TOPOPHOBIA, TOPOPHILIA, AND MALCOLM LOWRY: ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES IN SELECTED WRITING.

by

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ABSTRACT

Topophobia, Topophilia, and Malcolm Lowry: Environmental Perspectives in Selected Writing.

Literary Ecology involves the study of ecological ideas as these are presented in works of literature. Environmental Perspectives - individual perceptions which merge into a broader intersubjectivity of reader, character or narrator, and the presence of nature in the text - provide a medium for ecological awareness and consideration. In Malcolm Lowry's Mexican and British Columbian Writing this inter-subjectivity is intense, as is the sense of these narratives as dealing with ecological issues.

A discourse of environmental perspectives exists in much of Lowry's fiction. This discourse ranges from topophobia (a term used by humanistic geographers, meaning fear of place) in the Mexican novels - Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid - to topophilia (love of place) in the British Columbian writing - Hear Us O Lord From Heaven thy Dwelling Place and October Ferry to Gabriola. In "The Forest Path to the Spring" (From Hear Us O Lord) Lowry's narrator describes the squatters' community at Eridanus from an exemplary topophilic perspective. Lowry offers his readers 'Eridanus' as a prospective way of life; as a concept, Eridanus strives to respond to both ecological and social concerns.

Perspectives on the natural environment work as an implicit expository progression throughout these five narratives, a progression that begins with alienation but concludes with integration of both human and natural worlds. The effect of this progression upon the reader is to create a new awareness of the environment, and to potentially engender topophilia and a desire to integrate with nature, rather than to separate and exploit.

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INTRODUCTION.

Environmental Perspectives in Selected Writing.

EPIGRAPH: **There is a growing conviction that man's use of the earth's resources, his alteration of places in every corner of the globe, must proceed now with a view not only to present profit and pleasure but to the survival of the very next generation. The great question is whether man can change his perception of himself in relation to his surroundings in such a way as to achieve this end. An increased sensitivity to place seems to be required, a sensitivity inspired by aesthetic as well as ecological values, imaginative as well as functional needs. Insofar as the representation of place in literature has an important influence on how people regard individual places and the whole world as a place, it may be concluded that literature must now be seen in terms of the contemporary concern for survival. (Lutwack 2)**

The passage above, from Chapter One of Leonard Lutwack's The Role of Place in Literature, introduces the notion that literature and ecology are partially interdependent disciplines. Considering a connection between literature and ecology is also central to the study this thesis will make in the work of Malcolm Lowry. Three of Lutwack's premises that pertain to my argument are as follows: (i) literature not only represents but also influences the way in which people regard their environment; (ii) ecological thinking begins with people having an intense awareness of both their physical environment and of themselves in vital relation to this environment; (iii) the current ecological crisis requires of us, as individuals and as a society, extensive revision of the humanity/environment relationship, a revision at times informed by literature's depiction of this relationship. Each of these three premises is basic to literary ecology; my argument is that literary ecology can provide a basis for the interpretation of Malcolm Lowry's narratives.

It is necessary before proceeding into the narratives themselves to establish what literary ecology is, and how Lowryan narratives can be read in terms of it. Joseph Meeker's The Comedy of Survival defines the subject as follows: **"literary ecology ... is the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species"** (9). Meeker also suggests that **"literature which provides models of man's relationships with nature will thus influence both man's perceptions of nature and his responses to it ..."** (8). The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan makes the following similar point in his article "Literature, Experience, and Environmental Knowing" :

> **Literature depicts human experience. Experience may be defined as the sum of means through which we know reality and construct a world .... From one viewpoint literature is a diagnostic index or evidence of culture; from another it is a creative force directing culture enabling people to see their world in new ways.** (260)

Other statements about the inter-disciplinary workings of literature and ecology include the following from Salter and Lloyd's Landscape in Literature: **"The work of authors [in capturing landscape experience] can virtually change the reality of the landscape, as the unique images they weave help create new attitudes towards place which ultimately become reflected in the landscapes of the real world"** (5). This general sense of literature's work with land and place, or **"inhabited space"** (Lutwack 27), as being socially influential or critical is

reiterated in D.C.D. Pocock's Humanistic Geography and Literature. Pocock explains that **"landscape depiction has a further inherent creative quality .... it contributes to the general learning process whereby values, attitudes, and aspirations are acquired ..." (18).** The relevance of these statements to the novels, novellas, and short stories of Malcolm Lowry is that (i) as suggested by Meeker and Lutwack, a pro-ecology world-view is composed of 'new attitudes' towards nature, (ii) literature's depiction of the natural world is an ecological agent in that it can engender these new attitudes, aspirations and values, (iii) Lowry's writing has the potential to engender ecological thinking in the ways noted in (i) and (ii) above.

The next question is: how can Lowryan narratives be understood in terms of literary ecology; what is the interpretive process? In order to approach this question it will be helpful to set Lowry's work within a broader context, to consider other novelists whose works contain elements of ecology or environmentalism.

In a chapter entitled "Placelessness" Lutwack makes the following statement which provides a starting point from which to establish a literary context for the environmentalism in Lowry's writing: **"The predicament of characters drawn by realists in the nineteenth century becomes the universal predicament of man in the twentieth century" (241).** Douglas Porteous, in Landscapes of the Mind, further defines this 'predicament' as **"a growing urban**

rootlessness, squalor and despair" (9). Porteous continues to connect these conditions with early and mid-twentieth century writing, as follows:

> It is in this tradition that the British novelists who come to maturity between the two world wars operate. I am thinking especially of Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, D.H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Malcolm Lowry, Graham Greene, and a host of lesser novelists who express the feeling that there is something badly, perhaps fatally wrong with the urban civilization that had been built upon the corpses of the lost generations of the Industrial Revolution and of the First World War. (Landscapes 9-10)

In response to this sense that something is 'fatally wrong', some of these novelists seek solutions outside of 'urban civilization'. In The Nature Novel From Hardy to Lawrence, John Alcorn labels this loose grouping of writers working with "inevitably utopian" themes set within "an elaborately described landscape" and a "world of physical organism" as "naturists" ("Preface" x). Like Porteous and Lutwack, Alcorn points out that literary ecology in the early to mid-twentieth century extends from the presence of nature in nineteenth-century literature. Alcorn particularly focuses on Thomas Hardy, as in the following:

> one of the themes of the book [Jude the Obscure] is modern man's loss of contact with the physical world .... Hardy moves toward that sensuous immediacy of landscape characteristic of the later novels. The naturists inherit this exuberant awareness of the earth from Hardy. (3)

As Alcorn's title indicates, Hardy is at one end of the naturist spectrum, while Lawrence is at the other, along with

contemporaries such as Greene and Lowry. In his book on Lawrence, Greene and Lowry, The Fictional Landscape of Mexico, Douglas Veitch describes a presence of landscape and nature in these three writers that echoes what Alcorn, above, calls a "sensuous immediacy of landscape" or an "exuberant awareness of the earth" in Hardy. Veitch's ideas also recall Lutwack's, specifically that "an increased sensitivity to place" is elemental to ecological thinking, as noted in the epigraph to this thesis.

> **[These] are perhaps Lawrence's major contributions to modern literature: the ability to 'irradiate nature from within' and the capacity to deepen and widen the subjective life and its meaning for a statistical age. It is the possibility of a profounder subjective response than usually reported that Lawrence tries to reveal, and his landscapes carry much of the burden. (Veitch 57)**

Veitch's evaluation of Greene's landscapes also echoes the epigraph from Lutwack: **"If Greene is not given to the flow and panache of Lawrence's grand landscape orchestrating, he has an eye for the revealing detail that accumulates resonances" (Veitch 59).** Or more simply, Veitch points out that **"Greene's descriptions show a sensitivity to place ..." (62).** Veitch links Lowry with Lawrence and Greene, insofar as a vivid and vital depiction of landscape is concerned. Towards the end of his book, Veitch summarizes this linkage as follows: **"Lawrence, Greene, and Lowry respected the mysterious connection between place and mind that has haunted and still haunts the imagination" (183).** Veitch also says of Lawrence, that **"the mechanized state of modern western man was Lawrence's enemy" (15).** Such an attitude also

figures in the work of Greene and Lowry adding another dimension to the link between these three writers.

In his chapter "Homescape" Porteous also deals with Greene in terms of a 'connection between place and mind'. However, unlike Veitch, whose survey is limited to writing about Mexico, Porteous is able to provide an additional point of view on Greene's 'sensitivity to place', as in the following:

> **The concept of Greeneland emerged about the time of the Second World War, and has been used repeatedly by critics since the 1950's to describe the archetypal landscape of the Greeneian ouvre. It is a mental landscape of boredom, failure, distrust, betrayal and despair, reflected in a physical landscape of run-down city streets, squalid buildings, livid advertising signs, lonely bed-sitting rooms .... (Landscapes 107-8)**

Porteous also discusses elements of 'Greeneland' or "wasteland" (Landscapes 109) in work by Lowry and other 1920's, 1930's writers. Concepts like Greeneland or wasteland help to group Lowry with Greene and other contemporaries in terms of literary ecology. The sensitivity to place that Lowry shares with Greene, Lawrence and others, divides itself over the course of his writing into a general feeling of repulsion for mechanized-industrialized urban places, and feelings of attraction to and intimacy with more natural settings outside of cities.

E.M. Forster and William Golding also fit into the context of literary ecology that this thesis is framing around the work of Malcolm Lowry. As does Lowry, both Forster and Golding engage the relationship between individual, community, and environment.

Lutwack discusses "Forster's political theme" which is

> based on the assumption that a loss of contact with the earth, specifically that English countryside which was the creation of the country-house economy, perverts the life of the nation .... a return to the land and to the country-house community is necessary to restore the nation's torn fabric of love and morality. (205)

Golding, like Lawrence, Greene and Lowry, goes considerably beyond this residual Edwardian pastoralism evident in Forster. Golding explores some of the implications of a renewed 'contact with the earth'. Lutwack explains this aspect of Golding's work as follows:

> A spectrum of twentieth-century responses to the wilderness-as-salvation notion is presented in William Golding's Lord of the Flies .... Madman, dreamer and realist are tested by Golding in the wilderness setting. Jack Merridew can only seek to destroy whatever world he lives in, and finds it easier to destroy the wilderness island than England; in losing himself in nature Simon finds himself incapable of coping with social problems that destroy the nature he loves. Only Ralph deals with the wilderness in a rational manner, accomodating himself to its demands and yet witholding some part of his humanity from the temptations offered by selflessness on one hand and barbarous violence on the other. (211-12)

From this point we can return to the question posed earlier in this introduction: how can Lowryan narratives be understood in terms of literary ecology; what is the interpretive process? As with Lawrence and Greene, also Hardy as forerunner, Lowry's work is characterized by a strong subjectivity; Lowry's narrators are intensely aware of themselves in relation to place, particularly in relation to the natural world that is rarely absent from the

settings these narrators inhabit. As with Forster, Lowry's work concerns a 'loss of contact' with the earth; virtually all of his characters express a desire for some kind of 'return to the land'. And as with Golding, in Lowry's writing there is a 'spectrum of responses' to the natural world, and a spectrum of characters interacting with nature. The importance of such a spectrum in terms of literary ecology is, to reiterate Meeker's point, that **"literature which provides models of man's relationships with nature will thus influence both man's perceptions of nature and his responses to it" (8).**

This thesis will examine Lowry's depiction of character-interactions with nature in five narratives, two set in Mexico and three set in British Columbia. In the five narratives to be dealt with, the interactions, or models of perceptual relationships with nature, move between the alienation of self from nature at one end of the spectrum, and integration at the other. I would further suggest that the idea of alienation is central to Lowry's earlier Mexican work, while the idea of integration is central to much of his later work, set in British Columbia. Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid will be examined to reflect the Mexican setting; October Ferry to Gabriola and two selections from Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place will represent the B.C. setting.

As to which aspects of these settings the thesis will focus on, I will borrow again from Humanistic Geography. Porteous

divides landscape or "inscape" (Landscapes 87) into the following categories: "sea and land, coast and interior, garden and house, forest and path, mountain and cavern ..." (Landscapes 88); a further category is city (Landscapes 175). I will work mainly with house and garden, forest and path; these are settings that allow for possible intimacy between human and natural elements, and are located on the border between the human world and the natural world, not exclusively in one or the other. 'House' may belong to the human world just as 'forest' belongs to the natural; however, both 'garden' and 'path' landscapes represent attempts that the human world has made to engage or enter the natural world, possibly exploitatively, possibly reverentially. Central landscape symbols or figures in the narratives (volcano, barranca, inlet) will also be taken into account; however, my point of focus is inhabited 'border crossing' places on the periphery of the natural world.

"Places are neither good nor bad in themselves, but in the values attached to them, and literature is one of the agencies involved in attaching values to places" (Lutwack 35). One implication of Lutwack's comment is that literature's depiction of a landscape of inhabited nature inherently involves some interrogative and expository elements concerning the interaction between human and natural worlds, between the man-made and the organic; the written landscape does not reproduce the actual place, but gives a version or interpretation of that place in terms of what it means to the narrator/observer. For this

reason I refer to characters' responses to nature as perspectives. Although there is some ambivalence, in the Mexican writing the prevailing point of view is topophobic (a term used in Humanistic Geography, meaning 'fear of place'); in the B.C. writing it is topophilic (meaning 'love of place').

What follows is a brief synopsis of the perspectives and interactions that this thesis will evaluate. Since I am concerned with treating a collection of environmental perspectives from these five narratives as a work of literary ecology, unless the context in which the term is used obviously suggests otherwise, "environment" is meant to signify something larger than simply any one character's immediate surroundings; it addresses the concept of nature as habitat. By "environmental perspectives" I mean the position or attitude taken by characters towards the presence of nature in their world.

Yvonne and the Consul in Under the Volcano maintain a problematic relationship with the natural world which contributes to the destruction of their own lives, their 'marriage', and of one another. Yvonne's topophilia has more to do with the future she longs for than the present she inhabits. Hers is something of a 'good, but you can't get there from here' situation. The Consul's topophobia is as complicated as Yvonne's topophilia is unrealistic. While he sees himself as cut-off from various sources of life, and certainly perpetuates and magnifies his own alienation, his intense consciousness of the world around him,

both man-made and natural, seems at odds with his perceived severance from these. While he regards elements of nature such as the volcanoes, the jungle, and the barranca with a mixture of reverence, awe, fear and repulsion, he feels a great deal of affection, even empathy, for the Indians who are at home with these presences.

The Consul is a seminal figure in terms of understanding environmental perspectives in Lowry's work. Variations of this one character's crisis of self, other, world and nature become central to the other four narratives considered here. Like the Consul, Lowry's other characters navigate - circumnavigate, really - a region bordered by both regenerative and destructive potentialities: tension is always present. The Mexican tropical 'paradise' is an impossible paradise for these characters, particularly the Consul: they are foreigners in a land with a long history of foreign exploitation; the beauty that surrounds them is also foreign, and often overpowering; squalor, poverty, and death compose the margins of all their experiences; and ultimately Yvonne and the Consul are overtaken by those margins. The northern 'Eden' of later narratives, while a more possible paradise than the Consul's Mexico, is also a vulnerable paradise: urban growth and industrial pollution impinge upon the idyllic settlement; eviction threatens its inhabitants increasingly. The attraction/repulsion tension between individual and environment has at its heart a dilemma fundamental to the treatment of ecology in literature. Lutwack explains that

> humanity seems permanently disposed to waver between acceptance and transcendence of earth, between kinship with earth and revulsion against the environmental dependence that must be suffered equally with animal and vegetable forms of life. The ultimate cause of this ambivalence is the knowledge that earth is both the source of life and the condition of death, a place where life begins and ends. Though born of earth, man is reluctant to return to earth, to surrender possibility and accept known limitation. (4-5)

In Lowry's treatment of this subject, such conflicting responses to nature are embodied in the Consul and borne out in varying degrees by other and later characters.

The Consul's half-brother Hugh has a more ambivalent perspective than Yvonne or Geoff, neither topophilic nor topophobic, neither specifically seeking integration with nature nor alienation from it. He exhibits something of both Yvonne's romanticism and the Consul's pessimism. He is adaptable, not quite a scavenger, something of a survivor; and as such, his relationship with his environment is the most ecologically sound of the three, but only marginally so since his particular romanticism involves the volatile political causes of the day, making the natural world one of his lesser concerns. The Consul, Yvonne, and Hugh exhibit three sample relationships with nature that are not unlike those shown by Golding's Jack, Simon, and Ralph respectively: the Consul as madman, Yvonne as dreamer, and Hugh as realist ... if only by default.

Sigurd and Astrid act almost as temporary pilgrims in "The Bravest Boat". As they wander through the park, a microcosm of

idealized harmony between humanity and nature, they contemplate their potential for integration with a natural environment. They are on the point of achieving some of the integration they seek. The analogy of the pilgrimage or the allegorical quest can also be applied to Sigbjørn and Primrose in Dark as the Grave. Having experienced a dislocation from their environment, they travel and heal. They view-from-without other possibilities for integration with the earth, and hope to return home to renew their former integration with their own environment. In "The Forest Path to the Spring" Sigbjørn and Primrose live in a context of topophilia and relative integration with the natural world. October Ferry to Gabriola again presents the problem of dislocation. Ethan and Jacqueline travel with the aim of re-establishing the environmental integration they have lost. Their dislocation is more profound than that of Sigbjørn and Primrose in Dark as the Grave. They have to seek a new home, a new habitat. While the possibility of finding one exists, and their capacity for topophilia is still intact, at the close of the narrative their search remains incomplete.

Yvonne, Hugh, the Consul; Sigurd and Astrid; Sigbjørn and Primrose; Ethan and Jacqueline: **"It is against eutopic and dystopic landscapes ... that the Lowryan characters act out their theatre"** (Landscapes 88). The topophobic-topophilic/alienation-integration shift described earlier in this introduction is significant from the standpoint of literary ecology; the significance is that these observer-figures in literature, who

seek not to alienate themselves from nature but to harmonize with a natural environment, are both providing a constructive rather than destructive model of humanity's relationship with nature, and are potentially influencing readers' responses to nature towards emulating such a harmonious relationship, or are at least potentially engendering an attitude of topophilia in readers. I would suggest that Lowry's characters come, in the later narratives, to demonstrate the possibility of a relatively harmonious relationship with the natural world. And when constructive models are set in the larger context of other characters' interactions with nature, interactions that are destructive either to themselves or their environment or to both, then these environmental perspectives taken as a body of hypothetical situations work as a dialectic, if not as an exposition with a single 'thesis'. Not all readers will begin revising their own attitudes to nature in order to emulate Sigbjørn and Primrose rather than Yvonne and the Consul; however, readers will find themselves presented with these different approaches, some destructive and some not, to consider. Readers will be, as Tuan put it, 'enabled to see their world in new ways', which is where ecological thinking begins.

* * * * * * *

CHAPTER 1.

Under the Volcano:
Topophobia and Failed Topophilia.

> In this garden ... which seemed carefully and lovingly kept, there existed at the moment certain evidence of work left uncompleted: tools, unusual tools, a murderous machete, an oddly shaped fork, somehow nakedly impaling the mind, with its twisted tines glittering in the sunlight, were leaning against the fence, as also was something else, a sign uprooted or new, whose oblong pallid face stared through the wire at him. " _ Le Gusta Este Jardin?" it asked ....
> "_ Le Gusta Este Jardin?
> _ Que Es Suyo?
> _ Evite Que sus Hijos Lo Destruyan!"
> The Consul stared at the black words on the sign without moving. 'You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!' Simple words, simple and terrible words, words which took one to the very bottom of one's being, words which [were] perhaps a final judgement on one ....
> (Lowry, Volcano 132)

One of the things that takes place in the preceding excerpt from chapter five of Under the Volcano is a principal character's mistranslation of a statement in Spanish. Yet even the Consul's error is accurate in its own way; he feels observed, threatened, even judged by elements of the world he inhabits, both man-made and natural. While his response seems overly negative, it is an especially clear example of how environmental perspectives work in Under the Volcano. The character's awareness of himself and his situation in life is perceived in terms of a larger "world of physical organism" (to borrow a phrase from Alcorn). Because of what his point of view represents in microcosm, the Consul's 'mistranslation' helps to connect ideas from the introduction with the first narrative under discussion in this thesis. The Consul's perspective on 'the public garden' is a nearly perfect encapsulation of one character's acute awareness of some fundamental problem; the problem exists in his interaction with

his environment, a world that constantly impinges upon his consciousness, and yet a world that he struggles to distinguish himself from.

I begin discussion of Under the Volcano with this typical position of the Consul's because it is like an epigram of the operation of environmental perspectives as issues of literary ecology. As the Consul views the world around him, where nature figures strongly, his perspective inherently responds to a directive of literary ecology: **"it is essential to ponder what the landscape is saying; what it is demonstrating; perhaps even what it is warning ..." (Salter and Lloyd 28).** As he **"reels to the foot of his garden and at the fence looks over the barranca to an orderly public garden beyond" (Veitch 149)**, the Consul stands at several borders simultaneously: certainly as a diplomat, a political mediator, he operates on a border between governments. The Consul's role is also something of a parody of the gardener's role, which is to mediate between the human and the natural world, to work at an harmonious intermingling of the two; however, instead of harmony the gardener might only achieve a precarious control of nature. Halted at the edge of the two gardens as well as the barranca, the Consul's position and his interpretation of it implicitly suggest some questions pending: why does nature seem such an uncomfortable presence here; is this individual's thinking about nature or environment flawed somehow; how does he deal with his environment; how does society deal with its environment; what are the implications of answers to these?

What is important about the Consul's perspective is the extent to which it is interrogative. He collects and interprets information. While much of the envisioned 'data' is interpreted negatively (taken to mean 'I am doomed, we are doomed, the world is doomed'), some of it is not; and some of the Consul's negativity or topophobia is valid. The negativity is not as significant to this study as is the treatment of the perceived world as a continual statement being made, about oneself, and about one's role in a larger crisis. This sort of 'what is the verdict' condition pervades descriptions of human/environment interaction throughout Under the Volcano.

The description of the town in the novel's second paragraph is of a place where movement, growth and progress seem impossible: **"The walls of the town, which is built on a hill, are high, the streets and lanes tortuous and broken, the roads winding."** Inertia has replaced initiative: **"A fine American-style highway leads in from the north but is lost in its narrow streets and comes out a goat track"** (Volcano 9). Veitch proposes that **"The natural and the social pull in opposite directions in this description"** (128). Initially, only the town's buildings and facilities are described, not its residents or their activities, creating a first sense of the place as inert and lifeless despite the deceptive proliferation of **"eighteen churches and fifty-seven cantinas .... a golf course and no fewer than four hundred swimming-pools, public and private,"** also despite the deceptive activity of **"the water that ceaselessly pours down from the**

mountains," and despite the deceptive implication of arrivals and departures given by the town's having "many splendid hotels" (Volcano 9). The manner of description makes the churches, cantinas, golf course, and pool appear to be unused and barren, and makes the water's movement seem automatic and ignored. This emphasis on the impersonal and material is aided by the statement that "Quauhnahuac possesses" these things. The town is described less as a place to live and more as a large-scale working model of a town-site.

The novel's third paragraph enters into a description of a specific building, one of the "splendid hotels". "The Hotel Casino De La Selva stands on a slightly higher hill just outside the town .... surrounded by gardens and terraces which command a spacious view in every direction" (9). This place also seems abandoned and obsolete: its gardens do not give the impression of having either people walking amongst the bushes and flowers or of having birds flying here and there; the terraces do not seem occupied by guests gazing at the panoramic view. "No one ever seems to swim in the magnificent olympic pool. The springboards seem empty and mournful. Its jai-alai courts are grass-grown and deserted" (9). The narrator's emphasis on desertion here refers partly to the novel's 1939 context and the beginning of President Cardenas' political and land reforms (Veitch 113). Aside from this reference, the details of this long descriptive passage accumulate into a definition. The perspective of these first two paragraphs is that of the narrator: it is an

overview that 'lays the groundwork' for interactions to come. What the narrator gives us here and elsewhere in Chapter One is something of an internal critical context in which to set the forthcoming models - of perceptions of, and interactions with nature - that the novel will present. What is posited in descriptions in this first chapter is a general condition of environment; following chapters consist of three main characters responding differently to this condition.

After the Hotel Casino De La Selva, the next building described suggests death and despair more distinctly than the seeming emptiness and lifelessness of the town and hotel. **"The watchtower of a prison rose over a wood between the river and the road ..." (Volcano 11).** This topophobic view of the prison over-powering the woodland offers at least one equation for the perceptual relationship between humanity and the natural world: humanity (either society in general or the individual as its representative) as the hostile guarded enclosure, the natural world as something separate and mysterious at best. This will later become an equation that the Consul often adopts. This description, and the one of the town and the Hotel Casino De La Selva, begin a dialectic of description and perception that proceeds throughout the novel.

Chapter One of Under the Volcano contains a set of ideas that operates as a microcosm of the whole novel. Near the end of the chapter the following alternative situation is proposed, in which

interaction between human and natural elements is more harmonious than in the two previous descriptions:

> **... a new life together we might somewhere lead. I seem to see us living in some northern country, of mountains and hills and blue water; our house is built on an inlet and one evening we are standing, happy in one another, on the balcony of this house, looking over the water. There are sawmills half-hidden by trees beyond and under the hills on the other side of the inlet, what looks like an oil refinery, only softened and rendered beautiful by the distance.**
> **(Volcano 42)**

In this passage, unlike the 'walls of the town' paragraph, the emphasis is on the natural and the organic: mountains, hills, water, inlet and trees over-arch house, sawmill, and refinery. The sense of environment is very strong here because the two figures on the balcony, the balcony itself, and the other human elements viewed are placed within a larger context that contains them. The statement that "we are happy in one another" seems to include the place in which they are happy. The sense is that this is their habitat, not their property, and their well-being depends in large measure upon its continued existence and health. "Our house is built on an inlet": in this view the constructed building and the natural landform are depicted simultaneously; there is a strong sense of connection between one and the other. The sawmills are depicted jointly with trees that half-hide them; and the refinery cannot be extracted from the sense of space that makes it appear beautiful.

The man and woman are not in the foreground. We do not really see these things through their eyes: they are part of what is

seen. The industrial structures are not in the foreground. Thus the narrator has left us with the inlet for a center, with a few things peripheral to it; the man and woman become peripheral to it. The idea being forwarded in this passage is that the human observer-inhabitants of this environment have no primacy over the terrain they survey; in fact the roles are almost reversed: their presence is secondary to that of the inlet.

It is important to consider, though, that the visual hypothesis above is never actually applied in the context of the narrative by any of the main characters upon their way of life. They represent a microcosmic society in which changes must be made before 'the new life' can begin to work.

* * *

Chapter One of Under the Volcano provides what Douglas **Veitch** calls an **"overview" (127)**. The novel's second chapter moves into a more present world in which characters reside and act. The context in which their movements are set involves opposed territories and concepts: the town and its miniature urban environment, tamed nature in the town's gardens and courtyards, and the ambiguous wilderness terrain beyond the town's perimeters. The characters make evaluations about the world encompassing them and act in accordance with their evaluations. Here we can begin to measure the ecological soundness of positions or perspectives held by the characters with regard to their environment. By ecological soundness I basically mean survival: an ecologically sound perspective is one that allows

the character to survive the narrative with the ability to continue building a positive way of life, one that does not destroy self, other, or environment; an ecologically unsound perspective would be held by a character who is destructive of self, other, or environment. In this sense the characters can be seen as representing different points of view in a dialectical argument.

Towards the end of Chapter Two the two principal characters, Yvonne and the Consul, regard their house:

> **... their house was in sight .... the dark entrance in the ditch - the high walls on both sides had temporarily disappeared altogether - to the abandoned mine running under the garden .... and now here were the walls again, and their drive sloping down into the street .... and now here was their gate, off its hinges and lying just beyond the entrance ... half-hidden under the bank of bougainvillea. (68-9)**

This time the point of view is Yvonne's, not the omniscient narrator's. In her perception there is a sense of uncertainty, of things undermining other things: the walls disappear and reappear; there is a disused mine under the garden; the gate is open, but damaged, buried under rampant flowers. Her 'eye' works within what **Veitch** calls **"the basis of Lowry's landscape technique .... the mixture of gentle and foreboding elements and the close tailoring of perception to character" (122).**

Negative and positive interpretations of the seen world interchange. Although the garden seems a positive, wholesome presence, what underlies it represents mechanization, industry, and (as the mine is abandoned) the depletion of resources.

Although the bougainvillea could be indicative of verdure and abundance, that they partly hide the broken gate makes them appear slightly sinister. Their name adds to their sinister or foreboding effect: they are named after Louis de Bougainville who **"unlike early explorers did not believe in any literal Eden"** (Tuan, Topophilia 119). This places Yvonne at odds with some of the realities of her environment, because she expects to locate a nearly literal Eden somewhere within it, as becomes apparent in Chapter Four. Yvonne's perceptions vacillate between topophilia and topophobia. However, I think topophobia overbalances topophilia in her view of the house, because many things she sees impress her as being somewhat alien and slightly threatening.

* * *

In Chapter Three the characters move about within the immediate environs of their house. The point of view has shifted to the Consul's. His view of the house, **"white ... roofed with imbricated flower-pot-coloured tiles resembling bisected drainpipes,"** is not of it as a place, but as something to be commanded, a **"ship lying at anchor"** (Volcano 71). The comparison perhaps indicates his wish to keep his relationship with nature (and Yvonne) at a level structured and contained enough to rationalize. This possibility is also suggested by his definition of the garden as **"a rajah mess ... without a gardener"** (72), as though nature ideally must be maintained and controlled.

The porch of his house becomes, like the bridge of a ship, a control-position for him to evaluate his situation. He therefore

sees the volcanoes from the porch not really on their own terms, but in terms of civilization:

> **the plains rolled up to the very foot of the volcanoes into a barrier of murk above which rose the pure cone of old Popo, and spreading to the left of it like a university city in the snow the jagged peaks of Ixtaccihuatl. (72)**

Both the monogamous relationship, and the idea of the university city - an exemplar of civic order and social strata - are rational equations into which he can fit his thinking. However, equations can break down. Looking down from the porch he sees the pool and garden: **"trimmed about the pool's edges but sloped off beyond into an indescribable confusion of briars from which the Consul averted his eyes..." (72).** The garden has been neglected; the Consul's relationship with nature has been neglected. His need for decorum is undermined by a reassertion of nature, the 'confusion' of which causes him anxiety: his outlook here is more clearly topophobic than Yvonne's.

* * *

Chapter Four works through Hugh's perspective. Hugh's sense of the house differs from the Consul's. Hugh places it into a panoramic vision, with the prison watchtower at one end, the Cortez Palace at another, and in between a geometric ordering of gardens and residences:

> **The watchtower, nearer, taller, bloomed above a wood, through which they just made out the high prison walls. On the other side, to their left, Geoffrey's house came in sight, almost a bird's eye view, the bungalow crouching, very tiny, before the trees, the long garden below descending steeply, parallel with which on different levels**

> **obliquely climbing the hill, all the other gardens of the contiguous residences, each with its cobalt oblong of swimming pool, also descended steeply towards the barranca, the land sweeping away at the top of the Calle Nicaragua back up to the pre-eminence of Cortez Palace. (109)**

The scope is wide: Hugh seems to be examining the oppressive precepts of the Consul's world, which range from entrapment by punitive orders and conformity to societal rules, to the obsolete values of hierarchy. Hugh sees the public garden - the collective, egalitarian, and possibly agrarian ideal it represents - to be **"directly opposite the house" (109).**

In keeping with the public-garden concept, for the time being, Hugh and Yvonne rent horses from an experimental farm and go riding. A shift further into a 'back to nature' proposition is made as Hugh envisions the following escape for Yvonne and the Consul from their present circumstances:

> **No phone. No rent. No Consulate. Be a squatter. Call on your pioneer ancestors. Water from the well. Chop your own wood .... I can see your shack now. It's between the forest and the sea and you've got a pier going down to the water ... You'll have to go through the woods to the store. (126)**

This scenario of Hugh's is something of an abstraction, however: **"At this moment the best and easiest and most simple thing in the world seemed to be the happiness of these two people in a new country" (125).** Neither Hugh nor Yvonne consider the difficulties of realizing such a proposition. Hauling water - from a well they would likely have to dig themselves - and chopping wood are activities that seem very distant from the

relatively civilized world of a failing alcoholic diplomat and a former actress who has spent much of her life travelling - not eking out an existence on a remote piece of undeveloped ground. While probably aimed at giving Yvonne hope, Hugh's vision is too idyllic to be plausible as such: **"The woods will be wet. And occasionally a tree will come crashing down. And sometimes there will be a fog and that fog will freeze. Then your whole forest will become a crystal forest"** (126). Hugh has no vested interest in the plan he is outlining; so the fact that he is describing it to Yvonne, rather than Yvonne and the Consul discussing the situation they would have to cope with, again makes the 'new life' seem less than an attainable reality.

Returning to part of Hugh's earlier impression of the Consul's world, Yvonne and Hugh enter the grounds of Maximillian's ruined summer palace. **"Near them was what might once have been a chapel ... elsewhere were the remains of a wide stone porch ... "** (127). It represents something else undermining the new seacoast home idea, i.e. the personal and social history surrounding Yvonne and the Consul: **"Hugh, who had quite lost his bearings, secured their mares to a broken pink pillar that stood apart from the rest of the desuetude, a meaningless mouldering emblem .... Yvonne looked suddenly ill at ease"** (127). Maximillian and Carlotta also sought happiness in a new country: the results were disastrous. The parallel to Hugh's plan, and to Yvonne's implicit acceptance of it is clear enough.

* * *

The narrative returns, in Chapter Five, to the Consul's garden and the Consul's point of view. This is the chapter from which the thesis' epigraph is taken. "You like this garden? Why is it yours?" Through an 'over the fence' joke, the Consul perhaps unintentionally highlights a flaw in his own often topophobic outlook on the environment:

> **I've often wondered whether there isn't more in the old legend of the garden of Eden, and so on, than meets the eye .... perhaps Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cardenas in fact - tee hee! - kicked him out.' (137)**

His joke ironically connects new and old ideologies of western civilization, the political with the religious. On the political side there is the capitalist/marxist, sanctity/criminality debate about private property; on the religious side there is the problematic Eden myth; i.e. is nature the unregenerate, or the transcendent and incorruptible part of creation? In the next few paragraphs the Consul moves from 'Eden' closer to his own garden problems: **"To hell with the place! Just think of all the scorpions and leafcutter ants - to mention only a few of the abominations he must have had to put up with" (138).** The Consul has eloquently worked his way through a treatment of nature that is anthropocentric to one that is egocentric.

Standing by the house's parapet, the Consul compares his own soul to **"a town ravaged"**, and pictures the opposite ideal as **"a peaceful village" (148-9).** The distinction between the two is that while a village is usually a rural community clustered about

common grazing-land, a town is a more densely populated, more urban community surrounding something like a mine or a factory. Veitch's evaluation of this part of Chapter 5 is that **"Nature, again ambiguous enough and with occasional backlashes asserting its reality, more clearly emerges as lost to the Consul" (152).** If the Consul is in any way a representative of the values of western civilization, then nature is to some extent lost to it as well.

Such an implication seems to be supported by something that happens near the chapter's close:

> **... a sudden terrific detonation ... shook the house and sent birds skimming panic-stricken all over the garden. Target practice in the Sierra Madre .... [Three black vultures] sought another tree to wait in and the echoes of gunfire swept back over the house. (Volcano 151)**

After the Consul's ship simile, the house seems an appropriate recipient of the echoes of gunfire. However three denizens of the natural world, symbolizing death from an anthropocentric point of view, flee from the detonation and shun the house. The suggestion may be that by treating the natural world exploitatively - possessing what is considered useful or beautiful, and rejecting what is not - civilization (which the Consul and his house represent) will soon be overcome by the 'echo' of its exploitative and destructive impulses.

* * *

In chapter 6 the perspective returns to Hugh. Chapter 6 also begins on the porch, which to Hugh is more of a 'neutral

zone', being neither part of the house's interior, nor part of the exterior world of pool and garden. It is a meditative position rather than a control position, from which Hugh recalls something that expands the Consul's previous 'ravaged town' analogy: "**... the monstrous deceptions twitched on and off, and around them the black soulless buildings stood wrapped in a cold dream of their own destruction**" (156). There is not one element of the natural world incorporated into this image. The Consul's analogy of his soul as a "**town ... stricken in the black path of his excess**" (148), has become the soulless city; it is a conceptual progression, which, from Hugh's perspective, effects a rejection of the world the Consul represents as bleak and uninhabitable. While the Consul superimposes this world onto what he sees, Hugh's vision is opposite. Hugh sees the Consul's room as "**a delightful place, and extremely large for the size of the house .... the odours of the garden filtered in through Geoff's open bedroom window**" (177). Hugh sees the room's openness to the outside world as positive. The Consul sees the opposite: " **'Do you see that sunflower looking in through my bedroom window? It stares into my room all day .... Stares. Fiercely. All day. Like God!' "** (183). In Chapter Five the Consul calls the sunflower "another enemy". The dialectic between Hugh's, Yvonne's and The Consul's perspectives is becoming more evident; each character's relationship with the environment is determined in great part by that character's view of the environment.

* * *

Chapters Seven and Eight set the Consul's and Hugh's points

of view against one another, as chapters Five and Six did. The Consul's point of view is positioned inside, in Laruelle's house, and then inside of inside as he reviews his mental image of the Farolito. Hugh's point of view moves through the outside world between the two towns, Quauhnahuac and Tomalin.

"There were two towers ... joined by a catwalk .... These towers were as if camouflaged (almost like 'The Samaritan' in fact) ..." (198). Details of the Consul's view of Laruelle's house, from the street (from behind 'protective lenses'), reveal no parity between the house and the world external to it. The house 'commands the valley'. The Consul compares the house to a submarine-catcher, a destroyer disguised as a civilian vessel. So, to the Consul, the house is a covert position from which to defend oneself against enemy forces. His attitude towards the environment is still topophobic, characterized by tension and guarded separation.

From recurring enclosed or half-enclosed vantages the Consul defines the natural world in terms of defenses and attacks. Midway through Chapter Seven, now inside Laruelle's house, he looks **"out through the open doors of the balcony"** and gives **"the volcanoes"** a negative interpretation, overshadowing them with **"puffs of smoke, accompanied by the rattle of musketry ..." (211).** Rather than allowing for the possibility of another more neutral meaning for the volcanoes (or the sunflower, or the barranca) the Consul relentlessly asserts the values and

suspicions of his world upon things external to that world.

The previous reference to the submarine-catcher may, however, suggest a certain amount of ambivalence in the Consul's topophobia. He condemns himself earlier for his involvement, as commander of the Samaritan, in the wrongful deaths of enemy officers. Just as the Samaritan then was a deception in name and in action, the reference to the Samaritan here is somewhat double-sided. Whatever Geoffrey Firmin's involvement was in those deaths, he was in part forced into it by the role he occupied as commander of that vessel. Likewise, the Consul's apparently topophobic attitude towards much of nature in the present may be a product or symptom of the various social roles he currently occupies and is not quite able to extricate himself from.

Inside Laruelle's house the Consul introduces another interior, **"The Farolito, ... the lighthouse that invites the storm and lights it" (203).** The Farolito is an analogy for the Consul's preference of the artificial over the natural or organic. A lighthouse extends human power into what is otherwise a cyclical natural phenomenon. As the Consul describes it, this lighthouse extends its control over other natural phenomena, first engaging the storm by invitation and then modifying the storm by lighting it. The Farolito is not actually a lighthouse at all, but a cantina **"really composed of numerous little rooms, each smaller and darker than the last, opening one into another, the last and darkest of all being no larger than a cell" (204).**

No natural storm could work its way through such a circuit. So the Consul could experience only metaphoric storms here, fabricated in the imagination and substituted for natural storms less accessible to the Consul's analysis. The Farolito is also a place of separation from the 'down to earth' world of **"the potter and the field labourer alike"** who only hesitate **"a moment in the paling doorway dreaming ..."** (204). It is a place of separation from a way of life where the natural environment must be engaged and worked with on a daily basis; but the problem of the Consul's implicit (and later explicit) avoidance of this world is that it has not all been voluntary. His marriage has failed due, at least in part, to circumstances beyond his control; the collapse of his career also involves external forces; he has no children, few friends, and only a half-brother and ex-wife for family; there is no inherited country estate he can retreat to, only the politically-volatile here and now: these conditions of his existence all contribute to his sense of alienation from a living organic world, and his desire to hide in a dark cantina.

> **More than most lands, more even than other lands traditionally perceived by Western observers as 'exotic' ... [described by Evelyn Waugh as] a distorting mirror in which objects are reflected in perverse and threatening forms ... Mexico seems without fail to have elicited an impassioned response from foreigners. In consequence, the travel writing about Mexico tends to be doubly subjective.** (Walker 12)

The extreme subjectivity that enfolds the Consul turns his environmental perspective into an expository pendulum, returning,

and returning, and returning again, forcing implications into the open. The Consul's topophobia involves his being a foreigner - and an unofficial exile - in Mexico. He is not really able to love a land where he is increasingly seen as representing invasion and despoilation; yet, he is not really able to leave Mexico either: he must continue facing and fleeing everything the place means to him. The Consul's situation certainly calls Western colonialism into question, but does so from an ecological as well as a political or ethical standpoint. Ecologically, colonialism is called into question because of its adherence to **"doctrines which tell of man's ascendency over nature [implying civilized man's ascendency over tribal societies as well] rather than those which define man and nature as a single integrated system"** (**Meeker 16**); this is part of the Consul's perception of nature as accusing. **"Mexico assaults the outsider with the inscrutable, with bewildering contradictions [Day of the Dead/fiesta day, brilliant sun/shadowy cantinas, volcanoes/barranca] and with the overwhelming sense of a reality beyond the world of 'hard facts'"** (**Walker 18**); the Consul is precisely this outsider.

* * *

Hugh's perspective throughout Chapter Eight is neither separating nor stationary. It moves past **"a secluded square with great old trees"** and **"the garden under the trees"** (235), not accepting, not rejecting, but viewing and considering. This garden is inhabited by a lone figure, suggestive of the Consul, not an Adam under threat of eviction but a costumed devil with

a huge dark red face and horns, fangs, and

> **his tongue hanging out over his chin, and an expression of mingled evil, lechery, and terror. The devil lifted his mask to spit, rose, and shambled through the garden with a dancing, loping step towards a church almost hidden by the trees. There was a sound of clashing machetes. A native dance was going on .... (235)**

That Hugh's view of the garden includes an emblem of the Consul may signify Hugh's awareness that the environment he is presented with is neither uninhabited nor untouched; it has been used and changed by his predecessors, even one so immediate as his older half-brother. So Hugh is not working here with a sense of a new world, but of the world he has been left by others.

Hugh sees the devil remove his mask and go towards a church in the trees. Seeing this works as a reminder that the Consul's devil persona, his topophobia, is not so much his chosen position as an individual, but a result of his having been overtaken by the power of the social role he 'performs'. The church in the trees, the idea of nature as welcoming and sacred seems to be the option the Consul would try as an individual. Hugh's vantage is less finite than Yvonne's or the Consul's, and allows him to incorporate a review of their positions into views of his own.

The figure of the murdered Banco-Ejidal rider in this chapter reintroduces the idea of Cardenas' land reforms into the narrative; the reforms consisted of **"a six-year plan adapted from the soviet model [in which] land redistribution was high on the list of priorities and Cardenas succeeded better than any of his predecessors in returning land to the peons" (Veitch 113).** The effect of this reminder within Hugh's transient perspective

is to take the microcosmic world views shifting dialectically between the other characters and re-set them as neutrally as possible into a larger socio-historical and socio-political context.

* * *

Chapters Nine and Ten again pit outside against inside, Yvonne's environmental perspective against the Consul's, respectively. In Chapter Seven, and elsewhere, the Consul's perspective moves inside of inside; in Chapter Nine Yvonne's conversely moves outside of outside:

> **There was the narrow path that wound down through the forest from the store, with salmonberries and thimbleberries, and wild blackberry bushes that on bright winter nights of frost reflected a million moons; behind the house was a dogwood tree that bloomed twice in the year with white stars. Daffodils and snowdrops grew in the little garden. There was a wide porch where they sat on spring mornings, and a pier going right out into the water.** (Volcano 271)

Abstracting herself from the Arena Tomalin and interaction with the environment in the present, Yvonne visualizes a future in which the environment she inhabits is defined by her, an environment that is less threatening than the one she is currently in. Nature is placed into a position more subordinate to her imagination. Nature is placed into this position by the details included in her imagined description rather than by more overt methods such as the actual events taking place at the bullthrowing.

Yvonne's hypothesis omits too much to be realizeable. By creating a future scenario that avoids any analysis of the

immediate present, Yvonne has proposed a future that cannot plausibly be arrived at through that actual present. By declaring **"it was all possible! It was all there waiting for them" (271-72)**, Yvonne implies that her vision is complete and ready for implementation; however, she has incorporated into it neither her personal history in Hawaii, nor the Consul's in India and the war, nor theirs together in Mexico and elsewhere. Her vision is topophilic but not complete.

Also, Yvonne has built much of her 'view to the future' out of things external to her current situation, such as her superficial impression of **"An American couple"** attending the bullthrowing. She thinks **"How happy they seemed in one another .... Their future would stretch out before them pure and untrammelled as a blue and peaceful lake ..." (270)**. Her calling their future 'pure and untrammelled' is a reflection of her own desire to escape a past that is not. Her past with the Consul in Mexico is not untrammelled for personal as well as political reasons; and the political reasons have to do with the way in which place and environment are treated: Cardenas' land redistribution involved expropriation of American (and British) property **(Veitch 113)**, the ownership of which was considered by Cardenas' government to be exploitive of Mexican peasants. As with the example of Maximillian and Carlotta in Chapter Four, such plans to start over and leave the past behind are more complicated than Yvonne envisions them to be.

Yvonne's visions are extremely detailed, despite their conceptual omissions:

> **She saw the house plainly now; it was small and made of silvery weathered shingles, it had a red door and casement windows, open to the sun. She saw .... the crab-apple tree that half-supported the open sunny platform where the Consul would work in summer .... the mill-wheel reflections of sunlight on water ... sliding down the front of their house ... over the windows, the walls, the reflections that, above and behind the house, turned the pine boughs into green chenille .... (Volcano 271)**

In the passage above, as previously, Yvonne's depiction of nature selects details that do not threaten. She seeks an environment that will shelter and nurture them. The main problem with this aim is that the environment she envisions seems to have adapted itself perfectly to their needs; a more probable vision would have to engage their need to adapt themselves to the environment they would inhabit. Consequently, at the end of the chapter her vision is disassembled; elements from the actual present intrude: the 'untrammelled lake' becomes a mirage, **"a broken greenhouse roof .... only weeds lived in the greenhouse" (281)**. The "reflections of sunlight on water" are replaced by something less idealized: **"their shadows crawled before them in the dust, slid down white thirsty walls of houses .... swept away" (281)**.

While Yvonne's vision deals with an ideally subordinate environment, the Consul's environment is partitioned off: **"oozing alcohol from every pore, the Consul stood at the open door of the Salon Ofelia" (286)**. The Consul's barricades operate at many levels, physical, psychological, emotional and chemical. This is

"nature fronted versus nature filtered ... cantinas - this is Geoffrey's half of the world" (Veitch 137). From this position he sees "a natural waterfall crashing down into a sort of reservoir built on two levels" (Volcano 286). What he sees works as a kind of dual visualization, first of his need to control and modify his natural environment, and second, of the opposition of the environment to such controls. He sees his interpretation of nature revised by nature's definition of itself:

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

The dichotomy between artificial and natural has been resolved in favour of the latter. The Consul thinks of this as a loss of identity; really it is only a change of identity, a return to an original identity. However, it could be seen as a loss of individuality, which the Consul cannot entirely accept.

The Consul's view of nature is not as illusory as Yvonne's; but it is more negative. He is aware of a problem, but resists searching for a solution. The Consul's world is also more urban than Yvonne's, which contributes to the negativity of his outlook. Douglas Porteous suggests that "In Cuernavaca [Quauhnahuac] and other Mexican towns there is an endless parade of human and animal deformity: dwarves, emaciated pariah dogs, drunks wallowing in urine and vomit" and that "for Lowry [and the Consul in this case] cities become both symbols and generators of

mental distress" (Landscapes 185). The Consul's view of nature as disturbing, and sometimes threatening, is part of such mental distress. To change his thinking about nature, the Consul would first have to extricate himself from his unnatural surroundings.

The Consul's prayer for happiness **"somewhere ... out of this terrible world"** (Volcano 291) shows his realization of the need for a change of place and way of life. The realization is ineffectual because the 'prayer' is not applied outside of the Consul's artificial interior world, but rather locates itself in **"... one small room occupied by a huge brass bedstead ... rifles in a rack on the wall ... a tiny porcelain virgin ... [and] a little lamp"** (290).

The Consul's problems are insoluble because he barely confronts the possibility of change. Rather than rejecting the ugliness and unhealthiness of his current location, he identifies himself with it: **"The Toilet was all of grey stone, and looked like a tomb - even the seat was cold stone. 'It is what I deserve ... It is what I am,' thought the Consul"** (295). Even when 'outside' he rejects, or pretends to reject, the possibility of change, ignoring the natural world surrounding him: **" 'I like it,' he called to them through the open window, from outside .... 'I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running. I'm almost back there already' "** (316). So he heads for The Farolito and Parian, another interior location in **"the old capital of the state"** (119), thus expanding his rejection of the

natural world and positive change. His direction towards Parian is an implicit rejection of the whole concept of a reformed relationship with the environment (in this case pro-agrarian land redistribution) represented by Cardenas' new state-capital. Whether he takes this route 'to hell' in order to make some sort of ideological statement, or simply because he feels that things are too far gone - between himself and Yvonne, between himself and the world - to bother trying to reverse the course towards inevitable destruction, the end result is the same.

* * *

Chapters Eleven and Twelve again oppose Yvonne's and the Consul's points of view; but neither position 'wins' the dispute: **"If the Consul does not respect nature's autonomy enough, Yvonne's narrower conceptual framework expects more from nature than it can give .... At the end of the afternoon, nature becomes instrumental in both deaths"** (Veitch 154). Yvonne's awareness of the problems in her own relationship approaches at times an awareness of the larger problem of humanity's relationship with the environment, humanity's treatment of the natural world. This parallel awareness manifests itself in things that she observes on her way out of the narrative.

Yvonne takes a less direct route than the Consul; but her destination is also Parian and what Parian represents. At one stop she sees **"a wooden cage ... by the light from the windows, in which crouched a large bird .... The cage was set between the cantina and a low thick tree, really two trees ..."** (Volcano

320). What she "stumbles over" here is a three-part equation summing up her perspective on the environment. Between civilization on one side (the cantina) and wilderness on the other (the trees) is a 'linch-pin', nature tamed or caught. Interaction between civilization and nature results in the subjugation of nature. Yvonne's response to the problem thus defined is to release the eagle, which shows a desire to alleviate the problem. However, the credibility of her action is undermined because she sees the eagle only by the light from the cantina window: she acts only within the established parameters of civilized and familiar terrain. Her response is not the beginning of a permanent solution, but is only a 'stop gap' or token measure. In fact, soon after freeing the eagle she wishes to retrieve it: **"Wild woodland creatures plunged past them in the undergrowth, and everywhere she looked in vain for her eagle .... Rotting vegetation lay about them, and there was a smell of decay; the barranca couldn't be far off"** (322). Her redefinition of nature as 'her eagle' or 'their forest' shows her inability to accept what nature on its own terms implies, which is **"decay ... the barranca"**, meaning **"her fertility running to waste"** (Veitch 171), the dissolution of individuality, and death.

Once they exceed the 'jusrisdiction' of wayside cantinas, Hugh and Yvonne are disoriented by the forest and the darkness. Thus disabled, Yvonne is killed by a loose horse (coincidentally 'freed' by the Consul). That she is unable to survive this first sudden encounter with uncontrolled nature points out some

insufficiency in her environmental perspective. Her idealization of nature, while often reverent, leaves her overwhelmed when nature operates outside of her expectations. And so her vision at the point of death is filled with a sense of betrayal and defeat: **"everything was burning, the dream was burning, the house was burning .... the walls with their millwheel reflections of sunlight on water were burning, the flowers in the garden were blackened and burning ... the garden was burning ..." (**Volcano **336).**

Similarly to Yvonne's personalized interpretation of the eagle, the Consul, again looking from the inside out, superimposes an egocentric meaning upon an element of the natural world: **"Popocatepetl towered through the window .... blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead, the barranca, the Farolito, directly beneath it. Under the Volcano! It was not for nothing the ancients had placed Tartarus under Mt. Aetna ..." (340).** Thus the volcano specifically and nature generally are defined by the Consul as things that imprison him **(Ackerley and Clipper 420).** Yvonne feared the decay and death inherent in the rotting vegetation, her own death and the death of her way of life. In Popocatepetl the Consul recognizes the power of the natural world, its expansiveness and continuity; he fears what he sees in the volcano because it emphasizes his mutability. He fails to recognize any alternative 'readings' for the volcano; he does not see it simply as a product of natural geomorphological processes comparable to the human life cycle, signifying a

regenerative relationship wherein humanity is incorporated into nature's continuity.

His rejection of nature, entirely self-willed or not, becomes increasingly irrevocable because he is immersed in a world based on the replacement of natural orders by its own. His gaze out the window provides evidence of this: surveying Parian, he looks past the **"little public garden"** and focuses on **"the grey turreted barracks of the military police"** (Volcano 340). From **"dungeons with wooden bars like pigpens"** the Consul's gaze moves across to **"the jungle which on all sides surrounded the town [like a besieging army]..."** He sees an approaching thunderstorm as **"unnatural livid light" (341)**. Instead of identifying the actual source of the threat -- the barracks, the dungeons - he feels threatened by the jungle and the storm. His 'urban' surroundings either compound or cause his error: nature is enigmatic to him because he is separated from it; in mistaking nature for 'the threat', he has mistaken the Farolito for "sanctuary" (339). His death (and Yvonne's) is very much a result of this error.

The Consul's death (at the hands of the military police) coincides significantly with the thunderstorm; thunderclaps and gunshots occur simultaneously. Rhetorically, the connection between nature and the Consul's death is important to the narrative's conclusion. Nature presides at the Consul's execution in order to emphasize that premature, wasteful death is a probable consequence of continued rejection of the natural world.

His death, like Yvonne's, involves realization and revision. He is **outside**; he is on the ground; the life leaving him is received by **"the tenderness of the grass"** (374). He wonders **"how could he have thought so evil of the world when succour was at hand all the time"** (375); and he does not mean the 'terrible world' of cantinas and towns. The Consul's death, however, is also the death of civilization's representative; so his final vision is more apocalyptic than Yvonne's: **"... it wasn't the volcano, the world itself was bursting, bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space, with himself falling through it all ... burning bodies, falling, into a forest, falling"** (375-76).

The final sentence of the narrative, **"Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine"** (376), leaves us with neither Yvonne's environmental perspective of idealization and expectation, nor the Consul's perspective of alienation. The subject of the sentence takes no definite position. Both dog and ravine are left with their original identities intact. The neutral perspective is closer to Hugh's in Chapter Eight.
The success or failure of these characters to survive conditions in the narrative is important from an ecological standpoint. These characters represent divergent ways of thinking about the environment that move dialectically through the narrative. Yvonne and the Consul are destroyed in part by their misapprehension of the natural world about them. **"For Yvonne, the private dream of paradise, based on love, perishes; for Geoffrey the world itself**

dies as he falls into the barranca" (Meeker 203). Yvonne's topophilia is shown to be too egocentric; the Consul's position is anthropocentric and too topophobic. Hugh's environmental perspective remains. Meeker points out that "an environmental ethic requires that human behaviour be modified to agree with the ecology of the world, not that the world be rearranged to suit human desires" (162). Hugh comes closer to this condition than Yvonne or Geoff because his environmental perspective is less fixed than either of theirs, and because of his greater ability to survive change; he is at least capable of entering into a more egalitarian and regenerative way of interacting with nature.

> With its snow-capped twin volcanoes, its lush gardens, and its thick and sprawling forests, the Mexican landscape beguiles with beauty. It seems indeed to be paradisal. But for this very reason, in Under the Volcano, the landscape emerges as a conspirator in Geoffrey Firmin's damnation. For the twisting path that carries one amidst all of the apparently edenic splendour invariably brings one to the brink of that ominous feature of the Mexican terrain which has been there all along at one's feet, waiting .... what lies under the volcano: the reeking, cloacal abyss. (Walker 245)

What lies under the Consul's final invokation of William Blackstone is also the abyss; it is what Geoffrey Firmin would find upon overturning one large stone at the heart of his neglected garden. In coming to terms with the idea of a return to nature - which is ultimately what Mexico means to the Consul, what he struggles against - the difficulty for him as an individual, and for the society he represents (as does William Blackstone) is this final implication. To return to nature is, as

Lutwack phrased it, to accept "known limitation" and "surrender possibility", to finally redefine immortality not as an ascent but as a cycle emphasizing not self but a physical return to earth from which other life and growth will eventually come. "Thus the various clusters of chthonic images gradually mesh into a web of doom which entraps the characters, not despite but precisely because they aspire to impossible transcendent ideals" (Walker 245). The cycle, however, continues; narratives, characters, generations follow.

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CHAPTER 2.

"The Bravest Boat": Topophilia in Theory.

Earlier in this thesis I proposed that a progression exists in Malcolm Lowry's writing of environmental perspectives and descriptions that act cumulatively as a work of literary ecology. Belonging sometimes to omniscient narrators, sometimes to first-person narrators, and sometimes to major characters whose consciousness the narrative enters, these distinct perspectives work together dialectically. Within narratives and between narratives these alternating perspectives on the environment negotiate a **"eutopic: dystopic polarity"** (Porteous, Landscapes 88), or a topophilic: topophobic polarity. The previous chapter examined Under the Volcano in which topophobia and a fairly abstracted topophilia are the dominant points of view. This chapter will deal with the short story "The Bravest Boat" in which the point of view is topophilic, and the outcome less destructive.

Astrid and Sigurd, in "The Bravest Boat" occupy a different position in relation to the environment than positions taken by Under the Volcano's characters. Yvonne and the Consul see nature as an extension of themselves, as an avenue for wish-fulfillment in Yvonne's case, and as a place of threatening power in the Consul's. By each taking such an abstract or prejudicial stance, rather than realizing themselves to be extensions of the natural world, Yvonne and the Consul distinguish themselves too much from the reality of nature and thus lose access to nature's life-sustaining and regenerating properties. That the environmental relationships and issues in "The Bravest Boat" differ from those

of Under the Volcano is emphasized by the nordic names of characters and by the meticulous description of a northern setting; here we are dealing with virtually the opposite of tropical and saturated Quauhnahuac.

In Under the Volcano Hugh sees the world around him, both human and natural, simply as a changing presence, and has the potential to accept his life as incorporated into the larger cycles of this presence. Astrid and Sigurd's outlook is more positive still. In discussing the relationship between topophilia and environment, Tuan explains that

> **...technological man's involvement with nature is recreational rather than vocational. Sightseeing behind the tinted windows of a coach severs man from nature. On the other hand ... man is [often] pitted against nature in violent contact. What people in advanced societies lack (and countercultural groups appear to seek) is the gentle, unselfconscious involvement with the physical world that prevailed in the past when the tempo of life was slower, and that young children still enjoy.** (Topophilia 96)

The above passage, while taken from the discipline of humanistic geography and not literature, accurately describes Astrid and Sigurd Storlesen's perspective towards the environment. Although not absolutely unselfconscious, their relationship with nature as they walk through the park's open and forested paths is gentle but intensely involved. Astrid and Sigurd's perspective is actively topophilic in that their happiness with themselves is inseparable from their happiness with the place; their perspective is ecologically sound in that the interdependence between their personal well-being, faith in their marriage, and

their environment is a safeguard preventing them from exploiting or destroying that environment.

Sigurd and Astrid jointly possess **"a sense of life, of natural abundance. Lowry's protagonists are [here] immersed in the detail of existential things"** (Porteous, Landscapes 94). They are "very happy" to see that:

> **In the lagoon swam wild swans, and many wild ducks: mallards and buffleheads and scaups, golden eyes and cackling black coots with carved ivory bills .... under the trees lining the bank other ducks were sitting meekly on the sloping lawn, their beaks tucked into their plumage rumpled by the wind.** (Lowry, Hear Us O Lord 12)

The characters seek neither to dominate nature, nor to ignore any of its properties beyond the superficial. In fact, the accuracy and detail of their perception shows the **"vital relation"** to the environment that Aldo Leopold (in "The Conservation Ethic", 1933) asserts is essential to the success of pro-ecology/pro-conservation movements (Blau 296).

The preceding excerpt from "The Bravest Boat" introduces another aspect to the discussion of environmental perspectives .... the lagoon, the lawn. These wildfowl are occupying **parkland**, which is neither wilderness, nor civilization, but a kind of intermediate location where humanity and nature can theoretically commune. The narrator of the story informs us that **"The Park, seagirt, was very large, and like many parks throughout the Pacific Northwest, wisely left in places to the original wilderness"** (Hear Us O Lord 13). In Under the Volcano the

characters occasionally regard the public garden. "The Bravest Boat" takes the public garden notion a step further: this park is a kind of public garden; but unlike Yvonne, Hugh and the Consul, these characters have freely entered it, temporarily becoming a part of what it represents in the narrative.

Advocacy of parkland, however, has 'reservations' in "The Bravest Boat". The story's third paragraph begins with a less idyllic description than that of the lagoon:

> **In the park of the seaport the giant trees swayed ... noble red cedars that had grown there for hundreds of years, but now were dying, blasted, with bare peeled tops and stricken boughs. (They were dying rather than live longer near civilization. (11)**

This introduction to "the park of the seaport" seems to imply that parkland, while superficially an environmentally positive form of land-use, can too often be civilization's token gesture of reverence for a natural world that it elsewhere strips and devastates. As Lowry asks in a later narrative **"who wanted a five-car lane to a park that would end by being logged and a five-car lane itself?"** (October Ferry 188). One implication of such a statement is that humanity's treatment of nature as sacred must be more holistic, seeing all of nature as a home rather than selected parts of it as temples, must be more 'vocational than recreational' (as Tuan puts it).

"The Bravest Boat" differs from Under the Volcano in two ways important to this discussion: (1) it is more overtly concerned with environmental issues; (2) and its depiction of the city is

more overtly anti-urban. The narrator describes "The city of Enochvilleport" as

> **composed of dilapidated half-skyscrapers, ... all kinds of scrap iron, even broken airplanes on their roofs .... cerise conflagrations of cinemas, modern apartment buildings, and other soulless behemoths ....** (Hear Us O Lord 14)

The anti-urbanism in "The Bravest Boat" is more than a rejection of the city as psychologically and physically damaging to its human inhabitants, however; it is a condemnation of the growth of cities as the cause of much of the destruction of the natural world. Part of the cityscape of Enochville port includes **"sawmills relentlessly smoking ... Molochs fed by whole mountainsides of forests that never grew again, or by trees that made way for grinning regiments of villas in the background of 'our expanding and fair city' ..."** (15). The narrator is clearly stating that the urban world is presaged by the expropriation of the natural as construction 'resources'.

From a criticism of the city, the narrative shifts to a criticism of part of the 'park' concept, the zoo. The description of the animal exhibits becomes increasingly negative; Beginning with caged bears which are referred to as **"sad lumbering"**, it moves to lynx, referring to their **"seeking in desperation also some way out"** (18, 20). While they are at the zoo, Sigurd and Astrid think of other animals **"wild sea birds, shearwaters storm petrels, jaegers ... dark albatross ... the killer whale ... the eagle and the salmon ..."** (18-19), as though making a mental

comparison between animals in their natural habitat and animals in man-made terrain. The following incident demonstrates both the inadequacy and the destructiveness of the latter:

> **Suddenly across their vision a squirrel ... darted across the top of the wire mesh .... one of the lynx sprang twenty feet into the air ... hitting the wire with a twang like a mammoth guitar .... the infuriated lynx sprang straight up, sprang again, and again and again and again, as his mate crouched spitting and snarling below. (21)**

I do not believe this narrative is dismissing the whole concept of parks and conservation areas;it is identifying certain aspects of conservation as nothing more than humanity's self-glorification through displaying its ability to subjugate **"the pure ferocity of nature" (20).**

The perspective in this narrative is omniscient; the narrator never intensively enters the consciousness of either character. The characters are not fully developed; they seem more to be vehicles the narrator uses to create situations allowing him to express certain ideas. There is a theoretical quality to much of the description, as though "The Bravest Boat" were more a narrative essay than a short story. As an essay, it could be examining alternative relationships between the human world and the natural. The urban alternative is rejected outright as destructive. The park or preserve alternative, in which humanity and nature each occupy their 'appointed places' is considered at length: if the city is the only option, the park is a viable alternative as it at least protects some of the natural world

from destruction; however, the park is not the best alternative because humanity is privileged: the park's existence is too conditional. However, in "The Bravest Boat" the city is not the only option; Sigurd and Astrid see another as they reach the Park's perimeter.

Sigurd and Astrid's walk in the park in "The Bravest Boat" modifies certain ideas introduced in Under the Volcano. The earlier narrative contained a reference to Adam's eviction from Eden, the idea being that a loss of organic habitat somehow results from human behaviour. "The Bravest Boat" contains the following reference to regaining Paradise, implying that a restoration of organic habitat can also result from decision and action:

> **And it was the sea that lay before them, at the end of the slope that changed into the steep beach, the naked sea, running deeply below, without embankment or promenade, or any friendly shacks, though some prettily built homes showed to the left, with one light in a window, glowing warmly through the trees on the edge of the forest itself, as of some stalwart Columbian Adam, who had calmly stolen back with his Eve into Paradise, under the flaming sword of the civic cherubim. (22-23)**

Although no detailed plans are laid, the narrative is suggesting a way of life that rejects the urban system and is established along more organic guidelines, ie. a 'return to nature'.

Sigurd and Astrid examine this other alternative more closely. They descend below the park's "promenade" and walk out onto the beach:

> **And everywhere too was the grotesque macabre fruit of the sea, with its exhilarating iodine**

> **smell .... Then more wreckage: boots, a clock, torn fishing nets, demolished wheelhouse, a smashed wheel lying in the sand. (24)**

Unlike the case of the city, in this interaction between natural and man-made, the artificial structures have been pulled apart, meaning possibly that a return to nature would require dismantling urban civilization, not just leaving it. It is significant, however, that the wreckage is that of a boat. The sea that carried the story's namesake (the model boat) unharmed destroyed a real boat. I think this passage shows the narrator's recognition that a hypothesis or a model for returning to nature is easily rendered, whereas implementing such a model would be far more difficult, perhaps impossible. Other connotations of this passage may have to do with the cyclic quality of the natural world as this cycle reflects Sigurd and Astrid's hope for continuation and renewal in their own lives: death and decay in one season become generation and growth in another; the boat that is destroyed by the sea furnishes planks for fuel and building; their lives continue.

The story ends at an optimistic point in the cycle by emphasizing the characters' topophilic environmental perspective; in doing so, the narrator also acknowledges topophobia as a possibility, but dismisses the latter perspective as superficial:

> **Nor was it possible to grasp for more than a moment that all this with its feeling of death and destruction was only an appearance, that beneath the flotsam, under the very shells they crunched ... down at the tide margin, existed, just as in the forest, a stirring and stretching of life, a seething of spring. (25)**

If either Yvonne or The Consul achieve such a realization in Under the Volcano, they do so only at the point of death. Hugh approaches such a realization in Chapter Four. However, Under the Volcano only states by inference what "The Bravest Boat" states more directly, that humanity's misunderstandings of the natural world must be revised before a mutually nurturing relationship can replace the current exploitative one.

Is it important to this study that the narrator (Lowry) chose a British Columbian setting for the above realization? Yes, **"Lowry's life and work are one ... [and his later works], written while living in a wilderness setting in close juxtaposition to Vancouver, contain concentrated and considered judgements"** (Porteous, Landscapes 178). These 'judgements' tend to be anti-urban, and work at viewing the natural world - not the city - as the place where humanity needs to make its home. Also these judgements have to do with the B.C. setting because in British Columbia Lowry was able himself to leave urban surroundings long enough to achieve a more than marginal understanding of the natural world and its processes. In fact, when considered together with Lowry's Mexican writing the setting of "The Bravest Boat" becomes testimony supporting the statements this short narrative makes against urban civilization.

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CHAPTER 3.

Dark as the Grave: Topophobia and Topophilia; Loss and Renewal.

An important point to recall from Chapter Two of this thesis is that the dialectic of environmental perspectives in Lowry's writing operates both within and between narratives. This process allows the reader to consider both healthy and destructive points of view; it also introduces the idea that environment is not a constant. Lowry's narratives can be read in terms of literary ecology not only because they deal with characters' attitudes towards the natural world, but also because they deal with what happens to characters as a result of changes in habitation and habitat. Surviving such changes is a central dilemma for most of Lowry's characters.

This chapter considers Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid, in which characters return to the Mexican setting. The environmental perspectives this novel renders via its third-person narrator (Sigbjørn Wilderness) are more sustained than those of "The Bravest Boat" and less abstracted and personal than in the earlier Mexican novel, Under the Volcano. The interaction has a broader scope than in "The Bravest Boat" because Sigbjørn and Primrose in the novel 'cover more ground' than Sigurd and Astrid do in the short story; the discourse of environment in Dark as the Grave considers more than a dialectic limited to parkland versus urban-sprawl.

Dark as the Grave works with a narrator who has lived harmoniously in a place where the human settlement is enveloped by the natural world, where the coexistence of inhabitant and habitat is neither destructive nor exploitative. The difference

between Lowry's two Mexican narratives also works dialectically; as Douglas Day explains,

> **Lowry, moreover, looked on the journey [to Mexico, of which Dark as the Grave is largely a record] as an opportunity for some sort of exorcism of bad memories: they would make a pilgrimage to every hotel, every cantina he had known in the Thirties; and, by seeing them now, as it were in the light of relative happiness and sanity, prove that they were not such nightmarish places as they had once seemed. (Day 311)**

Thus the world of the Consul can be dispossessed of its power to destroy, when viewed with an awareness that alternatives such as Eridanus are attainable and viable. Dark as the Grave's traveller-narrator also intends to return to the place of topophilia; thus the ideal home or community is closer to the characters, more realized by them, than it was in Under the Volcano. As with Volcano, topophobia has its place in Dark as the Grave. However, unlike Volcano, Dark as the Grave ends with a topophilic perspective: presenting topophilia as something with which to compose a way of life is the emphasis of Dark as the Grave.

The narrative begins with a description of enclosure. The characters are not even within a dwelling from which they can see something of their natural environment, but inside a moving mechanical structure; they can see nothing out of its windows: **"they were enclosed by the thing itself as by the huge bouncing machine with its vast monotonous purring, pouring din ..."** (Lowry, Dark as the Grave 19). Like the mills of Enochvilleport in "The Bravest Boat", negative emblems of

twentieth-century industrial civilization become part of Dark as the Grave's argument. Because the narrative opens with Sigbjørn and Primrose contained uncomfortably in a passenger plane, Dark as the Grave's rhetoric of environmental perspectives begins from the position of criticizing the industrial progress that the plane comes to represent as something that humanity does not ultimately benefit from, but is trapped within: "**... they were able only to see the inside .... of the streamlined platinum-coloured object itself they could only glimpse a wing, a propeller, through the small, foolish, narrow oblong windows**" (19). The unnaturalness of their situation is emphasized by Primrose's statement, " **'you never saw such a sunset on earth' ... and indeed you did not, Sigbjørn thought, so dark and terrible, this great black basalt sunset over the burned forests of Oregon...**" (20). The place they are in is not of the earth; and Sigbjørn's addition to Primrose's exclamation makes an association between the destruction of the earth and separation from it: separation enables destruction.

Much of Dark as the Grave's visual description entails the narrator's observations of what goes on at the boundary between the human world and the natural. Chapters One through Three are set in airplanes, and in airports on the outskirts of urban areas; the characters are much more observers than participants here. This sense of exclusion is also part of the discourse of environmental perspectives in the novel. Dark as the Grave's characters at the novel's outset see a world dominated by

machines and mega-complex buildings, **"a deathscape of bleary hoardings"** (Grave 42), an unnatural world that seems bleak and lifeless, even hostile; but beyond a feeling of topophobia, they are powerless to change this world. Sigbjørn and Primrose's situation in Chapters One through Three (and the condition of people they encounter) is again part of the text's criticism of twentieth century 'machine civilization' for its use/misuse of things natural and organic.

The concept of western history also figures in these chapters: **"the sense at once of descent, [of] tremendous regression"** (Grave 19), the movement of planes 'down' the continent seems to signify the decline of Western Civilization. To extricate themselves from **"being caught in that suction of the future"** (53), the Wildernesses must acknowledge that the movement of their civilization is negative, a decline towards destruction; then, from the lowest part of the continent (where the 'bottom drops out' of Western or North American civilization, its ideologies) Sigbjørn and Primrose can eventually return to their house made of **"lumber from a dismantled sawmill"** (25), to their 'down to earth' way of life at Eridanus **"... oil lamps, hauled and chopped ... wood ... the privilege of diving off the front porch into the sea every day"** (55), a way of life that is alternative in that it rejects the false-idealism of technology, mass-production, and progress defined as expansion.

In Chapter Three, Sigbjørn describes departing Eridanus and entering the non-world of planes and airports as **"if ... he had**

opened his eyes upon another reality" (Grave 70). The novel does present more than one 'reality'. There is the (remembered) reality of **"awakening at dawn in the cabin in the forest with the grey sea and whitecaps almost level with the windows"** (69), and the present reality existing in direct opposition to the former, one of

> **mountains [standing] ... desolately in the rain and those few distant factory chimneys, a few shacks and huts, and the swampy desolate Gogolian landscape ... all one could see of the metropolis.** (84)

This is very much how environmental perspectives operate in Dark as the Grave; unlike the Consul's 'fearscape' and Yvonne's 'fantasyscape' in Under the Volcano, these characters must comprehend and choose between existing ways of life. Lutwack points out that, **"there is a moral principle involved in the choice a character makes between alternative places"** (70); in the case of Sigbjørn and Primrose, the 'principle' is a kind of environmental or ecological ethic. The vivid and detailed evidence that they must use to make their choice surrounds them, and saturates their vision; and because the text is alternatively saturated with topophobic and topophilic perspectives towards inhabited-landscapes, the reader takes part in the comparisons.

Chapters Four through Seven have a predominantly urban setting, in Mexico City, and the smaller town Cuernavaca. **"Sigbjørn and Primrose re-enter what was the Consul's world in Under the Volcano ... [and] the night places of the city"** (Salter and Lloyd 26). Hotels, hotel bars, cantinas, these are places where one feels **"transported and released [or cut off from] real**

space and present time .... the most artificial - hence perhaps the most human - environments" (Salter and Lloyd 27). The induction of nature into this world is both subjugating and violent. Sigbjørn observes:

> The street, the Cinco de Mayo, overflowed into a carpetless dark lobby .... — the restaurant abutting the hotel lobby, through which a man with the look of an executioner had dragged the shrieking fawns to slit their throats behind the barroom door, was still a restaurant .... (Grave 90-91)

Sigbjørn further considers attempts made by indigenous residents to adapt to this world:

> Upstairs the decaying modern outfitting produced a weird effect. Tiers of washing hung outside the windows like a scene in an old soviet movie. Whole families, obviously in poverty, inhabited some of the rooms and in places seemed actually to be camping out in the corridors ... it ... suggested to Sigbjorn some super modern yet even so jerry-built apartment house in Vienna or Berlin left unfinished .... (91)

The combined effect of descriptions such as 'decaying modern outfitting' with 'families camping in the corridors', and the idea of the place as some incomplete 'super modern' European design, turns Sigbjørn's initial half-amused, half-topophobic view of the Hotel Cornada (or 'nada') into a statement about the futility (or absurdity) of trying to maintain the collapsing and 'unnatural' principles of Western Civilization.

As Sigbjørn and Primrose go from city to town, another idea about the interaction between human and natural worlds is introduced in Chapter Five. In terms of this interaction, Cuernavaca's situation as "'Quauhnahuac'... Near the Wood" (Grave

120) is important because, like the airports (built on the outskirts of urban centers) earlier in the novel, the town exists on the dividing line between civilization and wilderness; Cuernavaca is an emblem in Dark as the Grave for the characters' confrontation of and choosing between different 'realities' of twentieth century life. Appropriately, Sigbjørn's point of view on Cuernavaca, once again from within a mechanical enclosure, is one of dislike for 'signs of progress' (growth) in the town:

> **The bus passed, still going down, the Cuernavaca Inn, to which they were making certain obscure additions. Yet hideous buildings were going up everywhere, Bebe Coca-Cola, the huge stone statue; the new bus stop .... (121)**

"Still going down", like the plane in Chapter One, civilization's decline does not impede (in fact aggravates) its encroachment upon 'the wood', aggravates its consumption of nature. Sigbjørn's resentment becomes a tension because the two worlds confronting him have an adversarial relationship; he perceives that one is overwhelming the other ... **"Thus was disaster's message without word" (126)**: so the need to choose the positive one and reject and dismantle the negative, destructive one is urgent.

The 'new idea' introduced in Chapter Five is a criticism of civilization's token gesture of incorporating nature into its design. Sigbjørn and Primrose take up temporary residence in the Quinta Dolores (Laruelle's house from Volcano). Sigbjørn describes this as follows:

> **The Quinta Dolores itself was largely a garden that stretched right down from the Calle Humboldt to the barranca. It was uncultivated on the slope where the declivity began, on level**

> **ground was a swimming pool. The nearest approximate to the establishment in America or Canada was indeed one of those 'drive-ins' or 'auto-camps of the better class' that had threatened and were threatening Primrose and Sigbjørn's existence in Eridanus. (125)**

The motivation for a garden hotel or woodland autocamp is condemned by Lowry (by Sigbjørn) as hypocritical: wanting to incorporate or enter nature, but destroying it in the process.

In Chapter 6 Sigbjørn is unable to escape the pervasive negativity and topophobia engendered by the town surrounding him. Threatening emblems of urban civilization invade his views of what elements of nature he can find in and around the town:

> **Sigbjørn ... moved to the window overlooking the garden. The mailbox was the most brilliant thing in the garden, more brilliant than all the flowers .... Underneath it at night broad leaves, of cannas: over it a jacaranda tree that disappeared into the night sky, over the top of that, a star - no, it was the light in the prison watchtower. (Grave 137-38)**

In fact, the density of the urban world has distorted Sigbjørn's perception to the point that he (like the Consul) mistakes artificial light for real light; however, he notes his error, and recognizes the light in the prison watchtower for what it is. Although Sigbjørn hesitates **"on the threshold" (146)**, and attempts suicide, he survives. In Dark as the Grave Sigbjørn has an opportunity to change his way of life and alter his world - an opportunity the Consul does not have in Under the Volcano. The circumstances of the Consul's life never presented a viable alternative to the entrapping interior world of ships, houses, hotels and cantinas. While Sigbjørn might have an element of 'the

Consul' in his character, life in Eridanus demonstrated that to extricate himself from a world that would destroy him remains a realizeable possibility.

Chapter Seven is still set exclusively in Cuernavaca; most of it takes place inside houses, with the characters' attention focused inside. At this point the narrative revises a statement introduced in Under the Volcano ... "Le gusta este jardin? Que es suyo? Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!" The Consul mistranslated it as an eviction notice for himself from 'Eden'. Sigbjørn is given the correct translation, as follows: **"Do you like this garden which is yours? See to it that it is thus: that your children don't destroy it"** (Grave **154**). Their neighbour's remark, **" 'It doesn't have anything to do with evict."' (154)**, suggests that the Consul's interpretation of the notice was too personal. Sigbjørn perceives the actual translation to be **"more relevant and terrifying" (155)**, perhaps because it implies responsibility for the actions of subsequent generations.

The issue at this point is collective responsibility: Sigbjørn and Primrose must maintain their way of life at Eridanus, not merely for the sake of their own health and happiness, but as an effort on their part contributing to a larger solution, a widespread rejection of urban-industrial civilization in favor of a reorganization of society along lines that are scaled-down and more ecologically sound.

Chapter Eight involves a day-trip to Yautepec, a sort of

small-scale practice version of the longer trip to Oaxaca, which is the substance of Chapters Nine through Twelve. So the point of view the characters take towards the environment in Chapter Eight works as a prelude or introduction to the more extensive ideas forwarded in the text's last four chapters. In Yautepec, Sigbjørn and Primrose make a minor pilgrimage to the top of a hill: **"... this hill he proposed they should climb .... It was certainly not a street, no vehicle could possibly climb it, huge boulders, very steep and sunny, adobe thatched huts, cats, dogs, chickens, lizards, children** (Grave 183). This not only gives them a vantage point from which to view the town and its environs, but also a vantage point from which to view their relationship with the place and what it represents. Yautepec as they see it is composed of human and natural elements interconnected and inseparable from one another. That the terrain prohibits vehicles from fully entering the place suggests that Yautepec represents a way of life apart from any urban or technologically-based civilization.

> **... there was a path mounting through steep rocks that were piping hot. It was absolutely deserted .... behind them, and far below, was the empty town; to the left the rocky treeless mountains, immediately in front the flat green fields and trees, a river, and the road winding away, and ahead Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, rising straight from the floor of the valley.** (Grave 183-84)

Again, descriptions of "the empty town" and "the road winding away" cause Yautepec to signify a way of life in which technology and industry have little or no place; elements of nature are

dominant. As above, the relationship between fictional characters and their literary landscapes is capable of demonstrating possible models for 'real world' relationships between individuals or communities and the environment. The relationship between the Wildernesses and Yautepec is neither negative nor positive: although Sigbjørn and Primrose are viewing an example of harmonious interaction between human and natural worlds, they are viewing it in detachment; at this point they are observers of, rather than participants in such an interaction.

The characters' role as observers to the world of Dark as the Grave continues through the four final chapters. However, as their list of what to see in Mexico diminishes, and as the prospect of their return home increases, their role changes to that of students or disciples: returning to the role of participants in their home-environment depends upon the application of insights they gained as observers.

"... he climbed once more up to the roof and looked over the city" (Grave 207). Chapter Nine moves from this vantage on Cuernavaca, to Oaxaca via the **"dark ... Mixtec city"** (218) of Parian (the Consul's 'end of the road'). The trip takes the Wildernesses through Yautepec again; and Sigbjørn summarizes his comprehension of the place as a possible way of life: **"... the huge white butterflies ... the sparkling little stream, and the view of Popo like a dream. Ah, Yautepec was where they could live and love in forever, so happy in one another"** (209).

However, the characters are still apart from that possibility because they have 'unfinished' business in Oaxaca.

I think the point of this transitional chapter - indeed the point of other 'travel' sections in Dark as the Grave - is to consider the polarities of relationships with the environment. Like Sigbjørn and Primrose, characters in Lowry's narratives exist in either destructive urban environments, or in the more natural environment of Eridanus, or in transit somewhere between these. More extensively than in "The Bravest Boat", Chapters Nine through Twelve again take up the concept of the city and offer an alternative way of life to the urban. Sigbjørn's initial response to Parian (a prelude to Oaxaca) is topophobic:

> **So dark this Mixtec city, absolutely and so utterly dark and sinister it was almost beyond belief. At night, at ten, as in the Middle Ages, the great doors of the Hotel El Jardin were shut, and double bolted, and a great haft of wood propped against the giant door.** (Grave 218)

Like the image of the airliner descending the continent in Chapter One of the novel, the passage above is not only a criticism of one city, but a thought about urban origins in Western Civilization. The city is seen as essentially a psychological and physical garrison: "the great doors of the Hotel El Jardin were shut"; and the garrison is in turn seen as a cause of the destructive sense of difference between human and natural worlds.

Chapter Ten takes Sigbjørn and Primrose from Parian to

Oaxaca. En route they traverse the valley, an anti-urban alternative that the novel forwards here, and handles in greater detail in Chapter Twelve: **"They passed small villages of adobe, with tiled roofs and neat farms, and the cattle seemed well fed .... it seemed to him there was a vast improvement in the human lot, and all this he put down to Ejidal"** (219). There is a sense of topophilia here, evincing both similarities and differences to the topophilia of Eridanus:

> **The small farmer or peasant's attachment to land is deep. Nature is known through the need to gain a living .... the farmer's topophilia is compounded of this physical intimacy, of material dependence and the fact that the land is a repository of memory and sustains hope.** (Tuan, Topophilia 109)

In Dark as the Grave, more clearly than in Under the Volcano, the Ejidal agrarian communes, and the Banco Ejidal represent 'a way out' of the city, a way for society to restructure itself along more organic lines, a way **"to make this life fruitful and good as ... in the Garden of Eden"** (Grave 238). The Oaxaca valley, under the influence of the Banco Ejidal, is a sort of Mexican (and socialist) version of Eridanus. Once out of the countryside, however, the complexity and intimidating quality of the city confuses its 'inmates', preventing them from finding alternatives to it: **"Sigbjørn now wanted to find ... the Banco Ejidal. But there seemed for one thing more squares. And those squares were astonishingly ugly: the garish electric lights, the white lime on the trees"** (228).

In Chapter Eleven the Wildernesses learn of the death of

their friend, Fernando, an employee of the Banco Ejidal. His death echoes some of Under the Volcano's political themes. Other than **"a longing to see his grave"** (Grave 255), Fernando's death leaves Sigbjørn and Primrose with no reason to remain in Oaxaca; so the characters' direction in Chapter Twelve begins to turn homeward. Communal land or land managed in the public interest, used in a way not harmful to nature, is the emphasis of this chapter. Even the **"meticulously cared for"** (255) cemetery is a kind of 'public garden'. Things the characters see through the rest of Chapter Twelve seem to be more visions of potentiality than actuality, ideas to be taken back to Eridanus with them. Everything they see refutes what was signified by the locked gates of Parian's Hotel El Jardin:

> **But the old Banco Ejidal at number 25 was not shut. The great green doors stood open, they had been thrown wide. The Banco Ejidal was no longer a bank - but it was no longer a house either .... The whole place was in glorious bloom, packed along its entire length and breadth with blossoms and riots of roses. Independencia number 25 had become a garden.** (257)

'No longer a bank', the Ejido is not an institution in Dark as the Grave, but a premise, just as the squatters community at Eridanus is a premise in Lowry's British Columbian narratives. The premise is that alternatives exist to the idealism of cities, mass industry and technology, that North American society could be re-established along the lines of smaller communities (like the Ejidos) able to interact more symbiotically with the natural world.

Wandering amidst the ruined city of Mitla, Sigbjørn's observations further the novel's criticism of civilization: **"They walked among pillars ... columns out of place ... which could have supported no roof, scattered ... unbearable evocation of our time ..."** (Grave 259). The implication is that much of civilization contemporary to the characters is also collapsed and unsound in 'structure'. Sigbjørn's observations also highlight Lowry's expository use of landscape, as follows:

> **Suddenly it struck Sigbjørn that perhaps they were not there for no reason at all, that this was a landscape, so to say, to which they did bear only too pointed a relation .... what conceit was it drove man to such extremes as postulating the end of our civilization as almost the end of the world ....** (259-60)

Also in this chapter, Sigbjørn walks through the **"walled closed streets of Oaxaca"** (264) to revisit the Farolito (the site of the Consul's execution). He does not revere it as the Consul does; his perspective towards its unnatural 'beauty' is more one of regret: **"such concealed gardens and cloisters and misericordes, and rooms wherein took place such invisible debauches ..."** (265).

Shortly after this the Wildernesses leave Oaxaca, **"going back the way they came"** (Grave 266); ultimately their destination is Eridanus. As they pass through the Oaxaca valley for the second time, their perspective on the environment is one of optimism: What they see is not entirely natural, but a conjunction of natural and human worlds that is positive and productive:

> **This time he was conscious of a great change, directly the result of the work of the Bank.**

> Everywhere one saw rich green fields, felt a sense of fruitfulness, and of the soil responding and of men living as they ought to live, in the wind and sun and close to the soil and loving the soil .... the houses ... were nearly all adobe ... growing out of the very soil, for adobe was the earth itself. (266)

What they see here seems also to work as an affirmation of their way of life at Eridanus. "... young trees, obviously planted within the last ten years and blossoming .... The Banco Ejidal had become a garden" (267). Like Eridanus, this place is a signal for change that renews an increasingly active topophilia in Sigbjørn and Primrose.

"But there is nothing of the peasant in Lowry [or Sigbjørn]. The rural scene is a welcome contrast to the city, but for Lowry the organic is best expressed in the wilderness of forest and sea, where human agency has left much less of an impression" (Porteous, Landscapes 182). Yet the Ejido and Eridanus have more in common than simply the "contrast to the city" they offer; both seek to link ideology and practice to enter into a more positive environmental relationship; both are ecological experiments:

> The human mentality gives mankind the power to create imaginary ecosystems (as has been done in art), to destroy them (as has been done with technology), and to explain them (as man is beginning to do with scientific ecology). The similarities between esthetic and ecological conceptions of nature suggest the possibility that the two may reinforce each other in the effort to change the long history of destruction our species has caused by its simplistic view of nature. (Meeker 134)

There is also a sense of the Ejido as a kind of restored Eden, and later of Eridanus as an Eden to which Sigbjørn returns as

Lowry's version of Adam-restored. Both conceptions are significant to literary ecology since Eden is a prototype of the "imaginary ecosystem" basic to the literature/ecology equation. Thus returning to Eridanus, re-entering 'Eden' (exploring the prototype), becomes a way for Lowry to deal with the problematic duality of attitudes to nature that are as inherent to Western/urban civilisation as the Eden-myth itself is.

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Chapter 4.

"Forest Path" and October Ferry: Topophilia in Practice; Topophilia out of Practice.

> **The sheltered sea- or lakeshore may be one of mankind's earliest homes .... could it be that our earliest home was a sort of Eden located near a lake or sea? ... [the seashore offers] the best opportunity to eat, settle, increase, and learn. (Tuan, Topophilia 115)**

The environmental situation described above is epitomized by the characters' way of life in Lowry's 'fictional' community of Eridanus. The characters' interaction with their world, and the descriptions of this world in both "The Forest Path to the Spring" and October Ferry to Gabriola, cover much of the same interpretive terrain; therefore, they will be examined jointly in this chapter. Discussion of "Forest Path" will focus on 'Eridanus' as a community-ideal, a 'new and better' way of life for Sigbjørn and Primrose Wilderness (and for Lowry). Parts of October Ferry will be discussed as they highlight problems outside of idyllic Eridanus, but also problems related to the long-term maintenance of the Eridanus way of life.

The shifting between natural and artificial worlds that takes place in Lowry's writing (life close to the natural world being a consistent ideal) serves to suggest to the reader the possibility and practicality of a way of life that seeks to attune itself to nature. As Yi-Fu Tuan suggests:

> **Any creative act, however small scaled, influences perception .... by providing tantalizing images of possible idyllic worlds, literature can break conventional modes of thought to initiate new lines of thinking, new attitudes, and new enterprise. (Tuan, "Literature ... Env. Knowing" 268)**

"Forest Path" does provide an image of an idyllic world that is possible, does initiate new lines of thinking, new attitudes, and

new enterprise. Worlds contrasting the idyllic one, in narratives coming before and after "Forest Path", integrate the positive prospect of Eridanus with a larger argument; Lowry's other interconnected narratives implicitly take into consideration that all the world is not Eridanus, that Eridanus must often be 'arrived at' from existences that are far from idyllic, and that Eridanus can be destroyed by these opposing worlds and therefore may require relocation and reconstruction.

As "Forest Path" opens, the narrator is not looking out from a manmade structure, as with the opening of Dark as the Grave, but finds himself within a naturally formed world:

> **The way that led to the spring from our cabin was a path wandering along the bank of the inlet through snowberry and thimbleberry and shallon bushes, with the sea below you on the right, and the shingled roofs of the houses, all built down on the beach beneath round the little crescent of the bay. (Lowry, Hear Us O Lord 216)**

The narrator observes both the natural world (represented by forest, sea, and spring) and the human world (represented by the houses) from a position of intimacy with both. He is neither seeking to dominate nature, nor to defend himself against it; his existence depends on both the natural and human sides of Eridanus. This is also the reading Porteous gives "Forest Path":

> **In his lyric novella "The Forest Path to the Spring ", Lowry celebrates the path that connects his beach home to the life-sustaining mountain spring .... here he comes face to face with nature ... becomes at one with the forest. (Landscapes 99)**

In Lowry's work, Eridanus becomes more than simply the setting for "Forest Path" and sections of other narratives; it

defines a prospect for living that is both ecologically and sociologically healthy. The narrator's descriptions of Eridanus in "Forest Path" outline some of what this prospect is composed of:

> **Since we were in a bay within the inlet, the city was invisible to us, behind us on the path, was our feeling ... and on the opposite bank too, though nearer the city, was the oil refinery. But the point southward blocked for us what would have been, beyond wide tide flats, a distant view of the cantilever bridges, skyscrapers, and gantries of the city ....** (Hear Us 218)

Thus life at Eridanus for this narrator, for these characters, involves a rejection of the technological structures that typify the urban world. This is 'their feeling': they have chosen this place as home in part for the alternative way of life it represents. So far their perspective favors the natural and opposes the artificial.

The characters' house at Eridanus seems less artificial and lifeless than city buildings described later, in October Ferry. The house is constructed in accordance only with necessities determined by nature:

> **It was simple and primitive. But what complexity there must have been in the thing itself, to withstand the elemental forces it had to withstand? A ton of driftwood, launched with all the force of an incoming high tide with an equinoctial gale behind it, the house would thus withstand and turn aside harmlessly.** (Hear Us 233)

The Narrator's love for his house is part of his topophilic response to the whole of Eridanus; he loves the house for its ability to survive natural forces without being at war with them. As Porteous points out, the house and the path are integral parts

of Lowry's Eridanus. Statements in "Forest Path" make it clear that with Eridanus Lowry forwards the premise that (a) much is wrong with modern urban life, and that (b) here is one alternative:

> **Was it possible to be so happy? Here we were living on the very windrow of existence, under conditions so poverty stricken and abject in the eyes of the world they were actually condemned in the newspapers, or by the board of health, and yet it seemed that we were in heaven, and that the world outside - so portentous in its prescriptions for man of imaginary needs that were in reality his damnation - was hell. (244)**

Perhaps the way of life that Lowry's Eridanus represents is "abject in the eyes of the world"; however, in the eyes of certain readers, Eridanus demonstrates that it <u>is</u> "possible to be so happy". The narrator's question, **"Could one translate this kind of happiness into one's life?" (257)**, also invites the reader to try.

As I suggested earlier in this Chapter, "Forest Path" also makes the point that a harmonious relationship between human and natural worlds has both ecological and sociological value. The following excerpt highlights this point:

> **There was at one time, in later years, a family with three children living in Eridanus by necessity and not by choice and they were indeed convinced that it was 'beneath them', and that the true values were to be found in 'keeping up with the Joneses'. They let themselves sink into degradation, as seeming to be the conventional counterpart of poverty, without ever having looked at a sunrise .... they left, to move into a slum in the city, where they certainly did not have to carry their water from a spring and where their only sight of a sunrise was behind warehouses.** (<u>Hear Us</u> 247-8)

In the passage above, as elsewhere in "Forest Path", the narrator makes connections between nature and society. In terms of environmentalism in Lowry's writing, such connections are significant in that they demonstrate that social problems are not necessarily separable from environmental issues; therefore, each set of problems can act as an added incentive to solve the other.

The houses of Eridanus at times are seen to be microcosms of the larger 'down to earth' community; they are figures for the new perspective Eridanus enables its human inhabitants to take towards relationships amongst one another and with nature:

> **Feeling like thieves we peeked in the window. But where else could all nature look in too, and the house still have privacy? For it did. It was not merely that the sunlight came in, but the very movement and rhythm of the sea, in which the reflections of trees and mountains and sun were counter-reflected and multi-reflected in shimmering movement within. As if part of nature, the very living and moving and breathing reflection of nature itself had been captured.** (Hear Us 276)

So life at Eridanus is a process of revision. This understanding of what Eridanus means in Lowry's work is indirectly supported by Tuan's comment on the post-war seasonal migration to the seashore in North America (from his chapter "Environment and Topophilia"): **"The origin of the movement to the sea is rooted in a new evaluation of nature"** (Topophilia 117). Eridanus involves such a "new evaluation"; the characters become able to identify their lives with the movements and rhythms of the natural world, without losing any necessary sense of self.

The previous passage from "Forest Path" appears in Section

VIII, the narrative's final section; but there are frequent references to shadows and reflections throughout the novella, some negative, most positive. In the context of this study, the importance of reflections has to do with insight and revelation. The characters see partial representations of themselves in things beyond their immediate physical persons. What this reveals to them is their interconnection with the natural world in which they repeatedly see themselves reflected.

Shifting tides, seasons, lives ... mirroring the natural cycles that are a recurrent theme of "Forest Path", the narrative's shape becomes cyclical as it ends 'where' it began:

> **And I remembered how every evening I used to go down this path through the forest to get water from the spring at dusk .... Looking over my wife's shoulder I could see a deer swimming toward the the lighthouse. Laughing we stooped down to the stream and drank.** (Hear Us 287)

The narrator's perspective has returned to the inclusive, unconfined topophilia that opened the novella. Regarding "Forest Path", Porteous suggests that **"Nature is discounted in the city. Lowry celebrates wild nature from his retreat only a few miles from Vancouver ... surrounded by forest and sea ..."** (Landscapes 104). Certainly the novella has a celebratory tone, and ends optimistically; however, the problem of the city remains. Although "Forest Path" has a positive ending, before it ends the narrative considers the following negative prospect that resurfaces in October Ferry:

> **Look at that old hut, the passerby shouts in his motor launch above the engine, laughing contempt-**

> uously: oh well we'll be pulling down all those eyesores now. Start here, and keep going! Auto-camps for the better class, hotels, cut down those trees, open it up for the public, put it on the map .... Squatters! The government's been trying to get them off for years! .... (Hear Us 277)

This attitude is espoused by an outsider to Eridanus; it is the point of view of an inhabitant of "Civilization, creator of deathscapes," preparing to expand "murdering the trees and taking down the shacks as it went ..." (279).

The Garden of Eden/eviction theme that threads its way through all five narratives considered in this thesis also has a place in "Forest Path". With a slight biblical echo, the narrator describes first the virtue of Eridanus, then the 'open it up for the public' sort of vice characterizing the opposing world, as follows:

> And everything in Eridanus ... seemed made out of everything else, without the necessity of making anyone else suffer for its possession .... it was not human beings I hated but the ugliness they made in the image of their own contempt for the earth .... (Hear Us 248)

This sets the stage for the following judgement on the Eden/eviction dilemma: "It was as though man would not be contented with anything God gave him and I could only think that when God evicted him from Paradise it served him right" (263). The community at Eridanus does possess some features of the original Eden, as Northrop Frye summarizes these: "the bible begins with man in a paradisal state, wherein his relation to nature was of an idealized kind suggesting a relation of identity on equal terms. The imagery of the garden of Eden is an oasis imagery of

trees and water" (142). Although Eridanus is Edenic to this extent, its importance as a work of literary ecology is the way in which descriptions of Eridanus engage the concept of Eden to deal with problematic attitudes towards the environment. There is a consistent presence of duality in the narrator's perceptions of **"Eridanus, known both as the River of Death and the River of Life" (Lowry, Hear Us 227).** The initial concept of Eridanus as a version of Eden is likewise double-edged, as Eden is associated with conflicting Western-Christian evaluations of nature as either something subservient to humanity, or something that humanity is a part of (Frye 75, 139).

The sense of duality in "Forest Path" also has to do with the recurrent intrusion of urban civilization and its values: **"But could you rent Paradise at twelve dollars a month?" (Hear Us 229)**, the narrator thinks, still dazed by his recent change of worlds. Other overlapping perceptions occur, reflecting not only the conceptual duality of Western attitudes to nature, but also the essential life/death duality inherent in all natural cycles:

> **this spring was the same and not the same as the springs of years ago. And I wondered if what really we could see in age is merely the principle of the seasons themselves wearing out, only to renew themselves through another kind of death .... this winter had been the longest and gloomiest we had ever known, and one had almost seemed to feel the onset of another ice age, another search for Eden. So much more welcome and sweeter the spring, now it had come.** (Lowry, Hear Us 281)

This particular reference to Eden is appropriately bittersweet; there is a sense of both fatigue and longing: "another search for

Eden" foreshadows the potential destruction of Eridanus, a potential which expands Eridanus' scope as an imaginary ecosystem beyond the idealized condition it initially presents.

"Forest Path" and October Ferry have a joint effect. The novella presents an idyllic premise while the novel gives the premise a more realistic quality by examining some problems that inevitably intrude on Eridanus. Characters in October Ferry struggle with two central difficulties, first the negative effects of having to retreat to the city rather than endure the hardships of wintering in Eridanus, then the more serious (and possibly insoluble) problem of rebuilding their naturalistic way of life in another location when the original site is destroyed. Porteous summarizes the combined operation of the two narratives as follows:

> **If Hear Us O Lord [particularly "Forest Path"] rejects travel and celebrates home [within this compact between man and nature ... the existential outsider finally achieves insideness], October Ferry celebrates home but grieves for its loss .... Another Eridanus was not to be found. Suburbia and development creep up until .... the Llewelyns go into exile once more, as did Lowry ....** (Landscapes 97)

As in Dark as the Grave, October Ferry's characters are often travellers without a home, having only an observer-relationship with the natural world. Only in Chapters 11, 13, 22 and 23 do Ethan and Jacqueline Llewelyn live the **"new and better life"** in Eridanus that Sigbjørn and Primrose do in "Forest Path" (Lowry, October Ferry 99). Most of the time they are in exile from their

small-scale Eden, exiled by cherubim in industrial civilization's own terms "... that glittering sword in the night like a scintillant oil-waste pyre" (172).

Chapters 24, 25, and 26 show the Llewelyns homeless, but in the city. Life in the city is associated with the destruction of Eridanus. The city is of course the logical conclusion to the obliteration of Eridanus; without dwelling-places like Eridanus there would be fewer escapes from city life:

> ... this part of the city was evidently in the grip of that same 'clean-up' campaign whose tentacles had reached to their hamlet eight miles away as the killer whale swam. CLEAN-UP OF VANCOUVER DEMANDED BY ANGRY CITIZENS, yelled the headlines. TREES, EYESORES, MUST GO. And with that down were coming all the horse chestnut and the maple trees ... Bulldozers grunted up and down .... (Ferry 176)

This topophobic perspective on the city is a poignant reminder of the narrator's remark in "Forest Path" that what he hated was not human beings "but the ugliness they made in the image of their own ignorant contempt for the earth ..." (Hear Us 248). Similarly, Ethan does not specifically hate the city, but much of what defines the city:

> "... poor old Gothic steamboat buildings being torn down, like the trees, to make way for soulless Behemoths in the shape of new apartment buildings, yet more deathscapes of the future .... The fake modern buildings going up everywhere were proving far more deserving of literal cold-blooded condemnation than even were those they replaced. (Ferry 177)

What is destructive for these narrators, and thus for Lowry, is not necessarily the concept of an urban settlement, but the city's simultaneous rejection and exploitation of nature and of

anything remotely natural in origin.

October Ferry does not reject the city as evenly as "Forest Path" does; the later narrative admits the need for the city. Therefore its criticisms of city life are less criticisms of the city itself, and more criticisms of the way life in the city is made to be. One implication of this distinction is that city life could be restructured, improved, and made less destructive of its inhabitants and surroundings. Ethan considers the situation as follows:

> **. . . Two advantages alone Ethan was able to see in their return to civilization, you could take a hot bath in more comfort, and there was a good gas stove, and both of these seemed equally — the latter irresistibly so and daily to someone somewhere in the city, if the paper was to be believed — temptations to suicide .... the days passed with a terrible meaningless swiftness, like the pages of a book abandoned in a garden, blown over by the wind . . . . Like a real book, perhaps, left behind in their garden.** (Ferry 182)

Tuan asserts that **"Natural environment and world view are closely related .... In nontechnological societies the physical setting is the canopy of nature and its myriad contents"** (Topophilia 79). But, as described above, the setting of the city is more one of entrapment and sensual euthanasia. Tuan further suggests that **"As a human habitat the chief distinction of the rainforest environment lies in its all-enveloping nature "** (79). This was true of Eridanus, a nontechnological society in miniature; however, Vancouver City in October Ferry is not welcoming but deadening:

> **... viewed from the corroding standpoint of the city .... it was as if they had exchanged sunlight on water for photographs of sunlight on water, cool**

> commotion of blowing grasses and pennroyal ... for the tragic incidental music that always accompanies documentaries involving blowing grasses .... Soon they might not even have that. (Ferry 191-2)

The problem here is that rather than incorporating nature into itself organically, the city strives to modify, to control what little of nature it allows its inhabitants to retain. Furthermore, the modification of nature by city life and city values, which Ethan objects to, seems to have as its inherent (if unconscious) objective the separation and division of human and natural worlds, placing its own devices and mechanisms between the human being and anything spontaneously natural.

This 'once removed' perspective characterizes the Llewelyn's bus trip to Nanaimo, and is a very different perspective from the immersion of "Forest Path". I suggested earlier that a sense of separation from the natural world is one of the things that enables humanity to exploit and destroy nature without realizing that it is also destroying itself; one of the values of the reverent point of view towards nature that dominates "Forest Path" is that of re-establishing (in the reader) a sense of connection between humanity and nature, thereby undermining the separation that facilitates destruction. October Ferry again emphasizes the 'de-naturalizing' effects of the urban world, as the Llewelyns see Nanaimo's billboards from the bus window causing Ethan to think:

> The notion prevalent in these last frontiers of the western world [was] that a town had only begun to come of age when industry moved in and the trees began to be knocked down, and its natural beauty

began to disappear .... (Ferry 226)

Ethan and Jacqueline soon observe further results of such a 'maturation': **"... ugly standardized houses in a long row, boxes crowded together in an exact row as though dropped there by a conveyor belt"** (229). This vision re-emphasizes Porteous' comment that "Nature is discounted in the city", which is clearly the primary feature of Lowry's criticism of the urban world in October Ferry (and elsewhere).

Beyond dealing with some negative aspects of the industrial, technological, and urban bias in post-war society, another central dilemma for October Ferry's characters is that of losing their topophilic way of life at Eridanus and having to begin again. For the Llewelyns (for the Lowrys) part of the problem with relocating on Gabriola Island is that there is no squatters-community there, sharing beach, spring, forest and path communally. To live on Gabriola would mean owning property; and although resigned to the necessity of owning property at times, Lowry is clearly on the side of the communal example set by the squatters at Eridanus. In October Ferry ownership of property is often connected with the more destructive garrison-mentality, as part of the characters' dilemma: **"... the difficulties in finding out about getting to Gabriola, the bastion, the bastion itself, the seemingly irrelevant, or perhaps not so seemingly irrelevant, fact that there was a real estate agency in the bastion ...** (Ferry 321). The Llewelyns' need for a home is genuine, as is humanity's; however, the prospect of how their life on Gabriola

would have to be conducted differs from that of uncomplicated, idyllic Eridanus. Signifying uncertainty and irresolution, the Llewelyns' direction towards a new home on Gabriola wavers: **"The next moment the mountains and forests were sweeping past them again on the same wide arc as before, though in a contrary direction. Beginning: beginning again: beginning yet again. Off we go! Once more they were bound for Gabriola"** (322).

> **... ERIDANUS SQUATTERS REPRIEVED . . . as if he were an angel, or a seagull hovering over it Ethan saw the inlet .... He saw their own cabin, the tame seagulls still circling over it and now alighting on the porch .... 'Plans for a park site have now been abandoned due to a dispute regarding back taxes .... 'Of course, if someone buys the land that's different. But ... they can stay where they are until some definite plan for the property is put into action.' "** (Ferry 324)

With this temporary repeal of their eviction from Eridanus, the Llewelyns' decision to go on with the move to Gabriola rather than returning to their former home is bound-up with the complicated issue of property. Ironically, they were evicted so that Eridanus could be converted into marketable property; yet, they decide to continue with the plan of buying property on Gabriola rather than become proprietors of Eridanus:

> **... it wouldn't work .... I got so I felt I owned that whole forty acres, I felt just like an English squire. And the more I thought I owned it the more selfish I got about it .... the point is, we couldn't own it. I mean, we couldn't own it as it is, and if it ever got so we could, we wouldn't want it, it would be so different.** (325)

The difference between Gabriola and Eridanus in Lowry's writing is conceptual: Eridanus is 'the figurative world' referred to in

allegory, an idealized way of life, and possibly an attainable goal for readers; Gabriola is closer to the real world. The notion of ownership is incompatible with the concept of Eridanus; owning a piece of it would endanger what Eridanus means to the Llewelyns (and what it represents in Lowry's narratives).

October Ferry ends as the Llewelyns' are about to disembark at Gabriola, and ostensibly embark upon the job of building a new life there: " **...they stood alone at the rail .... staring at Gabriola. Abruptly the little ferry rounded the jutting headland ...**" (Ferry 332). Their perspective is ambivalent, neither topophilic as at Eridanus, nor topophobic as in Vancouver and Nanaimo; however, there is much about this ending that seems optimistic. The place seems to be welcoming them:

> **And now through the twilight as the echoes died away Jacqueline and Ethan distinguished the outlines of a sheltered valley that sloped down to a silent calm harbor .... The sound of lowing cattle was borne to them and they could see a lantern swinging along close to the ground. A voice called out, clear, across the water. And now they saw the dock, with silhouetted figures moving against a few lights that gleamed in the dusk . . . .** (333)

In fact, this description is slightly reminiscent of the Oaxaca valley part of Dark as the Grave, the point of that novel from which its characters prepare to return home and resume their lives. The problem with October Ferry's seemingly optimistic ending is that it is all speculation and no application: we do not see the Llewelyns rebuilding their life; we only hope they will be able to do so. While much seems welcoming about the

novel's closing passage, much also seems intangible and only half real ... the twilight, the echoes, the silhouetted figures ....

The initial optimism of October Ferry's ending is also undermined by the repeated references to 'flaming' and 'sparks' and 'darkness' in the ten or so paragraphs leading up to the final passage of the novel. Particularly foreboding is the repetition of **"burning tree stumps"** (331), **"burning tree stumps to clear his land"** (333). One implication of these negative portents, especially the last, is that rebuilding a way of life as idyllic as that of Eridanus may not be possible in the long-term because ultimately urban civilization cannot be escaped or ignored; some compromise will have to be reached between civilization and wilderness.

Tuan makes a relevant comment on the allegorical or figurative virtue of 'visions of paradise' that are not completely real, or realizeable, as follows: **"Gardens of Eden and Island Utopias have not always been taken seriously, least of all in the Twentieth Century. But they seem needed as make believe and as a place of withdrawal from high pressured living on the continent"** (Topophilia 120). So perhaps in "Forest Path" and October Ferry we are shown examples of different ways of life from which to selectively construct what Porteous calls 'the good life': **"Living well is not merely the best revenge, it is our right and our duty .... Above all, it requires the achievement of state of balance"** (Landscapes 198). 'Living well', then, must

require the compromise between civilization and nature or wilderness that the 'sceptically optimistic' ending of October Ferry indirectly and grudgingly admits is necessary. Perhaps it is possible for the reader to find a workable ecological 'utopia' somewhere between Eridanus, the option that could not be maintained because urban growth consumed it, and Gabriola, the option more 'of this world' that Lowry could not himself make work.

Day's biography of Lowry summarizes the central idea of both final narratives as follows:

> **The common theme [of October Ferry as well as Hear Us O Lord] is one which preoccupied Lowry during his entire career: it has to do with the struggle of man and woman who, having been expelled from the Garden, hope first to survive, and then, with luck, to return. The theme is at first existential: how are the exiled lovers to live at all in the noisy welter of civilization? It becomes a moral problem: how are they to live ethically, with regard to their fellow man? (446)**

Thus the personal problem is also a social problem, is also an ecological problem. As suggested earlier, the solution to these must be a joint one in order to 'hold'. Day continues:

> **The solution, in every case, lies in simplicity: Lowry's lovers learn (or do not learn — the epiphany does not always come) that their best hope lies in returning to a life lived close to things. The enemy is not only a venal and loveless civilization ... but also a dangerous urge toward obsessive introspection: the barrenness of self-absorption .... There are, then, two enemies facing the lovers: one lies all around them, befouling then devouring their garden; the other, more insidious, lies within. (447)**

The "simplicity" and "best hope" Day mentions recalls what Tuan - in the opening quotation to this chapter - says of "our earliest

home". Real, or fictional ideal, Eridanus does offer the "best opportunity" for both individual and group, author and reader(s), to begin constructing solutions to crises of self, other and world. The crises are certainly presented in Lowry's work, as are some possible or (to use Lutwack's term) model solutions. "Forest Path" is a model of the "simplicity ... a life lived close to things" that Day refers to; October Ferry is very much its antithesis. The harmony of "Forest Path" has to do with solutions coming together as much as the transience of October Ferry concerns an inability or failure to work out the problems of relationship, community and environment as an interconnected whole.

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Conclusion:
Topophobia, Topophilia, and Malcolm Lowry.

In 1933 Aldo Leopold wrote the following in an attempt to define a new ecologically sensitive way of thinking about the environment as a 'land ethic':

> **It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without ... a high regard for its value (philosophical not economic) ... the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it .... (Blau 296)**

In 1939 Malcolm Lowry moved to British Columbia, where he spent most of his career linking land with literature. The topophilic perspectives of Lowry's British Columbian narratives, exhibit the "high regard" for the value of land, the "intense consciousness of land", and the "vital relation" to land that Leopold feels is essential to the formation of a land ethic. Leopold's work is acknowledged by contemporary environmentalists as setting a necessary precedent for current environmental thinking (Blau 283). This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that Lowry's work can also be seen to initiate ecological thinking, although not in the overt way that Leopold's does; Lowry is of course a writer of fiction, not directly an essayist.

In his preface to Landscapes of the Mind (1990), Douglas Porteous asserts that

> **The way we live now is unhealthy, wasteful, dehumanizing and ultimately absurd. We can change it at the public level, as green parties recognize, by adopting alternative technologies and lifestyles in pursuit of right livelihood and a green geo-**

> **graphy. But the key to such a transformation is personal change at the private level, and to encourage such change we need a back-to-basics movement that will result in the necessary revolution in consciousness and a new awareness of our sensual and spiritual selves. (xiv)**

Porteous is a humanistic geographer. Once again, Lowry's work corroborates with that of researchers more directly involved with environmental issues. Some of Lowry's characters espouse such "personal change at the private level"; their movement is exactly "back-to-basics". Other characters either die or suffer as a result of their involvement with a world whose cherished way of life is "unhealthy, wasteful, dehumanizing and ultimately absurd". But beyond what Lowry's characters manage or fail to achieve in their own textual lives, their points of view have the ability to influence readers' thinking and readers' lifestyles. This is also Yi-Fu Tuan's point:

> **The mental maps of literature are cosmographies and idealized worlds: they help us to understand on the one hand the stable [extant] structures of mental life, on the other, the visions that lead to change .... Both scientific and imaginative literature have the power to transform the image of the world .... ("Lit... Env. Knowing" 272)**

In fact, from the topophobic view of the urban world given in Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave, to the topophilic view of wilderness given in Hear Us O Lord, to both views of both worlds in October Ferry, Lowry literally transforms the image of the world, perhaps engendering real transformation in the world beyond the image.

In the five narratives considered in this thesis,

> **we are dealing with two regional landscapes, the**

> **Mexican City region ... [Quaunahuac] and the British Columbian wilderness ... [Eridanus] .... in Lowry's British Columbia, forests are benign, the house is in harmony with its environment. In Mexico ... houses crumble, gardens rot ....** (Porteous, Landscapes 103)

In each narrative the characters' points of view towards nature are dealt with in terms of causality: each point of view affects the manner in which the character conducts his or her life in relation to the natural world. In Under the Volcano both main characters have problematic points of view towards nature. Yvonne idealizes and romanticizes the natural world, but has no practical understanding of how that world works; therefore, she is unable to survive when nature acts according to its own instinctive drives rather than according to her naive expectations: she is unprepared for nature to act as it does, and so is destroyed. The Consul has come to fear nature and opt for a world more contained and artificial, a world unable to truly sustain life; he is killed by a denizen of his adopted world acting in accordance with its dictates: his destruction is a consequence of his choice of a world exclusive of nature. Hugh's perspective is more ambivalent. Accordingly, he is neither destroyed by the narrative, nor does it provide him with an especially hopeful future. These main characters act against a backdrop of local inhabitants' and Indians' relations with nature, relations that are **"communal, impersonal, submissive, mystical and self-denying"** (Tannenbaum 32). So a dialectic that operates between Yvonne's abstracted topophilia, the Consul's acquired topophobia, and Hugh's neutrality (or irresolution),

notes on its periphery a more real and integral topophilia; this topophilia is manifested by native Mexicans who **"live out [their] round of days in an unperturbed universe, following an ancient pattern and living by old rules" (Tannenbaum 32).**

Sigurd and Astrid in "The Bravest Boat" are certainly on the side of nature. Their perspective becomes increasingly topophilic. By the end of the story their life acquires a sense of regeneration, of fulfillment and even security. In Dark as the Grave, Sigbjørn and Primrose have a detached perspective, and the urban world they marginally inhabit for two-thirds of the narrative provides them with more suffering than sustenance. Recalling the Consul's at times, Sigbjørn's perspective is often topophobic and infused with a sense of futility; he hates and fears the city, but is nonetheless a part of it. But as their perspective becomes more actively topophilic, as they begin to return to their home and previous intimacy with nature, the text-world capitulates and projects an optimistic future for them. The future of Dark as the Grave is located in "The Forest Path to the Spring."

Sigbjørn and Primrose in "Forest Path" have a reverent attitude towards nature: they depend on it for physical and emotional support; and their life is filled with both. They acknowledge their dependence on nature, without trying to force it to 'render unto them their due'; and nature continually meets their needs. Sigbjørn and Primrose's situation in "Forest Path" is very indicative of Lowry's own perspective; as pointed out

earlier, Porteous emphasizes this idea throughout his work on Lowry:

> **Lowry used his journeys to map the 'terra incognita' of his own mind .... nowhere else do we find such congruence between an author and his art .... This inseparability between subject and object, this blurring of landscape and mind, this identification of land with personality, may appear to be on the edge of schizophrenia .... [But] 'alternative' psychiatry, notably the work of Szasz, Laing, Reich, and Castenada, suggests that a 'participatory' role in the man-nature relationship may be more sane than the current 'mastery' world view ....** (Landscapes 104)

In contrast to Sigbjørn and Primrose in "Forest Path", in many chapters of October Ferry Ethan and Jacqueline Llewelyn are alienated from an earlier close bond with nature. Attempts to re-establish this bond falter; thus the future the novel alludes to for them is ambiguous and barely realizeable.

These character-perspectives on the environment form an implicit 'environmentalist' argument as they are compared and contrasted from narrative to narrative. To say that 'the characters who revere nature are happy and those who reject or toy with nature do so at their peril, and this means the narratives can be given a pro-ecology reading' would be too simplistic a statement. Lowry's writing also takes into consideration other factors involved with the formation and application of the characters' points of view, for instance the following: the unavoidability of the technological/urban world in the Twentieth Century, societal prejucides and pressures, and the enigmatic impression nature makes upon those who mature outside of it and thus approach it as foreigners. But I am suggesting,

as Porteous also suggests, that "ultimately Lowry indicts machine civilization for its greedy, remorseless devastation of the natural, the organic" (Landscapes 189). His indictment is gradual and accumulates from narrative to narrative; it is conveyed by character-observers whose perspectives cover both "machine civilization" and "the natural, the organic".

Working principles of literary ecology into a coherent reading of these five narratives is possible because an environmentalistic position is given repeated emphasis throughout them: the negative possibilities change; the positive alternative remains reasonably constant. Furthermore, the characters who are most successful in achieving happy and healthy ways of life are the ones who espouse an environmentalistic perspective, or something close to it. Once again, Porteous' position regarding environmental issues supports mine regarding Lowry's writing:

> In the long run, to avoid deathscape [as Lowry has depicted it], whether it come by nuclear devastation or ecological disaster, we need to leaven our over-scientized culture with a more intersubjectively loving relationship with the earth [a possibility Lowry demonstrates with Eridanus]. We need, in short, to rediscover that feeling of oneness with the land which primitive societies seem to have retained wherever they have been allowed. (Landscapes 202)

Lowry certainly endorses the reverent attitude towards the environment which is epitomized by the way of life in Eridanus. However, of greater importance than an author's endorsement of an environmental-attitude or a lifestyle is the effect of his depiction of such a way of life on the contemporary reader. I

think one effect of such depiction (perhaps more so now than in the 1940's and 50's when Lowry was writing, because environmental questions have now increased in urgency) is to galvanize effort, to make something like Eridanus seem both possible and necessary. Leonard Lutwack explains this part of literature's involvement with ecological issues as follows:

> **Literature dealing with the theme of place-loss and placelessness has performed a valuable service in calling to attention earth's deterioration and recalling a traditional respect for earth .... Long before science sounded the alarm, literature reacted to the onset of a problem serious enough to threaten the survival of mankind and began to develop a new sensibility to environment in preparation for a time that now appears to be the start of the age of ecology. It is unreasonable to expect a return to Eden, the primal place, but respect for earth's remaining beauty and for the health of its soil, air and water may be revived .... This will be a service for literature to perform in the immediate future. (245)**

At times Lowry's characters fail in their desire for "a return to Eden"; at other times they become lost in their intense awareness of "earth's deterioration"; or they are caught slipping back and forth between these extremes. But Lowry also presents a completely other possibility, the sustained and working topophilia of Eridanus that epitomizes the "new sensibility to environment" and "respect for earth's remaining beauty" that Lutwack notes above. Such environmental interactions and perspectives depicted in Lowry's work ask the question, yet also become part of the response ... "Could one translate this kind of happiness into one's life?"

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