

THE REBELLIOUS SERVANT
OF
CULTURE:
A STUDY OF MALCOLM LOWRY'S
UNDER THE VOLCANO

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The general thrust of Lowry scholarship has been in the direction of explicating the "givens" -- what Arnold Hauser has called the "surfaces". However, such criticism, instead of revealing art as an aspect of reality, places art within a special context in which formal critical competency obscures the way that the critic retreats from experience. The fecundity of surface in Under the Volcano has allowed this methodology to stand relatively unquestioned. This fecundity, which we may designate an aspect of style, has led to a positivistic criticism in which access to experience is blocked off or spiritualized, in which the underlying truths which the novel might contain are denied or avoided.

Criticism of the surface, by denying access to what might lie beneath the surfaces, has consistently avoided what seems to this writer to be the fundamental aspects of Under the Volcano; that is the various dialectics concerning the nature of freedom and culture, and the whole question of knowledge in conflict with reality -- the way in which Lowry's writing indicates the destructive aspects of the kind of knowledge that denies reality. The novel can be read as a critique of a culture that is the product of abstraction in which the daemonic nature of the body has no place to go except into destruction. But Lowry's tendency is to transcend the barbaric nature of such cultures, even while recognizing the necessity of opposing them. A kind of child-like angst that longs to be consoled defeats his critique.

Instead of asserting the struggle for primacy of the individual in the face of a barbaric civilization he retreats into a spiritual enclave in which the daemonic nature of the body becomes sublimated into a spiritualized war between god and the devil. The repressed Eros is central to Lowry's writings but he is apparently unable to approach it at the level of the real, turning instead to revelation through parody of style, critique and mystification in a denaturalized version of "nature".

This thesis is an attempt to indicate the kind of access that style itself provides -- to show how style functions as a critique and therefore is not something to be surrendered to as surface. It further attempts to explore those aspects of the novel that are concerned with the loss of reality, finally to challenge Lowry's own acquiescence to form and pseudo-religiosity, his apparent desire for the reification of man and culture.

Dedicated
to my wife, Glenda

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- iii. Thesis Abstract.
- 1. Introduction.
- 5. General Comments on Under the Volcano.
- 15. The Critics.
- 25. Style.
- 55. The Man of Knowledge.
- 78. The Critique of Culture.
- 90. Bibliography.

Introduction

"A book about a personal crisis, the crisis of the artist, a social crisis. Only after the indissoluble link between the poetic self-revelation and the cultural criticism has been recognized can the book be fully comprehended and properly interpreted."¹

Hans Mayer's critique of Hesse's *Steppenwolf* can be applied equally well to Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*², as indeed it could be applied to any number of modern writers. What his statement indicates is the struggle on the part of the modern writer to find an image that is authentic to his own experience in a culture that appears to deny access to authenticity.

Mayer is a critic not only of literature but of the social structure and his critical approach is one of testing the validity of the artist's product against social realities. As such he is one of a number of literary and social critics whose work is an attempt to see literature and art in the context of the dynamics of individual and social processes. The works of such critics as Theodor Adorno, George Lukacs, Erich Heller, R.P. Blackmur, Stephen Spender, Arnold Hauser, Harold Rosenberg and Alex Comfort, among others, reflect a desire to deal directly with the artist's experience, the object, and social reality; to discover and name the "real"; to discuss the liberating and repressive aspects of art in the context of the sources of experience and its denial.

Many of these critics draw upon the philosophical and socio-scientific dynamics established by Marx and Freud, both of whom were concerned with concretizing the nature of experience in opposition to doctrinaire ideologies that tended toward stasis and coherence as ends; towards the acceptance of "given" contents and

forms. The dynamics and inhibitions surrounding social and philosophical thought in relationship to experience have been continued in the works of such critics as Herbert Marcuse and Erik Erikson. Geza Roheim and R.D. Laing are of particular relevance in their studies of the pathological effects on individual experience and society in certain cultural conditions.

By contrast, the secondary sources on Lowry that I have consulted seem largely to indicate an attempt by the critic to gain a perspective on his writings through a comparison of form and images to various sources of influence. This perspectivism gives the critic a point of view that implies objectivity and competence. Since my own experience of reading Lowry's works, especially Under the Volcano, has been one of feeling quite mystified as to what was actually happening in the presentation of all those images, I could only conclude that either my experience was a result of my own incompetency, or that the scholars had avoided dealing with their own direct experience in favour of academic conformism that had served primarily to further deepen the mystery. Insight, it seemed (their own and the author's), was to be avoided in preference to servicing the culture industry. That professional readers should be thus forced to conform in the face of Lowry's mysteries in itself seemed to indicate something of the nature of the content of those mysteries.

The scope of this thesis then is really an attempt to discover what it is in Under the Volcano that blocks access to the readers' abilities to discover those aspects of the novel that are authentic and to examine the conditions that thwart discovery. I have attempted to move away from interpretation in the context

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of images or biographical comparisons, and formalist discussion, in a desire to examine the conditions that the novel imposes on the reader and itself out of a belief that the formalists and perspectivists have largely avoided the whole problem of authenticity; a problem that I feel is at the very root of Lowry's work. That my own perspectivist blinkers occasionally get in the way can only indicate how deep-rooted the problem of avoidance is in attempting to separate the genuine expression of experience from the consciously spurious.

Introduction -- footnotes.

¹ Hans Mayer, "Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf," in Steppenwolf and Everyman, trans. Jack D. Zipes (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971), p.1.

² Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1947, 1965). All further references are to this edition. Page numbers will be indicated where required in preference to footnotes.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON UNDER THE VOLCANO

What, after all, was a Consul that one was mindful of him? (p.29)

The individual and his possession. His possession is his fear. His theme is the moral victory over fear. 1

What happens when a writer attempts both to criticize and to transcend his culture? when he attempts to relate the particular experience to the general in the light of a transcendental critique? Such a critique, in which the writer wishes to reveal the inadequacies of his culture at the same time as he surrenders fatalistically to its "givens" in an attempt to transcend them, seems to me to condition the whole of Malcolm Lowry's work. Yet the scholarship applied to his work has left this fundamental aspect relatively unexamined, choosing instead to mirror the transcendent images and concepts that serve as a mask for the critique.

But styles and themes are precisely the areas that command the reader's attention, that are the dominating aspects of Lowry's writing. The values of ideologies, the eternal image, despair and resignation in confronting reality with art, permeate Under the Volcano in its attempts to transcend that which is being reified; to reify that which cannot be transcended.

As Theodor Adorno says:

In general, cultural critics become intoxicated with idols drawn from antiquity to the dubious, long-evaporated warmth of the liberalist era, which recalled the origins of culture in its decline. Cultural criticism rejects the progressive integration of all aspects of consciousness within the apparatus of material production. But because it fails to see through

the apparatus, it turns towards the past, lured by the promise of immediacy. This is necessitated by its own momentum and not merely by the influence of an order which sees itself obliged to drown out its progress in dehumanization with cries against dehumanization and progress. The isolation of the mind from material production heightens its esteem but also makes it a scapegoat in the general consciousness for that which is perpetuated in practice.... The cultural critic is barred from the insight that the reification of life results not from too much enlightenment but from too little, and that the mutilation of man which is the result of the present particularistic rationality is the stigma of the total irrationality.... That the fatal fragmentation of society might some day end is, for the cultural critic, a fatal destiny. He would rather that everything end than for mankind to put an end to reification.²

Central to Lowry's criticism of culture, as well as to its inadequacies, is the conflict that it contains regarding the nature of freedom (idealized as Life triumphing over Death), a conflict which enters into the novel at all levels,³ including the level at which the reader may be tempted to use the conveniences of Lowry's fictions as his own. Rationalized, this conflict can be seen in terms of the oppositions inherent between the "liberal imagination"⁴-- the longing to be "free" (independent in hope but removed from the contingencies of reality in actuality, and thus alienated), to do good (with its implications of evil and guilt), or to discover freedom and goodness-- and an apparent need for a universal order, a cosmic vision. Implicit in this conflict (this rationalization) is the transference of reality into symbolic modes and ironic projections as the central aspect (the central "reality") of experience in which reality and experience are placed in perspectives which condemn them forever to the limitations of those very modes and projections: in which the possibilities of freedom (the individual asserting his primacy in oppos-

ition to the repressions of society and culture) are swallowed up in an acquiescence to hermetic systems, self-imposed isolation, and ideologies.

Such an artist envisions a world of freedom, an abundant "heavenly city", just beyond his grasp and compared to which his own apparent world is an empty husk, a spiritual wasteland, devoid even of the agonies of hell, and in which, as Stephen Spender says, "he appears to be working in circumstances where he is not only solitary in his exceptional awareness of the human condition, but where he feels, it seems, alone in being alone."⁵ His goal, and his agony, is to re-form the world of which his protagonist is a microcosm; to charge objects and events with symbolic value in order to free them from the solitary confinement, the sterility, the alienation, in which they have apparently been placed. It is agony, because as microcosmic man, he must suffer for the world in order to free it.

This view is not only transcendental but represents an extreme organicism which is reflected in the concern with magic as a displacement for reason and in the images drawn from rationalized magic, such as the Cabbala. As Adorno puts it, "All specifically modern art can be regarded as an attempt to keep the dynamic of history alive through magic, or to increase the horror at the stasis to shock, to portray the catastrophe in which the ahistorical suddenly begins to look archaic."⁶

The complexities of the novel, however, do not derive so much from its paradigms of the occult or of freedom, but rather from the awareness of the author and his central protagonist, the Consul, that their definitions of freedom and form are paradigmatic: that

they fall short of the dream of freedom.

The Consul's agony, and his paralysis, his alienation, are derived in part from his awareness that he is role-playing, living an illusion -- but he refuses to surrender, or is unable to surrender, that illusion, choosing instead to drive himself magically, hopefully, finally even without hope, back into his illusions of affect, his dream world in which he is man at the center. Paradigms of form and freedom, magic hope versus fatalism, produce the agonies of bad faith which the author and his persona religiously translate into a mea culpa, a shroud of guilt that must (but paradoxically cannot be) expiated, in order to free themselves and the world. They recognize but seem unable to deal with the fact that the illusions of freedom, the transcendental visions which they open, will continually be re-formed back into prisons. This transcendental aspect of Lowry's work, in which life is lived at one remove from "nature" (and thus from the contingencies of reality) is central?

What is notable in this is the way Lowry's transcendental critique shifts the role of the suffering rebel as hero over to the marginal life of the helpless stranger. Helpless in the face of a reality at once brutal and all-pervasive, and frustrated in his attempts to "rediscover" a mythic past in which action was his to control or be a participant hero in, he is driven to the condemnation of culture in which existence is seen as a balancing act between the totalitarianism of the myth-maker (the shaman), the man of apocalyptic vision translated as eternal order (the totalitarianism of form); and the totalitarianism of existential man, "condemned to be free" to choose his own fate, but bound by the necess-

ity of choosing (the totalitarianism of chaos or the absurd). Both are merely alternative states of false consciousness. The avenues of escape (which is seen as necessary in order to isolate the self from the torments of the self and culture) are illusory -- magic power, ritualized religion and a denatured naturalism -- all become anagrams for death. The dialectic between freedom (posited as escape) and the imprisoning self (the dialectic of so-called "post-historic" man) is a false view of the dialectic of history.⁸ Reconciliation, coherence and the reification of the self become the positive resolution to which the only alternative is death. As Alfred Kazin says in this context,

The protagonist of middle-class literature ... naturally saw life as a struggle against convention. Under the slogan of nature as freedom and truth, man saw himself as a hero re-uniting man to the natural destiny of which he had been robbed by the gods. If there had been no profound tradition of repression, no moral code to bind us ... there would have been no guilt to suffer and no rebellion to honor. But the great human symbol of contemporary literature, I suggest, is no longer the rebel, since there is no authoritative moral tradition that he can honestly feel limits and hinders his humanity. It is the stranger -- who seeks not to destroy the moral order, but to create one that will give back to him the idea of humanity.⁹

Lowry is aware of this, but his solution is dualistic in his attempt to create a protagonist who is both suffering hero and marginal stranger. He attempts to recreate moral law and God through a fiction that incorporates the mythopoeic, the death of the "wise fool" (the Faustian striver), the "eternal return", combined in a naturalistic and supernatural context; all conditioned by an ironic awareness that these finally will not provide him with his lost humanity.

But Under the Volcano was initially hailed as a tour de force

because it seemed to be recreating for the reader an awareness of all that had been lost. The irony was overlooked, or perhaps was not totally intended, as Lowry indicates in his pre-publication letter to Jonathan Cape in which he suggests that some moral lesson is to be learned from the Consul's death, whose end points back to the beginning: "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."¹⁰ But the novel can only be read in terms of the Consul's (and generic Man's) heroic apotheosis if one forgets its denaturalized and dehumanizing aspects, or unless the moral is intended to be discovered by the reader through the reader's ability to negate what he has read.

Thus in the more "naturalistically" constructed novella "The Forest Path to the Spring",¹¹ we realize that the hero is only coming up against his own isolation and cannot be considered as a symbol (even ironically) for "the times". We realize in Under the Volcano that Lowry may be wanting us to draw cultural and spiritual values from both his symbols and their negations, but what we actually experience is simply the sense of negation of values. The "values" must be drawn from the ironies; the allegory is empty of meaning despite its surface richness, yet the allegory is all we can turn to in a search for affirmation. The implication of this is that culture, even if it is empty and valueless, is preferable to what Lowry sets up as the only alternative -- the silence of despair. Keep rereading the novel, keep spinning the wheel, keep

returning to the beginning, as Lowry's letter suggests, and presumably you will realize that "the universe is unfolding as it should". This is Lowry's real message -- not the affirmation of love and brotherhood -- but the iron necessity of acquiescing to the repressive "logic" of an either-or system: either death-dealing culture or death-seeking self, either art as all form and no content or the sound of one hand clapping, either control or madness, either the City of Dis (which will destroy you in its mechanisms) or a presumed paradise in the "wilderness" where after a while you can set up the machinery for destroying yourself.

If this is a "shamanistic journey" or Katabasis as one Jungian critic sees it,¹² are we all compelled to take it in order to come out the other side? One is tempted to say that such a truism would only apply to those who, like Lowry, are no longer capable of self-affirmation without the aid of a "forest of symbols". The obvious lesson that Lowry seems to have learned from Baudelaire is that only when you have reached, not a heightened spiritual level, but an exacerbated awareness of alienation and splintered "self", do the symbols come pouring in. And then you are going to construct a life out of them; you are going to "write" your life and not live it.¹³

It is easier to condemn culture than to resist it. That we are all Saturn's children teetering on the brink of his lip is bad news, but it is not new news, and to accept as good news the mystique of love reified in some other world is to accept a false view of the possibilities reality offers, a false escape. The peculiarity of Lowry's writing is his apparent recognition of the fals-

ity of this escape coupled with a despair at being able to do anything about the quandry in which he finds himself except to resign himself eventually to it. The impact of the images that he creates serves to deny the possibilities of the joyful experience of the senses as an aspect of one's bodily reality, or to view the body with horror as a degraded receptacle for "that part used to be call: soul" (p.5). Eros becomes the servant of the unreal. So while the central theme of Under the Volcano is stated as the destruction brought about by eros denied -- "no se puede vivir sin amar", its real center is eros mystified.

Footnotes -- Chapter I

¹ Hans Mayer, "Ionesco and Ideologies," Steppenwolf and Everyman, p.209.

² Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p.24. This book is invaluable for its various studies of cultural critics.

³ The term "levels" or "layers" permeates formalist and perspectivist writings on Lowry. Lowry himself preferred the word "plane". Critics have generally used the concept to exploit the novel in a way that serves their own needs.

⁴ The term is taken from the title of Lionel Trilling's, The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

⁵ Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1963), p.18.

⁶ Adorno, "Spengler after the Decline," Prisms, p.58.

⁷ See Lowry's letter to Downie Kirk in Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit & Margerie Bonner Lowry (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965, 1969), pp.208 passim. in which he discusses Ortega's Toward a Philosophy of History, quoting Ortega as saying: "Human life transcends the reality of nature....He makes it himself, beginning by inventing it.... Is human life in its most human dimension a work of fiction? Is man a sort of novelist of himself who conceives the fanciful figure of a personage with its unreal occupations and then, for the sake of converting it into reality, does all the things he does -- and becomes an engineer?" As Lowry says, "this makes life rather like fiction.... This probably recommends itself to me partly because if it is true, and man is a sort of novelist of himself, I can see something philosophically valuable in attempting to set down what actually happens in a novelist's mind when he conceives what he conceives...."

The sense that one gets from this is a passivity toward the "reality of nature". "Man is 'what has happened to him.'"

⁸ As opposed to, for instance, Marx and Engels' critique of ideologies in their essay on Feuerbach in The German Ideology: Part One, ed. and intro. C.J. Arthur (Surrey and London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970, originally written in 1846), in which they present a basis for a view of history based on "the existence of living human individuals." (p.42) Their "materialist method" offers a critique of ideological concepts of history that put the concept first. See also Hans Mayer's "Ionesco and Ideologies".

⁹ Alfred Kazin, "Psychoanalysis and Literary Culture Today," Contemporaries (Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1962), p.373.

¹⁰ Lowry, Letters, p.88. Also p.85 in the same letter, Lowry says "there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old Consul at the end...."

¹¹ Malcolm Lowry, "The Forest Path to the Spring," Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1961)

¹² Elvin Albaum, "La Mordida: Myth and Madness in the Novels of Malcolm Lowry," Dissertation Abstracts, 26(1971), 7315 (S.U.N.Y. Stony Brook).

¹³ That Lowry was aware of Baudelaire is indicated both in the novel and in his Letters in which he says (in the letter to Cape) "Life is a forest of symbols, as Baudelaire said, but I won't be told you can't see the wood for the trees here!" (p.78) He has been discussing the images of futility as projections of the Consul.

THE CRITICS

... every man to his own taste. --Did not Dr. Kunastrokius, that great man, in his leisure hours, take the greatest delight imaginable in combing of asses tails, and plucking the dead hairs out with his teeth, though he had tweezers always in his pocket?

Tristram Shandy,

It is to this mystification of experience in Lowry's work that scholarship has largely directed itself. His writings are a godsend to the kind of critic who does not want to be bothered with confronting art at the point where it challenges his own confrontation with reality. The repression of reality in Under the Volcano into allegory, symbol, hermetic form, grotesque images, parody, irony, itself indicates the center of Lowry's art is not to be touched except in the most reductivist or spiritualized forms.² Received notions, the cultural respectability of Clive Bell's "significant form", the concern for coherence, often tend to obscure the same kind of cultural despair in the critics that is in Lowry.

There is ranged throughout the whole body of critical work an unquestioning attitude toward whatever form the criticism itself takes; an attitude that ensures that the mysteries to be explored will remain mysterious, whether they are the mysteries of "form" or content, or the mysteries locked in one of the many "planes" of the novel that are there to be interpreted. Interpretation itself becomes a genuflection in the direction of "truth" that takes on all the aspects of a magic ceremony and ritual, extending but not re-

vealing the ones existing in the novel.

Indeed, the overwhelming emphasis on cult and "occult knowledge" in critical studies of Under the Volcano suggests, not only that there is a great deal of this going on at the surface, but that what is buried, imprisoned in the language by form and surface, is something the critic cannot or is unable to reveal. A sort of metaphysical criticism takes place that is aimed at exploring the given surfaces as if the novel were a new Book of Revelations; and it becomes difficult to tell if the critical competency is disguising religious fervor or cynicism.³

The critic is always "right" since this kind of criticism is a travesty of empirical processes in which the critic starts with his conclusions and effectively demonstrates how the novel as a "problem" coheres to them. The unquestioning acceptance (there is no attempt to undertake what Marcuse has called the "power of negative thinking"⁴) of attitudes as truths, on which the critic bases his argument is central to a way of living that Lowry himself was struggling to reveal as barren of all meaning; a life-"style" that holds experience at arms-length in its efforts to remain free -- and for free we may read "indifferent" -- from questions about values. Empiricism becomes a way of viewing art and history as a collection of dead "facts".

Reality for these critics is always "official",⁵ always received and always unquestioned. This reflects a competency of critical thought that misses the point because its direction is towards the fulfillment of competency. The critic forgets the "forgetful" condition involved in reading the novel, and so he forgets the struggle involved in recovering his lost memories. It is almost as

if competency is the justification for criticism, the "necessary" end. What this competency provides for the critic is certainly open to question. The whole body of Lowry criticism, from comparative studies, to exegetical analysis, to the time-serving pamphleteering⁶ resembles the same kind of positivism in science that Lawrence Sterne parodies in the figure of Dr. Kunastrokius, and disguises the same kind of nihilistic despair. The "given" pleasure of the good Doctor, who "forgets" about the existence of his tweezers at the precise moment when scientific contingency should remind him of them, is not merely an obscenity of taste. Sterne's scatological remarks and his ensuing digression on hobby-horses condemn scientific "objectivity" that pretends to avoid that by which it is most intrigued (the forbidden) for what it is: a parody of reason in which action and thought are removed from each other's sphere of experience even though that sphere is the same for both. Not only does this positivist methodology provide the critic with a dishonest view of his action, but it provides him with a dishonest view of himself, as objective, "uninvolved" observer. Thus he can equate the identification of the object with his mastery of it.

The convenience of Lowry's work for such critics is obvious, with its provision of a Baudelaireian "forest of symbols" so "labyrinthine" that almost endless examinations of "layers of meaning" can be brought forth, without the necessity of involving the tweezers. Yet these examinations touch only the surface of meaning, no matter at what level they appear to be dealing with the novel, if they are contained within the context of preconceived and unquestioned responses to art. If they accept as basic fact

the given forms, both of the work and of the critical method used, then they deal with art as its master. Such analysis always gives the appearance of being meaningful because it uses the accepted forms, the given tools of the critical tradition which have become part and parcel of culture in its broadest sense,⁷ but in which culture is never questioned as a central mode of repression, and art and criticism as a central means of opposing it.

Simon O. Lesser, in Fiction and the Unconscious, says:

The critic who tries to ignore the substance of literature and to discuss it in rigidly formal terms has fatally hamstrung himself. The ultimate rationale of the formal effects he takes note of will elude him: he may observe their inner consistency, but will not be able to account for their appropriateness. His work will suffer not only because it disregards the light that substance casts upon form but also because it blinds itself to the light form can cast upon substance, refusing to move ... from perceptions about imagery to deeper insights into character and motivation. By his very definition of the task of criticism the rigidly formal critic limits himself largely to cataloguing and comparing -- operations which may reveal his ingenuity and scholarship, but seldom deepen our understanding of literature.⁸

The acceptance of such givens (the labyrinth and the coherencies derived from it) combine to form what R.P Blackmur has called a "seemly obscurantism", a means for the mind "bent on protecting its certainty from its own restlessness and random anarchic promptings"⁹-- reality. A kind of smug "expertise", a literary in-group fan-dom,¹⁰ has arisen that relates to what Blackmur is saying. Thus Robert Heilman, writing in Canadian Literature, can say, "To have been an original admirer of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano, and to remain an admirer for almost a decade and a half, is very much like belonging to a semi-secret order".¹¹

This "semi-secret order", so akin to the mystic and mythic

quasi-religiosity that is a favorite topic for discussion among Lowry scholars, serves to keep the lid on things, to provide a private language of formal control that is not a revealing of sense but a means of maintaining a watch over it. Heilman's language (and he is not alone in this) suggests what the surface of Under the Volcano, but not the experience buried within, would suggest: we really do control the world through magic. For writing enters the sphere of magic control when its units of sense are rich in surface texture but devoid of content. Blackmur's "seemly obscurantism" becomes, he says, "the protection of something intolerably smothering", so that the retreat into the seemly discovers, "not reality, but some human idiopathic horror of it."

The way language is used by these critics is not only the subject of their scholarship, but is contained within it, so that words "fraught with meaning" are either reduced to banalities or elevated to the ranks of the spiritual, where they are apparently beyond the reach of further exploration. The mere naming of a thing seems to imply knowledge of it (the mystic power of the Word), a parody of all the neo-Platonic elements in Lowry's writings that Lowry himself parodies in Under the Volcano.¹²

Thus criticism extends metaphor by re-naming it in a complex game: these critics are the professionals of play.¹³ For while buried in literature there exists something at once compelling (the absent realities locked out by a repressive society¹⁴) and distracting (that which has become "intolerably smothering" -- history, to be lived out and through); this conflict that is at the very center of our experience of literature and that relates literature to reality is ignored when the images from which it is

formed are merely extended into a new set of images. Such methods, rather than experientially discovering reality, extend the surface of illusion. That creative action can occur magically is a popular element of contemporary culture,¹⁵ and to understand this helps to explain not only why Lowry is criticising culture, but what his critics are doing in their apotheosis through mystification of art.

Perle Epstein's study of images in The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry¹⁶ is a classic example of the way the critic positivistically adjusts his thinking to conform to the surfaces in order to affirm them, thus denying access to that which is authentic but which can only be authenticated, not through adjustment, but through the dialectic of experience.¹⁷ Her analysis, for example, of the Consul's death, is so mystifying that it appears that nobody dies, death merely being a conversion into an astral body that fits into the stock-pile of religious images that so intrigues her. It seems almost amazing as to how she so precisely misses the point, as this astral event (death) is wrung out for every drop that will match her own obsessional attachment to the image. Thus she can say of the Consul's dying that, "although he is deluded as to the actual events in the physical world where he is not being saved but lifted up to be cast down, on another level, perhaps, the Consul's soul has loosed itself from his tormented humanity and achieved a flash of enlightenment."¹⁸ One hopes to be protected from such enlightenment, since she makes the point about his delusion, and by a sort of force majeure turns it into an apotheosis. It's all just occurring on another "level", quite painlessly. That the novel can seriously be read this way indicates as much about Epstein's self-

conquest as much as it comments on the powers of the novel's images on the reader. Her obsessional attachment to the image not only denies access for herself, but avoids the implication that the obsessional is itself a crucial aspect of Lowry's critique of culture.

Malcolm's labyrinth is really no more "private" in the sense that Epstein describes it than is the nearest adequate public library. One can acquire technical knowledge of the Cabbala (she did) without becoming an adept just as one can read Yeats' A Vision for what it is -- a complex provider of images. If there is an authentic language in Yeats' poetry, the proof of its authenticity hardly lies in the arcane nonsense of A Vision, but in his poetry.¹⁹

Alex Comfort's distinction between "soft-centred" and "hard-centred" thinking is at the core of the distinction that I am trying to make between the surface images of Lowry's work and its underlying struggle for authenticity, and the way the critics have denied that very struggle. As Comfort says,

The hard-centred approach to an observed sequence of events, a "regularity of behaviour", is to assume, justifiably or not, that it can be "explained" -- that we can find out upon what the regularity depends. The soft-centred approach is to state the regularity, call it a law, a truth, or a spiritual reality, and treat these names as if they were explanations. Reverence is the soft-centred equivalent of curiosity.... If we are soft-centred, our reverence for the mystery may prevent us from guessing anything. We shall proceed in the expectation, and I think, the hope, that here at last, is something inherent, transcendent or supernatural; we shall be looking eagerly for the pretext to stop thinking.²⁰

Footnotes -- Chapter II

¹ Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Ian Watt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p.10. What Lowry does in the name of "learned wit" is not that far removed from what Sterne does.

² See Day's Malcolm Lowry, Kilgallin's Lowry, Epstein's The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry, Heilman, etc. (the list is in the bibliography), for examples of the applauding positivist and the objective formalist. Among the worst examples are William New's Malcolm Lowry and Daniel Dodson's Malcolm Lowry.

³ Undoubtedly the worst offender is Perle Epstein, in The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), about whom the notes on the author say she "firmly believes in the Cabbala." It is difficult to tell where her firm belief stops and her exploitation of the novel begins.

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, "Preface: A Note on Dialectic," Reason and Revolution (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1941, 1960), p.viii.

⁵ Jerald Zaslove, "Counterfeit and the Use of Literature," West Coast Review, 3, No.3 (1969), 5-19. Zaslove comments as follows:

Official versions of reality monopolize feeling, and language itself becomes incapable of expressing more than the obvious. In such a world the cliché as a unit of "sense" is at one level what the concentration camp as a unit of politics is at another level. Both manipulate language and reality to the point where the individual trying to express and live his own emotions finds himself internalizing experience which he feels ("incompetently" knows!) is not his own. (p.7)

⁶ Comparative, Richard H. Costa, "Lowry's Overture as Elegy," A Malcolm Lowry Catalogue, essays Perle Epstein and Richard Costa (New York: J. Howard Woolmer, 1968), 26-44.

Exegesis, Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1973). Also Epstein as quoted above.

Pamphleteering, William New, Malcolm Lowry, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971); Daniel B. Dodson, Malcolm Lowry, (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1970).

⁷ Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961, 1966), provides an interesting discussion of the ways in which society confirms its own modes of repression through culture. eg. "The Growth of Standard English" in which he discusses the successful attempt of the dominating "anxiously correct middle class" (p.223) to produce a "correct" or "good" English language from dialects. The chapter on "The Creative mind" examines the positivistic way such words as "creative" are used to describe values, without reference to the continuing alterations in the sense in which the word is used.

⁸ Simon O. Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious, pref. Ernest Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p.72-73. Oddly enough, Lesser is a formalist himself as he reveals in his devotion of a large section of the book to various problems of "form" and its consoling nature for the psyche.

⁹ R.P. Blackmur, Eleven Essays in the European Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p.82. Also quoted by Zaslove in "Counterfeit and the Use of Literature" cited above.

¹⁰ Adorno, Prisms, in his essay "Perennial Fashion -- Jazz", reminds us that "fan" is short for "fanatic" (p.123). The implications of fanaticism among critics reveal how the critic becomes attached to the object that he claims he is being objective about.

¹¹ Robert B. Heilman, "The Possessed Artist and the Ailing Soul," Canadian Literature, No.8 (Spring 1961), 7-16, p.7.

¹² There will be further discussion of this in my chapter on "style". R.P. Blackmur defines parody in his essay on Mann's Doctor Faustus in the work cited above as follows:

Parody is something sung beside the main subject. Parody is not caricature, not satire: it is a means of treating reality so as to come short of it either on purpose or through necessity. Parody emphasizes mechanics, especially prescriptive mechanics in executive techniques, and greedily fastens on the merest possibilities in the material. In our day, every man is a parody of his moral self. (p.110)

In Lowry it becomes the recognition of the Ideal, in which the Ideal is parodied through the dualistic view he provides; a kind of Manichean heresy, which also becomes the subject for the parody.

¹³ See Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950, 1963), p.213, on play and the "commodity producing nature" of "professional play".

¹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Lowry, and for example, Hermann Hesse regained popularity as chiliastic and apocalyptic belief and an interest in the occult were renewed as aspects of "popular" culture. The generalized schizoid condition of society living through its apocalypse hungers longingly for the strength provided by the magician.

¹⁶ cited above, note 3, p.22.

¹⁷ Marcuse, Reason and Revolution.

¹⁸ Epstein, The Private Labyrinth, p.214 passim.

¹⁹ Alex Comfort, Darwin and the Naked Lady (New York: G. Braziller, 1962), discusses Yeats' A Vision as follows: Yeats made a

... growing discovery of re-occurring symbols that he saw as linking his mind with the "mind of the world". Like pseudo-sciences they became ideés fixés by selecting coincidences. These discoveries upset him ... He could neither explain them away nor leave them as intuitions. If the idea of endless recurrence which he found outcropping repeatedly in his own mind was echoed again and again elsewhere, it must represent not only a repeated human conviction but the secret truth about history: an excited search of the record produced, as it always does in such circumstances, passable confirmation. We can watch the original sense of pattern growing into a soft-centred hypothesis. p.15 passim.

²⁰ ibid. p.4 passim.

STYLE

"Everything is to be found in Peter Rabbit," the Consul liked to say -- (p. 175)

What both attracts and denies access to these critics of the "imagined world" is style, the metaphor through which content acts but which, as surface, stands as a barrier to the discovery of "meaning". Harold Rosenberg defines style as "the irreducible plus that separates a work of art from the universe of things."¹ Operating as the borderline where Lowry rejects the world of things for his personalized images of the world, style in Under the Volcano dominates. It is, to refer to Blackmur, that "seemly" surface that becomes "the protection of something intolerably smothering". To penetrate style as surface, to see through the style, laden as it is with what seems to be a triumph of metaphor² over reality, the reader must refer himself to the historic context of this style, and must be aware that style can have its own meaning, can be a means of discovering content.

Further, style can challenge the reader's own experience of himself as the powers of convention in art forms (the form he has come to expect) are used in Under the Volcano and at the same time are presented for what they are -- cultural packages, containers -- and are thus rejected or "degraded". That these packages might be functioning outside of convention is what the critics seem to have ignored. Yet used as containers, they ultimately comment on the culture of which they are a product. That is, style itself is a conceptual aspect that comments on the nature of reality, as a

critique of culture, and as an individual mode of expression through which the artist realizes his experience of himself (interiorized) and his relationship with culture. As Lukacs comments in Realism in Our Time,

The distinctions that concern us are not those between stylistic "techniques" in the formalistic sense. It is the view of the world, the ideology or weltanschauung underlying a writer's work, that counts. And it is the writer's attempt to reproduce this view of the world which constitutes his "intention" and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing. Looked at this way, style ceases to be a formalistic category. Rather, it is the specific form of a specific content.³

What examinations of "formal" aspects of the novel indicate is the way stylization can triumph over meaning. The formal critic is blind to this even though (or perhaps because) it is so central to what Under the Volcano is about. For them, style is seen outside of its particular content, and is viewed in culturally approved forms -- philology, aesthetics, religion -- that are blind to the wider implications of style. Further, critical commentary that is maintained on one formal level serves to deny, not only other "levels", but the "specific content", and at the same time delivers the novel over to whatever aspect the critic finds acceptable. This not only denies the novel its validity as a mode of expression but denies the critic what he himself is experiencing at a level that becomes, logically enough, "hidden" from himself.

Such critical techniques "distance" the novel, extend the metaphor rather than reveal it. And by distancing they alienate the reader not only from the novel, the object, but from himself,

in a technique that places art at the level of a surplus commodity transaction. This view "frees" the critic from the style by turning the object into a fetish, but in doing so, the whole impact of the peculiarly "stylized" nature of this novel is lost, for it fails to see that Lowry is turning the conventions of style back upon themselves. His style not only provides a view of the "great tradition" from the other side of Alice's mirror, but is a parody and critique⁴ of, not just a stylized art form (a "self-conscious" style) but a stylized view of a stylized world. It involves both the surreal and the expressionistic in its attempts both to parody the internalized world by projecting it as an image that fluctuates between the realistic and the denatured, and to transcend the parodied image that it has created. Andre Breton's Surrealist dictum that "Living and ceasing to live are imaginary solutions -- existence is elsewhere"⁵, is confronted with the anxiety of an artist who hopes that the dictum is true, but is aware that it is not.

Such a view is neither tragic⁶ nor ironic, but grotesque. It plays on the reader's own insecurity through the use of literal images as puns (eg. the "stool pigeon", the "cave of the winds") that may imply some "higher" symbolic value, but only at the expense of their value as jokes. But at the same time the joke disguises the forbidden image in order to present it and to control it. Alternatively the forbidden act or image is disguised as high melodrama. But in either case there is the sense of the artist keeping an anxious watch over his material. The way "nature" or reality is represented in Under the Volcano disturbs the consensus of modes that underlies conventional representations in such a way that those

conventions are invalidated, destroyed. The image fluctuates not only between the internal and the external, between the real and the dream, but between past, present, and future time. Lowry shows the imagination as working both sides of the street, as it were, and the middle as well. The "illusion" is intended to provide at one and the same time the image of the real and the unreal.

In an example of a conventional reading that reveals how the image confuses at the same time as it focusses on what is occurring, David Markson, in "Myth in Under the Volcano"⁷, says, "... in a subtle but inescapable manner the entire narrative is meant to be seen as unreal." Yet the words "subtle" and "unreal" can only apply if the novel is read in the context of the conventions of the "naturalistic" or "realistic" novel forms, for the "unreal" is being questioned by the novel as well as the "real". One suspects that it is this unreality that Markson finds attractive, that defines the contours of the novel for him, so that his own anxiety as to what is real or unreal will not need to be explored. Myth provides him with a culture dominated "reality" (form) to which he can submit, and it becomes a virtual self-contradiction for him to go on to say that "Under the Volcano is a Joycean work in the strictest sense of the adjective -- in fact, in the Finnegan's Wake sense, of all-embracing, mythic evocation." Joycean myth is a "real" form that denies access to the question that he has raised about the nature of the "unreal". Thus he turns from what could have led to a "hard-centred" insight to the "soft-centred" language of convention and assent. He sees and yet cannot "explain" that Lowry has shifted the mimetic conventions of reality not merely to

rewrite myth, but in a desperate attempt to focus on a new view of reality that can contain both the naturalistic and the sense of unreality contained within his image of the naturalistic-- the way his image of nature is confronted by his sense of reality, of what is real. It is a means of grappling for a new sense of reality that will meet his need to show time present and to prophecy time to come.⁸

Critics like Markson become the prisoners of style to a far greater extent than Lowry is imprisoned by language and the personalized images that become his style. Markson's submission to the authority of style is a necessary aspect of the positivism of his critical technique, but at the same time it indicates the extent to which he has become a willing prisoner of culture. He presents a sham interpretation under the authority of form that side-steps the question of myth under the guise of pretending that an evocation of Joyce dissolves the question. What the critic describes as "unreal" is really the struggle against the obliterating (for the writer) coherence of "all embracing mythic evocation". The struggle is "unreal" because it does not consent to surface; or where it does consent it is treated either as parody or obsession. And those areas in which it does consent, the very fact of surrender is as revealing of the repressive nature of culture as is the struggle not to submit.

The blind search for expression reveals the bars of the prison (like the discovery of the walls of Plato's cave) in the way it shows the impoverishment of the writer's in-"sight" into the reality of the prison that has stolen his sight. His insight, that

with which he incompetently opposes the culturally imposed reality, is in conflict with a whole host of conditions and systems that claim to be the totality of experience, and that claim him for themselves. None of the cultural "conditions" imposed on this writer seem as real as his inner experience, but they demand access, and it is as surface and form that they receive it. But Lowry is a rebellious servant of culture and the form that "must" be the way it is because that's the way it has to be,⁹ the extreme organicism, can be seen as destructive of "mythic evocation", epic¹⁰ or allegory. The tension between the mimetic aspects as a symbolic or expressionistic art form (the hopefully culturally acceptable) and the fugitive elements that deride them (the negation of form and styles through the excessive use --abuse -- of form and styles) provides the arena in which the perhaps unwitting rebellion against styles can take place.

Style, then, becomes at one and the same time a forum for the critique of culture and a surrender to it. We can see how form is the stylized ritual of myth and allegory, and not merely the "consolation" that formalists such as Kermode and Lesser¹¹ see it as. It is an attempt to integrate the dissociated relationship between self and object through technique back into the "real". At the same time however, it is doing battle with those consolations in a style that is anything but consoling: the style shifts and parodies itself, it contains its images and scatters them, it stereotypes men into "everyman" at the same time as it places symbolic value in the stereotypes of commodity culture (advertisements, radio, films, comic books, posters). Finally, what could be described as "characters" (in the sense used in the genre of the realistic

novel) become interchangeable with and at the same time alienated from the landscape through which they move like figures in a nightmare.

To quote Lowry, who is one of his own most prolific critics,

Under the Volcano

... is hot music, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce, and so forth. It is superficial, profound, entertaining and boring, according to taste. It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall. It can even be regarded as a sort of machine

This novel then is concerned principally, in Edmund Wilson's words ... with the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself. It is also concerned with the guilt of man, with his remorse, with his ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past, and with his doom. The allegory is that of the Garden of Eden, the Garden representing the world....¹²

But to connect these disparate images through clock-work time (the mechanistic aspect and at the same time the mechanics of the novel) as message, and to integrate this message with the message provided by the allegory competes with the quality of the pastiche¹³ or collage that is obtained by the dispersal of the images, and reveals the conflict between the catatonic and the schizophrenic, between the ritual of stasis and the ritual of incessant motion that carries man, not up to heaven or down to hell, but merely back and forth and from side to side. To read the book as an allegory is a sort of faux frais which one must pay in order to enter this museum of the mad: it belongs with all of the other "stuff" of culture that is in there to provide images between the writer and the empty world; to make "things" (conditions) real by reincarnating the Time Before the temps perdu. To read it and believe in its

allegorical possibilities, as its author apparently wishes us to do, is to acquiesce to form as an authority without challenging the way it is used. In Under the Volcano form is used as a sort of watchful "father", a novelistic super-ego placed there to control the disintegrating (and therefore in terms of the Father, disintegrative), chthonic, "daemonic" and subversive elements that outside the context of the obsession for control would represent liberation, but in that context indicate the struggle for and denial of liberation. Read only as allegory, the novel becomes a cautionary tale on the nature of evil and bad thoughts in which fantasies of destruction and sexuality and the guilt they incur must be seen as some generalized condition of "fallen" humanity. Fate and destiny, now that God is dead, rule in a "universe concentrationnaire".¹⁴ Fate and destiny are the new puppeteers who rule us all from within, and "we" the typological characters in the allegory, are the puppets, doomed by our pseudo-Promethean naughtiness, to be returned eternally to the box-full of the playthings of Fate.

The positivism engendered by reading a novel as a kind of exercise in Medieval Schoolmanship can be seen in Tony Kilgallin's study of Under the Volcano, of which a quote from a small part will more than do justice to the whole:

In Under the Volcano, initially the Inferno novel of a planned Dantesque trilogy, Lowry set out to parallel not only Dante's structural and thematic descent into hell, but, to a lesser degree, his quadrivial layers of meaning: the literal meaning of the story itself, the allegorical meaning involving its application to world history and man's social and political behaviour, the tropological meaning signifying more specifically individual moral behaviour, and the anagogical meaning which involves a mystical

or spiritual application.¹⁵

Kilgallin's fascination with Lowry's ability to synthesize all those images into a neat little parallelogram of words disguises the terror that exists with the images that Lowry might be unable to synthesize them, a terror that supercedes descends into geometric hells, a terror that is the obsessional, personal voice speaking out through and from under the formula. Kilgallin, as if performing an exercise in squaring the circle, magically takes all the terror away with his invisible ink of "systematized" knowledge, turning the novel into a treatise on the philosophy of religion. What this modern "Thomist" fails to realize is that his ordering of the novel is a means of control that denies access to the way the novel represses experience through analogy and the use of allegory. This exegetical ordering elevates insight to the level of a mystique through its use of clearly defined "layers" of meaning in a way that accepts order as a substitute for experience. And this can only be at the expense of denying Lowry's obsessive awareness of form and his sense of the dangers involved in becoming too attached to the image.¹⁶

One way to read the novel is to observe how analogues of experience fail both as a means of confronting reality and as a means of conditioning the images of reality so that they service our expectations -- the fatalism which I am describing. To systematize "works", and then to apply the system to the novel is as much of a tribute to Lowry's awareness of the pathological effects of civilization in conditioning people to accept systems of which they are both the masters and the slaves (modern mythologies), as it is a

condemnation of the educated mind that knows how to systematize but not why: that systematizing reifies the torture of the individual.

Within the novel allegory, myth, symbol are open to parody and critique. M. Laruelle, who, like Alice's Chesire cat, isn't always where he seems to be, says to the Consul, "Je crois que le vautour est doux a Prometheus et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers." The image of suffering Prometheus is undercut -- "It's too easy".¹⁷ Not only does the undercutting reveal man fallen from his mighty pretemporal state of grace through agony, man "alone, cut off from God"; but it also reveals Lowry saying that the disenfranchisement of man's search for liberation occurs when he is presented with a spurious license combined with the ballot box. And the guilt lies in these parodied images, lies in the "softness" of modern suffering revealed in Lowry's parodies of the heroic pretemporal sufferers. In the search for consolation and surrender that he presents as the alternative to heroic agony, no-one knows who the real rulers are, because there are no heroic, masterful figures in Lowry's created world to which his characters can submit themselves -- only "Moctezuma on the bottle." Lowry's continual parody of the image relates to the confusion he sees in modern attempts to equate mythic heroism with contemporary figures: Hitler as merely a black magician, or an artist with a murderer's hands. Without the heroic master, the daily surrender to the gangster and the provocateur goes unnoticed alongside of a surrender of the self to the "inner" masters. This is the modern anaesthetized version of damnation:

"... You've even been insulated from the responsibility

of genuine suffering ... Even the suffering you do endure is largely unnecessary. Actually spurious. It lacks the very basis you require of it for its tragic nature. You deceive yourself." (p.219)

Borges, in "Kafka and his Precursors", comments on one of Kierkegaard's religious parables as follows:

The subject of the ... parable is the North Pole expeditions. Danish ministers had declared from their pulpits that participation in these expeditions was beneficial to the soul's eternal well-being. They admitted, however, that it was difficult, and perhaps impossible, to reach the Pole and that not all men could undertake the adventure. Finally, they would announce that any trip -- from Denmark to London, let us say, on the regularly scheduled steamer -- was, properly considered, an expedition to the North Pole.¹⁸

The recognition of guilt and emptiness that spurious action produces along side of "moral well-being" in attempting to live out the parable of heroic action is similar to the "allegorical" implications in Under the Volcano, in which the images hover between the profound and the ridiculous.

Allegory and mythology¹⁹ are the rationalized versions of repression, the "super-ego" of culture: they represent the guilty "I" imposing its guilt (in encompassing the universal) on society in order to incorporate it as the guilty "we". The individual becomes "man" and the repressed memory of pleasure enjoyed by the child ("Paradise Lost") becomes the primal sin that the allegorist commits us all to having performed, and in whose name he permits us all to be punished. The allegorical style reveals all its characters as undifferentiated, as an autarchic subjectivity that must submit to its "authoritarian" self. With this in mind we see that it is not for nothing that Lowry uses as an epigram a selection on guilt from Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of

Sinners. What it suggests is that redemption will come through the self-punishment involved in writing Under the Volcano, as Lowry transfers his guilt onto the universal "mankind".

But the two-faced nature of allegory is that by condemning and repressing the body it reminds us that we have and are bodies, just as the allegorical obsession with form recalls for us the amorphous and suggests the loss of control over form. The paranoid and autarchic nature of the allegorist lies in his sense of control and fear of being controlled by which he hopes to gain control over his audience and the external world. Belief in control allows him to tell himself that it is more comforting for us to believe than to be reminded of the nameless, the formless, the autonomous potency of the self or what the self has surrendered.

That allegory extends itself in this way into the absurd and destructive, that it becomes self-parodying within the novel, is an aspect of the disjunctive sense that Under the Volcano presents to the reader, an aspect that the formalist critic cannot see because he cannot see the way style comments negativistically on itself. The critic is Kierkegaard's Danish minister clothed in critical drag. Kierkegaard presented a critique of culture attempting to hold back the absurd in a way that revealed the absurd. Lowry's allegory reveals the character "everyman" (the character who incorporates the whole) as the characteristic of every man who is incorporated by the whole; a character whose "wholeness" is flattened by the repressive nature of "style" in the same manner that the individual is flattened by the repressive nature of his culture. When Hugh has "another shot at San Antonio" (p.153), he is not only

tuning in the radio but being condemned as one of St. Anthony's torturers; and as well the act is self-condemnatory, self-accusatory, because he retains his guilty inactivity in his head instead of promoting heroic activity in the world. Hugh, as an individual, becomes an allegorical figure, who, through the conventions of "stream of consciousness" technique, is combined with the "repressed" character. But the responsibility for both his allegorical nature and his character resides in Lowry's interpretation of the conditions that reality imposes. Hugh's "guilt" is both symbolical and individual, but even in this most "personalized" section of the novel, the effect is one of parodying the nature of "character"²⁰ by betraying the individual to the general: that reveals not only Lowry's search for an "absolute reality" of forms in the images of allegory, but his insight into the way the individual depersonalizes himself in his search for those images.

In the flattening of character, the novel itself becomes the character. The individual, now a piece of "everyman", becomes a "personality", a citified, world-wandering one-dimensionalized man whose "flatness" becomes a critique of civilization as juggernaut; whose world-wandering becomes, not a search for "freedom", which the terms of the novel deny him, but a search for identity. Loss of the bourgeois protagonist's "right" to be an individual and hence his right to be alienated as a "sign" of freedom is replaced, in the typology of character, by the "found" personality (self-consciously recognized as not the "right" identity) of the stylized role. Individuals are revealed as objects in a surrealist painting, stock pieces in a costume melodrama, or, to the autarchic eye, "creatures" -- demi-urges -- that confirm for "us", not only

our madness and alienation, but the fear, too, that we are not looking at a picture, but a mirror. "Everyman" is victimized by the autarchic shift from the individual to the universal, a shift that is both promoted and condemned. The Consul is destroyed because of his deluded desire to see the "Indians" as demi-urges, figures merely interacting between the "ideal" world and the world of material things, who turn out to be very real. Yet he too must carry the burden of a role as "chief of sinners" with the suggestion that with his death Adam is no longer in Paradise "-- for long after Adam had left the garden the light in Adam's house burned on" (p.22). He adopts his Consular role when he finds a need for an identity, just as Hugh adopts the role of "professional indoor Marxman", and their guilt revolves around the very "flatness" of their role-playing. But this is a condition of the novel which is an attempt to contain the world in its images, and not a necessary condition of the world. It is a way of commenting on the conditions of the world.

As a critique, this typologizing of individuals is verified as an aspect of the "authoritarian personality", which turns not only the "others" but the self into a type as a means of control. Adorno, in his study of "Types and Syndromes" in The Authoritarian Personality, comments on stereotyping as follows:

Individualism, opposed to inhuman pigeonholing, may ultimately become a mere ideological veil in a society which actually is inhuman and whose intrinsic tendency towards the "subsumption" of everything shows itself by the classification of people themselves. In other words, the critique of typology should not neglect the fact that large numbers of people are no longer, or rather never were, "individuals" in the sense of traditional nineteenth-century philosophy. Ticket thinking is possible only

because the actual existence of those who indulge in it is largely determined by "tickets", standardized, opaque, and overpowering social processes which leave to the "individual" but little freedom for action and true individuation. Thus the problem of typology is put on a different basis.²¹

So Lowry's use of the typological figures as an aspect of allegory can be seen as revealing the "ideological veil" that masks "ticket thinking" as an aspect of "overpowering social processes". The standardizing processes that produce the "type" integrate with the modernist myth in such a way that the struggle of the individual for liberty is necessarily diverted to a anguished struggle for identity. The "typological figure" wishes to sort himself out from the herd, and his only means of doing so is to estrange himself or to identify himself with a different herd.

Descriptions in the novel of the way characters dress, pose, the things they carry, "characterize" them not only for the reader, but for themselves. Yet each character is aware of the spurious nature of this "identity". "Identity" is a disposable or interchangeable mask or uniform that disguises their "inner self", not only from others but from themselves.²² The Consul is murdered, and mythological guilt apportioned, in a large part because Hugh has earlier borrowed the Consul's disguise. Mistaken identity that results in death has come about as the result of mistaken and misplaced things through which identities are defined. Characters defined as things or objects simply become doubles for one another as their masks are interchanged.²³

This personification of the thing that is interchangeable with the thing-like quality of persons, moves the style of the novel away from the allegorical into that of the dream. The phantasies

of terror, the disjunctive nature of the surreal, the machine-like (thing or object) world is combined with the expressionistic whose literary forebearer is in Mannerism²⁴ and whose central characteristics are the distortion of classical modes, complexity of form and image, and tension. The central images of the novel are the masks (disguise), the motifs of death and the liebstd, that become images of mystery and terror; that signify individual and social loss of identity. The allegorical and the mythological become a part of the struggle against nihilistic despair, in which the hermetic struggles with the expressionistic, the closed with the open: in which, as Hauser says of the dual nature of surrealism, the reader has the "sense of having one foot in each of two worlds, in one of immediate experience which is naturalistically representable, and at the same time in another, which is visionary, and therefore capable at most of being hinted at by sensual means."²⁵

Style as heroic spokesman reveals the struggle for identity of the self that is terrified by what it might find in the real, yet is equally terrified by the quality of the "unreal" in which it seems to exist. The objects of both the real and illusory worlds against which the Consul attempts to define himself constantly shift and interchange, time is distorted and images repeat themselves but in a way in which their qualities and values are never quite the same. It is both his fear and hope that the very objective world through which he would define himself does not exist. The world is unreal -- "'Yes, I can see,' he said, only he couldn't see, only hear, the droning, the weeping, and feel, feel, the unreality" (p.197); or too real -- "How loath-

some, how incredibly loathsome was reality" (p.207). Feelings become embodied, as in the Consul's hallucinations, "the uncontrollable mystery on the bathroom floor" (p.146), and bodies, as in a dream, become disembodied: "M. Laruelle wasn't there at all; he had been talking to himself" (p.219). And sometimes the unreal and the real are revealed as doing battle that is edifying to the helpless self only as unmitigated, brute terror:

The Consul imagined he still heard the music of the ball, which must have long since ceased.... It was doubtless the almost tactile absence of the music however, that made it so peculiar the trees should be apparently shaking to it, an illusion investing not only the garden but the plains beyond, the whole scene before his eyes, with horror, the horror of an intolerable unreality. This must be not unlike, he told himself, what some insane person suffers at those moments when sitting benignly in the asylum grounds, madness suddenly ceases to be a refuge and becomes incarnate in the shattering sky and all his surroundings in the presence of which reason, already struck dumb, can only bow the head. Does the madman find solace at such moments, as his thoughts like cannonballs crash through his brain, in the exquisite beauty of the madhouse garden or the neighbouring hills beyond the terrible chimney? Hardly, the Consul felt.

p.75

In this style reality is always open to question through the very negation of the stereotyped external conditions we impose on reality. As Hauser says:

The rule of metaphorism and metamorphism prevails ... everywhere, and everything lives and moves but is threatened with collapse, for there are no firm foundations. Art expresses itself in riddles and paradoxes more mysterious than ever; once more the object is to say everything in as difficult, allusive, and devious a way as possible, in order to avoid banality of expression and make its appreciation more dynamic by increasing the tension present in all artistic experience. 26

The hermetic, teleological and parabolic aspects of the allegory no longer service culture by providing the individual with an ex-

ternalized vision of universal mysteries, but at once constrain and explode his vision in a way that makes such visions of the external both terrifying and banal.

"The hermetic principle is that of completely estranged subjectivity",²⁷ so that the objects of the world, to the allegorized individual, are seen on the inner eye in whatever associations that "estranged subjectivity" produces. They are no longer objects, but the enclosed subjects that fit monotonously, over and over again, to the point where their allegorical value is sabotaged by the absurd, even as their value as objects has been sabotaged.

The Consul was gazing upward dreamily at the Ferris wheel near them, huge, but resembling an enormously magnified child's structure of girders and angle brackets, nuts and bolts, in Meccano; to-night it would be lit up, its steel twigs caught in the emerald pathos of the trees; the wheel of the law, rolling; and it bore thinking of too that the carnival was not going in earnest now. What a hulla-baloo there would be later! His eye fell on another little carrousel, a dazzle-painted wobbling child's toy, and he saw himself as a child making up his mind to go on it, hesitating, missing the next opportunity, and the next, missing all the opportunities finally, until it was too late. p.218

Each objective image is internalized as Kierkegaard's "objectless inwardness",²⁸ a totality of "estranged subjectivity" because it fills the "objectless" inner space absolutely with objects transformed as abstractions, ideas; and at the same time it can be seen as the internal state of being, feelings, objectified. As Adorno says, "Again and again, the space-time continuum of 'empirical realism' is exploded through small acts of sabotage, like perspective in contemporary painting"²⁹

But what had happened then? "Oh," the Consul cried aloud again. "Oh." The faces of the last hour hovered before him, the figures of Hugh and Yvonne and Dr. Vigil moved quickly and jerkily now like those

of an old silent film, their words mute explosions in the brain. Nobody seemed to be doing anything important, yet everything seemed of the utmost hectic importance p.141

The mechanics of the clock-time chapter divisions match the hermetic nature of the allegory even as they are intended to assist in establishing the "eternal re-occurrence", the cosmic "wheel of the law", which is itself a mechanism; style as well as image revealing world history as the "infernal machine", a film projector that re-runs world-history as a sort of monstrous grand guignol, a bad joke:

"And the same features come back over and over again. Cimarron and The Gold Diggers of 1930 and oh -- last year we saw a travelogue, Come to Sunny Andalusia, by way of news from Spain --" p.110

This "clock time" mechanism is broken by the mechanics of the collage of images within the novel, so that the style becomes like a machine gone mad, internalized, fatalistic; the machinery of fate in the subjective apocalypse that behaves like the random "junk machine" sculptures of artists such as Tinguely.³¹ Again the style presents a critique of itself, for if the universe is a machine, it is random, absurd, and may very likely destroy itself if tampered with:

Yet who would ever have believed that some obscure man, sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts, was authoring their doom, that, even while he was thinking, it was as if behind the scenes certain strings were pulled, and whole continents burst into flame, and calamity moved nearer -- . . . Or perhaps it was not a man at all, but a child, a little child, innocent as that other Geoffrey had been, who sat as up in an organ loft somewhere playing, pulling out all the stops at random, and kingdoms divided and fell, and abominations dropped from the sky -- p.146

The universe is Rube Goldberg plumbing, with the nastiness of all those "abominations" dropping onto the disbelievers, set into action by the obscure and innocent.

The images of the universe as a machine gone out of control reflect both the despair of "objectless inwardness" and the recognition that internalizing the universe is inaccurate. There is a conflict between the fatalism of the "writer as a novelist of himself", the internalizing, and the recognition that the object world exists not merely as a whim of his own mind (the "power" of autism). Yet because Lowry does recognize the problem he provides a kind of dialectic that involves subject and object. Lukacs has called this duality "modernism" and "realism" -- "abstract potentiality" and the "concrete potentiality of human beings in extreme situations".³² Modernism for Lukacs is a condition of ontological solitariness, which "implies, not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself; but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence."³³ As he explains further,

Abstract potentiality belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity; whereas concrete potentiality is concerned with the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality. The literary presentation of the latter thus implies a description of actual persons inhabiting a palpable, identifiable world ... But the ontology on which the image of man in modernist literature is based invalidates this principle. If the "human condition" -- man as a solitary being, incapable of meaningful relationships -- is identified with reality itself, the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality becomes null and void.³⁴

Lowry's writing is in that void. It is the abyss between the object and "objectless inwardness" that not only resembles the

"ontological solitariness" of the modern,³⁵ but, to use Comfort's terminology again: it indicates a surrender to a concept of "human nature" at its most "soft-centred" -- a schizophrenic condition of life lived, not in nature, but as "second nature". "Modernism" as the ideology of the writer relates to style in the way experience becomes a secondary concern: the structuring of reality into formal qualities seems primary. As Lukacs says of Kafka, "The realistic detail is the expression of a ghostly unreality, of a nightmare world, whose function is to produce angst."³⁶

Modernism becomes a ritualization through various motifs of style (dissociation, association, inner monologue, montage, contemporary events glued against a flat background, shifts from "high" to "low" writing style, hermetic allusions), of the events and artifacts of the individual and culture. History, art, culture, nature, are packaged as artifact, museum-like, removed from the real world into the "dead past" in which the novel is placed. Eclecticism overwhelms itself ("... the eclectic systeme is perhaps un poco descompuesto ..." p.144) -- there are too many wheels, and the effect is like visiting too many museums, or reading too many of the Consul's travel brochures. For example:

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. p.280

The reader may be intended to see this image as a tragic symbol of the past and present, as historical and psychological symbolism, but the effect is not even pathetic. The futility that is woven

into the images, the fatalism of the overview of allegory, causes the reader to see the "burdens" merely as more packages, things before which we are intended to become helpless or indifferent, as "things" in a universe of things are opaque and inaccessible, there only to invoke the "objectless inwardness". The reader is a tourist, condemned by the artist as one of those "vandals in sandals looking at the murals", condemned to be "like" the author's characters, because the reader is required to see everything in terms of a fetish, as the characters are, in order to promote the author's belief in the "higher man". Cultural and philosophical anthropology searching for a soul.

The author's attempt to sabotage both culture and the reader through style is oddly dualistic, as if Lowry himself is not certain whether the Quixotic is meant to negatively "affirm" the heroic ideal ("look at what we have lost"); whether style reflects culture and can be used to parody it, so through excessive techniques of the style the excesses of modern culture can be exposed. But the ritual of repetition and re-occurrence is meant to hint at a pre-cultural, pre-conscious "mystery", the way the fetish, the attachment to the substitute object or "double", is intended to recall the real object magically. As Roheim says, "The repetition compulsion keeps us true to ourselves and prevents the loss of our infantile introjects or love objects."³⁷ The concretizing of emotions in objects, the montage and the apparent randomness of collage is actually highly organic: it resembles the "logic" of magical or schizophrenic thinking, an autarchic "magical principle" that deals with the world outside as if it were governed by our wishes or drives or emotions."³⁸ The "randomness" of pastiche or

collage is actually an integrative process, a ritual that builds up tension between the obviously observable relationship between images and the "hidden" relationships. The relationship of the technique employed by Lowry to cinematic technique, for example, can be seen in the way the "images" in a film build up tension in the viewer because they are really a series of still pictures being viewed very rapidly -- the tension of nothing happening versus everything happening at once that occurs in Under the Volcano.

In one of Lowry's letters regarding Under the Volcano he writes

Should you hold to the Bergsonian idea that the sense of time is merely an inhibition to prevent everything happening at once -- brooding upon which it is pretty difficult to avoid some notion of eternal recurrence -- inevitable destruction is thus simply the teleological end to one series of possibilities; everything hopeful is equally possible; the horror would seem to exist in the possibility that this is no longer true in our plane and absolute catastrophe has fallen in line with our will upon so many planes that even the other possibilities are for us gradually ceasing to exist.³⁹

This statement not only is evocative of the magical principle but projects that principle as a need for, and the possibility of, control over eternity and time (recurrence and teleology). The way images relate to one another temporally not only provides the basis for a critique of "the drunken madly revolving world" (p.194), but suggests Lowry's obsession with his own repetition-compulsion that is supported by his "brooding" over the "Bergsonian" sense of time. His critique of the autarchic, as revealed in the destructive nature of the autarchic images, veils his own introjection in the frontier he creates from philosophical concepts that avoid experience by universalizing it. Lowry's style can be said to be the "heroic" subjective in his struggle to surrender (sacrifice) the control of

his image to the reader.

The problem of the autarchic writer is that "subjectivism" is only a highly controlled use of the object, in this case, the structuring of images in writing. If the subjectivism is to mean anything the object must be shared, sacrificed, or there is no purpose to it, no temptation. Dadaist writing, for example, at the limits of "total" subjectivity, converted itself to the pictographic or the surreal in its search for an audience.⁴⁰ The style of the novel thus becomes concerned with an obsession for control over the images created from language in order to retain them, coupled with a need to sacrifice the image (subject "converted" to object) by giving it over to another (the reader). This can be seen as both projection of and domination through the writer's metaphors for the world into the world.

The obsession with form is an attempt to recover the lost unity with the object. Roheim describes this as a turning against the ego in an attempt to appease the superego; the "real" is sacrificed to the severity of the "ideal".⁴¹ The obsessional aspect of Lowry's writing becomes of such total concern for him that not only is the style obsessive but the book is about obsession -- the alcoholic's, the magician's, obsession with himself and self-control, loss of control, and sense (fear) of being controlled. The "destructive" aspects of his style are really highly "constructive" in the desperate attempt to show the image of the universe (the ideal) as if it were the universe. The "unity" of the world has been destroyed, and its recovery lies in the manipulation of images of the world.

In "modernist" (manneristic-surrealistic) art there is the similar sense of form being "decontrolled" through abstract and apparently arbitrary relationships between objects and events that are conventionally associated or "controlled". Hauser describes mannerism as "the first modern style, the first concerned with a cultural problem and which regards the relationship between tradition and innovation as a problem to be solved by rational means. Tradition is here nothing but a bulwark against the all too violently approaching storms of the unfamiliar, an element which is felt to be a principle of life but also of destruction."⁴² It is a style that asks its audience to be both doubters and believers at the same time. Further,

Mannerism is not so much a symptom and product of alienation, that is to say, an art that has become soulless, extroverted and shallow, as an expression of the unrest, anxiety and bewilderment generated by the process of alienation of the individual from society and the reification of the whole cultural process. The alienation of the individual does not in this case exclude the creation of true works of art; on the contrary, it leads to the most profoundly self-revelatory creations. The sense of alienation is the artist's raw material, not a formal element in his work....

One of the contradictory features of mannerism is that it not only represents a struggle against formalism and what might be called "fetishism" in art, but is also itself a precious and fetishistic form of art that alienates itself from the creativity of the individual.⁴³

In his letter to Jonathan Cape, Lowry discusses the way the "churrigueresque" or "overloaded style" in which the buildings of Tlaxcala are described in Chapter X, as suggesting that the novel is satirizing itself.⁴⁴ His own suggestion that the style of the novel is "overloaded" is a suitable description and at the same time reveals the attempt to cover all possibilities, to leave no gaps on

the canvas that are not filled with form, to the point where form parodies itself in that contradictory way that Hauser has described. Art turned into a travel brochure summarizes the principle that alienation is all; that art turns to the reification of the image both from the necessity to fill the void, the angst that produces the fetish, and in order to point to the way in which reification has destroyed the humanistic artist's hope.

To condemn the possibilities of future liberation through style is to deliberately counterfeit the images of liberation in order to direct them -- in order to be the master of the future time, its emptiness and its images. At the same time such a style places the artist at the mercy of his own degraded images. He "rescues" himself from the unknown into a place where everything is known, and from which he must look forward with fear again into the unknown, or with disgust at the known.

Footnotes -- Chapter III

¹ Harold Rosenberg, "Signs," Artworks and Packages, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969, Delta, 1971), p.192.

² See Stephen Spender's introduction to Under the Volcano in which he discusses "symbolic myth", but says that it "is used as metaphor, as analogy." p.xi.

³ George Lukacs, Realism in Our Time, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p.19.

⁴ See R.P. Blackmur, "Parody and Critique: Mann's Doctor Faustus," in the work cited above. For Mann, "parody is a way out.... He can submit all his desperate material to the arrogant, debasing parody of itself.... It is the rebellion of the bourgeois against himself in a created self. Only the bourgeois understands Bohemia (his slipping) or needs the devil (his climbing); or at any rate, the bourgeois is in the gulf between his slipping and his pride...." p.110.

⁵ Quoted by L. Moholy-Nagy, Vision in Motion, (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1956), p.330.

⁶ A. Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano," Canadian Literature, No. 26 (Autumn 1965), 43-54, manages to use both "tragedy" and "ironic" as descriptive terms in his study of the Faust analogy. Lowry and the Consul are typically viewed by positivist commentators as modern "tragic heroes".

⁷ Prairie Schooner, vol.xxxvii, No.4 (Winter 1963/64), 339-346.

⁸ Lowry's apparent need to control time is a central aspect of his style. This concept is developed further in the chapter.

⁹ Lowry, Letters. The emphasis in his letter to Jonathan Cape (pp.57-88) is an attempt to draw attention to the thematic importance of every detail of form, structure and content, as it stands: eg. "I have to have my 12 ... I feel it destined to have 12 chapters and nothing more nor less will satisfy me" p.65 passim.

¹⁰ As Adorno says:

An expressionistic epic is a paradox. It tells of something about which nothing can be told, of the totally self-contained subject, which is unfree and which, in fact, can hardly be said to exist. Dissociated into the compulsive moments of its own restrictive and confined existence, stripped of identity with itself, its life has no contin-

uity; objectless inwardness, is space in the precise sense that everything it produces obeys the law of timeless repetition. Prisms, p.265.

¹¹ Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1967), discusses the way literature satisfies our "hunger for ends and crises" p.54.

Lesser, cited above, says "The relief of guilt and anxiety ... is itself one of the most important sources of the pleasure we secure from form" p.125. What seems to be more important, however, is Lesser's own anxiety about obtaining "anxiety-free perception" through form. That form can be a source of anxiety is ignored.

¹² Letters, p.66.

¹³ Pastiche relates Lowry's stylization to Mannerism. A useful discussion of neo-Mannerism can be found in Wylie Sypher's Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature, (New York: Random House, 1960). As Sypher says in his chapter on "Style, Stylization, Blockage,"

The distinction between style and stylization is needed since the nineteenth century nourished two types of artists Focillon calls the pasticheur and the virtuoso: the one diluting past styles or techniques, the other abandoning himself to his own originality, seeking effect for the sake of effect. Both can stylize; but neither can properly be said to have a style. Rather, each has a manner. (p.153)

¹⁴ See Zaslove's article cited above, for a discussion of the way ideologists use literature positivistically as an imprisoning device and as a confirmation of the absolute nature of their images of reality.

¹⁵ Kilgallin, Lowry, p.151.

¹⁶ In Lowry's world, the image (ultimately, everything "seen") serves as both shattered symbol and allegory. The "self" is overwhelmed by a world filled to its edges by meaningless "meaning".

¹⁷ UTV., p.219.

¹⁸ Labyrinths, (New York: New Directions, 1964), p.200.

¹⁹ See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's discussion on mythology and priesthood in Dialectic of Enlightenment, Trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973)

²⁰ (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), p.747.

- 20 Blackmur, in his essay on Mann's Doctor Faustus, says: It may be that harmony is needed to create character, vital and cultural harmony, and that in a polyphonic age only parody of character and the individual is possible to express. Private life disappears either into public life or into itself and is in either case, when expressed, only a parody of itself.
Eleven Essays in the European Novel, p.109.
- 21 (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p.747.
- 22 The disposable identity is one aspect of Under the Volcano that relates it to Mannerism and the use of mask. Loss of (and search for) identity is central to this style in which the "real" is so often confused with surface appearance.
- 23 The "double" is that unconscious projection of the imagination that reflects the conditions of the world as perceived. disposable identity reflects the surplus-commodity or "junk" conditions of civilization: the assembly line and mass culture merge.
- 24 See Arnold Hauser, Mannerism; the Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art, trans. Erich Mosbacher (London: Routledge & Paul, 1965), and The Social History of Art: Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque, Volume Two (London: Routledge and Paul, 1951, 1962).
- 25 Hauser, Mannerism, p.371.
- 26 loc. cit.
- 27 Adorno, Prisms, p.261.
- 28 loc. cit.
- 29 loc. cit.
- 31 Rosenberg, "Art and its Double", Artworks and Packages, p.11. Such machinery distinguishes art as metaphor in order to separate it from McLuhan's "total" media of the world-as-package. (p.20) The deliberate creation of junk machines as art is, as Rosenberg says, "more 'human' than a B-52"; but it is also the return to an "aesthetic" critique of culture.
- 32 Lukacs, Realism in Our Time, p.23.
- 33 ibid., p.20.

34 ibid., p.23.

35 ibid., p.20. Lukacs comments on Heidegger's "thrown-into-being as the condition of modern man -- ontological solitariness:

This implies, not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself; but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being.

36 ibid., p.26.

37 Geza Roheim, Magic and Schizophrenia (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U.Press, 1955), p.82.

38 loc. cit.

39 Lowry, Letters, p.200.

40 See L. Moholy-Nagy, Vision in Motion for a discussion of Dadaist writing. Moholy-Nagy says, "the dadaists' humor is the gallows humor of the condemned. Their 'nonsense' designates a deep purpose." p.312.

41 Roheim, Magic and Schizophrenia, p.83.

42 The Social History of Art, p.111.

43 ibid., p.92

44 Letters, p.82.

THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE

'But where does it all get you in the end?
The knowledge, I mean. One of the first penances I
ever imposed on myself was to learn the philosophical
sections of War and Peace by heart. That was of course
before I could dodge about in the rigging of the Cab-
alla like a St. Jago's monkey. But then the other day
I suddenly realized that the only thing I remembered
about the whole book was that Napoleon's leg twitched--'
(p.82)

"To be a man of knowledge has no permanence. One is
never a man of knowledge, not really. Rather, one
becomes a man of knowledge for a very brief instant...."

Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan,

Style in Under the Volcano comes from the ritualization of
collapsed images, in which the image is both valued as hope and
discarded as despair, but is still used obsessively and conscious-
ly as a machine for the manufacture of meaning. These techniques
that wrestle with the images of "lost and found" art and ideas
serve to turn the novel in the direction of cultural and ideo-
logical criticism in which the struggle to possess the image is
tied to the desire for and fear of knowledge. In the novel's
terms, to possess knowledge is to possess fear. The possession
of the man of knowledge, which is his fear, may escape from him
by being robbed of its meaning and he may be buried in the void
that is left, the rubble of empty images.

But within that void, knowledge is viewed as a protective
device that can be used as a barrier against the unfamiliar world
of things. Barren of meaning but rich in its convolutions, know-
ledge is worked into the devices of imprisonment and escape.
The knowledge provided by a dying culture is placed in the con-

text of the struggle for the "secret" knowledge required to cross the "awful unbridgeable void". Empty words, the mask of knowledge, are made to do battle with the knowledge of power, whose language is forbidden.

Under the Volcano is about seekers after knowledge who dread what they might find. As Hugh says, "A little self-knowledge is a dangerous thing" (p.180). The novel thus promotes the conditions for an eternal tug-of-war between what has been learned and what one must know; between the recovery of repressed experience seen as eternal verities or "secret knowledge" (which implies the use of repression as control) and the representation of official knowledge as a return to a repressed state of mind in which mental activity is ironic. The condition of uncertainty that prevails in not knowing everything is, as Horkheimer and Adorno point out, the abyss where "paranoia takes root"; so that the search for knowledge and truth is a search within the boundaries of a delusion in which "distorted personalities take the truth for fantasy and the illusion for truth."²

The use of knowledge as a disguise against the immediacy of events reveals the spurious, illusionistic nature of those events, at the same time as it suggests a state of mind that moves on the borderlines of the abyss where the paranoiac recognizes his madness. Both the author and his characters are resigned to their psychological destinies while they search through the landscape of their dreams for the formula that will lead them out of the abyss: "Or is it because right through hell there is a path, as Blake well knew, and though I may not take it, some-

times lately in dreams I have been able to see it?" (p.36) *

Knowledge is the defence against the continuing crises of events which, as they continue, become merely the working out of the projected fate. The formulas of escape, instead of providing an escape from fate as an act of self-preservation, merely prophesy that which will occur.

The need for formulas indicates something beyond the nominal ironies of situation, the ironies resulting from the confrontation of the educated man with his fate. The ironic mask hides not only despair created by nihilism (the abyss) but disguises the very roots of nihilism: the borderline of paranoia is blurred by the madman's very knowledge that all experience is a delusion. But the isolation required to maintain such a view in no way alleviates the suffering. Indeed, the suffering goes beyond despair in that the "educated" man's delimited knowledge tells him that he is suffering for the collective consciousness, for "culture", however alien it is to his experience. It is a knowledge that both elevates and isolates him. To quote Horkheimer and Adorno,

Paranoia is the symptom of the half-educated man. For him, all words become part of the delusive system, of the attempt to possess through the mind everything for which experience is inadequate, to force meaning upon the world which makes him meaningless; but at the same time to defame the spirit and experience from which he is excluded and to attribute to them the guilt of the society which excludes him. Half-education, which (unlike a complete lack of education) hypostasizes limited knowledge as the truth, cannot stand the now intolerable gulf between within and without, between individual fate and the social law, appearance and essence.... In a stereotyped manner, half-education reaches out in its fear for the formula which is best suited to it in order soon to provide a rationale for the evil which has already occurred, or to prophesy catastrophe -- which is sometimes disguised as regeneration. 3

The devices that Lowry uses, his own sources of "scholarly wit", the balance between irony and angst, the prophetic and the teleological, indicate an attempt to penetrate beyond the alcoholic's "epistemology of self-control" (the battle with the bottle as a life formula)⁴, and at the same time to remain within the confines of the way that epistemology has contoured the world. What the Lowry-Consul "knows" is what has been done to him; and the image of what has been done to him is projected as a metaphor for what has been done to the world. His insight into the internalized struggle for the possession of himself, into what has gone "wrong", becomes a means of measuring the larger battle between the universal forces of Good and Evil. If control ("equilibrium") is all, it is also the obsessional root of the Consul's need for knowledge as a means of control. The struggle to penetrate beyond control is the struggle to reject the "dreadful tyranny of self" that knowledge has produced without rejecting the knowledge. It is impossible to disburden the self from knowledge (that dread possession), since, for the man of knowledge, it is the self. So the devices which present the cast-off images of the world, also are there to indicate that one never knows enough in the struggle for possession of the self. The "word magic" of the educated man drives him away, in Lowry's terms, from the secret sources of whatever knowledge will provide meaning for the world. The Word Itself (as with the Caballists) is the fruit of Lowry's Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And as each word is emptied of meaning it is given a new meaning in the magic nexus of words that become the world.

The Kaleidoscopic encyclopedia of knowledge in Lowry's "eclec-

tic systeme" not only provides the images of a cultural wasteland, but questions the very nature of the uses of knowledge, for knowledge as a magical principle is dangerous in the way it demands continual shifts of the borders between the self and the self-created world. These shifts produce an alien state of being in which the self is alienated within itself and from the world which it has projected as "real". Under the Volcano is the dramatization of the conflict between Lowry's own need to know if anything is real in the world of words and his fear that the pursuit of knowledge will prove that nothing is there after all.

In this drama, it is not for nothing that the Consul is equated with Faust and a "black magician", but he is Faust trapped in the realpolitik of domesticity; his alkahest has become alcohol. The result is not ironic (contrasting the real with the ideal), as in Mann's Doctor Faustus, so much as it speaks of the terror of trying to invest with meaning the empty acts and objects that fill the enormous storeroom of the mind. But it is not meaning that comes out of the iron relationships that are invested in allegory, but the weariness of standing on the threshold of meaning with an infinity of wrong keys for the door; or with an infinity of doors leading into empty mirrored rooms like the chinese boxes of the Farolito.

The Consul is an up-dated "anti-heroic" version of Goethe's Faust, for Faust understood the nature of magic knowledge in its relationship to reality and the attainment of the desired object. Both have been alienated, "cut off from God", by knowledge and are attempting to discover a lost innocence that will make them whole, but the Consul is simply unable to take reality into account in

his approach to the desired object. His is the magic of schizophrenia, and not of the power of the ego. As Lowry says of him, he is "all destruction"

Faust, reality-oriented, moves from the logos to the act through the processes of creative magic. His magic formula of Word, Mind, Power and Deed is what Roheim calls "the counterphobic attitude" of magic, "the transition from passivity to activity":

As such, it is probably the basic element in thought and the initial phase of any activity. Schizophrenic magic, on the other hand, is purely "imagination magic" -- realistic action does not follow. In fact, schizophrenic fantasy is generally a substitute for action. Realistic action does not follow need or desire because the schizophrenic ego is markedly weak or totally absent, and we observe merely a series of diverse and fruitless attempts at restitution.⁶

Faust, moving from passivity to activity (the Deed) can be contrasted with the Consul, who, "advancing boldly through a diversity of powerless emotions" (p.81), avoids the "deed", even though he sees it as his salvation, the "one shared instant". That "instant" is the crisis that requires realistic action and not the "imagination magic" of fantasy or secret knowledge.

The barriers to the Deed are like Blake's "mind forg'd manacles". But what chains the Consul is his fear of power in action, of living through that crisis; the fear that one's knowledge is powerful enough to destroy the world coupled with the fear that the secrets of one's knowledge of the world will be destroyed. Lowry is writing about the dread of one's own magic knowledge; the dread of letting go of that control over the mind that has been so carefully constructed as a barrier against realistic action. That

dread contains the guilt of possessing knowledge and of the spurious means by which knowledge has been acquired. The struggle to conquer the guilty soul is the struggle to conquer the fear of action. Because he knows too much, the Consul is caught in the endless repetition of the images that are contained in his mind. These are the images of the world that have become confused with the world itself. The word becomes a substitute for the deed because it controls the inner images. The Consul, who wants to escape from "these fellows with ideas", cannot do so because he is one of them. He is Gnostic to the core: "How loathsome, how incredibly loathsome was reality." (p.207)

The crisis of knowledge occurs when the image can no longer be controlled; when the lines between inner and outer are re-established and the mind is forced to examine the requirements of reality. Avoidance of this crisis is an attempt to use the recognizably counterfeit image as a means of controlling one's fate, and merely adds fuel to the fires of the guilty conscience./

The Consul uses "imagination magic", the anaesthesia of alcohol and the Caballa ("from alcohol to alkahest"), as a means of maintaining his guilty self, his "burden of conscience, of sourceless sorrow" (p.76). Without a guilty "secret" self, to which reality always appears so loathsomely cloacal, he would have no reason not to perform the deed, to experience the world as real. Magic is a weapon that enables him to deal with the world without being soiled by it; a food for thought, a mental contraceptive against the act.

The internalization of the material world places it at the disposal of the mind, but only at the expense of being able to

function meaningfully in the real world. Roheim, discussing a schizophrenic patient who could not take "the first step toward reality," says:

Our patient did not come to dinner when called but continued to play. He denied that he refused to eat (in his terms such a refusal would appear psychotic). But he went on "playing," that is, leading a life of fantasy, when he ought to have had dinner. However, he wishes to return to the world of objects, and thinking about things is the magic he performs to get them back.⁷

As the Consul moves toward the "approaching scene" ("copula maritalis") of Chapter III, he does a good deal of thinking, talking, avoiding (by running away) and drinking in order to retain the images of his possession, his guilty self:

Yvonne, it was clear to him, dreaded the approaching scene as much as he, and now felt under some compulsion to go on talking about anything until the perfect inappropriate moment arrived, that moment too when, unseen by her, the awful bell would actually touch the doomed child with giant protruding tongue and hellish Wesleyan breath. (p.74)

His knowledge of Yvonne's "dread" is the knowledge of his own fear of what his attempts to share the world have done to him in the past. Avoidance will maintain his knowledge of the importance of guilt as self-control, the importance of his battle for the possession of his guilt as the image of what he is: "Ah, a woman could not know the perils, the complications, yes, the importance of a drunkard's life!" (p.85) The Consul is the one compelled to "go on talking" in his hopeless effort to avoid the "shared instant". His desire to re-enter the material world is deliberately deflected by his wish to remain in the prison of his own images, where defeat is something to be relied on. When the "inappropriate moment" finally arrives, he is still "thinking about things", using imagination magic, in terms of his images

and projections, and fulfillment of the deed is avoided:

... he could feel now, too ... the image of his possession, like that jewelled gate the desperate neophyte, Yesod-bound, projects for the thousandth time on the heavens to permit passage of his astral body, fading, and slowly, inexorably, that of a cantina, when in dead silence and peace it first opens in the morning, taking its place. It was one of those cantinas that would be opening now, at nine o'clock: and he was queerly conscious of his own presence there with the angry tragic words, the very words which might soon be spoken, glaring behind him. This image faded also: he was where he was.... (p.89)

What the deed verifies for the Consul is the unpleasant nature of experience. Sexual knowledge is linked to the loathsome world of the body; to direct experience rather than the images of experience. It is not merely the "awful bell" that pursues him, but his detestation of reality. Sex is real -- and as filthy as the floor of an unswept cantina. The necessary images desert him: "he was where he was". Such knowledge re-enforces the sense of futility and failure that is special to him; that in a sense is him. His importance as an alcoholic and frustrated genius is the importance of being a failure, his prime vocation. "Born 1896 and still going flat."

What the reader sees in this is the man of knowledge in rapid retreat from the experience of that which represents his liberation. Knowledge is connected with repentance; the implied sin is that of knowing too much. But it functions in order to promote guilt. [The approaching deed is merely the Sisyphean repetition of the guilty past as the mind projects the image of that guilt into the future.] Knowledge is not seen in its relationship to potency, a return to and fulfillment in the object, but as a device for obtaining power over the object; and among the objects

over which power must be attained is the self. Knowledge is used as a device to shuttle self and object back and forth between dominance and submission. Faust's formula is dangerous, for the original deed happened in the guilty past and is now locked up in the memory, and therefore deeds are to be avoided, as all deeds are symbolic repetitions of the original deed, trying to get it "right". So the formula is applied backward, back to the original guilty "Word". Consciousness is paralyzed in its guilty deceitful knowledge of the Word, and where the word will lead to. The shaman, the man of knowledge, becomes a "shaman". This image of the sham magician, of the false "knowledge" that the Consul lives with and by which he is destroyed, makes it difficult for the reader to accept the Consul's apotheosis, Lowry's "trochal" intentions notwithstanding.

The crisis described in Chapter III is one of many false apocalypses that occurs throughout the book before the final one. The way that Lowry uses knowledge to promote the presence of guilt and to manipulate the conditions for failure indicates more than the Consul's "failure of nerve" -- it indicates the insecurity of Lowry's own intellectual liberalism in its confrontation with his inner resources that seem to be speaking to him continuously of the mystique of power and the power of mystery -- the "secrets" of knowledge.

The freedom of the liberated intellect to dissent is seen in terms of the power of the will to act ("wishful" thinking). It is his search for the heroic "ideal" as a means of opposing the barbaric nature of modern civilization that causes Lowry to condemn all that talk, the spurious intellectualism, to its guilty

grave. Dissent in Under the Volcano is never an act of liberation but a confirmation of repression; for it is the product of the angry reaction against self-deceit whose absolute nature is re-affirmed by the absolute structure of the novel. Everything tends toward the given end. The kind of knowledge that Lowry's characters possess is simply a burden to them: it keeps them from becoming heroic innocents abroad.

The recognition of heroic innocence as a virtue is an alternative way of recognizing that "cleverness can prove stupid";⁸ but it is also a way of placing innocence and power in a context that excludes the entangled intellectual. The attempt to renew one's innocence is at the center of the Consul's need to drink, his need to be purified. The problem with knowledge, apparently, is that it enables one to see all too clearly, so that the energy that should be devoted to heroism is devoted to "the battle for the survival of the human consciousness". As M. Laruelle admits:

" -- the truth is, I suppose, that sometimes ... you do see more clearly.... But certainly not the things so important to us despised sober people, on which the balance of any human situation depends. It's precisely your inability to see them, Geoffrey, that turns them into the instruments of the disaster you have created for yourself. Your Ben Jonson, for instance, or perhaps it was Christopher Marlowe, your Faust man, saw the Carthaginians fighting on his big toe-nail. That's the kind of clear seeing you indulge in. Everything seems perfectly clear, because indeed it is perfectly clear, in terms of the toe-nail." (p.217)

This crisis of "knowledge", of spurious intellect versus muscular activity, is Lowry's vision of a universal crisis. The parody of the "learned man" as a condemnation of the "couch liberal"⁹ (Hugh) on the one hand and the paralyzed mystic or "black magician" (the Consul) on the other hand, raises questions about

knowledge that extend outside the novel but which the novel, being a totality of "eternal recurrences", does not provide access to.

Hugh's "couch liberalism" condemns him to play out the role of muscular heroics in "the plot of history"¹⁰ for which his guilty knowledge has prepared him. Muscular heroics (deeds) is a new way of being angry that replaces the anger caused by the tension between verbal heroics and his guilty conscience. His beating of the bull in Chapter IX in the "bloody arena" is the muscular version of his intellectual beating of Geoffrey ("shooting" the bull) in Chapter X. His actions are reactions against his guilty conscience. His arguments and daydreams about freedom and liberation (Stalin and the True Cross), are really about power and the domination of the self.

With Hugh, education is given out, not as a means to liberation, but as a kind of surplus commodity condition of bourgeois life: "If I were you I'd go to the boxing place. Get what you bloody can out of the set-up", advises the communist lamp-trimmer. Education as an aspect of the "commodity fetish" confirms Lowry's general fetishistic use of knowledge in the novel, as if guilt and education walk hand in hand:

What, if anything, did one do at Cambridge, that would show the soul worthy of siegebart of East Anglia -- Or John Cornford! Did one dodge lectures, cut halls, fail to row for the college, fool one's supervisor, finally, oneself? (p.176)

But this is not because education stops us from thinking, in the novel's terms, but because it reminds us of our lost "innocence" and therefore removes our ability to act, replacing action with

reverie and self-contempt. In that internalized version of Dante's dark wood where Hugh has retreated to, the faces that he sees could well be reflections of himself:

The heart sickened at running once more full tilt into the past, into its very school-close faces, bloated now like those of the drowned, on gangling overgrown bodies.... giant oafs in pepper-and-salt, mincing like old women, their only meaning in another war. (p.176)

The heart sickens at the consciousness of its own failures, its own "knowledge ... that one could not be young forever" (p.150), that it sees in those drowned, oafish faces; and the "knowledge" of all those lost moments when the past could have been shucked off for the innocence of experience contrives to show Hugh as not stupid but merely stuck between ideologies:

Accept it; one is a sentimentalist, a muddler, a realist, a dreamer, coward, hypocrite, hero, an Englishman in short, unable to follow out his own metaphors. Tufthunter and pioneer in disguise. Iconoclast and explorer. Undaunted bore undone by trivialities! Why, one asks, instead of feeling stricken in that pub, didn't I set about learning some of those songs, those precious revolutionary songs, anyhow, if only to recapture some early joy in merely singing, and playing the guitar? (p.182)

His acceptance indicates the justification for a bad conscience through a surrender to a kind of Oxbridge jingoism. The mentality of the perennial undergraduate who has surrendered to his own image of himself as irresponsible is seen as some earlier, more rational image of the Consul's mentality. The failed undergraduate graduates to the failed magician; but his redemption is certain. He need only stop "acting" and start acting.

What one sees in these characters is not only an accurate description of the self-defeating nature of ideologists with guilty consciences, but also an implicit statement that the ideologist must either submit to or transcend his intellect. / The

novel implies that knowledge is useless in any direct struggle with the "given", and that any action that results will be too little, too late. The uselessness of reason, intellectual self-deception, in the face of the contingent (that symbolic but opaque and impenetrable world) is at the center of the horrible; the dread of the mere existent invests it on the inner eye with a daemonic power in order that it should appear more real. The existing conditions are then equal in power to those inner "daemons" of anxiety and guilt. This daemonic nature in the existent in which the inner and outer "realities" cross and intermingle, derives from the necessity to give meaning, both to the world of things and to the imagination. Only then can the struggle to submit or transcend occur.

This is an approach to knowledge that is at once fetishistic and mistrustful. The bits of information with which the book is layered are both attractive and irritating; they "mean" everything and nothing. The Consul's unfinished work on "secret knowledge", a book intended to "answer such questions as: Is there any ultimate reality, external, conscious and ever-present" (p.39) is finished as Lowry's Under the Volcano, in which the answers are disguised in the apparent trivia of old books, film titles, the names of golf balls, junk landscapes and so on. The juxtaposition of the banal and the profound is a way of saying that everything is of equal meaning, equally important, to the befuddled "experts" who populate the novel. "Come, amigo, throw away your mind," admonishes Dr. Vigil to M. Laruelle. What he is saying is, "become an innocent, like me."

The modern version of the torments of hell is to be stuffed to the teeth with knowledge that you cannot use, since it prevents you from acting. The fear of "action" reveals an insight into the romantic version of action in which deeds in themselves have no moral value, are "innocent", but in which moral values are the derivatives of the meaning of deeds. /Action is the attempt to give value to the meaningless present, to test the internalized images of the world, to re-unite mind and matter./ And what would usually be the romance of the quest for knowledge through action is instead a journey through a nightmare landscape infested with the dragons of the traveller's guilty past, the authenticity of the contours of which cannot be confirmed since even the map and the signposts are merely significant of the explorer's previous journeys through the same territory.

The quest back is a search for information in the shards of a history that is totally personalized: "secret" knowledge is the secret of one's own past, the "innocence" of one's own childhood. But with the recovery of that information, one also recovers its meaning, which is that it has no meaning:

...the banality stood: that the past was irrevocably past. And conscience had been given man to regret it only in so far as that might change the future. (p.108)

The meaning provides a conscience, a necessary guilt, because only that knowledge which services guilt is given meaning.

The knowledge selected from the past is the medium in which the self is nurtured. It contains the rituals of renunciation of pleasure in the face of reality that the man of knowledge uses in order to gain control over the world that is the same ritual that

the child uses in the formation of the ego, as a means of acquiring dominance over his environment.¹¹ The "trochal" or re-occurring nature of the novel itself is a ritualized means of control. Repetition has as its center the knowledge of the function of renunciation or postponement of pleasure that combines with the hope that power over reality can be achieved and pleasure retained. However, this knowledge is deceitful: what is occurring is not the liberation of the repressed memory, but a specific concentration on certain well-remembered incidents in order to moralize about them. The tabooed areas are only hinted at because control is all, and the struggle for control of both self and "other" is part of the battle to maintain equilibrium as the center of identity and survival. This "knowledge" of the past is merely reverie undertaken to repress pleasure and promote anxiety -- "Father is waiting for you though. Father has not forgotten" (p.189).

Marcuse, in Eros and Civilization, discusses memory "as a decisive mode of cognition" that "becomes the vehicle of future liberation."

... the therapeutic role of memory derives from the truth value of memory. Its truth value lies in the specific function of memory to preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in his dim past and which are never entirely forgotten.... The ... liberation of memory explodes the rationality of the repressed individual. As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies.... The rediscovered past yields critical standards which are tabooed by the present. Moreover, the restoration of memory is accompanied by the restoration of the cognitive content of phantasy. Psychoanalytic theory removes these mental faculties from the noncommittal sphere of daydreaming and fiction and recaptures their strict truths.... Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer, the orientation on the

past tends toward an orientation on the future.¹²

But the functions of reverie and myth ("daydreaming and fiction") in Under the Volcano disguise their "cognitive content" except where the functions service the fatal "correspondences" between past, present and future; except where they service Lowry's own needs as a "modernist mystic", who, through the uses of fiction, presents his dreams of "an absolute power to rearrange life according to any pattern of [his] choice."¹³ The "truth value" of memory is not allowed to intervene in determining the way Lowry rules over those "forbidden images and impulses of childhood" as he projects them into his dreams of the future.

The quest for knowledge as a means of bridging the abyss avoids the liberating possibilities that exist if the "truth value" of memory is recognized. M. Laruelle's apotheosis of the Consul as Faustian hero merely shows the way in which the conscious mind forgets or rationalizes the truth of the past in order to remain passive about the present and fatalistic about the future. The "orientation on the future" as inner cinema verité is an orientation on the past coloured by Laruelle's surrender to fate. Laruelle's repressed memory tells him to accept fear, alienation and the renunciation of his dreams; to mythicize as destiny the death of a man who had been "living in continual terror of his life" (p.30).

...to-day these dreams seemed absurd and presumptuous.... A sense of fear had possessed him again, a sense of being ...still a stranger. Four years, almost five, and he still felt like a wanderer on another planet....He had few emotions about the war, save that it was bad. One side or the other would win. And in either case life would be hard. Though if the Allies lost it would be harder. And in either case one's own battle would go on. (p.9)

Laruelle's "film" of the Consul's last day tells the same "complicated endless tale...of tyranny and sanctuary" as in "The Hands of Orlac": it is the story of his own life, of the "artist with the murderer's hands."

This picture of life as a battle in which the self is both victim and hero -- the "battle for the survival of the human consciousness" (p.217) -- provides the correct aura on which the Consul can be projected as world-suffering Promethean scapegoat, knowingly victimizing himself. Rather than recovering the "forbidden images", the renunciation of ideas seals the images into the codified dimensions of bad art.

To accept Laruelle's view of the Consul as scapegoat, as tragic renunciator and way-shower of the possibilities of paradise and the existence of hell, is to accept the "apotheosis of the predestined victim"¹⁴ as an unalterable condition of the relationship between the priest and his victim, between "man" and his "fate". The Consul's battle with the universe, where even the elements oppose him, is not tragedy, but nihilism with a religious twist; the individual becomes his own priest and his own victim, thus arranging his own destiny. The relegation of priestly deceit to the inner scene indicates a basic mistrust of the individual's knowledge of the visible world and the reliance on the powers of the mind to restrict access to that world.

Under such conditions, action becomes, at best, quixotic: "Never mind, old boy, it would have been worse than the wind-mills." (p.248) And what makes it quixotic is its relationship

to thought: the outcome of rational knowledge and dream reverie that places the heroic image in juxtaposition with "common sense".

Knowledge, thinking, reason, are seen as banal and absurd. And because they are banal they are meaningless, they have "no permanence." The search for knowledge leads to the consciousness of fear of the incognito, the void. As Hans Mayer says of Ionesco: "An individual with his obsession -- the threat of anxiety and death. An ideologist who imagines himself to be fighting against all ideologies."¹⁵

The mistrust of knowledge as "dangerous" is peculiarly dualistic, for the Consul, a man of ideas, sees his freedom in running away from the "people with ideas", only to discover that everyone has "ideas" -- and he allows himself to be destroyed by them. Hovering between free will and fate as the dualities, the Consul is allowed to "choose" both, or is chosen by both, as a means of getting him to the abyss and over the edge -- final "action".

"I choose --".... "Hell," he finished absurdly.... "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost back there already." He was running too, in spite of his limp, calling back to them crazily, and the queer thing was, he wasn't quite serious,...(p.314)

The finality of death is one way of resolving the difficulties that knowing too much presents. There is no anxiety involved in being dead, and it provides a neat resolution to the questions raised by the Consul regarding the duality or multiplicity of meaning, by removing the questioner. It has "permanence." According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the search for knowledge based on the desire for enlightenment leads to an

alienation that is "ultimately self-destructive":

What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim. Ruthlessly, in despite of itself, the Enlightenment has extinguished any trace of its own self-consciousness. The only kind of thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive....Power and knowledge are synonymous. 16

The extinguishing of "self-consciousness" is total alienation, a world without "meaning". Knowledge as "want" or "need"; power as fulfillment of need -- this is the same as death or Nirvana, the "state of 'constant gratification' where no tension is felt -- a state without want." 17

Total alienation, death, is the abyss that the Consul is trying to cross with another kind of knowledge than that provided by rationalized conquest of nature. But his alternative in trying to trace the "all-but unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God" (p.39) is in a myth that has no more meaning than rationalized science, and is just as concerned with domination through knowledge. The Cabbala, or black magic as a means of providing one with knowledge in order to get through the on-going apocalypse produces the same kind of failure to gain control that is seen in schizophrenia (Roheim) or in the failed magic of shamans who try to meet the "apocalypse" of cultural conflicts. The cults of "priestly deceit" were attempts at filling the void left in the universe when myths were emptied of content through the arrival of more powerful myth-makers. The failure of the "ghost shirt" to stop bullets, even though it was based on the new mythology of the conquerers (Christianity), merely proved how dangerous it was to possess

the wrong kind of knowledge; the universe was already empty, and the "magic" of these new shamans, while it could be rationalized, was not magic that entirely gratified the needs of the group in a practical way, but mainly served to rationalize power in the shaman. His failure was the failure of a psychotic, not a magician.

The knowledge of "reasonable men" that teaches them to avoid action, becomes, in the novel's terms, a protective device that avoids the "truth value" of memory and the attempts of the self to authenticate the nature of experience. The mind becomes "clever" in its rationalized avoidance of action until, as Rosenberg puts it, "...when the crisis is ripe, a fast-moving explosive force finds nothing in its path but a pile of decomposed scrapings."¹⁸

Footnotes -- Chapter IV

¹ Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui Way of Knowledge (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968 - 1971), p.78.

² Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p.193.

³ ibid., p.196.

⁴ Gregory Bateson, "The Cybernetics of 'Self': A Theory of Alcoholism" Steps to an Ecology of Mind (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p.309.

⁵ Letters, p.200.

⁶ Geza Roheim, Magic and Schizophrenia, p.3.

⁷ ibid., p.226.

⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.209.

⁹ Harold Rosenberg, "The Resurrected Romans", The Tradition of the New (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), p.155.

Compelled to add a new act to the drama which is "given", the revolutionists were easily deceived both as to what they were doing and as to who they were....They imagined they were performing the part set down for them by the events of their own lives -- their actions became a spontaneous repetition of an old role. They imagined they were playing themselves -- they were but mimicking the engraving of a hero on one of history's old playbills.

¹⁰ loc. cit.

¹¹ Roheim, in Magic and Schizophrenia discusses this in relationship to the development of the super-ego. See p.59.

¹² Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (New York: Vintage, 1961), p.18.

¹³ Harold Rosenberg, "The Resurrected Romans", The Tradition of the New (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), p.220.

- 14 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.51.
- 15 "Ionesco and Ideologies", Steppenwolf and Everyman, p.211.
- 16 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.4.
- 17 Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p.214.
- 18 Rosenberg, Tradition of the New, p.220.

THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

"Why can't people mind their own damned business!" (p.310)

The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man.

R.D. Laing: The Politics of Experience (p.24)

Under the Volcano is centered around characters who have surrendered their roles in society -- ex-consul, ex-reporter, ex-film-director, ex-actress. Not only are they resurrected ghosts from the past, but in the conditioned present they are alienated from ordinary social activity. They are all, in one form or another, self-condemned oppressors whose tasks in society seem even to them to be devoid of meaning; we view them as pawns of their own fatalism placed in a cultural context that is one of crisis. The novel is not so much a critique of social structures as it is a critique of types within a social structure.

Yet while the moral attached is directed toward the individual -- his irresponsibility as producer of cultural collapse -- there is the implication of destiny working itself out through the cycle of time; so the individual both is and is not responsible for the collapse of civilization. Further, the use of types is in itself significant as a view of culture that demands of the artist no longer that he reveal the psychological developments of an individual in context and conflict with society, but that the artist depict instead individuals as opaque objects moved by the abstractions of culture. The novel may be about Faustian man, but in the generic sense in which he serves as a

vehicle to promote points of view on the rituals and cycles of culture. In the crisis of the dead past and the dying present the depiction of a fated type whose words and actions basically reveal him as a stock figure in a "scene" condemns the romantic ideal of the individual mastering his fate and at the same time condemns the culture in which men have been deprived of that ideal. The crisis of culture is not only taking place within the confines of the novel, but through its very nature the novel is revealing a crisis in the bourgeois culture of which it is a part.

The dramatization of ritual and of world-historical figures (rites of initiation, the redemption figure, Maximillian, down to the politicians of the late 1930's) is devalued in the context of these former "figures" who are their masks. Fate rules all, and civilization is the giant abstract figure, the machine, which processes all action and thought; the final arbitrator of all decisions. "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" (p.230) is an overview that applies to the inevitability of everything as the cycle of history works itself out. This kind of Spenglerian overview of typological enlightened man at the end of his tether is re-enforced by the eschatology that pervades the novel, serving to emphasize the juggernaut of culture as the ultimate controller of men's deeds. There is a kind of perverse "truth" to the logic of man dominated and destroyed by his own products (Frankenstein!).

As Adorno says of Spengler,

The image of the latter-day city-dweller as a second nomad deserves special emphasis. It expresses not only anxiety and estrangement but also the dawning ahistorical character of a condition in which men experience themselves solely as objects of opaque processes and, torn between sudden shock and sudden forgetfulness, are no longer capable of a sense of temporal continuity.¹

M. Laruelle feels "like a wanderer on another planet", "still a stranger." These "former" role players have not only surrendered themselves to their former roles, but have become nomads whose search for some "real" identity in the world is typified by their wanderings, with the Consul, as the highest representative of the non-utilitarian bourgeoisie, doing the greatest amount of wandering in search of himself, with the greatest amount of insight as to what his wandering indicates. In the posthumous letter of Chapter I, he writes,

And this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell. It is not Mexico of course but in the heart. (p.36)

Despite the non-productive aspect of the characters' various "careers" and the guilt that is associated with this, the novel is not written éater le bourgeois, but rather as an indictment of civilization that creates roles without meaning, form without content, in which, "as objects of political power men surrender their spontaneity".²

World-wandering as the outward sign of a search for identity becomes a search for a place where one can retreat from civilization, the "city of dreadful night". How much difference is there between the "dream of dark magician in his visioned cave" and a shack in the wilderness "away from the people with ideas"? The sense of place or "home", in the novel's terms, is vital to the sense of self, a place where "one might bathe and slake his thirst". Being an "owner" rather than a tenant or guest is not so much a historical and economic condition of socio-political

ideologies as it is a psychological condition connected with the devotion of the self to an economic role (thus apparently justifying the role) which removes guilt as to the spurious nature of roles and devotions to that identity that enables one to bridge the abyss of loneliness. "Ownership" provides the sanctuary for what can be described as the "romantic love" that Lowry seeks and which is not found in the purchased sanctuaries of the cantinas or the displaced castles of Maximillian. "Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth" (p.40) is a cultural maxim which is reproduced as artifact in the "no se puede vivir sin amar" or writing on the wall of Laruelle's house.

The characters are products and followers of world-historical events, rather than creators. And as objects, the light they cast in relationship to, for example, Hitler in one direction and the Spanish Loyalists in the other, produces an effect of sinister low comedy, in which they appear to themselves as clowns in the world's circus, unable to affect the performance in the center ring. They function as the suppliers and consumers of the surplus commodities whose fetishistic qualities are the sources of obsession and alienation.

Mexico may be in the heart but it is also Mexico as scene -- it is "symbolic" as the extreme example of everywhere else in the world -- a place where even the Indians have ideas. What Lowry is showing is a repressive culture, symbolic for everywhere, which in allowing a kind of freedom in the outward trappings, individually licenses self-destruction, love as prostitution, "life as sold to you," officializes murder -- all within the eyes of

the police --culture giving the truth to the lie that anarchy is dangerous and repression necessary. He shows the ostensibly permissive culture using permissiveness (the day of the Fiesta of the Dead) as an act of repression in order to enforce repression: a kind of parental benevolence that matches on the social scale what is happening on the individual level. The signs that are posted in public places as regulatory indicators of government power, indicating what has been prohibited, become indistinguishable from the posters and newspapers that advertise destruction and power. The individual is first rendered useless and then made to see himself as creator, dispenser and purchaser of cultural barbarism. This systematizing of barbarianism into ostensible legality turns victims into criminals and the criminally insane into policemen. The arbitrariness of this kind of cultural order (anarchy) results in demands from the victims for more punishment and justifies the further legalization of violence. As the Consul says,

"What is it Goethe says about the horse?..." "Weary of liberty he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains." (p.213)

The novel condemns civilization as the provender of a meaningless but ever-increasing oppression and betrayal of the individual and his liberty. At the same time, however, it places the responsibility for that betrayal on the shoulders of the individual, who betrays his own opportunities for freedom; opportunities that have been entangled in the paralyzing questions about innocence and guilt. The result is that "liberty" is both mythicized and parodied. The emptiness and brutality of contemporary culture

is emphasized in the way the "strangers" -- alien in Mexico -- contrast their own passivity and sense of futility with the peace, simplicity, strength and courage of the Mexican peasants:

The Consul felt a pang. Ah, to have a horse, and gallop away, singing, away to someone you loved perhaps, into the heart of all the simplicity and peace in the world; was not that like the opportunity afforded man by life itself? Of course not. Still, for a moment, it had seemed that it was. (p.213)

However, at the same time as the metaphor is constructed, that "pang" that is the longing for innocence, is interfered with by the ironic nature bred of his own despair, and merely serves to emphasize the Consul's rejection of the possibilities of liberation. Helplessness in the face of the machinery of culture is made to be seen as a way of life that is inevitable outside of the imagination. The individual is cut off from the spontaneity that is central to his ability to be free by limiting freedom to the realm of aesthetic and romantic possibilities. What is being described is a "politics of cultural despair" in which, to quote Adorno, "As objects of political power men surrender their spontaneity" and "All events are things that happen to men, not things they bring about themselves."³

Reasonableness caught up in the "objectless inwardness", the emptiness, of despair produces the kind of querulous arguments that lie half-way between anguish and anger. That the arguments are in some way "right" only serves to justify self-condemnation and the need for heroic action. The very correctness of the argument justifies one's helplessness in the face of the barbaric. As the Consul argues with Hugh,

"And you say first, Spaniard exploits Indian, then, when he had children, he exploited the halfbreed, then the pure-blooded Mexican Spaniard, the criollo, then the mestizo exploits everybody, foreigners, Indians, and all. Then the Germans and Americans exploited him: now the final chapter, the exploitation of everybody by everybody else --" (299)

The Consul's insight into the "historical tendency for cleverness to prove stupid"⁴ emphasizes for him the way he has been trapped by culture ("aufgefangen"): the way in which world-history narrows down the possibilities for freedom until nothing is left but to be "dead" -- emotionally and physically. To quote Horkheimer and Adorno:

...cleverness becomes meaningless as soon as power ceases to obey the rules and chooses direct appropriation instead. The medium of the traditional bourgeois intelligence -- that is, discussion -- then breaks down. Individuals can no longer talk to each other and know it: they therefore make the game into a serious and responsible institution which requires the application of all available strength to ensure that there is no proper conversation and at the same time no silence. On a wider scale, the same is true: it is not possible to have conversation with a Fascist. If anyone else speaks, the Fascist considers his intervention a brazen interruption. He is not accessible to reason, because for him reason lies in the other person's agreement with his own ideas.⁵

In reaction, the cultural rebel internalizes as paranoia what the Fascist has externalized as Power. Both are ways of turning against the inner despair which the mystification of experience brings; of turning potency into power of paranoia and the control of one's destiny.

The Consul's recognition that the rules no longer apply is one way that he justifies his attack on "interference in general". The "fate of nations" is determined -- "They all seem to get what they deserve in the long run." (p.309) But this justification for political irresponsibility is also a way of disguising an

inner irresponsibility in the "battle for the survival of the human consciousness". The struggle to express the self (liberation) is polarized in this context, as Rosenberg points out, with depersonalization,⁶ a withdrawal from the realities of power into their mysteries. The individual is merely absorbed into the processes of world-history working itself out "in the long run," and the mystification of the internalized battle is justified by equating it with the meaninglessness of political and cultural catastrophes. "Read history." says the Consul:

"Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course?What in God's name has all the heroic resistance put up by poor little defenseless peoples all rendered defenseless in the first place for some well-calculated and criminal reason ... to do with the survival of the human spirit? Nothing whatsoever. Less than nothing. Countries, civilizations, empires, great hordes, perish for no reason at all, and their soul and meaning with them, that one old man perhaps you never heard of, and who never heard of them, sitting boiling in Timbuctoo, proving the existence of the mathematical correlative of ignoratio elenchi with obsolete instruments, may survive" (p.310)

The Consul's confusion of inner and outer responsibility is equated, in Lowry's terms, with "the confusion that tends eventually to overtake conquistadores." (p.234) The heroic defiance of fate by forcing the inevitable to occur places guilt and paranoia in the same context as heroism and allows destiny to take its worthless course. The high esteem in which the paranoid personality holds himself is seen not only in the way the Consul associates his own possession of secret knowledge with Hitler's persecution of the Jews in order to obtain the same kind of knowledge; but in the way he equates his own "battle" with history in general.

"... Poor little defenceless me -- I hadn't thought of that. But, you see, it's perfectly logical, what it comes down to: I've got my own piddling little fight for freedom on my hands." (p.313)

However, Lowry's critical insight into the ways that paranoia can be projected into a myth of power that manipulates the whole world is portrayed in such a way that it mystifies or veils those very mysteries which it is intent on revealing. His insight into a bad culture retreats into the same kind of hermeticism that he shows as so destructive; and instead of challenging those destructive qualities in contemporary society, he attempts to transcend them. The very helplessness of life lived in the nightmare of its own creation is turned into an aesthetic that attempts to reconcile madness (life lived in a bad cartoon) with a quiescence that looks to the transcendence of guilt and the recovery of faith.

The insight that mystifies the experience of lives that are already being lived in helpless terror of the real, mirrors the surfaces of bad art in the same way that it attempts to show how that art both reflects and degrades terror. As in the poster of the "Hands of Orlac,"

... what a complicated endless tale it seemed to tell, of tyranny and sanctuary, that poster looming above him now, showing the murderer Orlac! An artist with a murderer's hands; that was the ticket, the hieroglyph of the times. For really it was Germany itself that, in the gruesome degradation of a bad cartoon, stood over him. -- Or was it, by some uncomfortable stretch of the imagination, M. Laruelle himself? (p.25)

The very process of alienation, of depersonalization, through which the experience of the body is mystified, are made to pay service to some larger mystery that orders the novel. The aura

of the mystery novel or film, in which language and images are exploited to conceal or disguise experience in order to manipulate events in such a way that they appear as critical insights of culture, pervades Under the Volcano, with its fantasies of terror and helplessness. "The world of things has gained mastery over the abstract subject."⁷ The dialectic between expressionism and depersonalization invests objects and language with hidden powers and degrades experience to a pathological condition of the flesh. As Octavio Paz says in The Labyrinth of Solitude:

The world of terrorism, like that of mass production, is a world of things, of utensils.... Utensils are never mysterious or enigmatic, since mystery comes from the indetermination of the being or object that contains it. A mysterious ring separates itself immediately from the generic ring; it acquires a life of its own and ceases to be an object. Surprise lurks in its form, hidden, ready to leap out. Mystery is an occult force or efficacy that does not obey us, and we never know how or when it will manifest itself. But utensils do not hide anything; they never question us and they never answer our questions. They are unequivocal and transparent, mere prolongations of our hands, with only as much life as our will lends them. When they are old and worn out, we throw them away without a thought, into the wastebasket, the automobile graveyard, the concentration camp. Or we exchange them with our allies or enemies for other objects.⁸

While Lowry attempts to express those individual needs that have been distorted by the submission to the impossible demands of a repressive culture, he surrenders those very needs to the demands of the Ideal. His attempt to express all that we have lost becomes the justification for authorizing that loss as a sin, not against the memory of our experiences, but against what has become of our memory. And what has become of our memory is that it has been distorted and mystified by the secret agents -- the

"police" -- of repression which memory itself was to free us from.

His special insights into what history and culture do in order to distort our needs and desires (projection and sublimation) become insights into our needs to recover myths of guilt and repentance, of the eternal. "Sourceless sorrow" as an overwhelming condition of contemporary man masks, for Lowry, the possibilities of recovering what we have lost and leaves us with an inevitably destructive but totally impenetrable world. Yet while he recognizes that in denial lies the falsification of experience, the journey back to where we can recover our experience is filled with terror. He replaces "insight into the negativity of culture"¹ with the negation of insight. The Spenglerian "freezing over" of culture and the trading-in of individuals for types are not only signalling cultural despair but indicate an obsession with form and image as a means of holding back that despair.

Finally, the abstraction of love through the mystification of the body, not only says what is happening in the world, but is a way of disguising a disgust at the way "lawlessness" seizes possession of childhood innocence; so that the longing for the images of innocence prevents rather than liberates the possibility of recovering "paradise". In such a world-view the abyss is indeed final.

Footnotes -- Chapter V.

- 1 Adorno, "Spengler after the Decline," Prisms, p.55
- 2 ibid., p.59.
- 3 loc. cit.
- 4 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.209.
- 5 loc. cit.
- 6 Rosenberg, "Surrealism in the Streets," The De-Definition of Art, p.54.
- 7 Theodor Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," Prisms, p.265.
- 8 Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude, New York: Grove Press, 1961, p.69.
- 9 Adorno, Prisms, p.32.

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