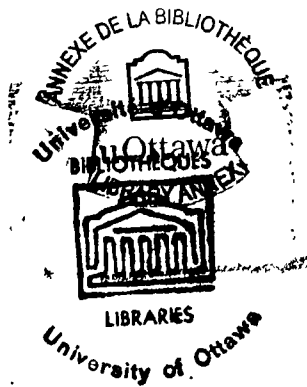


THE LUMINOUS WHEEL:
THE EVOLUTION OF MALCOLM LOWRY'S STYLE

by

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Sister Mary Rosalinda, S.S.A., Agnes Cecilia Nyland, was born April 19, 1907, in Victoria, British Columbia. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, in 1947. The Master of Arts degree was received from the same university in 1958. The title of her thesis was Brébeuf and His Brethren: a Great Canadian Poem.

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INTRODUCTION

If one were faced with the problem of finding a symbol for Malcolm Lowry, a symbol that would express his thought and his work as well as the pattern of his life, one could not do better than choose the one he used so effectively in Under the Volcano, the luminous wheel. The association with the wheel goes back to his university days. He speaks of "my college of St. Catherine's, she who was broken on the wheel."¹ He was proud of his college and, on the whole, happy in his association with it, although it was there that he started some of the ghosts which, for the rest of his life, he tried to exorcise with his pen.

In his writing, the wheel is the objective correlative² by which Malcolm Lowry expresses much that he would otherwise find inexpressible, but there was something cyclic in the very texture of his life. One gets the impression that he is always working around to the point from which he started, adding, with each circle, new ranges and new values to his thought and new insights into his appreciation of the meaning of life. This trochal pattern exists geographically as well as intellectually. Sea voyages and returns, in 1927 and 1930, form the most obvious cycles in his early life. The link with Mexico, terminated seemingly in 1938, was not really completed until Lowry returned there with his wife in

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1945 and underwent an almost traumatic experience with the police of that country, one that paralleled to a surprising degree that which his own Consul had suffered some years earlier. Lowry's own imprisonment and the harrowing experiences connected with it form the theme of "La Mordida," a powerful novel which, as yet, remains unpublished.

Another cycle can be traced in the Dollarton experience. Driven from their home when their beach cabin was destroyed by fire, the Lowrys lived in eastern Canada for a while, then returned to Dollarton and rebuilt their small house. This cabin in turn was destroyed by bulldozer and fire when the area was cleared to make what is now Cates Park. The last geographical circle was the trip to England, Lowry's native country, in 1955. This time all cycles were completed as Lowry met death in the land that had given him birth.

There are many intellectual and even spiritual cycles in his life. These form a constant theme in his work for, to an extraordinary degree, his life was his work. Spenser gives profoundly meaningful advice to the writer, "Look in thy heart and write."³ Malcolm Lowry did just that. He looked deeply into his own heart and realized that what he saw there was part of the universal struggle in

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which all men share in one form or another. He described his own agony and in doing so spoke for all mankind.

As this thesis progresses through a study of the evolution of Malcolm Lowry's style, it will note the wheel symbol which he uses as an objective correlative. It will also study the unusually well developed wheel pattern in the texture of the work itself. Poem after poem, story after story, and, above all, his great novel Under the Volcano, are built on a deliberate cyclic pattern. In the novel this technique is used so powerfully that, on reaching the last page, one feels driven to turn to the beginning and read at least the first chapter again. When one does this, the luminous wheel has spun full circle and held the reader fascinated by its meaningful movement. This is what Lowry wanted to give his readers. To him this sense of significant repetition was important, not just as a representation of his recurring and encircling struggles with alcohol and the other neuroses that tortured him, but also as a pattern of life for every man. His was a complex character of very great sensitivity. To such a man remorse was torture but, on the other hand, pleasure was sheer delight. The wheel spun through darkness and back into light in an unending, whirling succession of its own revolutions as it moved along its curving path to complete the circle of its journey.

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At times the circle is not a wheel rising up into space and dipping back to earth. Sometimes it is a great spinning merry-go-round, gyrating about a fixed center, an area whose movement sets up centrifugal or centripetal forces driving the thoughts outward into space or drawing them ever closer to the center which is the artist himself. Sometimes he follows ideas that radiate out from this center, like spokes, into an unlimited peripheral area. Sometimes the motion is the opposite of this; from the periphery of impressions which are vague and remote, the ideas converge in an ever-narrowing definition and exactness. A man who could grasp the meaning of all this and make it, in turn, meaningful for others, is by necessity no ordinary writer. One need not read very much of Lowry's work to understand and appreciate the truth of this statement.

The wheel is not, of course, the only symbol in Lowry's work. He discussed his use of symbols fully in his letters and also in the working notes for his German translator, Clenens ten Holder. An interview with his French translator, Clarisse Francillon, on the symbols and their interpretation, has since appeared in English as "Preface to a Novel."⁴ From these sources it becomes clear that he worked on the symbolism very carefully and with studied

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effect, endeavoring to obtain definite responses from his readers. This will be dealt with in the section devoted to style.

Lowry used many things as symbols: the garden, the horse, the number seven, the cat, the scorpions, the vultures, the mountains, the stars, the sea. Some of his most powerful effects are obtained by using notices, or groups of words forming the inscription on a notice or an advertisement, as symbols. He used these symbolic words or phrases to reiterate a point that gives a clue to the purpose behind his work. As an example of this usage one might cite the motto, "No se puede vivir sin amar"--"You cannot live without love." This little sentence is a key thought in Under the Volcano and a recurrent motif in his writing. It is the motto on Laruelle's house, the place where the Consul's love was betrayed.

This thesis is not an attempt to interpret Lowry's work, to criticize it, or to explain it. It is, rather, an attempt to show what Lowry, the writer, considered important as the means by which he might accomplish his aim, present his vision, or express life and what it meant to him. It will treat of the development of Malcolm Lowry's style in the three obvious time divisions: immature work, undergraduate and early work, and finished work. Definite correspondences will be established between the style of the

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earlier work and that of the mature work. It is the same man who is responsible for both. Except for obvious growth that came as his experience of life widened and deepened, the changes are not in the person but in the skill with which that person expressed all that went to make up his personality and his world.

Since this thesis will deal with his artistry through its manifestation in his style, it must show his ever-increasing skill in handling the tools of his craft. For this reason he is presented as passing through the three stages of training used by the old guild system; apprentice, journeyman, and master. The apprentice learned to handle his tools; the journeyman practiced the craft, studying it at home and abroad; the master was accepted as such when he had produced a masterpiece that proved his right to be ranked with the leaders of his craft. Lowry passed through these three stages in his development and each is clearly marked in his work. This thesis, then, will study Lowry the craftsman as he develops into Lowry the master stylist.

Lowry's work is well able to stand by itself in any body of contemporary writing. A knowledge of the man, however, will make the work more meaningful since, in his case and to an amazing degree, the man and the work are one. There will, then, be a coverage of the main points in his

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life. Since no biography has appeared to date, this presentation is necessary for the proper development of major points in the thesis. It is, of necessity, limited to a survey of the main facts in his life, those that were shaping influences in his work.

The word "artistry" as it is used in this thesis will embrace the two shades of meaning that are commonly linked with it: first, "the pursuit of art" and second, "the artistic quality of effect or workmanship."⁵ The thesis will trace Malcolm Lowry's pursuit of art through literary expression from his early efforts to his most mature work. It will deal with the main forms or genres into which his work can be classified: short stories, poetry, letters, novels, and criticism. It will also treat of his own conscious artistry in workmanship. He has given definite expression to his ideas on what constitutes perfection in a writer. These ideas are expressed in his letters, his comments on his own work, his working notes, and also in his generous criticism of the work of other writers. All this will be studied and, wherever possible, his work will be evaluated by his own standards of perfection.

Finally, this thesis will present the judgment of critics of established reputation who have commented on Lowry's style. No great body of criticism exists as yet on

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his work as a whole. Almost all the critical matter available is in the form of reviews dealing with each major work on its appearance, a few articles in scholarly magazines of the same date and genesis, and, recently, short mention in critiques of the novel of the forties or of English literature in the first half of the twentieth century. The re-issue of Under the Volcano in hardcover nineteen years after its first appearance has evoked a considerable amount of comment well worth the attention that will be given it.

Almost all the critics who have written of Lowry's work praise his style. But style depends on the harmony that exists between the idea to be expressed and the manner of expressing it. The individuality of the author controls the expression. It is in the manner of expressing the idea that the greatest challenge lies; this is the test of style. A study of his writing proves that Lowry met the challenge and passed the test in a way that is worthy of consideration. This thesis, then, will deal with the work of Malcolm Lowry, the supreme stylist of the forties, and one of the outstanding stylists of our century.

NOTES

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¹Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (New York, 1965)--hereafter cited as Letters, p. 137.

²Eliot, T.S., Selected Essays, (London, 1932), p. 145. Eliot describes an "objective correlative" as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." Since the expression "objective correlative" has now become part of the vocabulary of criticism, it will hereafter be used without quotation marks and with no further credit reference to T.S. Eliot.

³Sir Philip Sidney, "Astrophel and Stella," I, l.14.

⁴Malcolm Lowry, "Preface to a Novel," Canadian Literature, IX (Summer 1961), 23-29.

⁵Oxford English Dictionary.

CHAPTER I

THE MAN

In Dante no, in Shakespeare no,
Nor yet in any library you go.
And in His book you scarcely dare
To hope you'll find your agony there.¹

To Malcolm Lowry there was no such thing as a closing off of experience. Everything was interrelated. Each new experience impinged on and modified the old in just the same way that each new piece of literature, having status of its own, impinges upon and modifies all that has gone before it. To him his writing was his life and his life was his writing and the two were completely interwoven into one texture. Because life was a continuing process he was constantly revising and reshaping his expression of the things in it that were important to him. It was almost as if he were attempting to describe a large opal that was being slowly revolved as he looked at it. Each new view modified his understanding and appreciation of its beauty and so changed what he might want to say or be able to say about it.

In spite of the fact that his work and his life are one texture, he was too much the real artist to think that mere autobiography was, per se, fiction as soon as it was written. He used his experiences as the objective

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correlative for presenting their deeper, their universal meaning. He took what he knew and transmuted it into art. In a letter to Albert Erskine in which he discusses "fiction about writings and writers as such"² he unfolds his plan for the novels "Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid" and "La Mordida." Then, of his protagonist Sigbjørn Wilderness, whom he has made a writer, almost a doppelgänger, he says, "What he suspects is that he's not a writer so much as being written--this is where the terror comes in. (It came in just then.)"³ He goes on to make other distinctions and comparisons and ends with the revealing phrase that his character is "looking for himself or his soul."⁴ Many indications in Lowry's own life, his work, his letters, suggest that he too was the possessed artist that was "being written," the man in search of his soul.

Clarence Malcolm Lowry was born on July 28, 1909, at "Warren Crest," North Drive, Liscard [now incorporated into Wallasey], in the Birkenhead district of Cheshire, England, the fourth and last son of Arthur Osborne Lowry. His mother was the former Evelyn Boden, daughter of a Norwegian sea captain. The circumstances of this grandfather's death made him an almost legendary hero to his grandson. On the return voyage from the Orient, Captain Boden signalled a gunboat and commanded it to blow up the ship because the entire crew was dying of cholera. He stayed with his ship.⁵ This event,

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slightly changed to suit the circumstances demanded by the story, forms a constantly recurring incident in Lowry's writing.

Arthur Osborne Lowry was a wealthy broker with interests and holdings in cotton, sugar, and oil in several countries. He was active in organizing and directing the companies in which he was a shareholder and travelled extensively in North and South America, India, Egypt, Russia, and many European countries. He was well known in athletic circles as an expert swimmer. He won contests and, on several occasions, saved people from drowning in the Mersey and other waters. For this he was awarded the medal and certificate of the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society.⁶ No doubt it was under his father's influence and training that the boy developed his skill as a swimmer. To Malcolm Lowry love of the sea meant being in it as well as on it.

The Lowry home, Inglewood, at Caldy, Wirral, overlooked the river Dee, the distant Welsh mountains, and the estuary that was the setting for Lycidas. It was a beautiful place and Malcolm Lowry referred to it with affection and also with regret that he had not been able to spend more time there. After his seventh birthday he was sent to boarding school and from then on spent very little

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time at home. When his parents were travelling, he passed his vacations at school.

The boy had been named Clarence Malcolm Lowry but he did not use his first name. In a letter to David Markson, he quips, "it was Royal Welsh Fusiliers brother who'd insisted I be called Clarence after the gent of that name who was drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine."⁷ To the same correspondent he also gave a picture of his home life with the remark that he came "from a huntin' and shootin' family near Liverpool, who weren't interested in literary matters."⁸

He was not happy at his first school. He was subjected to considerable teasing which, at times, became open taunting. On his father's insistence he joined a Wolf Cub Pack, but to the shy and sensitive boy this was a form of torture. His subsequent use of the wolf as a symbol for cruelty stems from his school experience. Later he was able to sublimate this; the wolf then came to represent control, strength and peace. This is well exemplified in "Queer Poem" which has the two symbols coordinated:

I knew a man without a heart:
Boys tore it out, they said,
And gave it to a hungry wolf
Who picked it up and fled.

And fled the boys, their master too,
All distant fled the brute,

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And after it, in quaint pursuit,
The heartless man reeled on.

I met this man the other day
Walking in grotesque pride.
His heart restored, his mien gay,
The meek wolf by his side.⁹

Linked with these unpleasant memories is the blindness to which he often refers in his later writing. At the age of nine he suffered an eye injury when playing ball. This resulted in an infection which left him at times almost totally blind until, at thirteen, he was cared for by the school's new doctor who saw to it that he was sent to London for proper surgical attention. From then on his eyes were remarkably good and remained so almost to the end of his life. It is only during his last stay in Europe that he mentions his distress from failing sight.¹⁰

These experiences left their scars, however, on the boy's soul. References to them are found, in one way or another, in almost all of his work. The characters in his novels have similar experiences. In "The Element Follows You Around, Sir!" the protagonist, Captain Ethan Llewelyn, remembers a poster he had seen as a boy in the London tube station "because it had been just after his eyes got better."¹¹ The same protagonist also shared the hatred Lowry expressed in many poems. Llewelyn, unable to sleep, experiences, night after night, a flood of fears and

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. . . out of the fears 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 himself, and out of all this hatred did not grow sleep.¹²

Although there is a somewhat solipsistic element in "Autopsy," the poem throws further light on what these early experiences meant to Lowry:

An autopsy on this childhood then reveals:
 That he was flayed at seven, crucified at eleven.
 And he was blind as well, and jeered at
 For his blindness. Small wonder that the man
 Is embittered and full of hate, but wait.
 All this time, and always lost, he struggled.
 In pain he prayed that none other
 In the world should suffer so. Christ's
 Life compared with his, was full of tumult,
 Praise, excitement, final triumph.
 For him were no hosannas. He writes them now.
 Matriculated into life by this, remembering how
 This laggard self was last in the school Marathon,
 Or that he was last, last in everything,
 Devoid of all save wandering attention--
 Wandering is the word defines our man--
 But turned, to discover Clare in the poor snail,
 And weave a fearful vision of his own.¹³

Following this period of frustration and inactivity the boy, on his recovery, was driven to prove his strength by extreme physical activity. Like the Taskersons in Under the Volcano¹⁴ he went on long hikes of twenty or thirty miles in a day. Whether he also imitated the Taskersons in drinking a minimum of six pints of beer on the way is not clear, although it does seem probable. He also enjoyed swimming, rugby, tennis, and golf. References to these

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games recur in his adult writing and are made with the ease of familiarity. The last stanza of "Kingfishers in British Columbia" uses a simile drawn from this experience to describe the female bird's flight as she swoops towards her mate:

A mad kingfisher
rocketing about in the
red fog at sunrise

now sits
on the alder
post that tethers the floats
angrily awaiting his mate.
Here she

comes, like a left wing
three quarter cutting through toward
the goal in sun-lamped
fog at Rosslyn Park at half
past three in halcyon days.¹⁵

A change of schools at this time brought a happier period in Lowry's life. From the fall term of 1923 until the spring term of 1927, he attended Leys Public School, Cambridge, the school in which "Mr. Chips" was a master.¹⁶ James Hilton had attended The Leys a few years earlier and he and Lowry had the same housemaster, W.H. Balgarnie, the lovable protagonist in Hilton's story.

In her biographical note on her husband, Mrs. Lowry says that "he had always intended to be a writer and he wrote continuously from his early youth."¹⁷ His new school published a paper, The Leys Fortnightly, to which he became a contributor. The young writer now had an outlet for his

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literary efforts. His first published work, as far as has been established to date, was a short story in the issue of March 13, 1925.¹⁸ "The Light That Failed Not" is by no means remarkable except for the significant fact that he had now appeared in print. In typical schoolboy fashion he built his pen name from his initials; C.M.L. became CAMEL and identified most of the six stories, the poetry, the reports on school games and matches, and the letters that represent his earliest work.

One does not find many references to this period of his schooling in his later writing. Perhaps the lack of comment indicates that life at The Leys offered sufficient challenge to make it interesting and that he was happier there than he had ever been before. He had grown in understanding and in tolerance.

His last letter to the editor, printed on December 16, 1926, shows the point to which his sense of values had developed. It is an indictment of the arguments offered in a school debate and accepted as "good points" by a Mr. Gardner. One of these--"that Public School men are better than self-made men"--is indignantly attacked by CAMEL on the score that such a "statement is neither patriotism, nor snobbery, but, for lack of a better word, childish."¹⁹ His innate sense of justice, sharpened no doubt by the unpleasant experiences at his first school, presents here, for the

first time, a theme that recurs throughout his writing. He hated snobbery and looked on it as a violation of freedom, a form of injustice. In a letter to Downie Kirk, written nearly a quarter of a century later, he discusses the work of José Ortega y Gasset and, quite characteristically, picks out the things that he finds most significant in Ortega's thought. There is a long passage discussing snobbism in which he defines the snob as "the person who imagines he has only rights."²⁰ Then, speaking of this in regard to the "business of vocation" he quotes Ortega and claims that "to have found one's vocation, whatever it may be, is 'to understand that one is alive for some specific and unexchangeable purpose. . . . Liberty has always been understood in Europe as the freedom to be our real selves'."²¹ His last non-creative prose work, "Halt! I Protest," left incomplete at his death, had been started as a letter-to-the-editor, but had developed into an essay on the philosophy of freedom.²² His sense of justice stayed with him to the end.

In answer to questions put to him by Albert Erskine, Lowry made a light-hearted reference to his success in golf. It is worth quoting for the glimpse it gives of the school-boy:

Yes, I was pretty good at golf once, I broke the boys under-15 record, and also later under-18, held for fifty-odd years by Johnny Ball (later open champ) in 1924: I did the first 8 at the Royal Liverpool (Hoylake) in 28 once in the annual boy's show there

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when I was 14½, broke down at the 9th a short hole took in six (still two under actual par so far) but came back in the last 9 in the late forties but still broke the record. But later I took to socketing and even beer perhaps and dreadful nervous twitchings on the green. When I began to think I was really good I became lousy. But should you care to--er--look you will still find my record inscribed on the wall in the Royal Liverpool to this day: there is a very nice pub beyond the 17th green, on the other side of the road, called The Bull also. My record isn't quite fair altogether because Johnny had to use a gutta-percha ball in them days. But I beat H.H. Hilton's winning score too, who didn't, and several others who later became amateur or open champs. My record wasn't beaten until sometime in the 30's, balls and clubs were getting better or perhaps even the players: to me, the holes were getting longer and more complicated.²³

This sounds as if the unhappiness of the earlier years has given way to a measure of success and contentment. The scorned and taunted boy is now able to meet his peers in competition and win recognition by his success.

Lowry's brothers had gone into the family business after receiving the B.A. from Cambridge. Malcolm was expected to follow this pattern, so his father had entered him for Christ's College for the fall term of 1927. But the boy who had written trenchantly on snobbery in his school paper wanted to see more of what life had to offer before going to college. Promising to attend Cambridge later, he won his father's consent to his plan. His reading of Eugene O'Neill had made a strong impression on him; his dream of going to sea would now become a reality. He did not "run away to

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sea" as some reviewers claim.²⁴ His father consented to the boy's going and even used his influence to get him a job on what he considered a suitable ship. This was disturbing to young Malcolm; he wanted to find his own job. However, he accepted the one arranged by his father and in due time arrived at the dock in the family limousine. The local newspapers considered the story worth covering and reporters were at hand for interviews. One of them quoted Lowry as saying, "No silk-cushion youth for me, I want to see the world, and rub shoulders with its oddities, and get some experience of life before I go back to Cambridge University." He also quoted the lad's mother: "He is bent on a literary career, and his short-story writing is all to him." Then she added a detail to the picture, "Of course, he has taken his ukulele with him, and he hopes to compose some more Charlestons during the voyage."²⁵ The crew resented all this, especially the fact that influence from above had negotiated the job. Because of this unfortunate start the circle of friendship was closed against him. Once again he was an outcast. But from this experience his first novel came into being.

The voyage lasted from May until October 1927 and ranged from England to the far East, China and Japan. While the ship, the Pyrrhus, was in these waters it was caught between the cross-fire of Chinese gun-boats and shore

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batteries. Lowry was wounded in the knee. Except for the fact that it furnished one more tale to tell on the return, this incident appeared annoying rather than significant. It proved to be the factor which prevented Lowry's being accepted for military service during World War II. Because of this injury he stayed in Dollarton during his most creative period and finished Under the Volcano.

When the lad returned from his 50 shillings a month job, the reporters again considered him worth interviewing.

Malcolm is quoted in the Daily Mail:

I do not regret my action, but I do not intend to go to sea again. . . . My hardest job was chipping the paint off winches, and what you cannot chip off you get off with your nails or your teeth. Another job I did was to paint the inside of a coal bunker with black paint. As a rule I worked from 5:30 in the morning until 7 at night, scrubbing decks, polishing brasswork, and carrying the meals to the seamen. I took my ukulele with me and tried to compose some fox-trots. I hope to go on to a university and compose some more fox-trots and write fiction.²⁶

The months following his return to England were spent in reading Melville and Aiken, authors that had a strong influence in shaping his literary career. A letter to Derek Pethick traces the effect Melville had on him and the link he saw between that writer and his own grandfather:

The identification, on my side, if any, was with Melville himself and his life. This was partly because my grandfather had been a skipper of a wind-jammer who went down with his ship--Melville also had a son named Malcolm who simply disappeared--purely romantic reasons like that, but mostly

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because of his failure as a writer and his whole outlook generally. His failure for some reason absolutely fascinated me and it seems to me that from an early age I determined to emulate it, in every way possible.²⁷

The second shaping and lasting influence that entered his life at this time was that of Conrad Aiken. Lowry's letter to David Markson shows the effect Aiken had on him:

. . . Yes, Aiken's Blue Voyage was an enormous influence upon me, especially since (I made its acquaintance at the age of 18 in England having just returned from my first voyage to sea) not being able to find out anything about its author, I felt that Aiken was my own discovery. Of course the truth was Aiken was highly respected in a small circle in England, but I didn't find this out till much later.²⁸

He says that he took up the "dedicatory coincidence of C.M.L." to the extent that he soon persuaded himself that it was dedicated to him. He even imagined that he had written the book himself and was pleased, and also annoyed, "vicariously to receive the Pulitzer Prize a few years later." The C.M.L. of the dedication was, of course, Clarice Lorenz, Aiken's second wife.

In the letter he contributed to the Aiken number of Wake magazine, he makes a further and even stronger comment on this influence. Speaking of Aiken as a writer, he says that, before he had heard anything of him, "his work first slammed down on my raw psyche like lightning." He then makes a judgment that shows his interest in style, "I have always thought that he was the truest and most direct

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descendent of our own great Elizabethans, having the supreme gift of dramatic and poetic language."²⁹

In 1928, Lowry was enrolled at the English College at Bonn. He had promised his father that he would go to Cambridge, and this period in Germany was a preparation for his further studies. One of the coincidences that Lowry loved to trace in his life arose years later in connection with the short time, eight weeks, he spent at the Bonn school. Clenens ten Holder, the German translator of Under the Volcano, knew Karlheinz Schmidhus, one of Lowry's German teachers. Lowry devotes almost half of his letter to ten Holder to praise of this teacher whose kindness and patience he had found so unusual and so memorable.³⁰ A letter to Downie Kirk, from the same period, the spring of 1951, sums up briefly what he had said at length to ten Holder. He admits that if he learned little it was not the teacher's fault, but the pupil's, since the latter was usually in the Reinischer Hof. Then he says of the former, "He was by far the nicest, the most brilliant, and the only genuinely kind teacher I had there, and we were great friends, despite my being such a rotten pupil."³¹

His life at Cambridge began in the fall of 1929 when he entered St. Catherine's College. There is now a definite pattern of reading, writing, hiking, tennis, and drinking. This last occupation had been a major activity for some

years. Even as early as eighteen, Lowry was a heavy drinker. At Cambridge the habit became intensified to such an extent that it caused trouble with the authorities of his college. T.R. Henn, at that time a Junior Fellow, taught Lowry for some three years and found him intelligent but "from the academic point of view rather idle." In person "he was immensely tough, strong and virile." Lowry worked efficiently under Mr. Henn's guidance and "showed a great deal of originality and even pugnacity in argument." The teacher remembers the student's sea voyages every Long Vacation and the tales he told on his return. He also remembers that Lowry drank very heavily and steadily as an undergraduate and was "in danger of being sent down by the College." Among his hobbies were playing a guitar and singing somewhat dubious songs: "in 1932 he appeared in the University Footlights; (this is a club which produces a revue annually in June). He also practiced weight lifting."³²

Everyone who studies Lowry's life eventually asks the question, "Why did he drink?" Was it a compensation for something missing in his life? Was it defiance of his father's Methodist standards? Was it a desire to prove himself with his companions? No one can really answer these questions. The facts that have bearing on the matter suggest that a variety of factors existed, each of which probably contributed something to the formation of the habit, or

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the development of the disease. He was several years younger than his brothers who seem to have been held up as models for his imitation. His parents were often away on business-pleasure trips and the child was left with servants. From his seventh year he was at boarding school and his later writing indicates that he was bitterly unhappy. When he suffered from blindness for nearly four years, he was left at school during the holidays so as not to distress his mother. The Cub Pack experience, its initiation or something else connected with it, was a horror to him. His family did not understand, nor did they encourage his musical or his literary interests. He looked on middle class virtues and values as fronts behind which people hid their vices and their selfishness. All this probably developed into a pattern of frustration which surged into the hatred he speaks of in his writings. Perhaps his drinking was his only defence against this. Whatever the reason, the habit was formed early and the biographer must accept it as a fact. The wonder is not that he drank so much, but rather that he accomplished so much under the circumstances.

But the experience of life that he had sought in his sea voyages was now finding expression. Lowry had written several short stories and some poetry which had been published. The stories appeared in Experiment, an ephemeral journal edited by his undergraduate friend Gerald Noxon.

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Two of them, "Seductio ad Absurdum" and "On Board the 'West Hardaway'," were recognized by Edward J. O'Brien. The first of these was included in Best British Short Stories of 1931; the second, after appearing in Story was given 3-star listing in O'Brien's "Index of Distinctive Short Stories" for 1933, in the appendix to Best [American] Short Stories for 1934.³³ One of his poems, "For Nordahl Grieg Ship's Fireman," was included in Cambridge Poetry, 1930, edited by his college friends John Davenport, Hugh Sykes, and Michael Redgrave for the Hogarth Living Poets series of which it is Volume 13.³⁴

The two stories mentioned above later formed chapters in Ultramarine, his first novel and his major literary effort at this time. Although he drew on his life as deckhand, ship's-boy, and fireman, and reported experiences almost identical with his own, he was, even in this early work, an artist using the substance of daily living with imagination and vision. The book was, to a certain extent derivative. The young author was only too willing to recognize and acknowledge as his sources Conrad Aiken, Nordahl Grieg, Eugene O'Neill, Joseph Conrad, and Herman Melville. He felt that he was particularly indebted to Aiken's Blue Voyage, Melville's Redburn, and Grieg's The Ship Sails On. But in spite of the indebtedness, Ultramarine had something of its own. It was original in its handling of the

forecastle talk through multiple dialogue to give the effect of a blur of voices and in the way in which seemingly trivial matters are made to assume undue importance because of the monotony and emptiness of the men's lives. The book was accepted by the university board as partial fulfilment of the work required for his B.A. degree. It found a publisher while Lowry was still an undergraduate.

Years later, when recounting the experiences he had had with his various manuscripts, he liked to tell the story of the lost Ultramarine. Different versions of the story exist. That given by John Davenport, who knew him well at this time, is similar to the one Mrs. Lowry gives. Davenport says, "The typescript of the fair copy was stolen from Ian Parson's motor-car, and the whole thing had to be re-written from the penultimate version." He adds that "it was published by Jonathan Cape in 1933, and represented nearly five years' work"³⁵ Martin Case, the friend with whom Lowry had been staying, retrieved notes and working sheets from the wastepaper basket and the young author re-wrote the book. Conrad Aiken questions this story and claims that he had a copy of the manuscript that Lowry could have had if he had needed it.³⁶ If Lowry's writing habits at that time were anything like those of his later life, there probably were several versions of each page, but the job of editing his own work would still have to be done.

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While at Cambridge, Lowry made two more long voyages, both connected with the literary career he dreamed of for himself. The first was to Norway where he sought out Nordahl Grieg and received permission from that author to write a dramatic version of The Ship Sails On. He worked on this for years but was never able to complete it to his satisfaction. A friendship grew up between the two men. For the young lad it was a case of hero worship based on admiration which spurred him to emulate the other's work. The voyage and the meeting became the subject of the ill-fated novel, "In Ballast to the White Sea," which was destroyed by fire in 1944. There are also many references to Grieg and phrases echoing his work in Lowry's poems and stories.

The second long voyage was to Cambridge, Mass., to consult Conrad Aiken and study under him. This was another case of hero worship which became a friendship that lasted, through good and ill, to the end of Lowry's life. The boy to whom writing was his whole world gave Aiken a picture of his environment:

Nobody reads at home: the only paper we take is The British Weekly; there are few books in the house more exciting than Religions and Religion by James Hope Moulton (although a careful searcher might find in a somewhat inaccessible region Donne, Chatterton, The Smell of Lebanon, Crabbe's Inebriety and Blue Voyage) and although I have had a certain amount of youthful success as a writer of slow and slippery blues it is as much as my life is worth to play anything in the house--that doesn't worry me so much--but when they see me writing anything serious they don't exactly

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discourage me but tell me that it should be subordinate to my real work. What my real work is, heaven only knows, as the only other department that I have had any success in, is in writing seriously and that success rarely meant acceptance but quite often sincere encouragement from people whose opinion could hardly be taken to be humble.³⁷

In this same letter, his second to Aiken, Lowry asks the poet to be his tutor and guardian. It seems to be a strange arrangement for a boy who had a father and a home, but it makes clear how little understanding existed between father and son. Malcolm makes the suggestion in these words,

Next October I am going to Cambridge for three or four years to try and get an English Tripos and a degree. Until October I am more or less of a free lance and a perpetual source of anxiety to a bewildered parent. The bewildered parent in question would be willing to pay you 5 or 6 guineas a week . . . if you would tolerate me for any period you like to name between now and then as a member of your household.³⁸

The business arrangement was worked out between Lowry's father and Aiken, and the poet took on the duties of unofficial tutor and literary director. He served also as a substitute father and became a trusted friend. Aiken's Ushant, in which Lowry is identified as Hambo, gives many vignettes of their life together.³⁹

Just before Lowry left Cambridge he lost a college friend under circumstances that shocked him and haunted him for the rest of his life. A member of Lowry's group, an unhappy, maladjusted young man, expressed, time after time, his

desire to commit suicide. The threat was made so often that the others became bored to the point that, when it was repeated, someone said, "Well, why don't you?" with the intention of brushing the threat aside and jolting their friend to a more cheerful frame of mind. It was taken amiss. A few hours later the lad was found dead. Lowry never forgave himself for his lack of sympathy towards his friend at this crucial point.⁴⁰ Several of his protagonists, especially Llewelyn in "October Ferry to Gabriola," are troubled by like memories.

In 1932, Lowry left Cambridge with a third-class in the English Tripos and his B.A. degree. His three older brothers, measuring up to their father's expectations, had entered the family business after graduation. This was not for Malcolm. He wanted to write and he wanted to be free to devote all his time to it. After considerable discussion of the matter, his father gave his consent and established a trust fund that would pay him about £7 a week. At that time this was enough to live on so it set him free to seek what he thought was the most important thing in life.

He lived for a time in London and in Paris. No doubt the pattern of drinking and youthful irresponsibility continued. Whether there were interludes of more serious trouble is not clear, but his father later wrote sadly

of this period and implied that his son had disgraced the family name.⁴¹

In her novel, I Bring not Peace, Charlotte Haldane developed her character James Dowd from Malcolm Lowry. Dowd is a guitar-playing, song-writing English lad with a vast capacity for liquor. The lyrics for which Dowd is responsible in the story were written, according to Charlotte Haldane, by Lowry.⁴² The author makes Mical, the protagonist who has helped Dowd with her friendship, describe him as one who "keeps his despair for other things than love." She thinks that he is a "daemonic person" who has "an inner voice. He lives an intense and strange life of his own that is not much affected by his relations with other people, at any rate by me."⁴³

Lowry went to Spain in 1933 with the Aikens and Edward Burra, a painter. In Granada Conrad Aiken introduced him to Jan Gabriel, a young American writer. In Ushant Aiken admits that he wanted to keep Jan near him and thought that by marrying her to Hambo (Lowry), he would be sure to do so.⁴⁴ This ugly admission was apparently made to Lowry when mentor and pupil quarreled during Aiken's visit to Mexico in 1937. Whatever the circumstances, Lowry married her in Paris, in December, 1933, with Julian Trevelyan as his best man.

The couple lived in France, at Chartres and Paris, for some months but were not happy together. "Hotel Room in Chartres," a story written a short time later, describes a similar situation and is autobiographical in theme, if not in actual fact.⁴⁵ In 1934, Jan returned alone to the United States and Malcolm went to Paris where he shared an apartment with James Stern, the Irish writer, who remained a good friend and a lifelong correspondent.

In 1935, Lowry went to New York. Writing and drinking had filled his time in Europe and the same sort of existence dragged wearily on in New York. At this time he got to know Bellevue Hospital well enough to use it in shaping Lunar Caustic. In his letter honoring Conrad Aiken, he relates the story of a visit from his old friend to the squalid room in which he was living. From the distance of time he makes it amusing, but one can read between the lines.⁴⁶ Years later, Lowry described New York in his letter to David Markson:

In my own experience--odi et amo--that particular city--it favours brief and furious outbursts, but not the long haul. Moreover for all its drama and existential fury, or perhaps because of it, it's a city where it can be remarkably hard--or so it seems to me--to get on the right side of one's despair; once having got on the wrong side of it, that is; even hangovers don't seem the same in New York as anywhere else, though to be sure they may not last so long, the deceitful medicament being more easily at hand; which only makes it worse in the end. Not that one can't learn a great deal from hangovers: everything, in fact, save how not to get one next

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time, but that one can too easily find oneself slipping into the state of mind in that city--or so it seems to me--where to be slightly tight or hungover seems one's natural state, the only way to maintain one's balance and one's harmony with the place: and the bad thing about this is not the tightness so much, which as you say can be highly enjoyable. . . . but that that state of mind is really as eminently rational as it is--or can be--dangerous; an uncomfortable combination. . . . I don't say one can't keep fit (whatever that may mean) in New York, but after a while, does one really want to?⁴⁷

Fortunately the release from this inferno was at hand.

On the invitation of his school and college friend, John Davenport, Lowry went to the West Coast. Davenport was working in a film studio in Hollywood and offered Lowry a job as a script writer. Lowry accepted and went to Los Angeles in 1936.⁴⁸ He and Jan were together again and tried for nearly two years to save their marriage. But Lowry was not happy writing for studio production. The system whereby each writer was responsible for a certain area only was stultifying for him; he preferred to work on a larger scale in which he could handle the whole plot and setting. The experience was, however, extremely valuable and had a direct effect in developing the cinematographic technique which he employed later in his novels.

The Lowrys went to Mexico in November, 1936. Here he found much to challenge his imagination: a beautiful country, pleasant climate, interesting people, historic buildings and monuments. He also found a too easy means of satisfying his thirst. He spent a good deal of time

writing, but much more time drinking in the cantinas and pulquerías of Cuernavaca and neighboring towns. Conrad Aiken, in Mexico to divorce his second wife as a preparation for marrying the third one, gives a pathetic picture of the Lowry household. One of the first times Aiken mentions Nita, i.e., Jan, in Ushant, he describes her as "dark, secret, close, and as hard as nails, with steel-shod little high heels especially invented for the perforation of hearts." This tiny streamlined Nita "would go through life as murderously as a bullet. . . . Faithless and Pitiless--!"⁴⁹ Writing of this later period, he repeats the picture and makes it abundantly clear that whether Lowry's drinking and dejection were the cause or the effect of their incompatibility, the marriage was virtually ended. During Aiken's stay, Nita-Jan went off to a silvermine to visit with some engineer friends. This was the end. Aiken calls it a "flat declaration of unfaithfulness."⁵⁰ Lowry was willing to admit that part, at least, of the blame lay with him. In a letter to John Davenport, he tries to make this clear, "Jan is not responsible for this," i.e., the situation in which he finds himself. "I foresaw my fate too deeply to involve her in it."⁵¹

All this time Lowry was writing. He was working on Lunar Caustic which was then entitled "The Last Address," "In Ballast to the White Sea," the drama based on Grieg's

The Ship Sails On, and a short story which refused to be a short story and insisted on growing into the novel, Under the Volcano. From his Mexican experiences, harrowing as they were, he got his Consul and his great novel, but years were to pass before he shared it with the public.

After a period of misery in which he drained desolation and despair to the dregs, he pulled himself together and returned to Los Angeles. Jan went to Santa Barbara as soon as he arrived, leaving him "a sort of Lear of the Sierras, dying by the glass in the Brown Derby, in Hollywood," as he wrote to Aiken.⁵² At this time he met Margerie Bonner and began the happiest and most productive period of his life.

Margerie Bonner was born in Adrian, Michigan. She had studied at art school in Chicago with the intention of becoming a commercial artist. On the invitation of her sister who was an actress, Margerie went to Hollywood and played small girl roles in western pictures. Later she did art work for film studios and costume research in the Walt Disney Studio for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. She worked also on various programs for Western Coast Radio Stations.⁵³

These two people understood one another. She could look beyond his faults and see wherein his individuality and his greatness lay. In his letters he paid many tributes to

her, and readily admitted that she spurred him on to completing his work. In a biographical note prepared for Ralph Gustafson he says of Under the Volcano, "That this novel was ever finished at all is largely due to the encouragement of my wife."⁵⁴ Her marginal notes in the working draft of this novel indicate her pride in his ability and her interest in his work. This was exactly what he needed.

Lowry's financial affairs were in the hands of a business agent appointed by his father to administer the trust fund. 1939 was offering its threat of war when this man brought Lowry to Vancouver, the nearest British Empire port, to arrange for a re-entry visa. The war broke out while they were in Canada, and Lowry was denied permission to return to the United States. His "guardian"-- galling term to a man now thirty years old--put two Vancouver men in charge of the funds and returned to Los Angeles, leaving Lowry stranded in a strange city with people he did not know and did not like. Several drafts of long letters to his father protesting this treatment are in the files of the Malcolm Lowry Collection. There are also letters to Conrad Aiken begging him to assume, once again, responsibility for him so as to enable him to return to the U.S.A.

From the letters to his father, some sort of reconciliation with his parents resulted. The father demanded an apology for past conduct and assurance that he would mend his

ways. Lowry gave him this assurance. In reading the correspondence, especially the preparatory drafts of the letters, one feels that it was a forced assent. It had the effect, however, of clearing up some of the misunderstanding, or the injury, that had existed between father and son and brought about a happier relationship from then on. The father's comments on his son's projected divorce are stern, almost harsh, and his business sense enters strongly into his insistence that if a divorce is obtained it must be an absolute decree.⁵⁵ Lowry had instituted proceedings for divorce before leaving Los Angeles and as soon as the final steps were completed, he married Margerie Bonner in Vancouver, December 2, 1940.

What began as a search for an inexpensive honeymoon became a way of life. Through friends they were directed to a squatter's cabin on the foreshore at Dollarton. To them it was the perfect solution of their problem. The cabin was small but comfortable, ideally situated in a beautiful natural setting; quiet, almost isolated, with the sea at their door, and living was cheap. They enjoyed their stay so much they decided to make their home there and bought a cabin nearby. The fresh air and the swimming, which Lowry continued on into the winter months, provided a much needed tonic and the peace of the place made writing possible.

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Their beach at Dollarton was their Eden and came to symbolize to them all that was good and beautiful in life.

Unfortunately there were times when all was not good and beautiful; times when money was so desperately needed that it had to be borrowed, when ill health or accidents meant hospitalization or, at least, heavy expenses for medical care, X-rays and prescriptions. Sometimes winter storms or the ill health of one or the other forced them to seek refuge in a city apartment. These were periods of unhappiness during which they both longed for their Eden at Dollarton which Lowry loved to call, in his letters and in his writing, Eridanus, the River of Stars. He fed the wild birds and counted with joy the varieties that could be seen from the window. He even used this information to head letters to friends, "Dollarton, 3 golden-eyes, / 2 mergansers, 3 gulls, / 7 grebes, 1 cat."⁵⁶

During this peaceful period his work progressed steadily, perhaps one should say simultaneously, for he had the habit of writing several things at the same time or, if concentrating on one piece of work, he worked on several versions of it. These many versions of the work in progress have made Mrs. Lowry's task of editing her husband's unpublished work a truly formidable undertaking.

Lowry had started to write Under the Volcano in 1936 when in Mexico. It gradually assumed a dominant position in

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the work on hand and he concentrated on it, writing three versions before he released it to his agent, Harold Matson, in 1940. By the end of 1941 it had been refused by twelve publishers. Lowry withdrew it from his agent and began the fourth version.

June 7, 1944, was a trying day for the Lowrys. Their house, a wooden structure in an area where there were no adequate fire-fighting services, caught fire. At great personal risk they snatched as much manuscript material as possible from the flames. Margerie saved Under the Volcano and Malcolm her current mystery story, The Shapes that Creep. He was rather badly burned when a beam fell across his back. Both suffered greatly from shock. But his greatest loss was the almost completely finished novel "In Ballast to the White Sea." All that remains of this novel on which he had been at work, writing, shaping, and re-shaping, for fourteen years is a few circular remnants with charred edges, kept in the Lowry Collection as a monument to a vanished work.⁵⁷ The few surviving pages of handwritten notes, almost illegible from discoloring by water and time, were not enough for him to begin the re-writing. The Paradiso part of his projected Divine Comedy was gone; the Inferno part still unfinished.

Gerald Noxon, a Canadian who had been Lowry's friend at Cambridge, offered the Lowrys a refuge where they could

live while he completed his novel; they accepted and made their home at Niagara-on-the-Lake, near Toronto, until February, 1945. The writing of Under the Volcano was finished while they were living in eastern Canada and the final revision and typing was begun.

When the Lowrys returned to Dollarton they found that, in spite of the notices and markers they had left on the site, a family had pre-empted the spot on which their home had stood and they were forced to build farther along the beach. Helped by a few fishermen and friends who had cabins there, but mostly by their own labour, they rebuilt their home. This was a challenge to their ingenuity and determination since building supplies in wartime were not easy to get and Lowry's income, from British investments and holdings, was strictly controlled by the government to the extent that a mere trickle of funds could reach him. While in the east, the Lowrys had earned a certain amount by writing and reading radio scripts. They had to sacrifice even this limited income because this form of writing took too much of the time they felt should be devoted to what was less ephemeral.

June, 1945 saw the completion of Under the Volcano. It was sent simultaneously to Lowry's literary agent, Harold Matson, to find an American publisher and to Jonathan

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Cape in London, who had brought out Ultramarine twelve years earlier.

In January, 1946, Gerald Noxon wrote to Malcolm to urge him to send The Volcano to a publisher; he did not know that this had already been done. The letter is interesting because the writer of it knows the author so well and also because it is one of the earliest critiques of the novel. He believes it should be published because it is a work that has "grown out of much anguish" that he knows, much that he does not know, but all that is of great importance to him because he believes that what happens to one man, happens to all men. He feels that the writing of a book like that is something which should "help everyone everywhere always as Tom Jones does and Pilgrim's Progress and King Lear, and God knows how many others. Many, but not so many that we can ignore a new one."⁵⁸ The letter ends on a note of personal appreciation that must have been heart-warming in these days of anxiety:

Difficult, impossible and improbable you have always been, Malc, and you can repeat the same adjectives in my respect and yet, beneath or perhaps above those considerations, there has been from the first a kind of understanding that endures. . . . You have been one of the few artists that I have admired, one of the very few men that I have trusted and one of the few writers that I have read, feeling that I was in the presence of genius. And I mean "genius" in the good old-fashioned sense of the word.⁵⁹

Although the Lowrys had completed the outer walls of their home, buying secondhand doors and windows from a mill

that was being dismantled, they could not afford to buy, nor could they get the materials to finish the interior. The thought of the winter in an unfinished house was discouraging. Lowry needed to verify notes made in Mexico, his wife needed a holiday, and he also wanted to bring her to the locale of the book to which they had devoted so much time. She had typed and re-typed endlessly, and proof-read his manuscript to the extent that, although he was the author, she was the force that swept the book on to completion. For these reasons they decided to spend the winter in Mexico. They went there in November, 1945.

By one of those strange coincidences that Lowry was so conscious of in his life and to which he subjected the characters in his novels, a friend who knew they were looking for an apartment brought them to one that was available. It was in one of the towers of the house Lowry has assigned to Laruelle in Under the Volcano. While they were living there, two letters were delivered on the same day in February, 1946, by the same little postman who had delivered Yvonne's postcard to the Consul in the novel. One of the letters was from Reynal and Hitchcock accepting the Volcano, the other from Jonathan Cape confirming his acceptance of the novel without the changes he had at first requested.

In typical Lowryesque fashion, after this happy period, things went wrong and a bizarre arrest on espionage

charges, ending in deportation, marked the end of their holiday. The couple had gone to Acapulco to have a few days by the sea and to meet some of Lowry's former friends. Since the city is a port of entry, the police asked to see their passports. Unfortunately they had been left behind in the bags Mrs. Lowry had packed for storage in Cuernavaca. Police investigations began and Lowry was recognized as the man who had been under observation and imprisoned for supposed espionage in 1936, at the time he was journeying through the Slough of Despond. They now claimed that an old fine levied against him had not been paid, detained him in his hotel room, then imprisoned him.

The whole affair now seems to have been simply an attempt at extortion, a desire on the part of the police to collect "la mordida." From this seemingly corrupt police system Lowry could have bought himself off by paying this bribe; he refused to do so and was imprisoned. Mrs. Lowry went alone to Cuernavaca to get help from friends and to retrieve the passports. Many notes were written as the incident developed, some humorous, some poignant, and from this material there later grew several drafts of another novel, "La Mordida," as yet unpublished.

Perhaps the most personal and most touching of all the Lowry notes is this one which appears in pencil under the rough draft of a letter to the bank. After a prayer,

"Our Senora of the Sacred Heart, divine patroness of difficult and desperate causes, help me. Help us," he writes,

I am now going to sleep: please, sweet Mother of Jesus guard Margerie on her night trip: help me to want to help myself so that in her return she may have joy. You have already given her faith: I pray thee to abate the forces that are destroying me, but abate them with wisdom, plenitude and some result of joy; for if I am dead--should I even sacrifice my life--how should she live?⁶⁰

In spite of the fact that this might sound melodramatic, it has the ring of sincerity and tells a great deal about the relationship between Malcolm and Margerie Lowry. In the end the couple were deported to Laredo, Texas, and made their way back to Los Angeles, then to Dollarton.⁶¹

Cambridge University once more accepted Lowry's work towards a degree. A telegram from his brother Stuart asks Malcolm to notify the praelector at Saint Catherine's College if he wishes to take his M.A. by proxy. Lowry's nephew Donald received the degree for him. The same telegram closes with words of commendation from the family, "Mother brothers and families send love heartiest congratulations your success writing."⁶²

The summer was spent proofreading the galleys of Under the Volcano and in trying to get Scribner's to straighten out his wife's publishing problem. This firm had accepted her book and published it. Through an error on the part of her publishers, Mrs. Lowry did not receive her author's copies and so did not know, until letters of

complaint began to come in from readers, that The Last Twist of the Knife was measuring up to its title since it had been published and released to the booksellers minus the last chapter. Lowry's letters to Maxwell Perkins, which show his ability to present a case clearly, if somewhat lengthily, led to a satisfactory adjustment and to the understanding that her next book be submitted to them. This book, Horse in the Sky, a serious novel, was published by Scribner's in 1947.

Letters of appreciation began to come in from friends and readers as Under the Volcano became known. One of the most interesting is from John Davenport, now back in London. He throws a little light on the experiences they had in common, some of which are echoed, faintly perhaps, in the novel:

. . . it's truly magnificent. I love the contrapuntal clarity of it--no harmonic hunks; and apart from the arch of the whole grand plan there were for me innumerable exfoliations and escarpments to recognize--flowers on the railway track, Joe Venuti (I still have Going Places and Doing Things inscribed on some inner whorl of my inner ear), "Wilson's" dress trousers, poor James Travers' Chagford; & even the ghost, mercifully transformed, of Charlotte Haldane. And the Philoctetes pages light up sections of Ultramarine with a sort of benign brilliance. Also--but this is pure vanity--the blue lakes of B.C. had for me a personally evocative quality, for they reminded me of a long forgotten 'dream' poem I sent you from Pimlico to Paris in 1933. The Astoria poked a purple nose from its nun's coif. One strange thing: as I was reading Under the Volcano in a taxi going through Picadilly I swear that each time I looked up from the page I saw a dead man walking in the crowd. Three:

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two perhaps more reasonably than the third--James Travers, Nordahl Grieg and Patrick Railton. Nordahl I met during the war in London: I'd have told you of it had I known your whereabouts.⁶³

He then picks up little points. One which he calls a "pedantic footnote" is the use of est in the Virgil quotation, "Facilis est decensus Averno."⁶⁴ He wonders what "Mr. Chips" would have said of spoiling the scansion of the line. Then he goes on with the rest of the Virgil quotation, commenting,

Marvellously apposite, taken with your Goethe quotation, of what you've done in your book. Night and day the portals of gloomy Dis stand wide: but to recall thy step and issue to the upper air--there is the toil and there the task!⁶⁵

A continuation of the same letter bears the date of the following day and expresses even more personal reactions:

. . . I had a strange feeling last night--pondering over the absurd inadequacies of my letter--that you might not, after all, have laid the ghosts you wished to lay. As I see it, it doesn't matter if you have or not. If you have the power to write this book, this tremendous act of contrition, that is sufficient. God knows what further cyclic journeyings lie before you. But I hope all is well with you, as you deserve it should be. One must never stop, or seven devils replace the one expelled.⁶⁶

He then apologizes for the tone and asks forgiveness for his "platitudinous moralizing." But unable to leave alone the thought that he feels he has not yet properly expressed, he continues:

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I only felt that self-purified extraverted Hugh might be a disappointing companion. I know he's as much a part of you as the Consul, but the Consul created the book. You can't kill off one or the other. So for God's sake feel no guilt for a murder you haven't committed. . . . Hugh is saved by devotion to a cause. Consul is destroyed by his self devouring introtwistings. The act of knowing, the power of seeing, & then of creating a book is far more than the mere equivalent of any mere action in any mere practical field (or mere). The work exists in its own right, and having enabled it to come to being you have no control over it. It is independent. As independent as the Sphinx. And powerful. Its power, though, is entirely for good. I may be wrong to suspect, or to imagine I suspect, all sorts of bloody intentions. . . . One thing I am certain of is the extraordinary quality of the book, a quality of absolution.⁶⁷

In the light of this letter it would appear that the author of Under the Volcano was not just writing a book, but "being written". He is, indeed, a man in search of his soul.

Arthur Osborne Lowry had died in February, 1945. His son's financial position should have been improved by inheritance, but the estate was left in a trust fund until the death of the widow. The slight monetary improvement was offset by postwar restrictions on the exportation of funds. However, advances had been received from the publishers, so the Lowrys decided to spend the winter in a place where the weather was warm before going to New York for the publication day of Under the Volcano.

By plane, bus, and riverboat, the Lowrys travelled to New Orleans in December, 1946. Then they sailed on a freighter for Haiti. They made many notes as they went

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along, describing the trip from air, land, and sea. While on the island, the Lowrys met Philippe (Phito) Thoby-Marcelin, the Haitian writer, and his brothers Pierre and Emil. Through these friends they were permitted to attend a Voodoo service. This was intensely interesting to Lowry and he referred to it often in later correspondence and in his work. When they travelled up the American coast to New York, the Lowrys stopped at several places and the ubiquitous notebooks carry jottings that were eventually shaped into short stories or novellas and used in Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place.

After spending the better part of the year at Dollarton, the Lowrys sailed, in November, 1947, on the S.S. Brest, a French freighter, for Le Havre. This journey furnished the material for the novella "Through the Panama" and background references for other stories. They spent the winter in France, then went to Italy, and returned to Dollarton with plentiful notes for the writing they both planned to do.

Mrs. Lowry began work on a novella, "The Castle of Malatesta." Lowry was busy with book club negotiations, arrangements for French and German translations, short stories, the two Mexican novels, "La Mordida" and "Dark is the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid," and the strange,

abortive novella, "The Ordeal of Sigbjørn Wilderness," which had a peculiar genesis.

While Mrs. Lowry was enjoying a short visit with her mother and sister in Los Angeles, Lowry fell from his pier at low tide and broke his back. The nearest large hospital, St. Paul's, was in Vancouver and he was brought there suffering from shock and the aftermath of a bout of drinking. This led to a state of hallucination in which he was convinced that a deceased friend, James Travers, had appeared to him giving him a message that he wanted relayed to his mother. In letters addressed to T.R. Henn and to Frank [possibly Frank Taylor] he relates the story and says that although "Margerie placed no credence" in it, the experience was of a "diabolical nature such that required the closing of the ward and the necessity for exorcism"⁶⁸ Knowing that any manifestation requiring exorcism would be recorded by the hospital, a Catholic institution, the present writer made enquiries to discover if any such material existed. The reply that no such incident was recorded indicates that the experience was in the nature of hallucination or delirium.⁶⁹

The incident, however, troubled Lowry for some time. It led to the writing of the letter drafts referred to and also a long tortuous account which he tried to shape into a story. On reading the drafts of the story, one gets

the impression that he was trying to do for hallucination, brought on by pain and drugs, what he had formerly done for intoxication in Under the Volcano. Perhaps he found it impossible to express his ideas in the necessary form. Quite in character, he studied this subject thoroughly, reading a good deal on the occult, the cabala, voodoo, spiritualism, and exorcism and making copious notes on his reading. But the story eluded him. No doubt the effort was not altogether wasted, for in writing it, he purged his mind of the experience and was able to go on to things that were more lasting and more significant.⁷⁰

At this time he began to write a movie script of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night. This is a truly remarkable piece of work that deserves to be printed for reading and study in spite of the fact that it has not yet been used for the production of a film. It was written for Frank Taylor who had been one of Lowry's original editors. When the publishing firm of Reynal and Hitchcock dissolved, Taylor went to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures as an editor. Of the script Taylor wrote,

I have read many scripts and seen many pictures, but never before have I seen writing so purely cinematic. The impact of your work was much, much greater than that of the novel. It goes devastatingly deep, and its direct filmic evocation of life's complexities is magic and miraculous. I have the feeling that everything that

has been thought, written and recorded on and about film is preparation for and prelude to this creation.⁷¹

For the next four years, that is, from 1950 to 1954, Lowry worked on the short stories and novellas that were to make up Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place, his poems, the two Mexican novels, and a new novel that had begun to emerge, as Volcano had done, from a short story. He had written "The Element Follows You Around, Sir!" after their fire at Dollarton and their stay in the east where they noted and, at times, were frightened by other fires in the area in which they were living. To this fire motif was added another that had harassed them for some years, the threat of eviction. They held their property in Dollarton on the very slightest of tenures, that of squatter's rights. The municipality was growing and people who had purchased property in the area complained of the squatters cabins as unsightly.

To ensure possession, the Lowrys tried to purchase the land around their cabin, but this was impossible since steps had already been taken to have the beach cleared and the area turned into a park. They tried to find a piece of waterfront property that would offer privacy and seclusion without being too far from the city. They even explored the possibilities of a move to Vancouver Island or one of the Gulf Islands. They travelled by bus from Victoria to

Nanaimo and then by ferry to Gabriola Island in a vain search for a suitable place. All the spots that appealed to them had already been purchased and their owners were unwilling to sell. The Lowrys did not find a home, but Malcolm found the subject and the vehicle for his next novel. "The Element Follows You Around, Sir!" had begun the exile theme. It grew into the novel "October Ferry to Gabriola" which its author felt was his best and most significant work.

Malcolm's mother died in December, 1950. His eldest brother Stuart wrote giving details of her death and informing Malcolm that his financial position would be considerably improved when the estate was settled and it would be possible to get money out of England. His mother had died intestate, so the settlement of the estate dragged on for some time. French, German, and Italian translations of Under the Volcano had appeared but, because of the tight money policy in these countries, he had difficulty collecting his royalties. In theory the Lowrys were well-to-do; in practice they sometimes had trouble paying their bills, especially when faced with an emergency.

For a time emergencies did occur with appalling frequency. As related earlier, Lowry had broken his back; he took some time to make a complete recovery. There were dental problems, infected throats for both; a badly broken

leg for Malcolm and at the same time a seriously injured thigh and leg for Mrs. Lowry when she was bitten by a dog. Her health was poor and her husband's letters reveal his worry. It was a period of nagging anxiety for both.

The money problem, the threat of eviction, and Mrs. Lowry's health made the Lowrys decide to leave Dollarton. At times the possibility of their remaining in possession of their home seemed almost a certainty, then a new threat would arise and the certainty would become, once more, an impossibility. Eventually, they no longer felt able to face the constant strain of uneasiness and indecision. In August, 1954, they went to New York, then sailed for Genoa. The winter was spent at Taormina, in Sicily. This was not a happy time for Lowry. The noise drove him frantic, he could not become reconciled to the loss of the Dollarton home, he was drinking heavily and becoming more and more irritable. Mrs. Lowry's efforts to have him submit to psychiatric care were unavailing. In the spring, they went to London and for a time both were hospitalized.

Lowry's eyesight had been troubling him and the doctor feared brain surgery would be necessary. The X-rays were favorable, however, and he responded to treatment. During the next few years he was in hospital several times. A letter to Albert Erskine, July, 1955, describes his

attempts to keep working and his discouragement at his lack of success:

Both of us have been under medical care a good deal longer than we've been hospitalized and the former doctor forbade me to write (especially on the Gabriola theme), supposing this to have been possible, or even think of writing until things were much better sorted out than they were: the present treatment so far as I'm concerned has had as its aim my resumption of the Work in Progress but I have to write off much of the last 18 months as a dead loss, I fear. Today the necessary MSS has been teleported to me again and sits glistening by my bedside in the ward . . . waiting for me to bash into it once more, which I mean to do as well as I can, starting immediately, though things are bound to be delayed, not least because of typing, moreover what with this eye business I have to revise entirely my method of writing and in fact generally reorient myself to it--it's been hard for me up to now sometimes to hold a pencil at all for more than 5 minutes at a time. Needless to say I feel badly not to have delivered the goods, some goods, long ere now, . . . I believe I can make the grade though luck has been consistently against me and us so far and I don't have any right to make any promises save that I'm going to TRY, after so long silence and limbo.⁷²

It was certainly a black period, almost another Slough of Despond.

Eventually Mrs. Lowry found a cottage not too far from London and they moved there. It was a haven of peace after the din of the city and Lowry worked steadily for some time. The letters written at "The White Cottage, Ripe, near Lewes, Sussex, England" have some of the old sparkle. In the spring of 1956, he wrote to David Markson:

Margie is having a wonderful time with the garden, as am I, she planting seeds destined to be glowing hollyhocks, I sowing sweetpeas--4 seeds in each

hole--"one for the rabbit, one for the cow, one for the fieldmouse, and one to grow," as they say here while meanwhile I weed sentences full of contorted lousewort which I lay neatly in rows, for use later no doubt. Though we miss the water-bourne bounties and forest and sea and mountains drama of old Dollarton at times, without abandoning our forest home we nevertheless have a good feeling of temporary home here at least and are having a great deal of fun while at the same time living quite cheaply compared with American standards.⁷³

In spite of the pressure of his own work and his own indifferent health, Lowry found time to help and encourage other writers. He read and criticized in manuscript Viscount Churchill's book, All My Sins Remembered: The Autobiography of Lord Churchill.⁷⁴ His long letter with detailed notes and comments must have been a heavy task, but a note of cheerfulness gives the impression that he enjoyed doing it. A letter to Ralph Gustafson about poems to be included in a Canadian anthology shows the same desire to help others. He mentions the work of Curt Lang and suggests that Gustafson might find it worth including in the anthology. This letter, written April 29, 1957, concludes with a nostalgic postscript,

We are going to live in the Lake District, in Grasmere, for a while not because it reminds one of Wordsworth so much but because if we half shut our eyes we may be able to imagine we're back on Burrard Inlet!⁷⁵

The Lowrys went to Grasmere and had a happy, restful holiday. Lowry's health was better and he was not drinking. On their return home, however, he began to drink

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again. The end came swiftly. Death by misadventure. The long hard quest was over. The struggle with his own weakness had brought great sympathy for and great understanding of others. In 1947, he had written an indignant letter to Jacques Barzun, challenging his criticism of Under the Volcano. In it he quoted Anna Wickham's poem. In using the lines, he quoted more truly than he realized, for no poem could be a better epitaph for him:

God has raised his whip of Hell
That you be no longer weak
That out of anguish, you may speak
That out of anguish, you may speak well.⁷⁶

NOTES

CHAPTER I

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¹³Lowry, "Autopsy," Canadian Literature, VIII (Spring 1961), 23.

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¹⁷Margerie Lowry, "Biographical Note on Malcolm Lowry," p. 1, U.B.C. Collection, Box 33. Hereafter cited as Note. All biographical material, unless otherwise stated, is from this Note. The Collection is hereafter referred to as UBCC.

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- ²⁹Ibid., p. 279.
- ³⁰Ibid., pp. 237-239.
- ³¹Ibid., pp. 236-237.
- ³²T.R. Henn, [Letter to U.B.C. Library], undated UBCC., Box 33.
- ³³Earle Birney and Margerie Lowry, "Bibliography," Canadian Literature, VIII (Spring 1961), 82.
- ³⁴Lowry, "For Nordahl Grieg Ship's Fireman," Cambridge Poetry, 1930, ed. John Davenport et al. (London, 1930), pp. 47-49.
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- ³⁷Letters, pp. 6-7.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 5.
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- ⁴⁰Earle Birney, Personal Interview, Toronto, Dec. 1, 1965.
- ⁴¹Arthur Osborne Lowry, [Letter to Malcolm Lowry], April 22, 1942, UBCC., Box 21.
- ⁴²Charlotte Haldane, [Author's Note and Dedication], I Bring not Peace (London, 1932), p. v.
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- ⁴⁴Conrad Aiken, Ushant (New York, 1952), pp. 351-360.
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CHAPTER II

THE WRITER

A. The Apprentice

From September 1923 to March 1927, Malcolm Lowry was at The Leys. At this time and in this place he made his debut as a writer. His initials, C.M.L. (Clarence Malcolm Lowry), expanded into CAMEL, formed the pen name which identifies his writing. It appears in print with ever-increasing frequency in the school paper, The Leys Fortnightly.

His housemaster W.H. Balgarnie, "Mr. Chips," had helped James Hilton in his ambition to be a writer. No doubt Lowry was also encouraged by this educator, but no specific record of such help or acknowledgement of it can be found among the Lowry papers. All that can be proved is that he wrote poetry, short stories, and sports reports and that these were accepted and published in The Leys Fortnightly from 1924, during his second year at the school, until 1927 when he left it. His work received some measure of recognition, since he won the first and second prizes for news reporting in 1924-25, and in the fall of 1925 was elected to the editorial staff.

His early stories foreshadow his later work in several ways, especially in the importance given to autobiographical elements. In a young writer this is hardly surprising. Lowry's experience was limited. His world was bounded as well as expressed by that limited experience. He was wise enough to use what he knew and to use it as well as he was able. His first published story is an example of this. "The Light That Failed Not" tells of a student who was caught reading a story during study, given a detention, and saved by a power failure which, by plunging the room into darkness, made dismissal necessary.¹ There is nothing very remarkable in this; nothing except CAMEL's choice of a subject that would appeal to his schoolboy readers.

In this early writing certain characteristics which became dominant in his later work make their appearance. Easy familiarity with his subject and friendly informality towards his reader mark the opening sentences of "Travelling Light." It begins,

For the perpetuation of the human race it is necessary and desirable that people marry. If one is so lucky as to have a brother doing this in the middle of term and to go home oneself for the ceremony, one may heartily endorse that statement without fears of conscience, however infinitesimal.²

The protagonist in this story must take part in a full dress Corps parade as soon as he returns to school. Lowry speaks of this,

All through my stay at home the black dog of this parade had sat on my back with its two front paws, as it were, down my neck. Just as I might be transporting myself to the heights of bliss, for instance, at the reception, it would bark in a rather sceptical fashion, and whisper into my ears that not only was my uniform uncleaned, but that my cap badge was missing, my puttees still retained the mud of the last field-day but one--and countless other things which would pain you as well as me if you read them.³

Years later, in describing the Consul's inability to escape the fate that was closing in upon him, Lowry says that the man felt "as if a black dog had settled on his back, pressing him to his seat."⁴ This is just one of the many "dog" images or references that help to build up the symbolic pattern in Under the Volcano; they are, obviously, deeply rooted in Lowry's past.

The passage cited above from the early writing, also gives a hint of something else he used cleverly in his later work. Under the Volcano recounts what seems to be complete understanding between the Consul and Mr. Quincey's cat.⁵

"Elephant and Colosseum" has a similar projection of ideas through an animal's response.⁶ These links with an animal provided Lowry with a means for intensifying the expression of the protagonist's thoughts. A recurrent idea takes on a new emphasis from this blending of human consciousness with animal awareness.

Another characteristic of his mature work that appears in this early writing is his complete and conscious

identification of himself as the writer in the story he is telling. One gets the impression that here it is a school-boy's way of meeting the possible taunts of his peers. Later it becomes a significant aspect of his way of looking at life. Under any circumstances, an author is always present, consciously or unconsciously, in his work since his ability to show and even to imagine situations, characters, actions and reactions is coloured by his own experience. With Lowry, experience was more than this. It was a standard by which he judged his own life and achievement and one against which he measured his characters. His commitment as an author is evident from his voluminous notes in which everything he has experienced has been recorded. He was always the conscious craftsman desirous of setting down in the best possible way each experience and every facet of each experience that came his way. His use of this criterion for his characters is shown later in the number of his protagonists who are writers, among them Wilderness, Cosnahan, the Consul, Hugh, and Dana Hilliot. Even in his school stories there is a writer, Lucius Bright, the protagonist in "The Repulsive Tragedy of the Incredulous Englishman."

Schoolboy humour is shown in a murder story, "The Blue Bonnet," which begins offhandedly, "Said one of these charming people: 'Yes, it certainly was a very nasty murder now I come to think about it'."⁷ The influence of his

mathematics courses is evident in the naming of the characters, but a typical touch of humour lends variety and local colour; they are called Macexe, Macwye, Macay, and Macbee. The setting is, of course, "the wilds of Scotland."⁸ There is a tongue-in-cheek description of the murder. Macwye shot Macexe, "but not before he had turned the handle of his telephone and gasped 'Police!' in a rather futile fashion down the mouthpiece. He died just before the close of the inverted commas."⁹

His ability to describe accurately and arrestingly begins to appear in these early stories. In "A Rainy Night" he gives a picture of a golf links on a wet day when "the flags of the greens, which are full of troubled pools, are so soaked as to have lost most of their flapping power."¹⁰

The story, however, is not about golf. It is the treatment of a theme that would haunt him all his life, the theme of suffering, and even death, that results from man's inability to communicate except in words which, under some circumstances, he cannot say. One man leaves the train, an unopened package of sandwiches in his bag, and leaves behind the other man to whom he had been casually kind, pitying one whom he thinks is addicted to drink. This man had really been dying of starvation. Melodramatic and jejeune this is, no doubt, but starvation, here physical, later mental and moral, furnishes the theme for much of Lowry's writing, and

the inability to communicate is the reason for the mental and moral hunger that becomes at times almost an obsession with him. The schoolboy very strongly foreshadows the man.

This story shows three other traits which became Lowry trade marks. The Swede is the first of a long succession of seamen; he is a ship's fireman. Even before his first voyage Lowry was interested in the sea and the men who sailed in its ships. No doubt some of this interest can be traced to the sea-faring grandfather who was part legend, part hero to the boy. Some of it too is the natural interest of an intelligent boy in the life he sees around him. He grew up near one of the world's great seaports overlooking an estuary that was always alive with ships.

The second mark is the use of advertisements as links with the background. Sometimes, in the mature work, advertisements serve as anchors by which the character is moored to reality; sometimes they are bridges by which the characters make the transition from thought to thought, or from present time to past time. In this early story such skillful usage does not appear. The advertisements are mentioned as being part of the scene noted by the protagonist from the train, "Everywhere sodden advertisements clung like wet rags."¹¹ From his consciousness of the need to identify a scene by the use of specific details grew the ability to use what the advertisements were saying as a means of

emphasis, or to form a link in the development of complicated thought. This small point of observation developed later into a means by which texture could be obtained.

The third mark of identification with his mature work lies in the thoughts that go through one man's mind as he judges, and misjudges, the other. Drunkenness is supposed to be the malady from which the Swede suffers. The protagonist judges him, kindly, but very definitely on almost non-existent evidence. His tolerant aloofness is an adumbration of Mr. Quincey's attitude towards the Consul in Under the Volcano.¹² Alcoholism, the problem which forms a constantly recurring subject in his later works, appears here for the first time.

Even in this early writing Lowry seeks the significant word, the fresh expression of his idea. In "Satan in a Barrel," which Lowry calls "pirated history" about Jeffreys of the Bloody Assize fame, the warder speaks "in a voice like a cracked phonograph record."¹³ Later when the warder replies to one of Jeffreys' speeches Lowry writes, "'I don't,' phonographed the warder. 'My reasons are as follows. They followed.'"¹⁴ Lowry does not give the reasons. He leaves them to the reader's imagination showing that he knew even then that some things are much more emphatic when left unsaid. The word "phonographed" is a neat reference to his earlier simile. It is perfectly suited to the story

which is a serio-comic treatment of a supposedly authentic historical incident.

In the same story he attempts to describe sound with a visual image; a daring flight into imagery that would challenge him again and again. The Voice of Grace speaks to Jeffreys trying to bring him to repentance. Lowry describes it, "A kindly voice! it breathed good will! I could almost see it: it looked like violets in a mud-bank."¹⁵ This is not too successful; but the attempt to describe the indescribable has been made.

In his later work Lowry showed great skill in presenting the passage of time. The reader almost hears the minutes tick off while some action, seemingly insignificant, is described. This is, of course, the reason for the use of that action. It is described in detail to arrest the flow of thought and to make the reader conscious of the passing of time and often of the boredom of the protagonist for whom the slight action takes on an undue importance. "The Repulsive Tragedy of the Incredulous Englishman" is noteworthy mainly for the strength and sureness with which this device is used. The protagonist, a writer, bound for Australia, is on board the S.S. Chian which "furrowed white on a blue ocean, an easy-going plough of fifteen knots."¹⁶ His wife is ill so he is left to his own devices. The peace of the

sea voyage has become monotonous and he wishes something would happen:

Couldn't there be an alarm that the boat was going to sink or something? Not sink, really, of course. . . . A good change from writing novels, but he did wish something would happen. He relit his pipe. The match flared up, and, its work done, warped and went out. A black curled useless chip, he threw it over the side, and watched it rebound off the bilge-keel to disappear astern. What a fuss, he thought, for his mind to make about a match! The smoke from his pipe flew towards the stern, and mingled in the black smoke of the funnels. Well--well.¹⁷

A trivial little description? Perhaps. But how perfectly it shows how trivia assume gigantic proportions in the emptiness of monotony.

In the same story the antagonist, an Armenian hypnotist, criticizes the wordiness of the protagonist, an English writer, "The less adjectives, the more forcible the remark. Avoid always bombast and arrogance."¹⁸ This thought occurs many times in Lowry's revisions of his own work. It even appears, thirty years later, and couched in slightly different terms, in his criticism of the work of others. He does use adjectives, it is true, in much of his writing, but their use is always controlled and when the work reaches its point of highest intensity it is stripped to the essential words, each one of which carries its full load of meaning.

Another pattern of expression that has become characteristic of his mature work is also evident in his school writing; this is the use of a journey. Lowry's

characters are always going somewhere--for a walk, a boat-ride, a canter, or perhaps on a real journey by boat, train, bus, or airplane; they seldom just sit and talk. Movement acts as a release for stream-of-consciousness comment or for interior monologue by which the reader is told all he needs to know. Sometimes the journey is short, an afternoon walk, as in "The Bravest Boat" and "Gin and Goldenrod." In this case the story is threaded on the things described as the protagonists walk along. Sometimes it takes a considerable time to develop, as in "Through the Panama," in which he gradually sorts out the background and fits it in, piece by piece, almost as if he were completing a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes the story is almost completely unravelled by the protagonist's digressions or distractions on a bus ride, as in "October Ferry to Gabriola," or during a plane and bus journey as in "Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid."

Three of the early stories, "Travelling Light," "A Rainy Night," and "The Repulsive Tragedy of the Incredulous Englishman," use this device. It even appears in one of the poems, "The Old Woman Who Buried Cats." By means of this device, Lowry keeps the characters together in a situation in which their minds can wander to fill in the background for the reader. At the same time, it holds them fixed in their relative positions towards one another and enables them to break into each other's thoughts with no

manipulating on the part of the author. The characters might be said to form a captive audience for one another, always within reach when the need arises. Lowry used this device with ever-increasing skill until the pattern of movement, the enclosing of a group within some sort of vehicle, became dominant in his writing to such an extent that one feels it is an expression of his life, that is, a long seeking, a long journey towards self mastery and fulfilment.

In addition to the stories discussed above, CAMEL contributed reports on sports. It is reporting with a fresh approach. He states that a drawn game, (1-1), was extremely poor and uninteresting, "Poor because the defence would not defend nor the attack attack: uninteresting because of the apparent sulkiness of the whole team." The score had remained unchanged, "not because of the brilliant defence of each side but because of their parallel mediocrity."¹⁹ Then his writer's instinct makes him present a human action and he states that the most interesting incident in the whole game occurred when one of the referees brought off a catch from a hard hit, "not only with the utmost nonchalance, but with hardly removing one hand from his pocket, and with absolute immobility of expression."²⁰

His disgust with poorly played games sometimes brought forth caustic comments. Of one match he says, "the centre half and the backs spent the rest of the game

wandering round like mislaid ewes and hitting at this and that." The game raised itself "slightly off its pillow at the beginning of the second half."²¹ His originality even leads him to describe a game entirely in terms of a poorly mounted stage play in which the "actors" miss their "cues" or forget their "lines." He claims that the first act is about as "diverting as a musical comedy without any music," the second as amusing "as a farce without a single laugh, without a single epigram." This was played, however, "in a theatre of excellent traditions and many previous successes."²² Having set the stage, he introduces the principal actors and apports to them the blame for the "play's" failure.²³ He describes the acting of the other "artistes" in the cast, and then concludes, "It was slightly before the final curtain that I crept (complete with hump) towards a door which, had it been there would have been surmounted tactfully with the legend EXIT."²⁴

Two final extracts are of interest because they show that this young reporter brought his whole self and his whole experience to his job. Literature has often borrowed ideas and similes from sport; sport has seldom done so from literature. One does not often find sports writing like this, "It seems almost inconceivable that a team which played so well should, five days later, give such a dismal

display. Still, Shakespeare had his "Pericles"; comfort in that."²⁵

In the same number, reporting an earlier game, he made two remarks which brought a flood of letters to the editor protesting his method of reporting. CAMEL had written, "Haller, our goalkeeper, who was compelled to fox for the majority of the game, made one save for us, just before half time, with a Pantagruelian kick."²⁶ This, and his habit of using dots to express the inexpressible, sparked the criticism to which he replied in part:

There seems to be a yet further objection concerning my reports, on which I have attempted to bestow a little sadly needed originality; you ask "What can I mean by Pantagruelian?" Is it a confession that you yourselves do not know your Rabelais, and perhaps a further confession that you are not old enough to read it: and "fox"--what can I mean by "fox"? A fox, I may state for your benefit, is an animal which, in its spare time, foxes. Hence the verb, to fox.

And dots. I admit (being of a generous mood) on reading through my story, that there were, maybe, just too many of them for some tastes: but this error was partly due to the printers, who are liable to print . . . as But even so they (the dots) remained much less offensive than your letters.²⁷

CAMEL makes a few remarks on his critics' error in etiquette in saying that he has "undoubted talent" and promises to make no such mistake about them. He finishes, "Therefore, I say, dots to you, Sirs. And, I may be permitted to add, having a bad cold, that I shall continue to write as I wish,

notwithstanding. This place is reserved for conventional salutations. CAMEL"²⁸

One further point remains to be noted regarding Lowry's work as a reporter. Even at this early stage he shows his ability to turn a phrase. A few examples of his precision of expression have been noted above in other connections, for example, the centre half and the back described as "mislaid ewes" and the game raising "itself slightly off its pillow." He also has play moving "at a snail's pace"²⁹ and the ball that "scarfed itself round our circle in a most listless and clinging fashion."³⁰ For one gifted with such ease of expression, the reporting of a game in which nothing happened must have been a truly stultifying experience.

CAMEL contributed to the Fortnightly in another genre. From time to time a poem appears over his signature. Except for the last of these poems, this work does not show the freshness or the originality evident in his prose. One of the earliest, "The Old Woman Who Buried Cats,"³¹ parodies a well-known nursery rhyme in its opening lines: "There was an old woman who lived in a nice/ Little house that was badly infected with mice."³² The serio-comic note is well sustained throughout and the poem must have amused its schoolboy readers.

The next poem to appear, "The Rain Fell Heavily," is a lugubrious description of a graveyard and the inscription on a headstone.³³ The young poet's use of contrast by the change of stanza form, tempo, and imagery is good, but the lines, "The mourners slowly crept away/ And left me to my solitude,"³⁴ hint that the source of inspiration was the Graveyard School of poets, and this was not the company the lad was really seeking. His inspiration lay elsewhere as his last poem printed in the Fortnightly shows.

A year after he left school he made his final contribution to his old school paper. During that year he had made his first voyage and had learned a good deal about life and about himself. He had also learned how to express himself with the simplicity and the strength that indicate the end of his apprenticeship and the beginning of the next stage in his development. That the experience at sea had given him a new dimension is evident in "Number 8 Fireman" in which the man comes up from the stokehole, "sipping the wind."³⁵ He pictures Jesus counting all creatures, beginning with the sand on the seashore:

The gulls that wheel, Klio,
 And mew around the funnel;
 The sharks and the dolphins;
 Red sponges, fiddler crabs,
 Snouted squids umbrella-winged
 Squeezing and buzzing,
 Coiling and heaving;
 Stars that are reeling:

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And all of his children
He counts for his Father.³⁶

Then the young poet sweeps to his climax by using a dramatic contrast:

But I have no father:
The fire is my mother,
And roaring she bore me;
She washed me in coal dust,
And fed me on cinders;
She parched me, then maimed me;
And I am her stoker.
As God cannot count me,
The Board of Trade count me,
Like winches and derricks
Or boilers; like pistons
Revolving and gleaming;
Like brass-silled white cabin-doors
Windily creaking.³⁷

Quite obviously no body of criticism of this early work exists. In his second letter to Conrad Aiken, the young writer--now twenty years old and at work on his first novel--indicates that he had received encouragement from those whose opinion he valued, "the only other department that I have had any success in," is in writing seriously and "that success rarely meant acceptance but quite often sincere encouragement from people whose opinion could hardly be taken to be humble."³⁸ The phrase "that success rarely meant acceptance" is revealing. It indicates that what had appeared in print was but a small portion of what had been written. Whether he realized it or not this was an advantage; he needed the discipline of rejection as much as he needed the encouragement of acceptance.

In her study of his early work, Suzanne Kim, who is at present writing a French biography of Lowry, describes the schoolboy writer and makes this comment on the point he has reached in his development,

Le reproche le plus grave à lui adresser consiste dans le manque de diversité à la fois du fond et de la forme. La production de cette période se rattache trop à l'immédiat; même l'argot d'écolier qu'il utilise n'échappe pas à ce reproche. Mais un point reste acquis: c'est tout naturellement qu'il ancre son langage dans la réalité du temps. À présent c'est l'argot des écoles, plus tard il utilisera et reproduira celui des bateaux et des bars. Dès ces premières oeuvres, le processus semble inévitable, congénital pour ainsi dire.³⁹

This criticism is made by one who, having knowledge of his later work, looks for traces of that work in the early writing, that is, she approaches the past but illuminates it from the present. Again, to limit his later use of language to that of boats and bars is to limit almost to the point of nullity prose which has infinite variety. But her point on the style of that early period is well made. He did write from a limited experience and in the speech of the schools for the most part, but the comments from his schoolmates which have been cited show how far he is above the average, or the typical, in this expression.

His work must be allowed to speak for itself. The young writer is clearly striving to express himself, drawing on his experience and on his reading, shaping his material in the furnace of his imagination. But the most important trait

of all is the fact that he was not concerned about the judgment of his peers. He wrote what he thought should be said and wrote it in the way he thought it should be expressed. This independence, or fidelity to his vision, stayed with him to find eloquent expression in his defence of his novel, Under the Volcano when editors requested changes he was not willing to make.⁴⁰ He had begun early to establish his own viewpoint and to demand freedom to express it and, when attacked, showed himself well able to defend his position. Having advanced to this point he was ready for further growth. The apprentice has acquired a certain skill in handling his tools, he has some idea of what he wants to do with them. The journeyman must now produce some original work and this was to be shaped from life as he saw it when he deliberately went out and lived it as a deck hand on a freighter.

B. The Journeyman

What has been examined thus far of Malcolm Lowry's work shows that, as a schoolboy, he has made contributions to his school paper in poetry, the short story, and sports reporting. His letters-to-the-editor, although cleverly handled, are incidental, arising from a specific need, and, as such, represent but a phase in his prose writing. In poetry he is obviously trying to find his voice and, in the

last poem treated, there are indications of a definite advance towards surety of expression. In the short story his work is mannered but there are hints that, given something worth saying, he would find his own way of phrasing it. In the sports writing there is a deliberate attempt to bring freshness to a form that, for most writers in this field, too often degenerates into jargon or into inane comment cloaked in clichés. He realized that these faults marred most sports writing and he consciously tried to avoid them. This section, "The Journeyman," will treat of his development prior to the publication of Under the Volcano.

Malcolm left The Leys at the end of the spring term, 1927. Normally he would have gone on to Cambridge; he had been registered at Christ's College for that fall. But he wanted to be a writer and he knew that he could never write aseptically, sealed off from the world around him. He wanted to see life and to gain experience so, from May to October, he worked as cabin boy and deckhand, and sailed to the storied ports of the Far East. With mind and notebooks crammed with incidents and images he returned to England and began his first novel.

He had already done considerable work on Ultramarine before he went, in the summer of 1929, to Cambridge, Mass. to meet Conrad Aiken. Something of Lowry's ability to see double or multiple significance in words is shown in his

choice of a title for his work. He had been greatly impressed by Aiken's novel Blue Voyage--Aiken claims he knew it by heart.⁴¹ The title Blue Voyage expresses much of the visual impression of a seascape, but Ultramarine, as a title, expresses much more. The direct Latin meaning becomes "beyond the sea" in English. But "ultra" has another shade of meaning, that of "more than." The book, then, is going "beyond the sea" to far countries to express "more than" what lies within sight on the sea. But "ultramarine" means still more than this. It is the name of a blue pigment made by pulverizing lapis lazuli. Brought to Rome from far countries this pigment was something very beautiful from beyond the sea. The choice of this title for his book suggests a poetic awareness in the young writer.

The book, however, is not poetic, nor is it meant to be. It is the story of a boy making his entry into the world of men. The environment and many of the details are based on Lowry's own sea and shore experiences. He wisely used the material that he knew, but he coloured it with imagination. He asked himself, "How would this boy, having this background and this character react when placed in these circumstances?" Criticism has been offered that the protagonist is a somewhat unlikely fellow acting and reacting in a somewhat strange way. But Dana Hilliot, placed in an entirely different milieu from that in which he grew up

and facing a challenge of remaining faithful to his girl and to the standards of conduct instilled into him by his training, is not so atypical as one might think. He is youth on the edge of awareness. In many ways he is Romeo in love with love, just as callow and inexperienced; he is the anti-hero, at times comic, at times pathetic. Dana's girl is not the quick-witted, resourceful, strong-willed Juliet. But she is the girl who has captured his imagination and, for the time being, at least, his heart.

Dana Hilliot is a schoolboy living by choice among rough men with the intention of learning about life from them. But these men do not prove to be the simple, strong, direct men that Dana had expected. He had dreamed of Rousseauistic "natural" men. These men have set ridiculous standards as their test of manhood. Dana is looked on with suspicion; he belongs to the world of the ship owners, he is a rich man's son, he is doing an honest man out of a job by taking one that he does not need, he has taken his job for experience and not to earn his daily bread. In spite of the fact that the boy can outdrink the best of them he is an outcast because, faithful to his promise to Janet, he refuses to enjoy the fleshpots of the East.

In a way, the crew members are like the schoolboys of the world Dana has just left. They show the same unreasoning prejudices that schoolboys show when they band

together against a newcomer who has roused their animosity or whom they wish to test. Their dislike of Dana suddenly fades away in the shame they all feel in not rescuing Norman's pigeon, a "mickey" in their jargon. These men, who were to show Dana what life was like, show him instead that they are guided by the same snobbery, the same lack of understanding, the same selfishness that he had seen and hated in the middle-class environment from which he had hoped to escape. Whether intentional or accidental this is clever anti-climax.

This is what Lowry is trying to tell his reader. How does he do it? He does it quite simply by the very thing that constitutes the book's originality, by taking the reader into the crew's quarters and letting him listen to their conversation. The book opens with rapid-fire question and answer, a full page of stichomythia.⁴² It gives an immediate sense of assembly-line efficiency and complete impersonality as the crew is signed on. This breaks off suddenly and the reader is plunged into Dana's thoughts after six weeks at sea. Another break into reality comes as the bosun calls the lad to the well deck to help prepare for docking. His clumsiness brings scornful dismissal, "you can go back and dream to your heart's content."⁴³ He dreams bitterly,

No, there was precious little meaning left now in this life which so surprisingly had opened out

before him. Nor could he see why he had ever been fool enough to set this seal upon such a wild self-dedication. No meaning at all, he thought, as he shook out some ash from his pipe. Not, at any rate, to himself, a man who believed himself to live in inverted, or introverted, commas; to a man who saw the whole damned business in a kind of benign stupor.⁴⁴

The phrase "to live in inverted, or introverted, commas" carries one back with surprised recognition to Lowry's schooldays and the story, "The Blue Bonnet," with Macexe dying "just before the close of the inverted commas."⁴⁵ It is the same mind at work.

There are incidental descriptions that have the ring of authentic observation. Dana's thoughts go back to his arrival on the ship, he saw:

The two detectives on the Oedipus Tyrannus, the night watchman and the dirty firemen carrying wrenches; saw himself enter the forecastle and put his seabag in a bottom bunk before looking into the sailors' messroom; saw the light burning, and the shadows which galloped over the long cedarwood table with forms around it, riveted to bulkheads, saw the stove with a twisted chimney on which a dishcloth and a pair of dungarees were drying. A skylight opened out on the poop.⁴⁶

The same skylight gives him another viewpoint from which to observe the crew's activities later on. Hilliot has made up his mind to face Andy whose taunting, "Hurry up there, Miss Hilliot, seven bells gone half an hour ago, your ladyship,"⁴⁷ has become more than he can stand. In searching for him,

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Hilliot suddenly lifted the skylight by which he was standing, and looked down into the messroom of the sailors' forecabin: tobacco smoke curled up towards him, and there was a fresh smell of soap and water. It was as if he had lifted the lid of a box of toys.⁴⁸

He then picks out individuals in the group, each caught as if photographed in the action he was performing at the moment. It is a good description and is brought sharply into focus with a simple, but incisive sentence, "It was as if he had lifted the lid of a box of toys."

Although the ship is a world apart, he places it neatly into its setting,

The ship rose slowly to the slow blue combers, a ton of spray was flung to leeward, and that other sea, the sky, smiled happily down on her, on seamen and fireman alike. . . . But the Oedipus Tyrannus poured out black smoke, mephitic and angry, from her one enormous funnel; its broad shadow slanted blackly along the sea to the horizon; it was the one black smudge on all that glad serenity.⁴⁹

With a sure writer's instinct he follows the cue and describes the engine-room, the place from which this "smudge" on the "glad serenity" originates,

Hilliot poked his head in through an iron engine-room entrance, and watched the engines, a maelstrom of noise which crashed on his brain; it was humiliating to watch the nicety with which lever weight and fulcrum worked, opening and closing their hidden mechanisms and functioning with such an incomprehensible exactness!⁵⁰

He walks along until he can see the stoker, "through a shower of sparks, like red blossoms . . . a firebright fiend."⁵¹ The introspective nature of the boy is well

presented in scenes like this in which keen observation is linked with poetic expression.

It is also shown in his reminiscences of his girl Janet. She is the means by which he can justify himself to his own ego for his petty failures. When he is snubbed by the crew, is clumsy at his work or oppressed by the monotony of his life on board ship, he seeks release in daydreams about her. Like Romeo towards Rosaline, he thinks it is a young man's duty to be in love, and so is in love with love. Later, when he comes to see life and himself more maturely he expresses clearly what Janet has been. In a letter, which he does not intend to send her, he says,

I regard it all now with sanity and detachment
 . . . the relative ease and quickness with which
 I have shifted my balance towards Andy, after
 the interrogative stage of things, is partly
 occasioned by the fact that yourself acting as an
 inhibiting factor are at the same time a sublim-
 atory factor. Although Andy beat me out in port,
 it ceases to bother me because first, there is
 yourself; secondly, being in love with you I have
 the universal experience of sublimated all-
 embracing love for mankind.⁵²

This is hardly the sort of thing one says in a love letter. He is quite obviously using the letter as a means whereby he can gain insight into his own situation and his response to it. Lowry uses Janet all through the book in this way. She is the push button which releases the stream-of-consciousness, or the interior monologue which shows the reader the stage Dana Hilliot has now reached in his development.

The letter, written but not sent, is a further application of this device. The two together help Lowry express Dana's thoughts and help to express them through a means other than simple introspection.

Lowry the craftsman has gained much in precision of expression. One recalls his early attempt to describe sound with a visual image, the voice that "looked like violets in a mud-bank."⁵³ From time to time in Ultramarine he describes sounds much more happily by direct imitation as in this short passage, "And in Norway itself, where they had first fallen in love, over beyond Sandvika, the goat bells going tinkle tonkle tankle tunk--"⁵⁴ There is also the description of an echo which is neatly handled. The ship is approaching port as "the sun bled away behind chalk-white fields."⁵⁵ "Then the Oedipus Tyrannus' siren roared, and the mountains and rice fields and the town roared back thunderously at the Oedipus Tyrannus."⁵⁶

In Chapter II, and from time to time in the rest of the novel, Lowry uses a device by which he often relates his characters to their environment. Dana walks from one part of the ship to another and the signs over the doors or on plates set into the walls flash into his consciousness as he goes along, "Saloon. Purser. Third Engineer--Oedipus Tyrannus--Liverpool. . . Cammel Laird Shipbuilding Company, Birkenhead. Bosun. Carpenter. Cooks."⁵⁷ He uses the same

link with reality in his description of the town when Dana goes on the prowl with Popplereuter. The headlines of a poster, signs on bars and stores, and the current offering of the theatre blend into the atmosphere of the place,

A poster of the Free Press in English said:
 MURDER OF BROTHER-IN-LAW'S CONCUBINE. . . Bar.
Boston Bar. Café Baikine. Bar and Cabaret.
Trocadero. Satsuma Wares. Grand Revival--
Richard Barthelmess in 'The Amateur Gentleman.'
Miki Bar. Dancing. Norddeutscher Lloyd Steamships.⁵⁸

It is a simple device but a most effective one.

The difference, in upbringing and education, between Dana and the crew is emphasized, not only by the way he speaks, but also by the literary allusions that pass through his mind. A passage of Greek on a page of sailor talk brings this difference sharply to mind.⁵⁹ The same effect is obtained by the use of allusions to literary style, for Dana, planning to be a writer, is conscious of technique. One of the hands, describing an incident to another finishes with the expression, "--so drunk that he tried to wrap the deck round him for a blanket."⁶⁰ This releases Dana's thoughts in another direction,

("--a selection of the real language of men--"
 "--the language of these men--" "--I propose to
 myself to imitate and as far as possible to adopt
 the very language of these men--" "--but between
 the language of prose and that of metrical com-
 position there neither is nor can be any essential
 difference--" Lingua Communis. . . .)⁶¹

The incident is cleverly used and shows Lowry's sense of

humor for the conversation that preceded his digression was certainly not expressed in the language Wordsworth had in mind nor was it the sort of anecdote he would have considered the subject of poetry.

Ultramarine was finished after nearly five years of work and was published in 1933 by Jonathan Cape of London. It had been accepted by the board of the university as his thesis; he had passed his examinations and, in the summer of 1932, he left Cambridge with third-class honors in the English tripos and his B.A. Parts of his novel had appeared in 1930, 1931, and 1933 and had received recognition by Edward J. O'Brien in Best British Short Stories of 1931; these were "Port Swettenham," which became Chapter 5 of Ultramarine, and "Seductio ad absurdum," the earlier, shorter version of Chapter 4 which appeared also in Experiment under the title "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre." In 1933, Lowry made his first literary appearance in America with an expanded version of "Port Swettenham," Chapter 5 of the novel. It was given a 3-star listing by O'Brien in his Best [American] Short Stories for 1934.⁶² The young writer was beginning to receive recognition. The reviews of Ultramarine were, however, not particularly encouraging. J.E. Arrowsmith claimed that one would have to go through an experience "precisely similar" to that of Dana in order to understand the book⁶³--not a very cogent critique since it

omits the part played by the reader's imagination in accepting all literature. Derek Verschoye failed to understand what Lowry was trying to do. He found the writing "disastrously mannered," and accused the author of mixing a manner derived from Ulysses with the "psychology of the more analytical type of school story." He found that such a mixture was not successful but arrived instead at effects "which are neither cumulative nor adequately complementary."⁶⁴ A more hopeful note appears at the close of the review by V.S. Pritchett. After pointing to "strained self-consciousness" as the curse that lay upon the book and the "unimportant and insignificant schoolday memories" as flaws in its structure, he commented on Lowry's skill as a writer and concluded in these words, "When he has stopped straining eyes, ears and nerves and ceases to let the world hammer him so that he sees nothing but stars and fragments, he may do something good."⁶⁵

However, with the reissue of Ultramarine in 1962, a new approach was evident; the critics looked at it through Under the Volcano. David Dempsey considered it "a brilliant performance" in which the "autobiographical tendencies never crowd out the milieu about which Lowry is writing." He finds that in all his work Lowry "used the self primarily as a fulcrum to pry loose the reality that he found embedded

around him."⁶⁶ He goes on to outline the autobiographical elements and then deals with the style:

Lowry was not interested here in the conventional structure of the novel, and he shifted between an intense verbal realism--a documentary approach that at times gives one a sense of reading the notebook itself--and a subjective monologue that provides the outlet for his poetic grasp of life. Life to Malcolm Lowry was language itself: he was a born writer who could not separate experiences from its ultimate necessity for expression.⁶⁷

Critic after critic makes a brief comment on the style, especially in regard to Lowry's skill in handling multiple dialogue to give the impression, as Robert Lawrence expresses it, "of a babble of voices heard from a distance."⁶⁸

Although Ultramarine was the most significant work Lowry produced up to this time it was not the only piece of work published. The short stories that later formed chapters of the novel, and their recognition by E.J. O'Brien have already been mentioned. While at Cambridge he contributed "For Nordahl Grieg Ship's Fireman" to Cambridge Poetry, 1930.⁶⁹ Two Norwegian firemen, sharing a watch, are conscious of the ship, "an iron moloch" that "visits lands of strange beauty/ Where broad leaves struggle against the sun."⁷⁰ They think of the places they have visited and their thoughts return to the cruelty of the ship "When they remember this the ship is a moloch/ An iron monster that crushes seamen and firemen/ In its jaws; . . . There is no beauty about the ship."⁷¹ But one night all this is

changed. They are standing near the hen-coop and one of them notices that a hen has chicks. They wonder, "How these could emerge from the cruel naked iron and thrive,/ And they forget the murdering strength of the ship,/ How it slays like a lion."⁷² This brings a flood of happy memories and, as "the ship staggers and wallows in the sea," they pity it because "One thinks that the poor lonely ship is still in its birth-agony,/ It is as though the very ship itself has given birth."⁷³ It is a good poem. It shows that the young poet realized that a seemingly trivial incident could carry the burden of immediacy and that he has acquired simplicity of expression.

Lowry worked on other stories and poems at this time; a few he shelved with the intention of using them later, some he lost in the Dollarton fire, the rest he polished and revised, working at them continually until his death. Of this last group "Lunar Caustic" and some poems have been published posthumously.

"Hotel Room in Chartres" was published in 1934⁷⁴ and was given 2-star listing by E.J. O'Brien in his Best [American] Short Stories for 1935.⁷⁵ It was probably written in France during Lowry's first marriage and has for subject the incompatibility, quarrel, and reconciliation of a young couple. He used this idea again in Under the Volcano, where he expressed the need for love and the difficulty of

communicating with another even in marriage. Lowry had not yet learned to handle the deeper emotions with a sure and delicate touch. For this reason "Hotel Room" is flawed in execution. But it is affecting and indicates the growing power of the young writer.

"Economic Conference 1934" was written about this time but appeared in Arena in 1949. The Contributor Notes indicate that it is a passage from an unpublished pre-war novel, but no records in the Lowry papers indicate which novel or what happened to this novel. Perhaps it would be more correct to say "a projected novel," since Lowry always had ideas for possible novels hovering in the background of the work then in progress. Mrs. Lowry believes this story was written at Cambridge and given to John Davenport, his friend and fellow-undergraduate, who later became the editor of Arena and who published the story, without Lowry's permission, after the success of Under the Volcano.⁷⁶ It tells of an American, a writer on economics, stranded in London because of a forgotten cheque book, and befriended by a taximan. Liquor flows and the two solve the economic problems of the world in hazy, disconnected dialogue in which flashes of brilliance occur. The situation is well handled and the befogged world of the alcoholic is presented with deft touches and a surety in obtaining effects that indicate steady development in technique.

Two unpublished short stories from this period are in the Lowry Collection. "Enter One in Sumptuous Armour" was probably written about 1930.⁷⁷ There are working notes with it that belong to a much later date. It deals with the induction of a newcomer into the public-school world. The subject matter and treatment suggest that the experience described or the idea from which it evolved--they are often identical with Lowry--might be linked with *The Leys*. The style is more mature than that of the school writing which would indicate that if the idea came early the version that exists developed later.

Also in manuscript in the collection is "June 30th, 1934,"⁷⁸ which uses the journey device for closing the characters off from intrusion, and two incomplete drafts of "In the Black Hills,"⁷⁹ which seemingly date from Lowry's first stay in Los Angeles.

Lowry's major literary efforts, however, during the period preceding Under the Volcano were the dramatic version of Grieg's The Ship Sails On, the novel "In Ballast to the White Sea" and the novella "Lunar Caustic." The first two were never completed and the working drafts and notes were either lost completely in the fire or were depleted to such an extent that he could not develop them further. The novella "Lunar Caustic" was in progress to the day of his death. A French version, "Le Caustic Lunaire," translated

by Michele d'Astorg and Clarisse Francillon, was serialized in Esprit in 1956. The papers in the Collection give some idea of the amount of work Lowry put into this novella. Of the first version, "The Last Address," 385 pages of manuscript exist. This was re-worked into the second version, "Swinging the Maelstrom," of which 135 pages are extant. The final version, "Lunar Caustic," has shaped up to twenty-four finished pages and notes for the completed manuscript.⁸⁰ Edited by Mrs. Lowry and Earle Birney, the final version appeared in fifty-four pages of The Paris Review.⁸¹

In his introduction, "Malcolm Lowry and the Outer Circle of Hell," which prefaces the novella, Conrad Knickerbocker says that

at one point in the mid-1930's, an early draft, under the title, "The Last Address," was accepted by Whit Burnett for Story magazine, but Lowry called it back. He permitted a French translation of the first version. . . . only because, he explained, he was afraid of losing the manuscripts, something that had happened to him more than once.⁸²

The pages of this manuscript are very interesting to anyone studying Lowry's work habits as an approach to his style. Fifteen and more versions of some sentences, varying only by a word or a short phrase, show the meticulous care with which Lowry shaped and polished his work into its final form. This novella can not be judged as part of the journeyman's development since its progress extends far into the period of mastery that has been reached by the finished

writer. The involved, convoluted style makes the story of an alcoholic's commitment to Bellevue Hospital twist and spiral in a superb representation of the tortured mental processes of the protagonist. It is a terrible novella, harsh and cruel, but one that presents the alcoholic's problem with a full understanding of the meaning of despair.

During these years of development Lowry released a few poems for publication. One of the earliest of these is a sonnet based on a news item telling of a sealed bottle containing a message for those at home found by a fisherman in the North Atlantic. The original letter was written in Norwegian and Lowry put it into poetic form:

While we sail and laugh, joke and fight, comes death
 And it is the end. A man toils on board;
 His life blows away like a gust of breath:
 Who will know his dreams now when the sea roared?
 I loved you, my dear, but now I am dead,
 So take somebody else and forget me.
 My brothers, I was foolish, as you said:
 So are most who place their fate in the sea.
 Many tears have you shed for me in vain.
 Take my pay, Mother, Father; I have come
 A long way to die in the blood and rain.
 Buy me some earth in the graveyard at home.
 Good-bye. Please remember me with these words
 To the green meadows and the blue fjords.⁸³

This was one of Lowry's favorites among his poems.

"Sestina in a Cantina," a double sestina written at Dollarton, appeared in Canadian Poetry Magazine in 1947. The difficult poetic form is well sustained and has some challenging lines, from the simple question, "How long since you have really seen a sunset?" to the philosophical

comment, "The mind has ways of keeping us in prison." The poem closes with the words of those driven from the tavern at daybreak, "And now the dawning drives us from our prison/ Into the dawn like sunset, into the ocean,/ Bereaving him of horrors, but leaving him his mirrors."⁸⁴ The drunkard, driven by guilt or misunderstanding, is a subject that recurs in Lowry's work. The idea of a multiplication of images in a mirror is one that he tried many times to express to his satisfaction. In the rough drafts of "Elephant and Colisseum" eighteen versions of a sentence expressing this idea indicate how he struggled with it.

Another poem, "Salmon Drowns Eagle," published in Contemporary Verse in 1947, has become well known and is included in The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse. It is based on a story told Lowry by "Old Sam," a Dollarton squatter. The tone is lightly contemptuous as the eagle expresses her dislike of the crows that swoop in to share in her catch. But the salmon is not dead. When the eagle tries to rest, the salmon threshes and turns and finally pulls the eagle under the water. Lowry's closing comment is typical, "It appears,/ In the mundial popular thunder,/ Any moral to this dins in drowned ears."⁸⁵

There is a considerable amount of poetry that belongs to this period but, since it was not published until much later, most of it posthumously, the form in which it

existed at this time is difficult to determine. The rest of his poetry will be dealt with at the end of the next section.

From this study of Lowry as a journeyman the indications of his growth and development are evident. He has gained, through sympathy and understanding towards others, a greater awareness of the beauties as well as the sufferings that are experienced as life goes on. He has gained immeasurably in his ability to express the ideas that clamored for expression. In an early letter to Conrad Aiken he says,

I have made up my mind about only one point in this business of living which is that I must, and as soon as possible, identify a finer scene: I must in other words give an imaginary scene identity through the immediate sensation of actual experience.⁸⁶

Although he makes fun of himself in the sentences that follow, one has the impression that he is using understatement to cloak his real feelings on the subject. His life shows that he did try to "identify a finer scene." He drained experience to the dregs, then fought his way back to the expression of what he knew of life and of himself. When he came to write in this way he had finished his period of training. He was now ready for his masterpiece.

C. The Master

In a letter to Harold Matson, their literary agent, Mrs. Lowry offers a defence of her husband's novel that is of value to any study of his work. It is of biographical

interest also, since it is not often that a wife can be vocal to this extent and under these circumstances. She presents her opinion of the novel:

One possibly expects good books, even first-rate ones, to come one's way occasionally, but one does not expect one of the caliber of the Volcano, and why should one, for they come, if they come, very rarely indeed. I tell you without hesitation that the Volcano is such a book: one which will stand comparison with the past as well as the future.⁸⁷

Then she points out the faults that she sees in the book:

I am not blind to Malcolm's faults as a writer. His astonishing awareness of the thickness of life, of the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and interrelated, causes him to write a symphony where anyone else would have written a sonata or at most a concerto, and this makes his work sometimes appear dispersed, whereas actually the form and context have arisen so inextricably one from the other that they cannot be dissociated. Then too he is cramped, for instance, to some extent as a novelist by the subjective equipment of a poet, so that I doubt if he could ever be a great novelist of 'character'.⁸⁸

She goes on to discuss the book and the indifferent acceptance of most masterpieces when they first appeared, and challenges him to find a publisher:

In this book you have the opportunity of handling a work that is not merely a 'good book' or even merely a first-rate one, but, it is at least arguable, is a classic of some sort, every bit as much as Moby Dick or what not, a milestone, if you like, and it is on this basis and no other that it must be dealt with, for, seeing its faults as we do and recognizing them, it has found its form, it is complete, Malcolm has found his style and come to maturity as an artist with it: it is finished. . . only a person whose whole existence is his work, who has dominated and disciplined the volcano within him, at what a cost of

suffering even I do not wholly understand, could have written such a book.⁸⁹

This is the earliest critical comment on Under the Volcano in its final form, the fourth version. It accepts the fact that the book has faults, looks at those faults with observant and understanding eyes, then looks beyond the faults to the book's unique character and makes the judgment that this book will last because it offers something that no other book has given, or could give. Every quality that had formed his earlier work is here, intensified and perfected. Many qualities not apparent before are present now because, as his wife has said, he has become aware of "the thickness of life, of the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and interrelated."⁹⁰ and he has now found the means to express this.

The book is cosmic in scope, the whole world is its locale. Lowry has established this with the first paragraph. He has universalized the opening of the novel by travelling over the globe locating points on the same latitude as Cuernavaca, his "Quauhnahuac." This is the seaman's approach, the concept of wide horizons. Although the action is limited to a small area, a few square miles, and a brief time, one day recalled a year later, it ranges from England to India, Normandy to Mexico, Spain to Canada and throughout

the conscious lives of the characters as their thoughts move forward and backward to weave the texture of the novel.

The range is even beyond what is normally understood by "the world." The title means more than at the foot of, or in the shadow of the volcano. The significance is "under" in the Dantean sense, that is, into the depths by trial and ordeal to purification and understanding and love. Lowry thought of his projected novel sequence as a modern Divine Comedy and this gives cosmic scope or dimension to the concept of this book. There is a range too beyond the sea--the "ultramarine" idea--and even beneath sea. The Consul says to the doctor, "Do you know, compañero, I sometimes have the feeling that it's actually sinking, like Atlantis, beneath my feet. Down, down to the frightful 'poulps.' Meropis of Theopompus. . . And the ignivome mountain."⁹¹ The depth is intensified by the word 'poulps' whose source is Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.⁹² The cosmic dimension also stretches up "through eddies of stars scattering aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water, . . . towards Orion, the Pleiades. . . ." as Yvonne passes from consciousness to death.⁹³ Depth appears again as the Consul imagines himself falling, from the summit he has somehow reached, "into the volcano . . . the world itself was bursting" as he too met death.⁹⁴ These two characters are cosmic in that they represent Everyman

and Everywoman, the whole human race, all who cannot, dare not, live without love.

Modes of expression that had been considered flaws in his earlier work now play an integral part in the style. One remembers the "Pantagruelian kick" and "Pericles" in his attempt to bring a fresh approach to sports reporting. One also recalls the literary allusions which, as half-digested scraps from his schooldays, popped into the mind of Dana Hilliot and, although quite in keeping with his character, fitted, at times, rather oddly into the setting aboard ship. This was an attempt at contrast, especially in characterization, but it did not always succeed. Now, at last, in the Volcano Lowry is free to draw on his vast store of knowledge and weave it into the texture of his prose to the delight of his reader. It is true that all readers do not enjoy this feature to the full. There is the reader for whom the story only is of interest. He reads at one level. But there are many, many more readers to whom the allusions give a shock of recognition and a delighted enjoyment at their fresh application.

The book can, indeed, be read on many levels. One is first aware of the human interest when faced with these people, in this place, facing these problems. Alcoholism is a disease that reaches far into our society today. There is some basis of truth in Hugh's cynical remark, "Good God, if

our civilization were to sober up for a couple of days it'd die of remorse on the third."⁹⁵ But Lowry gives it another dimension. Through this weakness the Consul, a kindly, friendly, even lovable man is shut out from others, barred from loving as he should, driven from the Garden of Eden, or enclosed within it according to his own idea of the punishment of Adam.⁹⁶ It is his tragic flaw.

The novel can also be approached from the historical level. The aura of world conditions permeates the story; various classes of society and their impact on one another from the turn of the century to the Day of the Dead, 1939, blend into the history of Mexico to form the milieu in which the characters move and act. The history impinges on politics; political factions in Spain and in Mexico forge the trap in which the Consul is finally caught. There is the level of mystery, natural and occult. The Consul's father has disappeared in the Himalayas, the Consul has been involved in the Samaritan incident, Hugh moves in espionage entanglements as a gun-runner for the Spanish Loyalists.⁹⁷ The Consul, supposedly writing a book on the subject is interested in mystical phenomena, the cabala, and alchemy to the point that Hugh suggests jokingly to Yvonne, "Maybe he's a black magician!"⁹⁸ The book can also be enjoyed for its humour and for the artistry with which it is presented, but these require fuller treatment.

Lowry's early style had aroused indignant comment on his tricks with punctuation. He was criticized by the schoolboy readers of The Leys Fortnightly for the use of dots, dashes, and asterisks.⁹⁹ In Ultramarine he continued to use dots and dashes. From the dashes he evolved the trick of expressing a silent reaction as if it were spoken; this is done with a dash enclosed in quotation marks, "--", as in this conversation:

"Well, there you are, you see! Well, I must be getting. Coming along ashore tonight?"
 "I'll say not. Cheerio."
 "--"100

He uses the same device in the Volcano but intensifies it:

. . . The Englishman switched his engine off.
 "I say, haven't I seen you before or something."
 "--"
 "--"101

For more than a page, as Lowry describes the early morning walk to the house after Yvonne's return, her only replies, except one, to the Consul's running commentary are in this form.¹⁰² It has become a very useful tool to express briefly what would otherwise be difficult to express.

Lowry used advertisements and street signs in his early writing as links with the outside world during a journey or, as in Ultramarine, to give the atmosphere of the city. Now he uses them to express the intrusion of the business world into the privacy of the individual, or to show a state of mind; fuzzy from alcohol in the Consul's

case, anguished and desperate in Yvonne's. When Yvonne thinks of her career as an actress she is tortured by her sense of failure,

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 the Consul, the sign in the Town House window 'Informal Dancing in the Zebra Room' turn 'Infernal'--or 'Notice to Destroy Weeds' become 'Notice to Newlyweds'.¹⁰³

Lowry's tongue-in-cheek understatement in his school writing has now developed into a stylistic device. He uses it here to describe the Consul's befogged mind:

"All right, Geoffrey: suppose we forget it until you're feeling better: we can cope with it in a day or two, when you're sober."

"But good lord!"

The Consul sat perfectly still staring at the floor while the enormity of the insult passed into his soul. As if, as if, he were not sober now! Yet there was some elusive subtlety in the impeachment that still escaped him. For he was not sober. No, he was not, not at this very moment he wasn't! But what had that to do with a minute before, or half an hour ago?¹⁰⁴

He continues in this vein and comes eventually to the inspired remark, "Ah, a woman could not know the perils, the complications, yes, the importance of a drunkard's life!"¹⁰⁵

In the letter to Harold Matson cited above, Mrs. Lowry says that because Malcolm has "the subjective equipment of a poet" she doubts "if he could ever be a great novelist of 'character'." In this novel there is little personal description, and somehow, as in the morality plays,

none is needed; the depths of the soul are presented and the reader is left to fill in the physical details for himself. Fairly late in the novel Yvonne describes herself, the glamorous Hollywood actress, but the reader wonders to what extent the portrayal is coloured by her imagination.¹⁰⁶ The picture of the Consul as he left for the afternoon outing is sharply in focus and it also has connotations of character portrayal. Dressed in his freshly pressed shirt and tweed suit, he "appears fresh and lively" and "dispossessed of any air of dissipation whatsoever."¹⁰⁷

Size is presented indirectly, as in this passage showing the Consul's shock as he realizes that his wife has come back, "Still holding the time-table the Consul built himself to his feet as she came forward."¹⁰⁸ There is the even more clever comment on size, this time direct, for the purpose of deflation as he gives Hugh's reaction, "'My God! Horses,' Hugh said, glancing and stretching himself to his full mental height of six feet two (he was five feet eleven)."¹⁰⁹ What a complete insight is given in that remark!

Character is betrayed too by reactions to situations and to one another. As they near Laruelle's house where she had betrayed her marriage, Yvonne's detailed comment on the postman makes Hugh wonder, "Why are you so voluble?"¹¹⁰ Later in the day the alcoholic fumes lift for a moment and

the Consul sees Yvonne, "The mist had cleared, but Yvonne's eyes were full of tears, and she was pale."¹¹¹ But he cannot understand her problem nor can he solve his own. When they are having dinner he comes close to it for a moment,

And then, for the second time that day, their eyes, in a long look, a long look of longing. Behind her eyes, beyond her, the Consul, an instant, saw Granada, and the train waltzing from Algeciras over the plains of Andalusia, chufferty pupperty, chufferty pupperty, . . .¹¹²

He thinks over pleasant memories until a realization of the barrier between them sweeps down on him, "How many bottles since then? In how many glasses, how many bottles had he hidden himself, since then alone?"¹¹³ Then he sees the glasses, "a babel of glasses," and hears as well as sees the long procession of bottles of every kind, all the drinks of all the world. He sat very still and asked himself,

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?¹¹⁴

No, Lowry is not a great novelist of "character." He lets his reader round the character out for himself. He does more than paint characters. With all the power that can be found in Greek tragedy he presents what lies behind the dramatis personae.

In her letter to Harold Matson, Mrs. Lowry draws his attention to another aspect of the novel when she says, "it is always dynamic and frequently hilariously funny, (it is, in fact, on one plane a comedy, a sort of cosmic jape if you like)."¹¹⁵ Again she is right. The obviously comic scenes when the Consul falls in the Calle Nicaragua, when he talks with Mr. Quincey, when he takes refuge in the Infernal Machine to escape the children who later befriend him, when he finishes off all the drinks in Laruelle's house, when he reads the menu and when he struggles through the sense of the tourist folder while in the toilet, are all funny, "a sort of cosmic jape." But there are many other examples of humour that help to give the book its individuality. The Consul's distorted world which he views with alcoholic solemnity is serio-comic and so are the small, rather absent-minded lapses which bring him up with a shock from time to time. As the Consul and Yvonne are filling in time with pointless conversation, the Consul "struck a match against their old jest" to light the cigarette "he had somehow failed to place between his lips: after a little, finding himself with a dead match, he put it in his pocket."¹¹⁶ Later the Consul begins to get ready for their outing at Tomalín,

First to wash. Sweating and trembling again, he took off his coat and shirt. He had turned on the water in the basin. Yet for some obscure reason he was standing under the shower, waiting in an agony

for the shock of cold water that never came. And he was still wearing his trousers.¹¹⁷

A laugh at the Consul's expense is usually tinged with pity.

At times the humour lies in the aptness of a phrase, the mistranslation of an expression, the distortion of a literary allusion or in an error in quotation. These quips and jests are points of light gleaming, at the most unexpected moments, in the fabric of the novel. "Come, amigo, throw away your mind."¹¹⁸ "And flood: the drains of Quauhnahuac visited us and left us with something that smelt like the Cosmic Egg till recently."¹¹⁹ "Intercepting Concepta . . . with the breakfast tray, the Consul, innocently as a man who has committed a murder while dummy at bridge, entered Yvonne's room."¹²⁰ "He was not the person to be seen reeling about in the street. True he might lie down in the street, if need be, like a gentleman, but he would not reel."¹²¹ "Guanajuato is sited in a beautiful circus of steepy hills."¹²² "I should have become a sort of Donne of the fairways at least. Poet of the unreplaced turf."¹²³ One could multiply examples indefinitely.

The writer who, as a schoolboy, described a ball as having "scarfed itself" around a circle did not lose his gift for the apt phrase. The lurid sunset is contrasted with the quietness of the town, in the opening lines,

Slightly to the right and below them, below the gigantic red evening, whose reflection bled away

in the deserted swimming pools scattered everywhere like so many mirages, lay the peace and sweetness of the town.¹²⁴

The next page has a biting comment,

Though tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless it seemed one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value and was not a mere misprint in a communique.¹²⁵

As the darkness came down "there was a savage scribble of lightning over the hotel opposite the cinema, followed by another peal of thunder."¹²⁶

The same precision of expression is evident in the description of animals and insects. In his garden the Consul notices "huge butterflies, whose precise stitched markings reminded one of the blouses in the market,"¹²⁷ and in the bathroom he watches

The insects which lay at different angles from one another on the wall, like ships out in the roadstead. . . . A large cricket, with polished fuselage, clung to the curtain. . . . He turned, expecting the caterpillar to be much nearer, but it too had turned, just slightly shifting its moorings.¹²⁸

But, once again, examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

In the development of the plot Lowry does not play tricks on his reader. Everything that contributes to the climax is introduced early into the novel and carried along with the action. The net in which the Consul is entangled is established from the first page, "Quauhnahuac possesses eighteen churches and fifty-seven cantinas."¹²⁹ The

barranca is a "dormitory for vultures and city Moloch"¹³⁰ and, on the bridge which crossed it, Laruelle recalls his holidays with Geoffrey Firmin when they were boys. His reverie is interrupted by a horse, guided crazily by a drunken rider.¹³¹ The prison watchtowers and their police guards dominate the landscape and make their presence known from time to time with the rattle of their target practice. A powerful use of foreshadowing is in the closing sentence of Chapter II, "A hideous pariah dog followed them in."¹³² Was it the same dog that followed the Consul into the barranca?

These properties for the last act of the tragedy are not just introduced and then tossed aside until they are needed for the climax and the conclusion. They move in and out of the action and contribute to the development of the plot. The barranca is crossed and re-crossed by the characters, or they walk beside it and look into its depths noticing the rubbish that has been tossed into it. Hugh and Yvonne have an idyllic ride through the countryside with the foals following their mares. The Indian rides back and forth on his horse that is branded with the number seven. Hugh and Yvonne notice him and he even intrudes into the befogged consciousness of the Consul as he inspects the garden, once an Eden, now a jungle. The black spectacled men in the streets hint that the Consul is under

surveillance. When the police are mentioned in connection with the dying Indian, they are made to appear ruthless enforcers of pitiless laws.

The same meticulous care has gone into the use of symbols. Almost everything in the novel can be construed into a symbol if one is so inclined. The properties mentioned earlier are symbolic, especially the barranca and the dog. There are, however, two symbols that are particularly important to this study of Lowry's artistry: The garden and the wheel. The Consul's garden, now fallen from its pristine state, is a symbol of the Consul's condition. It abuts on the public garden with its sign which he constantly misreads. "See to it that your children do not destroy it" becomes a warning of eviction to him, giving him a sense of frustration. These small parks are being set up everywhere by the government so the Consul is conscious of them at every turn, he even watches the workmen putting up the signs, knowing beforehand what they will say. This is linked with the inscription of Laruelle's house, "No se puede vivir sin amar."¹³³--"one cannot live without love." This is the real problem, the real reason for the Consul's eviction from the Garden of Eden; it is also the reason for the existence of the political system by which he is finally trapped.

More powerful than the garden symbol is the wheel. It is more than a symbol; it is the pattern on which the novel is constructed. Cyclic movement fascinated Lowry. The wheel, the eddy, the maelstrom, the spiral flight of birds are patterns that he describes time after time in his works. Sometimes it is factual description, often it is a simile or a metaphor, occasionally it is a symbol that finds expression in this way. Lowry planned the book on a cyclic pattern; when one reaches the end one is impelled to turn back to the beginning and re-read at least the first chapter. The wheel is in the closing sentence of Chapter I, "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel."¹³⁴ In the letter to Jonathan Cape in which he defends his book, Lowry traces the wheel pattern in all its intricate manifestations, in chapter after chapter as he criticizes his own work.¹³⁵ This letter will be given fuller treatment when Lowry, the critic, is studied. To him "this sublime celestial machinery" suggested movement into infinity as well as man's eternal quest. The scope of his thought becomes clear from this passage:

And the earth itself still turning on its axis and revolving around that sun, the sun 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?¹³⁶

The wheel, especially the luminous wheel, is the pattern of Lowry's thought. To him it is the pattern of life itself and all human relationship.

In this novel Lowry uses cinematic technique to develop his plot by giving continuity to the action. The opening lines give a cosmic view as if the world were in focus from outer space. This gradually sharpens as detail after detail is supplied until the hotel, the tennis courts and finally the two men are centered on the screen. Wide vistas are followed by close-ups as one scene after the other is presented. The presentation of these different perspectives is cleverly handled. Hugh and Yvonne walk, then ride, and from their viewpoint the Consul's white house gleams out against the shrubbery on the hillside. Signs and shop windows give the sense of movement as the Consul and Yvonne walk along the street. Glimpses of the scenery alternate with close-ups of the passengers during the bus ride. Laruelle's farewell walk through the town is a means of introducing the reader to the area in which the first major scenes are laid. This following of one character showing

him in his environment then fading into a presentation of his thoughts is definitely cinematic and is handled with consummate skill. One character after another is treated in this way until the reader feels that Laruelle has kept his promise and has made his film which is unrolling before him. One does not just read this book; one watches it unfold.

A final characteristic of Lowry's writing in his great novel must be noted. This is the use of delicately handled descriptions, particularly those that are idyllic. The little descriptions are nearly all authentic pieces of local colour, the sort of thing the camera-man would catch in a close-up as it passed by. The Consul had spoken of a corpse as Yvonne stood and watched him before he knew she had returned. When they were walking towards home,

It came sailing out of nowhere, the child's funeral, the tiny lace-covered coffin followed by the band: two saxophones, bass guitar, a fiddle, playing of all things "La Cucaracha," the women behind, very solemn, while several paces back a few hangers-on were joking, straggling along in the dust almost at a run.¹³⁷

As a touch of local colour this little scene is perfect.

Late in the afternoon the sun is getting low in the sky and shadows are lengthening as the group moves toward the Salon Ofélia.

A hot thundery wind launched itself at them, spent itself, and somewhere a bell beat out wild triphongs. 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.¹³⁸

This description is imagination colouring observation and it shows the real artist at work.

Chapter IX closes with another vignette that links close observation with skillful description:

Now their own shadows fell full across the square to the raised twin doors of the tavern, Todos Contentos y Yo Tambien: under the doors they noticed what looked like the bottom of a crutch, someone leaving. The crutch didn't move; its owner was having an argument at the door, a last drink perhaps. Then it disappeared: one door of the cantina was propped back, something emerged.

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.

They all stood watching the Indian as he disappeared with the old man round a bend of the road, into the evening, shuffling through the grey white dust in his poor sandals. . . .¹³⁹

That is not just a description of the scene; it is a statement of the humanity of the man who wrote it.

Except for a few descriptions of the Mexican scene, for example, the town at sunset and early evening as Laruelle walked through it, the countryside as Hugh and Yvonne saw it on their walk and ride together, and the descriptions of the two volcanoes that link the landscape with the cloud-filled sky, the idyllic passages are descriptions of the

area around Dollarton, now Cates Park, that was home and Eden to the Lowrys for fourteen years. Indeed, it would be almost more correct to say seventeen years; during the last three years of exile he hoped some day to go back to the place where he had been so happy. The dream of this haven first slips into the novel in the Consul's letter to Yvonne which M. Laruelle finds in the book of Elizabethan plays, *Dreaming of possible happiness with his wife*, the Consul writes:

I seem to see us living in some northern country, of mountains and hills and blue water; our house is built on an inlet and one evening we are standing, happy in one another, on the balcony of this house, looking over the water. There are sawmills half hidden by trees beyond and under the hills on the other side of the inlet, what looks like an oil refinery, only softened and rendered beautiful by distance.

It is a light blue moonless summer evening, . . . from beyond along the coast comes the gathering thunder of a long many-engined freight train, thunder because though we are separated by this wide strip of water from it, the train is rolling eastward and the changing wind veers for the moment from an easterly quarter, . . . and then all at once a fishing-boat with tall gear comes running round the point like a white giraffe, very swift and stately, leaving directly behind it a long silver scalloped rim of wake, not visibly moving inshore, but now stealing ponderously beachward towards us, this scrolled silver rim of wash striking the shore first in the distance, then spreading all along the curve of beach, its growing thunder and commotion now joined to the diminishing thunder of the train, and now breaking reboant on our beach, while the floats, for there are timber diving floats, are swayed together, everything jostled and beautifully ruffled and stirred and tormented in this rolling sleeked silver, then little by little calm again, . . . 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.¹⁴⁰

The dream of the shack by the sea is presented by Hugh when he rides with Yvonne. She wants to get the Consul away from Mexico, preferably to a farm in Canada. Hugh realizes that the Consul will never fit into that environment, so he suggests a squatter's cottage with foreshore rights near Vancouver. The idea appeals to Yvonne and from then on it slips into the novel whenever she has a moment to dream. Hugh presents his idea:

I can see your shack now. It's between the forest and the sea and you've got a pier going down to the water over rough stones, you know, covered with barnacles and sea anemones and starfish. You'll have to go through the woods to the store. . . . 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.¹⁴¹

This is Roche Point in all its pristine beauty as the Lowrys knew it, the place where Under the Volcano was written.

As she dreams of this Eden, Yvonne adds details, "salmonberries and thimbleberries and wild blackberry bushes that on bright winter nights of frost reflected a million moons;" behind the house she sees a "dogwood tree that bloomed twice in the year with white stars."¹⁴² Womanlike,

she furnishes the house down to the lamps and the bright Indian blankets. She imagines the

millwheel reflections of sunlight on water, . . . 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.¹⁴³

But the transience of life, the cycles of change that make one wonder about its purpose--the cui bono?--was always present in Lowry's mind. This happiness is not to be for the Consul and Yvonne. In her next dream she sees the house from different viewpoints, from above, in the forest, from the beach, from the sea. Then she suddenly asks herself, "Why was it though, that right 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?"¹⁴⁴ These are prophetic words. As she dies Yvonne has another dream of the house but this time it is on fire. One after the other the things she had put into the house, or around it are destroyed,

Geoffrey's old chair was burning, his desk, and now his book, his book was burning, the pages were burning, burning, burning, whirling up from the fire they were scattered, burning, along the beach, and now it was growing darker and the tide coming in, 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.¹⁴⁵

The house was dying, the dream had faded, the dreamer was dead. These lyrical passages which have served their

purpose in giving beauty and authenticity to the novel are factual. Lowry has used his own experience of the beauty of this place he loved so dearly and the traumatic shock of its loss through fire to present something he otherwise might not have been able to say. The artist is at work; from the warp of reality and the weft of vision he has presented a world that is wholly his own.

So far as style is concerned, Under the Volcano represents the highest level of Lowry's achievement. When Mrs. Lowry wrote, "Malcolm has found his style and come to maturity as an artist with it,"¹⁴⁶ she stated an undeniable fact. Everything else he wrote from then on was determined or measured by this achievement. The title Under the Volcano was even more significant than Lowry thought. He became Vulcan shaping his thoughts into swords and ploughshares through the medium of words. What this cost him will be shown later in his own criticism of his work.

Many of the ideas embedded in the Volcano are developed elsewhere as poems. He wrote a considerable amount of poetry which he was reluctant to release for publication. In the introduction to Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry, Earle Birney suggests that this reluctance stemmed from the fact that "his verse was so innocent of defense."¹⁴⁷ No doubt this is true. Many of his poems are intensely personal. Some of them speak surprisingly of the hatred that

often engulfed him. In the light of the Letters this is rather different from what one would expect; he does not sound like a person driven by hatred. Were the poems and his drinking the outlet for it?

In reading some of the poems one notices the similarity, in subject matter and expression, to thoughts or incidents in Under the Volcano. Perhaps through the poem he was able to effect a crystallization of an idea that made it possible for him to give the prose expression the validity it needed and which he could not otherwise have achieved.

Lowry was always fond of seagulls. Simple line drawings of them decorate letters and manuscripts when he is in a happy mood. There are countless references to them from his earliest writing; like the wheel they form a recurrent pattern. Only one who knows the gull and its habits could have written this poem, especially its first three lines:

THE GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL

The hook-nosed angel that walks like a sailor,
 Pure scavenger of the empyrean,
 Hunter of edible stars, and sage
 Catsbane and defiler of the porch,
 Dead sailor, finial, and image
 Of freedom in morning blue, and strange torch
 At twilight, stranger world of love
 Old hunter of the Mauretania,
 Snowblinded once, I saved. And hove
 Out of the rainbarrel, back at heaven--
 A memory stronger than childhood's even
 Or freighters rolling to Roumania.¹⁴⁸

This poem takes on an added dimension when one compares it with the passage in Under the Volcano in which Hugh is justifying himself to his 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?¹⁴⁹

The two are not exactly alike in detail but some experience seems to have sparked the description. If Lowry did rescue a seagull what a sense of power this would have given him in that "magnificent moment" and what a surge of happiness would have accompanied the memory ever after.

The loss of their house by fire is also expressed in a poem which has its echoes in the novel:

A LAMENT--JUNE 1944

Our house is dead
It burned to the ground
On a morning in June
With a wind from the Sound.
The fire that fed
On our marriage bed
Left a bottle of gin.
Black under the moon
Our house is dead.
We shall build it again
But our home is gone. ¹⁵⁰
And the world burns on.

This is very close to Yvonne's last dream as she loses consciousness; the dream that closes with the tragic line, "Their house was dying, only an agony went there now."¹⁵¹

The passage quoted earlier in which, in her imagination, Yvonne sees the light reflected from the water and playing on the walls is almost identical with the poem, "Indian Arm," which begins, "Mill-wheel reflections of sun on water/ And the spokes of light wheeling on the shacks." It closes with these lines which echo the picture in Under the Volcano:

Softly renews the round of the mill-wheel
Sun reflections winding longer shadows
And turns the pine bough into green chenille.

After the moonlight walks over windows
Mill-wheel reflections of moonlight later
On water embroider waving windows. . . ¹⁵²

Lowry wrote many poems about ships and the sea, the forest, and the happiness of life at Dollarton. He also wrote about death and remorse. These subjects are used so often and so powerfully that one recognizes in them a pre-occupation that is almost an obsession. Some of these poems are not only very powerful, but also very beautiful. This is one of the finest:

SUNRISE

Sober I rode into the bran new dawn,
With steady hand grasping the single rein,
New-shod new-shrived and all but newly born
Over the smiling grandiloquent plain.

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Surcingleless as heaven ran my steed
 And true to heaven rose my simple song,
 Ah, the years behind seemed lost, and lost the deed,
 As pommel and stirrups unheeded I cantered along.

--But what cactuses are these on every hand,
 Wild dogs and spectres, all enveloping?
 And came again into that evening land,

Galloping, galloping, galloping--

Bound to that unrelenting fatuous horse
 Whose eyes are lidless and whose name, remorse.¹⁵³

Man's cruelty troubled him greatly and it is often expressed in, or liked with poems about death. Surprisingly he uses the villanelle, usually the vehicle for a happy subject, to express sorrow in "Death of A Oaxaquenian" which begins, "So huge is God's despair/ In the wild cactus plain/ I heard Him weeping there."¹⁵⁴

Lowry could also write whimsical poetry when he chose and his sense of humour flashes out from time to time in the turn of a phrase, as in this which is half serious, half comic:

THE UNBORN

He wrote for the dead, but the ubiquitous dead
 Liked their own wisdom, and preferred their bed;

He wrote for the blind, yet the polygonous blind
 Had richer, thicker things just then in mind;

He wrote for the dumb, but the golden-voiced dumb
 Were singing their own songs and could not come;

So he wrote for the unborn, since surely, it is said,
 At least they're neither dumb, nor blind, nor dead.¹⁵⁵

In the Lowry papers there are many pages of partly finished poems, some of them barely started. This problem of creating the poem and shaping it to its perfect form is the theme of "One Flying Line" from which these few lines have been extracted:

Phrases rejected for a trochee's sake
 bobbing like corks on margins of volumes
 may mark depths where the caught iambic glitters:
 or one flying line among such fragments
 soar on forever like the Bird of Paradise.¹⁵⁷

His poetry often does just that, utters a "flying line" that soars. Describing, in "Iron Cities," a busy harbour with ships moving back and forth, he says, "The ferry utters/ A last white phrase."¹⁵⁸ What a perfect picture of the moment when the boat speaks with its steam whistle! The ship's stoker must be behind this metaphor for lightning, "And lightning scrapes blue shovels against coal."¹⁵⁹ Perhaps the loveliest of these single lines is this one which is a little poem in itself, "The meadows wait for rainbows to say God."¹⁶⁰

All Lowry's themes, his loves and his hates, are gathered into this short poem which will serve as a final example:

FOR THE LOVE OF DYING

The tortures of hell are stern, their fires burn
fiercely.
Yet vultures turn against the air more beautifully
than seagulls float downwind in cool sunlight,
or fans in asylums spin a loom of fate
for hope which never ventured up so high
as life's deception, astride the vulture's flight.
If death can fly, just for the love of flying,¹⁶¹
What might not life do, for the love of dying?

The themes and techniques that Lowry had learned and applied in his novel and in his poetry were used also in his short stories. Some of his stories are still being edited with the hope that they will be published. The most widely known have been released in the collection Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place. There are seven stories in the book, including the two which have been most frequently anthologized, "The Bravest Boat" and "The Forest Path to the Spring."

Lowry seems to have been particularly happy in the short story although the mass of notes and rewritten versions in the Collection suggests that he often had to wrestle with his theme to make it take form. The great perfection of some sentences is, in itself, a comment on the author's clarity in seeing as well as his ability in expressing. "The Bravest Boat" opens with this sentence, "It was a day of spindrift and blowing sea-foam, with black clouds presaging rain driven over the mountains from the sea by a wild March wind."¹⁶² Point after point is noted in the landscape as he

builds up a picture of the mountains and sea, clouds and trees that is alive with movement and colour. The seagulls are there, "The angelic wings of the seagulls circling over the tree tops shone very white against the black sky."¹⁶³

But the eye travels beyond them, up into the sky beyond the mountain tops, "And highest of all an eagle, with the poise of a skier, shot endlessly down the world."¹⁶⁴ The beautiful prose should not be fragmented in this way even though these sentences are so well worth noting. The people in the story are Astrid and Sigurd. They are also Margerie and Malcolm Lowry for the autobiographical note comes in very simply as the two protagonists walk along the beach with its welter of driftwood swinging at the tideline. When they come upon "a few bits of lumber almost ready to burn" thinking that someone might take them home, "automatically they threw them up beyond the sea's reach for some passing soul, remembering their own winters of need."¹⁶⁵

The next story in the collection is "Through the Panama." To the accompaniment of the ship's engines beating out "Frère Jacques" the Wildernesses, Sigbjørn and Primrose, sail on the freighter, S.S. Diderot, for Rotterdam. This story is taken from Sigbjørn's notebook, but he becomes Martin in the story that is told. Again, the protagonists are really Margerie and Malcolm Lowry, who sailed to France, in November, 1947, on the S.S. Brest. The story is not only

an account of the voyage but also a commentary on what Lowry had been reading at the time. Newspaper clippings, and guide books are incorporated into the text or used, along with the glosses from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," as a running marginal commentary. Martin is a writer. This gives Lowry freedom for the distorted literary quotations and references that he liked to use, for example "I am the chief steward of my fate, I am the fireman of my soul,"¹⁶⁶ and "My faithful general Phenobarbus, treacherous to the last."¹⁶⁷ The ship runs into storms; at times the protagonist dreams of home, "Thousands of white gulls. The crew feeding them. Will our gulls starve without us?"¹⁶⁸

There are deliberate repetitions and echoes of earlier works in this story. These are meant to establish the fact that this man is the same author who wrote the earlier passages. In this story Lowry tried out an interesting experiment in short story technique. The marginal glosses make a running commentary on the ideas in the story itself, or present the same ideas from a different viewpoint. It is like the photographing of the same scene with two cameras set a few feet apart to obtain a stereoscopic, or three-dimensional, effect. In this way Lowry uses cinematic technique to give multilevel presentation a startlingly new impact.

The next story in the collection, "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession," is also built up from a notebook belonging to Sigbjørn. The letter he uses is almost a replica of the draft of one Lowry wrote to the person in charge of his trust fund. With this story and its autobiographical twist, the previous account of the sea voyage is so closely related that one realizes that Lowry is attempting to write a novel by presenting a series of related short stories. Glimpses of the Keats and Shelley memorials in Rome are given in such a way that the reader feels that cults are often nothing more than the indulgence of sentimentality. This feeling becomes stronger when the author presents the notes of his visit to Poe's shrine in Richmond. He draws the parallel with his own life and shows that an author is one who needs tangible help and understanding during life more than he needs memorial rooms or shrines when he is dead.

"Elephant and Colosseum" is also about a writer, this time on a visit to Rome from America. In youth he had shipped on a freighter as cabin boy and had been appointed caretaker of the animal cargo the ship was bringing back to the zoos. There are echoes of this in Ultramarine. Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan, a native Manxman, allows his mind to wander over the whole range of Lowry thought including the occult. The Collection indicates how much work goes into a

Lowry story and especially how much went into this one. The 654 pages of manuscript and the working notes make a pile eight inches high. From this Lowry distilled the 58 pages of the finished, published version. The beautiful Lowry style is the product of heart-breaking labour.

"Present Estate of Pompeii" presents another view of the writer's mind as its protagonist, Roderick McGregor Fairhaven, is also an author. He is more than this. He comes from the same place as the Wildernesses, knows them well, so well, in fact, that he quotes Wilderness as several of his ideas fit into the experience the Fairhavens are having, as they view the remains of Pompeii. In this story the theme of eviction is strong and the passages describing Eridanus are particularly evocative and nostalgic. The reader becomes aware of the intensity of suffering when one is wrenched unwillingly from the place that has been a haven of peace.

With "Gin and Goldenrod" the protagonists are back at Eridanus and are, once again, Primrose and Sigbjørn Wilderness. The threat of eviction hovers in the background, expressed mainly by the signs on the office of the real estate development company, the scars on the landscape where new roads have gone through, the felled trees, and the ugly new houses. The story is a vignette which brings more sharply into focus the people who have been moving through

the book. The reader gets a glimpse into their lives that reveals a good deal about their characters. The same pattern of drinking that marked "Through the Panama" forms the background of the situation in which the protagonists are placed. One never escapes from it for very long in Lowry's work. The reader sees clearly that civilization is moving into the forest and destroying their Eden. There is a very definite sense that the way of life that had meant so much to these two people is now over. They will never find it again.

The last story, "The Forest Path to the Spring," is the most beautiful thing Lowry has written. It was intended as the closing section of his novel sequence and would, indeed, have formed a fitting conclusion to the saga. Dedicated "to Margerie, my wife," it is an eloquent tribute to all that she meant to him. It shows, as nothing else could, what the peace and beauty of his simple home at Dollarton meant to him and the part this environment played in his fulfilment as a writer.

The protagonist in this story is a musician, one who plans to write a great symphony, but so far is tortured with contradictions and perplexities. He comes upon the dedication which he had written years before and which was all that was left of the work, the rest having been destroyed by fire. If the one word "notes" is changed from a musical

to a literary connotation, the words will serve as Lowry's own statement of purpose:

Dear Lord God, I earnestly pray you to help me order this work, ugly chaotic and sinful though it may be, in a manner that is acceptable in Thy sight; thus, so it seems to my imperfect and disordered brain, at the same time fulfilling the highest canons of art, yet breaking new ground and, where necessary, old rules. It must be tumultuous, stormy, full of thunder, the exhilarating Word of God must sound through it, pronouncing hope for man, yet it also must be balanced, grave, full of tenderness and compassion, and humor. I, being full of sin, cannot escape false concepts, but let me be truly Thy servant in making this a great and beautiful thing, and if my motives are obscure, and the notes scattered and often meaningless, please help me to order it, or I am lost. . . . 169

The whole Dollarton setting is found in this story: the untouched forest, the spring, the beach, the distant oil refinery, the lighthouses, Deep Cove, Burrard Inlet and its northern branch familiarly called Indian Arm. The fishermen who were the Lowrys' only neighbours during the winter and the summer visitors who were their friends are there. They do the things such people would do and they talk about the things that would interest them and Lowry gives it the air of authenticity by the sureness and beauty of his prose. The writing is not "fine writing" in the derogatory sense; it is fine writing in which every art is employed to show forth with truth the thing one loves.

There are many "flying lines" and gems of description. He gives a glimpse of the view from the path:

Often all you could see in the whole world of the dawn was a huge sun with two pines silhouetted in it, like a great blaze behind a Gothic cathedral. And at night the same pines would write a Chinese poem on the moon.¹⁷⁰

Freighters come into view or anchor in the roadstead, "Sometimes too, on the seaboard of the night, a ship would stand drawn, like a jeweled dagger, from the dark scabbard of the town."¹⁷¹ When the mist was thick they heard "the thrilling diatonic notes of a foghorn in the mist, as if some great symphony had just begun its opening chords."¹⁷²

A beacon was visible to the south,

It was a whitewashed concrete structure, thin as a match, like a magic lighthouse, without a keeper, but oddly like a human being itself, standing lonely on its cairn with its ruby lamp for a head and its generator strapped to its back like a pack; wild roses in early summer blew on the bank beside it, and when the evening star came out, sure enough, it began its beneficent signaling too.¹⁷³

Lowry delighted in the wildlife around him and wrote many delightful passages about the animals, the birds, and the sea creatures he was constantly observing.

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 moon-struck swelling water to land noiselessly on the float: a squark when they met, the one waiting for the other, and then flying off together.¹⁷⁴

Literary allusions are part of the texture, but there is one that is particularly interesting. The couple had gone by boat up the inlet and were impressed by the

beauty of the mountains that could be seen in the distance.

Then they had a significant experience:

As we rowed along the shore in the warm late afternoon light these great peaks were reflected in and shadowed the flowing water, and seemed to move along with us, so that my wife spoke of Wordsworth's famous peak, that strode after him; this was something similar, she said, though very different, because there was nothing threatening about this apparent movement; these peaks that followed us were, rather guardians. Many times were we to see this phenomenon, as of a whole mountainside or ridge of pines detaching themselves and moving as we rowed, but never did it, or they seem "after" us: it seemed a reminder of duality, of opposing motions born of the motion of the earth, a symbol even while an illusion, of nature's intolerance of inertia.¹⁷⁶

Sigbjørn is tortured by hates and fears that surge into his soul. He is unable to explain their cause or to understand them. Finally, as the peace of the place calms and strengthens him, he conquers these fears. Part of this new strength comes from his wife's belief in him, part of it from his love for her. He comments on this, "I reflected how little I had known of the depths and tides of a woman until now, her tenderness, her compassion, her capacity for delight, her wistfulness, her joy and strength, and her beauty, that happened through my wild luck to be the beauty of my wife."¹⁷⁷ From this love and this peace comes a greater understanding of life and of what will satisfy man's hunger for beauty:

And suddenly, as I helped my wife out and tied up the boat, I was overwhelmed with a kind of love. Standing there, in defiance of eternity, and yet as

if in humble answer to it, with their weathered sidings as much a part of the natural surroundings as a Shinto temple is of the Japanese landscape, why had these shacks come to represent something to me of an indefinable goodness, even a kind of greatness?¹⁷⁸

It is not surprising that Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place won the Governor-General's Award for fiction in 1962. This was the first time the award was made posthumously.

Lowry wrote other stories at this time, notably "The Element Follows you Around, Sir!" which grew into the, as yet, unpublished novel, "October Ferry to Gabriola." He wrote book reviews, notably one on Turvey, the novel of his friend, Earle Birney. He wrote a charming article on Mexico, "The Garden of Etna," which talks about the friend in whose memory he wrote another novel, "Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid," now edited and ready for publication this fall.¹⁷⁹ He wrote "La Mordida," a novel about the Lowrys' experience with the Mexican police and this too is in the process of being edited with a view of publication in the near future. But, all this time, and right to the end of his life he wrote letters; charming, indignant, desperate, beseeching, humorous, friendly letters that show the man better than anything else ever could.

To the student of Lowry's style, however, these letters have a particular value. They reveal his thoughts

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on the subject of style, the way in which the artist expresses what he has to say, what he thought was important for a writer to know. Under the Volcano marked the peak in his stylistic development. Mrs. Lowry said truly, "Malcolm has found his style." Everything he wrote before this was a preparation for it; everything he wrote after had been shaped or "informed" by it. It is to his sense of style, his conscious statement, in letters and working notes, of his aims as an artist that attention will now be given.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

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CHAPTER III

THE CRITIC

A. The Subjective Critic

There are a great many comments on style scattered throughout Lowry's novels and short stories. This is to be expected since so many of his protagonists are writers. Their creator puts into their minds the expression of the ideas that he was concerned with himself at the time of writing, or problems that he thought worth following out towards a solution. But interesting as these comments are, the richest and most prolific source of Lowry criticism is his letters. He makes statements in them on the stories in progress, his plans for future novels, his opinion of the place which various pieces will hold in the finished body of his work. He discusses the achievement of other writers and he gives helpful advice to those who have asked him to read and evaluate what they have written.

In addition to the letters, he wrote critical notes on his own work in the margins of the drafts and even on the galleys of his book as it was being set up for printing. His notes on the work submitted for criticism by his wife and his friends show that he went to a great deal of trouble to make his comments and suggestions as helpful as possible.

They are never generalized expressions of opinion; they are a study of the particular problem presented by that page in that work, the need of that writer at that moment.

From the existence of these statements, then, it is obvious that one can study Lowry as a critic, subjective and objective, and that from his criticism one can arrive, not only at a fuller understanding of his work, but also at a better perception of the problems of style that all writers must solve. This thesis will now examine Lowry's critical comments in so far as they express his ideas on style; first, in his own work, and then in the work of others.

Whenever Lowry mentions Ultramarine he expresses dissatisfaction with the book. In an undated draft of a letter, marked "Harcourt, Brace," he makes this comment, a typical one which can be taken as a summary of what he had to say about it:

It is one of those pieces of those juvenilia that their authors would like to buy up all the copies of and burn and then forget that they had written. But its form, its drang, the experience that informed it is a different matter: it can be a first class work if I wholly rewrote it on the basis of what is truly mine in the experience. I thought of rechristening it False Cape Horn.¹

This is true to Lowry's standards: a work is of value for what is original and distinctive in it.

In the same letter the author makes an interesting comment on what he considers to be the values that give

artistic merit. In spite of the fact that he had offered Lunar Caustic to Harcourt, Brace, he says:

I hope you don't take it. I see that one could reasonably feel, from this way of presenting it, that it was the kind of book that left "an unpleasant taste in one's mouth." But I believe its unpleasantness to be beside the point, if it is done right, and is made an integrated work of art. It could be, unless I am very self-deceived--if one is hanging on at the same time to the highest kind of theory--that a work like this could fill a gap. Anyhow I've often thought that modern literature suffers from not being anchored deeply enough on the one hand, or made fast enough on the other. To myself, then, these secret inadmissible shames, then, these unpronounceable words, and unvintageable anxieties which I would try to bring under the pen in Lunar Caustic, must have real value, though that would be only in proportion to its artistic merit. In other words, I tend to believe in it.²

He goes on to discuss the background of the possible characters in the story and his intention of establishing an identity between Garry and the protagonist if he makes the point that the protagonist's father is also in prison. Then he develops the motivation:

Moreover I believe that Thurstaston [Plantagenet in the finished version] takes refuge in the hospital because he feels himself, almost as if by force majeure, or poetic justice, being driven to commit suicide himself, his life having become a sort of actual "to be, or not to be": actually he has too much final guts,--nonetheless I perceive great drama in a man being confronted at every turn of the wheel with this kind of temptation, exacerbated by the feeling that this is what he is supposed to do;-- he feels himself a character again, as if at the mercy of some transcendental gloomy novelist. There should be a baseball scene on the roof of the hospital: and a horrendous hydrotherapy scene in the basement, though in reverse order: if I analyze him

in terms of each situation, and not in a "vacuum"--as someone said--these geographical polarities should be helpful. However the best thing to do now is to cork in the daemons of Caustic and let the thing itself ripen.³

Suicide, linked with his Cambridge experience and also with Aiken's attempt, described in Ushant, recurs with increasing frequency in Lowry's work until it becomes the principal theme of his last novel, "October Ferry to Gabriola." Its introduction in this earlier work as a powerful motive for the protagonist's actions is interesting. Interesting, too, is the planning of the two contrasting poles of experience, the ball game on the roof is placed as far apart as possible, in locale and in intensity, from the hydrotherapy scene.

The final version of the novella Lunar Caustic does not have quite the form Lowry has suggested here. However the unity of conception, at least in the mind of the author, is seen in his overall plan for his finished work. In a letter to Albert Erskine he presented this plan which he reiterated many times after, adding to and expanding the sequence, but never basically altering it:

I wrote another short novel called Lunar Caustic in 1936 (rewritten in 1940) which has never seen the Light. Under the Volcano was originally planned as the inferno part of a Dantesque trilogy to be called The Voyage That Never Ends. Lunar Caustic was the purgatorial part, but was to be much expanded. I lost all the notes for its expansion in a fire, but though rather unmotivated, it's probably better as it stands. . . . The Paradiso part was called In Ballast to the White Sea, was a good deal longer

than the Volcano and was completely destroyed in the fire here which took our house and all our books.⁴

Into this plan a new idea insinuated itself, that of writing a novel by developing a series of related short stories. He makes this suggestion in another letter to Albert Erskine:

On the other hand though Hear Us is much easier to write [than Lunar Caustic] with its less interrelated problems, it seems to be shaping up less like an ordinary book of tales than a sort of novel of an odd aeolian kind itself, i.e., it is more interrelated than it looks. And so, I suppose, while it might not sell, what if it were an exception and did?⁵

At one time he had planned to include twelve stories, or "chapters" in this integrated collection and he seems to have given considerable thought to its arrangement and development, even linking it with the Volcano, "La Mordida," and "Dark as the Grave"--the Mexican trilogy:

Hear Us O Lord--with its 12 chapters--would be, if done aright, less a book of short stories than--God help us--yet another kind of novel: a kind of--often far less serious, often much more so--Volcano in reverse, with a triumphant ending, but ending (after "The Forest Path") in the same way, with the words Le Gusta Esta Jardin, etc. You will see the point of this in Gabriola.⁶

The Mexican trilogy was being developed at the same time as the short story sequence and it was giving Lowry a good deal of trouble. The series of letters to Albert Erskine, reporting on work in progress, mentions the two Mexican novels which had grown out of the experiences

the Lowrys had had during their visit to Mexico in 1945-46.

He wrote:

Dark as the Grave--700 pages of notes and drafts--is deposited in the bank (it hadn't occurred to me till very recently that there were things called safety deposit boxes): La Mordida has been started on the long haul of typing. I didn't send you any of the former because in toto it is not in a fit state to read and it would take a lot of time to make "suitable selections."⁷

What he means by this last statement is clearer from a later letter to the same editor in which he mentions his Mexican trilogy then remarks, "much of it in its present form is far too intimate in nature to send even you, supposing it had been possible to do so."⁸

Interwoven into this work and finally dominating all his last efforts was "Gabriola." In August, 1952, he mentions the trouble he was having with one of the novellas in "Hear us":

I am having to rewrite--for the umpteenth time--the penultimate novella in Hear Us, due to the appalling difficulty of trying to render overlapping material consistent: the number of false restarts and hen tracks on the page I have made has me half dead with discouragement, I don't feel I've earned my hire for the last month despite a more or less sizzling (though still imperfect) "Pompeii," I feel lamentably out of touch with the contemporary world of fiction.⁹

A letter, six months later, to Harold Matson makes this reference clearer. He speaks of the necessity of preventing "October Ferry" from "greedily gulping the material" he had planned to use elsewhere and then remarks:

Work in progress is still last 4 novellas of Hear Us, and their interrelation: with a re-written (and I hope terrific) October Ferry to Gabriola as the current and besetting problem that has engrossed and forestalled obsessed and delighted me for months and is still a problem child for it grew almost to a novel on its own and is still not quite subdued and cut to size, though I hope to have results soon.¹⁰

Another six months went by. In the early summer of 1953, he again wrote to Erskine. This is a long letter in which he mentions his wife's illness, his worry about her, his financial problems, and the struggle he is having with "Gabriola" which has cost him "more pains than all the Volcano put together." He is still hoping it will fit into "Hear us O Lord," but decides that "having gone so far there is only one thing to do which is to finish it." He says:

Meantime the perilous chapel section obliged me to rewrite the "exposition." But by the time I had done that I realized that what was required was not one, but two expositions. . . . The first exposition, though objective, is nonetheless being composed in the protagonist's mind. A shock suddenly makes him see that he's lying to himself, merely "goofing" in fact, and a totally different consciousness arising in the same person works diabolically back through the same material, putting a completely different construction on it. I am hoping that the reader's sympathies, far from being disengaged or bewildered, will be intensified by this odd treatment which though I feel it artistically justified might certainly give many a psychologist pause, I fear. What crisis was the author himself passing through, he might ask, that would cause him so to deliberately hebephrenize his apparently objective data, and did he come through it successfully? The answer to this question I can only say must be found in Gabriola itself, which I more and more see as a challenge--though perhaps half humorously--to the author's actual

personal salvation, which I had been a little forward in already assuming maybe. Hence the story's importance.¹¹

He speaks of his uneasiness over the effect this was having on his own mental health and that he had spent some weeks reading nothing but psychology. What he learned about himself was not encouraging, but then "at that rate and in those terms the Volcano was a sheer psychologic impossibility to begin with," so he took heart and went on with the work. He again mentions the struggle he had in shaping the novel:

one part of Gabriola moved so slowly that in the original you may see invocations to everyone from St. Jude, the Saint of the Impossible, to the spirit of William James, not to say God, to help me get on more swiftly, at the head of each page.¹²

This is true. One can sense the difficulty or the ease with which a page has been written. When he has been struggling to express his thoughts or shape his material, the page is headed with a prayer, usually to St. Jude. Occasionally in the margin is written, "O God, what am I trying to say?" When he is able to write with ease, or is in a happy mood, line sketches of flying seagulls decorate the page.

He has not abandoned the thought of keeping "Gabriola" as a novella, but is becoming convinced that the whole idea, as he sees it at that time, is now becoming too unwieldy.

On the other hand if I can get some of the nonsense out of "Through the Panama" and perhaps the "Elephant" the whole thing does have a very beautiful form, and makes a very beautiful sound when taken together: and it is a form you can only see when you see the book as a whole.¹³

"Gabriola" refuses to fit into this pattern and Lowry blames his "daemon." He had willed "one thing and the daemon has decided another" and although able to master "booze," bad temper, self-deceit, and his "other myriad bad habits" he is not able to master his daemon.

And if he was a good one it would be different. But he is slow, confused, paranoid, gruesome of mind, as well as being completely implacable, and he seems to have some vices unknown even to me. And in Gabriola he has turned out what set out to be an innocent and beautiful story of human longing into quite one of the most guilt-laden and in places quite Satanically horrendous documents it has ever been my unfortunate lot to read, let alone have to imagine I wrote. One saving grace is that it is in places incredibly funny, I think.¹⁴

The more he struggled with "Gabriola" the more he saw it as something vitally important in the body of his work. It became to some extent a sublimation of all that had troubled him in his life as well as in his writing. He expressed this to Erskine in the same letter. He sees the novel as a "psychological triumph of the first order," one in which

the challenge seemed--and seems--ultimate, a matter of life or death, or rebirth, as it were, for its author, not to say sanity or otherwise: perhaps I overstate the case, but my love for this place and my fear of losing it, nay actual terror, has begun to exceed all bounds; moreover

the tactile objective threat has been horrible for me beyond words--which is part of the point, alas.¹⁵

He compares his spiritual position to that of Dante when he wrote the Inferno and claims that he will have no Inferno to show for it but only a piece of prose that if it manages to live "will no doubt do so for the wrong reason, and for a reason which might well condemn it as a work of art." He explains that this reason is that the agony of the person writing it is "so patently extreme that it creates a kind of power in itself that, together with the humour and what lyricism it may possess" takes the mind of the reader off the faults of the story. But these faults are part of the development:

its character drawing is virtually non-existent, symbols are pointed at blatantly instead of being concealed or subsumed in the material, or better still simply not there at all, it is-- or is as it stands--repetitious to the point beyond that which you can believe. It's all done on purpose, and some readers--if they read it once--might have to read it 5 times before they could be convinced anything has happened at all. But I make it sound too interesting. I have to accept the possibility that you will consider it a total failure and my remarks prompted by self-delusion. The important thing though is that I should have written it--touch wood!--at all.¹⁶

It was shortly after writing this that Lowry tripped on a protruding root and broke his right leg and ankle, and his wife, running to the store to telephone for an ambulance, was attacked by a large dog and badly bitten.

They were unable to work for some time, but Lowry kept on making notes and revisions and coordinating his rough drafts into their final form. On October 31, he wrote to Erskine:

. . . once it took me 3 months to produce as many readable pages, and even so some of the writing seems slack or matey in places or redundant (though sometimes later it is meant to appear redundant on purpose--as to give the effect of the man caught, washed to and fro in the tides of his mind, unable to escape) and can stand tightening.¹⁷

One of Lowry's last comments on this novel, which had haunted him for years, is linked with some remarks on his poetry. Ralph Gustafson had written to ask permission to include some of Lowry's work in an anthology of Canadian poetry that he was preparing for the Penguin publishers. Lowry makes some suggestions: "Sestina in a Cantina," "Salmon Drowns Eagle," and "In Memoriam: Ingvald Bjordal." He says that he is fond of this last poem and asks for a comment on it because he mistrusts his ability to "understand the most elementary principles of scansion, stress, interior rhyme and the like." Then he links the idea of poetry with the novel in progress:

All this is very sad and complicated to me because I think of practically nothing else but poetry when I'm not thinking about my old shack on Burrard Inlet but like so extremely few poems of any kind by anybody that it seems to me I am maybe inhibiting myself from writing, either by some serious lack of judgement in regard to my own draft, or some fanatical narcissism or other that makes me set the touchstone impossibly high, as a result of which I am now writing a huge and sad novel about Burrard Inlet called October Ferry to Gabriola that I sometimes

feel could have been better stated in about ten short poems--or even lines--instead.¹⁸

Two months later Lowry was dead. His lifelong struggle to find the words that would give adequate expression to his thoughts was over. In his letters, however, he has left an account of the genesis of his novel. From this tracing of the development of a novel through a period of seven years, from its inception as a short story to the shaping of what was to have been the final draft, it is evident that this writer put so much of himself into his work that he was, in truth, "being written."

Lowry's most powerful subjective criticism was written about Under the Volcano. Few authors have attempted to explain or to justify their concepts as clearly as he does in the letter to Jonathan Cape. The reader for this publisher had found fault with the novel on these points: the first part of the book is "slow" and "does not engage the reader's interest" since it is a "novel of situation rather than action;" the situation is elaborated by flashbacks which he finds "tedious and unconvincing;" Mexican local colour, although "heaped on in shovelfuls" is well done and gives "one an astonishing sense of the place and the atmosphere;" and the "mesqual-inspired phantasmagoria" is impressive, but "too long, wayward and elaborate." He summarizes his objections into three points: the weakness of

the character-drawing, the fact that the "author has spread himself too much" in writing a book that is "much too long" and "over-elaborate for its content" and the point he mentioned first, "the long initial tedium." He states that the main virtues of the book are "the astonishingly vivid and well-observed picture of Mexico; and the equally vivid and mostly impressive exploration of the tormented weakness of the drunken Geoffrey." Finally, he says that the book is worth considering and suggests cuts since the author "has written a remarkable book and it should be worth his while to make it as effective as possible."¹⁹

Lowry answered these objections in a long letter--thirty-one printed pages--which must, of necessity, form the basis of all critical study of this novel. He takes the points offered by the reader and answers them, then goes into a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the work. He defends the slow opening, claiming that it is necessary since "it sets, even without the reader's knowledge, the mood and tone of the book as well as the slow melancholy tragic rhythm of Mexico itself" and establishes the terrain as well as expressing the sadness which he feels is important.²⁰ He claims that the book is a good deal more carefully planned and executed than the reader suspects and that it is deeper, thicker and better than he had found it. He feels that the reader is at fault

in not spotting some of its deeper meanings or in dismissing them as pretentious or irrelevant or uninteresting where they erupt onto the surface of the book, that is at least partly because of what may be a virtue and not a fault . . . , namely that the top level of the book, for all its longeurs, has been by and large so compellingly designed that the reader does not want to take time off to stop and plunge beneath the surface. If this is in fact true, of how many books can you say it?²¹

He then claims that he has succeeded with the end, 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 indeed the whole book "would lose much of its meaning."²²

The author then pleads for a rereading of his novel and goes on to make a rather interesting judgment on himself as a novelist. He feels that the main defect, "from which the others spring, comes from something irremediable." This is nothing less than the author's equipment which is "subjective rather than objective, a better equipment" for a "certain kind of poet than a novelist." He has tried, "aware of this defect, to conceal in the Volcano as well as possible the deformities" of his own mind, "taking heart from the fact" that "the conception of the whole thing was essentially poetical." He feels that "poems have to be read several times before their full meaning will reveal itself, explode in the mind," and that it is "precisely this poetical conception of the whole" that has been missed.²³

In regard to the weakness of character drawing, he replies that he has not attempted to draw characters in the normal sense because "there just isn't enough room." And so

the characters will have to wait for another book, 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 four main characters being intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit. . . . I suggest that here and there what may look like unsuccessful attempts at character drawing may only be the concrete bases to the creatures' lives without which again the book could not be read at all.²⁴

Lowry next picks up the point regarding the so-called "eccentric word-spinning" and claims that everything he has used is in some way "thematic." He says that, in the presentation of material through the stream-of-consciousness technique, he has kept this matter to the minimum and Jonathan Cape's reader would finally agree, "if confronted with the same problems, that most of it could be done in no other way." Lowry feels that much of this can be justified "on poetical or dramatic grounds" since it is exposition and the author is "trying to proceed on Henry James' dictum that what is not vivid is not represented, what is not represented is not art."²⁵ In regard to the suggested cutting of sections of the book, Lowry says, "There is not a single part of this book I have not submitted to Flaubert's acid test of reading aloud or having read aloud, frequently to

the kind of people one would expect to loathe it." It had passed this test and those concerned had enjoyed it.²⁶

He then proceeds to give a detailed analysis of the book and to suggest some of its deeper meanings. He insists on keeping the twelve chapters:

Each chapter is a unity in itself and all are related and interrelated. Twelve is a universal unit. To say nothing of the 12 labours of Hercules, there are 12 hours in a day, and the book is concerned with a single day as well as, though very incidentally, with time: there are 12 months in a year, and the novel is enclosed by a year; while the deeply buried layer of the novel or poem that attaches itself to myth, does so to the Jewish Cabbala where the number 12 is of the highest symbolic importance. . . . I have to have my 12: it is as if I hear a clock slowly striking midnight for Faust; as I think of the slow progression of the chapters, I feel it destined to have 12 chapters and nothing more nor less will satisfy me.²⁷

This book, he says, was "written on numerous planes" with the hope that it would reach almost every kind of reader. He felt that his approach was the opposite of that used by James Joyce who had taken something basically simple and had built it up into a complex and elaborated form. Lowry says that, on the contrary, he had tried, as far as possible, to simplify what had "originally suggested itself in far more baffling, complex and esoteric terms, rather than the other way round."

As its author sees it, the novel is concerned with the "forces in man which cause him to be terrified of

himself" and 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 Garden of Eden is linked with the public garden and it, in turn, represents the world.

The drunkenness of the Consul is used on one plane to symbolize the universal drunkenness of mankind during the war, or during the period immediately preceding it, which is almost the same thing, and what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind.²⁸

The parallel with the war is carried out also in the scene where the people are taking refuge, in the cinema and the bar, from the storm, just as in the "world they are creeping into bomb shelters, and the lights have gone out as they have gone out in the world."²⁹

The luminous wheel with which the first chapter closes has a number of meanings:

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, it is eternity, it is the instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return, and it is the form of the book; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before 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.³⁰

The twelve chapters of the book are also linked with the wheel and its author asks to have the very form of the book

considered "like that of a wheel, with 12 spokes, the motion of which is something like that of time itself."³¹

The drunkenness of the Consul has also a meaning other than the universal drunkenness of the world in war-time. The "agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers." This is linked with the Tree of Life, Adam and Eve, the Garden, and the Cabbala,³² and the fact that the Consul is, after all, "part of humanity," and "what profundity and final meaning there is in his fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind."³³

Hugh is the "youth of Everyman" and his desire to be a composer or musician is "everyone's innate desire to be a poet of life in some way," his desire to be "accepted at sea is everyone's desire, conscious or unconscious, to be a part--even if it doesn't exist--of the brotherhood of man."³⁴ He, too, was frustrated and through these frustrations he too might have become intoxicated under the pressures of life like the Consul. In the bull fight section Hugh "conquers the animal forces of nature which the Consul later lets loose."³⁵ As Everyman he is the one who survives, the one who continues the struggle for meaning in life.

The deeper meaning of the book is more important to Lowry than the character portrayal and he comes back on this point with a new emphasis.

There are a thousand writers who can draw adequate characters till all is blue for one who can tell you anything new about hell fire. And I am telling you something new about hell fire. . . . in our Elizabethan days we used to have at least passionate poetic writing about things that will always mean something.³⁶

He links its structure also with the classical pattern in which the tragic flaw brings punishment. In this case it is the German submarine officers who take revenge on the Consul through the Mexicans at the end. The Consul's death comes about because he had caused their deaths. This is the Greek idea of tragic justice.

Lowry traces point after point in the pattern and the development of his novel. He closes his discussion with a further reference to its cyclic pattern:

This book should be seen as essentially trochal, I repeat, the form of it as a wheel so that, when you get to the end, if you have read carefully, you should want to turn back to the beginning again, where it is not impossible, too, that your eye might alight once more upon Sophocles' Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man-- just to cheer you up. For the book was so designed, counterdesigned and interwelded that it could be read an indefinite number of times and still not have yielded all its meanings or its drama or its poetry.³⁷

This conclusion is more than a summary of the pattern of the book's structure. It is a final statement of what has been

obvious from this brief analysis of Lowry's defence of his novel and that is the fact that this author is a master craftsman who planned every detail of his work and who carried out his plan with all the artistry at his command.

Even after the novel's acceptance Lowry still had to struggle with his editors. The typography was extremely important to him because he felt that certain responses could only be obtained by ensuring certain visual effects on the printed page. There are letters in which he argues for the large Roman numerals as chapter headings. These are meant to remind the reader of the passing of time by relating with the numerals on a large clock, the "Faustian idea" that he linked with the number 12.

He also insists that the typesetter must use a hand pointing to *Parián*. This is more than a directional indication; it is the hand of fate, or the Consul's destiny. In a letter to Clenens ten Holder, his German translator, he insists on the hand in the German typesetting:

I am very proud of this hand (having stolen it from Thomas Hardy--from Jude the Obscure, to be precise, the only other place where I have seen such a hand) which never fails to give me a chill down the spine; aesthetically the hand may be a bit hard to justify, I admit, but I am very fond of it just the same.³⁸

Perhaps this seems like a very small point, but it is from an accumulation of such small points that his total artistic effect is obtained.

He asks also for special typesetting for the travel folder which the Consul, half sober, half intoxicated, reads with distortion of meaning that, at times, verges on hallucination. Discussing this with his American editor, Albert Erskine, he says that he wanted to make "some kind of excursion into typographical genius: such as the use of pearl type or even diamond, or both (or occasionally extra-condensed)" and his reason for this is "to compress it and heighten the feeling of delirium." This very small type is to be combined with "black letter for the headings by way of contrast." He admits that this is a "maddening suggestion for an editor,"³⁹ but gained his point as an examination of the text of the novel in the hard cover editions will reveal.⁴⁰

In the same set of notes that accompanied the letter to Erskine, he insists on the frame around the name of the town which Laruelle sees at the station on his farewell walk, the night before his departure from the scene of the tragedy. This same sign on the station platform comes to Hugh's attention in Chapter VIII when the bus makes a brief stop there on the way to Tomalín. Lowry felt that "Quauhnahuac was rather an esoteric name and that the border round it sort of universalised it, by relating it to any wayside station anywhere." It represents, to him, the point of arrival and departure for all the world, so the frame

should be there to strengthen this idea. He also held to the arrangement and the placing of the garden signs and made sure that one of these signs should appear at the close of the book to give the reader pause after the last page had been read. Lowry had copied the words, in 1938, from a sign in a little public garden in Oaxaca and the errors in the Spanish occurred in the original. He kept the errors to indicate the Consul's confused state of mind. He says, "To me, both the sign as it appears in the book, incorrect as it is, and the Consul's hallucinatory translation of it, are of the utmost importance." When the sign appears at the end it is the correct version, what a person in a normal state of mind would see.⁴¹ It is evident, from his insistence on such detail, that he saw his book as a unified whole and that the perfection of the whole would depend on the perfection of each of its parts.

The texture obtained by blending various shreds of conversation, which though apparently unrelated were really part of the broader application of meaning, is also very important to the author. He makes this clear in the detailed explanation he gives to Clenens ten Holder. One recalls the use of conversation in Ultramarine, especially multi-level dialogue used to give the impression of a blur of voices. In Chapter II, the voice of Weber, Hugh's gun-running friend, breaks into the conversation of the Consul and

Yvonne. Weber is in the other part of the cantina and can not be seen by the two protagonists. The Consul has not met Weber, but without knowing it, has overheard his voice. The meaning of this, what Lowry calls "the unconscious meaning," is that the "Consul is, as it were, already involved with his destruction, his fate, carrying it around with him" and is, at this time, separated from it "only by a glass partition." He is "as good as in the same room with it." Lowry admits that this may seem complicated and goes on to clarify it. He wanted the effect to be musical, "a contrapuntal device, as it were, that at the same time is a motif of fate." Used in this way, Weber almost "seems to answer Yvonne's and the Consul's voices and make comment on their situation." When Yvonne is asking the Consul, "What have you done with your --" the word "Life" is supplied by the voice from the other side and the speaker uses the word with a meaning entirely different from the one in Yvonne's mind. It has the effect of an oblique ironic comment on the other conversation into which it fits with an almost diabolic perfection. It suggests escape, suicide, and shooting. It also suggests the way out of the Consul's plight and does so with such force that the Consul leaves half his drink.⁴²

The idea of Weber as an instrument of fate is linked also with Hugh's arrival. Hugh had crossed with him into Mexico in a cattle truck, wearing cowboy clothes. He had

left his other clothing at the border to avoid paying the excessive duty that was demanded. The two men had then flown the rest of the way in a plane supplied to Weber by his revolutionary friends. Lowry makes an interesting remark on this detail of Hugh's clothing. Besides the "thematic relationship of this with Yvonne," who had acted in western movies, the underlying idea in the cowboy clothes was "to dress Hugh's communism, or his conception of it, however he may be a sincere decent and far-sighted fellow at bottom, in supraromantic, even operatic clothing." Then Lowry explains where this idea had originated:

A communist acquaintance of mine once said of another acquaintance, not a communist, but who had actually been killed fighting against Franco: "And that was the end of that little romantic urge in him." The complicated inhumanity of this remark has stayed with me: nonetheless Hugh has his cowboy clothes.⁴³

This is, indeed, the sort of remark that stayed with Lowry, haunting him, until it had found an outlet somewhere in his writing.

One further remark to ten Holder is worth including in these comments Lowry made on the way in which he shaped his novel. Some of the translator's questions dealt with points of interpretation of the menu in Chapter X when the Consul is dining at the Salon Ofélia with Yvonne and Hugh. Lowry admits that many of the expressions are obscenities, but claims:

I add in passing that the obscenity is not there for its own sake, that there is even definitely a moral--or infernal--reason for it: on the other hand its effect in English--so some critics have been kind enough to say--is of the most devilish kind of humour. Such, at least, was what I was striving for.⁴⁴

To Lowry "cutting" was the final means by which he could obtain perfection in expression. On page after page of his typescripts the words "cut this" appear in the margin. At times there is even a humorous twist to the phrase as when he writes, "Cut this; it won't bleed." Almost all the final changes in the galley sheets of Under the Volcano are cuts in which a whole clause is replaced by one word. This "tightening" process, as he called it, often entails a great deal of work; it always indicates the finished writer striving for perfection in expression.

Occasionally he allows his work to echo something in another's work; when this happens it is always done for conscious effect. If he felt that any echo of another writer was present and was not functional, he cut rigidly. In a letter to Albert Erskine, he gives some idea of the way in which he works on this elimination of echoes:

The only other brilliant thing worthy of note as regards this chapter is that I have cut out from the beginning five of the better lines in the book under the impression that they were familiar and possibly echoed Katherine Anne Porter. They were familiar all right, but did not echo Katherine Anne Porter or anybody else, their familiarity being merely due to the fact that I had rewritten them myself some 50 times. Doubtless to the

chapter's advantage, however, these lines are now gone beyond precise recall.⁴⁵

His work gained from this process of distillation in which only the best was kept and anything that spoiled the purity of this essence was rigidly discarded. He used this also as a test in judging the work of others, whether he was making a comment on the work of a finished writer or offering a suggestion to someone who had asked his help.

B. The Objective Critic

A number of writers sought Lowry's advice and he was always most generous in helping them. Some of these people seem to be merely trying to prove their own cleverness in reading real or implied meanings into Lowry's work, especially Under the Volcano. One such correspondent was Derek Pethick who wrote a commentary on the Volcano with the intention of using it for a radio broadcast. In this commentary Derek Pethick traces many elaborate parallels with Moby Dick, numerology, astrology, the Apocalypse, Prometheus, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and other sources. Lowry took time to answer the letter in considerable detail, pointing out the error in interpretation in one case, or the real parallel he had used in another.

Pethick's comparison of the Volcano with Moby Dick elicited the response that he is not quite right; the

parallel does not exist between Moby Dick and the Volcano, but between Moby Dick and the book lost in the fire, "In Ballast to the White Sea." He says that if any identification did exist it was with Melville himself and his life. In regard to the zodiacal significance, he claims that he had no intention at all of making this equate to anything in Melville and that he now has the feeling of reading it for the first time, "the passage now affects me supernaturally if at all, as if it meant something literal for me, and it was I who had been tracing the round again."⁴⁶

In regard to the "scorpion" he had meant it as an image of suicide since scorpions are supposed to sting themselves to death. Then he admits seeing a new significance in the fact that the whole book takes place "in Scorpio"--"The action of the book is in one day, exactly 12 hours, seven to seven; the first chapter takes place 12 months later on the same day, so it is also in Scorpio."

He discredits the conscious parallelism with Moby Dick as a political parable on the score that he had never thought of Melville's book in that way before. He admits that on one plane the Volcano is meant to be a political parable, "it started off as such" but he had not intended to imply that the future belongs to the Mexican peasant workers, "or indeed to anybody at all, unless some true charity can mediate, and man's decency and dignity be

reestablished." The police are those of the present, but they are also "Interference"--"interference with people's private lives." He discusses other points, then says:

Nor was the book consciously intended to operate upon quite so many levels. One serious intention was to create a work of art--after a while it began to make a noise like music; when it made the wrong noise I altered it--when it seemed to make the right one finally, I kept it.⁴⁷

He finishes by saying that he had also intended to write one really good book about a drunk and that his third intention was to write a book that was funny in parts.

Lowry also wrote long letters to David Markson, at first on interpretations of the Volcano and later on points connected with Markson's own work. At the time of the first letters, dating from August 1951, Markson was a student at Columbia and was writing his master's thesis which bears the title "Malcolm Lowry: A Study of Theme and Symbol in Under the Volcano." This is the first thesis written on Lowry's work. He was pleased, even flattered, by the attention given to his novel and answered David Markson's queries at considerable length giving a sketch of his writing career with comments on what he considered his successes and failures. Among other things he gives a very complete, although disguised, account of the lost novel "In Ballast to the White Sea" and his relationship with Nordahl Grieg.

The original letter has an interesting formula expressing this interaction of one author on the other and fitting it into the wheel concept by means of the mathematical formula for the area of a circle. This passage has been erroneously printed in the Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry. In the Letters this sentence appears, "X represents the complementary and life-giving operation of the daemon pleading to II or perhaps--implicit in II too--but without which II becomes satanic."⁴⁸ The present writer was greatly puzzled by this statement even though Lowry comments on it, "My terms are all mixed up, and I realize that like this it sounds more than a little ridiculous." Even with this qualifying comment the statement was far below the clarity Lowry usually managed to arrive at when expressing his ideas, especially when explaining them to one whom he hoped would understand.

In 1966, the original of this letter was acquired by the University of British Columbia, along with other letters to David Markson, and the present writer was able to verify this passage in the letter. It became very clear that the sentence as Lowry wrote it is, "X represents the complementary and lifegiving operation of the daemon π leading to $\pi\rho^2$ perhaps--implicit in π too--but without which π becomes satanic."⁴⁹ This is much clearer and it definitely links the thought to the wheel symbol by using the area of a circle

to express the relationship between the characters he is discussing. When this conclusion was presented to Mrs. Lowry she answered, "You're undoubtedly right about the Greek letters and the wheel and I congratulate you."⁵⁰

Knowing that Mr. Markson would be pleased to receive an extract from the original manuscript of Under the Volcano, Lowry sent it with this typical comment,

On back of all pages save page 1 are some bits of the original MSS of Under the Volcano my wife and I dug out for you and thought you might like to have: when I say original, some of it is pre-original, dating 11 years or so back, though I can't find any of the pre-pre-original which goes back to 1936 save in typescript; as a matter of fact we can't even find any typescript to speak of.⁵¹

He comments on the notes down the sides of the pages and says that they are due to "a habit my wife and I have of exchanging MSS for mutual correction." He then remarks of the pages, "some of the work looks as though one definitely knew what one was doing, other parts look uncertain and as if the author were out of touch, and the style flabby and derivative."⁵² His critical eye was still looking for faults in his work.

When the thesis was finished, a copy was sent to Lowry. He wrote to say how touched he was by this tribute and by the young man's understanding of his work, and invited David Markson to spend a holiday at Dollarton. He did so, and a friendship developed that grew with the years.

Markson became a writer, and there are many pages of comment on work in progress for both writers in the correspondence that passed between them. Lowry always tried to encourage the younger writer and he often gives him very good advice for handling his work. In a letter written from Sicily, he says:

You have defined my position absolutely. But not your own: your exposition of it was too brilliant and clear;--I propose, with your permission, to steal it.

You don't have any technical problem--turn it all into the 3rd person, as Somerset Maugham would say.

Style is cutting: Markson is Flaubert + Markson - Flaubert - Maugham - [-----]: $\pi\rho^2$?
Something like that.⁵³

And just twelve days before his tragic death, Lowry wrote again, this time from Grasmere, enquiring about Markson's work on his Oedipus story,

How goes Swellfoot the Tyrant? Your letter was melancholy, but cannot you use that very uncertainty as to one's ability as a strength? O'Neill (see Long Day's Journey) thought himself not much use as a writer too. Have you read Isaac Babel? You should. Do you know which stars are which and what bird is flying over your head and what flower blossoming? If you don't the anguish of not knowing is a very valid field for the artist. Moreover when you learn something it's a good thing to repossess the position of your original ignorance.⁵⁴

Besides offering excellent advice on what to use and how to use it, this letter is typical of Lowry's reaction to nature. He could not understand how anyone could see

living things around him and not try to know them, or how anyone could destroy trees, or flowers, or birds.

But Lowry's encouragement of the amateur writer goes much farther than the guidance of one young student. Among those who asked his help with their writing problems was Mrs. Bonner, Mrs. Lowry's mother, a student of astronomy who had given to her children a love for as well as a knowledge of the heavens. Mrs. Bonner had written a story, "Awaiting Palomar," in connection with the setting up of the 200-inch telescope, and had sent it to her son-in-law for criticism. He begins by expressing his pleasure at reading her manuscript, then makes an excellent comment on settling the form of the story,

I realize you wrote it hurriedly, but that was quite as it should be for our, or my, suggestion was made with the aim perhaps of finding out what form was choosing you, rather than vice versa, which, speaking from experience, I think is the major problem to cope with when you are possessed with an unstaunchable impulse to create order out of chaos.⁵⁵

He then discusses form, asking her to assume, for argument's sake, that "everything which is good and has order and inner cohesion is a sort of poem." He claims that all first-rate short stories "are first rate because they are essentially 'poems,' they are bound together by an integrity which is essentially poetic." He makes the distinction between "poetic" prose, i.e., "flowery" prose,

and poetry, and claims that "roughly speaking, stark, bald and simple prose has more in common with poetry perhaps than elaborate and overweighted verse." He suggests that she write her "Ghost Star" as a short story but in roughly mapped out stanzas. A poem, or a short story of this type is, he thinks, "an entity apart from its author: but it may have to find out what it is from people apart from its author and be helped by various people to exist."⁵⁶ As an example of what he means by a poem that is a short story he quotes Rabindranath Tagore's "Day After Day." He suggests that she strip her story down until it is quite without rhyme and write it in "the purest, the most excellent, the most ancient tradition of all, that of the fable, but in this case a modern fable, which could also be a poem."⁵⁷ He writes a few sentences in the style he has in mind to show her exactly what he means:

The Milky Way

In the beginning, when man first lifted his eyes to the heavens, he saw a silver band of light trailing across the distances of space.

He wondered at its beauty and pondered on its light.

Since then, the ancients of every race, of every climate, have left to us the legends and myths of this marvel of the skies.⁵⁸

He then points out the simplicity of expression that is possible in this form and how it can stand without "poetical" words and "clichés such as clime" because the humble simple

words are best.⁵⁹ He concludes by suggesting that she should try writing a few sonnets for practice since the iambic pentameter is the "real metric base of English poetry, also of blank verse."⁶⁰ The whole letter is kindly in tone and shows a sincere interest in helping another to find expression in a suitable literary form. It also shows Lowry's complete understanding of the writer's search for a suitable medium, one of the basic problems of style.

Another friend, Viscount Churchill, sent Lowry his manuscript of All My Sins Remembered: The Autobiography of Lord Churchill asking for his criticism. Lowry wrote several letters dealing with chapters as they were submitted to him and a final long letter giving his opinion on the entire manuscript. He makes many helpful suggestions dealing with specific problems in the book and some that are of general interest. He warns him not to become "less careful" from time to time and reminds him that "one has to drive in one's finishing nails accurately or chinks appear in the corners of one's style."⁶¹

Always alert to the presence of possible story material, Lowry suggests, towards the end of his letter, that there is excellent material, hidden in the biographical incidents, that could be turned into a short novel. He picks up the points that give value and "story quality" to the incident. "There is the universal need for

participation, to belong," and the "ennobled position of the protagonist, which might seem to disqualify him from universality, on the contrary makes him everyman too, in every man's eyes," while at the same time it "testifies to the uniqueness of the individual--peer is also a highly ambiguous word . . . which can even mean comrade, if you want it to." He then points out the possible conflict and says, "You have the individual vis-à-vis the group, vis-à-vis the law, divine and human, but also he is a maker of the law himself, or ex-maker of the law" and this individual is a "law unto himself, and certainly squelcher of the law, or potentially to be so once more." After the conflict has been established there is the suspense, "Will he be able to take his seat, or won't he? You can be sure that this question will come to symbolize something of vital concern in the reader's life."

The story also has the possibility of touching other emotions. Lowry sees in it "great opportunity for splendid humour and sadness." He wants it to end with "the hero's taking part in some fantastically involved debate in the House of Lords," and this debate could be "either upon a subject of deadly seriousness of vital importance to mankind, or upon one of correspondingly little importance, yet whose very negligibility is almost sublime." He finishes his projection of the possible story with the comment that

this is the situation which Henry James "always thought of as the most essentially dramatic one, yet never succeeded in carrying off emotionally himself, namely the return, after many years, of the wanderer to his own country."⁶²

This discussion is of interest since it shows what Lowry considered the basic ingredients of a novel: a protagonist who could be universalized; a conflict, preferably of an individual against a group; suspense that will grip the reader by symbolizing for him something of vital concern in his own life; a combination of humour and sadness; and a climax in which the protagonist is forced to take a definite stand. This is almost an encapsulated course in novel writing.

Comments on style are often inadvertently expressed when Lowry is discussing something else. In a letter to David Markson, Lowry goes into a digression on the meaning of the word "compromise" and then says, "The most perfect work of art, the most perfect sonnet, or novel cannot but be a compromise between what it leaves in and what it leaves out."⁶³ In the same letter he says that the blending of two worlds involves "diametrically opposed activities, not to say ethics." He then remarks, "from the confusion of the two worlds, of the domains of art and life, my own troubles have mostly arisen, not to say that of many other writers."⁶⁴ And to the same young writer he presents the

value of using one's limitations to arrive at an expression that is wholly one's own, "after all they can be among the most valuable cargo one has, those limitations!"⁶⁵ This is certainly an illuminating remark when one considers what Lowry did with his.

In 1951, Mrs. Lowry wrote a still unpublished short novel, "The Castle of Malatesta." The Lowrys, as noted earlier, had the habit of exchanging manuscripts for correction and comment. Some of Lowry's most significant statements on technique as a means of perfecting style are to be found in the notes he wrote on his wife's manuscripts. Her novel sets the tragic love of a modern couple, Jocelyn and Craig, against the equally tragic love of Francesca and Paolo with the setting in post-war Rimini and in Gabicci Mare within sight of the Castle of Malatesta. The notes on her work given here have been selected for their universal quality, since a knowledge of the novel would be necessary for an understanding of the more specific technical points.

At one point she has described Rimini as it appears after the war, using the two phrases "the empty desolate streets" and "the bare treeless streets." He remarks that her description is vivid and good but claims that she has missed out "one of the vividest horrors of all." This horror is "that you get the sense of many streets at once only because all the intervening houses have been blown to

hell, which enables you to see round corners," and this makes the town look like "an appalling subsection of some suburbia, in which the streets have been marked out but half the houses unbuilt." He tells her not to miss the effect that "you're seeing streets you're not supposed to see, or otherwise wouldn't see but for the damage."⁶⁶

Lowry, as noted earlier, had told Mr. Markson to use his limitations. He now tells his wife to use her experience. She had written two detective stories, The Shapes That Creep and The Last Twist of the Knife, and a serious novel, Horse in the Sky. Lowry suggests that one character must have said a certain amount about the Castle, but not enough to make the other person fully aware of the situation; it is important that he has not said too much. He tells Mrs. Lowry that she must "draw on her detective writing experience, and use that knowledge of how to work slow disclosure for an intellectual and poetic end."

At one point in the action, the lovers are planning what they must do when they part. This is a very tense scene which builds up to the quarrel which is the climax of the novel. It must be centered on a truly dramatic moment. In order to help his wife develop it to its highest intensity, he makes a very practical suggestion, "Perhaps, if in doubt finally, we could actually act out this part, with

yourself as Jocelyn, me as Craig, simply write out our parts and read them as if acting till we get it right."

Lowry, moreover, was always conscious of the level of writing. Knowing that she must part from Craig, Jocelyn keeps thinking that they can still have some time together. In establishing this, Mrs. Lowry had repeated the sentence, "They had tonight." He objects to the repetition and suggests that she cut it "because it returns you to the sexual per se when you need the transcendental."

He was equally insistent on the realistic and tells her that she has to know where everything is in the room, even if she doesn't use it. He emphasizes this point by adding, "All your psychological and dramatic understanding and mastery will serve you not at all if you make the slightest realistic mistake." He carries this idea out further when he speaks of the "interest" that should be aroused in the reader:

For the truth is that "interest" is everything, very nearly. If you have engaged merely that much in a clear situation with which the reader is identified you have done your duty--excitement would not be without it--excitement indeed is merely "interest" screwed up a notch, and it is absurd to suppose that "interest" needs to be accompanied at every moment by thunderclaps and demons poking their noses out of juke-boxes (though they are interesting too) in order to be interesting.⁶⁷

Then he makes a humorous comment, "It's a pity to throw

away all these notes it seems to me, they are perhaps the best work I've done in the last five years."

Lowry often advises her to cut and also to go back over passages that are good, looking at them carefully to see if she can make them even better than they are. Of one of the re-written passages he says, "The 'original' this time has the virtue of brevity. The 'revised' has the virtue of getting rid of a questionable technique in the immediate dialogue that follows." He then suggests that she compromise "always remembering that the shorter it is the better." When she has cut to good purpose he praises her efforts and at the same time puts her on her guard, "You need a feather touch--a feather dipped in the vitriolic restraint of the full realisation on your part of the vulgarity of this scene--to keep it good art." The scene has gained by being shorter, and "greatly so by being now a flashback." She must now guard against overwriting.

Some very good advice regarding the use of cliché is offered in the same notes, and it is worth quoting in full:

The only thing to do with writing where actual sincerity and passion and truth collides with cliché bombast and rhetoric is for the writer himself or herself to be aware of it and to hold it up to ridicule. If it does not pass the test something is lacking. . . . Now everyone on earth, especially in moments of stress, will think in clichés, sometimes including myself. But is it not honesty to admit it? For there is a self that is well aware that the emotions on these occasions are borrowed, but they are borrowed from cliché only because

clichés express something universally true in nearly all cases which is why they have become clichés in the first place.⁶⁸

He then says that certain emotions were "in part like the kind of thing you saw outside cinemas," and that for Jocelyn, the female protagonist, Mrs. Lowry has borrowed the phrasing of these emotions from outside cinemas." She subconsciously knows this and she also knows "that these emotions are true and there is no other way of expressing them." Lowry has made a very good point and has put it very clearly.

In one of the notes he criticizes the balance between action and reaction; he finds that Jocelyn's reaction is a good deal in excess of "anything actually said and is more to the whole situation than to anything specific" thus creating a problem in balance. "If there is too much now on the scale of abuse you've got to put a little more or less according to what you wish on the scale of the reaction," this might not be "as much as a weight, a tiny rider to pinch on the scales itself that will equilibrate the scales or disequilibrate them to your eye or ear or feeling." In parentheses he adds, "this is very good literary criticism, I would keep it if I were you."

At the end of the chapter he says her writing is "really masterly" and that her major fault here has been one of maintaining balance. He says it is wise

to observe Vico's dictum that if you alter one little thing it carries other alterations in its train, this and an occasional feeling I had that you had dramatised from the outside in rather than from the inside out, or that these two methods were not quite balanced; because you have so very few actors your background is as important as your foreground.⁶⁹

As a further test of the dramatic value he says she must ask herself if what she says is not only "what she wants to say," but also what she "wants to say there."

A final passage from these enlightening notes handles a point in regard to the use of interior monologue. Instead of saying, "What am I thinking?" it would be better to say, "What am I doing? . . . and then: What was she thinking?" The idea "What was she thinking" may be "phrased" to oneself as "What am I thinking?" and vice versa, but "in the mere act of having become conscious that one is thinking of oneself, one has turned it objective, for a moment." He then makes an interesting comment, "It is failure to understand some such elemental fact that makes Ulysses so infuriating to people whose lives really are internal monologues." Then he develops the idea further, presenting a point that is certainly worth consideration by anyone interested in the technique of writing:

But it is not an unimportant detail in the larger sense. The whole problem of selfishness or the religious opposite is finally involved with such habits of thinking. But such processes never are entirely subjective; and people like George Eliot, Flaubert, and Proust may get

nearer to the truth in their humdrum way than Joyce, whose tremendous inventions are often like giant rockets that fizzle out for this simple reason-- even when the interest is objective, or even objectifying.⁷⁰

One very important expression of Lowry's thought is the long letter he wrote to Frank Taylor, accompanying the script of "Tender is the Night." This script is a masterly piece of writing and the letter is a cogent statement of principles for the presentation of ideas through visual media, especially through films. Script and letter should be published, and studied in schools of creative writing. The letter speaks of the formative power of Hollywood on the youth of the world, "we shall never know how much our own character has been moulded by it." Everyone "has a stake in it," whether they know it or not. "To most people it is the only Sunday school, college, or military to say nothing of sexual training they ever get." He then speaks of the subjects chosen for films. He deplores the meanness of the choices made and the lack of understanding of what we really need:

Is there any valid reason for literature and the movies to portray man as ignoble and mean? How have we got that way? Where are the great motives, even the great temptations of Shakespeare's time, and so forth? And why, when such motives or conflicts turn up again, do they do so nearly always in corrupt and sentimental form, and why are the writers who employ them, like as not, fifth rate?⁷¹

This is a writer who values his work and who looks on it as a means of ennobling his readers. The letter explores this

problem and also discusses many of the technical points Lowry has had to solve in writing his script. Indeed, this letter is so well developed that it is an essay on style, and studies a wide variety of problems including the relationship of poetic and visual effects, sound effects and rhythmic presentations, the use of the narrator as a substitute for the Greek chorus, specific problems in visual and aural presentation, and the means by which the director can solve them. This detailed study establishes Lowry as a thinking craftsman, a master of style.

Scattered throughout his letters are comments on the style of writers in whom he is interested. Some of these are capsule critiques of considerable value, summing up briefly, but accurately, the points he wishes to make. He comments on poetry as well as prose. In the letter to Frank Taylor referred to above, he notes the power poetry has to present, in a way that is acceptable, matter that one would otherwise question. He takes Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" as an example and claims that Keats starts off "blithely with what seems more like an evocation of a mid-summer afternoon rather than night as a setting" for "the immortal and nocturnal bird." We are "projected via poesy into the nightingale's world where it is a bright moonlight night," but are reminded "without warning that it is probably" an early summer evening, almost pitch-dark though with a moon

too and the next moment are informed that it is, on the contrary, midnight." He claims that none of this apparent discrepancy really matters, the poem "is as magnificent as ever," but one is shocked by the realization that the poem is "not really about a nightingale, at all, that the nightingale is almost incidental, and might have been . . . a grebe or even a corncrake, with much better justice" since one finds it hard to imagine "Ruth standing among the alien corn, another curiously 'afternoon' image and the opposite of sylvan, listening even to the bulbul which would be the nearest approach" to a nightingale in those parts, "as for the magic casements, nightingales are so far woodland birds it is hard to associate them with the sea." Then he makes his point that "this land of faery is already projected beyond the border of life so that this doesn't matter." The poet has won our willing suspension of disbelief by the magic of his words.⁷²

His comments on the style of his contemporaries are often shrewd and illuminating. To Clenens ten Holder who was translating Nightwood into German, he mentions having met Djuna Barnes in New York and says of her book:

I myself cannot make out whether Nightwood is a work of genius or a disorder of the kin-aesthesia: probably both. . . . but despite the great formal and linguistic merits of Nightwood I find the sources of its inspiration so impure and non-universal that I have been reluctant mentally really to visit

them and so properly and in detail apprehend that work, if indeed it deserves to be apprehended other than in some unique category of the monstrous, though on another plane, it possesses admirable technical virtues.⁷³

From this it is evident that he valued purity and universality of inspiration above technical virtues.

In 1957 David Markson wrote to Lowry about a novel he was writing that was based on the Oedipus story. His friend replied with several facetious blurbs that were to be used, as he said, if needed when the novel would be published. He also sent some working suggestions and some criticism on what others had done with the myth. He insisted that Markson read Cocteau's The Infernal Machine since it was related matter that would not confuse his purpose as well as being one of the finest possible works. He says that "it is the one quintessentially poetical play I know of in which language seems to be scarcely a virtue at all," but is quick to add "needless to say this is not why I recommend it." His reason is, rather, that "what would appear to be substituted for language per se, is that forgotten virtue clarity." He admits that the two can be said to be identical and that the reason it is so striking a quality in this work lies in the fact that "as a poet Cocteau is often extremely obscure, which must often be, but also precious, which should not be." This fault, however, does not exist in The Infernal Machine. He then digresses

purposely with an analogy of cleaning windows and the reasons why they should be clean. This leads him back to The Infernal Machine with the comment that in its case the "windows of style are so clean that you are not aware of any interposing glass. What you see is anything but simple however: the workings of the machine itself." He concludes with a final comment, "Eliot has never managed anything as good as that through the medium of an almost imperceptible poetry."⁷⁴

One of Lowry's most revealing comments on style was made in connection with C.F. Ramuz' novel, When the Mountain Fell. He feels that the criticism indicated that the style was being approached in a rather odd way, that it was supposed to be "natural, as if artless, unsophisticated, stark, stern, unintellectual, above all uninfluenced, simple as a flower, a natural growth." This, to him, indicated a lack of understanding on the part of the critics. He does not see how a style, "however arrived at, often I imagine largely by cutting, can hope at bottom to be much more than simply appropriate in the fullest sense to what the writer is writing about." To him Ramuz' style does not appear to be particularly simple, nor is the story simple. He can detect a great many sophisticated influences, among them the avant-garde cinema, and feels that the story is not any the worse for that. Then he states his preference for "a clear

pure, concrete style, and one with the utmost of simplicity. But if one has arrived at that position, it is unlikely that the style has been uninfluenced." If one is to arrive at a style at all, one must pass through a maximum of influences. He finds it difficult to see how a style like that of Ramuz, "even if it achieves great clarity, can be called unsophisticated. Anyhow his simplicity, such as it is, strikes me as having cost great intellectual effort."⁷⁵ Only a person who has given great attention to the problem of style can see it with such clarity.

C. His Critical Code

From all the critical statements that have been offered, it is possible to form what could be called Lowry's critical code. As a writer, a mentor for other writers, or a critic he was always conscious of style, always interested in the "how" of writing. Downie Kirk said of his friend, "with him there was a passionate necessity to reflect and to distill in its purest form something within him that would not give him peace."⁷⁶ In attempting to do this, he formed very definite opinions on how the problem should be approached and these opinions will now be recapitulated so as to present, in a more unified form, the ideas that have been scattered through the critical statements presented above. They will be classified roughly into two groups:

those that deal with the author's subject matter, the "what" of the writer, and those that deal with the presentation, the "how". The two are, of course, so closely interrelated that at times the expression of Lowry's ideas will necessitate their interweaving.

Lowry felt that germs of ideas for the writer lay everywhere within reach, in his experience and in his observation of others. It could be revealed in a word, a gesture, an action, in anything that would help to define a human being and his problems. Once the writer has the idea he must let it find its own form because the form chooses the writer, the writer does not choose the form. This is close to Keats' idea of negative capability.

A writer, he says, must use his experience, not only as subject matter but also as a shaping influence in his writing. If he has learned to write well in one form or discipline, he can adapt the techniques of that discipline to solving problems in other kinds of writing. The writer must also use his limitations and turn them into strengths. The work must be very carefully planned down to the most minute detail. The architectonics and structure require careful attention since the shape of the whole work depends on its plan.

Lowry believes that the writer should seek new ways of presenting his material and that this offers a

stimulating challenge to his originality. A work is of value chiefly for what is original and distinctive in it. Autobiographical elements are important because this is often the best way for an author to express man as caught in his experiences, "washed to and fro in the tides of his mind." If a work is presented on several levels, it becomes enjoyable for different types of readers and more intensely interesting to those readers who can appreciate it on more than one level. This also makes it possible for the author to interweave these levels and so arrive at an intensity of expression that could not be otherwise obtained.

The writer, he insists, must always be critically alert. He must select; he must know what to leave in as well as what to leave out. Since the perfection of the whole depends on the perfection of each part, the author must see his book as a unified whole and build into it each detail, no matter how small, with the overall plan in mind. Besides considering every possible point in the plan, he must consider every possible point in the presentation. Nothing is too small to be considered, even the juxtaposition of words must be studied since their contiguity can affect the shade of meaning and so alter the overall effect.

He believes that everything used in a novel must be in some way thematic and it must be justifiable on poetical or dramatic grounds. Poetical conception can give strength

to a story or a novel if handled adequately. Imagery and symbols must be functional; they must be integrated into the material, not subsumed upon it. The writer's greatest strength in regard to words is in simplicity of expression, "stark, bald, simple prose is poetic."

He feels that, regardless of the subject, the writer must let the story touch on other emotions, especially humour and sadness. A novel should have agony plus lyricism plus humour. If the emotions are true, that is, valid for that situation or stimulus, the author can use devices that he would otherwise avoid if there is no other way of expressing these genuine emotions. It is under these circumstances that the writer can use clichés successfully since, at times, they express an emotion that is valid for the situation and that cannot be otherwise communicated.

The writer must study the presentation of his characters; they must be universalized. The protagonist especially, must have something that gives him universality and, at the same time, he must be a unique individual. There must be conflict; this can take the form of one human being against another, an individual against the group, or an individual against a force beyond his control such as the law. The story should end with something definite, a conflict or a triumph in which the reader can be identified and in which the protagonist is forced to take a definite

stand. Suspense builds up as the conflict is developed. It is very important because it helps the reader identify himself with the protagonist in some way, perhaps actually from shared experience, vicariously from imagined experience, or symbolically from a projected or even sublimated experience. In any case it must be something that is of vital concern in the reader's life, since it is the means by which interest is established. Excitement springs from this; it is merely interest screwed up a notch. It should be obtained from the elements that belong naturally in the situation and not by excessive means. It was for this reason that the Greeks frowned on the deus ex machina.

Action, he insists, must be studied carefully, not only for what it expresses directly, but also for what it implies or indicates. Action must be balanced with reaction. If the reaction is in excess of the stimulus, it becomes a reaction to the whole situation rather than to anything specific. This creates a problem in balance. In that case one must manipulate the scales and make them balance by appealing to eye, ear, or feeling.

Visual response is important. It can be established through mental recall by means of description or evocation. The writer must, therefore, be careful of realistic detail, the props in the stage set. These should be introduced early, and usually unobtrusively. When the time comes for

them to have their full effect, the reader accepts them because he knows that these things have been there all along. Typography is important in obtaining certain responses from the reader, giving certain kinds of emphasis, even emphasis that is unobtrusive at the time but which prepares a link with what comes later. When there are very few actors the background is as important as the foreground.

He rates purity and universality of inspiration ahead of technical virtues. Much of this purity and universality is obtained through clarity. The writer should be willing to sacrifice much to obtain it. Sometimes a seeming failure in this is merely an imitation of the confusion in the protagonist's mind and an imitation of the confusion is the best way of making it clear to the reader. The writer must be sure, not only that he is getting the desired effect, but also that he is not sacrificing other more important things in order to get it. Poetry has a power which permits it to present in an acceptable way matter that one would otherwise question. For this reason poetic quality can give great strength to prose. The author, especially the poet, can be obscure if need be, but should never be precious.

A great many different effects can be obtained by the skillful use of conversation. Sometimes more can be implied by one character's silence than by his speech.

Multiple level conversation can be used for contrapuntal effect, giving the impression of a musical accompaniment. It can also be used for comment, in much the same way that the Greek dramatists used the chorus. It can be used as an illuminating background for stream-of-consciousness or interior-monologue passages. When handling the interior monologue, the writer must be careful of the subjective and the objective relationships. Whenever the character becomes conscious that he is thinking of himself he has turned the subjective into the objective for a moment.

The author, he feels, must dramatize from the inside out, and not from the outside in, that is, the dramatization should grow from the situation and not be imposed upon it. As a test of dramatic value, the writer should ask himself if he is saying exactly what he wants to say and also if it is exactly what he wants to say at that particular point in the development of the action.

The writer must look carefully at what is written, making the good better and even improving it until it becomes the best. There is often a virtue in compromise. When one version has a certain value and another version has some other value, he advises compromise by combining them in order to take full advantage of the merits of each. Difficult passages must be written and rewritten, cut and recut to distill the essence as perfectly as possible.

The conscious, or seemingly unconscious, use of echoes, that is, links with the work of other authors, is a good method for obtaining certain effects, or for emphasis. This, however, must be watched carefully and any echo that is not functional must be cut. Cutting is the final and most important polishing process and it must be done ruthlessly. Since the sound of words often carries overtones that are important in obtaining effects, establishing atmosphere, and building different levels of meaning, the ultimate test, the true acid test, is reading aloud.

From this presentation of the major comments gleaned from Lowry's own criticism it is obvious that this man was not only an outstanding novelist and a distinguished short-story writer, but also a critic of considerable merit. He was a critic who had a life-long interest in style and who used his knowledge not only to improve his own work, but also to help others bring their work to as high a level of perfection as possible. This indicates the truly devoted writer, the dedicated stylist.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

¹Malcolm Lowry, [Letter marked "Harcourt, Brace"], undated, UBCC, box 21.

²Ibid.

³Ibid. Italics in this and in all other quotations appear in the original.

⁴Lowry, Letters, pp. 113-114.

⁵Ibid., p. 320.

⁶Ibid., p. 338.

⁷Ibid., p. 322.

⁸Ibid., p. 338.

⁹Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 328.

¹¹Ibid., p. 334.

¹²Ibid., p. 335.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 338-339.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 339-340.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 346-347.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 408-409.

¹⁹Jonathan Cape [Reader's report on Under the Volcano], Nov. 29, 1945, UBCC, box 22.

²⁰Letters, p. 58.

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- ²¹Ibid., p. 59.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 60.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 61.
- ²⁶Ibid., pp. 64-65.
- ²⁷Ibid., pp. 65-66.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 66.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 69.
- ³⁰Ibid., pp. 70-71.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 67.
- ³²Ibid., p. 71.
- ³³Ibid., p. 85.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 75.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 81.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 80.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 88.
- ³⁸Lowry, [Letter to Clenens ten Holder], March 21, 1951, p. 12, UBCC, box 22A.
- ³⁹Lowry, [Notes accompanying letter to Albert Erskine] June 22, 1946, UBCC, box 22.
- ⁴⁰Lowry, Volcano, pp. 295-301.
- ⁴¹Lowry, [Notes to Albert Erskine].
- ⁴²Lowry, [Letter to Clenens ten Holder], March 21, 1951, pp. 2-3.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 4.

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⁴⁴Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁵Lowry, [Letter to Albert Erskine], July 15, 1946, UBCC, box 22.

⁴⁶Letters, p. 198.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁸Letters, p. 256.

⁴⁹Lowry, [Letter to David Markson], August 25, 1951, UBCC, box 22A.

⁵⁰Margerie Lowry, [Personal correspondence with present writer], April 27, 1966, UBCC, box 33.

⁵¹Letters, p. 258.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Lowry, [Letter to David Markson], undated; from Sicily therefore sometime in the winter of 1954-55, UBCC, box 22A.

⁵⁴Letters, p. 413.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 42.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 400.

⁶²Ibid., p. 405.

⁶³Lowry, [Letter to David Markson], Feb. 22, 1957, p. 8, UBCC, box 22A.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 10.

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⁶⁵Lowry, [Letter to David Markson], June 20, 1951, p. 1, UBCC, box 22A.

⁶⁶Lowry, [Notes on Margerie Lowry, "The Castle of Malatesta"], UBCC, box 24. All notes cited in reference to this work are from this source.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Lowry, [Draft of letter to Frank Taylor], undated, UBCC, box 20.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁷³Letters, pp. 312-313.

⁷⁴Lowry, [Letter to David Markson], Feb. 22, 1957, pp. 2-3, UBCC, box 22A.

⁷⁵Lowry, [Letter to Downie Kirk], March 20, 1951, UBCC, box 22A.

⁷⁶Downie Kirk, "More than Music," Canadian Literature, No. 8, (Spring, 1961), 32.

CHAPTER IV

HIS CRITICS

One after the other Malcolm Lowry's critics praise his style, often in extravagant terms. But, in sifting their comments, one is amazed to find how few critics have made definite statements regarding specific qualities in Lowry's style or the specific means by which he obtains his effects. It is true that no serious body of criticism of this author's work exists as yet. The articles and reviews that have been printed treat, for the most part, of overall effects, his use of myth and symbol, his literary sources, the story of his two published novels, general statements on his work, and discussions of his private purgatory of fears, guilt-complexes, and alcoholism. All admit that this author is a superb stylist, some even call him the superb stylist of the twentieth century. But no critic has yet made a detailed analysis of Lowry's work with the purpose of discovering just what there is about it that makes his style so outstanding. This thesis will now examine the statements that come closest to expressing definite opinions on Lowry's style.

Malcolm Lowry's work met with favorable response in France from the time it made its first appearance there. His novel, Under the Volcano, was superbly translated by

Clarisse Francillon and Stéphen Spriel. As early as 1960, Les lettres nouvelles published a special Malcolm Lowry number in which his work was approached with understanding and genuine appreciation. In this volume an article by Max-Pol Fouchet, "No se puede. . . ," discusses Under the Volcano and expresses an opinion that is typical of the French approach. He speaks of the desire one has, on finishing the novel, to go back and re-read at least the first chapter, the chapter that on the first reading had seemed to move so slowly. The reader will then discover that this opening chapter is "une merveille d'écriture inspirée."¹ M. Fouchet then meets the possible objections of the reader regarding the seeming slowness of the opening, and asks, "Défaut de composition? Non pas. Procédé trop intentionnel? Encore moins. Il s'agit de quelques autres choses. De musique, d'abord, si l'on veut."² This first chapter, "purgatoire des impatients," is equivalent to a prelude, a means of setting the tone. The work of Malcolm Lowry, he continues, "ressemble à une symphonie dont les motifs, par leur récurrence, assurent l'unité tonale, se reprennent en modulations, s'organisent parfois en contrepoint." He then concludes, "C'est aussi un poème, où ces thèmes tiennent lieu de rimes, d'assonnances."³ So far this shows understanding, but it does not look very carefully at the style that has made these effects possible.

Later, in the same article, M. Fouchet comments on the recurrence of the Samaritan motif, linking the death of the Consul with that of the Indian. Then he notes the different levels presented and says that the book "pose encore des problèmes de langage et d'écriture." He notes the way in which words are used, "On assiste, en le lisant, à un maniement prodigieux de vocables, à des coulées verbales de souvenirs, de citations, des surgissements de la mémoire et de la culture." He develops the idea further, "Les péripéties de l'écriture valent celles de l'intrigue. On voudrait isoler des paragraphes, des pages, les retenir pour leur lyrisme particulier et cependant ils sont entraînés dans le mouvement général."⁴ This writer understands Malcolm Lowry and what he was trying to do. Without going into detail he has presented some of the significant factors that make up the novelist's distinctive style.

If one wishes to approach the criticism of Lowry's work chronologically one must begin with the critiques of Ultramarine. These have already been treated, in regard to style, in the discussion of Lowry as a journeyman writer. The re-issue of the novel in 1962 brought comments that were, of necessity, coloured by the critic's attitude towards Under the Volcano and Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place. Having these later works within reach, it is very easy for the critic to find germs of greatness in

the early novel. Two world wars and several court cases in which books were tried for obscenity have changed the critic's and the reader's attitude towards the problems presented in the book and made it possible for an author to be accepted more readily on his own terms when he is attempting to express something that he felt must be said and which could be said only in a way that had formerly been considered too frank.

In her introductory note to the revised edition of Ultramarine, Mrs. Lowry indicates her husband's attitude towards his book:

During the years we spent together he was always working on two or three projects simultaneously, and there was, too, a spasmodic running commentary on Ultramarine. I would come upon him with the battered copy in his hands staring at it angrily and making notes on the pages, or sometimes just holding it and gazing out of the window; he would turn to me and say, "You know I must rewrite this someday."⁵

Then she makes her own judgment that, to her, the most important thing about the book is not its partially autobiographical content, but "the fact that at this early period Malcolm was already so completely the self-conscious artist, in control of his material and his style."⁶

As noted in Chapter II, the early critics were for the most part puzzled by the book; the later critics influenced by Lowry's reputation. Of those writing in 1962, David Dempsey was the only one who noted specific points:

"an intense verbal realism," a "subjective monologue that provides the outlet for his poetic grasp of life," and the fact that, in his opinion, Lowry "was a born writer who could not separate experience from its ultimate necessity for expression."⁷ But this is merely comment; it is not analysis.

The year 1962 also saw the publication of Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry. Many reviewers contented themselves with echoing Earle Birney's preface, but occasionally an individual expression of reaction appeared. Robert Nye claimed that Lowry "was (like Joyce) most truly a poet when writing prose." He commented on the poet's reluctance to release his poems for publication then added, "There are perhaps ten poems here that will live as long as Under the Volcano: that is, for ever. Given Malcolm Lowry's standards, it is a lot."⁸ Fred Cogswell regrets the narcissism that, in his opinion, kept Lowry from greatness as a writer, but adds, "He has all the other qualities: honesty; a clean-cut, energetic style; a fresh but exact descriptive vocabulary; a synthesizing power of the imagination;" and, in addition to all this, "a sufficient store of experience, literary and lived, on which to exercise it; and a zest for perfection which bedevilled his life and glorified his writing."⁹ He makes a very interesting point regarding the source of many illustrations used by Lowry. He states that

Lowry must have had a great love for "the classics of world literature, particularly the sea ones," for in poem after poem, "when he wishes to illustrate a thought or experience, the most ready illustration that springs to mind is literary."¹⁰

An interesting comment by the Mexican reviewer, Ramón Xirau, links the cyclical interpretation of man and his world of Under the Volcano with the poetry and claims that this cyclical element "is very noticeable in the structure of the poems (the beginning line and the last line often close the circle with the same image)." This cyclical element leads "quite naturally to a constant transition between opposites."¹¹ Even in the criticism the wheel--"the luminous wheel"--appears.

In a statement that echoes strongly Lowry's own comments on poetry, Conrad Knickerbocker says that Lowry's poems are "Formal and almost courtly, they have the faintly declamatory tone of a man who sees in poetry the final resort of order and simplicity."¹² Earle Birney believes that the poems are more simple and more personal than Lowry's other writing because they are free of the fictional disguises that are used in the prose. He claims that the poems, like everything Lowry wrote, are products of an original imagination "expressing itself through a medium which was, for him, not merely a medium, not simply words,

but the substance of magic, of incantation, prayer, exorcism and song."¹³

The critiques and reviews of the poetry are, on the whole, close to what Lowry himself would have written on the subject. Poetic style is so much a part of the statement that constitutes a poem that the critic is forced, from the very nature of the matter being criticized, to make a comment on it.

The appearance of Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place in 1961 aroused comment which is, like that of the reprinted Ultramarine, coloured by the critic's knowledge of Under the Volcano. Elizabeth Janeway says of Hear us that the book is "crowned by two absolutely first-class pieces of work, each long enough for Lowry the novelist to hit his stride." These are "Through the Panama" and "The Forest Path to the Spring." The latter, she says, celebrates the "beauty, harmony and peace which balanced" his "destructive drive, kept him alive, formed his work, and which rings constantly through and around the despair and desolation in it." She finds that this is a "true version of Paradise, as real as the hell he also knew, and it at once clarifies and deepens his writing: Lowry's damned souls had sometimes seen salvation."¹⁴ She claims that, in looking at life, Lowry's "angle of vision was no one else's" and this led him to view experience in a way that was

uniquely his own. The bits of experience he presents "make odd, surrealist sense." They do not "merely repeat each other; they reflect and heighten each other and connect the stories, making them a whole."¹⁵ A further comment is worth noting. She speaks of the searching into the autobiographical elements in Lowry's work and warns against this,

Where "fact" leaves off and "fiction" begins becomes irrelevant, distracting, and downright vulgar for, out of the mélange of emotion, experience, dream and disaster that was Lowry's private world, he has made a work of art--moving, noble, to be received with humility and gratitude.¹⁶

John Hutchens finds that this book indicates "a writer fulfilled." It is an artist's autobiography, "but obliquely so, fragmentary and fantasticated, at once sardonic and unselfconsciously tender, even sentimental, as Joyce's self-portrait was." He recognizes the fact that there are overtones of his formative influences present in the work, "the sea as O'Neill, Melville and Conrad heard it, the ironic detachment of Stendhal, the sombre blues of Bix Beiderbecke's horn." But he admits that the book is truly Lowry's, "over and above all there is himself, lonely, compassionate and fiercely intent on bringing to us the world as he sees it," and he concludes that "the artist who in all honesty does that succeeds, and Lowry did."¹⁷

W.G. Rogers was quick to note that the book had, in all its heroes, only one hero and that it was actually a

novel. This was, of course, Lowry's plan and it meant a great deal to him. The same reviewer notices the all-embracing interrelationship of the parts. This passage states that:

There is an over-all unity, too, in the character of Lowry's observations. He is alive to color: birds that are "jet against an amber sky," and "cobalt thunderstorms," and bells with "a blue sound." He has the novelist's eye that sees things pure but at the same time metaphorically; the buoy like a little Eiffel tower, the lighthouse like a chessman, the jungle background like chicory salad. He is always conscious, in Rome as well as on the primitive Pacific shore, of animal life, of wind, water and rock, of the splendid brilliant sweep of stars and planets-- he even lives in Eridanus.¹⁸

On the whole Hear us has received a more alert criticism from the point of view of style than was given to Ultramarine or even to Under the Volcano.

Lowry's major novel, Under the Volcano, tempts the reviewers to retell the story, to wander into symbolism, or to use the Consul's addiction to alcohol as an excuse for drawing a parallel with the life of his creator. A few critics and reviewers, however, have noted the style of this novel and their comments will now be presented.

Jacques Barzun's unfavorable review does not say anything specific about style. He makes the sweeping statement that Lowry has "borrowed from other styles in fashion-- Henry James, Thomas Wolfe, the thought-streamers, the surrealists." He give no definite examples to prove his point

but closes with the expression that so irritated Lowry that he felt bound to make a reply. Barzun says, "His novel can be recommended only as an anthology held together by earnestness."¹⁹ Lowry answered this letter in his own fresh and original, yet wholly courteous way. In regard to the "anthology held together by earnestness," he said:

Whatever your larger motive--which I incidentally believe to be extremely sound--do you not seem to have heard this passage or something like it before? I certainly do. I seem to recognize the voice, slightly disguised, that greeted Mr. Wolfe himself, not to say Mr. Faulkner, Mr. Melville and Mr. James--an immortal voice indeed that once addressed Keats in the same terms that it informed Mr. Whitman that he knew less about poetry than a hog about mathematics.

Be that as it may. It is the "styles in fashion" that hurts. Having lived in the wilderness for nearly a decade, . . . I have had no way of knowing what styles were in fashion and what out, and didn't much care. Henry James' notebooks I certainly have tried to take to heart, and as for the thought-streamers (if you're interested in sources) William would doubtless be pleased. And I'm glad at least it was earnestness that held the anthology together. Nonetheless I shall laugh--and I hope you with me--should in ten years or so the Voice again be heard decrying some serious contemporary effort on the grounds that its author is simply regurgitating the materials to be found in Lowry. I shall laugh, but I shall on principle sympathize with the author, even if it is true.²⁰

Later in the same letter Lowry adds that, in his opinion, the Volcano "has been over praised and also praised for qualities it probably doesn't possess" but this is no reason for tearing it "to pieces for faults it doesn't possess either." Then he suggests to Mr. Barzun, "I wish,

sincerely, that you would read it again, and this time, because you don't have to write about it, look instead for what may be good in it."²¹ The whole letter is almost in the nature of a postscript to the defence of his novel which he sent, in 1946, to Jonathan Cape.

Mona Harrop's review, on the other hand, praises Under the Volcano for its "magnificent style, its seemingly effortless power to roll back the layers of man's personality" to reveal the "very depths of that innermost secret core each of us keeps hidden and inviolate." She believes that this is the "most significant novel written in English" since Joyce's Ulysses, "of which one is inevitably reminded by Mr. Lowry's superb style, though not by his vocabulary or his story's content." She says that, like Joyce's, this author's style is "involuted, resonant and refulgent." Then she makes an interesting distinction, "Unlike Joyce, . . . Malcolm Lowry finds English words sufficiently supple and their shadings sufficiently delicate to convey his thoughts." She finds that the very manner of writing "breeds an excitement in the reader." This has an effect that Lowry himself would appreciate. "Quite involuntarily one finds oneself reading aloud to catch the full beauty and resonance of Mr. Lowry's style." She comments on the skill with which the "master of his craft" handles very

long sentences which, "for all their burgeoning eloquence," have "grace and discipline."²²

To John Woodburn this book came as a revelation. He felt that Malcolm Lowry had "created his own genre, and bent it to his will." Even those who do not like the book, he says, will have to admit that "here is a man who can write a prose that is like wine, who can make the English language serve him like a slave." He concludes, like Mona Harrop, by declaring that Under the Volcano is a work of genius.²³ But before this he has a noteworthy passage, one of several that would bear quotation. Commenting on his own reaction to the book and the fact that he could not leave it alone until he had read it several times, he says:

The first reading was the reading of impact, the war-head; the second was the reading of exploration and discovery, in which the feathering of the arrow is observed, when each of the thin laminae becomes distinct, and the myriad references and cross-references of the book fall into symmetry, and what I had sometimes skimmed as casual detail took on exquisite relevance.²⁴

Much the same enthusiasm is shown in the review by H.R. Hays who says that there is cause for rejoicing when one encounters a novel which achieves a "rich variety of meaning on many levels, which is written in a style both virile and poetic, which possesses profundity of insight, which is, in short, literature." After tracing some of the incidents in the novel, he concludes that the external

events are less important than the way in which the story is presented through the feelings and perceptions of the main characters. Lowry uses a method "similar to Joyce's, in which the minutiae of experience are heightened thematically, and heightened by association" until the mood of "anguish and despair is given profundity and poetic meaning."²⁵

The Canadian reviewer, B.K. Sandwell, makes a comment that is particularly apposite in the light of Lowry's own insistence on the functional nature of symbolism. He speaks of the highly effective symbolism in the novel which must be "read with the greatest care because there is not a single episode or detail which does not contribute in some important degree to the total effect." One recalls also Lowry's insistence on the importance of the background, especially when there are few characters. This reviewer says that the setting is "so manipulated by the author's poetic sense and subtle style as to lend an atmosphere of lurid horror to the whole affair."²⁶ This is exactly what Lowry had intended to do.

A similar understanding of what Lowry is trying to do and the effects he wishes to obtain appears in George Woodcock's article on Lowry as a novelist. He points out the superiority of Under the Volcano to Ultramarine in style and in structure through its refinement of interior monologue and reminiscent fantasy and in the use of a more

flexible narration and of dialogue that is a much more sensitive vehicle of characterization. He finds that

The long, cumulative sentence, rich in paraphrase and illuminating divagation, is used with almost Proustian suppleness to convey the nuances of atmosphere and the sinuosities of alcoholic fantasy, while the surrealist tenor of the drunkard's world is conveyed in the sharp juxtaposition of actual perceptions and the sinister images of delirium.²⁷

One recalls the letter to Albert Erskine in which Lowry begged for variations in type sizes and fonts to ensure the effect of delirium. This review justifies that letter.

Reviews and a few critical articles have succeeded one another in the two decades since the Volcano first appeared. On the whole these show a progression in the critics' understanding of Lowry and his work. A few reviewers still make somewhat cheap capital out of his one great weakness and forget that he, too, knew that he had this limitation, but in this respect he followed the advice that he gave to another. He used his limitation as an asset and the literary world is the richer for it. Most reviewers now tend to remember this growth of strength from weakness and evaluate his work on its own merits rather than on any sensationalism that can be linked with it.

Lowry's old friend and mentor, Conrad Aiken, expressed his opinion of the first edition of Under the Volcano in an excellent comment on the craftsman and his style:

The book must be, for anyone who loves the English language, a sheer joy. Here it is, all renewed and alive again, a changeable shot-silk, sun-dot medium of infinite flexibility, which can adapt itself to the subtlest shade of perception or mood, or suffuse with the bloodiest of horrors, or vanish upward in the air like the most mystical of rope tricks. There is no contemporary writer who could not learn from this book: it should send us all scuttling back to our workshops.²⁸

In his introduction to the 1965 edition of Under the Volcano, Stephen Spender discusses in detail almost every aspect of the novel except its style which he mentions only in regard to Lowry's use of film techniques. Of the influences on Lowry he says:

Lowry has borrowed from Joyce, turned his symbolic devices upside down and used them for his own purposes either with audacious intelligence, or else from a kind of inspired misunderstanding. . . . But the most direct influence on this extraordinary book is not, I would suggest, from other novelists, but from films, most of all perhaps those of Eisenstein. The movies--that is, the old, silent, caption-accompanied movies--are felt throughout the novel.²⁹

He comments on the essentially cinematic technique, the use of flash-backs, "the abrupt shifts from extended scenes to close-ups." In the use of printed notices and the key phrases like the garden signs that carry a deeper meaning, he sees Lowry's presentation of what the camera eye would spot in a film and adds, "The cinema-goers' familiarity with this technique is most ingeniously converted into a literary device."³⁰ He notes that "the technique of divided

attention is used to wonderful effect to convey a characteristic of the Consul's drunkenness, his diffused attention." From the cinema, which is kinetic, Lowry borrows "for his own kinetic writing" and "seems to write with every faculty which is active, or observes action."³¹

In all his work, as has been shown, Lowry drew on his own personal experience to make his vision of life meaningful to others. In doing so he met his problems in interpretation and expression in a way that is so much his own that Giose Rimanelli says of him, "In Lowry one might even discover the signs of a narrative and a style that belong to the artist of the future more than to that of the past."³²

Criticism of this sort implies the existence of originality and some critics have recognized this characteristic in his work. Anthony Burgess expresses the opinion that Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place "explores consciousness in a manner hardly known in English since James Joyce." Then he enlarges on this idea:

It is Joyce one thinks of when confronted by the boldness of Lowry's technical experiments--the use of the musical leitmotif, the endless inner monologue, the marginal gloss which explains nothing. But Lowry remains triumphantly original.³³

According to Lowry's own standards, as shown earlier, originality is the mark of the genuine writer.

Malcolm Lowry was, indeed, in Lloyd W. Griffin's words, "a man who kept his perspective and an artist who knew in a phenomenal way exactly what he was doing."³⁴ As a result, he has won recognition in the literary world to the extent that he has become an international figure. The luminous wheel has taken on an added significance, a global meaning, with the translation of Under the Volcano into all the major European languages. Commenting on this, Dr. Earle Birney says that Lowry is "a writer good enough to flow over the barrier of his own language and become . . . a world writer."³⁵

In January 1967, Jonathan Cape's reprint of Under the Volcano was released in England along with the Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry. This has caused a resurgence of critical expression in the country where his life began and where it ended. Most of this criticism has been favorable, much of it enthusiastically so. Many of the reviewers present Lowry's claim to recognition for his style, but no one attempts to analyze or to evaluate the style with any specific comments. The same pattern of criticism that was established in the United States a year earlier, is repeated and Lowry's style does not receive the attention it deserves.

From this survey of critical opinions on the work of Malcolm Lowry it is obvious that many critics recognized the

fact that this author had a distinctive style of great beauty and power which helped to win for him a definite place among those who are noted for the purity as well as the strength of their writing. With the publication of his first novel, he received a few understanding comments that proved to him that some critics thought he had something worth saying and the ability to say it well even though he lacked experience and needed further development. The years he spent building up his knowledge of writing techniques and in perfecting his style saw their fruition in his masterpiece. With the first reviewers of Under the Volcano, the style was considered worth, at least, a comment.

With each re-issue of Under the Volcano in the twenty years following its first appearance, new comments were made and a fuller understanding of Lowry's work was shown. Hear us O Lord from heaven thy dwelling place brought an even more complete understanding of what Lowry was attempting to do and the way in which he did it. With the release of Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry it became evident that Lowry was a conscious artist always alert to the problems of expression and ever seeking new ways to solve them. His own critical comments form a very clear exposition of what constitutes style and how a writer can arrive at perfection in expression.

Reviews of Lowry's books showed, as time went on, an awareness of what constitutes the excellence of his style although all reviews stressed more strongly other points as dictated by each writer's special interests. In the past few years, however, critics have looked more carefully at Lowry's style and written better-defined comments on it. No critic has yet studied it in depth. This thesis has attempted to do so.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹Max-Pol Fouchet, "No se puede . . . ," Les lettres nouvelles 5, Huitième Année, Nouvelle Série, Juillet-Août 1960, 22.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵Margerie Lowry, "Introductory Note," Ultramarine (London, 1962), p. 7.

⁶Ibid.

⁷David Dempsey, "Sophisticated Innocence Abroad," Sat. Rev., November 17, 1962, p. 30.

⁸Robert Nye, "Horrors at Sunset," The Tribune, Nov. 2, 1962, p. 36.

⁹Fred Cogswell, "Lord Jim as Byron," The Canadian Forum, January 1963, 231.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 230.

¹¹Ramón Xirau, "Malcolm Lowry, Poet of Cycles," The News (Mexico), Sept. 9, 1962, p. 8-A.

¹²Conrad Knickerbocker, "Paperbacks in Review: Malcolm Lowry," The New York Times Book Review, Nov. 8, 1964, 27.

¹³Earle Birney, "The Unknown Poetry of Malcolm Lowry," British Columbia Library Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 4, April 1961, 35.

¹⁴Elizabeth Janeway, "A Legacy, a Man, and a Legend/ a New Collection by Malcolm Presents his Special Vision of Life," The New York Times Book Review, May 21, 1961, p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 1 and 16.

- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 1.
- ¹⁷John Hutchens, "Artist and Man," The Examiner, May 29, 1961, p. 21.
- ¹⁸W.G. Rogers, "Lowry is Grand Proof of Novel's Spirit," Statesman (Salem, Ore.), May 21, 1961, p. 12.
- ¹⁹Jacques Barzun, "New Books," Harper's Magazine, May 1947, 486.
- ²⁰Lowry, Letters, pp. 144-145.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 146.
- ²²Mona Harrop, "Book Talk," The Cincinnati News, Apr. 28, 1947, p. 23.
- ²³John Woodburn, "Dazzling Disintegration," The Saturday Review of Literature, Feb. 22, 1947, p. 10.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 9.
- ²⁵H.R. Hays, "Drunken Nightmare of the Damned," The New York Times Book Review, Feb. 23, 1947, 5.
- ²⁶B.K. Sandwell, "Under the Volcano by M. Lowry Shows Style also Symbolism," Saturday Night, Nov. 1, 1947, 15.
- ²⁷George Woodcock, "Malcolm Lowry as Novelist," British Columbia Library Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 4, April, 1961, 30.
- ²⁸Conrad Aiken, [Critique printed on dust jacket of Under the Volcano], New York, Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947.
- ²⁹Stephen Spender, "Introduction," Under the Volcano (New York, 1965), p. xiii.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. xiv.
- ³¹Ibid., p. xv.
- ³²Giuse Rimanelli, "Introduction," Modern Canadian Stories, Giuse Rimanelli & Roberto Ruberto, eds., (Toronto, 1966), p. xxv.

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³³Anthony Burgess, The Novel Today (London, 1963),
p. 16.

³⁴Lloyd W. Griffin, [Review of Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry], Library Journal, Vol. 90, No. 20, Nov. 15, 1965, 4982.

³⁵Earle Birney, [Letter to Louis Dudek], April 12, 1961, UBCC, box 33.

CONCLUSION

The luminous wheel has now spun full circle. This study of the evolution of Malcolm Lowry's style, which began with a biographical approach to the man himself, has proceeded through a study of his work back to the man through his own expression of what he thought was important to the writer.

Although many critics have written, in articles and reviews, on Lowry's work in general, no one has yet attempted a study of his style. The comments made on this characteristic of his work have been, for the most part, embedded in what critics had to say about a specific book on its appearance, or in a general comment on his writing as a whole. This thesis, however, not only surveys Lowry's development as a stylist, but also offers the first exploration of this subject. It has studied all the original sources available and noted the events in his life that helped to shape the writer. It has noted that the man, constantly aware of his work and constantly evaluating it, has arrived at a means of expression that is so much his own that it has produced Malcolm Lowry, one of the most outstanding stylists of the twentieth century.

This study of Lowry's style shows that he knew exactly what he was doing and exactly how to do it. He has

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solved his problems in interpretation and expression in a way that is his own. In doing so, he has met one of his own standards by which a writer must be judged, that of originality. This has brought him recognition in the literary world to the extent that he has become an international figure. The luminous wheel has thus taken on an added significance, a global meaning.

However, one cannot arrive at a complete understanding of Malcolm Lowry's contribution to literary art unless one knows something about his life because his personal experience and his work are almost completely integrated. He experimented with ways of reaching his reader through multi-level presentation of his matter. This multiplicity was, to a certain extent, a reflection of his own thinking. He was continually bombarded by ideas and impressions with the result that he worked simultaneously on several novels or stories, adding layer after layer of meaning to each as some particular incident in his life became significant in that context.

It was, indeed, this presentation of his vision of the significant human experience that led him to experiment with technical points of expression in the short story as well as in the novel. All his life, Lowry was obsessed by problems of style as he strove to make his inner world known to the outer world. He realized that communication through

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the ordinary printed page is a limited contact, so he tried to make it more meaningful by appealing to several senses at once. The format of the page became a means of amplifying the responses called forth by the printed matter on it. The page thus took on the value of visual appeal. Variations through changes in type size, through framing of certain words or phrases, through the use of marginal glosses to obtain a stereoscopic or three-dimensional presentation, became necessary to his expression and he did not hesitate to use them.

His sense of the fitness of words and the importance of their sound as an approach to their meaning, or at least as a concomitant of it, gave a seeming ease in expression. But this facility was the result of much labour. He wrote and re-wrote, shaped and re-shaped until the words said exactly what he wanted to say. Knowing the value of aural appeal and the way in which the spoken word added, through sound actually heard, a new emphasis to the meaning, he tested everything he wrote by reading it aloud. The strong sensory appeal in Lowry's writing is the result of much study, endless re-writing, ruthless cutting, and rigorous testing through reading aloud. It is through this kind of labour that Lowry, the stylist, came into being.

But he was too generous a person to keep all this to himself. He shared his ideas through his comments in

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letters, criticism, and evaluations of the work of others. From these notes and critiques, a set of norms, or basic principles, underlying the development of style can be built up and this thesis has summarized Lowry's comments into a detailed statement on style. This statement forms a code by which a critical evaluation of style can be made. If one measures Lowry's achievement by Lowry's standards, one sees that this writer knew what he wanted to say and also how to say it. The fusion of the matter to be presented and the manner of presenting it constitutes style. Ease in expression arising from clarity of thought and command of words, gives a beauty, an artistry, that makes the style intensely personal. Lowry's style has this quality.

In studying this style one notices the richness of the texture. Lowry realized that all writing, as well as all living, is an amalgam of the past. From the pooled experience of mankind all human beings draw, according to their needs, as they go through life. This sharing governs the everyday processes of living and also man's more spectacular achievements. Every advance in learning, every discovery in science, every act whereby one perfects an art is based on what one has learned from others, remotely or by direct contact. This is true of every man and every area of human experience but, most of all, it is true of the creative writer.

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Malcolm Lowry, as a creative writer, used this collective experience of man and blended it skilfully into the texture of his work to give it richness and clarity. His love for music, his wide reading, his deep study of subjects that interested him or that were of interest to his work, and his personal experience provided him with the raw materials; the creative artist shaped it into the finished product. He tried to contribute something new and from his personal experience give mankind a new understanding of the meaning of tragedy, a new insight into despair, a new vision of hell.

But, in spite of alcoholism and the neuroses that tortured him, and against which he fought all his life, he was a basically happy person and this is shown clearly in his letters and in the memoirs written by his friends. No matter how dark the problem, cheerfulness broke in and laughter echoed down the beach. His friends remember him for this and for the sincerity with which he closed every contact, every visit, and almost every letter with the words "God bless you." This was Malcolm Lowry, the man who could sound the depths of his own private hell and tell about it in a way that touched horror and delight, pity and humour at the same time; the man who could project a novel sequence that was to probe man's soul and then end in quiet peace by a forest with its path, its spring, its mountains, and its

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sea. Only an artist would dream of doing it. This artist has done it.

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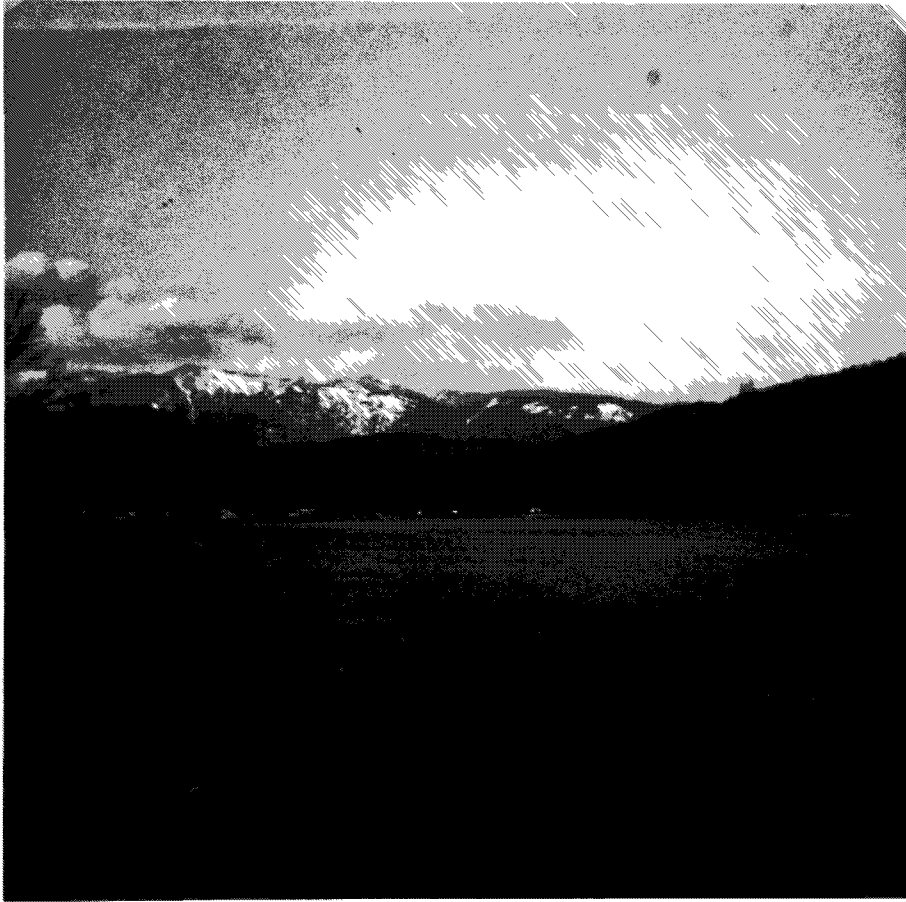
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APPENDIX I

1. Cates Park--site of former Lowry home.
2. Lowry manuscripts.



View from Cates Park, Dollarton,
B.C.--site of former Lowry home.

Please tell Scipio & Kitty the only reason I didn't send them a version
I sent was I didn't know the exact date they were to be
mailed: their card arrived after they were. A present - (humorous excepting)
is on its way.

Dear ol' Dave:

You have defined my position absolutely.
But not your own: your exposition of it was
too brilliant & clear; - I propose, with your
permission, to steal it.

You don't have any technical problem - I know
it all into the 3rd person, as Oswald Mayhew would
say.

Style is cutting: Maxham v Flaubert + Markham
- Flaubert - Mayhew - Hawthorne: ^{Tip?}

Something like that.

Here is the ~~Process~~! Scirocco!

And I try to smash its brains every day.

I seem to be succeeding, since it's
poor wretch, has none.

Love from me to you & your
Aunt

AN ABSTRACT OF

The Luminous Wheel: The Evolution of Malcolm Lowry's Style

by Sister Mary Rosalinda

This thesis is a study of Malcolm Lowry and his work in regard to the development and the quality of his style. Many critics have placed Lowry among the best stylists writing in English in the twentieth century, but no one has yet made a detailed study of Lowry's style or even presented a fully developed comment on it, its quality, or its genesis. This thesis has attempted to make a study of this kind. It is the first lengthy analysis in depth of Lowry's style and of his statements regarding style.

As briefly as possible, and yet with as much detail as the need demanded, Chapter I, the biographical section, has presented a picture of Malcolm Lowry as an individual. His personal experience played a very important part in his development as a writer and as a critic. He worked it into the substance as well as into the texture of his creative work so completely that the lines of division between his actual and his fictional life are never sharply defined. At times they are even non-existent. This gives his work an intensity that is distinctive and that can only be understood when one studies his life and his work together. From the interrelation of the two--his life on his work and his

Lowry was a master of English prose, they began to notice his superb style. Chapter III studies Lowry's own approach to the problem of style. His working notes, drafts, letters, and criticism show that much study and deep thought had gone into the solution of his writing problems. He drew on the past, the collective experience of mankind, the individual experience of writers of all ages and all countries, and from this worked out his own norms. He also experimented with new modes of expression and presentation.

At first his norms were used solely in judging his own work, in achieving his own standard of excellence. Later, at the request of friends, he criticized their work. With the publication of The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry in 1965, these evaluations became known to a wider public. From the cogency of the opinions expressed in his letters, Lowry is now being recognized also as a critic. The most important part of his critical expression deals with style. In this section of the thesis, then, Lowry has been studied as a critic of his own work and of the work of others in regard to style.

The next section, Chapter IV, presents the opinions of those critics who have commented on Lowry's style and evaluates their judgments of him in this respect. Weighing these comments one finds, however, that no critic has yet studied this aspect of his work in detail. This thesis has attempted to examine Lowry's style more completely and in

greater depth and, in doing so, arrive at a just evaluation of it.

Chapter V forms the conclusion of the thesis, summarizes the matter covered, and attempts to arrive at an evaluation of the contribution made to English literature by Malcolm Lowry through his blending of matter, manner, and personality in his writing. It is by the fusion of these means that a writer arrives at an adequate and distinctive style. Lowry achieved this fusion and in doing so earned his right to recognition as a master of English style.

The source material for this thesis is the published work of Malcolm Lowry, critical articles and reviews in various publications, and the Malcolm Lowry Papers in the Special Collections Department of the library at the University of British Columbia. Some of the material was obtained in personal interviews with Mrs. Malcolm Lowry and with Dr. Earle Birney and from correspondence with them and with others who knew Malcolm Lowry.

An annotated bibliography of material available in book form comments on the content and value of these sources. The bibliography also includes a complete list of critical articles, reviews, and unpublished material used in preparation of this thesis.

Presented in 1967 to the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada, in view of obtaining a degree of Doctor of Philosophy, this thesis contains 222 pages.