, some "clue", perhaps, as to the origin of that condition. Geoffrey's guilt - be it self-constructed or otherwise - immediately surfaces to make him feel threatened with exposure as an arch-villain. The threat of "exposure" returns him immediately to the "Hell Bunker" where Laruelle had come upon him - a return to an even earlier anxiety, his (again vague and unspecified) adolescent humiliation. More significantly, though, this humiliation is now given a new focus: the Consul has been found drunk in the bunker. Thus in his meeting with Vigil, the Consul gives a quick synopsis of his anxieties and guilts, which start and end with drink. The Consul's thoughts have been triggered by the fear that Vigil may have deeds to recount which he himself cannot remember. These thoughts lead naturally to the Consul's imagining that Vigil wishes to chastise and interrogate him, and thus to pictures on Vigil's surgery wall, and to the ever-watchful goat:

He saw again clearly enough --- the doctor's consulting room in the Avenida de la Revolución, visited for some drunken reason in the early hours of the morning, macabre with its pictures of ancient Spanish surgeons, their goat faces rising queerly from ruffs resembling ectoplasm, roaring with laughter as they performed inquisitorial operations; --- (U.V., p.141)

These are the workings of a mind under pressure, and under the burden of immense guilts, both past and present. The Consul fears being "found out" in his manifold misdemeanours - "found out" by the "Old Man", a "fierce" and vengeful God.

The Consul, with his pathological fear of authority, and of being observed must inevitably find that he cannot love God. He suspects that this is the case, knowing the words "No se puede vivir sin amar" to have a symbolical significance to him in particular. He cannot love Yvonne, or his fellow-man, and, like his postulated version of Adam, "hates" his spiritual garden. If he cannot love the Mexican paradise given to him, then his inability is a failure to love God. In drawing apart from the world as we know it, the Consul recedes into a self-constructed isolation, a withdrawal into "Secret Knowledge" - his research, with the aid of alchemical tomes and alcohol (a typical occult pairing of mysticism and the use of drink and/or drugs), into the "hell that is in the heart", a suffering which is, paradoxically, both intensely private, and Promethean.

Stephen Tifft identifies the Consul's alcoholism as more than escape - as mythical withdrawal. Thus, Tifft writes,

The Consul thinks of withdrawal as a form of self-reliance, a thumbing of the nose at the loved ones on whom he had so dangerously depended. Actually it is an expedient closer to escape. His chief avenue of escape is drinking, which escalates with each successive crisis. 15

As the Consul retreats further and further into his own interior cosmos, he loses the means of attaching himself to the outside world, and thereby, the means of constructing his own identity. The Consul's sense of loss runs through the novel. Indeed, he interprets his life in terms of the loss of his parents, the loss of Yvonne, the loss of having no children, and an unidentifiable loss, vague and all-encompassing - "it was more as if he had lost or missed something" (U.V., p.283).

After the Consul acknowledges this vague sense of loss which seems to undermine his entire life, he wanders off into a drunken digression. Paradoxically, although alcohol does allow him some respite from troublesome thoughts, it often leads him straight back to a more precise acknowledgement than he would like. In spite of himself, the Consul takes mental detours which seem to prompt the unconscious, so that the vague sense of "loss" is in fact more accurately focussed after a few pages:

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, for ever, 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)

Having rejected all points of attachment to the outside world, the Consul has lost his "identity". Stephen Tifft puts it thus:

As he sublimates the impulse to withdraw, in the form of a grand Dionysian gesture, the Consul attains to the impersonality that he needs as a tragic protagonist: he withdraws not simply from Yvonne, but from the world. The apotheosis of impersonality is the absolute dissolution of self; withdrawal from the world must finally be physical as well as mental. 16

Indeed, as the Consul experiences this "dissolution of self", he draws slightly apart from the narrative consciousness of the novel, such that the ironies of his position are not always appreciated by him. This is the "skewed vision" which makes him feel unable to change his "predestined" fate.

Tifft assumes the Consul to be a "tragic protagonist". There is probably no more vexed question about Under the Volcano than this matter of whether the novel is indeed tragic or not. However, other remarks made by Tifft in his article are convincing. Critics have assumed 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, as manifested in his failure to re-establish his relationship with Yvonne. Stephen Tifft, on the other hand, argues that the purpose which propels the Consul towards his fate and which is the "essence of the tragic definition of Under the Volcano" originates in the fact that "the Consul dedicates himself to the tragic destiny - which - he is convinced - is his." ¹⁷ Certainly it is true that on one level, the Consul "dedicates" himself to his tragic fate by refusing to desire salvation; on another level, Geoffrey Firmin is bound to the inexorable workings of the Infernal Machine and his fate is imposed on him.

Thus the Consul himself is of the impression that what he is engaged in is a Faustian tragedy. Although he is given the option of repentance and of salvation through love which Goethe gives Faust, Geoffrey Firmin chooses the road of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, where confirmation of his downward course serves to prevent repentance. This conviction that descent is to be his ineluctable fate means that the Consul is thereby aligned with the Bunyan epigraph, "yet that which was added to my sorrow was, that I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance." Tifft points out -

Bunyan was heavily influenced by Calvin, and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination provides another apt context for the fatalism and unanchored sense of guilt --- Like Bunyan --- the Consul feels that he is a predestined reprobate, and the conviction throttles repentance; his constant preoccupation with the possible signs of his sinful state inures him deeper in hopelessness. 18

Thus the Consul's despair means that he does not "unceasingly strive upward" and will not be saved.

Hugh echoes this note of "unceasing" desire for salvation when he remembers 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's revolutionary zeal at least permits him some hope for humanity. He is well aware that his impulses are romantic and idealistic in a way which does not accord with the world in which he lives; "Still, he had to pretend to himself, poor fellow, there was something romantic in what he had done." (U.V., p. 166) He has aspirations to save the world, but, although his travels have been somewhat unproductive, spiritually, Hugh is redeemed by his remorse at his own idealism, and by his struggle towards some kind of restitution.

Thus Hugh's position is contrasted with that of the Consul, who, abandoning the outside world and the notion of "responsibility", retreats into what Dr. Vigil rightly diagnoses as "sickness in the soul". Geoffrey Firmin's alcoholism is more than just that; it is symptomatic of, and linked to, the inner malaise of the noble man - "hombre noble" - turned self-destructive. The suggestion that he has abused the occult powers at his command reinforces the idea of the man suspended between genius and impending madness. Indeed, the Consul himself writes,

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 is preternaturally aware of his own condition, seeing that the elusive equilibrium is jeopardised by the immediate presence of the "awful unbridgeable void" - physically present in the Mexican landscape as the barranca; he is risking his sanity (and eventually his life) in the pursuit of the "all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God." He knows his pursuit of "Secret Knowledge" (U.V., p.45) to be dangerous - he has strayed from Dante's "right path" - and even virtually impossible. There is also the suggestion - reinforced by references to a multitude of babels, to be analysed in Chapter 8 - that the Consul's yearning for mystical knowledge is in itself similar to the desires of those who built the Tower of Babel, to reach God, and who were punished for such "over-reaching."

The Consul's desire for "Secret Knowledge" is specified.

He wishes;

--- to answer such questions as: Is there any
ultimate reality, external, conscious, and
ever-present, etc., etc., that can be realized
by any such means that may be acceptable to all
creeds and religions and suitable to all climes
and countries? (U.V., p.44)

Thus the Consul's desire for knowledge is a philosophical seeking of the true God, an omnipotent force which transcends the divisions and demarcations imposed by religions around the world. The/

The/ "means" to such knowledge for Geoffrey Firmin is through a study of alchemy, the cabbala and the occult. The heights of philosophical postulates are combined with the pursuit of the occult - and in the Consul's case, with the misuse of the occult, for which he will suffer the Dantean punishment for necromancers.

Anthony Kilgallin suggests that the reference in Chapter 12 of Under the Volcano to "Calderón" (U.V., p.339) - as Geoffrey is comparing the crag overhanging the barranca to a number of literary paradigms - is to Calderón de la Barca's play, The Wonder-Working Magician ¹⁹ also published as The Prodigious Magician. Kilgallin cites Goethe's indebtedness to Calderón for the Faust theme, but Lowry alludes not simply to the Faust theme of both Goethe and Calderón, but potentially, to something much more specific in The Prodigious Magician. For Cyprian, scholar and necromancer, becomes involved in a debate with (unknown to him) the Devil. The debate revolves around the question of the unity of God:-

CYPRIAN --- There is a passage from Pliny that I am extremely eager to understand, so that I may know who is the god of which it speaks.

DEVIL You refer to a passage which reads (how well I remember the words) as follows: God is a supreme goodness, one essence, one substance, all sight, all hands.

CYPRIAN The fact that I can't find the God about whom Pliny is writing --- 20

Thus Geoffrey Firmin has his literary predecessor in the figure of Cyprian; both are necromancers, and both are philosophers seeking the true God. Cyprian seeks God who is "supreme goodness, one essence, one substance, all sight, all hands" while Geoffrey Firmin quests after God who is "ever-present --- acceptable to all creeds and religions and suitable to all climes and countries."

Thus the two pursuits of philosopher and necromancer are linked, and Geoffrey believes that the descents into the shadows of alchemy are necessary to the ascent towards divine purpose.

He says,

'---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 porterhouse 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. A life which is amorphous, plastic and crystalline --- Or from alcohol to alkahest. (U.V., p.91)

Thus Geoffrey Firmin deludes himself that plumbing the depths of human misery and degradation is in fact an excellent method of achieving a flowering of the soul. This is a rationalization of his alcoholism, and the perfect excuse for his next drink.

Indeed, the Consul elevates drink to mystical heights. Here alcohol is not the seducer away from responsibilities, as the Consul occasionally suspects it to be. Instead, it is the liquor of Faustian experiments - "alkahest", the universal solvent thought to exist by alchemists - the means of forcing that "monstrous union" of body and soul in the pursuit of transcendent vision.

Revealingly, Firmin has bridged the gap "from alcohol to alkahest", and if we know that he has certainly misused alcohol (ironically, the above passage is the inspired, if somewhat obscure product of his drunken meanderings) we now also know that he has misused his "magical powers." But this may equally be yet another self-deception. 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, or so Geoffrey Firmin would like the world to think. Whether the reader is prepared to accept this or not, the Consul as alcoholic elevated to magician - or at least to aspiring alchemist - is the figure of a drunkard with stature added in terms of his own conception of the order of his fate.

Whether the Consul is indeed the mystic-manqué he believes himself to be or not, it is just this desire for a mysterious importance, for the affirmation of his mystical omnipotence which contributes to his downfall. The following exchange represents precisely the kind of gratification he desires:

'Yes', Hugh said, 'how much does he really know about all this 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 viewing himself in terms of a magician or alchemist. He quotes Shelley's

Alastor -

Twelve o'clock, and the Consul said to the doctor:
'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. Jesus. ---'
(U.V., p.151)

He omits part of the passage: "Raking the cinders of a crucible/ For life and power, even when his feeble hand" - a part which aligns him even more specifically with alchemy, and with the quest for "life and power" (time and knowledge, perhaps, which can only be allotted by God) which recalls the desires of Faust and Faustus.

Again, the Consul makes a significant misquotation - where Shelley writes "law", the Consul says "end". The Consul's fate is, unlike that of the magician, bound up with that of the world. In one sense, the death of the Consul is symbolic of the death of a world in which eros and agape appear as capabilities only of a past era. And Geoffrey Firmin's dying vision is of a world exploding and burning; his perception is that the end of Geoffrey Firmin is equally the end of the world. However, the Consul's interpretation of events is ambivalent, particularly as the novel progresses, and the exact nature of his vision is reserved for later discussion.

Interestingly, the Consul terminates his "quotation" with the word "Jesus". He opens his next misquotation - of the same passage from Alastor - with the word "God" (U.V., p.206). Even more significantly, "this so lovely world" has been transformed into "this so lousy world" (U.V., p.206). Geoffrey by now views himself as a permanent resident of a world he hates, just as he views Adam as trapped in the Garden of Eden and hating it.

Following the Consul's second reference to Alastor, he and Hugh have a conversation:

'Alastor, Alastor,' Hugh strolled over to him saying. 'Who is, was, why, and/or wrote Alastor, anyway?'
'Percy Bysshe Shelley.' The Consul leaned against the mirador beside Hugh. 'Another fellow with ideas ... The story I like about Shelley is the one where he just lets himself sink to the bottom of the sea - taking several books with him of course - and just stayed there, rather than admit he couldn't swim.'
(U.V., p.207)

Yvonne intervenes in the discussion - as Geoffrey says sardonically, "extricating them from all this" - and thus conversation, containing perhaps a crucial alignment with the Consul's condition, is lost. For, like Shelley, the Consul feels his identity to be "under the oceans" (U.V., p.294). And, rather than ask for help in his struggle for salvation, rather than "admit" that he is lost, and drowning under the weight of the past and in "the black path of his excess" (U.V., p.148) the Consul has remained in Mexico, suffering. He has failed to act, and has simply "stayed there", to be subsumed by events.

However, the Consul is not a small man, crushed by events over which he has no control, but instead, a figure of great stature who, even when lying face-downward on the Calle Nicaragua, can give an exegesis of the particular personal relationships which have placed him in this position! Even with his mind "staggering under the influence of the last half-hour's strychnine, of the several therapeutic drinks before that, of the numerous distinctly untherapeutic drinks with Dr. Vigil before that" (U.V., p.84), the Consul dominates a consciousness which integrates a history of myth and symbolism, and even of tragedy itself/

itself/ with the narrative of his own particular tragedy.

The Consul's presence in the world has had significant impact, a fact to which Laruelle testifies very early on in the novel:

What had happened just a year ago today seemed already to belong in a different age. One would have thought the horrors of the present would have swallowed it up like a drop of water. It was not 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)

Indeed, Laruelle clearly believes the Consul to have been not only a significant figure, and a figure of some stature, but also essentially a tragic one. The tragedy of that one figure - Geoffrey Firmin, formerly British Consul in Mexico - in a world which had since seen even less of Eden, has left a lasting mark on his environ, equally as it should have done on the reader. The Consul's fate has been an "unassimilable tragedy" (U.V., p.14), a tragedy which still stands as a monument to his essential humanity, combined with despair. The events of Mexico, on the Day of the Dead, November 1938 stand as significant, even in the face of the sophisticated mass self-destruction of war in the following years.

There is the suggestion, too, that the Consul's death has marked the end of an era when "one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value." This suggestion is reinforced when Laruelle comments that "an eternity had been lived through" (U.V., p.14). Indeed, Under the Volcano traces, in the figure of the Consul, a history of the tragic hero within the cyclical framework of the rise and decline of civilizations. Thus the Consul is in some senses a figure of Classical tragedy, in others of Christian or Romantic "tragedies" and in yet another sense, he stands as the last tragic hero within a modern context.

Lowry viewed Mexico as an apposite meeting place for ancient and modern civilizations, for human survival - "the meeting place --- of mankind itself --- the age-old arena of racial and political conflicts of every nature." (S.L., p.67) In Mexico, too, "there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing" (U.V., p.16) - thus the landscape, which is ultimately both "fatal" and "cleansing" contributes to the ensuing tragedy. At one level, this landscape - in which the Consul is continually confronted with the barranca, and where his spiritual home, the Farolito is ironically a place of no light, but oscillates instead on the edge of the barranca - conspires with the "untimely" machinations of the gods to bring about Firmin's downfall.

At the level of the workings of callous and infernal gods, the Consul is a tragic figure in the classical sense. George Steiner, in The Death of Tragedy, analyses the tragic mode as follows:

--- I believe that any realistic notion of tragic drama must start from the fact of catastrophe. Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome --- Outside and within man is l'autre, the "otherness" of the world. Call it what you will, a hidden or malevolent God, blind fate, the solicitations of hell, or the brute fury of our animal blood. 21

From the very outset of Under the Volcano, Lowry creates an expectation of "catastrophe", a "tragedy" which has not been "swallowed up like a drop of water" by the ensuing atrocities of the most sophisticated self-destruction. In the respect that it "ends badly", Lowry's novel accords with Steiner's delineation of tragedy.

At one level, the Consul is indeed "broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome." At one level, Geoffrey Firmin is victim of an impetus which appears to be beyond his control. Although he is an alcoholic - in one sense, therefore, a self-made sufferer - he is equally in the grip of something which is much more powerful and pervasive than the illness itself. The burden of the past - including the/

the/ mysteries of the Hell Bunker - extorts from Firmin the price of alcoholism and the subsequent, and related, price which he pays in refusing Yvonne's help. The past is inescapable, and the bleak, unloving horrors of this past seem to have been the work of malicious gods, in the service of the wheel of fate.

Although Stephen Tifft argues that the Consul's tragedy is entirely of his own making, this argument fails to admit the parallel force of malicious gods in the novel. Thus Tifft writes,

---the essence of the tragic definition of Under the Volcano, is as follows: the Consul dedicates himself to the tragic destiny which-he is convinced-is his.

It will be immediately evident that this tragic purpose is purely reflexive - tragedy proceeds from the conviction that it must proceed. 22

Undoubtedly, the overall tragic pattern of the novel depends on Firmin's belief that any action on his part would be in vain. He therefore embraces all that Fate has to throw at him. However, Tifft, obviously for the purposes of an article, rather than a lengthier discussion, - does not examine the role played by this intervening force. At various levels within the novel, this "force" may be seen as a manifestation of the malevolent and callous gods of Greek tragedy, or of the wrathful Christian God (the authoritarian patriarch associated with the sunflower).

Equally, the force drawing the Consul on to disaster may be what Steiner terms "the solicitations of hell". In Firmin's case, he has been tempted into the pursuit of "Secret Knowledge". On his Faustian course, he is accompanied by the voices of his "familiar" which alternately warn him of impending disaster, and lure him on to the next drink. The contrapuntal effect of the voices is clear in Chapter 5:

'I'm not going to drink', the Consul said, halting suddenly. 'Or am I? Not mescal anyway.' 'Of course not, the bottle's just there, behind that bush. Pick it up.'--- '---You might have another.' 'Thanks, I will.' The Consul palsiedly readjusted the bottle to his lips. 'Bliss. Jesus. Sanctuary... Horror,' he added. '-Stop. Put that bottle down, Geoffrey Firmin, what are you doing to yourself?' another voice said in his ear so loudly he turned round. (U.V., p.130-1)

The effect of the voices of the Consul's two familiars is analogous to the "Good" and "Bad" Angels which alternatively draw Marlowe's Faustus on to damnation, and warn him -

Bad Ang. Too late

Good Ang. Never too late, if Faustus will repent.

Bad Ang. If thou repent, devils will tear thee in pieces.

Good Ang. Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin. ²³

The weighting of the voices of good and evil is similar, in both cases; the voice of temptation is given arguments which are as compelling as those given to the voice of good.

As the Consul turns round, surprised by the warning voice, he is confronted with a symbolic representation of the voice of temptation - which has been temporarily warded off: "-- he turned round. On the path before him a little snake he had thought a twig was rustling off into the bushes---" (U.V., p.131). The snake recalls the Garden of Eden, but more specifically, it is associated with Hugh (the snake in the Consul's personal Garden) and with temptation - of Eve, of Adam, of Yvonne, and of the Consul. Having created this symbolisation (relating temptation to an entirely credible - even mundane - aspect of the landscape), Lowry continues:

It was a real snake all right. Not that he was much bothered by anything so simple as snakes, he reflected with a degree of pride, gazing straight into the eyes of a dog. It was a pariah dog and disturbingly familiar. ---All seemed normal again. Anyway, both snake and dog had gone. (U.V., p.131)

Both snake and dog may have crawled out of the shadows of Geoffrey Firmin's hallucinating mind, but they are equally likely to be present in the Mexican landscape. If we can identify the snake with the voice of temptation, it is also interesting that the pariah dog should seem "disturbingly familiar" to the Consul. At a narrative level, the pariah dog has followed Geoffrey and Yvonne into the garden at the end of Chapter 2, and which has "appeared familiarly at heel" (U.V., p.70) behind the Consul in Chapter 3.

Earlier, the Consul has been associated with the Tarot card of "The Fool". "The Fool" is depicted as being lured towards pleasure by the butterfly, while the dog nips his heels to remind him of the folly of temptation. Thus the pariah dog may be interpreted as symbolic of the warning voice of the familiar (note that the word "familiar" has been used in conjunction with the pariah dog at least twice), warning the Consul of his danger, as the dog nips the heels of "The Fool" in the Tarot, to warn him of the follies of pleasure.

Indeed, warnings to the Consul are numerous. The pariah dog, continually lurking in the shadows appears as the concretisation of the voice of one of his familiars, the voice which says, "I can see the writing on the wall." (U.V., p.222) The "writing on the wall" as a concept should remind Geoffrey that he is in immediate danger of being weighed in the balance and found wanting. But the Consul's interpretation of this is that his alcoholic suffering - his self-made hell - is a form of martyrdom, rather than any deficiency on his own part. And yet another voice within him - his "good" familiar, or conscience - tells him that this concept of his suffering is a rationalization of his excess. This voice says,

'---You've even been insulated from the responsibility of genuine suffering ... Even the suffering you do endure is largely unnecessary. Actually spurious. It lacks the very basis you require of it for its tragic nature. ---' (U.V., p.222)

The Consul's suffering is "largely unnecessary" in that he has been offered a clear route to salvation in the form of Yvonne. Unlike the tragic protagonists of Classical drama, Geoffrey Firmin has some choice in his fate. At the same time, though, the Consul is labouring under the weight of the past, and the machinations of the infernal gods mean that this weight is an insupportable burden to him, affecting whatever choice he may have adversely.

The Consul sees his fate as largely predestined, and thus the question of choice becomes less important. He thinks, "But the writing was there, all right, if not on the wall.

The man had nailed his board to the tree." (U.V., p.222) Firmin sees the man's construction of his own crucifix (as the man nailing his board to a tree may be interpreted, particularly in view of the mounting references to crucifixion - see U.V., p.244, p.319 and p.329) as a signal towards his doom, and an intimation that his fate is now sealed. He has been weighed in the balance and found wanting - the figurative "writing on the wall". The respect in which he is found "wanting" is that he loves nothing as he loves his poison. Geoffrey Firmin has turned his back on the literal writing on the wall of Laruelle's house: No se puede vivir sin amar. In loving nothing as much as drink, the Consul will inevitably be found wanting, and he understands his fate to be sealed accordingly.

Thus because of his own perceptions of his situation, the Consul's opportunities for choice in his destiny become increasingly limited. Given the Romantic possibility of individual salvation through Yvonne's love, the Consul chooses instead to evade this pivotal question. However, Geoffrey is absolutely aware that he has access to individual redemption; as late as Chapter 10 in the novel, he tries to pray in the Church of the "Virgin for those who have nobody with." (U.V., p.290) He says,

'Please let me make her happy, deliver me from this dreadful tyranny of self. I have sunk low. Let me sink lower still, that I may know the truth. Teach me to love again, to love life.' That wouldn't do either... (U.V., p.291)

In his essential loneliness, Geoffrey has some knowledge of what his aspirations should be: "Teach me to love again." But equally, he does not "unceasingly strive upwards." Even in his attempts to pray he finds himself saying "Let me sink lower still", and - like the ungrateful Adam he proposed in Chapter 5 - "Let us be happy again somewhere, if it's only together, if it's only out of this terrible world. Destroy the world!" (U.V., p.291) This cry for destruction can hardly be mistaken for "striving upward."

Indeed, the Consul's desire for deliverance founders upon such questions as, "To drink or not to drink"(U.V., P.289.

And far from learning to love again, the Consul has the greatest of difficulty in restraining himself from Othello-like jealous rages. Geoffrey thinks,

It was hard to forgive, hard, hard to forgive.
Harder still, not to say how hard it was, I hate you. Even now, of all times. Even though here was God's moment, the chance to agree, to produce the card, to change everything --- (U.V., p.202)

The Consul is given the option to deliverance - "God's moment" - but chooses to inhabit his own inner hell of rage and jealousy. In this hell, he excludes any agencies of help, and accepts the agencies of ruin:

No angels nor Yvonne nor Hugh could help him here. As for the demons, they were inside him as well as outside; quiet at the moment - taking their siesta perhaps - he was more the less surrounded by them and occupied; they were in possession. The Consul looked at the sun. 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 of all sit in its light, facing it.

(U.V., p.208)

The Consul will not attain "Kether, or Light" (S.L., p.65); he cannot face the sun, just as he cannot bear the "fierce stare" of the sunflower. He has chosen instead the "Qliphoth, the world of shells and demons" (S.L., p.65).

In turning away from the possibility of remorse and redemption at this point, the Consul leaves himself in the position of not "unceasingly striving upward." He therefore cannot ultimately be aligned with Goethe's Faust, to whom this possibility of redemption has been given. Steiner analyzes this romantic dramatic impulse as follows:

The mechanism of timely remorse or redemption through love - the arch Wagnerian theme - allows the romantic hero to partake of the excitement of evil without bearing the real cost. It carries the audience to the brink of terror only to snatch them away at the last moment into the light of forgiveness. "Near-tragedy" is, in fact, another word for melodrama.

Therefore Steiner views remorse and the ensuing redemption of the individual as an "evasion of the tragic which is central to the romantic temper."²⁵ Geoffrey Firmin is offered "redemption through love", but having refused this, becomes more clearly aligned with Marlowe's Faustus.

Both Geoffrey Firmin and Faustus fear the "fierce stare" of a watchful, vengeful God, for they know that the full price for their sins will be extorted. Steiner writes,

Marlowe's Faustus descends to hell-fire with a terrible, graphic awareness of his condition. He pleads; "My God, my God, look not so fierce on me." But it is too late. In his lucid mind, he is aware of the possibility of repentance, but he knows that the habits of evil have grown native to his heart: "My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent." It is precisely because he can no longer cross the shadow line between the thought of remorse and the redemptive act, that Faustus is damned. 26

The Consul, too, thinks of remorse: "consider the word remorse. Remors. Mordeo, mordere. La Mordida!" (U.V., p.222) But his thoughts are lost in the alcoholic Babel which pursues him, that confusion of snippets of foreign languages and the voices of his familiars - the "failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that became more and more like one voice to a death more dead than death itself," (U.V., p.362). Thus the responses to the Consul's "consideration" of remorse are:-

"Facilis est decensus Averno," yet another warning of his slide into the Malebolge, and "Je crois que le vautour est doux à Prométhée et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers" (U.V., p.222) ('I think the vulture is sweet to Prometheus, ---'), an ironic comment on the "pleasures" of eternal damnation.

Like Faustus, too, the Consul is unable to move from an understanding of the necessity of remorse to the "redemptive act." Redemption is offered right up until the last: "Who indeed even now could prevent?" (U.V., p.348) thinks the Consul, knowing that "even now" he might be saved. He continues, "He wanted Yvonne at this moment, to forgive her, to take her in his arms, wanted more than ever to be forgiven, and to forgive;/"

forgive;/ but where should he go?" (U.V., p.348). As with Faustus, Geoffrey Firmin is so firmly fixed in his ways that he simply cannot begin to repent, and is, accordingly, damned.

As Anthony Kilgallin points out, the visions of the descent to hell presented by Lowry and Marlowe are again remarkably similar and share features with the descriptions of the erupting volcanoes in Calderón's The Prodigious Magician and Goethe's Faust ²⁷ (although the last two are ultimately only the threatened or intended domains). Although Lowry quite clearly directs the reader towards a view of Geoffrey Firmin as a tragic protagonist - and intended, perhaps, to create the last tragic protagonist - the ending of Under the Volcano is ambivalent to some extent. As he dies, the Consul imagines himself to be climbing the volcano, then to be falling into it, and being thrust out with the eruption of the volcano, and of the world itself. If he sees himself as climbing the peak, this ascent contradicts any notions of damnation. And yet this may be one last example of the Consul's skewed vision; what he imagines to be ascent is more likely to be descent. In his full-length study of Lowry, Kilgallin quotes from the Consul's "bible" (see U.V., p.178), Dogme et Ritual de la Haute Magie: "The devil is God, as understood by the wicked." ²⁸ In the inverted world of the Qliphoth he can imagine salvation - "this greatest ascent of all had been successfully, if unconventionally, completed." (U.V., p.375)

Indeed, the reader may ultimately conclude that the Consul is damned, simply because his imagined "ascent" is immediately contradicted:

But there was nothing there: no peaks, no life, no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly: it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling, too, whatever it was, collapsing, while he was falling, falling into the volcano --- (U.V., p.375)

At the peak of his antithetical vision of an ascent which is at the same time a descent, we feel the Consul to be at the height of his self-delusion. Kilgallin supports this view, /

view,/saying that,

--- the light of the volcano and the dark of the abyss are visualized concomitantly on the split-screen of the Consul's final apocalyptic vision. The ambiguity of the simultaneous climb-and-fall can be traced to Levi (UTV 178): "A fatal law drives demons downward when they wish and believe themselves to be ascending." Magic and hallucination accompany Geoffrey right to his death. 29

Kilgallin's evidence thus supports the feeling that Geoffrey Firmin is ultimately damned, his destiny being not only the literal barranca, but, by extension, the abyss or Malebolge.

Thus the Consul is seen to descend into hell fire, like Marlowe's Faustus and to "bear the real cost" of his actions, as Steiner identifies tragedy. It will be remembered, too, that Lowry claimed that Under the Volcano is a tragedy. However, even if it is possible to interpret the Consul's dying antithetical vision as a product of his self-deception which is imposed on the "reality" of his descent, the investigation of the "tragic" nature of the novel does not end here. Lowry said of the final chapter,

I don't think the chapter's final effect should be depressing: I feel you should most definitely get your katharsis, while there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old consul at the end, who realises that he is after all part of humanity: --- what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind.
(S.L., p.85)

If the novel is indeed a tragedy, then Lowry's idea of "redemption" is worrying, in that the possibility of individual redemption is viewed by Steiner as an evasion of the tragic, as "near-tragedy" or "melodrama". The mechanism of redemption would clearly align the novel with Goethe's Faust, rather than Marlowe's Faustus.

Certainly Yvonne's fate - she, like Margarita, is drawn up into the heavens - suggests an alignment with Goethe's Faust. But all the other evidence relating to the Consul's "sickness of the soul" and his destiny would indicate that Geoffrey is/

is/undertaking the same journey as Marlowe's Faustus. However, the Consul differs from Faustus in that his sins are also the sins of mankind as a whole, the sins of a society where values are seen to be collapsing, and where eros and agape are as difficult as they are to the Consul. Thus the implications of the Consul's destiny - as related "to the ultimate fate of mankind" - are much wider than those of Faustus. Laruelle opens Marlowe's play to read "Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall -" (U.V., p.40). Kilgallin points out that the next line of the play - "Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise" - acts as a "potential warning to Laruelle and to the reader to observe, and profit from, the example of Geoffrey the damned soul." ³⁰

However, the "potential warning" may be viewed as much more serious, and on a much larger scale. The Consul's failings are manifestly those of mankind in the contemporary world. The Consul sees the approach of chaos - chaos within himself which is equally the chaos of the world -

Could it be Vigil considered his practised eye had detected approaching insanity --- as some who have watched wind and weather all their lives can prophesy, under a fair sky, the approaching storm, the darkness that will come galloping out of nowhere across the fields of the mind? Not that there could be said to be a very fair sky either in that connexion --- The Consul wouldn't have needed a practised eye to detect on this wall, or any other, a mene-Tekel-Peres for the world, compared to which mere insanity was a drop in the bucket --- it was as if behind the scenes certain strings were being pulled, and whole continents burst into flame, and calamity moved nearer -

(U.V., p.149-150)

Thus the "writing on the wall" which indicates to the Consul that he is insane, and that he has been found "wanting", is equally the writing on the wall for entire continents, intimating the proximity of madness, chaos and war. Geoffrey Firmin's needless self-destruction - his alcoholism and self-imposed "sickness of the soul" - is a metaphor and a warning of the self-destructive impulse of twentieth-century society.

The Consul envisions the approach of chaos - "whole continents burst into flame, and calamity moved nearer" - and at the same/

same/ time prefigures his dying prophecy of the onslaught of war. In his dying visions he sees "the inconceivable pandemonium of a million tanks, through the blazing of ten million burning bodies." (U.V., p.376) If, like Firmin, the world insists on self-destruction - in spite of the fact that it has "resource for all" (U.V., p.7) - then it shall have precisely that, for "The will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it." (U.V., p.97, p.209) And the will of man can indeed be so destructive that "Countries, civilizations, empires, great hordes perish for no reason at all, and their soul and meaning with them ---" (U.V., p.312).

If the Consul as an individual is aligned with Faust in being destined to damnation, then it is for the Consul as a representative of mankind - as "part of humanity" - or as Everyman that the "hint of redemption" is implied. The alcoholic Geoffrey Firmin has been staggering towards the abyss from the outset of the novel; of this there is no doubt. A pressure mounts throughout the narrative which means that the Consul cannot, will not, and ultimately does not really want to evade the tragic consequences of his actions - or inaction! He is steadily impelled by the burden of the past, from which he cannot escape, by the machinations of the infernal gods (which presumably have allocated him this past, and who make it as inescapable as Ixion's wheel) towards the Malebolge.

In the purging conflagration which consumes the Consul, his own soul - that of the alcoholic necromancer who loves only his poison - cannot be redeemed, and yet there is the "hint of redemption" for mankind as a whole, and this redemption at a universal level is not inconsistent with tragedy. Steiner writes:

Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods. It does not make him innocent, but it hallows him as if he had passed through flame. Hence there is in the final moments of great tragedy, whether Greek or Shakespearean or neo-Classic, a fusion of grief and joy, of lament over the fall of man and of Rejoicing in the resurrection of his spirit. 31

In Under the Volcano, there is indeed a sense of the lament over the fall of the individual - the damnation of one Geoffrey Firmin - and a strong feeling that he is consumed and expelled from the purging blast of the volcano. The redemptive possibility lies not with the Consul, however, for the fate of this "hombre noble" is in all respects consistent with tragedy. Instead, there is a possibility of redemption for mankind as a whole. In effect, Under the Volcano maintains a tension between two main levels, one on which Geoffrey Firmin is a man of stature, with the qualifications for the tragic hero in the Classical sense, where the outcome is predestined, and another on which he refuses to "desire deliverance" but has, like Goethe's Faust, the possibility of redemption through love. The conflict, whereby for example, the Consul can be aligned both with Jesus and Judas, Faustus and Faust, the intensely individualistic figure and Everyman, emerges from Lowry's technique of antithetical juxtaposition; elements of a flawed, alcoholic and isolated Geoffrey Firmin have to be relinquished to the abyss at the end of Under the Volcano, while elements of a lonely Everyman in search of a purpose, and of love are drawn from Under the Volcano for the consciousness operating within future novels.

CHAPTER 7: NOTES

1. Malcolm Lowry, "Preface to a Novel" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p.14.
2. Ibid., p.14.
3. Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, ed., John Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962) p.101.
4. Ibid., p.29.
5. Anthony Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p.27.
6. Ibid., p.27.
7. Ibid., p.28.
8. Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, p.39.
9. Ibid., p.35.
10. Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano", p.32.
11. Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, p.101.
12. David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p.95.
13. Stephen Tifft, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.61.
14. Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, p.103.
15. Stephen Tifft, p.51.
16. Ibid., p.51.

17. Ibid., p.47.
18. Ibid., p.53.
19. Kilgallin, p.34.
20. Pedro Calderon de la Barca, The Prodigious Magician, ed.,
Bruce Wardropper (Madrid: Jose Porrúa Turanzas, 1982),
p.73.
21. George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (London: Faber & Faber,
1963) pp.8-9.
22. Tifft, p.47.
23. Marlowe, p.39.
24. Steiner, p.133.
25. Ibid., p.133.
26. Ibid., pp.133-4.
27. Kilgallin, p.34, p.36.
28. Anthony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.187.
29. Ibid., p.209.
30. Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano", p.28.
31. Steiner, p.10.

PART III: HELL

Chapter 8: "Tower and Labyrinth"

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--- it was the memory of that old consciousness of fatality that he wished to revive, the stimulus of the old wine of complete despair whose cold internal glow he sought, and the memories of the Farolito. (D.A.T.G., p.222)

In the course of Under the Volcano, the Consul staggers in and out of a succession of bars. He begins in the "Bella Vista" where Yvonne finds him on her return to Quauhnahuac, and ends his day in "El Farolito" - the "Lighthouse" in Paríán - where he experiences "the final stupid unprophylactic rejection" (U.V., p.349) of love and of life itself. The hope which is contained in Yvonne's return has been dissipated - dissolved, no doubt, in the Consul's personal solvent, the alcohol which acts as his "alkahest" - and has been replaced with what Sigbjørn Wilderness (acting as the novelist and authorial consciousness of the fictional counterpart of Under the Volcano, The Valley of the Shadow of Death) identifies as "complete despair."

In the events of the Consul's last day, he has had the choice of going to Guanajuato or to Tomalín. The outing also involves Hugh, Yvonne and possibly Dr. Vigil, and Lowry indicates the nature of the question posed: "shall they go to Guanajuato (life) or Tomalín, which of course involves Paríán (death)." (S.L., p.74) The decision to go to the bullthrowing in Tomalín is largely that of the Consul, who does not want Vigil to accompany them due to his "acts of treachery"; in other words, his conversation with Yvonne in the garden. Knowing that Vigil is going to Guanajuato anyway, the Consul has an additional factor in wanting to go to Tomalín. Geoffrey,

--- had called down to Hugh --- 'Tomalín's quite near Paríán, where your pal was going,' he said. 'We might even go on there.' And then to the doctor, 'Perhaps you might come too ... I left my favourite pipe in Paríán. Which I might get back, with luck. In the Farolito.' And the doctor had said: 'Wheee, es un infierno.' (U.V., p.151)

Vigil, therefore, has a strong sense of the significance of the Farolito, but neither his warning, nor the fact that Yvonne indicates that she doesn't want to go to a bullfight (will a "bullthrowing" be much better?) deter Geoffrey. The Consul appears to have two somewhat nebulous reasons for choosing Tomalín. First, Hugh has a friend there, although socialising for the sake of itself, rather than for the sake of the accompanying alcohol, is somewhat inimical to Geoffrey's state of withdrawal. Second, braving the "infierno" for the sake of a pipe is, quite simply, unnecessary.

Indeed, the Consul's decision to go to Tomalín demonstrates the degree to which he is now impelled towards the fate that is Paríán by the forces of his psychological make-up (his intense jealousy) and by the machinations of "the gods". The Farolito itself - the main object of a visit to Paríán - has a dualistic significance for the Consul. The antithetical nature of this significance can only be interpreted by the reader by the context in which it occurs; the fact that the Consul has created his own internal hell within which he now operates means that his vision of the Farolito is distorted -

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. ---soon he would have another drink. That would help, but it was not the thought that calmed him. Paríán - the Farolito! he said to himself. The Lighthouse, the lighthouse that invites the storm and lights it! (U.V., p.203)

From his vantage point of the hell that is in the heart, the Consul sees the Farolito as both "inviting" and "lighting" the storm. Certainly the Farolito is to draw him on to destruction - to "invite the storm" of Firmin's destiny. However, as a source of "light" - in accordance with the struggle towards "Kether", and in contrast to the darkness of Dante's wood - the Farolito is unsatisfactory. At best it is a false source of light, arranged by the gods - acting as "wreckers" - to draw Geoffrey towards the rock on which he will founder.

Rather than being the Consul's beacon in the coming storm, then, the Farolito is a place of darkness:

The Farolito! It was a strange place, a place really of the late night, which, like that one other terrible cantina in Oaxaca, did not open till four o'clock in the morning. But today being the holiday for the dead it would not close. At first it had appeared to him tiny. Only after he had grown to know it well had he discovered how far back it ran, that it was really composed of numerous little rooms, each smaller and darker than the last, opening one into another, the last and darkest of all being no larger than a cell. These rooms struck him as spots where diabolical plots must be hatched, atrocious murders planned; here --- life reached bottom. (U.V., p.203-4)

The "one other terrible cantina" is the El Infierno, and thus the Farolito can be taken to be the equivalent of the "Inferno". The description, too, suggests a labyrinth, and the movement through the rooms, a trip through death - and hell- in life towards, imprisonment in a "cell".

Lowry informs the reader, "Parían --- has represented death all along, but this, I would like the reader to feel, is far worse than that." (S.L., p.85) "This" is the Farolito, domain not only of death in life, but also of hell in life. The Consul moves from the hell within himself into the external hell of the Farolito (to be followed only by the hell after life of the abyss/Malebolge). Dr. Vigil's diagnosis of this movement is as follows - "But I think if you are very serious about your progresión a ratos you may take a longer journey even than this proposèd one." (U.V., p.148) The Consul at this point is trying to explain the beauties peculiar to his downfall, and Vigil rightly forecasts that such a "spasmodic progression" - inconsistent, of course, with unceasingly striving upwards - will result in a long journey (downwards). Thus the "progression" of the Consul is through his own interior hell, into the exterior hell of the Farolito, to the everlasting hell of the Malebolge.

The threat of the abyss is inherent in the labyrinthine Farolito. On returning to Mexico, scene of his own despair,/

despair,/ and of the ruin of his character "the Consul", Sigbjørn Wilderness re-enters a bar, and knows himself to be investigating the darkness of the "Consul's" life:

- it was much as if by so entering the past, he had stumbled into a labyrinth, with no thread to guide him, where the minotaur threatened at every step, and which was moreover a labyrinth that now at each turn led infallibly to a precipice, over which one might fall at any moment, at the bottom of which was the abyss.

(D.A.T.G., p.97)

As he moves through the labyrinth of the past, what Sigbjørn is to find at the centre is the grave of his friend, Juan Fernando Martinez. After finding out that Juan Fernando is dead, Sigbjørn and Primrose make a symbolical journey to the ruined city of Mitla, meaning "inferno" in Aztec, or "tomb" in Zapotecan (D.A.T.G., p. 257), and into the subterranean passages containing tombs. Although Sigbjørn has feared his potential fall into his old ways, he is not without "thread to guide him"; in his fearsome journey into the past, Primrose acts as his Vigil, his Beatrice, his Margareta and his Ariadne.

However, Sigbjørn's sense of danger, and of the immense burden of the past link him very strongly with the Consul. He affirms the notion that the Consul has entered a state of "death in life" when he enters the Farolito:

--- here he [Sigbjørn] stood, in the tower of his own creation, surrounded by these ghosts of the past, of his life - it was a dream - and about to set off to meet one of his characters. Surely this was more what was meant by death. Death in life, for you could be dead, and yet have existence on earth too, at least according to Dante.

(D.A.T.G., p.201)

Thus the Consul's presence in the Farolito in Chapter 12 of Under the Volcano is confirmed as "death in life", or "far worse than that", as Lowry himself suggests - hell in life.

Sigbjørn Wilderness' anguish is resolved because of the presence of his wife, Primrose, and because of his constant reiteration of his desire that she, at least, should have a/

a/ good holiday in Mexico and that they should have a future together. He thinks that "he must strive to give a centre to their lives" (D.A.T.G., p.202) and knows that they must do this together. Thus Sigbjørn, although tormented to the point where he attempts to commit suicide, knows that the past, burdensome as it is, must be re-entered and then left exactly where it is - in the past. His continual striving to make Primrose happy in spite of his own pain, and to build a future together means that Sigbjørn "may be saved" and will be permitted to shake off the immense burden of the past.

Similarly, in Under the Volcano, Yvonne's return to Geoffrey Firmin establishes that he is being offered this possibility of redemption, and of off-loading past guilts. However, in contrast to Sigbjørn's perceptions of his predicament, the Consul cannot commit himself to any notions of happiness in the future. He is drawn instead towards what emerges as his greater love - alcohol. Instead of being able to demonstrate his love for Yvonne on her return, or tell her of it, he turns to his whisky: "I love you, he murmured, gripping the bottle in both hands as he replaced it on the tray." (U.V., p.95) Behind him, Yvonne is alone and weeping.

Echoing the words of Sigbjørn Wilderness - for whom the Farolito represents "complete despair" - the Consul has tried to explain to Yvonne the pleasures of the hell that is in the cantina. With his heightened awareness of his predicament, he urges her to understand the significance of cantinas in his life, even of the Bella Vista which he comments, "is not perhaps properly a cantina." (U.V., p.55) Interestingly, too, he reveals an awareness that his domain is something more magnificent, and more devastating in its impact, than "heaven" -

'--- you misunderstand me if you think it is altogether darkness I see --- But if you look at that sunlight there, ah, then perhaps you'll get the answer, see, look at the way it falls through the window: what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning? --- for not even the gates of heaven, opening wide to receive me, could fill me with such celestial complicated and hopeless joy as the iron screen that rolls up with a crash, as the unpadlocked jostling jealousies which admit those whose souls/

souls/ tremble with the drinks they carry unsteadily to their lips. All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster is here, beyond those swinging doors. (U.V., p.55)

Above all, this passage demonstrates Lowry in the act of reconciling darkness and light, heaven and hell, hope and despair, and human happiness and misery. The Consul's hymn to cantinas is equally an invitation to the malicious gods, and to his familiars, to perpetuate the motion of the inevitable wheel. If not even the joy of redemption can offset the temptations of this "hopeless joy" in "all disappointment and all disaster", then the Consul is inhabiting a phantasmagoric cosmos, the beauty of which is only accessible to the perspective of alcoholism.

Throughout Under the Volcano, Lowry establishes a contrapuntal interaction of darkness and light, his creative imagination maintaining a tension between antithetical elements which is resolved (often in terms of a symbol such as the river Styx, representing both life and death). However, such a reconciliation eludes the Consul's grasp, in spite of the fact that he is given the wherewithal - formidable powers of intellectual analysis and the chance to balance these with his own intuitive understanding of good and evil, and with the emotional generosity of Yvonne - to achieve such a synthesis. Geoffrey Firmin cannot form a bridge between his experience of his interior hell and his intuitive need for a love which would ameliorate his internal cosmos; a practical solution eludes him. Unable to make himself take any action at a crucial point, the Consul knows himself to have failed to mend the rift between he and Yvonne, and to make the leap from his internal chaos towards some kind of order and restitution - "he felt his mind divide and rise, like the two halves of a counterpoised drawbridge, ticking, to permit passage of these noisome thoughts." (U.V., p.202)

The Consul has earlier contemplated the domain of "those whose souls tremble with the drinks they carry unsteadily to their lips." In Jacques Laruelle's house, he is confronted with a visual representation of the predicament of these "souls" in the form of the "terrifying picture," "Los Borrachones"/

"Los Borrachones"/ (U.V., p.202). Geoffrey wonders why the picture is not called "Los Borrachos" and the answer which eludes him is that the picture is significant to him personally, and that he is aligned with the fate of those depicted - with "Great or Habitual Drunkards" rather than with those who are merely "Drunk". Thus the Consul meets yet another warning of - and equally signal toward - his fate.

"Los Borrachones" depicts not only the fate of its subject matter, but also those whose escape that fate, demonstrating again Lowry's concern with presenting antitheses as a means of establishing the novel's counterpoint. The Consul sees both the saved and the damned:

Down, headlong into hades, selfish and florid-faced, into a tumult of fire-spangled fiends, Medusae, and belching monstrosities, with swallow-dives or awkwardly, with dread backward leaps, shrieking among falling bottles and emblems of broken hopes, plunged the drunkards; up, up, flying palely, selflessly into the light towards heaven, soaring sublimely in pairs, male sheltering female, shielding themselves by angels with abnegating wings, shot the sober.

(U.V., p.202-3)

At this point it is perhaps worth noting that to the Consul - whether true of the picture or not - the damned appear as an infinitely more colourful and interesting subject than the pallid, insipid creatures who are saved. Gustave Doré, too, portrayed the miserable inhabitants of Dante's Inferno as forms of vice, suffering, but ultimately invests them with greater interest than the pale ghost-like angelic hosts which begin to appear in the Purgatorio and dominate the Paradiso. The description continues,

Not all were in pairs however, the Consul noted. A few lone females on the upgrade were sheltered by angels only. It seemed to him these females were casting half-jealous glances downward after their plummeting husbands, some of whose faces betrayed the most unmistakable relief.

(U.V., p.203)

The image of the "lone females" prefigures Yvonne's eventually being drawn towards the heavens, while, by analogy, the Consul is headed in the opposite direction.

It is highly significant, too, that Lowry should write of the Consul, "it seemed to him ---", for of course, with the artist's prerogative, "Los Borrachones" could actually depict the women as being "jealous" and the husbands, heading in the opposite direction to that of their wives, as being "relieved". It is most interesting that Lowry made this particular choice, in that the Consul's perception of matters is emphasised as being distorted. The women are jealous of their doomed husbands, who are in turn relieved to be escaping their wives only - it is suggested - because this is the ironic way in which the Consul wishes to perceive matters. Thus Lowry directs the reader towards an understanding of the peculiar system of "accommodation" within the novel, whereby the Consul sees the outside world as adopting a stance which will mirror or accommodate the landscape of his interior cosmos.

Indeed, the Consul's identification with the "relieved" husbands demonstrates exactly how isolated he has become by this point in the novel. Earlier in the novel, he has expressed incomprehension at Yvonne's refusal to start drinking at 7.00a.m., and now he imagines that she should be "jealous" of his abandon. He realises that in spite of the intense loneliness he has experienced in her absence, he is still just as alone in the world as he has always been. The isolated "pleasures" of the world of cantinas and the salvation offered via Yvonne are inimical, and the burden of his past guilts stemming in part from the cantinas interferes with the present, and any hope for the future:

And how could one begin all over again, as though the Café Chagrin, the Farolito, had never been? Or without them? Could one be faithful to Yvonne and the Farolito both? - Christ, oh pharos of the world, how, and with what blind faith, could one find one's way back --- from a place where even love could not penetrate, and save in the thickest flames there was no courage? On the wall the drunks eternally plunged.

(U.V., p.205)

The Consul's dilemma - "Could one be faithful to Yvonne and the Farolito both?" - prefigures his final mortification in the arms of María in Chapter 12. Indeed, his actions in the/

the/ Farolito answer his own question, for he is unfaithful to Yvonne, and feeling that his actions prevent any further reconciliation with Yvonne, he dedicates himself instead to the purpose of that place.

Put another way, the Consul's dilemma is having to choose between his love of alcohol, and his love of Yvonne. He is so immersed in the sorrows of his past that to "find one's way back" to hope, and to uncertain happiness, seems to him to be asking the impossible. Much, much easier is to embrace the Farolito, "with its certainty of sorrow and evil." (U.V., p.204) Knowing that the Farolito constitutes exactly this, Geoffrey then imagines it to be quite otherwise - "he was gripped by thoughts like those of the mariner who, sighting the faint beacon of Start Point after a long voyage, knows that he will soon embrace his wife." (U.V., p.204) Ironically, the "beacon" of the Farolito leads the Consul to embrace María in an act of self-mortification, and to embrace complete and utter ruin. Thus the Farolito, perched on the edge of the barranca, is a false beacon, urging Geoffrey to destruction rather than to salvation.

Geoffrey Firmin is impelled towards the Farolito - his own sophistry creating a false beacon - in spite of knowing it, and its inhabitants to be quite obviously dangerous:

He saw it all now, the enormous drop on one side of the cantina into the barranca that suggested Kubla Khan: the proprietor, Ramón Diosdado, known as the Elephant, who was reputed to have murdered his wife to cure her neurasthenia, the beggars, hacked by war and covered with sores, one of whom one night after four drinks from the Consul had taken him for the Christ ---

(U.V., p.204)

It is no accident that the Farolito is perched on the edge of the barranca; it is symbolic analogue of the Consul himself oscillating on the brink of the abyss. The inhabitants, too, of the Farolito are instrumental in bringing about the fateful plunge of Geoffrey Firmin; Diosdado's reputation is established as none too salubrious, and the other creatures are diseased, the detritus of the world.

The above passage is also an ironic prefiguring of the events of Chapter 12. Diosdado - the "God-Given" - is father of "A Few Fleas" who, on the Consul's final arrival at the Farolito, is reading "El Hijo del Diablo" - "The Son of the Devil". Thus Diosdado is anything but God-Given; instead, he is established as the devilish collaborator with the Mexican Fascist police who ultimately shoot the Consul. The situation in Chapter 12 is given a further ironic inversion, such that the Consul, who had been taken "for the Christ", is accused by the fascist police of being the "antichrista" (U.V., p.370). Ironically, too, it is the "debris and detritus of the streets" (U.V., p.352) - the pimp and the old woman - who try to save the Consul, and the old "patriarchal" (U.V., p.367) fiddler who also tries to warn Firmin, while at the same time sawing away at the "Star Spangled Banner."

The Consul's earlier description of the Farolito is further reflected when he contemplates the barranca from the window of the Farolito -

It was almost a sheer drop to the bottom of the ravine. What a dark, melancholy place! In Paríán did Kubla Khan ... And the crag was still there too - just as in Shelley and Calderón or both - the crag that couldn't make up its mind to crumble absolutely, it clung so, cleft, to life.
(U.V., p.339)

In spite of being drunk, and filled with a sense of "foreboding" (U.V., p.338), the Consul can echo his earlier description with the quip "In Paríán did Kubla Khan." However, the Consul's depiction of the landscape accords equally with the configuration of his own mind, prefigured again by the words, "he felt his mind divide and rise" (U.V., p.202). While the "crag" overhanging the ravine exists outside the window, it may either be the symbolic analogue of the Consul's mind (which is not made up "to crumble absolutely") or equally, it may have been produced by a mind, fragmented by torment and chaos, and imposed on the landscape outside. For although, customarily, humans tend to accommodate themselves to the world as it exists, in the Consul's symbolic landscape, the world adapts to his internal condition, and to his perceptions of it. Thus the crag,/

crag,/ already "cleft" as is the Consul's mind, oscillates on the brink of ruin.

The ironically dualistic nature of the Consul's world by this point is summed up in his thoughts of the Farolito - "He was safe here; this was the place he loved - sanctuary, the paradise of his despair." (U.V., p.339) The Farolito is a false sanctuary, as surely as it is a false beacon, and only in the most ironic sense is it "the paradise of his despair", for the Consul has entered hell on earth. Geoffrey Firmin is incontrovertibly alone, in a domain which brings together the elements of a symbolic matrix which has been built up throughout Under the Volcano. As Lowry writes in his defence of the novel, "All strands of the book, political, esoteric, tragic, comical, religious, and what not are here gathered together --" (S.L., p.84).

Indeed, Lowry also points to Chapter 12 as being the Consul's season in hell on earth. Commenting on Jonathan Cape's reader's comparison of Chapter 12 with The Lost Weekend (published just prior to Under the Volcano, unfortunately for Lowry and his constant worries about integrity as a writer), Lowry says,

--- it is not only not fair to say it merely recalls The Lost Weekend but ridiculous. In any event, I believe, it goes even on the superficial plane a good deal further than that in terms of human agony, and, as his book does, it can widen, I think, one's knowledge of hell.
(S.L., p.84)

However, the hell of Chapter 12 is of an intermediary kind; the Consul strongly senses that worse is to follow -

Yet it had to be faced, down, down he had gone, down till - it was not the bottom even now, he realized. It was not the end quite yet. It was as if his fall had been broken by a narrow ledge, a ledge from which he could neither climb up nor down, on which he lay bloody and half stunned, while far below him the abyss yawned, waiting.
(U.V., p.362)

The "narrow ledge" is the Farolito, which (like the passage in The Cenci) is "the huge stack clinging to the mass of earth,/"

earth,/ as if resting on life, not afraid to fall, but darkening, just the same, where it would go if it went." (U.V., pp.339-40)

Thus the Consul in Chapter 12 sits on this hellish springboard towards everlasting hell amid a company of grotesques - "the gargoyles --- are repeated with interest in this" (S.L., p. 84) - including Diosdado, A Few Fleas, the pimp, the prostitute, the "illiterate" and very drunk sailor, the toothless fiddler, the white rabbit and scorpions, the familiars and creatures of the Consul's imagination, the cock and the dog, before he is confronted with an even more sordid company, led by the ironically-named Fructuoso Sanabria ("Fruitful Well-Being"). However, these "gargoyles" are not all interested in facilitating the next stage in Geoffrey's descent; they are, rather, culminations, ironic or otherwise, of the various themes established within the book.

Thus one of the stranger inhabitants of the Farolito is the white rabbit, a rabbit which seems peculiarly involved in Geoffrey's destiny. The rabbit should recall the Consul's endearing remark, "Everything is to be found in Peter Rabbit" (U.V., p.178). Thus the creature is attributed some peculiar authority, an idea reinforced by its presence in Chapter 12 -

In one corner of the room sat a white rabbit eating an ear of Indian corn. It nibbled at the purple and black stops with an air of detachment, as though playing a musical instrument. (U.V., p.338)

This is not merely a realistic-seeming description of a pet, but rather, correlates to an earlier thought of the Consul's, about the "author" of his destiny -

--- perhaps it was not a man at all, but a child, a little child, innocent --- who sat as up in an organ loft somewhere playing, pulling out all the stops at random, and Kingdoms divided and fell, and abominations dropped from the sky - (U.V., p.150)

Neither child nor Rabbit are aware of any responsibilities for their actions, but simply continue to do what they do, unaware of any great importance in their action. Kilgallin suggests/

suggests/ a further significance - "the Aztec gods of drink and drunkenness were called "the Four Hundred Rabbits" since the rabbit was considered utterly devoid of sense." ¹ However, apart from establishing a link with Aztec mythology, and the link between the rabbit and alcohol, Kilgallin fails to explain satisfactorily the reintroduction of the rabbit.

Indeed, there would appear to be a further dimension to the rabbit. The comparison between it and the "child playing the organ" image is further emphasised by the following reference to the rabbit. As the "author of doom" has been "The uncontrollable mystery on the bathroom floor" (U.V., p.150) this is closely paralleled by an observation of the Consul in Chapter 12;

He turned round quickly, still free of the Chief:
it was only the uncontrollable face on the bar-room floor, the rabbit, having a nervous convulsion, trembling all over, wrinkling its nose and scuffing disapprovingly. (U.V., p.371)

The rabbit acts as yet another signal towards the grave danger in which the Consul finds himself, and points to the punishment for the condition of alcoholism.

In the hell that is within the Farolito, each detail and inhabitant takes on symbolic significance in the Consul's mind, a significance which has been built throughout Under the Volcano to fruition and culmination in Chapter 12. He is confronted with death in every form. Because it is the Day of the Dead, A Few Fleas is consuming "chocolate skulls --- chocolate skeletons, chocolate, yes, funeral wagons" (U.V., p.339). These are, of course, traditional fare on the Day of the Dead, but also appropriate viands for the creature identified with "Son of the Devil", and again, signals towards the Consul's destiny.

Geoffrey appeals to A Few Fleas to get rid of a scorpion on the wall - but the scorpion is dead already. Echoing the mutters of A Few Fleas, the Consul may desire to be saved from this pernicious little "devil", or may be, quite mistakenly, half-heartedly appealing to the boy:

A Few Fleas turned back to his story, muttering aloud thickly, 'De pronto, Dalia vuelve en Sigríta llamando la atención de un guardia que pasea!
!Suélteme! !Suélteme!

Save me, thought the Consul vaguely, as the boy suddenly went out for a change, suelteme, help: but maybe the scorpion, not wanting to be saved, had stung itself to death.

(U.V., p.339)

Again, Firmin's emotions are transported into concrete representations, imposed on the external world almost imperceptibly; for it is not the scorpion which does not want to be saved, but the Consul himself. He has toyed with the idea of salvation, and rejected it within the space of a sentence.

Indeed, the scorpion is a warning to the Consul of the end to which his self-willed destruction must lead. This idea has been prefigured by an earlier comment -

'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)

Again, it could equally be said that the Consul "cares not for priest" - religion and means to salvation - "nor for poor peón," as exemplified in the Good Samaritan incident. Scorpio, (the sign under which suicides are supposedly destined to be committed) is, for the Consul, "my zodiac zone" (U.V., p.207).

The Consul's "suicide" is a measured one, firmly established in his past, in the essential loneliness of his childhood and youth, in his semi-conscious guilts which are, however, not lessened in any degree by the fact of their vagueness. The somewhat indeterminate nature of the Consul's guilts may indeed serve a very useful purpose. The incident in the Hell Bunker, which is of a sexual nature, and on board the Samaritan, which is connected with the horrors of war, may be representative of the universal malaises of mankind as a whole. Certainly the theme of sterility/drought within the novel is manifested, first, in terms of war - man's failure in relating to fellow man (agape). Thus the Consul mutters, à propos of impending chaos, his own and that of the world. "Mass reflexes, but/

but/ only the erections of guns, disseminating death." (U.V., p.211)

Man's potency in war is contrasted with his impotence in terms of Eros, and thus the second manifestation of sterility in the novel is inherent in the Consul's two sexual encounters, his unsuccessful one with Yvonne, and his "mortification of the flesh" with Maria. The Consul's garden is a microcosmic representation of the garden of the world. Furthermore, it correlates to the Consul's internal condition, as the world for which he has taken little responsibility does to mankind. Thus mankind, like the Consul's plants, might be "perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst--- struggling --- to maintain some final attitude of potency." (U.V., p.70) The Consul is visibly engaged in this struggle - although "reunion" with Yvonne finds him impotent - as an individual, and as an Everyman.

Indeed, the Consul's entry into the labyrinth resolves the second manifestation of man's inability to love. He consciously rejects the last thought of Yvonne's safety as soon as he enters the Farolito: "Deliberately, he shut out all thought of Yvonne" (U.V., p.338) and at the same time, ensures that Ariadne's thread is well and truly severed. Yvonne's letters, handed to him by Diosdado, recall him momentarily, but not to any great clarity - "He was dissociated from himself, and at the same time he saw this plainly, the shock of receiving the letters having in a sense waked him --- from one somnambulism into another." (U.V., p.344)

Geoffrey Firmin gradually moves into the labyrinthine innards of the Farolito: "The Consul carried another drink with Yvonne's letters into an inner room, one of the boxes in the Chinese puzzle." (U.V., p.344) He moves through a mirrored room (U.V., p.345), back into the main bar, then seeing a family with children - the children he has never had - by the fact that he "hated to look at them" (U.V., p.348) is drawn to the final rejection of Yvonne:

At first he saw only the shapely legs of the girl who was leading him, now by the constricted power of aching flesh alone, of pathetic trembling

trembling/ yet brutal lust, through the little glass-paned rooms, that grew smaller and smaller, darker and darker, until by the mingitorio, the 'señores', out of whose evil-smelling gloom broke a sinister chuckle, there was merely a lightless annex no larger than a cupboard in which two men whose faces he couldn't see either were sitting, drinking, or plotting.
(U.V., p.348)

Through this series of rooms and the increasing darkness of the labyrinth, Geoffrey Firmin is being led by lust alone to a ruinous consummation, an act of aggression towards himself.

Thus the Consul says of María, "her body was nothing -- a calamity, a fiendish apparatus for calamitous sickening sensation" (U.V., p.349), recalling that other instrument of suffering, the Ferris Wheel, with its "sickening, plunging, retreating, unspeakable circuit" (U.V., p.226). This is not simply the "final stupid unprophylactic rejection" of Yvonne, but also an act of self-destruction, an act of aggression rather than of love. What Geoffrey experiences is close to the "evil phallic death" (U.V., p.70) symbolised by the plants in his garden, which in turn is linked with the "evil phallic death" of war, of "guns disseminating death". (U.V., p.211)

He recognises his ruin in the act of intercourse with the prostitute:

(and it was this calamity he now, with María, penetrated, the only thing alive in him now this burning boiling crucified evil organ - God is it possible to suffer more than this, out of this suffering something must be born and what would be born was his own death), for ah, how alike are the groans of love to those of the dying ---
(U.V., p.350)

He recognises his "fruitless selfish ruin" (U.V., p.346) in this final fruitless act, for the only issue of it can be "death". This is the acceleration towards the peak of his self-destruction, no longer the measured pace which has bred alcoholism out of his past, or the gradual, relentless movement into the interior hell of alcoholism. The Consul is hurtling towards Scorpio, while Yvonne is being drawn "towards Orion, the Pleiades."
(U.V., p.337)

The scorpion emerges as a symbol of the self-destructive impulse on both the individual and the universal level. For Geoffrey Firmin personally, Scorpio is his ruler, drawing him at first with measured pace, then at an ever increasing rate - as he becomes more convinced that this is how his life has been conceived by the malicious gods - towards self-destruction. At the same time, he suspects, almost to the very last, that the desire to make his life other than ruined might not have resulted in the same end, and wonders, "why have I ruined myself in this wilful manner?" (U.V. p.342) The Consul's individual ruin is conveyed by allusions to sexual impotence, beginning with the unsuccessful reunion with Yvonne, maintained by the ominous warnings of the plants in his garden and culminating in the "subterranean collapse" (U.V., p.338) of the labyrinthine Farolito.

In the darkness of the world of the Farolito, the Consul is assaulted by thoughts which point towards his impotence - "La Rame inutile fatigue vainement une mer immobile ..." (U.V., p.343) ["The useless oar wearies the still sea"]. And, in a waking dream, he imagines himself "shaking in impotent terror at himself." (U.V., p.345) His impotence in terms of determining his own control of his life - "Who indeed even now could prevent? --- where should he go?" (U.V., p.348) - and his final rejection of love and of life, constitute, of course, his final acceptance of ruin. Ironically, one of the most final incidents in his ruin springs from regained sexual potency, in spite of the symbols and motifs (and the Fisher King myth which is left unresolved) which have built towards the themes of sterility and impotence.

However, the Consul's regained sexual potency cannot be taken as a regeneration, for the only fruit to be borne of his union with the prostitute, María, is - ironically - his own death. In earlier chapters of the novel, the Consul's identification with the scorpion can be detected, but it is in this final embrace with utter ruin, that the parallel is completed; "- (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/

was/ penetrating, penetrated) -" (U.V., p.350.) His act is one of self-destruction, whereby, like the scorpion, a part of him - perhaps his intense isolation which results in his "brutal lust", his "crucified evil organ" - turns on himself and becomes his own destroyer. In Geoffrey Firmin's lonely world, the sexual powers which should have brought healing to his relationship with Yvonne, are inverted and turned towards the purposes of destruction. For him, the "groans of love" are indeed very like "those of the dying".

And indeed, the Consul himself sees that his drought, both physical and spiritual - the drought that leads him to slake his thirst - has turned from the "right path", so that, at the most basic level, he drinks to excess, which leads to his "cold aching loneliness" (U.V., p.350), leading in turn to lust, to the negation of love and of life: to death. In his powerful meditation/improvisations on the themes contained in the repeated chorus, "how alike are the groans of love, to those of the dying" (U.V., p.350, 351), in the cadenzas of "calamity", during intercourse with María, he contemplates,

- the thirst that was not thirst, but itself
heartbreak, and lust, was death, death, and
death again and death --- trembling, trembling,
carrying the carafe of water to his lips but
not far enough, it was too heavy, like his
burden of sorrow - 'you cannot drink of it' -
(U.V., pp.350-1)

Thus the Consul presents his own view of the elements and the pathology of his disease, knowing his lust to be as destructive as his drinking; alcohol, lust and death are inextricably linked in his mind. His two guilts, sexual and as a result of war - the Hell Bunker, which drives the young Geoffrey towards drink in "The Case is Altered", and the "Samaritan" incident which serves to increase the burden of guilt, until the Consul feels he has "The Hands of Orlac" - spring from lust and "murder" and leave him ever-pursuing "escape" via the nearest bottle.

Indeed, the paired guilts of Geoffrey Firmin are, at a higher level, those of the world. Man's inability to love/

love/ results in man's inhumanity to man. Thus the Consul is placed in the context of the rise of fascism, and his demise as an individual is accompanied by the highly ironic words on the radio -

'Incalculable are the benefits civilization has brought us, incommensurable the productive power of all classes of riches originated by the inventions and discoveries of science. Inconceivable the marvellous creations of the human sex in order to make men more happy, more free, and more perfect. Without parallel the crystalline and fecund fountains of the new life which still remains closed to the thirsty lips of the people who follow in their griping and bestial tasks.

(U.V., pp.371-2)

This is the Consul's translation of the message, and in it he betrays a view of the demise of civilisation, of chaos masquerading as the "new life", a new order which will destroy itself, rather than create a society "more happy, more free and more perfect."

Because the Consul cannot love, he cannot detect anything worth pursuing except death. Accurately, he likewise sees the world as pursuing self-destruction, and attributes the basest of motives to those who are idealistic or revolutionary. His own apathy and unwillingness to intervene in his destiny therefore is applied to the political apathy of the world. Any action which might alter the course of events - either in his own interior landscape, or in that of the world - is viewed by him as "hypocrisy" (U.V., p.313) since it is only offsetting against inevitable ruin a pride and false nobility which cannot possibly expect to change the cyclical history of the ages. Thus the Consul condemns,

'--- The dishonest mass rationalization of motive, justification of the common pathological itch. Of the motives for interference; merely a passion for fatality half the time. Curiosity. Experience - very natural ... But nothing constructive at bottom, only acceptance --- of the state of affairs that flatters one into feeling thus noble or useful!'

(U.V., p.312)

Indeed, the Consul sees war as the inevitable manifestation of our baser impulses, reducing it to a "common pathological/

pathological/ itch", and likewise, intervention as an idealistic and romantic self-gratification. He is remarkably accurate in detecting a basic instinctual drive operating towards destruction, when man cannot live comfortably with fellow man. But those who intervene are the very people who do not share his personal "passion for fatality". For instance, Hugh, however misguided his motives might be in some respects, emerges as sincere in his attempts to fend off the ruin of the world, and of Geoffrey alike.

The drive operating towards destruction derives from man's inability to love. On the level of the individual, Yvonne's ghost tells that of the Consul, "you loved only yourself" (U.V., p.20). Alone, isolated by his misery, the Consul sees "No se puede vivir sin amar", the literal writing on the wall which declares his death to spring from his inability to love. In life, he is condemned to the icy cold prison of alcoholism, an incarceration in his own consciousness which finds a final concrete manifestation in the Farolito. The prison tower is present, threatening, in the Mexican landscape, and is ultimately transformed into the Farolito. The towers of Laruelle's house, too, are identified with the "watchtower of a prison" (U.V., p.11) which first appears in Chapter 1, and with the observation posts which are seen by Hugh and Yvonne when they are out riding. Laruelle's house is described as follows:

There were two towers, Jacques's zacualis, one at each end and joined by a catwalk --- These towers were as if camouflaged (almost like the Samaritan, in fact) --- [they were] tiny roofless variants of the observation posts which everywhere commanded the valley in Quauhnahuac. (U.V., p.198)

Thus an association with the "Samaritan" incident is set up, such that the towers of Jacques's house are linked with one source of the Consul's condition. Later, too, Geoffrey wonders while standing in Jacques's room, "Was it here he had been betrayed? This very room, perhaps, had been filled with her cries of love." (U.V., p. 202) Therefore the towers of Jacques's house are linked with both origins of the Consul's guilts.

Furthermore, Jacques's "zacualis" anticipate the Consul's nemesis, for they are also "variants of the observation posts", and of the prison tower which he can see from the Farolito. In fact, the two towers of Farolito and prison are the transposition of the ominous "zacualis". The prison building appears to the Consul as follows,

This was the grey turreted barracks of the Military Police he had mentioned to Hugh as the reputed Union Militar headquarters. The building, which also included the prison, glowered at him with one eye, over an archway set in the forehead of its low facade: a clock pointing to six. --- Through the archway, grouped round the courtyard beyond, the Consul could make out dungeons with wooden bars like pigpens. (U.V., pp.340-1)

The building itself is ominous, but its incorporation of Time, inexorably moving onwards and calling Geoffrey, like Faust, to his last "dingy" (U.V., p.374) minutes on earth, and of the dungeons and imprisonment, are threatening the Consul as an individual. Indeed, the landscape of Mexico appears now to impinge on his person, the very features seeming to move towards Geoffrey, rather than he towards them, in a prelude to his final incarceration in the abyss.

Indeed, the peculiar "migration" of the Consul's nemesis towards him, rather than his own movement towards his destiny, is clear in the following passage:

Popocatepetl towered through the window, its immense flanks partly hidden by rolling thunder-heads: its peak blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead, the barranca, the Farolito, directly beneath it. Under the volcano! It was not for nothing the ancients had placed Tartarus under Mt. Aetna, nor within it, the monster Typhoeus, with his hundred heads and - relatively - fearful eyes and voices. (U.V., p.340)

Most significant are the words "it appeared almost right overhead"- fate seems to be enveloping the Consul; even as he sits within the Farolito, he is already "under the volcano", imprisoned, in Tartarus to do battle with the monster Typhoeus. Ancient mythology and the life of Geoffrey Firmin are drawn together, such that Typhoeus seems to have been placed in hell exclusively/

exclusively/ for the purposes of awaiting this man.

In addition, Typhoeus "with his --- fearful --- voices" points to a further symbolic significance of the Farolito. The Consul's last milieu on earth is the Farolito, filled with voices and scraps of overhead conversations, words which pour over him in his isolation, and which can only momentarily recall him to the land of the living. Even worse, the verbal accompaniment to the events of the Farolito is frequently gibberish which not only fails to help the Consul, but sometimes even aggravates his internal condition, since he siezes on the odd word which recalls his fallen state, and exacerbates his guilt. Thus Geoffrey hears,

'--- Hell, that's something else. --- They captured me on the German side of the camp --- A girl teacher. She gave it to me. And you can take it. And you can have it." (U.V., p.363-4)

At this point, as the American is launching into his sexual exploits, the Consul is addressed (appropriately!) by the pimp, thus ensuring that Geoffrey will feel the weight of his most recent sexual guilt.

In the midst of this continual chatter, the Consul is still extraordinarily aware of his predicament, thinking,

Yes, but had he desired it, willed it, the very material world, illusory though that was, might have been a confederate, pointing the wise way. Here would have been no devolving through failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that became more and more like one voice to a death more dead than death itself, but an infinite widening, an infinite evolving and extension of boundaries, in which the spirit was an entity, perfect and whole: ah, who knows why man, however beset his chance by lies, has been offered love. (U.V., p.362)

It has already been argued that when the Consul has taken so many steps towards his destiny, fate - in the guise of the landscape - itself begins to move towards the Consul. Here he presents the counterpart of this argument, commenting that "the very material world --- might have been a confederate, pointing the wise way."

The remark about the illusory nature of the world "out there" has several possible interpretations. It may be an authorial intervention, demonstrating the extent to which the cosmos of the Consul might be taken to be interior; the Consul's world is his state of mind. Equally, the Consul may be making a philosophical observation on the nature of reality, reality being what we perceive to be material, an observation of which, even at this point, the Consul is capable. Or, possibly, the entire landscape of Mexico as presented through Geoffrey Firmin's consciousness is, in fact, "illusory", a set of symbolic chess pieces which - unlike the concrete world - can be moved around at will to produce the final symbolic configuration or matrix of the novel.

However, the material world, rather than being a "confederate" in the Consul's salvation, collaborates in his downfall. Thus the signpost with the hand pointing "A PARIAN" (U.V., p.334) is one of many components of the landscape which appear to collude with fate in driving Geoffrey Firmin towards destruction. Other verbal material integrated within the Mexican context warns him of his situation, for instance, the "? LE GUSTE --" signpost in public gardens, the poster of Las Manos de Orlac which appears everywhere, and has even returned for Laruelle a year later in Chapter 1, the picture significantly entitled "La Despedida", the latest newspaper headling, "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" and the message on Jacques's house, "No se puede vivir sin amar."

Significantly, the above forewarnings are all in a foreign language. Geoffrey, as Consul, should have a good command of Mexican Spanish, but his skills as a linguist are not so great in the first place, and additionally, what fluency he has in the language has the most unfortunate habit of disintegrating at crucial moments in the novel. He extracts his own symbolic significance from each signpost, such that the news of the death of the Pope pursues the Consul as intimation of his own departure. He mistranslates the "? LE GUSTE ---" sign to accord with his own conceptions of a punitive God who will "Evict Those who Destroy". Geoffrey is a "Destroyer" - of others, of love, /

love,/ and of himself - so at this level, the warning of punishment for ingratitude as manifested in destructive behaviour - is ominous enough. He suspects that he has made a mistranslation "-for alcohol sometimes affected the Consul's Spanish adversely" (U.V., p.133) but unconsciously recognises that the real translation may be even more unpalatable - "Not that he had any intention of 'verifying' the words on the sign ---" (U.V., p.133). And indeed, the real translation is much worse. The final reiteration of the words on the sign after the last page of the novel serves partly as a reminder of the real meaning, partly as an explanation of the Consul's demise, and perhaps as a warning on a universal level.

Furthermore, the Consul's mistranslation demonstrates him as being barred from a complete understanding - from the truth, as it were - by the barrier of language. Appropriately, Geoffrey Firmin is ultimately imprisoned within his alcoholic linguistic ineptitude inside the Farolito. At the beginning of the questioning by the Mexican police which is finally to lead to his being shot, the only words he can muster are those of a Mexican joke, which serves only to compound his problems. When asked if he is American, his skills deteriorate further:

The Consul unsuccessfully tried to intrude, on his conduct's behalf, a cordial note of explanation

'Zicker', said the Consul, whose Spanish, in spite of a temporary insurgence, he knew virtually gone. (U.V., p.356)

At this point, he is accused of being American, of not paying for his drinks, and of not paying for the prostitute. To utter "Zicker" in his own defence may be amusingly inadequate, but the consequences of this inability to respond, show it to be tragically impolitic. It is highly ironic, too, that the Consul, who exhibits a sometimes magical articulacy throughout the novel, is trapped here by his inability to gain access to language.

The Consul sinks further into the morass of language at the next line of questioning. In trying to establish some human link - some communal experience - with the unpleasant Diosdado, Geoffrey has drawn a map of Spain on the bar counter.

The policeman begins to ask him if he knows Spain, and at this point Geoffrey is quite undone by language:

'Comment non,' the Consul said. So Diosdado had told him about the map, yet surely that was an innocently sad enough thing to have done. 'Oui. Es muy asombrosa.' No, this wasn't Pernambuco: definitely he ought not to speak Portugese. 'Jawohl. Jawohl. Correcto, señor,' he finished. 'Yes, I know Spain.' (U.V., p.357)

Misunderstanding piles on misunderstanding; the police are really looking for Hugh, who as a journalist should have left Mexico and who is known to be sympathetic towards the Spanish Civil War. The Consul claims to be "William Blackstone", but is found to be in possession of a telegram/newspaper report written by Hugh. The original version of the dispatch has been carefully worded to obliterate the message to a non-English speaker. However, the dispatch,-

DAILY GLOBE intelube londres presse collect following
yesterdays head-coming antisemitic campaign mexpress
propetition see tee emma mex-workers --
(U.V., p.98)

- is not so obscure to the Mexican police. Ironically, they make out enough of it to regard it as incriminating evidence, and the Consul is further undone by language.

The Consul is utterly lost in the crescendo of voices within the Farolito. What he hears is nonsense, the merging of English, Spanish, conversations, the radio, but this is punctuated with the words of Yvonne's letters, begging him to write to her, communicate with him at any level - "if you have lost the feel of me write of the weather, or the people we know, the streets you walk in, the altitude." (U.V., pp.366-7) But the notes struck by Yvonne's letters are drowned out:

The voice of the stool pigeon now became clear, rising above the clamour - the Babel, he thought, the confusion of tongues, remembering again as he distinguished the sailor's remote, returning voice, the trip to Cholula: 'You telling me or am I telling you? ---' (U.V., p.367)

Thus the Consul sees himself in Babel, and the Farolito emerges as both Tartarus, containing the many-voiced monster Typhoeus/

Typhoeus/and as the Tower of Babel, symbol of the false aspiration of man which was punished by the divisiveness of languages, and the ensuing difficulties of communication.

Lowry's power is that he can convert a strange little bar in Parian into a symbol which integrates and makes viable in the Twentieth Century elements of Classical mythology and Christian tradition. Lowry writes of his artistic process as a "fusion" (S.L., p.86) of elements, and what potentially holds together a very diverse and sometimes idiosyncratic array of symbols and mythological strands is the fact that he places them as concrete entities within the Mexican landscape; the symbols are physically present and are necessary to the narrative of themselves - that is, even when divested of the multitude of associations which Lowry brings to them and maintains throughout the novel.

Thus the Farolito actually exists. It is a bar. Furthermore, it is the bar in which, on the narrative level, Geoffrey Firmin finally becomes far too drunk for his own good. He aggravates the Mexican police, which is all the more unwise because a number of seemingly incidental details are colluding in making him seem an even less happy proposition to the police. He has returned to the Farolito ostensibly for his pipe, which does not endear him to Diosdado. For complicated reasons induced by the sophistries of inebriation, the Consul has failed to pay for some drinks and for the use of María. His own identity is beginning to elude him completely, he has nothing with him which will identify him as Geoffrey Firmin to the police, and thus all details which have been integrated with the narrative - the lost passport, the mislaid pipe, the unpaid for drinks and prostitute, the dispatch written by Hugh (Hugh had been wearing the Consul's jacket earlier in the day), the isolation of the Consul and his inability to communicate adequately - have contributed on the "realistic" level to bring about his downfall.

At this "realistic" level, the narrative is coherent; Dale Edmonds points out that this aspect of the novel has tended to be ignored, writing,

--- I am troubled by Markson's somewhat cavalier dismissal of the "more immediate levels of communication". I maintain that it is on the "most immediate" level - the level of people, places, events and circumstances within a fictional world that much resembles our own - that the novel communicates most effectively.

--- I --- think that few critics have emphasized sufficiently the fact that the novel exists powerfully as a story about people. 2

Certainly Edmonds makes a point which very much needs to be made; Under the Volcano does not exist solely on the levels of myth and symbolism, but also on a coherent "immediate" level. However, in seeking to make this most cogent point, Edmonds perhaps underestimates the power of the "esoteric" (S.L., p.66) elements which Lowry painstakingly built into his masterwork. Edmonds' point is well taken, but it is difficult to agree that "it is on the "most immediate" level --- that the novel communicates most effectively."

For the Farolito is not merely the bar where the exceedingly drunk Consul is overtaken by a miscellany of events. Lowry gives it a symbolic importance in the events of the Consul's day, saying of Chapter 9,

Shall the Consul, once more, go forward and be reborn, as if previously to Guanajuato - is there a chance that he may be, at any rate on the top level? - or shall he sink back into degeneracy and Parian and extinction. (S.L., p.81)

The Consul's dilemma is not merely where he should go for a nice day out, or whether he ought to go and get his pipe back; instead, he is deciding whether to continue under the burden of the past, and pay the inevitable price which will be extorted, or whether he will confront a future with Yvonne, with the related difficulties. The Farolito then becomes not just the place where he gets himself into trouble with the Mexican police, but a manifestation of the prison of the past in which Geoffrey has become incarcerated.

The Farolito is equally a labyrinth, a confusing succession of chambers, through which there is no Ariadne's thread to guide him, and in which the Consul must do battle with the "many-voiced"/

"many-voiced"/ monster which ultimately speaks of one thing only, becoming "one voice to a death more dead than death itself." (U.V., p.362) The fragmented voices echo those of Chapter 2 in the novel, but moreover, "in the Farolito in Parian, we are standing amid the confusion of tongues of Biblical prophecy." (S.L., pp.84-5) For his "overreaching" in pursuing "Secret Knowledge", the Consul is placed within this Tower of Babel (symbolic of his grandiose visionary scheme) and condemned to be unable to communicate his way out of his difficulties. The Farolito becomes the Consul's hell on earth, where he is subjected to the whims of a collection of "gargoyles", a Tartarus in which the grotesques are as many-voiced as Typhoeus, a Babel in which the Consul's voice is drowned out, as his identity slips away, and a prison which prefigures the grave.

Most significantly, Geoffrey Firmin is trapped within his own way of seeing, his perceptions and within language. His pursuit of a vision which transcends the lives of others, politics and even society as a whole, founders on the fact that he has isolated himself from all these external matters while knowing, too, that "One cannot live without loving." He ignores the mundane business of "unceasingly striving", and yet imagines that he may reach his vision of "heaven" without this. Furthermore, Geoffrey Firmin exemplifies on an individual level the difficulties of communication which have led to international divisiveness; the "confusion of tongues" which has exacerbated the problem of loving one's fellow man is seen on the universal level to contribute to the belligerent atmosphere of the modern world.

CHAPTER 8: NOTES

1. Anthony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.201.
2. Dale Edmonds, "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the 'Immediate Level'" in Anne Smith, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p.58.

PART III: Chapter 9

"The Malebolge"

PART III: HELL

CHAPTER 9

"The Malebolge"

Per mi si va ne la citta dolente,
Per me si va ne l'eterno dolore,

Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate.

"Through me you pass into the city of woe:
Through me you pass into eternal pain:

All hope abandon, ye who enter here." 1

The bells tolling, "dolente ... dolore!" (U.V., p.47) echo the inscription over the Gates of Hell in Canto III of Dante's Inferno. They interrupt Jacques Laruelle's thoughts exactly one year after the death of Geoffrey Firmin, and their tolling serves both as a reminder of the Consul's fate, and as a warning to Jacques (for whom the tolling bells are part of the 'bell, book and candle' of excommunication) that his own fate is liable to be very similar. Additionally, the tolling of the bells points towards the inevitability of the Consul's fate, for the herald to the opening of the action of the previous year in Chapter 2 - "dolente ... dolore!" - suggests not only suffering, but an instruction to the reader, "All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

Indeed, it is the Consul's abandoning of all hope which moves him ever in the direction of the abyss - literally, the barranca, or ravine into which he is thrown at the end of the novel. The Consul's failings are many, but more than anything else, it is his hopeless outlook, fluctuating from grim resignation to perverse delight at the prospect of his own downfall, which makes so incontrovertible his final destiny. It is certain that the calamity which awaits the Consul does so because his easiest option is to remain "locked into his torment (for reasons less noble than those of Prometheus)" 2 and acceptance of his tragic fate ushers in a guarantee of catastrophe. To reiterate this hopelessness in the terms of the novel itself once again,/

again,/ Geoffrey "does not find with all his soul that he does desire deliverance" - ironically, he does not desire his deliverance with very much of his soul at all, since he is otherwise engaged in embracing damnation. Nor does he "unceasingly strive upward". In fact, his limited heavenward striving is further curtailed by what he perceives to be God's irate stare.

Unable to resolve the characteristic Calvinist discrepancy between the authoritarian and punitive Patriarch, and a personal identification with the suffering of the Son - defined in the Consul's mind by His suffering, and even more significantly, by betrayal, he thinks of the fighting cock kept behind a bar as "the face that --- betrayed Christ into being" (U.V., p.288) - damnation appears as a more comfortable alternative. Geoffrey Firmin can feel no great desire to alter his condition, to relinquish alcohol and to learn to love again. His moods do not so much swing between hope and despair; rather, his personal manic-depressive rhythm is a swing between anguished suffering and a complete acceptance of his downfall. When he declares in all his perversity, "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there" (U.V., p.316), he has chosen the wrong path (although, of course, on another level, the operations of the Infernal Machine have helped to dictate such a choice).

However, for the purposes of examining a parallel which clearly exists between Dante's Inferno and Under the Volcano, the level on which Fate intervenes and limits Geoffrey Firmin's choice by creating his personal configuration of the past, thereby producing a likely paradigm for both present and future, must be viewed once again in terms of Lowry's technique of coadaptation of antithetical elements. For, at the level of the Dantean parallel, the Consul must retain no small degree of choice. In her article, "Under the Volcano and Dante's Inferno I", Carole Slade points out,

When pilgrim Dante remarks with some puzzlement that those shrieking blasphemous souls waiting to be ferried across the Acheron seem eager to enter hell forever, Virgil explains that they have deliberately and voluntarily chosen to reside in hell. Since each soul has the possibility of choosing or "loving" either the good or the bad, as Virgil explains in/

in/ his discourse on Love in Purgatorio XVIII, therefore the souls in hell have "loved" or chosen sin. 3

The Consul makes a series of choices which exclude Yvonne from his life, culminating in the scene with María. These choices are made in favour of the Consul's real love, alcohol. Thus when his hellward bound course becomes self-propelled - "I can't wait to get back there" - it is reasonable to say that he has "deliberately and voluntarily chosen to reside in hell." In the ongoing process of his addiction - a false love - the Consul is dragged so low that he cannot understand the love which would save him. He wonders, "ah, who knows why man, however beset his chance by lies, has been offered love?" (U.V., p.362)

Lowry fully intended the Dantean parallel incorporated into Under the Volcano. He informed his prospective publisher,

(Note: the book opens in the Casino de la Selva. Selva means wood, and this strikes the opening chord of the Inferno --- in the middle of our life, in a dark wood etc., this chord being struck again in VI, the middle and heart of the book where Hugh, in the middle of his life, recalls at the beginning of that chapter Dante's words: the chord is struck again remotely towards 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.)

(S.L., p.67)

Thus Lowry demonstrates his intention to draw the reader into a world which is both Mexico, and hell - "paradisaal" and "unquestionably infernal" (S.L., p.67) - to draw on the Dantean parallel of a voyage through the underworld, from the very outset of the novel. He locates his cosmos in very precise terms within the first two paragraphs of the novel, in what appears as a blank, travelogue opening, devoid of any emotion. And yet even at this point, the "fine American-style highway --- comes out a goat track" (U.V., p.9), establishing that we are in the domain of tragedy. The next paragraph opens with the "Hotel Casino de la Selva", a ruined "palace", surrounded by unkept gardens, commencing the Dantean under-pinnings of Under the Volcano.

The landscape is further established as being Dantean by a reference to "the purple hills of a Doré Paradise" (U.V., p.11) in the distance. Through this landscape, Dr. Vigil is a self-styled "apostle" - a guide analagous to Dante's "Virgil" - to the Consul, although he sees himself as a failure in this capacity:

'- I meant to persauade him to go away and get déalcoholisé,' Dr. Vigil was saying. He stumbled over the word in French and continued in English. 'But I was so sick myself that day that I suffer, physical, really. That is very bad, for we doctors must comport ourselves like apostles ---'
(U.V., p.10)

He had expressed concern over the Consul's health by asking Geoffrey to write him a note "if drinking have not killed him already" (U.V., p.10). A year later he says to Jacques Laruelle, "Try and come tonight, if not, please understand that I am always interested in your health." (U.V., p.13) Again there is the suggestion that Laruelle is following the Consul's course, which is reinforced by Dr. Vigil's invitation to take Jacques to the church "where is the Virgin for those who have nobody with" (U.V., p.12) - the same church to which he had taken the Consul on the night of the Red Cross Ball, the night before his death.

The Consul's journey through hell is further established in the awesomely articulate letter - ironically never posted while it could have been a communicative power to change the course on which he seems intent - which Jacques finds one year later. In the ravages of his condition, Geoffrey had written,

Horrors portioned to a giant nerve! 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.41-2)

Ironically his secrets are indeed "of the grave", from which he is speaking at this point. His pursuit of "Secret Knowledge" has led him to the realms of hell, from which he cannot return, /

return,/ and again, ironically, his knowledge is destined to remain "secret".

Geoffrey Firmin acknowledges that even in the condition in which he finds himself, there might still be a means of triumphing in his travels - in the labyrinth, Ariadne's thread has not yet been severed. A guide for the Consul has even been dispatched, to lead him through hell and purgatory, and back to the "right path" which he knows to exist -

I wonder if it is because tonight my soul has really died that I feel at the moment something like peace.

Or is it because right through hell there is a path, as Blake well knew, and though I may not take it, sometimes lately in dreams I have been able to see it? (U.V., p.42)

The image of the "path" runs throughout Under the Volcano, as an echo of the opening lines of the Inferno (Canto I):

Midway in our life's journey,
I went astray from the straight road
And woke to find myself alone in a dark wood. 4

As Lowry himself points out, the "chord" established in these opening lines of the Inferno, is resolved when Yvonne literally finds herself lost in a dark wood in Chapter 11, to which all the paths she has taken finally lead.

However, Yvonne's path is that of the pilgrim who escapes from Dante's dark wood (as does the pilgrim Dante, under the guidance of Virgil in Canto I). Carole Slade notes,

Her path begins, appropriately, on Virgil Avenue in "that accursed City of the Angels" where a sign for "Informal Dancing" seems to turn to "Infernal Dancing" (264), an indication that her path leads through hell. 5

Thus Yvonne is not presented as a complete contrast to the Consul. Although she will be saved and he damned, she knows much of the depths of despair which the Consul chooses permanently to inhabit. She, too is assailed by portents of disaster, "news of disaster, of suicide, of banks failing, of approaching war, of nothing at all" (U.V., p.267) and is in thrall to "that darkness, the/

the/ darkness of a world without meaning, a world without aim" (U.V., p.267). Like the Consul, she is burdened with a past of family disarray, seeing herself as the product of an endless line who had probably undergone "the same kind of meaningless tragedy, or half-tragedy, as herself and her father." (U.V.,p.265)

In the film "Le Destin de Yvonne Griffaton", Yvonne sees her predicament presented in microcosm. Seeing herself play Yvonne Griffaton, who labours unnecessarily under guilts about the past, the subtitles in English make the predicament all the more clear:

What could she do under the weight of such a heritage? How could she rid herself of this old man of the sea? Was she doomed to an endless succession of tragedies that Yvonne Griffaton could not believe either formed part of any mysterious expiation for the obscure sins of others long since dead and damned, but were just frankly meaningless? (U.V., p.269)

Yvonne sees that she, too, is unnecessarily burdened by the past, and sees that she has fallen into the trap of romanticising the past, seeing herself as "a victim of dark forces" (U.V., p.269). But she overcomes this sense of a burdensome, "inescapable" past, seeing a way through it which is ultimately a means of escaping it:

--- one could see oneself, or pretend to, as a small lone figure carrying the burden of those ancestors --- it was inescapable! - misunderstood and tragic, yet at least with a will of your own! But what was the use of a will if you had no faith? --- This was what she too was seeking --- -yes, even what she was now on the point of finding, and losing, a faith in a cause, was better than none. (U.V., p.269)

There are strong links in this passage with the epigraphs which determine the spiritual configuration of the entire novel. Yvonne finds that she does desire her deliverance, and strives to rebuild a life with Geoffrey through love, in spite of knowing the impossibility of this task.

Yvonne sees herself in the paradoxical position of both "finding, and losing" a means of living with herself; she knows/

knows/ that her destiny is bound with that of Geoffrey, and ironically, her return to create a new life results in death bound to his death. She sees "unselfish love" (U.V., p.270) as an escape from meaninglessness, however difficult this might be in the face of the Consul's self-contained alcoholism. Her ability to love is what distinguishes her from the Consul, although her dream of a Northern Eden (her means of extricating him from the more infernal aspects of Mexico) coincides with the Edenic vision which Geoffrey conjures up in accordance with the path "right through hell." But ironically, just as his letter, telling of "strange vistas" beyond this path, and of "visions of a new life together" (U.V., p.42) is never to be read by Yvonne, so her impulse to communicate the same dream to him is checked by Hugh's jumping into the bullring, by a resurgence of Yvonne's past concern for Hugh, and by the Consul's alcoholic ravings.

Thus what Yvonne has struggled to dismiss as a preposterous view of the burdensome past, "as a small lone figure carrying the burden of those ancestors" once again becomes inescapable. The past relentlessly dictates that she cannot communicate her dream, and although she still hopes, she cannot understand the presence of a new figure in her Edenic vision:

Why was it though, that night in the centre of her brain, there should be a figure of a woman having hysterics, jerking like a puppet and banging her fists upon the ground? (U.V., p.281)

Without even being able to acknowledge it, Yvonne experiences a despair at the impossibility of escape from the past; she may herself be able to overcome past guilts, but past events can only be laid aside, nor changed, and as for the Consul, he "proposes to disintegrate as he pleases", which makes communication quite impossible.

The inexorable past which Yvonne has struggled to hard to deal with intrudes upon the present. She is then confronted/

confronted/ with pointers towards the intransigence of fate - a bell, tolling once again, a bicycle wheel which becomes the wheel of fate, and the definitive version of the burden of the past, the old lame Indian carrying an even older Indian on his back, "trembling in every limb under this weight of the past, he carried both their burdens". (U.V., p.281) The image of the Indian carrying the Indian quite clearly echoes the image arising from the film of the "small lone figure" carrying its burden of the past, an image which, ironically, Yvonne has rejected as being untrue and pessimistic. She may still hope, but this hope must exist within the constraints of a force greater than this.

Indeed, Yvonne, as a segment of the consciousness which dominates the novel must understand the despair of the Consul (whose mind inhabits by far the greatest part of this consciousness) and must also suffer from the curious machinations of the wheel of fate, of which this consciousness conceives. Again echoing the opening words of the Inferno, Yvonne has written in a letter to the Consul, "What is a lost soul? It is one that has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness of remembered ways -" (U.V., p.346). She understands Geoffrey's despair, but, in keeping with the terrible and fatalistic ironies of the novel, she reaches him too late. Her letters arrive after the Consul has embraced damnation; he reads over and over again her words, "It is this silence that frightens me" (U.V., p.346) and Yvonne is proved right in this fear of silence, of the lack of communication by which they might have united their dreams. Ironically, by the time Geoffrey receives her letters, he is already a "lost soul", condemned to darkness and the caprice of fate.

The Dantean parallel is continued when Yvonne writes,

'You are walking on the edge of an abyss where I may not follow. I wake to a darkness in which I must follow myself endlessly, hating the I who so eternally pursues and confronts me. ---'

(U.V., p.347)

Although Yvonne manages to escape from the past, freed by the old film to the point where she can envisage a new life in the future, she is ultimately confronted with the past in the form not of her own guilt, but of the force loosed by the Consul as he staggers under his burden. Because she is able to love, Yvonne can hope for a future, and she tries to offer hope in one of her letters to the Consul:

- 'You are one born to walk in light. Plunging your head out of the white sky you flounder in an alien element. You think you are lost, but it is not so, for the spirits of light will help you and bear you up in spite of yourself and beyond all opposition you may offer --- you turned your footsteps towards a different path, a stranger route which you have trod apart ...' (U.V., p.365)

Again there is the Dantean path motif, and the elements of darkness- "an alien element" - and light, which in the Divine Comedy indicates God's presence. But the hope which Yvonne tries to extend to Geoffrey depends on his desire to strive towards light, or God. And for all that Yvonne has plumbed the depths of despair, she understands only too well that he has chosen a different course, "a stranger route which you have trod apart."

In spite of Yvonne's efforts to convey her hope and love for the Consul, she is unable to counteract his destructive power, the loneliness which is destructive of himself and ultimately of her. One of her letters predicts the outcome of Geoffrey's insistence on the isolation to savour his condition:

'--- Never think that by releasing me you will be free. You would only condemn us to an ultimate hell on earth. You would only free something else to destroy us both. ---' (U.V., p.367)

The Consul thinks repeatedly in terms of escape, but Yvonne rightly suspects that if he relinquishes her, this will not constitute a freedom worth having - instead, he will be "free" to descend into suffering and hell. Ironically, too, she foreshadows her own death, trampled by the horse freed by the Consul. Geoffrey, too, expresses the polarities of hope for the future/

future/ and his own destructiveness. His prayer "Please let Yvonne have her dream-dream? - of a new life with me -" (U.V., p.290) succumbs to his destructiveness, ending "Destroy the world!" (U.V., p.291)

Many of the Consul's more worthy thoughts degenerate similarly into cynicism and destructiveness:

The Consul felt a pang. Ah, to have a horse, and gallop away, singing, away to someone you loved perhaps, into the heart of all the simplicity and peace in the world; was not that like the opportunity afforded man by life itself? Of course not. Still, just for a moment, it had seemed that it was.

(U.V., p.216)

Indeed, the Consul is eminently capable of envisioning a future of love, "simplicity and peace". Knowing that he has this ability - that his life is not unmitigated despair and wilful self-destruction - makes his position as apostate that much more acute, and his denial of life more tragic.

However, rather than employ the horse towards establishing a future, the Consul thinks of the animal as burdened, as a force barely contained by man:

'What is it Goethe says about the horse?' he said. "'Weary of liberty he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains.'"

(U.V., p.216)

This echoes - albeit more negatively - a section of the Sophocles epigraph, "--- he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck." The horse which has triggered these thoughts is the one which crosses the paths of Hugh, Yvonne and the Consul on numerous occasions in the course of the novel, the creature on which has been branded the fateful number "7".

The same horse is, of course, misguidedly "liberated" by the Consul in Chapter 12. In liberating the horse, he is also releasing the primitive forces of nature which mankind has/

has/struggled to control. At the most obvious narrative level, the Consul's actions serve to anger the Mexican police, who are already none too pleased with him, to the point where they shoot him. Second, the horse, frightened by the shots and by the thunderstorm, stampedes into the forest, then tramples Yvonne to death. In her initial impressions as she walks into her old film, she prefigures her own destiny:

And 'Yvonne, Yvonne!' a voice was saying at her entrance, and a shadowy horse, gigantic, filling the whole screen, seemed leaping out of it at her: it was a statue that the figure had passed, and the voice, an imaginary voice which pursued Yvonne Griffaton down the dark streets ---
(U.V., p.268)

As she is being trampled to death in Chapter 11, Yvonne associates the horse above her with the one in the film and hears her name being called. Thus the above passage is echoed in her dying thoughts:

--- someone was calling her name far away and she remembered, they were in a dark wood --- the horse - great God, the horse - and would this scene repeat itself endlessly and for ever? - the horse, rearing, poised over her, petrified in mid-air, a statue, somebody was sitting on the statue, it was Yvonne Griffaton ---
(U.V., p.336)

In this way, Lowry draws together the branded horse in Mexico, the horse of the Sophocles epigraph, the horse in the film and integrates this with an environment which is in reality a forest and at the same time has reverberations of Dante's "dark wood".

Although Yvonne's death occurs in this "dark wood", her path has been quite different to that of the Consul. She is, of course, drawn up towards the heavens, while a separate fate is reserved for the Consul. But even before this final indication of her salvation, there are reverberations with the pilgrim Dante and his guide Virgil which suggest that Yvonne will take the right path through the dark wood: "They turned into the path. Hugh, with his torch, projected a phantom target---"/

target---"/ (U.V., p.332) suggests that Hugh is acting as guide to Yvonne. Momentarily losing sight of Hugh's light, she changes direction:

And now, here was the place where the path doubled back on itself, only to be blocked by a hugh moss-covered bole that divided it from that very same path she had decided against, which the Consul must have taken beyond Tomalín. The mildewed ladder with its wide-spaced rungs mounted against the near side of the bole was still there, and Yvonne had clambered up it almost before she realized she had lost Hugh's light. (U.V., p.334)

She had "decided against" following the same path as the Consul, beyond Tomalín "which of course involves Paríán (death)" (S.L., p.74). But having doubled back to this path, Yvonne finds she has "lost Hugh's light."

Thus, in her efforts to find the Consul, Yvonne is drawn towards a cross-road at which the right path and the wrong path meet. Because she has been drawn back to this point, she is killed by the stampeding horse, loosed by Geoffrey. As Yvonne herself has written to him, "--- my life is irrevocably and for ever bound to yours --- I am in your hands now" (U.V., p.367). She is bound to him in life, equally as their deaths are inextricably linked. However, in marked contrast to the Consul, Yvonne recognises the mistakes of the past, is willing to strive to counter the past and thus she ultimately emerges as a figure for whom salvation is just within grasp. She dies because her bond with the Consul demands it; she is saved because she desires this (and the salvation of the Consul, too).

Ultimately, Yvonne is not simply a figure to be aligned with Dante's Beatrice, as has been suggested by Carole Slade.⁶ Rather than being such an idealised and transcendental figure, Yvonne struggles with the chaos of contemporary life, trying to forge meaning from the meaningless; she has "never given up, or ceased to hope, or to try, gropingly, to find a meaning, a pattern, an answer -" (U.V., p.270). In her journey through/

through/ the dark wood, Yvonne, like Hugh, has to recognise the truth of Juan Cerillo's words: "No peace but that must pay full toll to hell" (U.V., p.112). Thus Hugh is equally aware - if not more so - of world chaos. As he listens to the radio, he perceives world catastrophe -

--- news of a flood was being delivered with such rapidity one gained the impression the commentator himself was in danger of drowning. Another narrator in a higher voice gabbled bankruptcy, disaster, while yet another told of misery blanketing a threatened capital, people stumbling through debris littering dark streets, hurrying thousands seeking shelter in bomb-torn darkness.
--- Darkness, disaster! How the world fed on it.
(U.V., p.157)

Hugh's catalogue of chaos - the world as reflected by the media - is echoed in Yvonne's thoughts of the news on the Times Building "of disaster, of suicide, of banks failing, of approaching war, of nothing at all, which --- snapped off into darkness, into the end of the world." (U.V., p.267)

Geoffrey, on the other hand, in the midst of alcoholic ramblings, manages to convince himself of his "little vision of order" (U.V., p.132). He would happily keep any vision of chaos at bay, but if he allows even a marginal state of sobriety, then reality has a nasty habit of breaking in:

He felt hemmed in. Gone was the little dishonest vision of order. Over his house, the spectres of neglect that now refused to disguise themselves, the tragic wings of untenable responsibilities hovered.
(U.V., p.133)

His refusal to accept any responsibility for the world around him means that he is condemned to remain in chaos, even after death. In the face of "untenable responsibilities", the Consul comes into the conclusion that the only "antidote" to them is another drink; moreover, it is a drink in a specific place - "The Farolito in Paríán" (U.V., p.134) - and it is in these circumstances that the Consul first thinks of a "pilgrimage" to Paríán.

Like both Yvonne and Hugh, the Consul is invaded by the media, but what the radio tells him is part of his own "dishonest vision of order". By this point in Chapter 12, Geoffrey has lost control of the irony which prevails in the novel's consciousness - as a character he is moving from being the controlling component of the consciousness, towards being an aspect of that mind - and in this position, the irony of the words on the radio is accessible to the reader, but there is no indication that the Consul appreciates it. Thus in the midst of the chaos of the Farolito, the Consul hears "Incalculable are the benefits civilization has brought us ---" (U.V., p.371). The ironies of external reality may operate upon the reader, but Geoffrey Firmin can no longer relate external reality to his own internal cosmos.

And yet after he is shot, the true disorder of "civilization" is reflected in Geoffrey's apocalyptic vision of "the world itself --- bursting --- the inconceivable pandemonium of a million tanks, --- the blazing of ten million burning bodies." (U.V., pp. 375-6) He has accepted himself as "the pelado, the thief-yes, the pilferer of meaningless muddled ideas out of which his rejection of life had grown." (U.V., p.374) Ultimately, the Consul knows that he has abandoned the burden of what he sees as "untenable responsibilities," but that he has done so at his peril; in rejecting all responsibilities towards other human beings, he has rejected life.

In contrast to the Consul, his half-brother, Hugh, is filled with idealistic notions of saving the world. Geoffrey dismisses political conviction as a pointless battle towards a pre-determined outcome - "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) But his rejection of politics is coloured by a much more personal disinclination, as he reveals when he says, "You're all the same, all of you, Yvonne, Jacques, you, Hugh, trying to interfere with other people's lives, interfering, interfering." (U.V., p.314) What Geoffrey most fears is not/

not/ a political coup, but that someone should stand between him and his next drink. The note of truth in the Consul's attack on political intervention - "almost everywhere in the world these days there has long since ceased to be anything fundamental to man at issue at all" (U.V., p.311) - is lost in his cynicism, a cynicism which masks his fear of sobriety. He also intends to accept the workings of fate as he sees it, without striving to alter this. He says to Hugh,

'--- Read history. Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course? Like a barranca, a ravine choked up with refuse, that winds through the ages and peters out in a- ---" (U.V., p.311)

He sees his own fate, too, as merely adding to the detritus in the barranca of history, to the inexorable collection of time past to which will be added time present and future. Ironically, the Consul's body is literally added to the refuse in the ravine.

The Consul's death is not meaningless: it has significance both to the remaining characters in the novel (Hugh, Vigil and Laruelle) and on a symbolic level. However, it is a pointless death, merely an option which the Consul has chosen over love and life, the culmination of a series of relatively minor events which cluster about Geoffrey on his final day, and which he does nothing to allay. He is offered a number of escapes, opportunities at which he could simply get up and walk out of the Farolito, but he prefers to savour his total rejection of life, surrendering himself to the worst that fate may produce until his condition is so static as to be death in life: "No thought of escape now touched the Consul's mind. Both his will, and time, --- were paralysed." (U.V., p.369) By this point he has surrendered his identity, merging with the chaos of the Farolito. He is not shot for being a spy (therefore having some political convictions), but rather for being too drunk to know who he is, for lying to the police, for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, for being unable to communicate/

communicate/ and ultimately for setting the horse free.

Geoffrey Firmin is also shot because the only identification on him shows him - wrongly - to be Hugh. The card- "Federación Anarquista Ibérica, it said. Sr. Hugo Firmin" (U.V., p.370)- shows him to have unsympathetic political tendencies. Ironically, the Consul criticizes Communism and Fascism alike, but - indirectly- dies for Hugh's Communism, and in line with his half-brother's romantic idealism which would lead him to die for a cause. In many ways Hugh himself is the Consul an earlier stage of his life, who - equally tormented - is trying at least to exercise the prerogative of choice.

Indeed, Hugh is also aligned with the opening words of the Inferno ("Midway in our life's journey, I went astray/from the straight road and woke to find myself/alone in a dark wood"). For Hugh is "Midway in his life's journey", thinking to himself, "I approach the second half of my life, unheralded, unsung--" (U.V., p.185). Hugh's past, like that of the Consul, is burdensome. To begin to indicate the nature of Hugh's past, Lowry employs his characteristic technique of the media agent provocateur - the radio voice which acts as stimulus to past guilts:

Even Juan Cerillo failed him [Hugh] now, as did, at this moment, San Antonio: two Mexican voices on different wavelengths were breaking in. For everything you have done up to now has been dishonest, the first might have been saying. What about the way you treated poor old Bolowski, the music publisher, remember his shabby little shop in Old Compton Street, off the Tottenham Court Road? --- No: I am much afraid there is little enough in your past, which will come to your aid against the future. (U.V., p.155)

Where the Consul is burdened with his too-grotesque war-crimes, Hugh has in their place his anti-Semitism - "In his day dreams he became the instigator of enormous pogroms" (U.V., p.175). Both Hugh and the Consul have shored very little against the future.

However, Hugh emerges as a much more contradictory figure than the Consul, for although he knows he has done little enough to assure an ascent rather than a descent, at this pivotal stage in his life, he chooses at least to strive. Chapter 6 of Under the Volcano is devoted mainly to Hugh and his past and opens with Hugh's thoughts: "- Nel mezzo del bloody cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai in ..." (U.V., p.154) establishing the parallel with the Dantean journey. The opening words of the Inferno are echoed - but with significant omissions - by the Consul:

The Terminal Cantina El Bosque, however, seemed so dark that even with his glasses off he had to stop dead --- Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura - or selva? No matter. The Cantina was well named, 'The Boskage.' This darkness---
(U.V., p.228)

The "Terminal Cantina" is one of the many dark chambers which prefigure the Consul's final entrance into the labyrinth and the grave; significantly, "he had to stop dead". The darkness of the bar, combined with its being "El Bosque" recall to Geoffrey the words of the Inferno, words which refer to the dark wood of the soul which he has now entered. Hugh, on the other hand, includes the words "nostra vita", and Carole Slade points out that these words "link the individual with the common life of mankind" and these words "Geoffrey omits." ⁷

It is in his feelings of political responsibility, that Hugh is linked with mankind. Unlike Geoffrey, Hugh recognises the mistakes of the past and is trying to make amends, answering the accusations of the radio by thinking,

- And yet is it nothing I am beginning to atone, to atone for my past, so largely negative, selfish, absurd, and dishonest? --- Nothing that after all I am willing to give my life for humanity, ---?
(U.V., p.156)

Hugh is to sail the following day from Vera Cruz on a ship with a cargo of dynamite for the Spanish Loyalists. While for Hugh, "the past remained, a tortured shape, dark and palpable and accusing" (U.V., p.159), he is willing to make recompense for/

for/ that past, by making a commitment to the future of humanity. His striving is a search for a situation which will enable him to demonstrate what he believes is his stature; he shares with the Consul the desire to make a gradiloquent gesture.

Thus, Hugh's commitment to the future as Dantean pilgrim is not a simple one; striving upwards is fraught with danger:

Yet in life ascending or descending you were perpetually involved with the mists, the cold and the overhangs, the treacherous rope and the slippery belay --- What am I trying to prove by all this? Accept it; one is a sentimentalist, a muddler, a realist, a dreamer, coward, hypocrite, hero, an Englishman in short, unable to follow his own metaphors. Tufthunter and pioneer in disguise. Iconoclast and explorer. (U.V., p.186)

Although in many ways, Hugh is as complex and contradictory a character as the Consul - an antithetical combination of "realist" and "dreamer", of "coward" and "hero" - he and the Consul part company in terms of any similarity in their attitudes to the future. Hugh is an "explorer" of the future, realistic in his knowledge that the obstacles to be encountered will be as obstructive in ascent as in descent; he, too, will have to deal with "the overhangs", but while he is "willing to give his life for humanity", the perils of the symbolic landscape (the Farolito overhanging the "Malebolge", compared to the Cenci) cannot represent the same danger to him as they do to the Consul.

To the Consul, on the other hand, the future is fraught with the dictates of the past. He feels he cannot escape the past; and because he convinces himself of this, the past becomes so onerous that it leaps out at him from every billboard, radio, and seems to be incorporated into the Mexican landscape specifically to taunt him. He is trapped in this vicious circle -

--- it was as though fate had fixed his age at some unidentifiable moment in the past, when his persistent objective self, perhaps weary of standing askance and watching his downfall, had at last withdrawn from him altogether, like a ship secretly leaving harbour at night. (U.V., p.187)

The Consul has obviously lost the aspect of character which might have prevented the imbalance in his life, an imbalance which he himself perceives is dangerous. In his letter to Yvonne, he asks, "--- do you find me --- - my equilibrium, and equilibrium is all, precarious - balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void ---?" (U.V., p.44) Ultimately he chooses Mexico, death and damnation over love, life and salvation; it is hope for a future which has departed "like a ship secretly leaving harbour at night", leaving the burden of past guilt as the main driving force in Geoffrey's life.

Like Hugh, the Consul sees himself as an explorer: "I sometimes think of myself as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land --- but the name of this land is hell." (U.V., p.42) (Laruelle, too, is a traveller in a strange land- "Four years, almost five, and he still felt like a wanderer on another planet." (U.V., p.15)). Geoffrey is an explorer of the past, of the labyrinth, the grave and of death; "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain" warns Sophocles. The Sophocles epigraph is echoed in Hugh's assessment of Geoffrey's condition -

It occurred to Hugh that the poor old chap might be, finally, helpless, in the grip of something against which all his remarkable defences could avail him little. (U.V., p.187)

Having decided to explore the hell which is in the past - his own "Secret Knowledge" or guilt - the Consul is incarcerating himself in the labyrinth of Time, tying himself to the Wheel of Fate, and ensuring that he is not to be Dante's pilgrim through Hell, but instead, one of its permanent inhabitants. Having chosen the wrong path - that of despair and the pleasures of past pains - the Consul becomes (like the bull at the bull-throwing) "some fantastic insect trapped at the centre of a huge vibrating web" (U.V., p.270). He is accused of being the "espider"; moreover, he is another kind of insect, "cabrón." Literally, "cabrón" translates as goat, or cuckold, and at this/

this/ level, it is appropriate that the Consul should be taunted with this.

However, within the context of the Consul's personal linguistic associations and interpretations, cabrón achieves an even more extensive chain of meanings:

[The Consul was] commencing to take one of the shrimps apart. 'Not camarones', he added. 'Cabrones. That's what the Mexicans call them.' Placing his thumbs at the base of both ears he waggled his fingers. 'Cabrón. You too, perhaps --- Venus is a horned star.'

'Have a devilled scorpion', invited/the Consul, pushing over the camarones with extended arm. 'A bedevilled cabrón.' (U.V., p,220, p.221)

Thus Geoffrey plays on the word "cabrón" to indicate to Hugh that not only has Hugh made of him a cuckold, but that he - Hugh - in turn is also a cuckold - "You too, perhaps ... Venus is a horned star." Furthermore, Geoffrey adds the meaning of scorpion to the word "cabrón"; he himself is not only the cuckold, but also the scorpion, the "fantastic insect". He himself clearly identifies with the scorpion as his own personal symbol, thinking, "maybe the scorpion, not wanting to be saved, had stung itself to death." (U.V., p.339) And Scorpio, too, is the Consul's "zodiac zone" (U.V., p.207), the sign under which suicides are destined to be committed.

Thus the Consul emerges as an explorer of the past; but his relationship with that past - bad enough in itself - is symbiotically self-destructive. He clings to the past, forgiving nothing. Far more dangerous, his "escape" - recalling Sophocles' "from baffling maladies he hath devised escape" - is via alcohol, which is even more self-destructive, dissolving away the Consul's identity. He wonders,

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, for ever, the solitary clue to his identity?

(U.V., p.294)

The Consul's concern with the "weight of the past" leads him finally to abandon his struggle toward the light.

In contrast, Hugh accepts the past, with all its "frustrations, triumphs, defeats, dishonesties and troubles" (S.L., p.75). His friend, Juan Cerillo, tells him "Firmin, you are a poor sort of good man" (U.V., p.111), highlighting his contradictory nature. Hugh is not held up as an ideal man; rather he is "just beyond being mediocre --- the youth of Everyman" (S.L., p.75). He has many of the Consul's failings - including his fondness for alcohol - and yet is trying to do a little better for the future:

Yet the banality stood: that the past was irrevocably past. And conscience had been given man to regret it only in so far as that might change the future. For man, every man, Juan seemed to be telling him, even as Mexico, must ceaselessly struggle upward. 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 understands that guilt and remorse are functional only in as much as they change the future, and thereby sets the past firmly in its place. Juan's advice to him echoes Goethe's words, "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him we can save," and Hugh accepts the "struggle", "warfare", "revolution", and inner "hell" which seems inherent in man's condition as a challenge for the future, a natural price to be paid for salvation.

Sigbjørn Wilderness, in Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid re-enters the labyrinth of the past - his own past, and that of his "character", the Consul, too. For him, as for the Consul - the Consul in both Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave - the past is a dangerous place to be, and his return to Mexico constitutes an immersion in this labyrinth. Sigbjørn thinks,

Very true, worse than that, on another plane, it seemed that the past was liable to come back, armed with a pitchfork itself, in the guise of the devil. Moreover, the past grows too, and confronts you in all kinds of strange forms, at the times when you least expect it, when you thought at last you were rid of it --- looms up behind you, gigantic, accompanied by a whore, in the liquor store where you least by the way want to be seen yourself. (D.A.T.G., p.232)

Indeed, Sigbjørn - like the Consul and Hugh - lives in terror of the past that is his, and that is also partly shared with his character. He is tormented by that same creature which taunts both Laruelle and Geoffrey Firmin in Under the Volcano, the "florid demon" (U.V., p.10) the "devil [which] brandished a pitchfork" (U.V., p.338) on the label of the bottle.

However, like Hugh, Sigbjørn has a friend who will guide him towards the struggle upwards. The character which has been Juan Cerillo in Under the Volcano is transformed into Juan Fernando Martinez, who is not merely a character in Sigbjørn's novel (The Valley of the Shadow of Death) but instead an actual friend of Sigbjørn's who has died in his work for the Banco Ejidal. In Sigbjørn's novel, Fernando had been "the doctor" (D.A.T.G., p.241) - Dr. Vigil? - an alcoholic guide to the Consul, who, because he shares the Consul's condition, may show him the way through hell. But in "real" life, Fernando has left Sigbjørn a legacy which does indeed help him to escape the labyrinth of the past.

Thus Sigbjørn is as transfixed by his past as the Consul -
--- he had seen those mountains turn, even as they turned now, to purple, a despair so great that he would need another language to describe it, the despair that his life was finally gone, his life ruined, his love lost, his work hopeless --- (D.A.T.G., p.223)

This, then was his past, to some it must seem as sad and hopeless as a poor ravaged city, but to him a matter of evil excitement. (D.A.T.G., p.225)

Like the Consul, Sigbjørn enjoys the sensation of ruin, the infinite pleasures of absolute loss. His character - and Lowry's character - cannot be persuaded to relinquish the horrors of the past by Dr. Vigil, a mild and urbane guide. But from a very similar past - with all its "excitement" - Sigbjørn is extricated by the legacy of Fernando, whose gusto and love of life and of humanity have left in their wake a burgeoning garden, literally,

Fernando had helped to make this life fruitful and good as men should have had it in the Garden of Eden: this was progress as God wanted it on the first day when he saw that the world was good. It was the Garden of Eden. Le gusta este jardín que es suyo? (D.A.T.G., p.238)

Fernando's impact - in spite of the fact he is now dead - on Sigbjørn's life is much more in line with that of Juan Cerillo on Hugh's future in Under the Volcano.

Fernando has literally left a garden behind (resolving the theme of the untended garden established in Under the Volcano); equally, Juan Cerillo leaves Hugh the will to struggle toward a more expansive future -

There was something in the wild strength of this landscape, once a battlefield, that seemed to be shouting at him --- some youthful password of courage and pride - the passionate, yet so nearly always hypocritical, affirmation of one's soul perhaps, he thought, of the desire to be, to do good, what was right. (U.V., p.128)

Hugh has no illusions that his life will be anything but a struggle; once again, it is significant that the landscape takes on the character's mood or cast of mind, such that it was "once a battlefield." The Consul imagines that Hugh's political convictions are illusory, lashing out at him thus:

"What have you ever done for humanity, Hugh, with all your oratio obliqua about the capitalist system, except talk, and thrive on it, until your soul stinks?" (U.V., p.314)

Hugh himself knows that his commitment to humanity could easily be interpreted as being - indeed, could very easily become - "hypocritical". It is profoundly ironic that the Consul should accuse Hugh of failures in respects in which he himself has not merely failed, but has absolutely rejected. Whose soul stinks?

Indeed it is Hugh, not the Consul, who desires to do something for humanity, not only in the political sense, but also on an individual basis. The attitudes of the two characters are perhaps most polarised in the dying Indian incident. The Consul doesn't want to "interfere", and finds good consular reasons for leaving the dying man exactly as he is. Hugh instinctively reaches out to help the Indian, and stops only when discouraged by both a passenger and the Consul. Hugh protests, "'But the man may be dy-'" (U.V., p.246), showing his concern. The Consul replies "'God, I feel terrible,'" (U.V., p.246) which demonstrates the extent to which he is locked into his own torment. Later, Hugh tells Yvonne that he thinks that the dying Indian may have been working for the Banco Ejidal, like Juan Cerillo. (U.V., p.299) Meanwhile, the Consul is entombed in the stone repository of the "Cave of Winds, seat of all great decisions, little Cythère of childhood, eternal library ---" (U.V., p.295), awash on his own drunkenness, the shreds of remembered sentences of recent events mingling with inevitable guilts to produce his Babel (p.302), and a chaotic, fragmentary version of Molly Bloom's soliloquy.

The Consul claims to have been invaded by "Apelki, the misleaders or turners aside" (U.V., p.189), and thereby returns Chapter 6 - which has opened with Hugh's "Nel mezzo ---" - to the Dantean path. Lowry says of this progression, "the theme of the Inferno is stated again, then follows the enormously long straight passage." (S.L., pp.74-5) If Hugh's thoughts and concerns are expressed in this "straight passage", the introduction of the Consul into the chapter with familiars which are "turners /

"turners/ aside" helps to establish the idea that their paths are different. Geoffrey has been turned aside, as equally the postcard which arrives a year too late (at the end of the chapter) had "gone badly astray in fact" (U.V., p.197). The path theme concludes the chapter - "The road turned a little corner in the distance and vanished" (U.V., p.197) - as Lowry himself wrote, "the path theme of Dante --- reappearing and fading with the vanishing road" (S.L., p.76).

Hugh's path, then, is quite separate from that of the Consul. He is aligned with the pilgrim Dante travelling the path which leads through hell, "And on that lonely platform tonight he himself would stand, with his pilgrim's bundle" (U.V., p.238). The Consul, on the other hand, refuses the help of those who love him - Vigil, who would be his errant (but all the more sympathetic) guide through hell, and Yvonne, who would be a very human Beatrice, if only Geoffrey would strive to take the path through hell, instead of clinging to it.

If the routes taken by Hugh and the Consul are indeed so very disparate, then it may come as some surprise that Lowry should make the following claim: " Hugh and the Consul are the same person." (S.L., p.75) Interestingly, Lowry extends this claim by saying that Hugh and the Consul are the same person "within a book which obeys not the laws of other books, but those it creates as it goes along." (S.L., p.75) Thus on the Dantean level, Geoffrey and Hugh have chosen their respective paths through hell - Geoffrey as necromancer and black magician, Hugh as pilgrim. The discrepancy is resolved, though, when the two characters are seen as essentially the same man, taking two different decisions. However, a counterpoint between the levels on which the characters appear to be the "same person" and on which they appear innately divergent (Geoffrey being self-destructive, incapable of love and driven by the mainspring of the past, while Hugh emerges as idealistic, romantic and driven by hope for the future) is maintained throughout the/

the/ novel; the reader is not called upon to make one single interpretation, but instead to maintain a process of accruing understanding on a number of levels. In this respect of constantly demanding a concurrent and multiple interpretation, the novel "obeys --- the laws --- it creates as it goes along."

The fact that Lowry suspects that the principles of Under the Volcano are "not the laws of other books" would point to a new conception of his task as author. Against an allegation of "weakness of character drawing in the novel", Lowry explains in greater detail at least one principle of the novel:

--- I have not exactly attempted to draw characters in the normal sense --- though I did go to incredible trouble to make my major characters seem adequate on the most superficial plane on which this book can be read, and I believe in some eyes the character drawing will appear the reverse of weak. --- 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.

(S.L., p.60)

On the "most superficial plane", Lowry establishes that his four main characters, the Consul, Hugh, Yvonne and Laruelle, are people living within a particular social climate, a political and economic framework, and within the contexts of their own pasts. They are individuals with varying commitments to their world, and with varying aspirations for the future.

How, then, can the character drawing appear both "the reverse of weak" and at the same time, "not only weak but virtually nonexistent"? The seeming contradiction in fact constitutes a central paradox within the novel. The four central individuals are concurrently but components of the overall consciousness which operates within the novel. At certain levels - particularly those linked with the more obvious concerns with plot and narrative line - these individuals have their own pasts and their own futures. Equally, they are united by a burdensome past which/

which/ threatens to engulf the present and the future; this past is the historical past of mankind, of a humanity which does not tend its garden, and which will go on to abuse the fruits of its earch, as the Consul warns prophetically:

'See here' old bean,' the Consul heard himself saying, 'to have against you Franco, or Hitler, is one thing, but to have Actinium, Argon, Beryllium, Dysprosium, Nobium, Palladium, Praseodymium - '

'Look here, Geoff - '

' - Ruthenium, Samarium, Silicon, Tantalum, Tellurium, Terbium, Thorium - '

'See here - '

' - Thulium, Titanium, Uranium, Vanadium, Virginium, Xenon, Ytterbium, Yttrium, Zirconium, to say nothing of Europium and Germanium - ah! - and Columbium: - against you, and all the others, is another.'

(U.V., pp.305-6)

The earth carries within it the seeds of its own destruction; it is man's responsibility to "prevent". But in the climate of approaching war, the Consul cannot "prevent" his own downfall, never mind that of the world, because he sees the workings of Fate - as manifested in the cyclical rise and fall of powerful civilisations - as inexorable.

Thus the "human spirit", according to Lowry, comprises at least one part which is self-destructive, and which is bound to events of the past. But within the same consciousness, Hugh's idealism, and his wish to take responsibility for the future, and Yvonne's female component (symbolised presumably by her new desire for reproductive creativity) and honesty in confronting the past (shared also by Hugh) coexist with the bleak and burdened factors of the Consul and Laruelle. By 1953, Malcolm Lowry had an even clearer idea that this "composite consciousness" might be well worth investigating, and might also provide a means of uniting his own Promethean task, The Voyage That Never Ends... He writes to Albert Erskine (his editor), "I think unquestionably what one is after is a new form, a new approach to reality itself" (S.L., pp. 330-1). Later in the same letter, Lowry is more specific, informing/

informing/ Erskine that "The real protagonist of the Voyage is not so much a man or a writer as the unconscious - or man's unconscious ---" (S.L., p.331).

It would appear, then, that Lowry was positing an alternative technique of characterisation in the novel. This technique of presenting four characters - both self-sufficient to a point, and symbolic in function - suggests that what the author was trying to achieve was the rendition of a human mind - a consciousness, or "unconscious" - in all its "aspects". The powerful delineation of a three-dimensional (or four-dimensional?) figure which presides over Under the Volcano is not repeated in the other novels. However as a highly original portrayal of an intense, ironically fertile, and sweeping imagination, Under the Volcano stands as an indication (along with Lowry's pursuit of a "new approach to reality itself") of the potential scope of The Voyage.

In this light, it is perfectly possible that the character drawing might seem both "weak" and "the reverse of weak". For example, Laruelle's position in the novel is remarkably sketchy, considering he is one of the four main characters. Laruelle may appear as an even thinner portrayal in comparison to the full-blooded oil-painting of the Consul (who in fact forces everything and everyone else in the novel to blend with his own symbolic landscape). However, Laruelle has a vital function as the "resurrected" consciousness of the Consul in Chapter 1. His perspective on the events of the previous year is very close to that of the Consul himself - Jacques, too, has an obsessive interest in the Faustian, the onslaught of the familiars - the devil on the anis bottle - has started, he is living under the prison watchtower in the Doré landscape. Jacques is in the process of giving up hope:

For Hugh, at twenty-nine, still dreamed, even then, of changing the world (there was no other way of saying this) though his actions - just as Laruelle, at forty-two had still then not quite given up hope/

hope/ of changing it through the great films he proposed somehow to make. But today these dreams seemed absurd and presumptuous. (U.V., pp.14-15)

But Laruelle is giving up hope in a different world to the one which the Consul has abandoned. Thus it is of little consequence that Jacques has been a character little investigated in the course of Under the Volcano, but it is crucial that we should have his perspective on the Consul's death, since he is sympathetic with the Consul in many respects, in order to maximise the impact of a different world context.

Indeed, there is a constant interplay between the facets of the novel's consciousness and time. Events and time have their own rhythms; in the Consul's world there is room, and time enough, for both hope and despair, but even at this point, there is the increasing sense of time running out (from Chapter 2 to Chapter 12) for both Geoffrey Firmin and the world. Even Yvonne, with all her hope for the future, is engulfed in the machinations of a Fate, which, we infer, is going to become increasingly incomprehensible and malicious. And yet Hugh has escaped, light in hand, to shoulder the responsibilities of the world.

However, Laruelle's context is bleaker. He appears to be caught in the double helix of events (or history) and time as they spiral downwards. What had happened to the Consul "seemed already to belong to a different age". (U.V., p.11) Events and time appear to be operating no longer in a syncopated twist of the helix, but are moving towards a meeting point of harmonious catastrophe. Both Laruelle and the world are confronted with the apocalyptic abyss (prefigured in Geoffrey's dying visions):

Half-way across the bridge he [Laruelle] stopped; --- and leaned over the parapet, looking down. 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)

Thus history, Mexico, time and fate seem to be reaching a culmination point, a ruination which is echoed by the ruins of Maximilian's palace, by Laruelle's interest in Atlantis, the reference to Díaz, to Nazi atrocities, even by the "suspended function" of the cinema projector.

Laruelle is seen to be pursuing the downward course of the Consul in the many reverberations with the rest of the novel which he experiences in the first chapter of Under the Volcano; there are clearly intended correlations between the thoughts and events experienced by Laruelle in Chapter 1 and those of the Consul throughout the rest of the novel. Laruelle's experiences prepare the atmosphere - the novel's cosmos - for the reader. The cycle is established by the fact that the last day in the Consul's life also prepares us for what should be Laruelle's last day in Mexico in Chapter 1. However, Jacques' context is, as has been said, a bleaker one, in which tragedy has become that much more "unreal and meaningless." (U.V., p.11).

Dr. Vigil identifies the Consul's life as having consisted of "continuous tragedies" (U.V., p.11). What has been reserved for Jacques Laruelle, however, is not tragedy. Nor, indeed is it salvation, for "the purple hills of a Doré Paradise sloped away into the distance"; significantly, salvation, too, is becoming inaccessible. Jacques' perceptions transform this Mexican paradise into a wasteland. He thinks,

How continually, how startlingly, the landscape changed! Now the fields were full of stones: there was a row of dead trees. An abandoned plough, silhouetted against the sky, raised its arms to heaven in mute supplication --- but beautiful, there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing as it happened to be, the beauty of the Earthly Paradise itself. (U.V., pp.15-16)

Yet again, Lowry's pairing of antithetical elements can be observed, for Mexico is potentially both a wasteland, and beautiful, both "fatal" and "cleansing", and both Hell and Paradise. As Lowry wrote to Jonathan Cape, "It is paradisaal: it is unquestionably/

unquestionably/ infernal." (S.L., p.67)

However, Jacques does not take the opportunity afforded by the "mute supplication". He is instead aligned with the Consul, from the very first scene in which we see him. Against the background of the fiesta, Laruelle has quietly slipped into a condition which means that he sees the demon on the anis bottle as "brandishing a pitchfork at him" (U.V., p.10). Dr. Vigil recalls (in their conversation over the anis) his concern for the Consul: " '- I meant to persuade him to go away and get déalcoholisé... I sended a boy to see if he would come ... if not, please write me a note, if drinking have not killèd him already.' " (U.V., p.10). There are echoes of this concern in Vigil's parting words to Laruelle: " 'Try and come tonight, if not, please understand I am always interested in your health.'" (U.V., p.13)

Vigil, too, has offered to take Jacques Laruelle to "-- the church for the bereavèd --- where is the Virgin for those who have nobody with." (U.V., p.12) Dr. Vigil has taken Geoffrey Firmin to this church in Quauhnahuac on the night of the Red Cross Ball; Firmin had, "prayed --- he might have Yvonne again." (U.V., p.290) Firmin's prayers were answered - as Laruelle notes, "Yvonne came back! That's what I shall never understand. She came back to the man!" (U.V., p.12) But the Consul has rendered himself incapable of choosing love: he asks the Virgin "Where is love?" (U.V., p.291) and answers his own question with his seething destructiveness and impulse toward death: "Destroy the world!" (U.V., p.291)

Thus the evidence that what the Consul pursues is Death- and "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain," Sophocles (U.V., p.7) - far outweighs the configuration of salvation offered to Geoffrey; the efforts of Hugh, Yvonne, Laruelle and Vigil cannot compensate for the Consul's individual refusal to take responsibility for his own salvation. Certainly, Firmin has/

has/ "devised escape" from "baffling maladies" (U.V., p.7), but in doing so, he escapes also from that burdensome duty (as he regards it) - the responsibility for himself. Even the escape can prove too loathsome: "What's the use of escaping," he asks, "from ourselves?" (U.V., p.89)

Indeed, Dr. Vigil functions in Under the Volcano as - at best - a guide, rather than a saviour. Vigil is a guide whose efforts are doomed to failure, for the Consul's fate is to be alone in his predicament. Geoffrey Firmin knows the right path but cannot 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)

On the other hand, Carole Slade suggests that Vigil's position is not so weak:

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

While the point about the Dantean parallel is well taken, and indeed, vital to this chapter, Dr. Vigil's character cannot be quite so neatly summed up. Vigil is an "apostle", but a peculiarly inadequate one. He himself stresses that he should be seen by Mr. Quincey to be comporting himself well; Vigil asks the Consul to collude with him in wishing to keep quiet about their drunken night at the Red Cross Ball:

'Por favor,' broke in the other [Vigil] hoarsely, placing a well-manicured though shaky finger to his lips, and with a slightly worried look up the garden.

The Consul nodded. 'Of course. You're looking so fit, I see you can't have been at the ball last night,' --- (U.V., p.141)

However Vigil's inadequacy as a guide - he, too, is rather too fond of a drink - should make him peculiarly adequate in the eyes of the Consul. The Consul certainly feels "loyalty"/

"loyalty"/ (U.V., p.141) towards his fellow alcoholic, and Vigil certainly knows that he is no apostle in reality. In fact, Vigil's value to the Consul should lie precisely in the fact that he too has shared the pleasures dearest to Geoffrey. Vigil is obviously compassionate and concerned: even the paranoid Geoffrey has to admit "of the doctor's generosity there was little doubt." (U.V., p.147)

Again, in contrast to Carol Slade's view of Vigil, the Consul finds Vigil to be much more than the apostolic doctor, interested in nervous complaints and "sickness of the soul" (U.V., p.148). In the "mingitorio" - the last cavern in the labyrinth - Geoffrey finds an inverted offer of salvation. As a pathetic and dreadful antidote to the "dirty prostitute" María, the Consul finds,

--- slashed advertisements on the slimy feebly lit walls: Clinica Dr. Vigil, Enfermedades Secretas de Ambos Sexos, Vías Urinarias, Trastornos Sexuales, Débilidad Sexual, Derrames Nocturnos, Emisiones Prematuras, Espermatorea, Impotencia.
666. His versatile companion of this morning and last night might have been informing him ironically all was not yet lost - unfortunately by now he would be well on his way to Guanajuato.
(U.V., p.352)

Vigil therefore emerges as this more complex figure, in keeping with Lowry's view of the antithetical nature of reality. The Vigil who has offered to take the Consul to Guanajuato, where "they bury everybody standing up" (U.V., p.150) - to be his guide in the underground tomb - is also the Vigil who offers cures for venereal disease on dirty lavatory walls.

Vigil's numer, too, is significantly "666" - identified by Perle Epstein as the "symbolic number of judgement."⁹ The Consul feels that his course has finally become irrevocable as a result of his intercourse with María - the final judgement on him, as passed by himself, is as a result of what he considers to be his sexual contamination. But rather than clutch at/

at/ what Vigil has to afford, the Consul chooses, stoically, to pay in suffering for his misdemeanours.

Perle Epstein also notes that "666" is the number of "the beast in Revelation." ¹⁰ As this number is associated with Vigil, this would reinforce the idea that Lowry is employing his established technique of bonding diametrically opposed characteristics or attributes. And Vigil's "infernal" aspect is further delineated in Chapter 1, where he,

--- 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 and the igniting one movement; he held the light for M. Laruelle. (U.V., p.12)

Indeed the "light" which he offers to Jacques Laruelle appears to be somewhat ambiguous; it is potentially a guiding light, but also something more infernal, a flare from hell. As has been noted, the device of suggesting both extremes recurs so frequently that - taken in conjunction with Lowry's own analysis of his novel - the author's intention becomes quite clear. What Lowry humorously acknowledged might be seen as the "dark morass" (S.L., p.58) of his novel should instead be seen in terms of the "thickness", the "depth" and the structure of "echoes" (S.L., p.59) which he -rightly - claimed were consistent with "this poetical conception of the whole." (S.L., p.59)

Consequently, Lowry's attempt to convey "thickness" and "depth" results in his appreciation and delineation of complexity in which the central dynamic appears to be conflict; in other words, a progression by alternating (and even combining) thesis and antithesis. In the resulting design of darkness and light, of the infernal and paradisal, Vigil emerges as yet another instance of this peculiar bonding process; Lowry is meticulously consistent in his own highly individualised technique down to the details of a character who is accorded very little space (if, however, a greater function) in Under the Volcano.

In fact, Vigil's function as "guide" is immediately reinforced in the next sentence, when he asks Laruelle, "Did you never go to the church for the bereavèd there?" (U.V., p.12) Thus the light he has offered Laruelle is genuinely one of guidance; his help, however, characteristically falls on deaf ears. M. Laruelle isn't interested and Dr. Vigil simply has to conclude, "Nobody go there." (U.V., p.12) The Consul's visit to that same church had brought Yvonne back, but possibly Laruelle "bereavèd" of the Consul, knows that there is no bringing him back. Faith in a world which has ended all possibility of tragedy and commenced all possibility of meaninglessness, and chaos is merely inappropriate.

In Laruelle's heart there is simply no passion left. He reviews his life in Mexico and knows it to amount to very little, a few pointless fragments:

Yet in the Earthly Paradise, what had he done?
He had made few friends. He had acquired a Mexican
mistress with whom he quarrelled, and numerous
beautiful Mayan idols he would be unable to take out
of the country, and he had - (U.V., p.16)

Evidently, there is little of lasting value in Jacques Laruelle's life; for him, Mexico is a wasteland of fragments and of lost opportunities. He has not found any semblance of love, only "a Mexican mistress with whom he quarrelled." His feelings appear quite dessicated; "It slaked no thirst to say what love was like which came too late" (U.V., p.16) thinks Laruelle. Not for Jacques Laruelle the impassioned cry which the Consul had made, "come back to me, Yvonne, if only for a day..." (U.V., p.46). Even if, ironically, Yvonne returns "only for a day", the answer to Geoffrey Firmin's plea is certainly not meaningless.

Laruelle's ideals have disappeared, seeming false and transient as the "Mayan idols" which he will have to leave behind him. As has previously been noted, he cares little about politics or war: "One side or the other would win." (U.V., p.15) Before the death of the Consul he had still retained some aim, some vestiges of ideals:

--- Laruelle, at forty-two, had still then not quite given up hope of changing it [the world] through the great films he proposed somehow to make. But today these dreams seemed absurd and presumptuous.

(U.V., p.15)

Having lost his dreams, and having passed the "midway" mark in his "life's journey" (as had the Consul) it would appear that Jacques' course, too, can only be downwards.

For Jacques is living in a world of increasing disorder, where a lack of faith is not only highly dangerous but almost inevitable. It seems to Laruelle that the world is hurtling ever faster towards the "Malebolge":

--- he was approaching 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)

The first appearance of the abyss in the novel clearly points to an alignment with the state of the world. 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 now 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.21-2)

Laruelle's thoughts return to the days of the (significantly named) "Hell Bunker":

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), suggesting a connection 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 the events of the "Hell Bunker" are left obscured, the Dantean parallel may provide some clarification; in Canto XVIII, Dante says, of the inhabitants of the "Malebolge", "All of these sinners are naked." ¹¹

Critics agree that Geoffrey has been observed in "sexual humiliation" by Laruelle. Terence Bareham notes:

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

And Richard Hauer Costa states that the "Hell Bunker" episode is the root of Geoffrey Firmin's "obscure sexual guilt" ¹³ which is above all manifested in his dread of venereal disease. Lowry himself fails to throw any light on the precise nature of the Leasowe incident, suggesting that the obscurity is intentional. The incident can then be seen in terms of universal sexual guilts- which the prevalent puritanism and reassuring words of Mr. Freud would have served to impress on Lowry was the fallen or the inevitable condition of mankind.

Certainly, the Consul's "sexual humiliation" points towards his failure in personal relationships. He is unable to have sexual intercourse with Yvonne, but successful with María, whom he despises as the "dirty prostitute". The critic, Art Hill, writes of Lowry that he was a "sexual hypochondriac", a "true syphilophobe" and that "his aversion to girls went quite beyond the bacterial." ¹⁴ The parallels between Lowry's alleged/

alleged/ neuroses and those of his character are clear. They do, however, lead us into the infernally murky waters of the Lowry/Geoffrey Firmin relationship. Art Hill's comments appear more appropriate when applied to the Consul, although evidence undoubtedly exists to support Hill's claims about Lowry's "syphilophobia".

One reason why it would be unfair to make too close an identification between the Consul and Lowry is that Lowry does demonstrate quite clearly his attitude towards another of the Consul's guilts:

We now hear more of the Consul, is gallant war record, and of a war 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 --- (S.L., p.70)

The author clearly distances himself from his protagonist when he writes of the Consul's "gallant war record", a record which is meant to be ambiguous, being potentially either what is usually meant by "gallant" in the context of war - that is, "bloody"- or positively criminal! Lowry also reveals an ironic distancing when he questions whether the Consul "is really as much to blame as he tells himself."

Thus the Consul's past and his guilt about it are again left ambiguous, this time for a clearly defined purpose. Once more, the ironic note of Lowry's analysis is evident, for Geoffrey Firmin is "merely being established in the Grecian manner as a fellow of some stature, so that his fall may be tragic." Lowry wishes to leave the possibility of tragedy open, while questioning the origins of the Consul's guilt. However, the two distinct areas of guilt - the sexual/personal one of Leasowe and María, and the area of responsibility towards others which is involved in Geoffrey's "war crime" and, by extension, in Hugh's anti-Semitism - are crucial to the novel. Their ambiguous/

ambiguous/ nature allows them to be interpreted on a universal level as examples of the failures at eros and agape previously noted.

For his consistent failures, Geoffrey Firmin is, of course, to be consigned to the abyss. His failures occur on many levels, from the intensely personal level to his sexual guilts and "sins" to the universalised level of the sufferings of Christ, the failures of Firmin as an "Everyman" figure - the failures of the modern world itself.

Not least in Geoffrey Firmin's failures are those sins which have Dantean parallels and which will locate the Consul's final resting place in very precise terms within the Dantean scheme. The obscure "humiliation" or misdemeanour in the Hell Bunker is paralleled in Canto XVIII of the Inferno by the fact that the inhabitants of the "Malebolge" are "naked". Second, the Consul actually chooses of his own volition to manufacture a series of temporary hells on earth as prelude to the infinite hell of his last abode. As Carole Slade has observed, Virgil explains in the Purgatorio that as each soul can choose or love either good or bad, the souls in hell have deliberately and voluntarily chosen their domain. The Consul's hellward-bound course becomes self-propelled with his words "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there."

Third, Hugh's words in the novel indicate another link with the "Malebolge". It is he who actually locates nemesis in the "Malebolge" and relates this to the ever-recurring barranca:

'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)

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. In Hugh's view, it is entirely/

entirely/ appropriate that journalists should be allotted the fate of the "Malebolge", since they are guilty of "intellectual male prostitution". Journalists are aligned with the inhabitants of the Fourth Bolgia in Circle Eight (Malebolge) whose fate is told in Canto XX of the Inferno, for these inhabitants are the "fortune tellers and diviners --- those who attempted by forbidden arts to look into the future." ¹⁵ They are doomed to have 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. ¹⁶

Thus Hugh's interpretation of journalists as those indulging in "prostitution of speech and writing" is close to Fowlie's evaluation of the sins of those condemned to the Fourth Bolgia.

The fate of these sinners - soothsayers 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 echoed by the cantina "Cerveceria XX", where Laruelle waits for Dr. Vigil, and comes upon the Consul's letter which reveals Faustian parallels. Hugh himself is (ironically!) a journalist, so the "Malebolge" is potentially his domain, too. And the Consul's yearning for "secret knowledge" means that he is in danger on this level also. The "Malebolge" overlaps with the Cabbalistic idea of the Qliphoth - the abyss to which all perverted aspiration leads. Both the "Malebolge" and Qliphoth are ravines which serve to punish the misuse of occult knowledge and powers, and both also have a universal function within Under the Volcano as the yawning abyss which awaits the ultimate stage of civilisation.

Consequently, the "Malebolge" is a symbolic warning of/

of/ both the depths to which an individual may sink in the pursuit of a knowledge outside the natural domain of a mortal (witness the Consul's pursuit of Faustian and alchemical powers through alcohol) and the end of civilisations. The Consul says, with more than a hint 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) Thus the particular predicament of Geoffrey Firmin is elevated to a prophetic warning of the impending fate of twentieth-century civilisation. Laruelle's answer, utterly despairing of both himself and the world is, "wherever you turned, the abyss was waiting for you round the corner." As the Consul finally is trapped and plummets down the barranca, so Jacques Laruelle fears that he will fall prey to the "Malebolge", whether he precedes the rest of civilisation or joins it in the inevitable apocalyptic death throes.

CHAPTER 9: NOTES

1. Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, trans. Reverend Francis Cary (Hertfordshire: Omega Books Ltd., 1984) p.23.
2. Stephen Tifft, "Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.60.
3. Carole Slade, "Under the Volcano and Dante's Inferno I" in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p.144.
4. Dante, Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, Canto I, p.28.
5. Carole Slade, p.149.
6. Ibid., p.149.
7. Ibid., p.148.
8. Ibid., p.147.
9. Perle Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (Canada: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p.128.
10. Ibid., p.49.
11. Dante, Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, p.158.
12. Tony Bareham, "Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano" in Barry Wood, ed., p.107.
13. Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry, p.171.

14. Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism" in Barry Wood, ed., p.128.
15. Dante, Inferno, trans. John Ciardi, p.174.
16. Wallace Fowlie, A Reading of Dante's Inferno (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) p.133.

PART IV: REBIRTH/ASCENT

Chapter 10: "Volcano and Phoenix: Trial by Fire"

PART IV: REBIRTH/ASCENT

CHAPTER 10

"Volcano and Phoenix: Trial by Fire"

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place, but where we are is hell 1

--- every man was his own Garden of Eden.
Personal responsibility is complete, though the
life is all interior. (D.A.T.G., p.251)

Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him
can we save. - Goethe (U.V., p.7) -

Damnation, at its most powerful, depends on the protagonist's consciousness of the element of choice in his destiny. Classical tragedy is based upon the premise that the hero is destined to make the wrong choice; the choice made is itself foreordained. Christian tragedy allows for the possibility that, while the wrong choices have been made, a plea for redemption and sincere repentance will close the gates to hell even at the last minute. Romantic tragedy allows of salvation through the love of another - Goethe's Margareta, for example - and the power of that love to invoke the "right choice". The notion of choice (and the individual's responsibility for that choice) is central, too, to Under the Volcano, and it is the pivot on which the action and tone of Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid swings upwards.

Geoffrey Firmin, Sigbjørn Wilderness, Faustus, Faust and Calderón's Cyprian are engaged in spiritual quests for knowledge - a knowledge beyond the normal domain of man's imaginings. They are apprentice magicians, driven by warring factions of Eros and Thanatos (love and self-destruction/death) - failing to respond at the level of Agape - towards what they consider to be spiritual enlightenment. The true version of this Light is present in Dante's Inferno, even in the "Dark Wood of Error." The pilgrim Dante speaks:

But at the far end of that valley of evil
whose maze had sapped my very heart with fear!
I found myself before a little hill

and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed
already with the sweet rays of that planet
whose virtue leads men straight on every road. 2

The light of the sunrise above the hill symbolises hope, but Dante's way up the "Mount of Joy" is blocked by the "Three Beasts of Worldliness".

Likewise, the action of Under the Volcano takes place in the valley below Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. However, the two volcanoes brood over the valley, as threatening omens of apocalyptic chaos. The volcanoes are alternately sources of divine light and of eternal darkness. In the opening chapter of the novel, Jacques Laruelle sees the landscape under the darkness of approaching chaos: "He watched the clouds: dark swift horses surging up the sky. A black storm breaking out of its season!" (U.V., p.16) These "dark swift horses" recall Eliot's "Waste Land" - the "black clouds --- over Hamavant". They are no sources of water, and do nothing to assuage the symbolic sterility and aridity dominating much of both "The Waste Land" and Under the Volcano.

The symbolic climate and topography of volcano/mountain and darkness/light is repeated not only throughout Under the Volcano, but also right from Calderón's "Prodigious Magician" (to whose Faust theme "Goethe was indebted" ³), to Marlowe's Life and Death of Dr. Faustus. Calderón has Cyprian describe the approaching storm thus:

The whole sky is crowned with clouds, and, pregnant with horrors, it does not spare the curly topknot of this hill. The whole horizon is Aetna's flaming paint-brush; the sun is fog; the air, smoke; the sky, fire. 4

This image of the dark and fiery volcano is reflected in Geoffrey Firmin's description of a sunset as "A mercurochrome agony down/

down/ the west" (U.V., p.340).

Anthony Kilgallin identifies this description of the sunset as suggestive "of a blood-red crucifixion."⁵ The image of elemental forces which reflect man's inhumanity is repeated in Lowry's work: to reiterate, the inner spiritual and philosophical cosmos is imposed on the topographical representation of Mexico. However, Lowry employs this technique with a basis on the Faust myth, as Kilgallin notes:

The suggestion of a blood-red crucifixion is comparable to the description by Faustus: "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!/
One drop would save my soul, half a drop, "a parallel that occurs elsewhere as I have already indicated, one year later, as a "gigantic red evening, whose reflection bled away in the deserted swimming pools."⁶

The image of crucifixion is strongest in Yvonne's imagination, returning to her throughout her last day in Mexico with ominous regularity.

Thus Yvonne's return to Quauhnahuac is set in a landscape which is directly relevant to her fate. She sees,

--- the Ferris Wheel --- the equestrian statue of the turbulent Huerta --- her volcanoes, her beautiful, beautiful volcanoes. Ah, how familiar it all was: Quauhnahuac, her town of cold mountain water swiftly running. Where the eagle stops! Or did it really mean, as Louis said, near the wood? --- the dawn - green and deep purple high above and gold scrolled back to reveal a river of lapis where the horn of Venus burned so fiercely --- the vultures floating lazily --- the windsock below streaming out its steadfast farewell. (U.V., p.49)

The first thing she hears on her return is "A CORPSE will be transported by express!" (U.V., p.48) Symbolically, this is the corpse of Geoffrey Firmin, who is to die at the end of the day. The configuration of forboding is continued by the matrix of Ferris Wheel, the horseman, volcanoes, the wood (the "dark wood"), the vultures and the "farewell" which ironically turns/

turns/ out indeed to be a last farewell to Yvonne.

However, in retrospect it is possible to discern that amongst these symbols of forboding (prefiguring the deaths of both the Consul and Yvonne) there are more specific symbols, relating to Yvonne only. Thus, for her, the volcanoes are "her beautiful, beautiful volcanoes", for she is destined to make the ascent of the volcanoes and to travel to the Eden beyond. It is appropriate too, that Yvonne should return to Mexico under the "horn of Venus" (remembering that Geoffrey's cosmos is dominated by Scorpio, under which suicides are destined to be committed). For the Consul, Quauhnhuac is indeed "near the [dark] wood" and for Yvonne, the wood is where she will lose her path and be trampled to death. But for Yvonne, Quauhnhuac is also "Where the eagle stops!", and this symbol of the eagle is in marked contrast to, and the antithesis of, the vultures which await the death of the Consul. The eagle may also suggest the phoenix which brings with it the possibility of resurrection to Sigbjørn Wilderness in Dark As The Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid. In the Consul's imaginative cosmos, Quauhnhuac suggests something different. He remembers Weber telling him:

'Quauhnhuac! That's where they crucified the women in the bull-rings during the revolution and set the bulls at them. And that's a nice thing to say! The blood ran down the gutters and they barbecued dogs in the market place ---' (U.V., p.103)

Thus Quauhnhuac is established in Geoffrey Firmin's mind as a place of crucifixion, (where the "eagle stops" and the vultures take over?), as a historical centre of unrest and chaos, and, in general, as a place stained with the blood of the past.

In fact, running through Under the Volcano appears to be a stream of the blood of historical acrimony and past guilts. Yvonne and the Consul are to visit a bull-throwing under the Consul's battle cry, " '- Forward to the bloody arena then, ' " (U.V., p.258). This cry makes Yvonne's thoughts return to the Indian dying at the side of the road:

That was her weakness though, and she remembered the dog that was dying on the street in Honolulu, rivulets of blood streaked the deserted pavement, and she had wanted to help, but fainted instead -- she hurried away without a word, only to be haunted by the memory of the wretched abandoned creature --- (U.V., p.258)

For Yvonne, the memory is one of regret at her own inaction in both the case of the dog and of the dying Indian; their deaths and her "non-intervention" are stains on her character, adding to the weight of the past, and to her burden of guilt.

Yvonne has an excuse for her "non-intervention" - her aversion to blood - but the Consul's rationalisation of his unwillingness to do anything for the Indian dying by the wayside is inexcusable. The Consul, in "seeing the cruel wound on the side of his head, where the blood had almost coagulated" (U.V., p.246) has only been able to think of his own sufferings. He fails to be the "companero", the Good Samaritan in a test which is overtly just that, taking place as it does beside "a stone wayside cross" (U.V., p.244). It is significant, too, that the Consul should be shot for freeing the horse which had belonged to that same Indian and that among his dying thoughts is the fact that "No one would help him even if they could. Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt." (U.V., p.375)

The Consul's guilt reaches further into the past. He carries the burden of the incident relating to the ironically-named s.s. Samaritan, for which he takes increasing responsibility for the burning alive of German officers in the furnace of the Samaritan. To M. Laruelle, Firmin "suddenly began proclaiming not only his guilt in the matter but that he'd always suffered horribly on account of it." (U.V., p.39) But the Consul's new responsibility for the atrocity is "merely an excuse to buy another bottle of mescal." (U.V., p.39) Whatever the extent of his responsibility, Geoffrey Firmin adds the guilt to his burden, and, in having blood on his hands, identifies with the/

the/ artist with the hands of a murderer in Las Manos de Orlac (the film showing on the Day of the Dead in both 1938 and 1939).

Hugh, too, is burdened by his own share of guilt and seems to hear accusations from the past; "What about the way you treated poor old Bolowski" (U.V., p.155) refers to Hugh's anti-Semitism and "they are losing the Battle of the Ebro. Because of you--" (U.V., p.154) refers to the fact that Hugh has left the Spanish Civil War to its own devices (although he does decide to return). Against the blood he has on his hands, Hugh can only shore a few fragments and his good intentions - the seagull which he rescued and his plea "- And yet is it nothing that I am beginning to atone, to atone for my past, so largely negative, selfish, absurd and dishonest?" (U.V., p.156)

In the face of such burdens of guilt, and the rivulets of blood running through Under the Volcano (which, in a historical sense are tributaries to the Armageddon of the Second World War), the Consul cries, "What's the use of escaping', --- 'from ourselves?' " (U.V., p.89) Whereas the Consul is destined to submit to the horrors of the past, Sigbjørn Wilderness finally decides to do battle with his own very similar past, and to at least modify the ending of the novel that is his life.

When Sigbjørn re-enters Mexico, then, it is a revisiting of his own past and of the locus of his novel, The Valley of the Shadow of Death. With reference to this "repetitive" aspect, G.P. Jones observes that,

Lowry is more disturbed than most authors by the parasitic nature of the creative process, by fiction's insatiable appetite for the past experience of its creator and by the temporal paradoxes it introduces into the writer's life as he relives the past in the fictional present of his artefacts. 7

In Dark As The Grave, Lowry is clearly revisiting the spiritual and psychological locus of Under the Volcano to investigate/

investigate/ whether there can be an alternative ending (Lowry and his wife Margerie had returned to Mexico in 1945). Dark As The Grave is criticised for this very characteristic. Witness George Woodcock:

Indeed, that work [D.A.T.G.] as it now stands exists only in terms of its relationship to the earlier novel [U.V.]. It is barely fiction, since it recounts with hardly any essential change the journey the Lowrys undertook in 1945. 8

Woodcock's criticism does inevitably raise the question of what distance there must be between real life and art before a novel counts as "fiction". Lowry's raw material was very much mined from personal experience, but this is not to say that his work was autobiographical and nothing more; surely the ordering process of artistic representation and the influence of the imagination are sufficient to render much of Lowry's work "fictional" as opposed to "documentary".

However, Woodcock's criticism is fair in that in terms of "plot" or narrative sequence of events, Dark As The Grave is what Jones terms "parasitical", if not on Lowry's experience then certainly on Sigbjørn's past experience as a writer. In the latter, there is cause for concern, because Sigbjørn's past experience as an author, coupled with the fact that he is not really a novelist (!) is simply not fertile enough ground for reinvestigation. Lowry himself pinpoints the ambiguous nature of Sigbjørn as author:

He is not going to be the self-conscious author himself of so many novels, if that was what you rightly were afraid of, even though I have to make him responsible for the Volc. Moreover he is disinterested in literature, uncultured, incredibly unobservant, in many respects ignorant, without faith in himself, and lacking nearly all the qualities you normally associate with a novelist or a writer.

(S.L., p.331)

Thus Lowry produces a character who is almost so flawed as a writer as to make his novel untenable; it seems fairly unreasonable/

unreasonable/ to expect Sigbjørn to be able to produce what he himself terms "The real book" (D.A.T.G., p.102), the "real" book being the book which he is contemplating - Dark As The Grave!

On the other hand, it suits Lowry's purposes to reinvent another essentially flawed character to tread in the footsteps of the Consul of Under the Volcano and The Valley of the Shadow of Death infamy. Only the individual who genuinely despairs of his own being, and who knows only too well the topography of hell can usefully take the same journey downwards and yet convincingly alter the ending of the novel, fight his way back from the morass of sin and guilt. Ronald Binns identifies Lowry's metafictional technique, saying that the "real" book is,

- the book which gives the truth about the writer's life and experiences in Mexico, past and present. (The unreal book is, of course, Under the Volcano: a book which rearranges geography, heightens reality and purges the individual life of its disorder, shaping it into art.) 9

As an experiment, it is interesting that Lowry should make Under the Volcano take on a secondary position in the reader's imagination, but the concept/experiment proves to be too inconsequential as the main body of Dark As The Grave, and it was inevitably outstandingly difficult to displace the consuming consciousness of his masterwork in the reader's mind.

As Binns also notes, "By the end of the book [D.A.T.G.] Lowry has demolished his first Mexican novel and built another one out of the pieces." ¹⁰ This is indeed the heart of the experiment. The "demolition" of Under the Volcano/The Valley of the Shadow of Death involves disproving that the Mexico of the earlier novel is a "romantic fiction." ¹¹ The symbolic topography is reduced to its most minimal physical realities. As he flies into Mexico, Sigbjørn sees, "his lake bed, his volcano bed, ugly, beyond belief." (D.A.T.G., p.87) The picture of/

of/ a historical meeting-place of nations is reduced, Sigbjørn's own illusions about the domain of tragedy and damnation are shattered -

--- they were coming to earth on a half-flooded planet in which some great catastrophe had taken place, though what seemed to have been there previously was not the landscape of floating islands and verdure of fantasy, nor the sort of quasi-Venetian civilization of fact, but some ravaged glass factory town in Lancashire; now the throttles were retarded, they were sinking, they had landed. (D.A.T.G., p.87)

To withdraw the symbolic connotations of the landscape - particularly when this is one of Lowry's greatest technical accomplishments- is dangerous, particularly so when all there is to replace such a body of "meaning" is the awareness, the memories of how much meaning the landscape used to have.

Binns suggests that the "metafictional" impulse in Lowry's work was not merely dangerous, but in fact, "fatal". The exegesis of the significance of a past which has now utterly receded which is contained in Dark As The Grave is a manifestation of the author's interest in recreating the action of his own creation, a manifestation which occurs on both the level of Lowry's relationship to his own work, Under the Volcano and of Sigbjørn's attitude to The Valley of the Shadow of Death. Ronald Binns writes:

In Dark As The Grave Lowry put forward the attractive but fatal notion that because life itself is in a constant process of creation, 'An organic work of art, having been conceived, must grow in the creator's mind, or proceed to perish' (D.A.T.G., p.168). This idea he applied not only to works-in-progress like Dark As The Grave, but also to completed works like Ultramarine and Under the Volcano ---

In Lowry's hands the idea proved fatal. If a work of art is in a constant state of growth at what point does the growth stop and the work get finished? This was something Lowry preferred not to think about. Worse still, he applied the logic of organicism to his entire oeuvre. Before long he had revamped an earlier idea for a Dantesque/

Dantesque/ trilogy (with Under the Volcano as the Inferno, Lunar Caustic as the Purgatorio, and In Ballast to the White Sea as Paradiso) and begun to conceive a massive epic sequence incorporating everything which he had written. This epic, to be entitled The Voyage That Never Ends, was to be subject to perpetual adjustment as each new fiction glossed what had gone before. 12

Admirable though Lowry's concept of integrating his entire opus might have been, the evidence of available drafts and posthumously published works indicates that the execution of the task was a Promethean labour. Also, the modification and "gloss" on Under the Volcano provided by Dark as the Grave shows how potentially destructive the "logic of organicism" could be. Under the Volcano can certainly stand alone without any future explanation of its merits; and in returning to comment on it, Lowry failed to give the novel its full value, and devalued Dark as the Grave at the same time.

In fact, the re-interpretation of Lowry's/Sigbjørn's perceptions of Mexico is of interest mainly as a literary experiment. The reader is inevitably liable to lament the loss of the vast symbolic landscape - the "landscape of floating islands and verdure of fantasy" - and to resent the reduction of this to "some ravaged glass factory town in Lancashire." The volcanoes, too, - icons in the Consular imagination - are utterly reduced:

--- Primrose had at last found Popocatepetl: 'There it is -' 'Yes...Yes... there', and Sigbjørn kissed her with delight: privately he was a little disappointed, for the sacred and majestic peak was considerably diminished by the enormous height at which they were flying, it was not much bigger than a slag heap --- (D.A.T.G., p.87)

The exception to this reductive process begins where Lowry turns the spiritual direction of Sigbjørn's quest, for Sigbjørn does sincerely desire his own salvation. The vision of order, and of a Garden of Eden which is the Mexico bequeathed by Sigbjørn's "Friend", Juan Fernando Martinez, at the end of the novel fulfils/

fulfils/ the intention behind Lowry's experiment. The remoulding of past experience of downfall into present and future salvation provides the culmination of the "organic creation" experiment, but it is only at this point, when the literary alchemist has turned base metal into gold - in Chapters 11 and 12 of Dark As The Grave - that the novel has any spontaneous interest for the reader.

Sigbjørn Wilderness's literary theory echoes Lowry's own and sets Dark As The Grave to founder upon the same rock:

--- he had suddenly a glimpse of a flowing like an external river; he seemed to see how life flowed into art: how art gives life a form and meaning and flows on into life, yet life has not stood still; that was what was always forgotten: how life transformed by art sought further meaning through art transformed by life; and now it was as if this flowing, this river, changed, without appearing to change, became a flowing of consciousness, of mind ---
(D.A.T.G., p.60)

The concept of the overlap between art and life appears to be perfectly reasonable; "life transformed by art" - the ordering of chaotic experience - is indeed superimposed by "art transformed by life". The creative process is a continuous one, for perceptions of the outside world and the internal domain (the self and the unconscious self) change with time, and realign themselves with each other constantly. As Sigbjørn puts it, on Lowry's behalf, "this flowing, this river, changed, without appearing to change, became a flowing of consciousness, of mind."

However, the flaw in Sigbjørn's argument is that he appears to have neglected one detail; the creative imagination thrives better on new experience than on revisiting the scenes of past experience. Thus Dark As The Grave gathers impetus when past experience is transcended, when the spiritual descent into the Mexico of the past is transformed into the spiritual ascent of Juan Fernando's Mexico of the future. The emergence of/

of/ the phoenix from the funeral pyre of the burnt shack at "Eridanus" (Dollarton) - which is also the pyre of the old Mexico of the memory, and of Juan Fernando himself - gives a more typically Lowrian power to the end of his novel, Dark As The Grave.

The evidence in Dark As The Grave indicates that Lowry had not dispensed with the technique of symbolic accretion after finishing Under the Volcano. While the volcanoes themselves are reduced in the former to mere "slag heaps", and there is a certain purpose in dispensing with a romantic version of the past, it is unlikely that Lowry, in projecting the construction of that oeuvre to be entitled The Voyage That Never Ends, intended in Dark As The Grave to produce a reductive gloss on Under the Volcano, without also constructing a new symbolic landscape, a new landscape of the mind. Sigbjørn Wilderness certainly indicates that the old interest in the symbolic significance of the environment, and of fortuitously coincidental events has not diminished. In Chapter 8 of Dark As The Grave, he finds himself in Laruelle's tower, trying to write an analysis of what the tower meant in Chapter 7 of his own The Valley of the Shadow of Death, and comments, "Talk about the projection of the unconscious upon reality!" (D.A.T.G., p.197)

Lowry's intention to produce the same effect of symbolic layering in Dark As The Grave as had been so essential to Under the Volcano is also noted by the critic, Matthew Corrigan. Corrigan writes,

Indeed all the machinery of a novel as brilliant as Volcano is present [in D.A.T.G.]: the quest clearly defined and adequate, the right kind of symbolic props, the landscape (or "deathscape" as he calls it) appropriately used as in the great novel, the descending and ascending spirit. But although the structure is more or less complete, the style, what is said and thought, needs to have been submitted to the author's critical intelligence, particularly to his rather fine sense of dramatic timing. 13

The "machinery" may indeed be present, as Corrigan claims, but/

but/ the symbolic execution of the task, for the large part of the novel, fails to approach that of "the great novel". Only in the landscape of the end of the novel are there the signs of the lyricism with symbolic undertones which would have lifted the novel to a comparable level.

The novel ends:

And then a field of young, new wheat-pale green in contrast to the dark green of alfalfa - and then a field of ripening wheat dimming to gold, then quince and peach orchards, young trees, obviously planted within the last ten years and blossoming ... The Banco Ejidal had become a garden.

Then they were leaving the state of Oaxaca behind them, and behind them, too, in the dark church of the Virgin for those who have nobody them with, one candle burning... (D.A.T.G., p.267)

Lowry establishes that what Juan Fernando has achieved in his work for the "Banco Ejidal" is a fertile future, even an Eden, rich and colourful in contrast to the dusty and sterile wasteland of the Mexico in Under the Volcano. Sigbjørn's relationship with Primrose has survived the confrontation with the past; he is no longer so alone that he needs "the Virgin for those who have nobody them with". And for his dead friend whose grave is Mexico, Sigbjørn has lit one candle, as a symbol of faith and hope; Sigbjørn's future is now "Dark As The Grave" where a single light shines. The candle is even more significant when the "bell, book and candle" of excommunication which are invoked at the end of Chapter 1 of Under the Volcano are recalled; in the larger frame which contains both Mexican novels, the candle of damnation has been transformed into the symbol of faith and hope.

Although Lowry failed to maintain the many layers of symbolic significance in most of Dark As The Grave, Corrigan claims that this would have been the author's intention, an intention curtailed by Lowry's untimely death. Corrigan argues,

Had he lived, the narrative threads would have been tightened, symbolic connections made more secure, and the whole not only rewritten but rewoven; Professor Day's estimation that it would have taken Lowry perhaps another four years is just. 14

Thus Corrigan seems fairly certain that Dark As The Grave would have been a further novel operating on many symbolic levels, as his source, Day, also suggests:

Dark As The Grave would, in fact, have been given the same treatment that Under the Volcano got: Lowry would have applied to it layer upon symbolic layer, tied together all his images in a tremendously complicated network of correspondences, and brought Sigbjørn Wilderness's quest into much sharper focus.
(D.A.T.G., p.17)

Ultimately, there appears to be a consensus on Lowry's method in writing, a method for which there is the evidence of the many redraftings of Under the Volcano and the 705 page typescript of Dark As The Grave which Lowry had deposited in a bank vault.

It is perhaps surprising, then, to find critics who discount the importance of symbolisation in the later novel. Barry Wood finds Douglas Day's explanation of the incomplete and "unthickened" nature of Dark As The Grave to be "apologetic."¹⁵ Wood goes on to contrast Day with another critic,

--- John Wain --- is thankful for "the simple and effective story of Dark As The Grave ... which got out of his hands before he had a chance to inflate and overelaborate it, and which now comes with its own true, natural and simple outlines."

Both views, one damning what the other praises, seem irrelevant to the metafictional genre of the book, where neither symbolic layering nor simplicity are germane to the intent. It would seem that we have here a breakdown because the rhetoric of metafiction is improperly understood. 16

It would be difficult to agree, like Wood, with John Wain's suggestion that the longer Lowry had a work in his hands, the more the author would "inflate and overelaborate it." Wain/

Wain/ makes Lowry sound like an outrageous liability given the wherewithal to write for any one period of more than n years! Also, Lowry never managed to "overelaborate" or "inflate" to excess his masterwork - for it is in the nature of Under the Volcano to be a work of fabulous complexity, and of mythical standing. What Wain sees as a potential danger in Lowry's work, Lowry could not have done; ten years of meticulous redrafting had, after all, gone into Lowry's masterwork.

However, Wain's claim is useful for Barry Wood's purposes; Wood is indicating that Dark As The Grave might be approached as metafiction rather than the usual process of Lowrian symbolic layering. Certainly the experimental nature of the novel has been noted, with the reservation that the experiment might have been more successful, had the author's stock of experience been newer. And certainly, Lowry was well aware of what Ronald Binns terms "Tristram Shandy's predicament" which he puts thus: "The onward surge of life continually outran his ability to get it all down on paper." ¹⁷ Thus the metafictional element in Lowry's later fiction - the self-reflexive process whereby literature is talking about its own processes - cannot be ignored.

In fact, Dark As The Grave is very much the novelist re-entering his creation, or to put it another way, The Valley of the Shadow of Death (Sigbjørn's Volcano) has been set within the frame of Sigbjørn's memories and re-experiencing of Mexico. However, Sigbjørn has little that is new to bring to the original novel and the revisiting of the past is too intrusive into the present - it is too much stamped by Sigbjørn's "disinterested" and "uncultured" (S.L., p.331) mind - to create a new novel. Sigbjørn himself has his doubts about the "re-mix" of the past:

--- he was surprised at the poverty of an imagination that had driven him back upon old and used material: but doubtless he had had no intention of writing the story, in fact he very much wondered if he would ever write anything again, so perhaps it didn't - but what about Primrose? - much matter. (D.A.T.G., p.78)

It would be mere conjecture to suggest that Lowry himself may have had similar misgivings about the re-use of material contained in Under the Volcano to construct Dark As The Grave. Lowry's hopes, as expressed in his letters, indicate otherwise: "both Dark As The Grave and La Mordida, especially the latter, should exist as powerful novels in themselves, if done aright, without obtrusive reference to writers or writing." (S.L., p.331)

But, even taking into account the fact that what we can read is by no means the finished product, it would appear that the presence of the writer, and the topic of the writing process is more "obtrusive" than Lowry himself predicted. Indeed, to take the most benevolent view possible, Lowry was so fascinated by Mexico and by the experience of Mexico that he felt Under the Volcano needed the enlargements and commentaries provided by Dark As The Grave and La Mordida (which remains - as yet-unpublished). A less kindly view of the Mexican "re-mix" is that - whisper who dares - Lowry did not find a new subject and was himself "driven back upon old and used material."

The truth of the matter probably lies between these two extremes - both polarities are only very loosely grounded in fact as it can be ascertained.

My own view is that there is a certain poverty of imagination in Dark As The Grave, and it is doubtful whether this poverty is wholly attributable to the peculiar conditions under which the edited novel comes into being. Nor is the peculiar thinness of a novel which discusses a (greater) novel, a writer talking about his former self as a writer, a piece of writing which ponders over the creative process, compensated by the mere fact of its metafictional and experimental nature, interesting though this may be. The fact that the novel opens out into a testament to faith, a hard-won battle in which light - the light of the single candle in darkness - triumphs over dark and meaninglessness and the signs of Lowry's process of symbolic accretion in achieving this mean that Lowry's purpose was at least bi-fold in nature; Lowry's concern went beyond the experimental self-reflexiveness, and he would have adhered to his former symbolic structures/

structures/ and expanded on them.

Indeed, Sigbjørn's quest is again Dantean. He recalls with fear as they travel towards Mexico the words over the door on another journey: "Through these portals pass the most damned people in the world." (D.A.T.G., p.50) Corrigan writes of "the descending and ascending spirit" as the central concern of Dark As The Grave, and this it would certainly have been. The words which have come back to Sigbjørn set up reverberations with Dante's words over the gate to Hell: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." On his pilgrimage through the gates of Dante's Inferno, Sigbjørn's quest is for faith, and he must undergo the same tests as the Consul before him; he must learn to love on the levels of eros (Primrose's support on his journey must not be rejected, although, with a profound irony, Sigbjørn imagines himself to be Primrose's "Virgil"!) and of agape (supported by the Juan Fernando Martinez Bequest). Sigbjørn's Inferno is the descent into the labyrinth of memories of the past.

However, the function of the character of Primrose in Dark As The Grave seems to dwindle until she emerges as a mere omnipresent shadow which occasionally scales great heights with some banal and inconsequential remark. Perhaps the clue to Primrose's insignificance lies in the title of the novel, for it is Juan Fernando to whom the title alludes; he is Sigbjørn's "Friend" and mentor from beyond the grave. Just as Dr. Faustus has his twin angels, Sigbjørn has Stanford and Juan Fernando as bad and good angels respectively:

--- that was the nearest Stanford had ever been to meeting Fernando. Curious - for they were, so to speak, his good and evil angels of that whole memory: Stanford, most remarkably so he reflected, being the evil one. ---And where would Stanford be? Dead, probably.
(D.A.T.G., p.57)

Paradoxically, Stanford is very much alive, and the grudge about a hotel bill which Sigbjørn has borne turns out to be a case/

case/ of Mexican chicanery, as Stanford reveals when he turns up later in the novel.

Instead of having died in the war, as Sigbjørn imagines, Stanford has become the owner of a silver mine (part of the concretisation of the labyrinth which runs under the Mexico of both Under the Volcano and Dark As The Grave). The ill-will borne Stanford over the years is reduced by Sigbjørn's confrontation with this symbol of skeletons of the past:

Wishing Stanford good luck, Sigbjørn parted from him hurriedly, wanting to get back to Primrose. --- Still, it was not without a certain feeling of, so to speak, belief in humanity that he had returned to their room: after all, in a sense Stanford had done the noble thing. (D.A.T.G., p.245)

Ironically, the bad angel Stanford, who had accompanied - even led, it is suggested - Sigbjørn on the strongly alcoholic road to Acapulco (scene of communal debauch) and damnation, is the person to renew Sigbjørn's "belief in humanity".

Furthermore, Juan Fernando Martinez - the "good" angel - is thought by Sigbjørn to be alive and the search for him is a major motivating factor in his return to Mexico. Ironically, Juan Fernando has died in very similar circumstances to Under the Volcano's Consul. Juan Fernando had been very drunk - "Loco. Crazy. He was drinking much mescal..." (D.A.T.G., p.252) - and "Un hombre le mató" (D.A.T.G., p.252). The suggestion is that he has been shot for his activities on behalf of the Banco Ejidal, which sets up further reverberations with the dying Indian in Chapter 8 of Under the Volcano. Hugh explains to Yvonne about the "Ejidal" that it is,

- a bank that advances money to finance collective effort in the villages ... These messengers have a dangerous job. I have that friend in Oaxaca ... Sometimes they travel disguised as, well, peons ... From something Geoff said ... Putting two and two together ... I thought the poor man might have been a bank messenger ... But he was the same chap we saw this morning, at any rate, it was the same horse, do you remember if it had any saddlebags on it, when we saw it?' (U.V., p.299)

If, as Lowry claims, the main character in his oeuvre is "man's unconscious" (S.L., p.331), then Juan Fernando is representative of the warring factions in the unconscious of modern man. His complexity has not been fully appreciated by Sigbjørn - just as Sigbjørn had been unable to see that Stanford was more complex than simply the "bad" angel. For Juan encompasses both the insanely self-destructive facet of humanity and the side which can offer succour to his fellow man.

Sigbjørn knows the humane side to Juan Fernando, and expresses this simply in his testimonial to his dead friend:

'He was un hombre noble', Sigbjørn said finally.

'He gave me his horse and ran himself', muttered Sigbjørn. 'He sold me his best clothes for nothing. He gave me his friendship and advice I will use for the rest of my life. And he is dead like that.'

(D.A.T.G., pp.252-3)

To Sigbjørn, Juan had lived by "the philosophy of La Vida Impersonal, that of the 'throwing away of the mind', where every man was his own Garden of Eden" (D.A.T.G., p.251) and this is the "advice" Sigbjørn will use for the rest of his life. To the world, Juan has bequeathed his work for the Banco Ejidal and the final vision of a new Mexico growing from the wasteland of the old which Sigbjørn sees as he leaves at the end of the novel. To his fellow man, Juan has indeed been the "compañero" and "hombre noble".

However, Sigbjørn comes to understand that even Juan, just as Stanford, is not the bearer of absolute characteristics. Initially, Sigbjørn simplistically thinks, "Fernando was one of the greatest men he had ever met in his life: a man of wild courage, humility, and greatness of soul." (D.A.T.G., p.233) Sigbjørn links him to Stanford: "But Fernando was merely the bright side of the same medal: and that medal had equally been forged in hell: the two men were linked together with invisible bonds, save that one was good, the other evil,---" (D.A.T.G., p.233). When Sigbjørn actually confronts his past/

past/ life in Mexico, he finds, though, that the memories are not intolerable, but nor is Fernando quite such a simplistic character:

And yet these terrible things were not so terrible in memory. --- They were days as beautiful as vultures circling in high sunlight, as beautiful as death that flies just for the love of flying. And of all these things Fernando was in some way the symbol. No one could be more alive or life-giving in spite of all he was. Which made it all the more puzzling that what all these things were that he loved so much should also so obviously be death ... (D.A.T.G., p.235)

Because Sigbjørn finds himself unable to "shut out the past" (D.A.T.G.p.218) he finds out that the subterranean world of memory is less unpleasant but more complex than he expected.

Thus the extreme angels of destruction and love - of Thanatos, the instinct towards self-destruction and death, and Eros, the instinct towards love and life - which have occupied Geoffrey Firmin's unconscious and semi-consciousness and which have been projected onto the landscape, are given human form in Dark as the Grave. But Sigbjørn, having identified his mentor and tormentor respectively, finds that they - Juan Fernando and Stanford - also contain both impulses. Stanford, while being "the prescience of disaster and its coefficient --- a blood relative of a terrible sort" (D.A.T.G., p.230-1) also does "the noble thing". And Juan Fernando, creator of the Garden of Eden on earth, is an alcoholic who becomes so insanely drunk with mescal that - like the Consul - he brings about his own self-destruction and is equally the symbol of death.

"The truth is that the character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent" (S.L., p.60) said Lowry of Under the Volcano. He then explains that the four main characters are "aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit" (S.L., p.60). Seven years later, in 1953, Lowry was making a very similar claim that "The real protagonist of the Voyage is not/

not/ so much a man or a writer as the unconscious - or man's unconscious ---" (S.L., p.331). Since Lowry's idea (that concern about character drawing might be subsumed under more important considerations such as the portrayal of the mind of "modern man") remained consistent over a number of years, it seems reasonable to suggest that Sigbjørn, Stanford, Juan Fernando and Primrose constitute a similar four factor matrix of the unconscious to the Geoffrey Firmin/Hugh/Laruelle/Yvonne aspects operating in Under the Volcano.

In fact, the presentation of the Sigbjørn, Stanford, Juan Fernando and Primrose factors in Lowry's portrayal of Western consciousness is possibly even more complex in conception than the "aspects --- of the human spirit" in Volcano. In Under the Volcano, it becomes fairly clear which characteristics will lead to damnation, and therefore who will be saved, and who will refuse to repent. Geoffrey Firmin and Jacques Laruelle, both questing after occult knowledge beyond the realm proper to man (with the aid and abuse of alcohol) are pursuing their own destruction. Since they cannot love, or will not, and since "one cannot live without loving", they are excluded from Romantic redemption through love. Nor do they particularly wish their salvation. Hugh, on the other hand, is at least trying to choose the "right path" and to help his fellow man; he is in pursuit of the ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory at the summit of which, in Dante, Eden is situated. Yvonne, too, is saved because she is willing to try to help Geoffrey, no matter how hopeless a task this might be. In the face of the Consul's "ultimate denial" (U.V., p.54) of life and of her love, Yvonne tries to reach towards him into "this stupid darkness --- where I cannot reach you --- the darkness of the sundering, of the severance!" (U.V., p.54)

Put in such terms, the configuration of the consciousness operating within Under the Volcano appears deceptively simple. The Consul does of course have glimpses of light and of the/

the/ Northern Eden which Yvonne holds out to him. Equally, Yvonne is not simply a Beatrice/Margerita figure offering Geoffrey salvation; she is "the eternal woman, as in Parsifal, Kundry, whoever she was, angel and destroyer both" (S.L., p.81). Her indiscriminate sexuality (as the Consul sees it) is potentially as destructive as her love may be healing. Hugh, too, in spite of all his professed concern for his fellow man and the contemporary world, has been an anti-Semite and has contributed to Geoffrey's sexual betrayal. Thus Lowry- while presenting different "aspects" of Western consciousness - can claim that his characters are "adequate on the most superficial planes" (S.L., p.60) since he admits of individual complexity and change.

However, in Dark as the Grave, the "aspects" of the unconscious- in the form of the characters of Sigbjørn, Stanford, Fernando, Primrose - are more complex, since they are all the battlegrounds for that warfare between Eros and Thanatos which Freud took to be the main instinctual human drives. (The exception to this would be Primrose, whose function within the novel is very limited, as has been noted.) Stanford is not simply "the prescience of disaster", nor can his ability to relate to other human beings ultimately be dismissed by observing, as Sigbjørn does, that his hands, "were large and beefy, kept in good trim doubtless by smacking female bottoms and stroking female thighs" (D.A.T.G., p.243). Stanford does "the noble thing", recalling first, the fact that Juan Fernando is also an "hombre noble", but also Sr. Bustamente's assessment of the Consul in Under the Volcano (U.V., p.37). However, unlike the Consul, Stanford does not have the stature to be damned; like Sigbjørn, Stanford stands amongst the multitudes of modern man, a mixture of self-destruction and more altruistic motives, neither side excluding the other. He swings between one and the other, lacking the Consul's persistent focus and grasp on his condition. Whatever the Consul's failings, he is absolutely aware of his path towards self-destruction.

The difference among the character configurations is of/

of/ course in line with the different directions taken by "man in search of a soul" in each novel. The downfall, then upward striving are set within two different historical contexts, both at a world level and at the level of the consciousness which Lowry intended to run through the novels. Under the Volcano prefigures the self-destruction of the Second World War. Lowry writes of Chapter 10: "the volcanoes, which have been getting closer throughout, are used as a symbol of approaching war." (S.L., p.82)

In Lowry's mobile symbolic landscape, the volcanoes literally appear to move towards the novel's consciousness, to try to impinge upon that imagination with their warning. Although the function of the volcanoes in Under the Volcano becomes increasingly to warn the Consul of his fate, and likewise to intimate impending chaos to the world, the volcanoes are intrinsically yet another example of Lowry's dualistic world view. They are not merely warning the Consul of damnation; the volcanoes are equally important as symbols of ascent and of the striving which brings salvation. Thus the Consul's attitudes to the volcanoes - which at first glance appear wholly inconsistent and replete with alcoholic delusion and misinterpretation - are in fact derived from the paradoxical nature of the volcanoes, from the fact that they represent both damnation and salvation.

Early in Under the Volcano, Yvonne's attempts to save the marriage are clearly doomed to failure; Yvonne and Geoffrey are as isolated, and as incapable of coming together as the two volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. The description of the two isolated humans could equally well be applied to the volcanoes: "For a time they confronted each other like two mute unspeaking forts." (U.V., p.80) Lowry's writing here moves out from the pain of the relationship into the symbolic analogue of the landscape; the two immovable individuals (the Consul, unwilling to move, Yvonne, paralysed at times by the hopelessness of loving the Consul) are analogous to Laruelle's/

Laruelle's/ towers, the prison watch towers and the two volcanoes. But, after the intervening move outwards into the landscape, the novel's consciousness moves back into the more personal areas of the Consul's mind, and the landscape simply serves to remind Geoffrey Firmin of the darkness which he inhabits:

As for this particular beauty he knew it dead as his marriage and as wilfully slaughtered. The sun shining brilliantly now on all the world before him, its rays picking out the timber-line of Popocatepetl as its summit like a gigantic surfacing whale shouldered out of the clouds again, all this could not lift his spirit. The sunlight could not share his burden of conscience, of sourceless sorrow. It did not know him. (U.V., p.80)

It is perhaps easier for Geoffrey Firmin if he superimposes his emotional condition on the landscape, for his main concern is not - as possibly we imagine it should be - his marriage. He diverts his attentions from that major issue to the even more insuperable one of the condition of the modern world (with Mexico as paradigm) and bypasses the question of his future with Yvonne on the way back into his consciousness. Thus he again ignores the main problem in favour of "his burden of conscience" and the dark night of guilt in which he - and the world at large - resides.

Although Geoffrey's contemplation of the volcanoes has originally triggered thoughts about his marriage, he skilfully avoids direct confrontation with this issue, preferring either more diffuse and insuperable problems (at a macrocosmic level) or much more personal, possibly illusory problems connected with past guilts which he can do nothing to alleviate, save reach for the next drink and rationalise away. In this respect, Jacques Laruelle's rather harsh assessment of the Consul is very accurate:

--- the poor Consul had already lost almost all capacity for telling the truth and his life had become a quixotic oral fiction --- the German officers were merely an excuse to buy another bottle of mescal. (U.V., p.39)

Indeed, when Geoffrey Firmin says of the sun "it did not know him", reverberations are set up with the sunflower which seems to the Consul to incorporate the wrath of God. In the Light, he could almost be forced into a confrontation with his present difficulties, which would spoil the sheer magnitude of the scale of his torment; his difficulties are primarily born of human frailties, not of Promethean struggles with the psyche, with Fate, with history, with the past and with that wilful creature, the world. The Consul will not look towards the Light - "the sweet rays of that planet whose virtue leads men straight on every road", as Dante expresses the light of the sun round Mount Purgatory - but prefers to think that the Light is shunning him, rather than vice versa.

Thus the Consul's aspirations towards the Light emerge as temporary "aberrations" in what is generally a downward path. After his rejection of the sun's Light - "it did not know him"- the path upwards becomes perceptibly more fraught with difficulty:

The Consul was guiltily climbing the Calle Nicaragua.

It was as if he were toiling up some endless staircase between houses. Or perhaps even old Popeye itself. Never had it seemed such a long way to the top of this hill. The road with its tossing broken stones stretched on for ever into the distance like a life of agony. (U.V., p.81)

Under his burden of guilt, the Consul's climb up the Calle Nicaragua is a Promethean task. The ascent is linked with the striving towards the Light, symbolised in Under the Volcano as the climbing of Popocatepetl. The Consul's way is interrupted by thoughts of his next drink, and thus becomes more difficult:

It was as hot as a furnace too out on the street and the Consul sweated profusely. Away! Away! He was not going very far away, nor to the top of the hill. There was a lane branching to the left --- and somewhere along that lane to the right --- waited a cool nameless cantina ---

This was where he was going (the lane was plainly in sight now, a dog guarding it) ---

(U.V., pp.81-82)

Thoughts of alcohol bring the Consul an introduction to his spiritual domain which is Hell - "hot as a furnace", the Consul strays from the right path towards the Light, turning instead towards the cantina, the way to which is guarded by a dog, recalling Cerberus, the dog stationed at the entrance to Hell.

Thus far, the significance of the volcano is unclear; it is associated with the Light and yet at the same time, it towers over the action of the novel as a warning to the Consul. Hugh had "entertained a quite serious notion of finding time to climb Popo" (U.V., p.128) and has a vision of an Eden lying beyond the volcano at the end of Chapter 4:

There was something in the wild strength of this landscape --- the passionate, yet so nearly always hypocritical, affirmation of one's soul perhaps, he thought, of the desire to be, to do, good, what was right. It was as though he were gazing now beyond this expanse of plains and beyond the volcanoes out to the wide rolling blue ocean itself, feeling it in his heart still, the boundless impatience, the immeasurable longing. (U.V., p.128)

In Hugh's striving is revealed the possibility of a Northern Eden (the Edenic vision which is replicated in the imaginings of both the Consul and Yvonne) lying "beyond the volcanoes". The volcanoes can therefore be viewed as the gateway to that Eden, and as symbolic of striving toward the Light, of, for example, Hugh's "desire to be, to do good, what was right."

The Consul dreams of a similar ascent of the soul, which, presented as it is in juxtaposition with Hugh's vision of the volcanoes and beyond, suggests that Geoffrey, too, associates the ascent with the volcanoes. His dream opens Chapter 5:

BEHIND them walked the only living thing that shared their pilgrimage, the dog. And by degrees they reached the briny sea. Then, with souls well disciplined they reached the northern region, and beheld, the heaven aspiring hearts, the mighty mountain Himavat... (U.V., p.129)

The dog reappears frequently throughout Under the Volcano.

It is initially a warning to the Consul of the path he is taking—the "pariah" dog. However, it becomes Cerberus, guarding the gates to Hell, one of the three offspring of the monster Typhoeus, which was crushed under Mount Aetna (under the volcano!) The function of Cerberus is to prevent the living from entering the infernal regions. ¹⁸

The Consul's dream continues:

--- he was blowing away himself, whirled by a storm of blossoms into the mountains, where now the rain was falling. But this rain, that fell only on the mountains, did not assuage his thirst. Nor was he after all in the mountains --- He was lying face downward drinking --- Yet his thirst still remained unquenched. Perhaps because he was drinking, not water, but lightness --- (U.V., p.129)

It is highly significant that the rain does not "assuage" the Consul's "thirst", and that the only light he aspires to is the tequila bottle to which he finds himself running when he awakens! No amount of alcohol is ever going to assuage his thirst; what he really aspires to is death and darkness, not light. Reverberations are set up with the "black clouds -- over Himavant" in Eliot's "The Wasteland", and the concomitant symbolic aridity further enhances the meaning of Lowry's work. The critic, David Markson, suggests further possible levels of meaning in referring to the aspiration towards the Light and the "mighty mountain Himavat." Markson points out that there is a potential allusion to the Cabbalistic Tree of Life, where the summit is "Kether" or "Light", and also to the Delectable Mountains of Pilgrim's Progress. ¹⁹ Even more relevant to this chapter, Markson writes "Himavat similarly corresponds with the Mountain of Purgatory at the summit of which, in Dante, Eden is situated." ²⁰ In effect, it is only by aspiring toward the summit - the "Light" - of the volcano that the Consul can reach the Northern Eden which lies beyond.

However, the Consul's fate is not to aspire towards the light as sincerely as Hugh and Yvonne. In his dying vision,/

vision,/ Geoffrey Firmin sees that Hugh and Yvonne have passed him in their climb up Popocatepetl, and have gone beyond:

He was in Kashmir, he knew, lying in the meadows near running water among violets and trefoil, the Himalayas beyond, which made it all the more remarkable he should suddenly be setting out with Hugh and Yvonne to climb Popocatepetl. Already they had drawn ahead ---Hugh and Yvonne had gone. He suspected they had not only climbed Popocatepetl but were by now far beyond it. (U.V., p.375)

It is undoubtedly significant that Hugh and Yvonne are "far beyond" the volcano, while the Consul has been left behind to his fate. Although the Consul is dying at what is indicated as the same time as Yvonne's death (that is, both deaths are concurrent), Firmin's dying vision is of the separateness of their destinies. They may share the same fate on a temporal and mundane level, but the reader is directed towards two distinct interpretations of their deaths.

The interpretations of the deaths of Yvonne and Geoffrey which the reader is invited to construct are in many respects guided by the symbolic associations attached to the volcanoes in each case. Just before Yvonne's death, Hugh and Yvonne are confronted with the volcanoes:

Before them, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl continued to dominate the north-east, the Sleeping Woman now perhaps the more beautiful of the two, with jagged angles of blood-red snow on its summit ---

Chimborazo, Popocatepetl - so ran the poem the Consul liked - had stolen his heart away! 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.318-9)

The above passage, which identifies Yvonne with Ixtaccihuatl ("no sooner found than lost"), prefigures a final separation of Yvonne and Geoffrey which seems utterly inevitable by this point in the novel) and Geoffrey with Popocatepetl - "strangely/

"strangely/ the dreamer". This dividing of the "genetic" symbol of the volcano into two constituent images helps to remove the element of ambiguity in this most major of Lowry's symbols. Characteristically, the constituent images are to some extent antithetical (hence the initial ambivalent nature of the function of the volcano) and the tension between the images is that of "La Despedida", of the tragic severance between individuals and between societies and cultures which constitutes an important dynamic in Under the Volcano.

The spiritual direction taken by Hugh and Yvonne is identified - "They were climbing, approaching a little hilltop clearing", (U.V., p.322) - and then reinforced by the reappearance of the volcanoes:

Snowstorms drove along the summit of Ixtaccihuatl, obscuring it, while its mass was shrouded by cumulus. But the whole precipitous bulk of Popocatepetl seemed to be coming towards them, travelling with the clouds, leaning forward over the valley on whose side, thrown into relief by the curious melancholy light, shone one little rebellious hilltop with a tiny cemetery cut into it.

The cemetery was swarming with people visible only as their candle flames. (U.V., p.324)

Significantly, Hugh and Yvonne know Ixtaccihuatl to be there even if obscured and "shrouded". The Consul, in contrast, only sees Popocatepetl, the icon to his own inner condition (see U.V., p.80, p.81, p.69, p.340, p.375) and does not mention Ixtaccihuatl by name.

Furthermore, in the above reference to the volcanoes, the ominous note stuck - Ixtaccihuatl is "shrouded", while "under the volcano" Popocatepetl, Hugh and Yvonne see a "cemetery" in the "curious melancholy light" - is counter-balanced by two aspects of the passage. First, as has been indicated, Hugh and Yvonne see a fuller picture of the landscape (both concrete and moral) than the Consul ever does. The second aspect leads on from the first; part of the "reality" that Hugh and Yvonne perceive is the light on the hilltop and the flicker of all the candle flames.

The ascent of Hugh and Yvonne is further reinforced by the reverberations Lowry sets up with Dante, and with Dark as the Grave. In "approaching a little hilltop clearing", the two characters are aligned with Dante in the Inferno Canto I where he writes, "I found myself before a little hill/ and lifted up my eyes. Its shoulders glowed." Lowry reiterates this allusion when he refers to the shining of "one little rebellious hilltop". The second reference to the "people visible only as their candle flames" operates on two important levels. First, the candle flames in the cemetery have a structural significance; they reiterate that this is indeed the Day of the Dead, echoing the initial scene of Lowry's prologue/epilogue in Chapter 1 where Vigil and M. Laruelle "turned to watch the mourners, a little later to be visible only as the melancholy lights of their candles" (U.V., p.10) and the opening words of Chapter 2, "... 'A CORPSE will be transported by express!'" (U.V., p.48) Second, as touched on earlier in this chapter, the candles of the mourners in Under the Volcano are transformed into the single candle of hope burning for Juan Fernando at the end of Dark as the Grave.

By framing the two Mexican novels between the two images of burning candles, Lowry, establishes his "churrigueresque cathedral" towers (S.L., p.88), not only in terms of the structure of Under the Volcano itself, but also in terms of the two components of his cycle; the descent into the "Inferno" of Under the Volcano and ascent from the "Purgatorio", Dark as the Grave. Under the Volcano, wrote Lowry, "should be seen as essentially trochal" (S.L., p.88) but it is, too, a wheel within the greater projected cycle of The Voyage That Never Ends.

Even within Under the Volcano, Lowry sustains a counterpoint between the appalling descent of the Consul, and what is strongly suggested to be the ascent of Yvonne. The Consul knows himself to have been left behind by Hugh and Yvonne in their spiritual ascent of the volcano:

He could go no further. Exhausted, helpless, he sank to the ground. No one would help him even if they could. Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt.

(U.V., p.375)

The Consul has rejected human life and love, and the Love of God." "No se puede vivir sin amar", they would say, which would explain everything," (U.V., p.375) is the epitaph which Geoffrey Firmin invents for himself. Having rejected the possibility of love, and of human relationships, he is right in thinking, "no one would help him even if they could."

As he hurtles into the barranca (literally, the abyss), the Consul deludes himself that his destiny is to ascend the volcano (whilst knowing at the same time that he has been left behind in this ascent):

How could he have thought so evil of the world when succour was at hand all the time? And now he had reached the summit. Ah, Yvonne, sweetheart, forgive me! (U.V., p.375)

Possibly in this last of the Consul's self-delusions, there is a grain of salvation. He asks for Yvonne's forgiveness, and perhaps for this final, if incomplete, prayer, he is given a dog to guide him across the River Styx: "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine." (U.V., p.376)

Certainly, Sigbjørn Wilderness, as author of the fictional fiction "The Valley of the Shadow of Death", makes a retrospective comment on the fate of his "Consul character" which suggests that this last line of Under the Volcano does contain a glimmer of hope for this magnificently damned character:

The Mexicans believed that in the journey taken by the spirit in the realm of the dead there came a time when a wide River, difficult to cross, was reached. For this reason they killed a dog to accompany his master on the last journey. The spirit of the dog was supposed to reach the far side of the river in advance of the man, and upon seeing his master would jump into the water and help him across. (D.A.T.G., p.239)

While this at least allowed Lowry to resurrect the consciousness of Under the Volcano for future fictions, my own personal feeling is that nothing could alter the impetus of the entire novel by which the Consul is to be unutterably damned. Having stepped onto the "Infernal Machine" which Geoffrey Firmin constructs out of his own past, "no one could stop the machine" (U.V., p.226) and neither can a dead dog alter the path of Fate!

Therefore, the Consul's spiritual direction is downwards, and this direction has been prefigured by the "movement" of the volcanoes in relationship to his path through the novel:

--- he would take the path to Parían, to the Farolito.

Before him the volcanoes, precipitous, seemed to have drawn nearer. They towered up over the jungle, into the lowering sky - massive interests moving up in the background. (U.V., p.316)

The sets - backdrops to the ultimate tragedy - are moving into the Consul's vision, and this spiritual landscape is finally focussed in Chapter 12:

Popocatepetl towered through the window, its immense flanks partly hidden by rolling thunderheads, its peak blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead, the barranca, the Farolito, directly beneath it. Under the Volcano! It was not for nothing the ancients had placed Tartarus under Mt. Aetna, nor within it, the monster Typhoeus, with his hundred heads and - relatively - fearful eyes and voices. (U.V., p.340)

The Consul has chosen Parían - death - and the labyrinth of the Farolito as his destiny. Significantly, the Farolito and the barranca are placed "directly beneath" Popocatepetl; in other words, his fate is to end life "under the volcano".

The symbolic matrix has crystallised. Geoffrey is heading towards "Tartarus" - held to be the blackest region of hell, where,

--- the most impious and guilty among mankind were punished --- such as had been disobedient to their parents, traitors, adulterers --- where Ixion, Tityus, the Danaides, Tantalus. Sisyphus and c. were punished. 21

Thus the Consul is to share the fate of Ixion (bound eternally to the wheel of fire), Tityus (whose entrails were devoured eternally by vultures) and Sisyphus, in Tartarus, which (to reinforce just how severe is the Consul's extremity) is also "under the volcano".

Indeed, the Consul's "ascent" of the volcano would appear to be a contradiction of these carefully constructed and reinforced symbolic omens, except that it is the last of his self-delusions:

But there was nothing there: no peaks, no life,
no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly:
it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling
too, whatever it was, collapsing, while he was falling,
falling into the volcano, he must have climbed it
after all, though now there was this noise of foisting
lava in his ears, horribly --- (U.V., p.375)

Like Empedocles, the poet, the Consul's fate is to be hurled into the "foisting lava" of the volcano. However, this is not merely the fate of the individual, of the last tragic hero. Lowry enlarges on this destiny in a prophetic vision of the Holocaust of the Second World War:

--- it was in eruption, yet no, it wasn't the volcano,
the world itself was bursting, bursting into black
spouts of villages catapulted into space, with himself
falling through it all, through the inconceivable
pandemonium of a million tanks, through the blazing
of ten million burning bodies, falling, falling, into
a forest, falling --- (U.V., pp.375-6)

The vision expands from the hurtling downwards of the Consul, whose last hope is contained in his prayer to Yvonne for forgiveness, which is answered - ambiguously - by the dead dog being thrown down the ravine after him; the fate of the Consul is meshed with an apocalyptic view of the world's being consumed in a hellish blast, of a war which will end not only an era, but a particular view of civilisation.

Lowry himself points to the glimmer of redemptive possibility for Geoffrey Firmin (albeit only a faint glimmer), and to the way in which this relates to the position of the world itself:

--- there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old Consul at the end, who realizes that he is after all part of humanity: and indeed, as I have said before, what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind.

You like this garden?

Why is it yours?

We evict those who destroy.

(S.L., p.85)

Lowry's repeated mistranslation of the "? Le Gusta Este Jardín?" motif suggests that the "hint of redemption" for the Consul is confined to being no more than a hint. The Consul has offended against the ethical stance of the novel as established by this mistranslation. He has refused both love and life itself - the tenets by which he might remain in the Garden of Mexico - and he has willed his own eviction. Geoffrey Firmin, finally, is a destroyer of his own world and of himself. According to the wording of the true translation, the Consul is equally an offender; he has done nothing to prevent the immanent destruction of the "Garden of the World" by its children (for whom he, too, must bear responsibility) nor has he any children of his own to cultivate that "Garden" (further comparison is made later in this chapter with the garden legacy of Juan Fernando Martinez in Dark as the Grave).

In view of the hints of redemption - even taking into account the strong qualifications which are inherent in the text - the apocalyptic blast of the volcano into which Geoffrey Firmin falls might be seen as a purging blast, stripping him of all his self-deceptions until - as Lowry suggests - he "realizes that he is after all a part of humanity". For the purposes of his fictional cycle, it is essential that the novel's consciousness be resurrected in order to maintain a core "persona" throughout the novels. Thus it is entirely to Lowry's purpose to leave the Consul's fate as inevitable death and damnation on one level and yet, at the same time, to incorporate this element of ambiguity. While Geoffrey Firmin is clearly denied the Northern Paradise/

Paradise/ which lies beyond the volcanoes, it is certain that his consciousness - remembering that the narrative centres on what he terms "my battle for the survival of the human consciousness" (U.V., p.221) - is to be salvaged for future novels.

As counterpart to the Consul's death in the purging flames of the volcano, Yvonne has a vision of this fiery blast as she dies:

--- Geoffrey's old chair was burning, his desk, and now his book was burning, the pages were burning, burning, whirling up from the fire they were scattered, burning, along the beach --

And leaving the burning dream Yvonne felt herself suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars--
(U.V., pp. 336-7)

The burning house is a recurrent image in Lowry's imagination. Lowry had already lost in a fire what was a major manuscript by all accounts; In Ballast to the White Sea was to have been the Paradiso part of The Voyage that Never Ends, and had reached more than two thousand pages in length when he put it aside to complete Volcano.²²

The main protagonist in In Ballast was to have been Sigbjørn Wilderness, judging by the remaining fragments of manuscript and by the letter written by Lowry to David Markson in 1951. Ironically, this Sigbjørn did not appear in print because of the fire at Dollarton on June 7, 1944²³; while Sigbjørn's first appearance as a character in a novel is after a fire "in [his] poor beloved rainy house in Eridanus" (D.A.T.G., p.24). Lowry was to be beset further by fire towards the end of his life, and this served only to reinforce the horror sustained in such appallingly uninspired poems as "A Lament - June 1944":

Our house is dead
It burned to the ground
On a morning in June --- 24

and "After Publication of Under the Volcano":

Success is like some horrible disaster
Worse than your house burning, the sounds of ruination
As the roof tree falls --- 25

However, as Yvonne's dying vision demonstrates, Lowry was to use this persistent horror to much better effect in his fiction. Yvonne is lifted from the ashes towards the stars in an ecstasy-an ecstasy, which Ronald Binns points out, was to have been an ending to Chapter 11 "with Hugh and Yvonne making love under the trees, Yvonne's impressions of rising towards the stars expressive not of death, but of orgasm." ²⁶ Lowry makes it clear that Yvonne is saved by his reference to Eridanus. Although the Paradise she has left behind on earth is burned, these same tides of Eridanus carry her on her ascent:

--- the tide washed under the ruined house, the pleasure boats that had ferried song upstream sailed home silently over the dark waters of Eridanus. Their house was dying, only an agony went there now.

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

Yvonne is stripped of her mundane concerns by the fire, and thus freed to ascend to the stars. The above passage also provides the lyrical counterpart to the Consul's description of the storm in the letter Laruelle finds in Chapter 1 (on what Jacques terms "Night of the Culmination of the Pleiades!" (U.V., p.35)) The "wheel of water" image is repeated and embellished in both passages. In the Consul's storm in his vision of a Northern Paradise, the "silver scalloped rim of wake" and "scrolled silver rim of wash" become "the wash of another unseen ship, like a great wheel, the vast spokes of the wheel whirling across the bay -" (U.V., p.43). For Yvonne, Sophocles' "power that crosses the white sea --- making a path under surges that threaten to engulf" (U.V., p.7) is no mere dream; the "millwheel reflections of sunlight on water" (U.V., p.336) bear her aloft "with ever wider circlings like rings on water."

Ultimately, Lowry leaves the Consul with unfinished business to be investigated by Sigbjørn Wilderness in Dark as The Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid. Wilderness re-enters the darkness/

darkness/ of self-pity and despair that the Consul inhabits as his natural environment. In fact, the self-pity experienced by both characters emerges as the key to their sufferings, to their inability to love, and thus to their roads to damnation. Too focussed on the interior landscape of failure and the concomitant despair, both characters find it difficult to concentrate at the same time on the outside world in which love may be offered and found. Sigbjørn thinks of himself as a man in the process of being cast adrift in the world:

--- he had few friends left. --- He was careful of making any friends, people liked him, often loved him. But he did not like to think of what it was in him they loved for the saying had got around that even to meet him was disaster. --- Not Faust was a man more accursed than he ---

(D.A.T.G., pp.235-6)

Sigbjørn is thus unable to take the proffered friendship without paranoid speculation as to the motives behind what he is being given. Self-pityingly - in spite of the love of his wife, Primrose and despite the friends who obviously love him, warts and all - he thinks, "Not Faust was a man more accursed than he."

The Consul derives a similar grotesque pleasure from his lonely despair, writing in the unsent letter to Yvonne,

For myself I like to take my sorrow into the shadow of old monasteries, my guilt into cloisters and under tapestries, and into the misericordes of unimaginable cantinas where sad-faced potters and legless beggars drink at dawn, whose cold jonquil beauty one rediscovers in death.

(U.V., p.41)

Sigbjørn, too, would like to wallow in the hopeless certainty that people only love him for the disaster he bears with him! But he cannot make the absolute evasions and self-delusions that the Consul makes in order to exclude hope from his life. After considering himself more damned than Faust, Sigbjørn continues:

--- but was he not blessed also --- The things he had survived would have smitten most men dead with fear: even to contemplate. But on the surface he was merely a drunk and an unsuccessful writer.

(D.A.T.G., p.236)

Lowry makes it quite clear that Sigbjørn is capable of a realistic appraisal of his position. Unlike the Consul, Sigbjørn is not tied to ideas of his magical powers, and thus cannot be presented as victim of the dark undertow of Mexican (and world) history. Nor is Sigbjørn inextricably bound to a horrific interpretation of his own past, because he can at least see that from the outside he appears "merely a drunk and an unsuccessful writer". Although this is a bleak view of what he has attained, Sigbjørn does not succumb to a preoccupation with failure, and to the hopeless self-pity which this brings the Consul.

Indeed, mixed with the less-than-pleasant knowledge of his failures is the persistent note of the bond of friendship struck by Primrose and Juan Fernando; their words return to Sigbjørn even in moments of despair. As soon as he has thought of himself in Faustian terms, he is recalled to a view of himself as a member of humanity, "God will help you if you ask him," he remembered Martinez saying." Thus Sigbjørn is related to Goethe's Faust, for whom there is the possibility of redemption. Significantly, the words of his friend return Sigbjørn from the labyrinth of his memories of his last visit to Mexico to the present, to his responsibilities towards Primrose, and to life itself: after his initial failure in the search for his friend, he does not fall into the customary despair:

They were tired and could not, finally, find it; the address they had been given, number 25, was a closed green horrible obtuse building. Sigbjørn thought of Fernando standing outside it with his sword unsheathed towards the sun --- It was terribly hot. Sigbjørn - remembering Fernando's twenty miles' run - was turned towards life: he would not let the day be ruined and asserted he would take Primrose to Monte Alban. (D.A.T.G., p.237)

It is important that Fernando is turned "towards the sun". For what Sigbjørn finds at the end of his journey through the labyrinth of the past is a small flicker of light which constitutes the legacy bequeathed him by his friend.

In portraying Sigbjørn's emergence from the Dark and the/

the/ chains of the past, Lowry draws on the structure of symbolic interrelationships established in Under the Volcano. First, although Lowry does not make it entirely explicit (and again there is room for conjecture as to the author's precise intentions), there appears to be a symbolic link between the volcanoes in the first novel and Monte Alban in Dark as The Grave. The volcanoes represent a joint ascent which the Consul and Yvonne are destined not to make together, while Sigbjørn and Primrose do ascend Monte Alban and view the reality of Sigbjørn's legacy.

Second, what Fernando has left behind is not only the Paradise which Yvonne in particular had longed for, but also a Garden of Eden; "every man was his own Garden of Eden." (D.A.T.G., p.251) It is certainly clear that what Sigbjørn and Primrose see is a Northern Paradise:

--- it was Fernando he saw in all this space, this fulfillment over the whole great hundreds of miles of valley one saw from the top of Monte Alban.

Fernando had helped to make this life fruitful and good as men should have had it in the Garden of Eden: this was progress as God wanted it on the first day when he saw that the world was good. It was the Garden of Eden. Le gusta este jardin que es suyo? (D.A.T.G., p.238)

Again, there is an allusion to the motif which recurs throughout Under the Volcano. The Consul finally translates the words of the sign in the public gardens (the repeated motif in Volcano)- "Do you like this garden, that is yours?" (U.V., p.235), and the importance of the motif is underscored by its reappearance as the final words of the novel. While on the one hand, the Consul is too bound up with his own miseries to take responsibility for his own personal relationships and to tend (politically) the garden of the world, Sigbjørn, by contrast, learns that what Fernando has left behind is literally a garden - Eden regained. Thus Sigbjørn has been led to a vision of a garden which he can indeed like and tend.

Although Sigbjørn has not entirely completed his excavations/

excavations/ of the past at this point in the novel, it is firmly established that he will survive and even triumph over the ordeal. Indeed, the last point which might be made about Sigbjørn's memory of Fernando is that his friend is turned towards the sun - the sun which had glared accusingly at the Consul, and symbol of the Light and the true path which the Consul is constantly engaged in evading and avoiding. From the point of Sigbjørn's ascent of Monte Alban onwards, there are recurring images of light, and these are frequently of a flicker of light in the darkness of the labyrinth:

And it was of Fernando too that he thought as following the guide, he descended into the dark tomb number seven, where gleamed the guide's one candle.
(D.A.T.G., p.238)

The candle in the above passage is echoed:

The candles were being lit --- and Sigbjørn was glad that they had bought a generous one for Fernando; they lit a great candle and prayed for him, 'A candle is a statement of faith,' Primrose said softly, 'a way of saying: "my dear one, I have not forgotten." And like the cross, it is a symbol of acceptance of suffering, but it's also of resurrection...'
(D.A.T.G., p.256)

The candle is symbolic of "resurrection" - of the resurrection of Sigbjørn Wilderness from the horrors of his own past, the light at the end of the labyrinth of memory.

The links with the symbolic structure of Under the Volcano are further reinforced by this religious element in Dark as the Grave. Not only is there the repetition of the image of the cross, but there is also a reworking of the Consul's unsuccessful attempt at prayer, where he cried, "Destroy the world!" (U.V., p.291) Sigbjørn, in contrast, prays "that the Virgin Mary might hear this humble prayer and that in some obscure way it might benefit Fernando". (D.A.T.G., p.253) While he is in the church, Sigbjørn is also given the opportunity to make "restitution" for the Consul's failure as Good Samaritan:

In the pew in front of him, he saw as they stood up, a drunk was huddled asleep, and yes, on his face too was an expression of infinite pity and peace. His sombrero had fallen to the floor so Sigbjørn picked it up for him. How many times and in the same way had not Sigbjørn himself in this terrible city taken sanctuary!
(D.A.T.G., pp.253-4)

It will be remembered that the Consul, preaching non-intervention, prevents Hugh from taking any action at the scene of the dying Indian, supposedly "For his protection" (U.V., p.245). In fact, this then exposes the dying man to the rapacity of the pelado, who, by altering the Indian's hat, finds out that there is still some money to be had. The Consul then instructs Hugh to move the Indian's hat so that he can breathe, which Hugh does, but the Consul will not perform this small task himself. Thus Sigbjørn makes a symbolic change in the course of events by his action in picking up the Indian's hat; whereas the Consul hides behind the pretext of officially "protecting" the dying man, Sigbjørn recognises the needs of another human being as being essentially those of his own. More fully than is ever achieved by the Consul, Sigbjørn recognises that he is "after all part of humanity."
(S.L., p.85)

When Sigbjørn finds that the friend he has come to visit in Mexico is dead, instead of despair, he himself finds his own regeneration. What Juan Fernando Martinez bequeathes is (in addition to the garden left in Mexico, of which more in the next chapter) a sense of control over our destiny. Ironically, Fernando's death has been remarkably similar to that of the Consul; he had been shot while drunk, probably by the fascists who would have opposed the work of the Banco Ejidal. In fact, Fernando had probably even less control over his fate than Geoffrey Firmin. Although Sigbjørn thinks,

The gigantic tragedy of life goes too fast for those who must merely sit down on some tomb and between scenes try and interpret it, especially when they themselves are actors: --- (D.A.T.G., p.256)

the garden which he finds on the site of the Banco Ejidal leads/

leads/ him to a continuation of the dramatic metaphor. He asks, "Were we not empowered as director of that film at least to turn the apparent disaster of our lives into triumph?" (D.A.T.G., p.260).

The hope which Sigbjørn manages to salvage from the "apparent disaster" of Fernando's death is symbolised by the burning candles:

Suddenly Sigbjørn found that they were all looking at the candles in the church. What was the meaning of the candle, the light burned to the dead? Was it the symbol of the mediation for life? Perhaps man was not so irrevocably alone, he thought --- between the gulf that separated the dead and the living from the unknown and from the ineffable was the mediating spirit of what was known as the Holy Virgin, mother of us all. (D.A.T.G., p.262)

Sigbjørn finds the hope which has eluded Geoffrey Firmin; a faith in other human beings, in life, and a religious faith. Even in "the church of the Virgin for those who have nobody them with", "man was not so irrevocably alone", and the candle is symbolic of the love for one's fellow-man, as well as of the Love of God. As Lowry hauls Sigbjørn up out of the abyss revisited, his intention to move his character from spiritual darkness into the light of a world burgeoning once more is quite clear, whatever the eventual configuration of symbols was to have been.

As co-editor of Dark as the Grave (with Lowry's wife, Margerie), Douglas Day has this to say of Lowry's symbols:

[They included] Not the authentic simple forms of vine, plate, wine, stone, woman, tree - Lowry was after bigger game: the archetypal daemonic forms of abyss, labyrinth, burnt forest, monster, blighted garden, ruined castle, dark and ominous forces at work in an ancient and dangerous world. 27

There is every sign that the symbols of these "dark and ominous forces" were to have been transmitted into a more expansive configuration of symbols of all that was wondrous in the world, of the mysterious forces of life. Lowry gives clear evidence of this new configuration in the ending to Dark as the Grave:

The Banco Ejidal had become a garden.

Then they were leaving the state of Oaxaca behind them, and behind them, too, in the dark church of the Virgin for those who have nobody them with, one candle burning... (D.A.T.G., p.267)

The fertile garden of Paradise Regained and the candle's light are affirmations of life, the legacy of Fernando, Fisher King who has "set his lands in order".

In his travels as a sightseer, Sigbjørn hears a legend of ancient Kings of Mexico:

When a king died, his body was borne to his tomb with much ceremony, placed on a funeral pyre, and the ashes placed in the tomb. In another room there was a door to a dark enclosure --- it was said that this cavity extended indefinitely under the ground, and it also was said that some were thrown into the tunnel alive, of their own free will, sacrificing themselves to the gods, in the hope of resurrection, rebirth. (D.A.T.G., p.261)

This appears as a mythologised version of Fernando's death, for he is in effect a "King" - the Fisher King - whose death brings "rebirth" and fertility to his land. In Sigbjørn's search through the "extended cavity" or labyrinth of his friend's grave, he eventually finds "hope of --- rebirth".

The reference to the ashes of the "funeral pyre" also contributes to the consistent nature of Lowry's symbolic and mythological framework for his novels. In the sense that the Consul feels himself being consumed by the flames within it, the volcano has proved to be the funeral pyre of the Consul, and from the ashes, a similar consciousness is resurrected in order to experience the ordeal of Sigbjørn's re-entering of the Mexican Inferno. Out of Sigbjørn's travels beneath the funeral pyre of Fernando comes a true rebirth. This rebirth is prefigured by the phoenix, a symbol also linked with the purging blast of the volcano, and the fires and ashes of the funeral pyre. Sigbjørn himself speculates on the phoenix as symbol of ascent:

It was as if the funeral pile had proved inadequate to the phoenix, and he had to look around him for another kind of immolation in the depths of the past. And he would find his old self in Mexico if anywhere, if not quite the old self he had meant: he would come here, if anywhere, face to face as well as with, he hoped, Fernando, with everything that that self had imperfectly transcended. (D.A.T.G., p.108)

Lowry reinforces the idea that Sigbjørn's escape from Mexico is an incomplete rebirth as follows:

Had, as Daniel jovially asked him, the phoenix clapped his wings? No, alas, Sigbjørn now could unfortunately answer the question, the phoenix had not. Not yet. True, he could see Mexico itself as utter ruination, in itself a charred ruin, the damnation from which he had risen, phoenixlike, to write his trilogy ---. Perhaps being in Mexico was, as it were, the spiritual analogue of the second disaster, when their house burned down, from which conflagration he had far from risen, and in the midst of which, spiritually speaking he still stood. (D.A.T.G., pp.108-9)

The ruins of the main protagonist of Sigbjørn's initial novel (and correspondingly, of the Consul in Volcano), of Sigbjørn himself, of Mexico, and of the world are linked by the images of the house in conflagration, of the funeral pyre, and of the eruption of the volcano. And the incomplete rebirth has indeed left Sigbjørn Wilderness with unfinished business, precisely located in Mexico - in Mitla, funeral pyre of the Zapotecan kings.

It is in Mexico that Sigbjørn would - ironically, "he hoped" - confront his own past, that minotaur-monster lurking within the labyrinth of time. Ironically, too, he is not to come "face to face" with Fernando; the disaster he is to confront is much greater than he anticipates, but perhaps, so too is the triumph. He is to be led from the "charred ruin" and "conflagration" on the landscape into a far more infernal region below. But - and this is vital to Lowry's purpose - the signs of emergence from the flames of hell are present throughout the novel in the form of the symbol of the phoenix.

The emergence of the phoenix as a symbol in Lowry's fiction has been prefigured in Under the Volcano. Both Hugh and Yvonne free birds in what appear to be unwittingly redemptive acts.

In Chapter 6, Hugh holds a dialogue with his guilty conscience:

No: I am much afraid there is little enough in your past, which will come to your aid against the future. Not even the seagull? said Hugh ...

The seagull - pure scavenger of the empyrean, hunter of edible stars - I rescued that day as a boy when it was caught in a fence on the cliffside and was beating itself to death, blinded by snow, and though it attacked me, I drew it out unharmed, with one hand by its feet, and for one magnificent moment held it up in the sunlight, before it soared away on angelic wings over the freezing estuary?

(U.V., p.155)

It is the saving of the seagull which Hugh presents to counter the evidence cited of his personal failures and anti-Semitism. Since such significance is attached to this act, the seagull itself appears to have symbolic importance; Hugh's act of kindness, of caring about the world, is invested with a mythic quality and as such, it is the first step on his journey to save the world (this is reinforced later in the novel by his decision to take a political stance in the battle to save civilisation). The thematic point which Lowry is making here is reinforced by his selection of certain key words which help to integrate the particular symbolic matrix involved in this passage. The seagull is "hunter" of "stars", released into "sunlight" on its "angelic wings". The idea of the "hunter" is possibly of some tangential significance, for, in contrast, the Consul is hunted, and haunted by the vultures which seem to lurk, awaiting the pickings from his bones. The aspects of light, flight and transcendence attached to the seagull in this instance prepare for the integration of these features into the symbol of the phoenix.

In Chapter 11 of Volcano, Yvonne stumbles upon a caged bird, and her freeing of it is invested with the same kind of mythic significance as Hugh's freeing of the seagull:

It was a small eagle she had startled, and which was now shivering in the damp and dark of its prison ---. With hurried quivering hands Yvonne began to unfasten the cage. The bird fluttered out of it --- it knew it was free - up soaring, with a sudden cleaving of pinions into the deep dark blue pure sky above, in which at that moment appeared one star. No compunction touched Yvonne. She felt only an inexplicable secret triumph and relief: no one would ever know she had done this ---

(U.V., p.321)

What is important in this act is that there is no ulterior motive, for "no one would ever know" of it. Freeing the eagle from its "prison" is a purely altruistic gesture, perhaps a gesture of faith in life. The release of the bird towards the star prefigures Yvonne's own ascent towards the stars, so again, the minor act has a thematic significance, and the suggestion of transcendence, with the "sudden cleaving of pinions", of ascent towards the star and of movement from dark to light again prepare for the integration of light, flight and transcendence in the phoenix.

Interestingly, the Consul's freeing of the horse is preceded by an image of a bird which induces in him a destructive frenzy:

Suddenly the Consul thought he saw an enormous rooster flapping before him, clawing and crowing. He raised his hands and it merded on his face. ---

--- The cock flapped before his eyes, blinding him.--- Where was that bloody cock? He would chop off its head.

(U.V., p.372)

Such thoughts as these indicate just how destructive is Geoffrey Firmin's relationship with all external objects; his thoughts are in clear contrast to the pure altruism posited in the cases of Yvonne and Hugh. At another level, the presence of the cock also suggests just how near its end the Consul's day is; the action of the novel has been contained (apart, of course, from Chapter 1) within the hours between sunrise and sunset. The cock, too, is symbolic counterpart of the chicken belonging to the old woman at the beginning of the novel's action: "The old woman with her chicken and the dominoes chilled her [Yvonne's]/

[Yvonne's]/ heart. It was like an evil omen." (U.V., p.56)

The return of this "evil omen" in Chapter 12 contributes to Geoffrey Firmin's hallucinatory and frenzied state, in which he tears "frantically at the horse's bridle" (U.V., p.373) and unleashes what Day termed "the dark and ominous forces at work in an ancient and dangerous world." The horse is linked with these elemental forces:

Thunderclaps crashed on the mountains and then at hand. Released, the horse reared; tossing its head, it wheeled round and plunged neighing into the forest.

At first the Consul felt a queer relief. Now he realized he had been shot. He fell on one knee, then, with a groan, flat on his face in the grass. 'Christ', he remarked, puzzled, 'this is a dingy way to die.'
(U.V., pp. 373-4)

The Consul has in effect abandoned himself to the destructive forces, and his ill-judged release of the horse brings about Yvonne's death. His attempt to make restitution for his "policy of non-intervention" regarding the Indian dying by the wayside by freeing the Indian's horse, sequestered by the Mexican fascists, comes far too late and has been prompted by incoherent drunkenness more than feeling for his fellow creature. "Oh Yvonne, we cannot allow what we created to sink down to oblivion in this dingy fashion-" (U.V., p.45) he had written, but he does little to "prevent".

In symbolic terms, the Consul is too fascinated by the darker forces in the human soul (hence his pursuit of "Secret Knowledge") to allow the regenerative forces much operating room. In the counterbalancing of Eros and Thanatos which Lowry presents as the landscape of the human psyche, Geoffrey Firmin chooses his own failure and imbalance. In the Promethean battle with his own alcoholism, the Consul finally abandons himself to the vultures which have been wheeling overhead, awaiting his demise:

Birds were sailing up there, ascending higher and higher. Infernal bird of Prometheus!

They were vultures, that on earth so jealously contend with one another, defiling themselves with blood and filth, but who were yet capable of rising, like this, above the storms, to heights shared only by the condor, above the summit of the Andes -

(U.V., p.318)

Although the vultures constitute a menacing presence throughout Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave - "evil omens" indeed - even they are able to rise above the filth in which they deal. On the one hand, the vultures are one side of the vulture/phoenix antithesis, while on the other hand, they contain a message for the Consul: that it is possible to transcend the degradations of the physical world.

Lowry also presents the phoenix in antithesis to the minotaur, the monster awaiting Geoffrey Firmin through the labyrinth of the Farolito, and awaiting Sigbjørn Wilderness on his return to Mexico. Douglas Day presents an insight into the true nature of the minotaur: "the minotaur will turn out to be Sigbjørn himself, or a piece of him." ²⁸ The minotaur is that part of the Consul and of Sigbjørn which they fear most: the anxieties and guilts of the past. In the antithetical pairing of the symbols of minotaur and phoenix, Lowry presents a view of the "human consciousness", of man bound by the chains of his interpretation of the past, and at the same time, able to transcend this handicap, and as containing the seeds of fresh life and inspiration. It is significant then, that what Sigbjørn finds - in addition to "his lonely dying youth" (D.A.T.G., p.264) - is a friend who is both death and life to him. And of course, he finds that Fernando - whose own personal philosophy had been that "every man was his own Garden of Eden" (D.A.T.G., p.251) has left behind him a Mexican garden which still flourishes. Juan Fernando Martinez, like the phoenix, has contained the seeds of fresh life for the world, and inspiration for Sigbjørn Wilderness.

CHAPTER 10: NOTES

1. Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, p.31.
2. Dante Alighieri, The Inferno, John Ciardi, trans., p.28.
3. Anthony Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Word, p.34.
4. Calderón de la Barca, El Mágico Prodigioso, p.139.
5. Anthony Kilgallin, p.34.
6. Ibid., pp. 34-5.
7. G.P. Jones, "Malcolm Lowry: Time and the Artist" University of Toronto Quarterly (Vol. 51, No. 2 Winter 1981/2), p.193.
8. George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror" in Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, p.68.
9. Ronald Binns, Malcolm Lowry, (London: Methuen, 1984) p.68.
10. Ibid., p.68.
11. Ibid., p.68.
12. Ibid., p.72.
13. Matthew Corrigan, "Masks and the Man: The Writer as Actor" in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p.211.
14. Ibid., p.211.

15. Barry Wood, "Malcolm Lowry's Metafiction: The Biography of a Genre" in Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p. 262.
16. Ibid., p.262.
17. Ronald Binns, p.73.
18. J. Lemprière, Lemprière's Classical Dictionary (London: Bracken Books, 1984), p.701.
19. David Markson, "Myth in Under the Volcano" Prairie Schooner (Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, Winter 1963/64), p.346.
20. Ibid., p.345.
21. J. Lemprière, p.659.
22. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.123.
23. Douglas Day, p.300.
24. Malcolm Lowry, "A Lament - June 1944" in George Woodcock, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work. p.94.
25. Malcolm Lowry, "After Publication of Under the Volcano" in George Woodcock, ed., p.95.
26. Ronald Binns, p.36.
27. Douglas Day, "Preface" to Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, p.13.
28. Ibid., p.15.

PART IV: Chapter 11

"Eridanus/Styx: A Paradise in Flux"

PART IV: REBIRTH/ASCENT

CHAPTER 11

"Eridanus/Styx: A Paradise in Flux"

The Mariner hath been cast into a
trance; for the angelic power causeth
the vessel to drive northward faster
than human life could endure.
-- the Mariner awakes, and his
penance begins anew. 1

Paradoxically, Sigbjørn Wilderness's friend, Juan Fernando Martinez, is symbol of a force greater than death: Juan Fernando emerges as the force and vitality which drives man through his life towards a future which is lived, rather than endured. Sigbjørn's vision of the past as the death of a former self - he is bereft of his "lonely dying youth" (D.A.T.G., p.264) - is subsumed under his emergence into the Garden of the personal Eden which had been Juan Fernando's philosophy. Driven northwards like the Ancient Mariner, Sigbjørn is to create his Northern Eden, Eridanus, surrounded by the tides which pull at his life in the extended short story, novella, "The Forest Path to the Spring", which was to have become a novel in Lowry's cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends. But, having taken the consciousness present in the cycle of fiction to that Northern Paradise, it is only to be evicted and cast adrift to continue the penance for the tragedies of the past in October Ferry to Gabriola.

Douglas Day points out that Lowry's intention was that "The Forest Path to the Spring" should serve as the "coda" to the author's cycle. ² As such, it would have produced an effect of equilibrium, asking simply how Man is to continue to construct and cultivate his personal Eden-be it interior or exterior, or both - after he has once again been evicted. If the question is posed in the context of "The Forest Path to the Spring", the story contains an answer; the protagonists which are an extension of Sigbjørn and Primrose have united in their love against the more destructive forces of nature and the malign forces of industrial and technological invasion in gestures of affirmation/

affirmation/ which are built from daily, weekly, seasonal, and annual cycles to make them at one with nature, and able to face disaster.

However, Day points to another version of Lowry's plan for his literary cycle, contained in an unpublished letter to Harold Matson:

THE VOYAGE THAT NEVER ENDS
The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness, I
Untitled Sea Novel
Lunar Caustic
Under the Volcano: The Centre
Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid
Eridanus
La Mordida
The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness, II ³

In other words, at this point, Lowry planned to have "The Forest Path" either as a component of the Eridanus section, or to be expanded such that it would become Eridanus in itself. It would appear that, instead of finishing on the note of equilibrium struck in "The Forest Path", Sigbjørn's sojourn on the tidal wave of the Lowrian imagination would have been completed by a further "Ordeal". Unfortunately, no clearer evidence as to the nature of this "ordeal" is available. However, since Lowry's intention was to incorporate all of his fiction into the cycle, October Ferry to Gabriola must have constituted part of the undertaking. Whatever the author's intentions for the novel's position within the cycle, October Ferry would have returned the "consciousness" to a position of flux, anxiety, and human suffering. It became a novel which threatened to elude the writer's control, emerging as a work "more serious" (S.L., p.356) than it had started. October Ferry was undermined by the increasing chaos of Lowry's own life, and the nature of the novel as we have it is again altered by the fact that it is a posthumous editing of 500 pages of manuscript. As Lowry wrote during a return to alcoholic bingeing in Vancouver in 1954, of his work (or otherwise) on The Voyage, "I ought to have been writing this, not living it or dying it" (S.L., p.368).

Even although October Ferry returns to the theme of man dispossessed and burdened by the past, Lowry demonstrates his artistic consistency with the plan for a modern Divine Comedy, for Ethan Llewelyn is in search of Light. Lowry is still engaged in his continual battle to resurrect from the tragedies of the past - the tragedies of Geoffrey Firmin and Sigbjørn Wilderness, and the sufferings of Dana Hilliot, Bill Plantagenet and Ethan Llewelyn - a hope for the future which is realistic. To reiterate the author's essential problem - the paradigms of suffering are many while our knowledge of human joy appears to have produced little in the way of symbolic foundations which might have nurtured Lowry in his task. Instead of mastering new material, he is to be found experimenting with language and with old subject-matter. It has to be said that whilst, for example, the poetic lyricism of his portrayal of man at one with nature in "The Forest Path" is a triumph in itself, it is a lesser one for the kind of author Lowry was - for someone who engaged in mortal combat with ideas, and for whom the entire armoury of Western culture might be called into service.

Thus the ascent from despair to hope in Lowry's fiction is fraught with difficulties. First, Lowry's fiction was ever in danger of becoming overburdened by the events of his own life. Second, Lowry as artist was faced with the enduring literary problem of how to depict Man in a Paradise "Regained". Third, his characters were not to come upon their Northern Paradise by any direct route; instead, they were to sojourn upon a difficult and often involuted path, with little certitude as to there being a Light at the end of it.

At the same time, Lowry's vision of Eden on earth is possibly at its most powerful when he has only just managed to drag his protagonist back from the gates of Hell. The best example of this occurs at the end of Dark as the Grave. It is probable that it is precisely because Sigbjørn Wilderness has endured the human sufferings with which it is possible to identify, and more, that his emergence into Juan Fernando's legacy of Light/

Light/ and fertility is so persuasive.

For Sigbjørn has indeed been submerged in the dark cavern of the past, and it appears that he has returned to Mexico to subject himself to precisely this darkness and despair. At the same time, he is most anxious that Primrose should enjoy her holiday. But as Primrose becomes acclimatised to her surroundings, and begins to put the more recent past behind her, Sigbjørn is increasingly enmeshed in the habits of the past. Lowry writes,

This was her life. This was her rebirth, her becoming the phoenix. And yet, while Primrose was being renewed again, Sigbjørn seemed to see nothing, to love nothing, to sway away from her into some agony of self, chained by fear, wrapped in the tentacles of the past, like some gloomy Laocoon ...
(D.A.T.G., p.177)

Yet again, it is worth noting Lowry's talent for reiterating his thematic concerns in a highly condensed manner. Within the space of a few lines, he recalls the symbol of rebirth, the phoenix, and contrasts this with the fears induced by excessive self-analysis and the resultant inability to love anything or anyone. The sea-serpents which crushed Laocoon are transmuted into the "tentacles of the past" which threaten Sigbjørn, and at the same time, suggest the motif of Under the Volcano: "No se puede vivir sin amar."

Alone in the dark while Primrose sleeps, Sigbjørn faces the horrors of his memories of Mexico, and he comes to dread the approach of that time of day when he must do so. His nocturnal penances erode whatever psychological gains he makes during the day, and Lowry clearly establishes a pattern (which in itself becomes a rhythm) thus:

--- every dusty poor village glowed like the dawn
and the very abode had this same ruddy warm colour,
and the colour of dawn, if you like of hope itself.

In spite of hope however, twilight was coming on.

Gliding downhill at at least seventy and taking
a detour into some town gleaming below, its churches
below the first stars, suddenly they blew a tyre.

(D.A.T.G., p.216)

Lowry establishes that dawn is associated with light and hope: and that conversely, as daylight fades, hope begins to ebb. As hope disappears, Sigbjørn prepares for his re-entry into the abyss of night, Darkness and despair. It is even more appropriate that the bus should be travelling "downhill", that single word recalling that memorable and highly significant opening of Chapter 8 of Under the Volcano, "DOWNHILL..."

However, Sigbjørn's vision is rarely one of unmitigated Darkness. In the above extract, he sees "some town gleaming below, its churches below the first stars" indicating that the candle of hope is never completely extinguished, and prefiguring the candle which he is to leave burning for his dead friend at the end of the novel. Even as he descends further into the night, there are prescient intimations of a rebirth into light. The journey continues thus:

Darkness, and strange lights were moving in the hills; lights were flashing in the fields beneath the bus. Wandering lights, like lighthouses, caused by light behind latticed windows. Sometimes these lights seemed to be signalling as to a plane. --- But now it was night. --- Somehow he had that feeling, that subtle sense of change, almost imperceptible, as perhaps when you die you don't know you're dying, it's the same kind of darkness, and you don't know you're crossing. (D.A.T.G., p.217)

Once again, Lowry recalls the structure and impetus (if not - as in this case - the exact wording) of his earlier novel. For the opening to the Consul's letter - that microcosm of his soul's ailments - had been "...Night: and once again, the nightly grapple with death ---". This construction is used repeatedly by Lowry in order to emphasise the momentum of the novels' narrative line, and the direction being taken by the novels' consciousness. Therefore the words "Darkness, and strange lights were moving ---" carry with their meaning the associations with emphasis, as established particularly at the openings of the chapters of Under the Volcano. For example, Chapter 8, as has been noted, begins "DOWNHILL...", Chapter 10, "'MESCAL'", Chapter 11, "SUNSET", and Chapter 12, with "'MESCAL'" once again.

The Consul's letter to Yvonne employs the same emphatic construction at the beginning of the paragraphs. A pattern of light and dark is also established in these openings as follows: "Night: and once again, the nightly grapple with death---" (U.V., p.41), "It is a light blue moonless summer evening, but late, ---" (U.V., p.42), "(Several mescals later.)" (U.V. p.43), "(Several mescalitos later and dawn in the Farolito)" (U.V., p.45) are examples of Lowry's linking of the time of day with the condition of Geoffrey Firmin's soul, and of his alcoholism with the descent into hell, or that hell on earth, the Farolito. The progression observed in the Consul's letter is expanded in the ensuing main body of the novel, where the words "MESCAL", "DOWNHILL", and "SUNSET" strike notes of foreboding, intimating that the Consul is determined to push his own tragedy to its most dire conclusion.

Likewise, Sigbjørn's journey is not simply into Darkness, but also into the hell of the past - "Time", wrote the Consul, "is a fake healer anyhow," (U.V., p.45) - and into the hell of the past novel. As he is sucked into darkness, he is aware of a transition being enforced: "he had that feeling, that subtle sense of change" is associated with the "nightly grapple with death" which had tormented his literary predecessors. Sigbjørn compares the loss of identity, consciousness, and control - the loss of "self" - to the darkness of death. Strangely, he thinks, "and you don't know you're crossing". The word "crossing" does suggest the transition from light into darkness, from hope into despair, and from life into death. However, it also prefigures the "crossing" of the River Styx, on the tides of which Lowry's protagonists are fated to sojourn eternally, it would appear.

In this way, Lowry links his thematic concerns with time and the condition of the human soul. Time is of course a condition of eternal flux; equally, perpetual change is the medium in which modern man in search of his soul resides. The eternal flux is integral to the eternal cycle of life itself, says Lowry, and this idea is reflected in the author's plans for a cycle/

cycle/ of novels. Descent into spiritual darkness and the ascent into the Light of hope are also vital to the cycle, and the interplay between the two elements becomes the main focus of the novels following Under the Volcano. Thus it is that Sigbjørn does not simply re-enter the darkness of past despairs, and emerge healed by this symbolic immolation (and not healed merely by that "fake healer", time). Sigbjørn's journey is more complex; he is pulled back and forth between hope and despair as if on a perpetual and seemingly implacable tidal wave.

However, although he is continually drawn away from his vision of a return to the Eridanus from which he has been "evicted", to the former hell he inhabited, there is a persistent note of hope which manages to invade Sigbjørn's thoughts during his self-immolation in the past. Sigbjørn's travels in the "dark of the grave", however disturbing or desperate, are studded with symbolic intimations of Light, and with affirmations of life. For example, "where, in The Valley of the Shadow of Death, he had put a funeral" (D.A.T.G., p.206) there is instead "a wedding", and Sigbjørn being nothing if not a symboliser - in keeping with Lowry's other protagonists - takes this inversion of the events of his novel to be a sign of hope.

Furthermore, although the path which Sigbjørn treads is the same as the one through the hell of his memories of Mexico, the journey is altered and mitigated by his interest in Primrose's having a good holiday, by the fact that he can and does love her, and by the fact that he can envisage a future beyond his despair. His vision emerges as increasingly a counterpoint between the events of the past which he must confront, and the possibilities of an expansive future which he must not discount. The interplay between the utter dessication of the past (the events which Sigbjørn had tried to water and drown alternately with liberal quantities of alcohol), and the prefigured fruitfulness of a return to Eridanus is reflected in the alternating aridity and fertility of the Mexican landscape, as, for example, in the following passage:

At first it was all desert, too high even for trees --- up, up, up, into the cruel strength of the country, but suddenly they saw a green valley, a sparkling river and then a waterfall. --- Grand canyons opened off to the right, where vast cataclysms had cracked the earth. --- It seemed to him that there was a lesson in this, that he had won through to this, he was taking the same journey, and yet by a more elevated route, it was almost as though he were flying ---

(D.A.T.G., pp.219-20)

On a literal level, the bus journey is of course a movement up into the mountains, through arid desert, and down again into fertile land. At the same time, it triggers a response in Sigbjørn to the extremes of fertility and sterility, of ascent and descent. His response is to relate the twin sets of events, and to mythologise his own experiences of both past and present: "there was a lesson in this, --- he was taking the same journey, and yet by a more elevated route, it was almost as though he were flying."

The same bus journey holds the promise of a reunion with Juan Fernando Martinez, which also gives rise to Sigbjørn's feeling of hopefulness:

Nowhere in the world, not even on the sea or on the prairie was such a sense of boundless immeasurable heavenly space as this, and his very soul seemed free as a bird within him, and it was Fernando he was inwardly thanking for all these marvels, it was as if Fernando knew they were coming and had sent something of himself to meet them to guide them.

(D.A.T.G., p.220)

Sigbjørn does not know yet that Fernando is dead. Even so, the greenery of the valleys is in fact "something of himself" that Juan Fernando has left behind in the world and which does indeed eventually guide Sigbjørn. For it is Fernando's work for the Banco Ejidal which has enabled the peasant farmers to cultivate the land, and, having seen this before he learns of Fernando's death, Sigbjørn has an enduring weapon against intrusions of the "Sein oder nicht sein, das ist die Frage" (D.A.T.G., p.204) ⁴ kind.

Thus, well before Sigbjørn actually looks for his friend, the evidence of Juan Fernando's work with the Banco Ejidal spreads in front of Sigbjørn. This evidence helps to combat the fear of the past which is an integral factor in this search. Looking for Independencia 25, the Banco Ejidal, Sigbjørn finds instead a sign which reads,

La persona que destruya
Este jardín sera
consignada a la
autoridad ...

?Le gusta este jardín
Que es suyo? Evite que
Sus hijos lo destruyan! (D.A.T.G., p.228)

The message of the sign recalls the motif of Under the Volcano. It automatically transports Sigbjørn into the horrors of the past, for the message seems to him to be a personal one. He has been evicted from his own personal garden, Eridanus, by fire, as mankind has been evicted from the potential earthly Eden by the hellish conflagration of war.

Although the message to Sigbjørn is one of fear, intimating God's wrath, and punishment by eviction, this reference to the garden is another means of prefiguring the garden legacy - the Garden of Mexico which will become transmuted into Eridanus - which Juan Fernando has left to unfold before Sigbjørn. Amidst the eternal flames of fear and unbelief, Sigbjørn says, "My soul is not a soul, it is a conflagration." (D.A.T.G., p.234) But again, as a counter to this torment, the words of Juan Fernando return to him: " 'God will help you if you ask him.' " (D.A.T.G., p.236) The spiritual advice to pray, combined with the concrete evidence of Fernando's beliefs help to allay Sigbjørn's fears.

The question posed by the sign motif recurs, but in its new context, it is answered as follows,

Fernando had helped to make this life fruitful and good as men should have had it in the Garden of Eden: this was progress as God wanted it on the first day when he saw that the world was good. It was the Garden of Eden. Le gusta este jardín que es suyo? (D.A.T.G., p.238)

"Do you like this garden, which is yours?" asks the sign. In Under the Volcano, Geoffrey Firmin had not been able to find enough in the world outside himself to care about; he perceived only a conspiratorial mirror image of his own inner chaos, where God (and the gods) operated capriciously to punish the sins of the past. In contrast, Sigbjørn Wilderness sees not a reflection of his own confusions, but the fruits of the seeds sowed by Fernando. These seeds have been planted both within himself-- the words "God will help you if you ask him" - and in the garden of the world. Thus the malign God of the Consul becomes one who "saw that the world was good". And instead of recalcitrant Adam who hated his Garden of Eden anyway, the consciousness operating within Lowry's novels has spawned a new "aspect", a protagonist who sees that he is in the Garden of Eden and that it is "good". Indeed, he has learned to like the Garden which is his.

Not only has the protagonist learned to like his garden, the world, but also the garden has itself burgeoned. Likewise, the garden of the soul ["Did not men too have such --- concealed gardens?" (D.A.T.G., p.265)] of Sigbjørn has been transformed into verdure. Even with the knowledge that the friend he had looked forward to seeing once more has been dead for many of the intervening years, Sigbjørn is not drawn into the despairs of the past, and sees at every turn the unexpectedly flourishing corners of his own memories. The Banco Ejidal is no longer a bank:

But the old Banco Ejidal at number 25 was not shut. --- The whole place was in glorious bloom, packed along its entire length and breadth with blossoms and riots of roses. Independencia number 25 had become a garden. 'Remember Parsifal', Sigbjørn told himself. (D.A.T.G., p.257)

The reference to "Parsifal" (Parzival) suggests a culmination of Lowry's own interpretation of the Grail legend, whereby the "Hero"/"Quester", Juan Fernando, has returned the lands about him to fertility, and by this legacy, has eased the sufferings of the Fisher King. Jessie Weston points out that the nature/

nature/ of the Fisher King's affliction is identified in one version of the legend as the loss of virility,⁵ and that this loss is the cause of a sympathetic arresting of the reproductive processes in Nature. Thus the sufferings of the Consul, his impotence and the wasting of the lands (which in another version of the legend occurs as a result of war⁶) which are presented in Under the Volcano, are extended into Dark As the Grave, where the redemptive potential of the "Quester" is more fully investigated via the garden symbol. While the Consul thinks that only Yvonne could have led him through the "stone fields" (U.V., p.361), the memories and legacy of Juan Fernando Martinez are enough to cause regeneration in Sigbjørn; the burgeoning of Mexico stimulates renewal in Sigbjørn.

As they leave Mexico, Primrose and Sigbjørn are left with a vision of the land regenerated:

And then a field of young, new wheat - pale green in contrast to the dark green of alfalfa - and then a field of ripening wheat dimming to gold, then quince and peach orchards and blossoming... The Banco Ejidal had become a garden.

Then they were leaving the state of Oaxaca behind them, and behind them, too, in the dark church of the Virgin for those who have nobody them with, one candle burning... (D.A.T.G., p.267)

Possibly the greatest strength of Dark As the Grave is in fact the move out of hellish torment into a flourishing natural world, where hope has been extracted from deepest despair. A landscape of crystal-clear colours and rich texture has emerged from the fascinating but blurred mixture of interior and exterior cosmos which has served as a landscape in Under the Volcano. Likewise, the "stone fields" which threaten Geoffrey Firmin's mind (although juxtaposed with this "Waste Land" is his indomitable and prodigious imagination) are transformed into the garden of Sigbjørn's soul. From the Eridanus, British Columbia (D.A.T.G., p.24) which Sigbjørn and Primrose have had to leave, through the Mexican hell of past despairs, they have travelled to the Eden of the present in Mexico, and have set off towards a possible future Eden.

Behind Sigbjørn and Primrose burns the huge candle lit in memory of Juan Fernando in "the dark church of the Virgin for those who have nobody them with." The candle "is a statement of faith" (D.A.T.G., p.256) as Primrose has said; faith in the natural wisdom of Juan Fernando and faith in the future. In the same church, Geoffrey Firmin had tried to pray with Dr. Vigil, but ends up asking, "Give me --- the knowledge of the Mysteries, that I have betrayed and lost", (U.V., p.291) and cries "Destroy the world!" Dr. Vigil tells him that "Nobody comes here, only those who have nobody them with." (U.V., p.290) The Consul thinks of this visit to the church of the "bereaved and lonely" as he stands at Cervantes' shrine, with the sacramental candle burning low, and Cervantes shows him "a photograph of a child lying in a coffin" (U.V., p.291), putting it on the counter in front of him. According to Jessie Weston, the Quester - and Geoffrey Firmin is of course Quester as well as Fisher King - who fails to ask the right question concerning the office of the Grail is punished,⁷ as must the Consul be for asking for "knowledge of the Mysteries" which is beyond the rightful domain of man. There is a further possible reference to the Grail legend, in that the church for the desperate recalls the "Chapel Perilous", where "sometimes there is a Dead Body laid on the altar; sometimes a Black Hand extinguishes the tapers."⁸ Another version has the Hand holding a bridle and stealing a child and a foal.⁹

By analogy, the candle is burning low and about to be extinguished for Geoffrey Firmin and for the world. Geoffrey himself may also be partially aligned with the Black Hand, for he wishes to "Destroy the World!" The suggestion of the "Dead Body" and stolen child is contained in the recurring image of the corpse of a child which recurs throughout Under the Volcano and which appears in the photograph on Cervantes' counter, while the candle in his shrine burns low. Thus when the candle reappears at the end of Dark As the Grave, the events of the "Chapel Perilous" appear to have been reversed, and whether Lowry is alluding intentionally to the Grail legend in the references/

references/ to the candle or not, Fernando's legacy in the form of a blossoming world (which is a demonstrable reference to the Fisher King mythology) means that hope burns more brightly for both Sigbjørn and the world.

Juan Fernando's legacy is not simply the burgeoning verdure of Mexico, the physical evidence which Sigbjørn sees about him. Juan Fernando has left the example of his life. As testimonial to his dead friend, Sigbjørn says,

'He was un hombre noble.'---

'He gave me his horse and ran himself,'---

'He sold me his best clothes for nothing. He gave me his friendship and advice I will use for the rest of my life. And he is dead like that.'

(D.A.T.G., pp.252-3)

Juan Fernando's nobility, natural wisdom and selflessness constitute an example which Sigbjørn, even in the midst of his own sufferings and his grief at the death of his friend, cannot ignore. Sigbjørn's immediate reaction to the news of the death is to take his friend's advice - "God will help you if you ask him" (D.A.T.G., p.236).

Sigbjørn,

--- knelt down and prayed; --- He prayed that the Virgin Mary might hear this humble prayer and that in some obscure way it might benefit Fernando in whatever niche of the next world he was. Tears ran down his cheeks.

(D.A.T.G., p.253)

Significantly, Sigbjørn prays not for himself, but for his friend. He then enters the church of the Soledad and lights "a great candle" (D.A.T.G., p.256) and prays again for his friend. Again he enters another church to pray to "the Saint of Desperate and Dangerous causes" (D.A.T.G., p.261). Unlike Geoffrey Firmin, Sigbjørn finds that he is able to pray. And instead of wishing anything for himself, Sigbjørn prays each time for his friend. Thus Juan Fernando's selflessness has been transmitted to Sigbjørn.

The regeneration thus induced in Sigbjørn means that he can leave Mexico with his "unfinished business" resolved. It can be inferred that he is sufficiently healed to return to the/

the/ task of rebuilding the burnt shack in his Northern Eden, Eridanus. The symbolic significance of this inlet has been established early in the novel, when Sigbjørn tells a fellow passenger on the plane,

'[Eridanus is] the name of a constellation, the one south of Orion. It looks like a river and to the ancients was identified with the River Styx. That's about all I know about it, except that it's also been called the river of youth, possibly because it was associated with Phaeton, a man who insisted on driving the chariot of the sun against his father's orders, and as a consequence burned the earth up. Thus it's been called both the river of death and the river of youth. --- (D.A.T.G., pp.26-7)

The same Northern Eden has previously appeared in the visions of the Consul, of Yvonne and in Hugh's description of salvation for Geoffrey and Yvonne. Eridanus has become a reality for Sigbjørn and Primrose, but their paradisaical world has been destroyed by fire. From the ashes of his memories of Mexico, Sigbjørn has reconstructed hope for the future; by implication he will be able to reconstruct his own Paradise, which had, like the earth in the above passage, been "burned up". Having completed the "penance" in Mexico for the over-reaching desire for "knowledge of the Mysteries" - sinning in the eyes of God the Father - the consciousness operating within the novels of Lowry is once again "driven northward" to endure the flux of youth and death, regeneration and eviction, which is at the heart of Eridanus.

The consciousness operating throughout Lowry's novels is returned to Eridanus in the novella, "The Forest Path to the Spring". Both the main protagonist, jazz-musician turned composer, and his wife are un-named throughout the work, which although again is published posthumously, is much closer to completion than much of Lowry's other work. (Lowry became increasingly obsessed with revising his works in the light of works written at a later date; in the case of Ultramarine this might have been understandable, but his idea that Under the Volcano should be "recalled and revised" ¹⁰ is quite ludicrous and indicates the/

the/ extent to which the gargantuan appetites of his projected cycle, combined with his increasing illness, had strained the author's artistic control.) Thus it would appear to be intentional that the two figures should remain nameless, and this anonymity is consistent with Lowry's idea that characterisation might be less important than the portrayal of man's consciousness.

However, the composer and his wife appear as logical extensions of Sigbjørn and Primrose Wilderness. The composer is attempting to escape the devastation imposed on his life by his "late nights" as a jazz-musician (-interestingly, he is not trying to escape the heavy drinking/alcoholism which is very prevalent amongst jazz musicians!-) by leaving civilization altogether, and living "under conditions so poverty stricken and abject in the eyes of the world they were actually condemned in the newspapers" (H.U.O.L., p.244). This life in Eridanus is of course life within the dream of the Consul, Yvonne, Hugh, Sigbjørn and Primrose, and within the reality of Malcolm and Margerie Lowry, for whom Dollarton, B.C. had afforded respite from the worst of the author's alcoholism.

Of this Northern Paradise, Lowry writes in a letter to Albert Erskine, his publisher,

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

(S.L., p.245)

Lowry explains this personal significance of Eridanus after one of the remarkably few references to "The Forest Path to the Spring" which at this point (1951) was "more or less finished" (S.L., p.245). However, specifically personal as this delineation of Eridanus may be, it coincides not simply with Dante's vision/

vision/ but also with his own symbolic configuration which Lowry has been building towards in all of his writing. The forest (and its dark side, the "dark wood"), the mountains ("volcanoes") and water have been present throughout his fictional cycle.

Lowry opens "The Forest Path to the Spring" with an integration of the components of this "celestial scenery", writing,

AT dusk, every evening, I used to go through the forest to the spring for water.

The way that led to the spring from our cabin was a path wandering along the bank of the inlet---

Beyond, going towards the spring, through the trees, range beyond celestial range, crowded the mountains, snow-peaked for most of the year. At dusk they were violet, and frequently they looked on fire, the white fire of the mist. Sometimes in the early mornings this mist looked like a huge family wash, the property of Titans, hanging out to dry between the folds of their lower hills. At other times all was chaos, and Valkyries of storm-drift drove across them out of the ever reclouding heavens. (H.U.O.L., p.216)

Immediately, Lowry has established an opening matrix of symbols: forest, spring/water/sea, path, fire, and snow-peaked mountains. He also begins to incorporate the rhythms of nature, of diurnal and seasonal cycles into his writing and this becomes vital to the sense of equilibrium, of change without change which informs the tone of the novella. What is also significant about this opening is that is absolutely representative of what is to follow. This well-modulated lyrical writing is sustained throughout the work.

Indeed, Lowry's works very often open with a wide-angled view of the terrain, which then emerges as a depiction of the symbolic setting of the particular work. In general, this sense of distance from the scene of action does not last long and the reader is quickly sucked into narrative drama rather than description. Unlike Lowry's other works, "The Forest Path" establishes a narrator before moving to the description of the setting, and the lyrical writing is then sustained - virtually uninterrupted - throughout the work. There is no sense of being rapidly drawn into the/

the/ drama of the narrative. In fact, there is little action, and very little drama.

Neither does "The Forest Path to the Spring" burst with ideas. While the sustained lyrical writing is certainly powerful, the work lacks the vigour - and, strangely, the wit and humour and, not so surprisingly, the ironies - of most of Lowry's writing. Lowry did not find new material for works following Volcano; he fell into the twentieth-century trap of imagining that novels which focussed on artists who discuss art ought thereby to say something of universal significance to the world. Most writers writing about writers and their relationship with writing have foundered in that somewhat narrow pursuit; art for artists' sake fails to confront what Kundera has delineated as the challenges for the modern novel.

Undoubtedly, Lowry demonstrates a strong sense of Kundera's challenges (of play, thought, time and dream) in Under the Volcano and in his concept of a cycle of fiction. The discussion of man's relationship with himself, with his partner, fellow-man, mankind and with God could not be of more universal significance and importance. And yet, as Lowry's life progressed, the gulf between conceptualisation and realisation of his aims and objectives in writing appears to have increased. Why did this gulf emerge? It would be very easy - and too simplistic - to answer that for the kind of author Lowry was, suffering was inspiration. However, in this answer lies an element of truth. "The Forest Path to the Spring" was written towards the end of Lowry's relatively stable time in Dollarton. It would seem that without the catalyst provided by experience, Lowry's imagination could not flourish. Lowry's blast furnace of creativity had been held in abeyance after the appalling events of Mexico, and he might have needed the catalyst of events which made a similar impression on him to unleash his true creative vigour. But would these events necessarily have to have involved suffering? It is impossible to say. By the time Lowry was forced to leave Dollarton, the loss was catastrophically detrimental to his health, and to his/

his/ writing. His alcoholism became uncontrollable, and his return to England was accompanied by voluntary alcohol aversion therapy ¹¹, the suggestion that a lobotomy or leucotomy might relieve his anxieties ¹², repeated electric shock treatments ¹³ and the other barbarisms involved in the treatment of mental illness. Not surprisingly, Lowry was in poor physical condition; he had suffered brain-damage, and injury to his nervous system and liver. ¹⁴ After a brief lull in his drinking habits, he was carted off in "the Health Department ambulance", ¹⁵ at the insistence of a local G.P. - presumably under a restraint order. Such heart-rending sufferings did not produce a late re-flowering of Lowry's creativity; they presaged only his death.

Although "The Forest Path to the Spring" lacks the virtually uncontainable labyrinth of monsters of the psyche threatening from the strata below the surface, and thus is not founded upon the concomitant dramatic tensions, the novella does supply a culmination to the symbolic matrices established within Lowry's cycle. Possibly, the paradisaic vision is inherently problematic. Suffering and the road to damnation is dramatic since it is founded upon the tension between what is and what might have been. Happiness, on the other hand, is only dramatic to the extent that there is a tension between that state and what might happen if the conditions for happiness are withdrawn. Even in the opening sequence of "The Forest Path" Lowry indicates a flux in nature between the calm of the Titans' washing line and the "Valkyries of storm-drift". The sense of flux is promoted by the continual threat of eviction from Eridanus under which the protagonists live.

However, although the natural flux of cycles, and the threat of eviction produce a certain expectation of change, Eridanus is overall remarkably unchanging, and static. The protagonist thinks of it as,

The Isle of Delight, where the lamps light of themselves for the offices of religion, and never burn out for they shine with a spiritual light, and where an absolute stillness reigns, and everyone knows precisely the hour of his death,/

death,
and one feels neither cold nor heat nor sadness
nor sickness of body or soul. --- And then I
thought to myself, stopping in the path: what
if we should lose it? (H.U.O.L., p.259)

In contrast the Consul's vision of this "northern country" has been much less static, and yet has prefigured the symbolic configuration of Eridanus. The "spiritual light" of this terrain is set against the darkness which has been Mexico; and yet the lack of negative feelings seems strangely unattractive. Is it necessary to human "delight" to know one's hour of death? The paradisaical vision, then, is essentially one of quiescent emotion, stillness and predetermined death and is counterpointed only with the fear of losing this quietism.

The fear of losing Eridanus is hardly as compelling to the reader as the aspiring and striving which constitutes the force behind human life and endeavour. However, what the narrator/protagonist has to contend with is not only this fear, but also the fear of a return to the discontents of civilization which lies directly across the bay, and the remnants of civilised man's hatred of his fellow-man. Man, according to this narrator, is essentially flawed. As he goes to collect water in a cannister from the spring, he thinks,

---I had to find something to irk me in this chore. It was as though man would not be contented with anything God gave him and I could only think that when God evicted him from Paradise it served him right.
(H.U.O.L., p.263)

In these thoughts can be seen the discontented Adam first imagined and described by the Consul in Under the Volcano. Here, God's punitiveness is justified; man should be punished for his discontent.

Even in Eridanus, the protagonist is unable to banish entirely the dissatisfactions which have escalated along with the manifestations of "civilization", and which have poisoned him with rage against his fellow-man. The rage and hatred emerge/

emerge/ in the course of life amidst the celestial scenery thus:

A moment before I had been thinking how much I loved my wife, how thankful I was for our happiness, then I had passed to thinking about mankind, and now this once innocent emotion had become, for this is indeed what it was, hated. It was not just ordinary hatred, either, it was a virulent and murderous thing that throbbed through my veins like a passion --- It was a hatred so all-consuming and so absolutely implacable that I was astounded at myself.--- my hatred became a thing in itself, the pattern of destruction. (H.U.O.L., p.245)

Such thoughts burst through from the unconscious and continue to cloud life in Eridanus for the protagonist:

Even when one is happiest it is possible to entertain, with one section of one's mind, the most ghoulish reflections, and so I did now --- It was as though I had entered the soul of a past self, not that of the self that merely brooded by night, but an earlier self to whom sleep meant delirium, my thoughts chasing each other down a gulf. (H.U.O.L., p.266)

The fears of the protagonist have thus become more specific. The past self is still present in memory; if unleashed from the unconscious, the past threatens to knock on the door of the present and to destroy the future. Such thoughts may pull the protagonist "down a gulf" - into the abyss of self-loathing and "the pattern of destruction."

The protagonist's fears of his own past, and the threats that past contain, constitute not only his own psychopathology but that of mankind in general. For man the malcontent is all the more easily tempted into "the pattern of destruction", given his increasing dissatisfaction with his world, and given that the past has established this "pattern" to such an extent that the destructive spiral downwards seems the only way to go. The individual's past and the history of mankind threaten the world of Eridanus with a vision of man as murderer of himself, destroyer of others and destroyer of his natural world.

Lowry achieves this vision of the static "Isle of Delight"/

Delight"/ under threat from chaotic civilization in terms of a symbolic delineation of the landscape. On one side of the British Columbian inlet is Eridanus, "existing by the grace of God and without police or fire or other civic protection" (H.U.O.L., p.226) while on the other side of the inlet is the Shell oil refinery, where the "S" has been omitted from its huge advertising hoarding, and "it was left HELL" (H.U.O.L., p.258). From the tankers lying at the refinery wharf emanates an "archetypal malodor" and the "slippery reeking slime" (H.U.O.L., p.228) of an oil slick. Behind the refinery lies "civilization, creator of deathscapes, like a dull-witted fire of ugliness and ferocious stupidity" (H.U.O.L., p.279). From this civilization come threats of eviction to the simple people living in squatter's shacks, built and rebuilt by themselves.

Thus, set against the opposing threats of encroaching civilization are the daily and seasonal rituals of the permanent inhabitants of Eridanus - of Quaggan, the boatbuilder, Kristbjorg, the seafarer, Mauger, the fisherman, and of the "lonely man from the Yorkshire moors" whose "joy [was] to make sure that the automatic lighthouse was working" (H.U.O.L., p.225). The protagonist and his wife have their own rituals of affirmation in the daily visits to the spring for fresh water, in regeneration through swimming in the waters of the bay, in their observations of the stars, and of the habits and cycles of the natural world around them, the seasonal changes of the path to the spring itself. The observations the couple make are a powerful evocation of calm. For example,

That night there were two evening herons in the moon at high tide, the herons projected large and primeval before it, the one flapping high, blocking a moment the moon itself, the other, engines switched off, gliding low an inch above the moonstruck swelling water to land noiselessly on the float; a squark when they met, the one waiting for the other, then flying off together: the bat turned into a firefly before the moon, and the cat's magical rites: --- the swim at high tide and love at high tide, with the windows liquescent on the floor: --- and again, the swim, the swim at dawn.
(H.U.O.L., p.260-1)

In such passages, Lowry displays the perfection of technical control which characterises "The Forest Path", but such control of language is not consistent throughout his later works.

October Ferry, for example, is a novel replete with symbolic intentions, but devoid of the execution of these, and, even more worryingly, lacking in the lyrical vision of such passages as the above.

The calm of the symbolic landscape is mirrored in the calm of the relationship between the main protagonist and his wife. There is a fundamental lack of development in this relationship; they have no children, and no real contact with children. This childlessness is perhaps more significant than it might appear at first. It is of course a continuation of the theme which had appeared in Volcano: "Do you like this garden, where is yours? See to it that your children do not destroy it!" The Consul had wrongly translated the sign thus: "You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" The main protagonist of "The Forest Path" wonders about Eridanus, "Why had God given this to us?" (H.U.O.L., p.260). This question is in keeping with Geoffrey Firmin's mistranslation of the sign which asks, "Why is it [the garden/Garden] yours?" and which threatens eviction. In line with the correct translation of the sign is the warning to mankind not to destroy the garden of the world, a warning which the protagonist of "The Forest Path" feels only too acutely.

Therefore, lurking beneath the apparent calm of life at Eridanus are certain conflicts to be resolved, or if not resolved, at least acknowledged. The protagonist's past will not be banished entirely, seeping from the unconscious to threaten present happiness. Civilization and its discontents threaten from across the inlet, and should the protagonist be able to prevent the enforcement of eviction from Eridanus, he must still wonder, "Why had God given this to us?" when there will be no one to inherit the task of tending and protecting this garden of the world.

One major confrontation with the conflict which is human experience occurs in "The Forest Path". On a daily trip to the spring, the protagonist is ambushed by a "mountain lion":

The cougar was waiting for me part way up a maple tree in which it was uncomfortably balanced, to one side of the hill section of the path, --- I stood traditionally and absolutely still. Then we simply waited, both of us, to see what the other would do, gazing straight into each other's eyes at short range; ---

Finally I heard myself saying something like this to the mountain lion, something extraordinary and absurd, --- 'Brother, it's true. I like you in a way, but just the same, between you and me, get going!' --- The lion --- slunk away guiltily into the bushes, disappeared so silently and swiftly that an instant later it was impossible to believe he'd ever been there at all. (H.U.O.L., p.264-5)

Perle Epstein identifies the "mountain lion" as "Blake's Iyger, a manifestation of all the obstacles to enlightenment combined." ¹⁶ However, in the context of the other beasts which lurk in the forest, the howling wolves (H.U.O.L., p.216), the "mountain lion" is equally one of the three beasts (leopard, wolf and lion) which occur in the opening of Dante's Inferno. The symbolic configuration of forest, hill and path encourages the alignment. Dorothy Sayers notes that the beasts are images of sin - the lion, of "violent sins" and the wolf, of fraud. ¹⁷ The protagonist reflects on the confrontation thus: "It was as though I had entered the soul of a past self --- mysteriously the lion was all that to." (H.U.O.L., p.266) By responding to the potentially dangerous situation with a calm recognition - "I like you in a way" - the protagonist stays his own potential violence while acknowledging the violence in the human breast, and the sins of the past which seep unbidden from the unconscious.

The path symbol is vital to the novella, first as a route to the cleansing ritual of collecting water. Second, it is a reiteration of Dante's "right path", only this time, the protagonist is returning from hell's edge and retracing a route to the path from which he has strayed. The significance of the path is presented to the reader thus:

There has always been something preternatural about paths, and especially in forests ---: paths that divide and become two paths, paths that lead to a golden kingdom, paths that lead to death, or life, paths where one meets wolves, and who knows? even mountain lions, paths where one loses one's way, paths that not merely divide but become the twenty-one paths that lead back to Eden.

(H.U.O.L., p.272)

It is to be regretted that an author with Lowry's ability to allow his symbols to evolve, to become integral to the thematic and narrative level and to resonate within a work such as Volcano should find it necessary to intrude into the lyricism of "The Forest Path" with the somewhat clumsily didactic thoughts of his protagonist which resemble little the thought processes of the ordinary human being. However, the passage does confirm the novella's setting within Dantean territory, and list the natures of the paths which have started in Under the Volcano, and have become transmuted in "The Forest Path". The Consul has travelled the path which "divides the path to Parían and despair", while the protagonist in "The Forest Path" has chosen the path to the "golden kingdom", to Eden and to Eridanus.

In addition to maintaining and augmenting the symbols which transform damnation and the vision of the Inferno into redemption and the Edenic vision, "The Forest Path to the Spring" continues the idea of antithesis which is the bedrock of Lowry's work. Between the shores of Eridanus and of civilization are the waters of the bay, ever in flux. While the waters are cleansing and integral to the protagonist's ritual of rebirth, the principle of "nature's intolerance of inertia" (H.U.O.L., p.231) means that they are also the waters of "the river of the dead --- the Styx." (H.U.O.L., p.231) Any equilibrium (and as the Consul had written, "equilibrium is all" - (U.V., p.44) which the protagonist may find will be between the currents of motion and opposing motion. This antithesis is contained in the following passage:

We poor folk were also Eridanus, a condemned community, perpetually under the shadow of eviction. And like Eridanus itself, in its eternal flux and flow, was the inlet. For in the heavens at night, as my wife first taught me, dark and wandering beneath blazing Orion, flowed the starry constellation Eridanus, known both as the River of Death and the River of Life, --- (H.U.O.L., pp.226-7)

While the protagonist holds rigidly to his static Eden, Eridanus contains the threat of expulsion, and while he strives toward his regeneration, the seeds of dying once again are contained in his rebirth.

Thus the protagonist's clinging to a static vision which fears change is inimical to the natural cycles which become the rhythm of the novella. Only by acknowledging that what he has is equilibrium between the opposing currents - of the bay and of life and death - and by living at one with flux rather than intransience, will the rumblings of the unconscious abate. This moment of acknowledgement approaches when he says of Eridanus,

It was there that our own life had come into being and for all its strangeness and conflict, a pang of sadness struck us now. Longing and hope fulfilled, loss and rediscovery, failure and accomplishment, sorrow and joy seemed annealed into one profound emotion. (H.U.O.L., p.277)

Thus the Edenic vision is one which is tempered by the knowledge of Darkness, where every current has one opposing in motion and where flux and the cycles of nature are the only law. The daily journey along the path to the spring is life lived in accordance with this cyclical law (the "Wheel of Law"). The novella devolves upon the extemporisations on the theme of nature's cycles which draw in the changing details of the lives of the creatures of the sea and the forest.

The idea of the reiteration of themes and extemporisation of them constitutes the foundation on which Lowry hoped to build the cycle of The Voyage That Never Ends. Apparently not content/

content/ with precarious equilibrium (and no doubt anxious to return, with the perverse glee akin to that which characterises the Consul, to "where the heart is"), Lowry intended to launch his literary consciousness to voyage once more upon the waters of the Styx. While David Miller, in his thematic investigation of The Voyage That Never Ends includes La Mordida - which "is still in the process of being edited, [and] has as its theme --- 'The abomination of desolation' " ¹⁸ - in the group of novels set in Mexico, Douglas Day positions this novel after the Eridanus section in the cycle. Whatever the position of La Mordida, still unpublished, it seems certain that The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness II, which exists in name only, would have cast the consciousness adrift upon Stygian tides.

In place of The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness II there is Lowry's October Ferry to Gabriola. As has been noted at the beginning of this chapter, the nature of this novel changed as Lowry was writing it, becoming "more serious" than the author intended. For instead of being a novel which might have explored the Edenic vision and/or the laws of flux, of the psyche salvaging that vast and resonating cultural heritage which is woven into Under the Volcano and Dark As The Grave and learning to live in the modern world, October Ferry plunges the consciousness back into waters better charted in Volcano, into past guilts and fear.

More so than in any other of Lowry's posthumously published works, there is the sense of raw material sifted from Lowry's past experiences and presented in an ill-digested form. Lowry was working on October Ferry to Gabriola in 1957, the year of his death and told Ralph Gustafson in that year that this "huge and sad novel --- [might] have been better stated in about ten short poems - or even lines - instead." (S.L., p.409) The brief samples of Lowry's poetry included in this thesis might make the reader grateful that Lowry had chosen the genre of the novel; the execution of October Ferry as it has been published might not! If the novel might "have been better stated" in "ten lines",/

lines",/ then my personal choice would include many of the chapter headings. Headings such as "A Grey Hair in God's Eyebrow", "The Tides of Eridanus", "A House Where a Man Has Hanged Himself", "The Element Follows You Around, Sir!", "Wheel of Fire", and "The Perilous Chapel" demonstrate that Lowry was engaged in battle with the same symbolic components of the literary consciousness operating throughout earlier works. The themes of man's relationship with God, of eviction, and of regeneration, the elements of fire and water, and the symbols of the Hanged Man and the wheel, are all incorporated into this sample of the chapter headings. All of them are clearly extensions of the same patterning in earlier works (although "The Perilous Chapel" has had no direct reference made to it until this point), demonstrating the consistency of vision, and of the technical renderings of this vision, which has been a primary argument throughout this study.

However, such condensed and incisive chapter headings promise somewhat more than they deliver. The chapters are, for Lowry, uncharacteristically short. Possibly this brevity exacerbates the problem that most of the novel is a restatement of material and, what is more problematic, a restatement without much "improvisation" or embellishment. Lowry firmly establishes that the locus of the book is back in the internal cosmos of the consciousness of the cycle: as Ethan Llewelyn and his wife, Jacqueline, look towards Eridanus, he thinks "In a way he couldn't have explained, they weren't looking at the view, but at something in themselves." (O.F., p.246) Both characters are performing ritualised escapes from gruesome pasts in their lives in Eridanus, and have withdrawn from that "major manifestation" of man's relationship with fellow-man which is war. Thus Ethan says of Jacqueline,

Given every opportunity, she was not a 'joiner' or a stitcher of socks or shrouds, a social busybody contributing to that noble cause shadowed forth in the image which always reminded him of the whole overstuffed stupid world doing eternally what it was told by its gruesome parents and groaning and straining forevermore on a pot: the war effort. (O.F., p.111)

Significantly, a transition has occurred in the stance adopted in Lowry's novels. Where the Consul has been strongly indicted for his lack of commitment to the principles which Hugh has about fighting for a better world, and condemned for his own inaction, there is now a sense that to be a non-'joiner' is laudable in the extreme. While withdrawing from the "war effort" may justifiably be upheld, the idea that this necessitates a final withdrawal from humanity, which leads Ethan to ask, "But what in heaven's name did they need with friends or a social life?" (O.F., p.111), is a dangerous one.

Ethan Llewelyn's own escape is from fears, which, it has to be said, are firmly rooted in the life of Lowry himself. Ethan's worst fear is that he will be implicated in the suicide of a long-dead friend, Peter Cordwainer, a fear which cannot but be linked with the "Wensleydale" figure of an early draft of Dark As The Grave¹⁹, who also appears under various guises in the unpublished manuscripts of The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness²⁰ and in the remaining fragment of In Ballast to the White Sea.²¹ The suicide has been linked with that of Paul Fitte, a fellow student of Lowry's at Cambridge.²² However, while the figure has been a tangential one in Lowry's earlier works, he emerges as a much more intrusive one in October Ferry. This is potentially an instance in which Lowry's judgement as to what extent reality could be instantaneously transmuted into art might be questioned. There is only so much capital to be had from converting psychopathology, neurosis and psychosis into art, and no more.

Again, Ethan's escape takes the form of withdrawal:

And out of the fears grew wild hatreds, great unreasoning esemplastic hatreds: hatred of people who looked at him so strangely in the street; long-forgotten hatreds of schoolmates who'd persecuted him about his eyes at school; hatred of the day that ever gave him birth to be the suffering creature he was, hatred of a world where your house burned down with no reason, hatred of himself, and out of all this hatred/

hatred/
did not grow sleep. In order to combat the
mental sufferings of the day --- Ethan had
now let his beard grow. (O.F., p.125)

There is no hint of irony in Ethan's withdrawal behind his beard, perhaps because the author himself, from the peculiarly haunting evidence of photographs taken of him in the Lake District in the year of his death, 1957, ²³ had done likewise. And Ethan's hatreds, too, recall Lowry's own sufferings - invented or otherwise - as a "blind" schoolboy, and the author's suffering at the behest of numerous fires, which were manifestations of an Element which did indeed Follow Him Around!

Ethan Llewelyn's fears and hatreds are loosed by his eviction from Eridanus. He is a lawyer patently unable to legislate or litigate against his own eviction, just as Lowry's other protagonists often appear quite unable to act in their professed capacities (the Consul is incapable of securing his own future in Mexico, Sigbjørn, a writer peculiarly unsuited to his task, and the protagonist of "The Forest Path", a musician incapable of pursuing the musician's life). Ethan justifies his paralysis by arguing that to create a new Eridanus would simply spawn the possibility of eviction once more. He says,

'Your poor little bit of property won't be safe from desecration no matter where you are. And then, when they've totally ruined most of the beauty of the country with industry, and thoroughly loused up the watersheds and the rainfall, and the last old sourdough has traded in his gold sifting pan for a Geiger counter and staked out the last uranium claim - as it says here - some jeezly fool will drop an atom bomb on the whole business, and serve them damn well right too!

(O.F., p.202)

Burdened by past guilts and the present emanations from "civilization", Ethan constructs a watertight excuse not to act. However, the couple must still find somewhere to live, and must thus submit to numerous journeys in this search, including passages on the ferry to Gabriola. Gabriola, it is suggested, may become/

become/ another Eridanus, another respite in the "favoring yet opposing circumstances" (O.F., p.196) of their lives. Or it may not.

Indeed, Ethan's voyage towards the future is one which is continually threatened by the undertow of Thanatos. He suggests to himself that "perhaps all you're looking for, all you long for, is your own death." (O.F., p.270) Against this dangerous impulse he posits his faith in "romantic love" (O.F., p.111). But he thinks that "this search for faith too had become like a longing for death" (O.F., p.271). The end of October Ferry to Gabriola does not attempt to interrupt this condition of flux. The voyage remains the voyage of man's life, which has been described earlier in the novel thus:

'Outward bound ... But are we going to heaven or hell? But they are the same place, you see...'
Voyage, the homeward-outward-bound voyage,
everybody was on such a voyage --- to the junction
of the two infinities --- (O.F., p.249)

The journeying consciousness of Lowry's novels is set adrift on the tides of the Styx, River of Youth and River of Death, to do battle with the antithetical currents of Eros and Thanatos, to strive towards Eridanus or to submit a paralysed will to Hell. As the epigraph to October Ferry to Gabriola echoes,

Al stereless with-inne a boot
am I
A-mid the see, by-twixen windes
two,
That in contrarie standen
ever-mo.
CHAUCER: Troilus and Cressida.

CHAPTER 11: NOTES

1. Coleridge, Poems and Prose (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), p.50.
2. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.459.
3. Ibid., p.425.
4. This is Lowry's German translation of "To be or not to be, that is the question", and is an echo of the Consul's parody of it: "To drink or not to drink..."
5. Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Bath: Chivers Press, 1980), p.21.
6. Ibid., p.19.
7. Ibid., p.17.
8. Ibid., p.165.
9. Ibid., p.167.
10. Douglas Day, p.17.
11. Ibid., p.29.
12. Ibid., p.20.
13. Ibid., p.27.
14. Ibid., p.29.
15. Ibid., p.34.

16. Perle Epstein, " 'The Forest Path to the Spring': An Exercise in Contemplation" in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.140.
17. Dorothy L. Sayers, "Notes" in Dante, The Divine Comedy: Cantica 1: Hell (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), p.75.
18. David Miller, Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends, p.39.
19. Douglas Day, p.142.
20. Ibid., p.139.
21. Ibid., p.143.
22. Ibid., p.144.
23. Ibid., pp.42-43.

PART IV: Chapter 12

"Conclusion"

PART IV: REBIRTH/ASCENT
CHAPTER 12
Conclusion

IF YOU BELIEVE IN heaven, be assured that Malcolm Lowry is there (and probably hates it). 1

Undoubtedly, Malcolm Lowry would have preferred the spectacle of his own sufferings in the company of the damned inhabitants of hell, to a sojourn in the world beyond ascent. For hell was the land well-charted by Lowry, with little lasting respite for good behaviour, throughout his entire life. In one of author's earliest letters, he declares, "I have lived only nineteen years and all of them more or less badly." (S.L., p.3) And his life in Mexico was punctuated by his cries for help. The following extracts are typical of the man:

--- I fear the worst, and alas, my only friend is the Virgin of those who have nobody with, and she is not much help, while I am on this last too-loose Lowrytrek. (S.L., p.13)

Have now reached condition of amnesia, breakdown, heartbreak, consumption, cholera, alcoholic poisoning, and God will not like to know what else, if he has to, which is damned doubtful. (S.L., p.15)

Having explored the many wrong paths which took him to desperation, despair and his own personal hell, Lowry knew nothing better, and was never more articulate than when recreating this territory in his fiction. The terrors of the alcoholic writer's labyrinth of torments became the literary domain of Malcolm Lowry, to the point where there was nothing about which he could become quite so impassioned and eloquent, and no other subject which would catalyse his inventiveness to such an extent. Indeed, Lowry's tortured striving which has (as Art Hill assures us) taken the author heavenwards has, paradoxically, meant his eviction from his most familiar domain, for, in his case, hell is where the heart is.

As an author who knew so much of the territory of hell, Lowry is most comfortable in his depiction of this land. The struggles of the individual, and with man's consciousness as a whole, with the hell that is in the heart, are given powerful symbolic and mythical aspects in Lowry's fiction. The struggles are timeless ones which run throughout the history of individuals and of mankind; Lowry's vision of man is of him struggling against his failures in respect of Eros and Agape, in relating to those who love him in a romantic sense, in his dealings with his fellow-man, his failure in relating to God and the world which God has bestowed upon him. Man's deficiencies in these respects creates within him an imbalance in the psyche which gives Thanatos mastery, driving man to destruction and death. The symbols and myths drawn from cultural history are integrated in Lowry's work to underline the universal nature of man's drives and impulses and to give emphasis to the dynamic of human failure, which arises from a disturbance of the equilibrium between Eros and Thanatos in the psyche. In order to re-establish what is at best a precarious equilibrium after a disturbance, a straying from the "right path", the consciousness is necessarily placed in flux, on the Stygian tides between regeneration and death.

The fact that Sigbjørn Wilderness in Dark As The Grave is to be found exactly at one of the moments of powerful regeneration in his life means that the ending of this novel provides what constitutes by far the most convincing depiction of "ascent" and the Edenic vision. Indeed, at the moment of regeneration, Sigbjørn is at the farthest point from the insidious undertow of destructive impulses to be found in man's life. As Time conveys man onwards from this "re-birth", he becomes susceptible to the eternal flux between the shores of life and death until he either experiences further regeneration or drives himself too close to the shores of destruction and death.

Thus the Edenic vision is of man trying to maintain an equilibrium between his higher aspirations and his baser instincts. Certain symbolic transactions - contained, for example, in the cleansing/

cleansing/ daily rituals of "The Forest Path to the Spring" - help to maintain the vital balance, but apart from this symbolic narrative action, the action of the world of Eridanus is mainly in the internal transactions of the mind. Compared with the dramatic tensions of both the exterior narrative action and the warring factions in the interior psychological arena which are present in Under the Volcano, the doubts and fears which threaten to seep up into the consciousness operating in "The Forest Path" and October Ferry to Gabriola do not produce the intensity of apprehension, struggle and tension which characterise Lowry's masterwork.

However, what operates with consistency throughout Lowry's fiction is the dynamic which offsets regeneration against destruction. The implications of the variations in the degree to which regeneration is called upon to combat destructiveness become the focus of each separate work. In addition to this consistent investigation and reinvestigation of this dynamic, Lowry's fiction has a coherence and unity which is the result of the author's use of symbol, myth and motif. This demonstrable consistency in dynamic, and in the symbolic renderings of themes and vision, is crucial to Lowry's powerful and profound expression of man's ability to create his own incontrovertible destiny and to choose to make of his own soul a heaven or a hell, a garden or a wasteland.

This study has been structured according to the journey undertaken by the human consciousness in Lowry's fiction, paralleling the movement of the cycle of The Voyage That Never Ends which Lowry intended to bring under an overarching pattern based on Dante's Divine Comedy. Because this structure has been adopted, it might be thought that Lowry's primary source of analogy and reference was the Divine Comedy. However, the content of individual chapters indicates the immense range of sources and traditions from which Lowry drew the symbols and myths which would give his work the necessary universality and the depth and texture of a timeless vision.

Even in terms of his Dantean cycle, Lowry's intentions are not entirely clear; towards the end of his life, the author became so pressurised by the knowledge of his failure to meet so many publisher's deadlines that he reshuffled the order of his manuscripts, and re-designed the shape of The Voyage That Never Ends in the hope of meeting some of his publisher's requirements. Again, because of exigencies of work owed to his editor, works like La Mordida remained in a state of incompleteness, "The Forest Path" remained a novella rather than a full-length novel, Ultramarine was not rewritten, and, perhaps the only fortunate aspect of Lowry's desperation, Under the Volcano was not tampered with.

The posthumous publications have been the result of sifting through the vast quantities of manuscript of each work and piecing together an artefact which in each case fulfils Lowry's intentions as they could be ascertained from the drafts. No-one was better qualified to undertake the task than Margerie Lowry, on whose judgement the author had relied implicitly during his lifetime. She was aided by Earle Birney, Canadian scholar, novelist and a friend of the Lowrys, and by Douglas Day, Lowry scholar and author of the meticulously researched and compelling biography of Lowry. The manuscripts and drafts from which they worked are held in a Special Collection by the University of British Columbia Library.

Access to this material in the Special Collection might have helped to answer several questions raised by this study. First, it would be interesting to know whether early drafts of Under the Volcano contained the ill-digested material and autobiographical intrusions which can be observed in the posthumously-published works. If Lowry had made such intrusions in his masterwork, and then excised them in later drafts, then, had he lived, it could be assumed that later works would have been subjected to the same treatment. Under the Volcano had, after all, demanded of Lowry ten years of writing and rewriting; the author did not live to complete such a gestation period in the case of his other works. Even more important in relation to/

to/this study is the question of when Lowry introduced the various symbol systems and patterns of myth into his drafts. If, as I suspect, each draft of Volcano included more of the framework of allusion, then it would be fair to conjecture that such material had yet to be added to later works. Also, symbols of regeneration such as the phoenix, might be expected to have been better developed, and to know how close specific manuscripts were to completion would help the scholar to judge what development might have taken place. Again, while a basic symbolic structure was in place for the entire cycle of fiction, it would be interesting to know whether new symbolic material might have emerged, but had simply not yet found an appropriate context in Lowry's work.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties about Lowry's work which are implied by these questions, Lowry's work demonstrates that the cycle would have had a strong symbolic coherence and unity. Lowry emerges as an author with an unparalleled mastery of layering and integrating the different traditions of symbol and myth. Not only does he integrate traditions - for example, the "Farolito" is a lighthouse, a wreckers' beacon and equally a prison tower, a labyrinth, a tomb and hell on earth complete with minotaur and suffering inhabitants - but he also maintains a tension between individual symbols and between versions of the same myth. This tension allows of a complexity of vision, a vision of man caught between love and hate, hope and despair, Light and Darkness and heaven and hell.

Thus the two most important characteristics of Lowry's symbolic and mythic patterning are the layering of symbols and traditions one upon another, and the antithetical pairing of symbols. While it is possible to take each individual symbol or myth and trace its development throughout Lowry's fiction, such an analysis of a symbol or myth taken in isolation conveys little of the thematic intricacies and of the mythopoeic impulses of his work. For as soon as Lowry establishes one symbolic level as a means of emphasising a specific theme, his mind spins off to another/

another/ symbol as a parallel means. An examination of one particular symbol-system is insufficient; Lowry's mind produces a proliferating complex of allusion drawn from several main traditions in literature. Since Lowry draws from several traditional sources of symbol - Classical, Alchemical/Cabbalistic/Mystical, Christian, Romantic and Modernist reworkings of these sources - and does not restrict himself to any one source for each purpose, the layering of symbols, myth and motif upon each other becomes a process of symbolic accretion in which it is possible to view a history of symbolic and iconic thought. The alignments made have no intentionally hierarchical order of significance and no one tradition dominates as a source of symbolism or mythology, and this certainly helps Lowry to maintain the "historical overview" of his sources.

Because of Lowry's concern with man questing, suffering for his sins, seeking his own redemption and the exoneration of man's failings, the symbolic structure must of necessity include analogies for both hell and heaven. This makes the references he employs appear contradictory; frequently individual symbols themselves appear confusing since they may contain two entirely polarised meanings. A pattern emerges from the collection of symbols, pairings of opposites such as phoenix and vulture, mountain and abyss, garden and wasteland, lighthouse and minotaur, dog and snake, freshwater spring and fire, and further pairings of dawn and dusk, Light and Darkness, Eridanus and Mexico, the cycle of nature and the wheel of infernal gods, are intended to promote Lowry's thematic concerns. Looked at from another perspective, certain symbols contain antitheses in themselves, as has been seen in the cases of the volcano, the Farolito, the Styx and Mexico itself. The antitheses established are entirely to Lowry's purpose; if man's unconscious is to oscillate between Heaven and Hell, so, too, must the symbols, mythical figures, myths and motifs with which it is associated. Between darkness and light, hell and heaven and all the other antithetical pairings there must be an equilibrium born of striving towards the positive polarities and in order to maintain this equilibrium, there must/

must/ be the will to act. If man does not choose to act, then "The will of man is unconquerable" (U.V., p.209). However, should he choose to act, then his will is equally "unconquerable" and he will triumph.

Therefore, instead of asking his reader to make a choice between the analogies of the "symbolic legacy", the reader is invited to conserve two apparently antithetical aspects (the light of the volcano with the darkness of Tartarus beneath it), or two antagonistic symbols, and to interpret the works by the tension maintained by and inherent in this antithetical vision. According to Lowry's vision, man is a complex of good and evil, of aspirations and weakness, and his technique of superimposing both sides of his nature - the hell and heaven which are both contained in his heart and in the impulses of his psyche - means that he avoids presenting any facile "answers" to the condition of man in the Twentieth Century. Instead, Lowry has found a means to integrating the experience of the individual with that of mankind, and thus of universalising human experience.

While, in Under the Volcano at least, Lowry establishes a realistic setting with individual characters with their own motivations, his fiction shows him to be questing after something even more important. Lowry seeks a "realism" beyond that of character, setting and narrative action, and the later works show that this "realism" is associated with the interior cosmos, with the portrayal of imagination, the landscape of the mind. In portraying the "real world" of the mind, Lowry postulates that only a symbolic rendering is adequate to the task. Indeed, what he produces is a spiritually accurate and profound landscape of the mind, of the ideas which have engaged man throughout history and of man damned and redeemed. His entire oeuvre maintains this strand of philosophical reflection on the basis for man's existence and on "modern man in search of his soul." Indeed, Lowry's work demonstrates that he anticipated Kundera's "challenge of thought" which was described in Chapter 1 of this study.

However, Lowry's pre-emptive responses to Kundera's other challenges - of "play", of "dream" and of "time" - are restricted mainly to the ideas contained within Under the Volcano. Lowry is at his most inventive in his masterwork, not least because it is in this novel that there is most allusion to the "symbolic legacy" and the interplay between different levels, the punning which is then possible and the manipulation of the reader's expectations all contribute to a sense of the unserious beyond seriousness. While on one level the Consul has all the necessary tragic stature, on another, his responses to his predicament can be outrageously ridiculous. Whether debating the Eviction from the Garden of Eden, deshabille, and stalking the big game of the tequila bottle in his "jungle" at the same time, or at his most spontaneously articulate while he is lying face downwards in the roadway, the Consul is absolutely compelling and endears himself to the reader. In the novels following Volcano, there is a sense of their having become more "serious" than Lowry intended or desired. Indeed, he wrote that this had become the case with October Ferry to Gabriola. And the main protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is certainly fallible, but not so endearingly fallible as the Consul.

Again, while the cyclical nature of time remains important throughout Lowry's work, it is not used to such powerful effect in the works following Volcano. The main events of his masterwork span twelve hours in the Consul's lifetime, while the entire novel is contained within the space of exactly one year. Moreover, the novel contains the Consul's lifetime, the events of history and the eternity of damnation. Concurrent events appear in separate chapters, flashbacks interrupt the progress of narrative action, and time filtered through the Consular imagination expands and contracts according to the proximity of his next drink. In contrast, the other novels follow a more "conventional" concept of time whereby events take place in accordance with normal linear narrative progression, although flashbacks are in evidence.

Undoubtedly, Lowry's greatest achievement lies in the area of the challenge of "dream". The "fusion of dream and reality" could not be better expressed than in the Consul's flight into the mescaline world of hallucination. The symbols which constitute the landscape of his mind are also physically present in the landscape of Mexico and vice versa. Each is an apposite reflection of the other, for the consciousness which is dominated by Geoffrey Firmin perceives the outside world in terms of its own characteristics. In both the interior and exterior worlds are manifested ubiquitously the icons of man's consciousness and his unconscious.

To contend that the crystalline visions of the Consul's alcoholic hallucinations contain the most powerful and profound expressions of man's struggles with himself and with his relationship with the outside world may appear to contradict the idea of the "visionary fallacy". Paradoxically, Geoffrey Firmin's greatest clarity erupts in the midst of the chaos of alcoholic hallucination. However, if for the Consul, alcohol produces transcendental visions and transforms life by mythopoeisis into a "quixotic oral fiction", it has to be asserted that real life is not so accommodating! Nor can death be expected to be so, either. Malcolm Lowry himself produced a "quixotic" version of his death which was not to be. He died "by misadventure",² having consumed barbiturates, and, in all probability, the contents of a bottle of gin bought earlier on that evening of June 27th, 1957.³ He was denied in death the epitaph he had composed for himself:

Malcolm Lowry
Late of the Bowery
His prose was flowery
And often glowery
He lived, nightly, and drank, daily,
And died playing the ukulele. 4

CHAPTER 12: NOTES

1. Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism" in Barry Wood, ed., Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, p.126.
2. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.53.
3. Ibid., p.53.
4. Ibid., p.4.

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