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LOWRY'S JOURNAL FORM:  
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND PHILOSOPHICAL DESIGN

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
December, 1976

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## ABSTRACT

The fictions Malcolm Lowry wrote subsequent to Under the Volcano seem to demonstrate little of the technical expertise he manifests in the earlier work, and one of the few unanimously held findings of his critics is that in Lowry's later fictions something has gone wrong. This thesis explores the "problem" of the later fiction. It shows how Lowry, throughout his writing career, experiments with fictional form, and how each of his later works marks an intermediate point in a process of fictional evolution towards a "new form." This "new form," although never fully realized, is initially shaped in the notebooks Lowry used to record the events which he later transformed into the material of his autobiographical fictions. Lowry's "new form" is in fact a development out of the structure of his notebooks: the journal form. The journal form inherently creates opposing perspectives upon events; conflicting narrative rhythms ensue from this. The "new form" is an ideal Lowry aspires towards: it is intended to structure a new type of realism -- the means by which human beings assimilate and order what has happened to them -- and to contain, and thus make contiguous, Lowry's diverse themes,

images, and oppositional narrative technique.

Lowry's theoretical approach to the "new form" is discussed in the Introduction. Chronology is then reversed. Chapter I discusses "Ghostkeeper" as Lowry's reflection upon his fictional method. Chapter II approaches "Through the Panama" as Lowry's use of the journal form to unify disparate narrative voices. Chapter III examines and compares the manuscript and the printed version of Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid. It shows that this book is Lowry's first direct experiment with temporal inversions which are used to attempt to reconcile narrative mode with thematic action. Chapter IV demonstrates that Lowry uses an oppositional system as the fictional unifying principle for Under the Volcano, and examines the formal dimensions which Lowry only retrospectively discovers operating in this book. Each chapter focuses upon fictional form and argues that Lowry's themes and narrative techniques grow out of the form he employs. The Conclusion examines Lowry's "new form" in relation to his philosophical outlook, shows how the new form reconciles Lowry's borrowings from Ortega y Gasset and J. W. Dunne and suggests a critical approach that will elucidate the literary and philosophical function of the journal-narrative method.

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## INTRODUCTION

In June, 1950, Malcolm Lowry wrote an extraordinary letter to Downie Kirk, a schoolmaster and friend. Lowry had made a discovery, one which appeared to liberate his fictions from subjectivity, and in a tone of controlled exuberance he extended it to the concerns of those professional vocations with which he identified himself: film critic, literary critic, historian, political scientist, philologist, composer, philosopher, and most important, writer. Lowry had been reading Ortega y Gasset's Toward a Philosophy of History, which at one point argues that human life transcends other forms of animal life because human beings invent a form for existence and then convert their experiences into this reality, the process being similar to the creative process of the novelist. Lowry perceived in this a means by which fictions about the creative process, or writings about writing, became of universal value:

This probably recommends itself to me partly because if it is true, and man is a sort of novelist of himself, I can see something philosophically valuable in attempting to set down what actually happens in a novelist's mind when he conceives what he conceives to

be the fanciful figure of a personage, etc., for this, the part that never gets written -- with which is included the true impulses that made him a novelist or dramatist in the first place, and the modifications of life around him through his own eyes as those impulses were realized -- would be the true drama . . . and I hope to finish something of this sort one day. But Ortega is not, here, at any rate, concerned with fiction: this is the thesis upon which he bases his value of history. Man is "what has happened to him."<sup>1</sup>

Ortega had thrown a life-line to a writer who was in the process of writing several fictions about his own experiences in life: "what had happened" to Lowry was contained by a form he had at some earlier point created. And since, at least according to Ortega, life and art could be seen as parallel processes of creation, fiction could be meaningful when it communicated factual events within a form which approximated that initial form by which the writer had plotted his life. The discovery of a viable form would "transcend the reality of nature"<sup>2</sup> and harmonize the chaos of experience, thus giving value to otherwise meaningless events. "To have found one's vocation," Lowry wrote, "whatever it may be, is 'to understand that one is alive for some specific and unexchangeable purpose.'"<sup>3</sup>

For years, however, Lowry had been writing about his own life, and Ortega's comments served mostly to clarify, and give objective support to, a process Lowry had long been engaged in. Three years later Lowry forcefully reiterated the point in a letter to his editor, Albert Erskine, where he argued that the viability of autobiography depended upon technique: "I think

unquestionably what one is after is a new form, a new approach to reality itself . . ."<sup>4</sup> The new form had to contain events as they actually happened, but ideally the writer could render these experiences exactly and yet not be caught in a tension between factual and fictional significance. The hero of the new form was conceived by Lowry as "Ortega's fellow, making up his life as he goes along, and trying to find his vocation;" not "in the ordinary sense . . . a novelist"<sup>5</sup> but a writer of some other, undefined prose form.

Perhaps critics inevitably fabricate fictions about their subjects. But my feeling is that Lowry only truly discovered his "vocation" after publication of Under the Volcano: "novelist" inadequately represented Lowry's metier; "novel" and "story" could not define the form that he retrospectively realised he was translating from life and re-creating in words. The letter to Downie Kirk signalled Lowry's sense of liberation in autobiography and a new and guiltless exercise of imagination in the process of recollection. What was of immense personal value to Lowry could be universalized, and truths discovered from subjective introspection could be accepted by any reader who had an interest in creating a meaningful existence. Matthew Corrigan, Lowry's most passionate critic, extols Lowry's break from the personal stasis of this period through the use of the first person in "Through the Panama" and "Forest Path to the Spring"; this marked Lowry's "release forward" from the confining



third person of the traditional novel.<sup>6</sup> But more importantly, the use of the first person marked Lowry's acceptance of the prose form which is the latent containing principle<sup>7</sup> of all of his fictions. In life, human beings were moulded by the experiences they underwent, but the meaning of living became clear only when those events were re-created in memory, analysed, correlated into significance. Lowry's new form must then function in the same way: the impact of immediate experiences had to be fused with the retrospective reflexiveness of the actuating imagination which operated through memory. Events had to be recorded, and then experienced once again. Art could parallel life, and life's process of evolving form could be translated into self-referring art which rendered the process of achieving its own form. Lowry's enthusiasm for Ortega's philosophy was probably based on rationalization and self-justification, but it allowed him to find creative release in his new prose mould. The simplest discoveries are always found too late, but it was not until near the end of his creative period that Lowry fully realized the dimensions of the structure which began the writing process and remained the shaping principle of all of his writings: the journal form.

Most of Lowry's protagonists are artists, personae of some aspect of himself, and though each is given a separate identity within his own fiction, all are united within the single collective consciousness that is the hero of the series of interlocked novels,

novellas and short stories, The Voyage that Never Ends. Thematic similarities abound in Lowry's fictions; each successive fictional unit in The Voyage series is, as Malcolm Bradbury points out, incremental to the fictions that come before it. Dark As The Grave contains Under the Volcano; Ultramarine is contained by them both; as the writer of one becomes the protagonist of the next "the retreat of past imaginings into history can enable the growth of consciousness, the evolutionary instinct."<sup>8</sup> Critical explorations of the thematic level of Lowry's fictions inevitably return to Under the Volcano, Lowry's only fiction fully accredited with success, and all that comes before and after is too often viewed as prelude to or peroration of the Volcano.<sup>9</sup> Certainly Lowry never surpassed the level of success of Under the Volcano, although "ten feet of manuscript in the University of British Columbia library attest to [his] prolificity"<sup>10</sup> in subsequent writing. Yet from the perspective of the mid-seventies, it appears that the Lowry critical industry is beginning to focus on Lowry's complete output, rejecting its previous sense of disappointment in the later works and questioning exactly what happened in the evolution of Lowry's writing.<sup>11</sup> Setting aside psychological criticism and biographical "excuses," Lowry's critics are looking to the works themselves for the answer to this pressing question. And as Lowry's later fictions are being rediscovered, critical focus is shifting away from thematic meaning towards fictional method. Within this reexamination, I believe that a major clue

to the problems which Lowry encountered in the fiction-making process is contained by the fictional form he was developing. For the form of Lowry's writing contains, and controls the nature of, the wide spectrum of his themes, imagery, style and technique.

Lowry wrote to arrest the significance of events that he experienced in his own life. His perspective was always retrospective, and the action of his fictions was controlled by events which had already occurred. "Truth" was more than verisimilitude to Lowry: Life was the great novelist who plotted her fictions perfectly, and the writer's duty, like that of Ortega's historian, was to explore the meaning of "what had happened." Lowry inherited the problem that has tortured biographers: how can one render the truth fictionally and yet adhere to the facts? How can one truth be presented when the events appear to verify another? The problem was further complicated in that the life Lowry fictionalized was his own. Memory was Lowry's source for material, and memory, especially when coupled with imagination, tends to distort. Lowry was conceiving himself in a fictional identity, and the characters he was creating represented himself in other spaces, times and forms. The problem of authorial distance was an enormous one for Lowry: a common thematic recurrence in his fiction is the protagonist's sense, himself a writer, that he is being written.

These issues cannot be synthesized into significance when they are examined on a disembodied thematic level. But they

become meaningful when they are perceived as an out-growth, perhaps an inevitable one, of the manner in which Lowry wrote. In his preface to Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid, Douglas Day speaks of how the book was made;

During the entire trip both Lowry and his wife made notes as they went along -- dialogues, descriptions, copies of signs along the way, all sorts of random observations. After a dreadful series of comic catastrophes in Acapulco and Mexico City, which culminated in their deportation from the country (and about which Lowry wrote yet another unfinished novel, La Mordida), they returned to Canada. Some short time afterwards, Lowry looked through all the notes of the Mexican journey, exclaimed, "By God, we have a novel here!" and fell to work on Dark as the Grave.<sup>12</sup>

Lowry, apparently, was an inveterate recorder of experience. The first layer of his fictionalizing process was this immediate rendering of what had just happened, and experiences were separated into units by the dictates of the journal form. In his drive for accuracy, Lowry would record what had happened to him on a certain day, and although he had not yet gained the temporal distance on the experience required to resolve its significance, the facts were faithfully recorded. Later, when attempting to convert these diary entries into fiction, he would exercise his powers of retrospective analysis on the recorded events, and attempt to arrive at their meaning. From this perspective, events would begin to flow together into an implicit pattern, but the record of events would all too often obstruct the flow of Lowry's imagination. Matthew Corrigan examines extensively this method of writing, and notes that in the manuscript of

## La Mordida

. . . Margerie Lowry corrects Lowry's rendition as she types it. Continually she is saying in brackets that such and such an event is dislocated in time, that it should precede and not follow some other: corrections of sequence, names, incidents, but never interpretations. Obviously she was fulfilling what was a desperate need on his part to get the facts straight -- exactly as they had occurred. He sought such accuracy for himself, in a way bound himself to it, as he bound himself to the form of the traditional novel -- the binding, in both cases, draining off a good deal of pure inspiration.

One can guess why this rage for accuracy took over: the belief that imagination learned from experience and did not have to alter it much in the process, at least factually. In his work there is this growing realization that truth is something already there in the universe and he has only to irritate it through "correspondence" into revealing itself. More and more Lowry loses his individuality as a writer and becomes, in his all too accurate metaphor, someone who is being written.<sup>13</sup>

Lowry was fully aware of the conflict between the facts and the meanings given them by imagination. At one point in Dark As the Grave, when Sigbjørn Wilderness has just discovered that his character's translation of a sign on the garden, though factually incorrect, is of far more personal significance than is the literal translation, Eddie Kent, an obtuse perceiver at best, chimes in from the sidelines, "'you've got to get it right. It's no use unless it's right.'" <sup>14</sup>

Lowry was attempting to make an art form which grew out of life. The concerns of his characters were to be reflections, or displacements, of the concerns of the writer, and in this way a work of fiction was to contain all of its dimensions within its own form, to be entirely self-referring, although placed within the interlocked series of fictions in the Voyage cycle. Yet Lowry

was attempting to do more than objectify his own life, and Ortega's concept of the process of living helped Lowry to rescue autobiography from solipsism.<sup>15</sup> Finally, it can be said that Lowry wrote fictions not simply as a means of self-expression but as an attempt at artistic creation. As W. H. New points out, Lowry viewed the reading process as a means of experiencing life itself; the issues found in books were pursued with the same assiduity as were elements of his own experience until they ceased "to be objects read and [became] part of the subjectivity with which he renders experience."<sup>16</sup> Lowry obviously conceptualized his readers in some special relation to his fictions. Men were form-makers, creating as they proceeded, and Lowry's readers were understood to be involved in this same process. The work itself would parallel life and would present experience from the perspective of the subjectively experiencing mind. It was incumbent upon the reader and not the author to complete the fiction, to unify it into a form and to conceptualize its final significance. Lowry's new form, then, began with the simplest possible structure for recording -- the journal form -- and yet included and contained its reader within a complex, collective unit designed to shape, and construct the meaning of, the fiction it contained.

The dramatized action of Lowry's later works is chronologically linear, and after the complex handling of time in Under the Volcano this appears a regression into the more traditional narrative mode. Lowry, however, was attempting to communicate full consciousness and to render concomitantly immediate experience

as well as reflexive recollection upon that experience. In moments of experience, human beings were subject to linear time, yet memory served to transform linear experience into a timeless form. The new form, then, was designed to capture a new type of realism: the means by which human beings assimilate and order what has happened to them. What results in the later works is a strange tension between fictional modes: the action appears linear and kinetic yet the point of view from which the action is rendered is retrospective and static. Again, this tension progresses from the form of the fictions and the means by which Lowry created. The journal form -- the basis upon which the fictions are built -- is inherently linear: experience must fall into day to day units. Yet even a single entry in the journal form is designed to draw the significance of a day's activity, and functions to collapse the separation of the hours of the day into timelessness. Later, when Lowry re-read his notes and re-experienced past events, his imagination found new levels of significance and he moved one step closer to seeing the entire series of entries as a static unit. Out of the initial journal form Lowry created his series of fictional drafts and the fiction developed towards an ordering of the component parts. Lowry's readers were asked to participate on two levels of activity at the same time: they were expected to share the experiences themselves in the linear manner in which they had occurred in life, and yet to collaborate with the narrator in the drive to construct imaginatively a retrospective ordering

of events which they were in the present process of vicariously experiencing.

As Matthew Corrigan points out, Lowry's adherence to the facts cuts across his attempt to hold the entire series of events in reflexive reference.<sup>17</sup> For as Lowry writes he repeatedly re-enters the experiences of his past and lives them once again. Events accord to the dictates of the journal form and remain within their isolated units; Lowry cannot fuse the whole into a static, single moment. Inevitably there remain two opposing rhythms or orders in his writing. In his drive to resolve the significance of events, Lowry expands isolated units of experience into a timeless stasis. And in his drive to render "story," Lowry attempts to unify these isolated units into a series through the linear, kinetic medium of summary narrative. The later works appear to be disordered collages of uncoordinated units, disembodied voices, irrelevant marginal notes and conflicting points of view. Yet Lowry believed that an order was implied by apparent chaos. Rudolf Arnheim argues that "disorder 'is not the absence of all order but rather the clash of uncoordinated orders.'"<sup>18</sup> Lowry left it to his readers to make his fictions cohere. The process of reading was to be no less difficult than was the process of living and understanding, or indeed the process of writing.

In Ortega's writing Lowry found a key to experimenting with chaos, yet paradoxically the theme of his later works is the affirmation of the order in life, the garden regained. On the



thematic level, the later works appear to break from the entropic vision that dominates Under the Volcano and to shift into the new directions of a new art form. But an examination of Lowry's formal processes reveals that his later fictions continue the method of writing that produces Under the Volcano. A current controversy in Lowry scholarship centres upon the tension in rhythms in Under the Volcano, the same tension between static and kinetic rhythms that evolves, in the later works, from Lowry's experiments with the journal form. Paul Tiessen, Margaret Davidson, and John Knoll, in examining Lowry's use of cinematic techniques in Under the Volcano, stress Lowry's adaptations of the montage principle.<sup>19</sup> They note that in montage, static units are juxtaposed without a transitional connective, the effect being to implicate the reader in the dynamic process of creating an implied image from the "representational guidelines suggested by the author."<sup>20</sup> Victor Doyen and Sherrill Grace stress the role of the "reflexive reader" and argue that Lowry intends his readers to approximate the authorial point of view and to complete the fiction.<sup>21</sup> They see an unresolved tension between Lowry's static portrayal of scene and his dramatic action, an opposition Terence Wright examines and which forces him to conclude that Under the Volcano fails to be completely successful because it is blocked by a struggle between naturalism and formalized art.<sup>22</sup> The later works, in advancing the journal form towards the new form, chronicle Lowry's attempts to come to grips with this opposition between

rhythms. This struggle not only focuses the manner by which the later works evolve organically from the masterpiece, but it represents Lowry's perspective upon, and so clarifies, the problem that these critics have found with Under the Volcano. The opposition between rhythms in the later fictions emerges from an opposition in the perspectives which Lowry attempts to collate. This same problem with perspective functions in Under the Volcano, but here it is used as a unifying principle for the work. Thus, the later works redirect the reader to Lowry's use of perspective in Under the Volcano. Thematically, this approach stresses the centrality of Jacques Laruelle, who, like the narrators of Lowry's later works, attempts to collate the meanings of the story as it is experienced with the levels of significance that he later finds in it when he re-creates it as an unrealized film in the opening chapter. But more importantly, this approach redirects the reader to Lowry's handling of Under the Volcano's form. Lowry's juxtaposing of the first chapter's present action with the past action of Chapters II to XII commands a reader's acceptance of two perspectives upon a central set of facts, and the tension in narrative rhythms in the telling of the story comes to be seen as part of the oppositional continuum that emerges from the book's form. The later works reflect upon the masterpiece like the backward movement of Laruelle's luminous wheel; they grow out of it, and in doing so they refocus the reader's perspective upon it and thus alter the significance of the story it contains."

Very little of the later work is finished; this because Lowry began but never fully realized the transition of the journal form into the new prose form he aspired towards in these later works. Lowry foresaw a time where the uncoordinated, static pieces of his material would fall into a complete and self-containing order. But Matthew Corrigan argues that Lowry's vision exceeded his design because Lowry remained reluctant to abandon the traditional novel mode which is inadequately structured to unify the self-contained, separate elements of his fictions.<sup>23</sup> Corrigan's argument may capture the problem of Lowry's later works, for every reader of Lowry's later works knows that there is indeed a problem. But his argument must remain a tentative conclusion until the critical industry has identified accurately the nature of the new form and has assessed, in this light, the experimental directions in narrative mode that Lowry's later works embody. For in each of his fictions Lowry builds incrementally upon his most recent experiment and advances his use of narrative mode towards the totality of perspective that the point of view of the new form ideally contains. Since Lowry's technique grows out of the form he employs, the task of his critics must be to recapture the continuity that Lowry saw in the evolution of his prose form and to attempt to conceptualize the nature of the new form he aspired towards. Lowry's method of rendering fiction is itself the best guideline for this critical task. Each of the fictions that are discussed in this thesis represents a different angle of vision upon the new form. When viewed as a kinetic series, they describe

a linear, incremental process towards a realizable ideal. And when viewed as static and juxtaposed perspectives upon a new form, they can be collated, through the principle of montage, into an image of a prose form unrealized by the author but implied by the representational guidelines that are his separate fictions. In either case, the new form is entirely a product of the reader's own imagination. But for a writer who focusses so strongly upon the importance of the creative imagination in the process of passing through quotidian life, this is as it should be.

## CHAPTER I

### "GHOSTKEEPER:" THE JOURNAL AS CONTENT

"Ghostkeeper" is one of the last things Lowry wrote, and it reads almost as a retrospect upon his problems with advancing fiction towards his unrealized new form. Its importance for Lowry's critics is in the process by which Lowry passes on to his readers the task of creating fiction; one senses that, in writing this, Lowry felt he could go no further and consequently attempted to expose the problem rather than create a unified fiction. The story, apparently, is unfinished,<sup>1</sup> at least according to Margerie Lowry.<sup>2</sup> Anyone taking a cursory glance at it would conclude as much: the author seems to be describing a process; yet there is none of the flowing development upon which a story line or plot progresses. Transition points, in fact, earn most of the author's attention: here Lowry writes, in brackets, long notes to himself in which he investigates alternative directions or reflects upon the apparently unrelated pursuits of other writers. But to term "Ghostkeeper" "unfinished" is misleading.

It implies that Lowry could have moved this story on to a point of structural and stylistic refinement where the primary action would be the unfolding of themes and plot. But "story," in the traditional sense, was not what Lowry was trying to create in "Ghostkeeper." Rather, he was attempting to explain exactly the nature of a philosophical crisis in which he found himself entirely enmeshed, and he was trying to apply this crisis to a rather banal set of facts designed to communicate his own sense of its universality.

The dramatic situation of "Ghostkeeper" seems simple enough: Tom Goodheart, a journalist and protagonist of the story, attempts to translate his own experience of a walk in Stanley Park into the form of a daily entry in a newspaper column. Lowry fleshes this out, completes it in a sense, through the reflexive device of his own commentary upon it, and it is only through Lowry's "unfinished" passages that readers come to understand the enormous difficulty Goodheart encounters in centering his perspective upon events. For in "Ghostkeeper," Lowry objectifies into thematic action his own problems with writing within the journal form, and the action of the story is the narrative process itself. Goodheart's problem is with creating journalistic fiction. His own experience supplies him with the material for what he should write, but the problem of how he should write it leads him to insuperable barriers upon the significance of experience. Quite simply, the events can mean everything or nothing. Goodheart may pass through a handful of coincidences and an inadequate moral. Or he may be

in the middle of a series of events which represents, through the tension between the facts of experience and the imaginative construction of possible becomings, the perspective, and the problems it contains, of man caught in the patterns of quotidian life. For Goodheart is trapped in a conflicting set of separate realities. The events he experiences are the material for both his life and his fiction, and, as they accomodate themselves to alternative forms, their significance, somehow, is transformed. In a descriptive note to himself, Lowry outlines how Goodheart's apparently simple situation resolves, through reflection, into a complex perspective upon events:

. . . although this is simply a short story, Goodheart, so far as I can see is in a philosophical situation (although on one plane it is absurd) of the highest dramatic order. That this situation must be in some sense a universal one (even though it is not generally recognised) is what I count on to provide the excitement . . . . In any case Goodheart is now standing within the possibilities of his own story and of his own life -- something like Sigbjørn in relation to the Volcano, though this is both more complex and of course less serious. The point seems to be that all these possibilities, of his story (as of his own life) wish in some ways to fulfill themselves, but what makes it terrifying is that the mind or intelligence that controls these things, or perhaps does not control them, is outside Goodheart and not within.<sup>3</sup>

As a writer, Goodheart, in a traditional sense, should be in absolute control of his material. Yet his material for fiction is the fact of autobiographical experience, and thus events themselves, which for Lowry are not the projections of the nominalist's or the idealist's mind but are Life's ultimate reality, control

both his life and his work. "How shall I describe it" (p. 204), Goodheart asks. He is forced to "wait and see how the story develops in real life" (p. 220).

Ortega's theory of creative existence informs "Ghostkeeper." But his theory stresses man's creation of form before events become patterned by retrospection, and thus the significance of events depends not only upon what will happen but also upon what may happen. Man must create and control life, or else life controls him. The issue translates into the familiar opposition of free-will and determinism, and within Goodheart's situation are contained both extremes. Potentially, Goodheart orders events and translates that order into his fiction. Alternatively, events impose a pattern which he is forced to inhabit, and that same pattern becomes the matter of his fiction -- his chronicle, simply, of "what has happened to him." Goodheart's "vocation," thematically represented as journalist, is a metaphor for the human drive for awareness. He, like all men, perceives from within an ongoing experience, and hopes to recognize the pattern or form that unifies it. If he is in control, any possible set of events which the imagination can order for the future is a part of his present experience and consequently should inform its significance; the number of possibilities which the future contains is infinite, and the levels of significance to any set of events is, correspondingly, infinite as well.



This situation implies an ideal perspective. If one is truly aware, one can apprehend in the present moment the levels of significance which reflexive retrospection will afford to that experience. This involves the transcendence of linear time, and for this process Lowry culls not only from Ortega (where man transcends the journalist's perspective by ordering his life upon a multiplicity of possible futures) but also from J. W. Dunne and his An Experiment With Time. Dunne argues that the subjective experience of time has little to do with the linear means by which time is measured empirically. Rather, in W. H. New's application, "events in time past, relived in memory, occur simultaneously in time present, which epitomizes in its way the process of 're-creation' that reading a novel involves readers in."<sup>4</sup> Conversely, "future" events, perceived from within a space-time continuum, can be apprehended in the present moment. Dunne bases his argument on the experience of dreaming, but his dreamer's universe, he feels, describes the real world -- a macrocosmic parallel to man's imagination:

That the universe was, after all, really stretched out in Time, and that the lop-sided view we had of it -- a view with the "future" part unaccountably missing, cut off from the growing "past" part by a travelling "present moment" -- was due to a purely mentally imposed barrier which existed only when we were awake. So that, in reality, the associational network stretched, not merely this way and that way in Space, but also backwards and forwards in Time; and the dreamer's attention, following in natural, unhindered fashion the easiest pathway among the ramifications, would be continually crossing and

re-crossing that properly non-existent equator which we, waking, ruled quite arbitrarily athwart the whole.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, an empirical examination of Lowry's philosophical outlook reveals some rather unsound doctrine. Dunne writes of giving oneself to experience and all of its ramifications; Ortega's concern is with ordering events while experiencing them. But as W. H. New notes, Dunne's metaphysics, though suspect delineations of the operations of the material world, apply neatly to the relations Lowry discovers between himself and the world he creates in fiction.<sup>6</sup> Matthew Corrigan, in sketching Lowry's approach to fiction, notes that "the writer provided experience with adequate housing; he did not arrange it from scratch or he was a mere fabulator, for which Lowry had little respect."<sup>7</sup> This is a key point for Lowry: he believed not only in the fact in fiction but in the fact of fiction. The journalist (meaning here, the fiction-maker who writes of events in which the meaning of those events depends on a continuation of them in time) must, on the basic level, record facts. He must also incorporate the fact of the experience of events, which involves one's sense of where they may be leading -- in other words, the fiction of those facts. Dunne offers Lowry a system which implicates all time in the present moment, and thus the simple event of a walk in the park translates, when accredited its full significance, into the creative process of form-making. Cosmos is contained in the moment, and the form that the mind creates to contain that moment

holds within it all aspects of existence that the imagination can conceive. Simple experience is expanded into chaotic proportions, but the imagination re-forms it, and makes it, finally and in a new way, comprehensible.

"Ghostkeeper" contains the story of a journalist attempting to discover the significance of a set of events and to transform those events, in a manner which renders their significance, into a fictional unit. Goodheart's subject is, on one level, the facts of events, but on another level it is the pattern that these facts reveal. This pattern is in a process of perpetual metamorphoses, and Goodheart's problem with creating fiction is one of perspective: he must transform an essentially retrospective, after the fact, point of view upon experience into one which inhabits the eternally present moment that Dunne's theory implies. The journal form, however, which inherently separates experience into units, appears to resist such a progression of point of view, and in an aside Lowry notes:

. . . the average short story is probably a very bad image for life, and an absurdity, for the reason that no matter how much action there is in it, it is static, a piece of death, fixed, a sort of butterfly on a pin; there are of course some flaws in this argument -- it is a pity I have no philosophical training for I unquestionably have some of the major equipment of a philosopher of sorts. But the attempt should be -- or should be here -- at least to give the illusion of things -- appearances, possibilities, ideas, even resolutions -- in a state of perpetual metamorphoses. (pp. 223-24)

On the thematic level, the situation is, as Lowry himself admits, somewhat absurd. Readers must contend with a story which gives the details of a story that the protagonist cannot write. But Lowry's digressions and applications, made in his notes to himself, expand "Ghostkeeper" into a fascinating discussion of an author's own difficulty with writing. The thematic level, which is concerned with a character's difficulty in achieving a journalist's perspective and producing from it fiction in the journal form, is circumscribed by a narrative level which is concerned with precisely this same problem. Goodheart's "future" is the narrator's "present," for the narrator writes Goodheart's story from the retrospective point of view which Goodheart hopes to apprehend while engaged in his experiences. Yet the narrator is plagued by doubts about where his fiction must go; he, too, strives for fidelity to both facts and their myriad levels of significance. The parallel between the thematic and narrative levels of the fiction implies a continuum which expands outwards to the reader. Goodheart is forced, finally, to sketch out the facts of his experience and delete the levels of significance which he perceives but cannot unify with the matter of his five-hundred word essay. Lowry's "Ghostkeeper" never fully succeeds in telling a story, but through the author's notes a colossal number of meanings is afforded to a modicum of happenings. Goodheart's story has substance but it is static, for it fails to imply the outward progression that events, in experience, always promote. And Lowry, by framing

Goodheart's story with a parallel narrative action, captures this kinetic progression but fails to accomodate the unity and substance of facts as they are experienced in life. The reader, then, becomes co-creator of an as yet unrealized fiction. Goodheart's journal form, a given theme, is circumscribed by a chaotic and formless narrative level. The reader, like Ortega's historian, must retrospectively order these levels into a form that contains their existence. And this, presumably, is the new form which Lowry aspires towards but which he cannot, unaided, attain.

At the end of "Ghostkeeper," Lowry employs an image of a form which is designed to pass on to the reader the form-making process. Goodheart catches a faint glimpse of "a vision of the ghostly ballet, seen through half cleaned windows, on the pier at the entrance to the park" (p. 227). In terms of the story, the image is projected forward in time so that it lies beyond, although contained by, the time sphere of the dramatized events. But it becomes part of the reader's present: although the story has already been told, the pattern it embodies has progressed beyond its ostensible dimensions. Goodheart's and Lowry's ordering of the components of this story have been described, but, like dancers in the ballet, the components have altered slightly within a containing form. Lowry gives his readers part of the process of an evolving form, and as a metaphor for this process the ballet is apt. Goodheart's fiction coheres but it cannot dance;

Lowry's fiction dances but it does not cohere; the ballet allows kinetic motion within a containing form that remains stable through time, and thus represents, metaphorically, the ideal form which Lowry's fictions aspire towards. Lowry uses this image to appeal to his future, the reader's present. He need not conclude his events; he need only describe some of the future possibilities and ask his reader to coordinate, as Goodheart tries to do and fails, both facts and possibilities into an ordered form that continues to evolve through experience. Thus, Lowry implies the resolution to the philosophical problem he describes, but he fails to find a form which contains it.

"Ghostkeeper" is not fiction in the ordinary sense. It is more an exposition, an analysis of a pursuit that lasted a lifetime and an indication of the future possibilities of a fiction-making method. By dramatizing the problem in perspective inherent in advancing journal writing towards fictional unity, Lowry reveals his peculiar problem with autobiographical fiction. Lowry believed in facts; he also believed in their fictional parallel, and thus he conceptualized a system whereby an apparently limited set of events expands towards universality. It is significant that the final note of "Ghostkeeper" is not one of despair in the face of failure but is an affirmation of the inherent worth of what is here and now. For Lowry's perspective upon his immediate surroundings was in the process of evolving towards a point where it contained the universe, and his abstract notions were always

firmly rooted in real events. "Ghostkeeper" was Lowry's attempt to capture the universe of time in a single moment, the final stage in his progression towards the new form. In its predecessor, "Through the Panama," he had already succeeded in capturing the universe of spatial perspectives in a single point of view; this was to be the closest he would come to the realization of his new form.

## CHAPTER II

### "THROUGH THE PANAMA:" THE JOURNAL AS FORM

"Through the Panama" succeeds as fiction because it expands organically the point of view contained within the form in which it is written: the journal. In "Ghostkeeper," Lowry attempts to unify his narrative technique with his thematic analysis of the problems inherent in journal writing, but he fails to achieve a form that can make such a pursuit viable as fiction. In "Through the Panama," however, Lowry begins by accepting the basic fact of his communicative medium. And he discovers in the process that a complex thematic level, as well as a complicated analysis of the same problems with fiction-writing that "Ghostkeeper" examines, can be made congruent with what appears to be a very simple fictional form. "Ghostkeeper's" major theme, examined retrospectively, evolves from "Through the Panama's" narrative technique: the point of view from which the story is rendered remains contained within a series of events. The narrator strives towards an understanding of the significance of the events he



experiences and he eventually comes to see a pattern which unifies those events. But always, events as they actually occur directly and immediately control the action of the narrative.

The present fact of experience for the narrator is a sea voyage, and this controls the action of the "story." But the present fact of the form in which the narrator is writing is the journal, and the journal form controls the action of the "narrative." Sigbjørn Wilderness, as he almost unwittingly tells his story (for the record is in one way intended to be a set of notes to himself towards a later fiction), tries to map out a pattern that unifies the experience he is undergoing with his subjective impression of how he sees himself in the world. He exercises his creative imagination not to fit real or invented events into a preconceived fictional unit or form but to come to see a larger pattern behind his present perceptions. From his perspective, everything is potentially significant in an infinite number of ways, and since future events are beyond his control, present events are made to correspond to a network of sensibilities, a pattern Sigbjørn infers, not determined by the events which in fact will occur in the voyage but by the narrator's own sense of what those events may be, and what they finally may mean. One usually begins a personal journal with faith: the events that ensue will be, at least to the recorder, worth preserving in words. On one level of activity, Sigbjørn's recording process is purely automatic. Events demand recording and Sigbjørn, in his own metaphor, simply

offers a passive hand to the operation of a planchette,<sup>1</sup> an instrument alleged to write sentences without any conscious direction or effort.<sup>2</sup> Here narrative point of view is inextricably tied to the first-person, where "I" is the character to whom events lend significance. But this level of activity is counterpointed by Sigbjørn's purpose in writing. He attempts to see events in terms of their relation to a pattern he has not yet perceived, and rather than allowing his story to write itself, he adds in layers of analogy which have a more profound and immediate significance to him, and which finally structure the primary level of activity in the story. Even in the first entry in the journal a tension in directions is apparent. Under "Nov. 7." Sigbjørn records not only the facts of his departure -- the exact nature of the ship, the activity surrounding its operations -- but also his initial sense of where these events, once translated into fiction, may lead. He strikes the "Frere Jacques" refrain, reflects back to an emotional moment in Eridanus, and enigmatically jots down "The Northern Cross" (p. 30), a symbol which neither the writer nor the reader yet understand or are sure will be at all relevant. "Through the Panama" opens with an almost absolute sense of lack of authorial control. Everything of potential significance is crammed into its ostensibly limited perimeters, and the story's direction is left up to whimsical chance. Anything may happen, or worse, nothing.

Yet the story moves not to close off this tension in direction

but to expand it, and from this tension the themes of the story evolve. Events are recorded throughout and they prevent the narrator from abandoning the material world and entering into an introspective attempt to map out the landscape of his own psyche. But the narrator is "striving to turn inchoate experience into a pattern"<sup>3</sup> that reflects upon both the world he experiences and the world he creates. And in the world he creates, the fact is that he is also writing a novel, Dark As the Grave,<sup>4</sup> whose protagonist, Martin Trumbaugh, has written his own novel. As Matthew Corrigan notes, the rigidly fixed "I" of the journal form is in an evolutionary process, "on its way to becoming Wilderness,"<sup>5</sup> and consequently a fiction is being written against the direction which the journal form commands. "Who am I" (p. 47) is the question which the story asks, and as the "I" of the material world transforms into the several "I"s of the fictional world -- Lowry, Sigbjørn, Trumbaugh, and how many others? -- the self that is being portrayed dislocates into a network of perspectives. The division between the direction which the journal form dictates and the direction which the narrator wants to go surfaces as the thematic representation of the state of separation, not only between Sigbjørn and his wife, Primrose, but <sup>also</sup> between the multiple identities of his own self:

-- But I dream of death, a horrible dream, Grand Guignol, without merit: but so vivid, so palpable, it seemed to contain some actual and frightful tactile threat, or prophesy, or warning: first there is dislocation, I am not I, I am Martin Trumbaugh. But I

am not Martin Trumbaugh or perhaps Firmin either, I am a voice, yet with physical feelings, I enter what can only be described -- I won't describe it, with teeth that snap tight behind me: at the same time, in an inexplicable way, this is like going through the Panama Canal, and what closes behind me is, as it were, a lock: in a sense I am now a ship, but I am also a voice and also Martin Trumbaugh, and now I am, or he is, in the realm of death . . . (pp. 39-40)

As these identities separate from the amorphous "I", the undefined but controlling consciousness, the narrative perspective moves towards them individually. Several points of view in several time-spheres emerge, and the process of dislocation is so dynamic that voices sometimes seem to come from nowhere. These finally can be seen to be contained within the single narrative perspective of the simple journal form, for Lowry shares Hesse's belief that one identity contains within its undefinable form an infinite number of personalities.<sup>6</sup> But until the story applies itself to metaphorical associations as the protagonist passes through the sea-change that his voyage entails, the narrator remains frustrated in his attempt to map the relations between them and discover, precisely, who he is.

The story must appeal to metaphor if its narrator-protagonist is to unify and so render comprehensible the divisions in the fictional form that contains him. Sigbjørn can only define himself in relation to something else, and as the introspective reflections on personality separate from the narrative of the events of the voyage, experience becomes the element against which Sigbjørn can set his sense of himself. Just as "I am not I" (p. 39), the

Diderot is no longer simply a ship, the canal no longer only a canal, the voyage no longer one, simple thing. And further, Sigbjørn's journal is no longer an accurate mirror to himself: the events that he has undergone are objectified in a series of quantum units that, although mirroring his sense of disconnection, deny his sense that on some plane of activity he is unified and integrated, a real human being. The process of travelling, which parallels the process of entering into the fictional form, seems riotously uncontrolled, and Sigbjørn is driven to resist this dynamic, kinetic impetus. He must somehow arrest the process and make his map of the relation between aspects of himself and their connection to the experiences he is undergoing. Since the ship is under another's control and events are driving his story on despite his apparent inability to keep up with them, he must appeal to metaphor, which, as Sharon Spencer notes, has as its most important power ". . . that it holds fused in a condition of stability and synthesis the 'truth' that is far too fluid in its natural state to be captured, comprehended and controlled."<sup>7</sup> From what point of view can Sigbjørn perceive an inherent unity in his many factual and fictional identities? Ortega has the answer:

All knowledge is knowledge from a definite point of view. Spinoza's species aeternitatus, or ubiquitous and absolute point of view, has no existence on its own account: it is a fictitious and abstract point of view. We have no doubt of its utility as an instrument for the fulfillment of certain requirements of knowledge, but it is essential to remember that reality cannot be perceived from such a standpoint. The abstract point of view deals only in abstractions.<sup>8</sup>

And if one is to focus retrospective attention upon oneself, how can one arrest time so that a contained series of past events may be considered? J. W. Dunne's answer is that one can never dig one's heels into time and arrest its flow; an individual is conscious in a series, and just as the journal form succumbs to an externally imposed spacing, the series of moments of awareness will never end.<sup>9</sup> Sigbjørn cannot pull himself together through any final static perspective: no single day that the journal records can afford him an absolute and ubiquitous point of view upon himself. The problem becomes resolved through the use of metaphor, but the connection between Sigbjørn and his experiences is affirmed through his selection of analogies that derive from present fact. The Panama Canal becomes, in the fictionalizing process, a static metaphor for Sigbjørn's relation to his fictional world, and the passage of the ship itself becomes a metaphor for his ongoing, kinetic process of passage through life. And because the two are connected by the facts of his travels, Sigbjørn discovers an apposite manner of connecting his involvement in art with his involvement in life.

Lowry uses the Panama Canal to graph metaphorically the relations between his own personal aspects of being in the world he creates in the fictionalizing process. The canal translates into a containing principle for the thematic problems that Lowry's characters must resolve, and the process by which the transmutation

from factual existence to abstraction occurs is appropriate. Passage through the canal represents the creative process, and the fact of the canal's present being is in this way perceived from an historical perspective that represents its becoming. Thus the canal becomes an entirely static metaphor for the unity implied by the otherwise discordant perspectives that Sigbjørn Wilderness separates into and for the almost metaphysical world view which informs the story. And as a static metaphor, it locks the points of view which it circumscribes into their own stasis so that one can construct from its various parts the sense of a whole but, as occurs when one is actually within the canal, one cannot actually perceive this whole in a single, frozen moment.

Because the Panama Canal is entirely static, its metaphorical significance does not depend upon a single point of view that relates it in precise ratio to a single, fictional concept. Rather, it can be perceived from an infinite number of viewpoints, and on one level, passage through the canal represents the peculiar perspective of one who writes within the journal form. The canal itself is a series of locks, each having its own being, and each having an implicit connection to the locks that come before or after, which the spectator can remember or imaginatively preconceive. The text renders Sigbjørn's perceptions from within the experience of passage, and here observations according to the indiscriminate camera-eye of the perceiver are entered: the names and natures of other ships, the surrounding landscape,

the wildlife, the writing upon the canal walls. It is Sigbjørn's wife, Primrose, whose basic and objective perceptions in themselves carry little interest but who nonetheless symbolizes a necessary component of the artist's total make-up, who identifies the problems of understanding inherent in this point of view, and, by extension, the point of view of the journalist: "Significance of the locks: in each one you are locked, . . . as it were, in an experience" (p. 59). This defines the stasis inherent in the present-tense, limited point of view, but it is Sigbjørn's fictional extension of this point of view that affords it a more potent significance. Without the ability to recognize other perspectives operating simultaneously with the one demanded by present experience -- and this applies to the reader of the story who must respond simultaneously to several levels of activity -- one is caught within a frame of reference that does not allow truthful or "real" interpretation:

But to Martin it [the world] was flat all right, but only a little bit of it, the arena of his own sufferings, would appear at a time. Nor could he visualize the thing going round, moving from east to west. He would view the great dipper as one might view an illuminated advertisement, as something fixed, although with childish wonder, and with thoughts in his mind of his mother's diamonds. But he could not make anything move. The world could not be wheeling, nor the stars in their courses. Or when the sun came up over the hill in the morning, that was precisely what it did. He was non-human, subservient to different laws, even if upon the surface he was at best a good-looking normal young man with rather rude manners. (p. 86)

Lowry counterpoints this static perspective through the



technical device of a marginal gloss. The gloss functions in accordance with the montage principle: essentially, two points of view are being juxtaposed, and ideally the reader absorbs both planes of activity simultaneously and collates them into a new image. This new image is, of course, of the reader's making, but the author guides the reader towards a reconstruction of the Panama Canal as a metaphor for the creative process. While Sigbjørn's immediate perceptions of the canal's nature are being recorded in the text, the gloss renders the history of the canal using Helen Nicolay's The Bridge of Water as the source. And as he reads of the canal, Sigbjørn (and Martin and Lowry) is himself re-creating its history. The process of history is synonymous and simultaneous with the process of creation, and the perspective of history tells, in a displaced form and from another angle of vision, the same story that Sigbjørn perceives as he experiences. Sigbjørn has probably distorted Nicolay's history in retelling it, and in the resulting transformation the evolutionary process of history into present experience, or, on another plane, the parallel process of fact into fiction, appears remote. "And that is about all," Sigbjørn says, ". . . save that this book tells us some things about the operations of the canal we probably wouldn't have known even though we're going through it at this moment" (p. 61). Yet the technical means by which this is rendered suggests that Sigbjørn is wrong. History, although the fiction of the historian, is itself a gloss to present experience, and

in offering another perspective upon the significance of a central set of facts it releases perception from the static confines of the present experience and places it within a continuum of multiple perspectives. Because history is a factor of present perception upon immediate events, present perception can be conceptualized outside of the confining framework of the canal's locks. The canal metaphor functions to imply that one can not only look outwards from within the fact of immediate experience, but, by imaginative extension, one can also look inward from an inferred perspective of the whole. Thus, the actuating of the imagination is itself a creative, structure-making process, and the journalist's problem is resolved through the use of it. Implicit in the canal metaphor is the concept that the imagination and memory serve to release perception from the confines of a single point of view, for through them one can simultaneously approximate other points of view. This is, in fiction, precisely what Lowry himself does, and thus both Dunne and Ortega's concepts are incorporated into the content of his fictions. Finally, the Panama Canal represents the world which fiction creates rather than describes; it is the reader who undergoes the process of constructing it and then identifying the peculiar nature of the lock which represents his or her point of view.

In developing the canal metaphor, Lowry constructs a map or his own concept of fiction, and it is from this concept that the themes of "Through the Panama" emerge. Every perspective is

relative, just as the locks on the canal are relative and in the aggregate compose the fact implied by the name, "Panama Canal." Without the sense of the whole, a character's place within the confusing fictional world is undefinable. And from that character's perspective, the world, uncoloured by the imagination, appears flat and static, consisting of only what is perceived. The customs official and his identity card push towards Sigbjørn's acceptance of such a perspective, for "to announce one's identity is to fix it"<sup>10</sup> and the establishment of any single identity is "a question you can never answer" (p. 49), let alone support with the awesome and final power of the written word. Yet the fact of the canal's being, which accords to the fact of the finished piece of fiction, accomodates further perspectives which, from the limited logic of one lock or frame of reference, seem untenable. From Sigbjørn's frame of reference, Martin is circumscribed by Sigbjørn and Firmin by Martin, yet if his present frame of reference is relative to a whole as is any lock in the canal, who, he rightfully wonders, circumscribes him? The pattern is one which W. H. New likens to a series of Chinese boxes,<sup>11</sup> an accurate analogy and one which Lowry himself develops in Under the Volcano, where the rooms in the Farolito are conceptualized as "boxes in a Chinese puzzle."<sup>12</sup> Yet each of these characters in the series is Lowry himself, or aspects of him that correspond to separate events at separate times. No single "Lowry" can be delineated, nor can a fiction be made parallel with this metaphor for it without the reader's own

creativity. Lowry uses the canal metaphor to point the way:

All in all though, gentlemen, what I would like to say about the Panama Canal is that finally it is a work of genius -- I would say, like a work of child's genius -- something like a novel -- in fact just such a novel as I, Sigbjørn Wilderness, if I may say so, might have written myself -- indeed without knowing it am perhaps in the course of writing, with both ends different in character, governed under different laws, yet part of the same community . . . for it works, God how the whole thing beautifully and silently works, this celestial mechano -- with its chains that rise sullenly from the water, and the great steel gates moving in perfect silence, and with perfect ease at the touch of that man sitting up in the control tower high above the topmost lock who, by the way, is myself, and who would feel perfectly comfortable if only he did not know that there was yet another man sitting higher above him in his invisible control tower, who also has a model of the canal locks before him, carefully built, which registers electrically the exact depth of everything I do, and who thus is able to see everything that is happening to me at every moment -- and worse, everything that is going to happen -- . . . . (pp. 62-63)

The canal metaphor, then, not only graphs the relation between aspects of the author, but it also represents the means by which these aspects come into being as fact is translated into fiction through the journal form. Each lock represents a daily entry in the journal form, and "Through the Panama" is made by a series of entries that represent the perspective of the subject who is held within the experiences that go into that entry. Events are presented in quanta which are measured by the linear time pattern of day to day existence, just as the locks themselves stand isolated but in a linear series that ultimately comprises the Panama Canal. Through the use of the journal form, "Through the Panama" remains a series of interlocked, static units which,

although they flow together from one perspective, are, from another, juxtaposed to imply a progression that aspires to describe the entire universe. Lowry himself describes this fiction as "a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another" (p. 34, 97).<sup>13</sup> A single entry in the journal form, when seen in the light of the metaphorical locks of the canal, implies the corresponding existence of other independent entries in a series, and thus the immediate fact of present experience is made congruent with past and future events which resolve themselves into a form. And in another application, each lock represents the containing principle or form of one of the fictions in the interlocked series that comprises the Voyage cycle. From the angle of vision that the canal metaphor affords, the rigidly defined form of a fiction such as "Through the Panama" is meant to imply, or to take within its own confines, the existence of other forms which reflect their own inherent angles of vision upon a central unit. Each form or unit is meant to be read in relation to all others, and in this way Lowry's intention in fiction can be seen as an attempt to create a form, or superstructure upon reality, which implies the entire universe. The journal form is a congruent analogy to this ultimate intention, and it stands at the root of most of Lowry's writing. The canal metaphor functions in one way to suggest that Lowry's concept of his own fiction evolves out of his grappling with the problem of making viable fiction out of the static and apparently isolated units that begin as

entries within the journal form.

The canal metaphor functions to freeze linear time and to establish that Sigbjørn, both in life and in his own relation to the fictional world, exists in an eternally present series of moments. From this emerges the theme of multiple identities, yet "Through the Panama" aspires to be more than descriptive of the nature of the fictional world. Against this static metaphor Lowry creates a kinetic metaphor which unlocks time and carries within it a resolution, in much the same manner as in the traditional prose fiction form. Sigbjørn perceives the implications of the canal metaphor yet remains caught within the confines of his own point of view, and consequently his identity and its corresponding self-control is threatened by a pervading power of dissolution. The Diderot thus becomes a metaphor for Sigbjørn's own identity and for the form of the story in which he operates. Just as a perceiver within one of the locks in the canal may aspire to a higher point of view, the ship, as a metaphor, aspires to become so many things that its basic form is threatened, here, thematically, by a storm at sea. Sigbjørn must learn that, although a higher controller may be controlling him, he must take control of himself. The Diderot is in similar circumstances: France has no government (p. 45), and as the Diderot in the storm threatens to break from the cohesive structure which gives it identity and transform into something else, the captain, "who not only

loves but is his ship" (p. 47) must, like the artist with his own fiction, accept responsibility and exercise control while the passengers, or the fiction's characters, supplicate: "Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place." As with Sigbjørn, or with any single fictional form that contributes to the Voyage cycle, the ship can be applied metaphorically to several of the frames of reference or Chinese boxes that comprise its total identity. The storm demands that it fix its identity within a single form: "Do not worry, Madame, we have put a ceinture around its middle" (p. 91). Once time has been released from stasis and existence again becomes a process, the clear delineation of relations between identities or frames of reference becomes obscured. The ship loses its contact with its implied controller (or in other terms it becomes less of a fictional ship in the hands of a benevolent author and more of a real ship in a storm) and the potential deus ex machina ending of the fiction, where the author writes in a rescue ship, will not take place. Belting the ship into its primary identity implies an abandonment of the community of multiple identities which fiction supplies, but, like Goodheart's fiction in "Ghostkeeper", it must be pared down to its essential form if it is to survive. The network of correspondences that fiction brings to facts can be entered, explored, and even charted, but finally fiction must be brought back into an understandable relation to the world it uses as a point of departure. The ship metaphor functions to imply a law that dominates Lowry's writing:

even though events are vehicles to artistic explorations of the world of fiction, fiction itself must remain consistent with the dramatised action which it develops. Story can be made subordinate to process, but it cannot be transcended, or the fiction falls apart. The dictates of plot in the traditional prose form must find their place and be fulfilled within the "new form" for fiction, even if the truer action of the fiction is taking place on another level altogether. Lowry uses the ship metaphor, it seems, as an explanation to his readers of why he cannot allow this story to break from the journal form and take off into an exploration of the network of correspondences that he believes events imply. He can only use metaphor to direct his readers, and it is incumbent upon them to complete the voyage out after the events of the story have been fully recorded.

Lowry manages to resolve "Through the Panama" thematically and yet escape the problem of reductio ad absurdum that Goodheart apparently encounters in "Ghostkeeper." Although he remains within the journal form and drives his narrative on to completion, Lowry succeeds in incorporating layers of allusive implication into his story; this through his use of language and in his implication of his readers as active participants in his fiction. As the consciousness which renders the story discovers its own infinite dimensions, the single, definable "I" of the journal form expands towards the impossible absolute and ubiquitous point of



view that Ortega describes. The message of the story is finally conveyed by the means by which the story is told, and the process of ordering, or of creating a perspective that allows the isolated units of the portrayed world to stand together, becomes the task of the reader. At the close of the story, voices come from everywhere, apparently incongruous and slipping past one another, but the voices belong to a single consciousness that the reader must create:

The day in Bowen Island we found the bronze bells  
and saw the harlequin ducks.  
Prayer for Einar Neilson, who saw us off, singing  
"Shenandoah."  
"And from the whole earth, as it spins through  
space, comes a sound of singing." (C. A.)  
Sonnez les matines!  
Sonnez les matines!  
'Le gusta esta jardin? 'Que es suyo?  
Vanity of human beings is terrific, stronger than  
fear, worse than that story in Schopenhauer.  
S. O. S. going on next door. Battement de tambours!  
God save the Fisher King. (pp. 96-97)

This speaking centre of consciousness has transcended his limited frame of reference, or Chinese box or lock in the canal, through the exercise of imagination and memory. Goodheart's vision of a ballet, here comprised of voices, is achieved by the incorporation of spatial (relative selves) and temporal (past and future) relationships into the present-tense here and now of immediate experience. Lowry launches the "I" of his story into process, and the voices function by the same montage principle that informs so much of the story because it implicitly informs the journal form. The reader becomes the maker of the new form that dances

and coheres as he perceives the implication of his own point of view into that represented by the disembodied voices travelling towards unity. And thus the story succeeds in affirming the creative power of all men through the expansion of the subjective, autobiographical "I" that belongs inherently to the journal form. "Through the Panama" fails to render credible "character;" rather, it aspires to render all character in the process of becoming, and in this way Lowry can be seen to anticipate a trend which Arlen Hansen ascribes to American writers of the sixties:

To the determinist's premise that man is exclusively and inevitably a product of his environment, they add that man's environment is determined in a significant way by the perceptions of the man himself. . . . This, the empiricists charge, is solipsism: and so it is. But it is a new solipsism, one that has more to do with the actuating and liberating imagination than with the entrapment of selfhood.<sup>14</sup>

The journal form is integral to this liberation of selfhood: isolated units of events are filtered through the prism of the first-person consciousness of which the reader becomes a part, and in the process subjectively experienced facts are transformed into a universally applicable fiction which demands the reader's involvement, through re-creation, memory, and imagination, in the creative act.

### CHAPTER III

#### Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid:

#### The Journal as Method.

On the thematic level of "Ghostkeeper" and in the narrative technique of "Through the Panama," Lowry examines the relation between a single perspective upon experience and the discordant orders or systems that come to be recognized from that perspective. In both stories he traces a process whereby these independent orders fragment and finally are unified within a point of view which involves the reader in the creative act. This expansion of the creative impetus from a story's thematic level into its formal processes and finally into the reader's own imaginative form-making transforms events which seem fairly unimportant in themselves into universally significant episodes. Consequently, readers are made to accept both the facts of Lowry's experiences and their relation to universal forms or philosophical systems. And as new levels of correspondence and significance are apprehended, readers incorporate them into an imaginative form within which the principle of relativity operates. In "Ghostkeeper," Lowry

speaks of the harmony underlying events; in "Through the Panama" he demonstrates it through the continuity between his fictional form, his narrative technique and his images, and because of this "Through the Panama" succeeds as fiction where "Ghostkeeper" fails. Lowry employs the canal metaphor to reflect upon his fictions' internal unity, and he intends this continuity to extend also to the separate parts of his incremental fictional unit. In "Through the Panama," Lowry makes obvious thematic connections to the book out of which it evolves, Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid. But in narrative technique and fictional form, this continuity seems broken. For Dark As the Grave,<sup>1</sup> at least initially, appears to incorporate an abundance of thematic material incremental to Under the Volcano but demonstrates none of the formal processes that so strikingly operate in the fictions that come before or after it. Its plot is boring, linear and slow moving; its setting is familiar but in this context far less exciting; it extols the unity of art and life, but its elements of unapplied autobiography appear to demonstrate, as one critic has it, "art's defeat by life."<sup>2</sup> One wonders if there are inherent weaknesses in Lowry's theory of incremental fiction. But the major critical question which Dark As the Grave promotes is this: what was Lowry trying to do in his later fictions? And why would he reduce his handling of time and point of view, which in Under the Volcano is so complex, into a linear narrative structure that appears to function within the confines of the traditional novel form? These questions are pressing,

for most of Lowry's critics accept that the man can only be understood in the context of his complete output,<sup>3</sup> and some of his work, of which this is the best example, seems unbelievably bad. One answer emerges when Dark As the Grave is seen as Lowry's first experiment with the fiction-making method that evolves from the basic structure of the journal form.

Dark As the Grave marks an intermediate point in Lowry's advancement of the journal form towards his new prose form for fiction. But to analyse it in this light requires the discrimination between the fiction Lowry wrote and the one that has been published. There are in fact two Graves, the author's own version sequestered in the University of British Columbia's Special Collections Division where it remains in manuscript form, and the published version, made by the editors from Lowry's notes towards a fiction. Lowry's manuscript resembles the published version of "Ghostkeeper:" it abounds in marginal notations, investigations of possible directions, and authorial comments upon the nature of the facts and the levels of symbolism and allusion they suggest. In comparison, the published version is akin to an imaginary completed version of "Ghostkeeper" where the open exposure of the method has been sanitized by the deletion of all of the author's own commentary, so that the really interesting levels of the fiction are cut. Here the salient point is that the fiction has been completed by imperceptive readers rather than by the writer himself. Matthew Corrigan has

already attacked the fiction's editors for stuffing an unfinished work into the mould of a novel,<sup>4</sup> but this unfortunate argument needs to be furthered. The published version of Dark As the Grave is worse than what is implied by the words "a chaste edition;"<sup>5</sup> it is no less than a disaster, for it discredits a writer who was actively seeking a new form for fiction. If readers hope to understand what Lowry was doing in his fictions written subsequent to Under the Volcano, they must be allowed to see how Lowry himself approached his fictions, and in Dark As the Grave this does not occur. "All we could do," claims Douglas Day, in defending his procedure for editing Lowry's record of this experiment, "was cut out what was repetitious, demonstrably not integral to the book, or still not begun to be incorporated from the notebooks into it."<sup>6</sup>

The editors rationalize their procedural method not on a "notebook on its way to becoming a novel"<sup>7</sup> but upon their own approximation of what that novel will become. The result demonstrates that this method develops from a fatal misreading of the text. In the manuscript, Lowry uses the facts of his travels as a point of departure so that he may enter the timeless fictional world already created in Under the Volcano and see it in a new way. This he makes explicit in an unpublished note to his readers:

In order to relieve the reader of a certain aversion [or] embarrassment at sight of what is apparently naked autobiography pretending to be surprised to be functioning as a sort of novel, I feel it better to state at the outset that this book was planned before Under the Volcano (The Valley of the Shadow of Death)

was accepted by any publisher, with the notion that the protagonist -- or a protagonist -- or Hugh or the Consul -- or the former should be the author of the latter, the intention being a sort of imaginary descent of the creator into the world of his creation . . .

A note written by Margerie Lowry in the manuscript, however, indicates a very different perspective on what Dark As the Grave is about:

Although I am putting exposition in this exposition may not finally be there. So although I have suggested this or that passage it is the description that may be through Primrose's mind that matters. (This, now, is probably invalid) in fact, the contrast of the hopes of what they expect to find in Mexico would be marvellously dramatic . . .<sup>9</sup>

Lowry's note indicates that place is to be used as a unifying element which allows him to re-explore, through the creative act, the primary experience of both living through and then writing about the Volcano material. Dark As the Grave is Lowry's attempt to find a pattern or structure which fuses the experience, and to translate his findings into a form which contains a meaning. The re-creative process is a means of re-experiencing the past, and the meaning of both the past and present experience is contained within the evolving fictional "new form" which charts the routes that his mind travels upon. Margerie's note stresses the primacy of plot, characterization and dramatic elements, especially the contrast between the two protagonists' opposing points of view. Where Malcolm Lowry hopes to create a point of view that incorporates all others, Margerie Lowry envisions the fiction as a travelogue with the added level of dramatic human interest. Sadly, Margerie's

perspective guides the editing policy, and the emphasis of the novel is changed. The published version of Dark As the Grave remains a narrative, bringing to centre-stage the theme of travel, the dramatic effects of characterization, and the unity of action. But the primary thrust of the manuscript, on the thematic level and in the narrative technique, centers on the tension between opposing perspectives: the immediate perceptions of factual events and the later reflections upon those same events translated into a fictional context.

Dark As the Grave is made from an angle of vision which, if realized, will contain but not distort the protagonist's past ways of seeing. Lowry bases his fiction upon the events he records in his notebooks, using memory and imagination to discover new meanings to those events. The notebooks incorporate both Lowry's present experience and his past experience of writing Under the Volcano and Under the Volcano, in turn, records the events Lowry invented and so experienced when living in the place where the novel is set. Clearly, an important element in this process is an attempt to apply to fiction Dunne's theory of the means by which distinctions in time collapse and resolve into unity. The failure of the editors to understand the fiction's primary thrust surfaces, specifically, in editing blunders which undercut the method Lowry uses to investigate his past. Lowry's use of a third person point of view is itself an experiment with perspective; through it he hopes to objectify the autobiographical elements of his



notebooks. But in the manuscript Lowry often discovers that he cannot sustain his detachment, and he indicates his absorption into the commanding reality of his material when he breaks into the first person point of view in the present tense. This close relation between the author and his material is smoothed over in the published text: such "lapses" in realistic narrative are restored to the point of view which Lowry found unsuited for rendering the material at hand.

A further shift in emphasis, this time a brutal one, results from the editors' handling of repetitive passages. Many of Lowry's reflections on life, art, and the creative process are marked for several points in the narrative. They evolve from the writer's reflexive re-experience of earlier events and are attempts to synthesize the whole experience into a unified pattern. Yet the arbitrary cutting of all but one version of similar passages implies that the reflection accords to a particular point in Sigbjørn's linear development, through physical action, towards understanding. Although some important repetitions are not plucked from the text,<sup>10</sup> the focus of the novel (and indeed focussing in perspective is the entire action) is mutated. As a result, one reads the published version with an eye to dramatic irony. A reader is made to feel that there is something missing in each of Sigbjørn's "break-throughs" until the important Mitla episode, that somehow Lowry is controlling a series of units of perceptual pattern that differ subtly in kind, and that the point of the book lies precisely in the difference between what Sigbjørn initially sees upon entering

Mexico and what he finally comes to see. These differences, of course, are important, but not for the reasons of dramatic effect. Rather, Lowry repeatedly attempts to piece this puzzle together, and it is his own sense that he has failed to control the ubiquitous pattern which informs the whole that accounts for the similarity in patterns of perception and the repetition of passages. Lowry does not control his narrative through dramatic effects; he lives through it. And repetition, recurrence, and re-creation is integral to understanding and synthesis, and to the creative method which he aspires to capture.

There is a parallel between Sigbjørn's progress through physical travel and Lowry's development through the fiction-making process. Both, by entering the past in their own ways, seek a form which envelops and orders the sprawling dimensions of their worlds. But the published version fails to make the fundamental distinction between these levels, and as a result the secondary physical action takes precedence over Lowry's primary plane of activity. The voyage here, as in almost all of Lowry's fictions, occurs in the mind of the writer and is actualized through the medium of language into a rendering of a pattern which corresponds, in the finished product, to the facts that the book records.

A clear example of this mutation and the importance of it is manifested in the editors' compartmentalizing of the action of chapters IV and V (and the structuring of Dark As the Grave into chapters is entirely the creation of the editors) into

separate units. In the manuscript, the immediate action of Sigbjørn's bus trip to Cuernavaca is rendered concurrently with his reflections upon the previous month of experience in Mexico City, thus implying an inherent similarity in pattern between present experience and past experience made present by memory. But the editors, preserving the linear temporal consistency of the traditional novel form, have broken these parallel actions into separate units. Sigbjørn's parallel to Lowry is eclipsed: the real point of the passage, communicated by the original form in which Lowry chose to render it, is lost. In the manuscript, Sigbjørn, while physically moving forward through linear time, travels, in a more profound sense, backwards in time yet forwards into the present and its corresponding re-creation of the past. Like Lowry himself, he fluctuates between the subjectivity of immediate experience and an untenable objective viewpoint upon his past. Here Lowry attempts to find a form that, by its shaping power, conveys a realistic impression of how the creative mind experiences time. The passage, as Lowry wrote it, is an experiment, and because it makes for difficult reading it is, perhaps, a failure. But the editors' decision to shatter the experimental attempt and to distort both the point and the point of view of the passage is indicative of the obdurate and inflexible adherence to the traditional novel form which Lowry was trying to put behind him.

At least part of Dark As the Grave's inability to transcend simplistic structure, then, can be attributed to the transformation it undergoes in the hands of Margerie Lowry and Douglas Day. The published version is their "novel," and as a novel it deserves to be evaluated by its effectiveness, or the lack of it, in communicating from within its own form. But for the answer to the more interesting question of what constitutes Lowry's experimentation with fiction, critics must turn to the fiction Lowry really wrote. The manuscript of Dark As the Grave marks an intermediate point in a process of the evolution of a form. The initial form is defined by the means by which Lowry first recorded events in his journal, and the journal form remains the shaping principle of the work. Dark As the Grave is an attempt to expand the dimensions inherent in the fictional journal form, and the work achieves its unity through its adherence to the method of fiction-making which ripens organically from the seed from which it springs: the journal form.

According to Ortega, experience is itself a creative process, and from this maxim Lowry discovers a means of connecting the dramatized action with the operations of his imagination when he writes. Sigbjørn's perceptual patterns in life translate into the journal form through Lowry's first-person record of his own experiences in his notebook. But Lowry attempts to resolve the entire significance of the parallel between his past and present experiences in Mexico from a perspective contained within a series of events. He searches for a pattern which is not yet apparent

to him, and since he remains bound to a linear time scheme when he records his experiences in his journal, his search repeatedly ends in failure. This is the fact of Lowry's own experience, and, when Lowry later delves into his notebooks for material for Dark As the Grave, he objectifies his own experience in the narrative of Sigbjørn. The problem with Sigbjørn's way of seeing, then, is precisely that problem which Lowry encounters in journalism. The connection is apposite, not only because of Ortega's theory concerning the similarity between the creation of art and the creation of life, but because Sigbjørn himself is dramatized as a writer, and his problems with living are inherently connected to his problems with writing. Metaphorically, Lowry is attempting to apprehend the significance of the entire puzzle from the apparent contours of the Chinese box which circumscribes any present moment.

The fiction takes its action from the perspective inherent within the activity of journal writing, and from this viewpoint it is not surprising that the dramatic or kinetic action of the book does not develop. Since each day recorded in the journal is an isolated unit of time used by the author to approach the total experience and to attempt to resolve its significance, and since the journal remains the structuring principle of the writings which are in the process of evolving towards fictional unity, the action of the "novel" surfaces in isolated units designed to define the significance of the entire book. The only real

development is in the process towards a projected definitive statement which Lowry undergoes. In the dramatized action, this process is manifested in Sigbjørn's attempt to define his whole life and to convert into consciousness the perceptual pattern which Primrose unconsciously participates in:

And again she was, as it were, herself a perceptive-ness of life, his perceptiveness of what life remained to him. She was a person whose creative perception was simply that of creative life and living, not a writer (but as a writer would be, so to speak, if he did not have to write) but a person who loves life. This was the contrast -- how much better she observes it than he. "Life" -- who lives her creative life in the living of life, is thus attracted to the person who can take her formless vast creative principle and give it form and a mould. (. . . the book is valueless, unless it can be made clear that Sigbjørn and to a lesser degree Primrose herself -- but very much more Sigbjørn -- is striving to give a centre to their lives, in this respect, William James' Variety of Religious Experience, especially the chapter on Conversion, should be the whole book's bible). Also re this -- have Sigbjørn realise the impossibility of amending his life by himself.

A reader who focuses solely upon the thematic action of the fiction will encounter only the repetition of Sigbjørn's attempt to centre his life in a variety of uninteresting factual applications. But a reader who, with Lowry, seeks the pattern which Life, the Great Novelist, offers to the journalist, or to anyone who searches for the meaning behind day to day activity, will become a co-author in the fiction-making process. Lowry's development through the book will parallel the reader's own, and, if the voyage is successful, the process will resolve itself in a transfer of understanding from author to reader rather than in the bringing

together of narrative threads in accordance with the pattern which unifies the traditional novel form.

The process of reading Dark As the Grave is best described by Lowry's own metaphor rendered in "Through the Panama." The structuring principle of the journal form holds its shape in the resulting, although not finished, product: isolated units describing a perceptive process are rendered in a series, and like locks in the canal they are basically similar, differing only in the space they occupy and the time in which they are encountered. And just as locks in a canal have a basic shape or form, the isolated units of Dark As the Grave share a similar pattern. A passenger through the Panama Canal can imaginatively construct the form of a "lock" by repeatedly encountering a variety of physical applications of "locks;" the experience allows the collation of images into an approximation of the architect's blueprint. Lowry's reader, like Sigbjørn, is meant to "come to see"<sup>12</sup> the pattern which informs the action through a similar process of imaginative collation. As in "Through the Panama," the principle guiding the writer's art of communication is that of montage, and Dark As the Grave is entirely static. Each pattern of perception that is rendered is an isolated quantum, as complete as any application of an imaginative construct can possibly be, and these quanta function as authorial guidelines for the reader's construction of an implied image. This image cannot be mapped

because it is itself a pattern or a process through time. And the method for rendering must be juxtapositional not only because the journal form is inherently disconnected, but because transitional connectives abnegate the shock value which sets the reader's own imaginative processes in motion.

Lowry sets the pattern of perception which unifies the isolated units of the fiction in the first paragraph of Dark As the Grave. Within the inherent unity of the single sentence Lowry attempts to build through the medium of words a structure that orders the contours of the journalist's perspective. Like his protagonist, to whom the perception is accredited, Lowry, as he writes, moves physically forward through time, but his subject calls him continually deeper into the past. Thus he counterpoints "the sense of speed"<sup>13</sup> that takes him forward against a parallel motion of "tremendous regression" (p. 1) in time; ideally, he can fuse these two disparate actions within a form that contains this tension in direction. Lowry represents the journalist's perspective spatially. The aeroplane on which he travels allows the dramatised perceiver to view a huge portion of the Mexican landscape and to attempt to discover the significance that the macrocosmic vision embodies. But, like the journalist who aspires towards a vision of a whole from the limited point of view of a single day, Sigbjørn and Lowry are contained within the form of the medium in which they respectively travel, and they cannot break "beyond the barrier" (p. 2) that form imposes:



. . . the dim shadow of the significance of what they were doing that Sigbjørn held in his mind: and yet it was possible to focus only on that shadow, and at that for only short periods: they were enclosed by the thing itself . . . a moving, deafening, continually renewed time-defeating destiny by which they were enclosed but of which they were able to see only the inside . . . (p. 1)

The perceptual pattern represented follows the perceiver's attempt to synthesise the entire field of presentation which he proceeds, from an initial perception, to recognize. But even as Lowry's words spin on and his character strives towards total vision, the possibility of breakthrough recedes, and the author directs his character into a consideration of the "crashing failure" (p. 2) of the attempt. Matthew Corrigan observes that the failure of Lowry's characters in the drive towards discovery evokes a corresponding response of frustration in his readers:

Usually, the character is reflecting on some visible phenomenon, something whose contours he has noticed for the first time. Suddenly, we are moving through the visible to the invisible. We are inhabiting matter, process. Links, correspondences, evolve, or rather are observed, for it is very much a passive surveillance that this roaming consciousness enacts. And always, the moment is hinged with discovery, with the expectation of discovery. We feel that we are rounding the bend or seeing beyond the mist: that something genuinely new awaits us. And always, what awaits us is further correspondences, a kind of pure symmetry which moves to become the universe.<sup>14</sup>

The opening paragraph records the entire pattern that unifies the isolated and static units. Lowry simply re-activates the drive to transcend the journalist's perspective in a variety of factual situations, and the remainder of the book chronicles

the manifestation of this pattern in further applications. The impossibility of perceiving the significance of the whole from a perspective contained within an integral part is dramatized spatially on the plane (chapters I and III, p. 69), in Laruelle's tower (p. 185), at Monte Alban (pp. 226-28), and at Mitla. In each episode the perceiver, though apparently liberated in space, finds himself imprisoned in the limitations of a single point of view, and the epiphany that is traditionally afforded by mountain-top vision does not occur. "La Universal" (the world) remains unavailable to the artist in his tower (p. 131); Sigbjørn is imprisoned within his own space and time, and Lowry, too, remains "enclosed in his own book" (p. 195). The tensions inherent in the journalist's problems with time are dramatised in the book's many travelling episodes. Total awareness of significance, which includes the future, eludes Lowry's imaginative retrospection; "setting out into the future" remains irreconcilable with the attempt to accomplish it by "setting out smack into the past" (p. 29). Prose is inherently linear and consequently this pattern must be dramatized in a series, but the pattern never develops beyond the boundaries set upon it in the opening paragraph. The action of Dark As the Grave must be read as a series of static units, each of which manifests a similar pattern. And the reader must work through the series of dramatised, factual applications of this pattern which the book presents and arrive at the message Lowry is communicating. Dark As the Grave is Lowry's confession

of the inherent problems of perspective in the journalistic endeavour. In it, Lowry cries out for sympathy and understanding -- the reader's own awareness of the impossibility of moulding a new form from the pattern imposed by the oldest form of prose: the ledger, the record, the chronicle, or the form which contains them all: the journal.

The reading of Dark As the Grave as Lowry's own attempt to arrest a kinetic perceptual pattern in words that form static and isolated units focuses the narrative rather than the dramatised action as the primary level of activity of the fiction. From this critical perspective stems the awareness that in Dark As the Grave the formal processes used to create the fiction themselves possess the thematic meaning. Lowry's use of a third person point of view to render autobiographical material heightens the tension inherent in the relation between narrator and protagonist. Just as Sigbjørn represents Lowry in another space and time, or in another lock in the metaphorical canal, the narrator, thematically, represents Sigbjørn himself at a later stage of development.<sup>15</sup> In Dr. Hippolyte's words to Sigbjørn, Lowry himself establishes that the theme of separation and the theme of the overlapping of the fictional and factual planes of activity are possessed by the narrative processes of this fiction. Here the priest corresponds to the narrator and the dancers to his characters, but in the dance, which represents the evolving process of the book itself,

priest and dancer, at points of intensity, become one:

"But remember what I told you, Sigbjørn. In Voodoo, there is a great lesson. There is discipline. The dancers do not leave the blazing circle. If you like to call it neuroses that they get rid of then that is what they do. And even if the priest becomes possessed, the ceremony goes on. A bell is rung when it has reached a certain point beyond which it might become dangerous. You have to be your own priest and ring your own bell. Yes, I will tell you. You are possessed too. You are possessed by Sigbjørn Wilderness. But not by Baron Samedi nor yet by Papa Legba, the Minister of the Interior of Death. You are possessed, by Sigbjørn Wilderness. That is to say, Sigbjørn is possessed by Wilderness. That's all right too, though you have to make up your mind whom you prefer." (pp. 151-52)

This passage also points towards what Lowry is attempting to accomplish in Dark As the Grave. The strange relation between an author and his fictional world must be communicated, but finally the narrative and the dramatised action must remain in their separate and independent units, although the pattern communicated by both levels of activity is similar. As in "Through the Panama," Lowry tries here to communicate a unifying pattern in both the process of living and the process of creating fiction; he finds support for this in the philosophy of Ortega, who conceptualizes the two processes as stemming from the same creative disposition. Ideally, what is represented in the process of living, dramatised in Sigbjørn, must not only as an analogy corroborate the process of fictional creation manifested by the means in which Lowry writes, but it must adhere to Lowry's sense of the means by which one truly experiences life. If what Dark As the Grave represents is true, then Lowry must represent this truth in both fact and

fiction, and both the dramatised action and the creative activity of the narrator must promote the reader's awareness of this same truth. Using Lowry's own metaphor, the two planes of activity can be conceptualized as parallel yet separate roads which independently guide the voyager to the same point. In the travelling process, however, the two occasionally come together, and the traveller is afforded a glimpse of the inherent unity in the pattern in which the creative process manifests itself in life's variety of activity and experiences.

Oaxaca indeed -- even though he had approached it before by that old parallel road (though they had now lost it); perhaps at this point the two [roads] had merged once more, so that now past and present and future were one . . . (p. 214)

Needless to say, the pattern manifested in the published version of Dark As the Grave falls short of the ideal pattern that Lowry aspires toward. If Lowry had himself completed the work he might have found a means of paralleling the dramatised action with the narrator's activity in writing without undercutting the fiction's primary thrust. As it is, the two actions are most effective only in that they rescue the fiction from the entire dominance of either one of them. Yet the real problem with this fictional attempt is one that Matthew Corrigan articulates:<sup>16</sup> the dramatised action of the work must serve two masters and consequently can be faithful to neither of them. The facts as they are initially experienced, and as they are recorded in the notebooks, command a pattern that does not always run parallel to the pattern

Lowry discovers when he retrospectively re-experiences the fiction's past material through the creative process. The journalist's inability to grasp entirely the significance that later analysis will afford to present experience becomes the tension that ultimately defeats Dark As the Grave. In writing of the experience, Lowry must allow the layers of significance discovered from both past and present perspectives to come into play, and too often in a passage he attempts to accomplish too much. Neither pattern achieves its "breakthrough" because either the past or the present meaning holds it back. And as a result, neither the dramatised action nor the narrator's activity effectively develops beyond the pattern manifested in the opening paragraph of the fiction. Further analysis could only increase the distance between the ideally parallel tracks, and perhaps this is one reason why Lowry never completed the book. Lowry seems aware of this, however, for in Dark As the Grave he finally turns to analysing the process of the book itself. He becomes self-reflexive, aware that he is creating static art despite his sense that "the universe itself . . . is in the process of creation" (p. 154). He appeals to images that will release his fiction from its inherent tensions in much the same manner as he resolves "Ghostkeeper" with Tom Goodheart's fleeting vision of a ghostly ballet. Finally, the art of the book achieves its development in Lowry's increasing understanding of the nature of his new form, and as Lowry turns to writing about his own writing the reader enters into the creative process itself. Rather than developing images from the

book's own dimensions, Lowry imports external images into his narrative: these are images of forms that represent the ideal of where Dark As the Grave should go, and through them the fiction realises a kinetic dimension.

Lowry's reliance upon images of his new form that, rather than developing from perceptions he experiences while travelling in Mexico, are inventions of his imagination independent of his earlier experience, suggests that even within the book that the author himself had written, Lowry had effectively given up. By using them as representational guidelines towards his reader's awareness of his new form, Lowry wrote against his own ideal of the perfect harmony between the process of living and the later process of writing about it. The facts as they were initially experienced gave the writer no adequate framework for a metaphor that could graph the relation between narrator and protagonist that Dark As the Grave was intended to trace. As a result, Lowry turned to his later experiences in Haiti and used Dr. Hippolyte, at best a force-fitted character, to make his point for him.<sup>17</sup> The Mexico experience afforded Lowry ample opportunity to trace the pattern which unifies his character's separate actions. But again the metaphor Lowry found most appropriate for this pattern appealed to a place and time outside Dark As the Grave's setting -- Eridanus, where the roll of the tides inherently communicates the pattern of "disaster, reaction, determination to

transcend disaster, success, failure" (p. 169) which the fiction's dramatised and narrative action fails to convey effectively.

Dark As the Grave was designed as a form which contained the experience of mental travelling as it really occurred, at least according to Dunne. Specifically, in his account of the bus trip to Cuernavaca, later separated by the editors into chapters IV and V, Lowry aspired to communicate the paradox of travelling physically forward into the future yet mentally into the past, but the result is chaotic and unreadable. Lowry compensated with an account of a poem, part of which is in the manuscript, which would communicate precisely this paradox through the nature of its form: a sestina of ten verses where the last line of the second verse rhymes with the opening line of the first (p. 16-17). Further, Lowry aspired towards kinetic action in Dark As the Grave that did not depend on the traditional novel's mode of plot progression. At some point he realised that his fiction had become a series of static units which implied kinesis, but for Lowry simple implication was not enough: it evidenced his failure to master his new form. He responded with an image and a device later re-used in "Ghostkeeper": a vision of his separate fears as dancers making a ballet of selves (p. 13). Here the separate aspects of himself are imagined in a constant process of flux where their relation to each other altered in space and time but the whole is fused in an unbreakable form that has permanence of duration and the stability of an implied choreographer. And



Lowry's concept of characterization, where characters factor as aspects of a central consciousness yet, unlike the nominalist's belief, preserve their separate identities, failed to materialise in Dark As the Grave as it had so successfully in Under the Volcano.

Lowry turned to musical composition as a structuring principle to show his readers what he had tried to do: "At one concert [Sigbjørn] had heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony whose mighty harmonies merely gave the impression while listening that he wanted to do the same thing in prose" (p. 30). The allusion works in a way that the factual level of Dark As the Grave does not.

In Beethoven's symphony voices are established and repeated in different contexts in the first three movements, and then in the last movement are fused into a final unity where each strain, formerly a complete entity in itself, becomes a part of a general refrain so simple yet complete and structured that, through its basic form, the piece seems to take off, or to "breakthrough" into transcendentalism. In all of these images Lowry drew solely from his mental operations in the writing process and after the fact accredited them to his protagonist. Only in this way could he liberate himself from the facts recorded in his notebooks and focus upon the realisation of process itself in an artistic application.

A significant irony in Dark As the Grave is that the journal form, which gives Lowry a means and a method for creating unified fiction, becomes, in the manner Lowry extends it here, the prison

from which the "new form" cannot escape and take full flight. When Lowry creates his images and draws his patterns not from the record which accords to the aspect of himself as half-aware experiencer and journal-writer but from his fully aware role as independent fiction writer, his fiction partially succeeds in rendering a kinetic development. These images allow the reader to understand where Lowry hopes to go in Dark As the Grave and to examine the writing processes he exercises in the attempt. Thus each static unit of the fiction can be read not for its dramatic effect but as a record of an experiment which the author has undertaken and which the reader, as fellow traveller, experiences in the present tense. And these images, when viewed in their contextual relation to Lowry's other writings, function to clarify what Lowry was really trying to accomplish in fiction. Although they appeal to situations outside Dark As the Grave's boundaries and inherently mark the failure of the book to realise what Lowry hoped to accomplish in it, they give Lowry a key to the liberation of the new form which his later writings more nearly approach. The ballet metaphor transforms from a catalogue of fears and failures in Dark As the Grave into an implied point of resolution in "Ghostkeeper." Hippolyte's homily and the poetic form Lowry describes become, respectively, a shaping principle for the canal metaphor and a containing principle for the journal form in "Through the Panama." And the image of Beethoven's symphony transforms into a thematic unifying principle in "Forest Path to the Spring" and a structure for Lowry's handling of voices in

"Through the Panama."

In beginning Dark As the Grave Lowry had realised the importance of the journal form in Under the Volcano and had tried to re-apply the means of writing that journalism entails as a method of composition. It was only through this experiment with the method that Lowry came to realise the difficulty of applying method to practise. And in abandoning Dark As the Grave Lowry abandoned only his first experiment with the application of the method of the journal form. He had learned what he needed to know, and had written into his narrative, through external images, the problems inherent in this method of application. The fact of this fiction became subordinate to the new awareness of the new form that he found in writing it. Through the creative process Lowry had made a discovery. Other fictions were waiting to be written; the journal form now seemed closer to realising itself as the structuring principle behind the new form. Lowry took what he needed from the experiment and turned directly to the journal form in "Through the Panama" where he came the closest he ever would come to succeeding with the new form. Yet the journal form, and the seeds of the new form, were inherent in Under the Volcano, and "Through the Panama" grew out of it. Dark As the Grave was a necessary intermediate point in the transition.

## CHAPTER IV

### UNDER THE VOLCANO: THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST AND THE ALTERED CASE.

" . . . seeing you in visions and in every shadow,  
I have been compelled to write this which I  
shall never send."

I title this chapter with this rather awkward conjunction of two of Under the Volcano's primary themes because I intend it to function, on its own terms, as an encapsuled allusion to the extraordinary continuity between Lowry's formal processes and his themes, and to the basic problem Lowry encounters in the evolution of his new form. The phrase "the weight of the past" epitomizes most of the thematic issues of Under the Volcano. It also identifies Lowry's inability to separate himself from the interpretation of events he records in his notebooks and journals, which accordingly denies his creative imagination the freedom needed to order experience and thus create unified fiction. Further, the phrase points toward the system of logic Lowry incorporates into his peculiar approach to the creative act, a system based

more on temporal processes than spatial relations. For Lowry follows J. W. Dunne in Under the Volcano as well as in his later works: the past may have weight but no real being; it is known only as a present memory. That structures change through time is one of Lowry's major tenets; created forms transform, and history alters the shape and meaning of events. And yet there is an intangible continuity in temporal alterations, perhaps a durable but inscrutable mythic tautology to which all experience ultimately attaches itself. Words themselves operate within it; the fact of past words can conflict with present meanings, and new word units function to embrace both present and historical significance. Thus "the case is altered." Legally, "case" connotes the state of facts; grammatically, it defines the relation of a noun to the sentence which contains it; in common usage it serves as a containing object, a form within which items are collected. Both "case" and "altered" touch on the theme of alcohol,<sup>2</sup> evidence of Lowry's scrupulous care in choosing his words. And the phrase functions as one of the first chapter's many clues to the means by which the fiction works. The facts surrounding the real or imagined deaths of the Consul and Yvonne, "what now at a distance one could almost refer to as a case" (p. 14), have developed into story. Particulars have been made congruent with history, myth and literature, and Under the Volcano alters a set of events into the story of all men in modern times. Both Lowry himself and several of his critics note that the point of view from which the

action is rendered does not allow the reader to discriminate between reality and appearance, between the real story and the written one, between the "facts" given and the subjective, inventive mind that records them.<sup>3</sup> The conjunction of the two phrases in the title is intended to signify that on all levels of the book's meaning and in the way the book is told there are two operative processes. That Under the Volcano is closely written is indisputable; that it communicates even through its commas and dashes is a theory slowly being made fact by the critical industry. These two phrases signify the book's thematic basis for tragedy: things, relationships, change; love itself, the axis of Lowry's spiritual universe, is impermanent. But by way of an introduction they signify more: the book attempts to render a process where facts re-pattern or reform themselves through the mechanics of time and surface, in memory or in retrospective fiction, in new units, evolved from but independent of, their original forms. This process contains not only the thematic issues in Under the Volcano but the means by which its story is told. And this same process emerges clearly in Lowry's later fiction as the unifying principle between form and content, and is the centre of the problem Lowry fought with in creating autobiographical fiction.

"The case is altered," perhaps reborn into a new ordering, a new form, but it is not static. Rather, it evolves. At one point Yvonne applies Lowry's universal pattern of kinesis to her own family: "in fact, nature meant to wipe them out, having no

further use for what was not self-evolving" (p. 265); the same can be said of the form of Under the Volcano. It is unsatisfactory to hold that Under the Volcano, the masterpiece, relates to the later fictions, largely failures, only in thematic connections, that Lowry abandoned novel writing technique so that, as one critic has it, "the maker gave way to the autobiographer."<sup>4</sup> My interest is in connecting Lowry's later fictions to Under the Volcano through an explication of the evolving prose form. Admittedly, the link between "journal form" and the structure of Under the Volcano appears a distant; Under the Volcano, however, serves as a point of departure for Lowry's creation of a form in process, a methodology for fiction. I intend to demonstrate that one can connect the method of writing the later fictions, a method which commands fictional form and contains thematic meaning, with the thematic level of Under the Volcano; that this thematic level is congruent with, and contained by, the form within which Under the Volcano is written; and therefore that a connection exists between the formal processes of both Under the Volcano and the later fictions. Lowry's "new form," which advances from the journal form through the writer's process of wrestling with the problems inherent in the journalist's perspective, springs organically from Under the Volcano; this becomes apparent when one approximates Lowry's own retrospective gaze into Under the Volcano in an attempt to capture the author's own sense of the salient levels. Ideally, this critical method will inform an analysis of

Under the Volcano's formal processes, and, by extension, will qualify the meaning of the work established on the thematic level. Under the Volcano contains the fledgling "new form;" based on the evolution of this prose form through the later works, the book invites new readings. Lowry's later works shift, but do not cast off, the weight of his past creation.

Addressing himself to the thematic meaning of Dark As the Grave, W. H. New captures the central problem in Lowry's theory of incremental fictional units. And in the light of Lowry's method of evolving fiction, the observation approaches directly the difficulty inherent in the transformation of journal entries, themselves a fiction of sorts, into artistic creations:

The problem being explored involves the relationship between an author and his work -- obviously, here, between fact and fiction, which together create a kind of dialogue between levels of the mind. When a writer writes a work, he is expressing something of himself. Yet when he finishes it, publishes it, launches it into the world on its own, it becomes something separate. It acquires its own identity or "reality." If the writer cannot separate himself from that earlier world -- if he continues to identify with the characters that is -- he runs the risk of losing his identity in the "real" world and so ending up wandering in limbo. Past, place, and present meld together as the mind shuttles through intricate realms of reality that differ both in degree of actualization and in kind.<sup>5</sup>

The valuable observation here is that time units meld together. Lowry wants his fictional units to counterpoint one another, to imply, through juxtaposition and the theory of montage, an image containing a definitive statement upon the universe. The image is of the reader's making and it inhabits an approachable future time sphere, a unity projected forward in time. Thus,



the concept of increment works in two ways; earlier fiction defines the sphere which later fictions will be built upon, and later fictions continue the process of evolving new meanings to the earlier works. W. H. New is correct in assessing the problem, but it is one which Lowry embraces as central to his theory of fiction; his task is to contain perspectives of the past, not separate himself from them. Even though Under the Volcano is a fictional "fact," a completed work, Lowry, in his later works, cannot abandon it to stasis. If it does not continue to evolve through his own writings, it dies, abandoning the Mexican landscape it contains to an unredeemable fallen world. What Under the Volcano, in itself, means, is obviously worth pursuing; what it comes to mean to Lowry is, I think, of far greater interest to his critics.

Two works reflect directly upon the thematic meaning and the form of Under the Volcano -- clearly the two levels are related. Dark As the Grave appears to deal most directly with the thematic meaning of the earlier work, so much so that the book has been mistakenly received as a mere retrospect upon earlier themes. The book shows Sigbjørn "moving in the midst of his own creation,"<sup>6</sup> attempting to stand "outside himself . . . as if he were watching a film with themselves as actors" (Dark As the Grave, p. 166). The recurrence of patterns unifies the book's structure and method with its themes; thus Sigbjørn is described in a series of similar and static units: "It was this scene

that kept repeating itself, over and over again, like a disrupted film repeating itself (and that disrupted film was uncomfortably an image of himself too) . . . ." (Dark As the Grave, p. 88).

Finally he perceives that he stands in a responsible relation to his projected, objective image of himself, and, formally, the book's narrator and protagonist merge together as opposing levels of reality coalesce: "were we not empowered as the director of that film at least to turn the apparent disaster of our lives into triumph?" (Dark As the Grave, p. 249). Whereas Dark As the Grave seems to apply most directly to the thematic level of Under the Volcano, the letter to Cape<sup>7</sup> seems to address itself most directly to the book's form. That the Cape letter is written to justify the book's publication seems to me no basis for invalidating what it says. Lowry was always "compelled" to write; here he simply adapts to the form of the letter, and perhaps the Cape letter belongs in Lowry's incremental fictional unit. Here he admonishes his reader to be "prepared to grapple with the form of the book" (Cape letter, p. 58) and, through reflexive reference to allow "the book to sink slowly . . . into the action of the mind" (Cape letter, p. 73). The luminous wheel, he argues, is, among other meanings, representative of the trochal ". . . form of the book, or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before and Chapter II and in this sense, if we like, we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's

eyes, as if it were his creation" (Cape letter, pp. 70-71, emphasis mine). Most important, however, are Lowry's suggestions that the book, by its essential form, contains within itself the levels of significance which he or his readers later come to see in it.

He implies that the narrative level of the book is self-reflexive, that the themes of the book are contained by its narrative process, when he remarks that "... the constant repetition of churrigueresque 'of an overloaded style' seemed to be a suggestion that the book was satirizing itself" (Cape letter, p. 82). And he makes clear that the form of the novel has evolved upon its own terms, that he has not forced his material into the form which the traditional novel imposes, when he remarks that "Hugh and the Consul are the same person, but within a book which obeys not the laws of other books, but those it creates as it goes along" (Cape letter, p. 75).

The employment of the word "superficially," in reference to the implication that, thematically, Chapters II to XII of Under the Volcano can be read as Jacques Laruelle's film, appears to mark a transition point for Lowry. Dark As the Grave suggests a stronger emphasis upon the importance of this theme. This transition can be noted in other letters. In 1950 Lowry notes that "the whole book could be taken to be M. Laruelle's film."<sup>8</sup> By 1951 Lowry has seen within Under the Volcano a series of circumscribing spheres of reference paralleling the model described by his canal metaphor in "Through the Panama:" "... thematically speaking, though, the pelado in Chapter VIII -- by extension the

Consul, by extension M. Laruelle -- gives the clue."<sup>9</sup> And by 1953 Lowry has come to perceive Laruelle in a relation to Under the Volcano parallel to Sigbjørn's relation to The Valley of the Shadow of Death in Dark As the Grave. In fact, the theme of Sigbjørn coming to live in Laruelle's tower in Dark As the Grave indicates a relation to Laruelle far more terrifying subjectively than that of his relation to the Consul: "As I've said, he doesn't even think he's a novelist himself. The Volcano -- which "Laruelle" doesn't think much of at first -- . . . appears less as a novel that as a sort of mighty if preposterous moral deed of some obscure sort . . ."<sup>10</sup> The point of this transition in Lowry's understanding of his own masterpiece seems clear: Lowry subsequently discovered further implications in the relation between Laruelle and Under the Volcano than he had imagined when writing it, and the discovery, or re-discovery (because Laruelle is partially effaced from this role which he so obviously plays in earlier drafts of Under the Volcano<sup>11</sup>), led him to explore further the relation of a creator to a creation which includes himself in Dark As the Grave, "Through the Panama," and "Ghostkeeper." Under the Volcano evolves into the later fictions as Lowry's angle of vision upon it changes, and the later fictions continue its meaning, for its form is flexible. A metaphorical application to the new form of fiction in Dark As the Grave, where a conductor plays the first three parts of a concert on successive nights and on the forth unifies all of them in harmony, is based directly on Under the

Volcano. The first three parts correspond to the principal dramatised characters of the book, Yvonne, Hugh, and the Consul. But the fourth "voice," which contains them all, is Laruelle's bringing them all back to life after they have already been realized in their initial "performance." The image of the new form pertains not to the means by which Under the Volcano was written, but rather to the means by which it continues to be written. Under the Volcano realises its dimensions of significance only as the new form, which evolves from it and continues to contain it, begins to realize itself in the later works.

The quotation that broaches this chapter is from the Consul's unsent letter to Yvonne that Laruelle finds one year after the action of the fiction. Although the letter does not factor in their dramatized relationship, it clearly modifies both Laruelle's and the reader's sense of "that self we created, apart from us" (p. 45) and becomes an ingredient in their fiction if not their actual experience. The letter is something of a literary creation, inherently confessional because of the letter form, and although it is thematically unrealized, it shifts the reader's concentration away from Laruelle onto the Consul.<sup>12</sup> The coincidental appearance of it may appear strained, but its importance is more metaphorical than thematic. The means by which the unsent letter becomes open to the reader describes a process, and this process parallels the means by which the story of Under the Volcano is told. Several critics make passing references to the possibility that the

Under the Volcano we read may correspond to Laruelle's unrealized film,<sup>13</sup> "a modern film version of the Faust story" (p. 33) aimed at "changing the world" (p. 15), but as far as I know, no one has really explored the thematic significance of this, or has applied it to the relation between the artist and his material that Lowry's later fictions so carefully describe.

Technically, the book is rendered from a point of view of selective omniscience where the narrator roves in and out of the characters' subjective thoughts. Consequently, the reader remains unable to discriminate between ideas and patterns that are those of the characters, and those that properly belong to the intermediating narrator.<sup>14</sup> Lowry approaches the fiction's "facts" by counterpointing the impressions of four major protagonists, a device he was never to employ again dramatically, but because no one character's perspective is verified by the narrator as being factually accurate, the device confuses rather than clarifies the reader's sense of what actually happens. From this it is impossible to make an absolute connection between the dramatized character, Laruelle, and the action of Chapters II to XII, but there appears to be sufficient internal evidence to promote the pursuance of this possibility and to read the book in this light. Lowry gives us an unsent letter to open the way to the Consul's story; its importance hangs somewhere between what it says and its effect on Laruelle as he reads it. Chapter I not only sets the stage but also portrays the state of mind of the character who is compelled to remember the events of the year before. It has been pointed out that Laruelle's present has been shaped by the

past actions of the Consul, that in one way he adopts the Consul's role in the world.<sup>15</sup> Yet when writers experiment with fiction -- and the form of the Volcano, where the story opens with the remembrance of a character who has died and goes on to tell of his life, should be sufficiently unusual to establish that the book is experimental -- their readers invariably are forced to account for the artificiality of what they read. We know the Consul only to the extent that the narrator, with all his devices, reveals him, and since the book is framed, in a scene that recalls Hesse's magic theater in Steppenwolf, by Laruelle's act of remembering, it is thematically supportable that the story of the Consul, like the "fact" of his letter, is entirely the property of Laruelle. And Laruelle, rather than being shaped by the Consul, may himself have shaped Geoffrey as an artist does a fictional character. Lowry implies a reciprocal relation between a dramatised character, who relates a story which partially concerns himself, and his protagonist. This same relationship becomes the unifying principle of Lowry's later fictions where the emphasis is upon autobiographical material. The story of the Consul is everyone's story who lives in modern times; in Under the Volcano Lowry gives us a new version of fictional autobiography. Martin Trumbaugh writes Dark As the Grave, the story of Sigbjørn Wilderness, and Sigbjørn objectifies autobiography by accrediting it to his character Martin in "Through the Panama." Under the Volcano is Laruelle's story, objectified onto "the Consul" (the use of a third person "name" indicates this

objectifying distance) in the same manner that Lowry writes Dark As the Grave in the third person. Here Lowry lapses into the first person in moments of intensity and total identification; Laruelle himself enters his own story and lives concomitantly with his characters, mostly to observe, sometimes to act, occasionally to posture in the adulterous relation to a marriage unit that a court of law would define, aptly, as "co-respondent."

Dave Godfrey, in a short story entitled "River Two Blind Jacks"<sup>16</sup> uses a framing device for his story that establishes that it is just that: a story:

This is one of my grandfather's, and like all of his, I am not sure if it is true or not. He was an old man when I knew him; truth and fancy ran like two tributaries from the river of his memory. . . . I would never say he lied . . . I am even reluctant to say he exaggerated . . . I call him instead a trader of truths.

The story that follows is glaringly unreal, more of a legend than a "true story" (inevitably, perhaps, an oxymoron). Its significance is entirely personal, for the facts it relates correspond to the patterning of imagination and memory of the grandfather, who is himself, one suspects, a mythical character. This framing device inherently distances the action, and places it within a contextual relation to a given teller of tales. Readers look less for the meaning of the story than for its relevance to first, the dramatized teller, and next, to the writer himself. The story begins, contrary to the pattern of the traditional novel, after the action has been completed; the opening section, in effect, displaces the story



into a modern context, and the following section tells the story again in a remote, past-tense setting. That critics of Under the Volcano invariably dwell upon the opening chapter, which for some is the book's only claim to modification of the traditional novel form, seems to me sufficient evidence of this chapter's effect to indicate that something of the same process operates here. A feeling of entropic, tremendous lethargy seems to hang over the chapter, and details describe a pattern that unifies the character Laruelle to the setting: "voices singing, diminishing, dying in the wind, inaudible finally" (p. 16). The landscape obviously contains a story: ". . . from these mountains emanated a strange melancholy force that tried to hold him here bodily, which was its weight, the weight of many things, but mostly that of sorrow" (p. 19); we feel that we must know the place to see the importance of the story, but more importantly, that we must know the story to know the place. Thoughts and words seem inevitably to be turning to a legendary denizen of the place -- the Consul -- whose presence, like that of indigenous gods, is still mirrored in the landscape long after he is dead. We begin to construct an image of this clearly magnetic personality from the effect he has had upon his future, but the way into the past is blocked: we are, as the Consul acknowledges just before his death, "reading him strictly in the preterite tense" (p. 331). Stories command story-tellers, however, and we focus upon Laruelle, the keeper and shaper of the events, the prism into the realm of story which is precursor to his present being. His subject, he tells

us, is a "quixotic oral fiction" (p. 38), one which he will be compelled, if we wait long enough, to relate, and suddenly we are inhabiting the mythic world and seeing something of the process by which facts evolve into legend. The first chapter describes a pattern and texture that, as the present fact, contains, like a palimpsest, the entire story, whose presence is evident in the mythic pattern that informs its present being. It is itself a complete picture -- a lock in the metaphorical canal -- and the process of re-creating the history behind it will be one of collating the present evidence we have: the isolated glimpses into the past that present manifestations of the pattern have made available to us. The first chapter, by offering a picture of the present, establishes that the story will become realized through the principle of montage. Another picture, a glimpse into the past, is about to be given, and the "story," complete with its internal patterns and its significance, inhabits a space and time somewhere between the two pictures. The past is ubiquitous but paradoxically remote, and the only way into it is through the imagination.

At the point where the reader enters into the past action beginning with Chapter II, then, two patterns that control the means by which the action will be rendered have been established. They are closely related, but it is necessary to discriminate between them, at least initially, to outline the extraordinary continuity between Lowry's formal processes and his themes. The first involves Lowry's technical handling of point of view, and is most

closely modelled in Lowry's own canal metaphor where Sigbjørn speculates upon the artist in his control tower, overseeing some planes of activity and being overseen by others. The first chapter's present contains within it the past, and thus the narrator, Laruelle "remembering," contains the individual points of view of the major protagonists. Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, acknowledges the role of reflector characters, or centres of consciousness, as narrators; there is also the "implied author" whom readers create against their own point of view, as the narrating personality behind the chosen words.<sup>17</sup> Thus Hugh, the Consul, and Yvonne are all given a certain narratorial role, and their subjective impressions are the action of their own isolated chapters. Laruelle, the thematic correlative to the implied author, shares the narrator's role with them so that a hierarchy of points of view is established even though past thoughts are made concomital with present ones. Yet the form of the book makes explicit what this handling of point of view would imply: the relation is reciprocal. "Time past 'contains' time future"<sup>18</sup> so that Laruelle, as narrator, becomes a factor of the past; paradoxically, the past and present are harbingers of one another.<sup>19</sup> Set against one another, these two levels imply an outward series: each character contains his or her own "flash-back" into the remote past; Laruelle, the narrator of Chapters II to XII, is contained by Lowry, the author of the whole book, and Lowry the author is contained by Lowry the reader who, in the

process of writing his later fictions, discovers new levels of significance to fiction. This discriminating, almost compartmentalizing, process belongs to the reader's reflexive reference upon the completed story, for at the time of reading, as Tony Kilgallin notes, "there is a sense of time as never quite passing or being recalled,"<sup>20</sup> a sense of an "absolute dislocation in time" (p. 248). Clifford Leech connects the technical "doubleness of viewpoint" between narrator and subject to the impression of simultaneity in time which the fiction creates: "there is a lifetime in the moment,"<sup>21</sup> not only a character's, but the narrator's, author's, and, if the symbolic dimensions of the book succeed in implying universality, the reader's as well. Independent perspectives upon the events of the story are juxtaposed to imply a single voice -- the "unconsciousness" Lowry speaks of as both protagonist and creator of The Voyage cycle<sup>22</sup> -- which is at the same time all voices, functioning in harmony. In the Farolito, the Consul reflects upon his lost possibility of sharing, not separating from, the pure form that the point of view of Under the Volcano aspires towards:

Here would have been no devolving through failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that became more and more like one voice to a death more dead than death itself, but an infinite widening, an infinite evolving and extension of boundaries, in which the spirit was an entity, perfect and whole . . . (p. 362)

His failure transposes itself, thematically, to Laruelle because Laruelle, formally, orchestrates the action. Though the Consul's fall initially compels Laruelle to create, it also prevents him

from unifying the discord in perspectives that this passage, which has the stamp of the intermediating narrator upon it, idealizes. The point of view which renders Under the Volcano stresses the conflict in the varying viewpoints and juxtaposes them against one another, yet against this conflict is set the appearance of the collapse of spatial and temporal units into timeless fluidity. The narrative mode of Under the Volcano, which is a factor of the book's basic form, contains the dual sense of actualized conflict and potential harmony -- in other words, the thematic issues of the book -- and this contrapuntal method of rendering extends into the book's technique.

The second technical method that evolves from the first chapter and Under the Volcano's form is a continuation of the montage process. Lowry draws a picture of the present before he writes about the past. Thus the form of the book inherently commands two major pictures which the reader is supposed to juxtapose, and from this stems Lowry's juxtapositional, visual technique of rendering details. Memory is inherently static; only one disconnected scene can be recalled in any moment. Yet the action which memory is used here to re-create is kinetic, for a process of dissolution within the Consul and the people and places surrounding him is being traced. This aspect of Under the Volcano has troubled Lowry's critics, and the controversy about the book's static and kinetic rhythms in narrative technique remains, at present, unresolved. Paul Tiessen has shown how the

cinematic technique of montage, where static scenes are used to imply kinetic action, functions as "both method and metaphor" for the book: the cinema not only informs the book's thematic level but it influences Lowry's handling of visual technique.<sup>23</sup>

Victor Doyen has partially explained the process whereby the reflexive reader assembles the independent pieces of the book (one is reminded of "Through the Panama's" self-reflexive remark that "the whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, apparently slipping past one another") and thus approximates the "authorial point of view."<sup>24</sup>

Terrence Wright has identified the static nature of the book's visual elements, and he concludes that these scenes, corresponding to movements in a piece of music, conflict with the reader's primary response to the unfolding of a story concerning characters and situations.<sup>25</sup> Sherrill Grace concurs with Wright that the "esoteric levels of the book set up an important rhythm which conflicts with the onward thrust of the story."<sup>26</sup>

But Grace focuses the problem, rightly I think, not upon the narrative technique of the book, which for these other critics has been treated as a disembodied element of the fiction, but on the form: "when the fusion of realistic and esoteric levels of Under the Volcano is criticized it is actually the form of the novel which is felt to be weak."<sup>27</sup> The form commands two opposing pictures of an historical process, the present and the past, and this opposition filters into the narrative technique, which plays off the opposing rhythms of juxtapositional (static scene) and naturalistic

(kinetic flow) art. What Grace identifies as a problem, however, I see as one of the book's greatest strengths. This opposition is the unifying principle of Under the Volcano: I have tried to show how it grows out of the book's form; Wright, Doyen and Grace demonstrate that it controls the book's narrative technique; Tiessen shows how it works on the visual level. What remains to be demonstrated is that it informs the pattern that controls, metaphorically, each lock on the canal or each box in the Chinese puzzle that describes the series that is Lowry's model for his handling of point of view. And thematic situation and characterization, what little there is of it, are themselves factors of the inherent opposition in the points of view from which the fiction is rendered.

Blake's maxim that "without contraries there is no progression" could well have found a place in the list of epigraphs that begin this fiction. Lowry deals with the dissimilar natures of past action and present effect; Laruelle remembers a set of events that were once fact and are now turned to myth in the re-creative process; each major character manifests a patterned response to experience that fluctuates between visions of order and the recognition of chaos. Clifford Leech applies the book's treatment of time to the theme of how characters apprehend reality:

... this book insists on a multiplicity of futures. There is what will happen, regardless. There is also the future we can imagine, and this is as much a part of our experience as the thing that must be.<sup>28</sup>

The future that must be is the property of Laruelle, who is the

only dramatized character who knows what "will" happen; this because the action, as we have it, stems from his present, his characters' future. When the world is viewed from within a series of ongoing experiences, the future does seem open to infinite possibilities, and all characters project themselves into it (Hugh, p. 124; the Consul, p. 143; Yvonne, in her several visions of Lowry's present fact: Eridanus). This similarity in propensity universalizes the pattern, but it also indicates a possibility of the narrator's "interference," the word the Consul uses to define Laruelle's relation to himself (p. 314). That all characters attempt to grasp the future by searching for patterns that recur through time adds weight to this possibility.

Hugh: "Yet he felt trapped. The more completely for the realization that in no essential sense had he escaped from his past life. It was all here, though in another form . . . (p. 165)

Yvonne: ". . . her own destiny was buried in the distant past, and might for all she knew repeat itself in the future" (p. 269)

The Consul: "Picking up the tire he [a madman seen by the Consul] flung it far ahead again, repeating this process, to the indestructible logic of which he appeared committed, until out of sight." (p. 227)  
 "'God, how pointless and empty the world is! Days filled with cheap and tarnished moments succeed each other, restless and haunted nights follow in bitter route . . .'" (p. 396)

Patterns of recurrence, however unacceptable those patterns may seem, at least serve to imply an order in the world, a form containing patterns of experience that move through time. Yvonne's perception of the slow, recurrent movement of the stars at the



end of Chapter XI is the book's most commanding image of universal patterns of inevitability. The action of Under the Volcano drives on towards what readers perceive must be the book's inevitable conclusion, the death of Yvonne and the Consul. And through this, Laruelle's after-the-fact point of view is confirmed on the thematic level. But from the subjective point of view of the present tense, the same point of view that recognizes a multiplicity of futures, inevitable and ordered patterns of impermeability seem far more remote than do perceptions of apparent chaos:

"'But after much tequila the eclectic systeme is perhaps un poco descompuesto, comprenez, as sometimes in the cine: claro?'"

(p. 148) The narrative mode of Under the Volcano renders in the same voice the opposition between subjective apprehensions of chaos and external images of inevitability. A similar polarity is found in the connections that are made to history, myth and literature. We read, at the same time, a very revealing and personal account of characters' methods of dealing with their own crises and an anatomy of man's response to the patterning of ancient and modern history. At one point the Consul cries out "Ah, the frightful cleft, the eternal horror of opposites!"

(p. 134) "Opposites" may be a subjective compartmentalization of events that fails to recognize the ordered pattern which contains apparently uncoordinated orders (for example, readers can recognize that the Consul's good and bad "familiar" are both aspects of his own consciousness and are contained within his point of view), but such discriminations are the fact of a perspective

contained within a series of events. Each point of view involved in the story must contend with such apparent oppositions, and the book's thematic message partially stems from the means by which apparent chaos or the cognition of randomness is resolved into order and inevitability. The form of Under the Volcano inherently launches the concept of polarity into the book, and on each level of its dimensions Lowry finds an effective means of expression for this concept. The critical recognition of the opposition of static and kinetic rhythms in the book is valuable and necessary; the evaluation of it out of context from the rest of the book's vast dimensions is indicative of a failure to approximate truly "the authorial point of view."

Geoffrey Durrant's analysis of neo-Platonism in "Through the Panama"<sup>29</sup> may indicate a viable starting point for further investigations into Lowry's approach to fiction. Lowry's fascination with the relation between Art and Life, or fiction and fact, became, it seems, an obsession in his later years and provided a basis for fictional investigation. Whatever dimensions philosophical investigations into Lowry reveal, however, the point of departure must be Under the Volcano, for in this fiction are the roots of Lowry's later experiments with prose. With the implication that Laruelle may be the creator of the film Under the Volcano emerges the possibility that Laruelle, like all gods, may have created his characters in his own image.

As neo-Platonists are aware, the images we are given are one step removed from their archetype; the fiction we are given in Under the Volcano is by Laruelle's re-creative process, one step removed from the fictional facts. Neo-Platonists embrace this polarity, but may well question which is the fact, and which the fiction? The ideal, of course, is to unify the apparent with the real, or the fact with the legend, and Lowry's later fictions struggle within themselves to reconcile the process implied by "The Case is Altered."

Within Lowry's developing mysticism and his own sense of "the horror of opposites," though, comes the relevance of the new form and its relation to the journal form. In Under the Volcano the theory of oppositional units patterns the whole work, but its development towards unity in his later writings is prefigured on the thematic level. In the Cape letter, Lowry writes of Hugh: ". . . his desire to be a composer or musician is everyone's innate desire to be a poet of life in some way . . .".<sup>30</sup> From this theme evolves Lowry's search for universal principles that eventually leads him to Ortega, where man is a novelist making up his life as he goes along. Thus, a universalized theme expands into a universalizing principle which liberates autobiography from subjectivity. Further, Hugh, both a musician and a journalist, is deliberately contrived as a doppelganger to, although a younger version of, the Consul, who claims "I'm not a journalist . . . I'm a writer" (p. 370). This implies

that, thematically, Hugh, a journalist, grows into the Consul, a writer; this thematic possibility becomes a fact of Lowry's creative method when he later attempts to transform his journal entries into fiction. But the really important connection to the method of Lowry's later fictions stems from Under the Volcano's method of characterization. Characters are caught in the journalist's dilemma of being contained within a series of events and attempting to discover its significance. Laruelle, when reflecting upon those events, attempts to form all ways of seeing into a universal or collective pattern of perception, and the tension between immediate and reflexive perceptions surfaces in the opposing rhythms of the narrative. Through universalizing the action, Laruelle attempts to coordinate his present perceptions with those of the past (or the characters' present perceptions with those that the future reveals); this is precisely Lowry's difficulty in writing Dark As the Grave. Both past and present (or art and life, fact and fiction) require independent and total expression, for both must be real. Process and harmony are facts of the universe; separate realities, however, do not, as they must, coalesce.

Under the Volcano is a success, a masterpiece, because it recognizes the separation between meaning and pattern that temporal processes inevitably create, and Lowry uses this recognition to unify the book's form and narrative techniques with its themes. Unifying fiction was, for Lowry, obviously a beginning to the

ordering process, but unifying fiction with Life was a far greater challenge. Within Under the Volcano he had, perhaps unconsciously, formulated his approach to this challenge, an ironic twist to his own theme that it only requires time for inevitabilities to surface. In his later works he locked himself into the problem of factual and fictional diversities. He attempted to unify his journals, his records of experiences, with the fictional patterns he created from a viewpoint separated in time from the facts. Thematically, he aspired to become both the Consul and Laruelle, for within this conjunction lay the point of view which could bring into being the new form. The process from journal form to new form paralleled the process of fact into legend that Under the Volcano rendered. I think Lowry would have seen great significance in the mythic dimensions that he posthumously assumed, for he failed to realize his potential in his later work. But in writing them he continued the process towards the totality of the new form, the form which grew out of those areas he explored in Under the Volcano and those which, subsequent to its completion, he retrospectively discovered within it.

## CONCLUSION

LOWRY: STRUGGLING WITH THE FORM  
OF HIS COILED WORK.<sup>1</sup>

Only once that I know of does Lowry refer directly to his "new form" for prose: this, in a letter to Albert Erskine where Lowry is defending his experiments with autobiographical fiction.<sup>2</sup> There is little hard evidence, then, which supports the centrality, or indeed the legitimacy, of the new form as a viable representation of the type of fiction which Lowry hoped to write. Matthew Corrigan doubts the philosophical validity of the "new form"; rather, he sees in it Lowry's attempt to evade, or divert himself away from, his sense of having failed to produce successful fiction in his later works:

What one notices most generally about the final work is its failure to achieve a form. . . . Throughout this period Lowry is cognizant of his failure with narrative and characterization, as indeed he is while writing Volcano; but the problem is now more central, and somehow he cannot surmount it as he does in the earlier novel. He rationalizes a "new form" around his failure: a form that will follow the configurative life of consciousness (his own, though he hopes incidentally, modern man's) as it constitutes itself through stages of becoming. The direction is clearly towards spiritual and psychic integration of an almost mystical kind, with some awesome reflexions on his infernal past thrown in for good measure.

But the theory does not stand in prospective relationship to work that will devolve from it but rather gets drawn from the work's failure; at times gets incorporated into the work at hand, a kind of oblique discussion why things aren't working as they should, why narrative perhaps is obsolete as we understand it, and so on. Almost nowhere does the idea of a new form work sui generis to produce something new.<sup>3</sup>

Corrigan makes a very good argument: the later works fail to approach the level of success of Under the Volcano and Lowry knows it; the "new form" epitomizes what Lowry's later fictions only aspire towards; Lowry's concept of the integration between Art and Life remains a philosophical principle apparently undigested in his fictional applications of it. And from this estimation of the "new form" as a retrospective rationalization, Corrigan predicates his conclusion that Lowry failed to create fictional unity because he could not bring himself to break away from the form of the traditional novel.<sup>4</sup> To some critics, this may appear to be an artificial chicken-and-egg dialectic. But I believe it crucial to an understanding of Lowry's approach to fiction to recognize the "new form" as an ongoing pursuit and a realizable ideal, and to view Lowry's fictions as conscious experimental attempts to advance towards it. For if Corrigan is right, Lowry is indeed "a novelist . . . by accident,"<sup>5</sup> a "novelist manque,"<sup>6</sup> although some critics may extend a little more sympathy to his fictional failures. But this thesis is concerned with giving new credence to Lowry's "new form," and when the separate pieces of Lowry's incremental fictional unit are read as experiments or intermediate points in an evolutionary process, the "new form" becomes not Lowry's excuse for failure but the image of a

fictional structure which guides him into the future. The critical industry is not yet ready to classify Lowry, and Corrigan's argument, perhaps inadvertently, promotes such classification. The necessity of coming to terms with Corrigan's argument, then, explains the inverse arrangement of the fictions that are discussed in this thesis. From the perspective that this arrangement establishes, Lowry's statement of intention towards his "new form" remains consistent with the fiction that anticipates it, "Ghostkeeper," for in this story Lowry approaches thematically the problem of advancing autobiographical fiction from the form in which it first takes shape: the journal. And in "Through the Panama," "Ghostkeeper's" predecessor, Lowry successfully expands the journal form and its single point of view into a fiction which unifies a complex network of opposing perspectives. "Through the Panama" evolves from Dark As the Grave, where Lowry struggles towards this unification of perspective but finds himself as yet unable to accomplish it. Yet the informing principle for Dark As the Grave stems from Under the Volcano. Here, Lowry creates successful fiction by extending his system of opposing orders or conflicting perspectives into every aspect of the book so that an oppositional system becomes a unifying principle for fiction. And in each one of these works, the fictional form that Lowry employs is the containing principle for the imbroglio of themes, imagery, style, narrative technique and mode that constitutes its individual nature.

Lowry's new form requires a new arrangement of parts, and



towards this end he closely examines elements in relation to one another. Readers are implicated into this arrangement, and like Lowry himself, who always attempts to perceive the total significance behind events, they are meant not only to respond to events themselves, but also to see events in relation to the writer who renders them. Thus, the theme of separation between a protagonist and his wife, which occurs in much of Lowry's writing, is important not only in its meaning for the "story" but also in its power to reflect the relation of a writer to the world he creates in fiction. The new form incorporates the principle of relativity, and readers themselves are principal elements within it. Lowry not only arranges his fictions so that his readers' perspectives are made part of the unifying structure, but he also expects his readers to participate in ordering the structure of those fictions and in this way to aid him in his pursuit towards the new form. Lowry perceives everywhere a continuum containing fact and imagination, but what is truly admirable about his approach to structure is his fidelity to his points of departure: facts cannot be reshuffled and yet they must be congruent with the fictional ordering of them; the new form must incorporate into itself the fact of its beginnings in the journal form. Because Lowry's fictions stem from autobiographical material, fiction ideally becomes its own subject and incorporates life into itself. But the new form for fiction can evolve only at a pace whereby it continues to contain the evolving processes of life. Corrigan is correct in arguing that Lowry's "new form" is primarily a philosophical idealization,

but its evolution always remains firmly rooted in the fact of actual experience.

I have written of Lowry's "developing mysticism" in his pursuit towards his new form, and this needs qualification. Lowry constantly looks for hidden truths and for a means of structuring them, and facts of the material world are, for him, doorways into the structure that binds them. But Lowry is not a nominalist, and the apprehension of new levels of reality never undercuts his acceptance of the phenomenal world. His structure-making method, then, should be discriminated from the type of fictional self-sufficiency that Corrigan seems to envision for Lowry's work and that a fiction such as The Alexandria Quartet exemplifies. Lawrence Durrell has no interest in credible characters; he focuses directly upon the structure that contains them: the city. The only level of importance is the relationships characters form with each other, and Durrell's structure, or containing principle for this work, is based upon these relationships. Alternatively, Lowry, who also looks towards absolute structure and containing form, affirms to the end the reality of his characters, although he does not focus on making them fictionally credible. His ideal structure is far more remote than Durrell's, for in it he must arrange and combine, yet avoid falsifying, the disparate orders of fact and fiction. Under the Volcano is Lowry's last attempt to present individual realities against a structure that depends

primarily upon spatial relations. In his later works he explores the possibility of inversions in temporal processes, which he retrospectively discovers operating in Under the Volcano, as a means of rendering the reality of both factual events and the superstructure that contains them. Lowry envisions fiction as a continuum, embracing and containing opposing orders, "with both ends governed under different laws, yet part of the same community."<sup>7</sup> Only within the "new form" can the journal of facts be made congruent with the mystical apprehension of the hidden structure or process that unifies events. The path towards the new form's realization is the evolution of the journal form. "Form" is both the beginning and the end of the process, and in the creative act it becomes the medium for translating the pursuit into fiction. The critical re-creation of Lowry's approach to "form" leads finally towards a desire to understand the world-view that promotes it. One begins with Lowry's love of knowledge and fact, and his aspiration towards an understanding of the nature of ultimate truth. The way into Lowry becomes an examination of this as it translates literally: "philosophy".

William Gass, in "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction," argues that the creative act inherently challenges the author's role within his or her fictional world.<sup>8</sup> But the author's approach to this relation inevitably filters into the fiction's themes and narrative technique.<sup>9</sup> The approach an author adopts depends upon his or her philosophy with respect to fiction, and the nature

of that philosophical stance commands its own fictional form from which all other fictional elements follow. Having established this, Gass is then enabled to explore Under the Volcano,<sup>10</sup> and he discovers in it a cohesion between Lowry's handling of time, his images, and his use of language. The world Under the Volcano describes, he concludes, "is always a metaphorical model of our own."<sup>11</sup> Gass' article is an important one; it not only suggests that Lowry's philosophical outlook may translate into the principle which unifies his work (for example, next in series to the unifying operations of the book's form lies the author's philosophical stance), but also that through this approach and the critical re-creation of it emerges a means of coordinating the book's superstructure with the dimensions of the real world which it metaphorically mirrors. Gass writes after the fact of Lowry's writing, but the process he describes is rooted in the works of a writer from whom Lowry draws obvious themes and images: Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>12</sup> Coleridge defines the philosophical faculty of the mind in Biographia Literaria, Chapter Fourteen:

The office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction; while it is the privilege of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy. But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the result of philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

For Coleridge, the philosophical faculty makes distinctions and

discriminations, then re-constructs a manner of unifying them.

In poetry, he argues, this unification is achieved by the combination of elements into a poetic form, and that form depends upon the truths it is intended to convey. "Truth," he claims, "either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end"<sup>14</sup> of poetry, and pleasure is residual in the attainment of this end. If the poet succeeds in the achievement of such form, he manifests "that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination,"<sup>15</sup> and this power "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities."<sup>16</sup> This unification is Lowry's goal in fiction; fictional form is his medium for attaining it. What informs his handling of fictional form, and his approach to the new form, is his mystical propensity and his philosophical outlook.

In his drive to transcend Under the Volcano, Lowry annexes J. W. Dunne's notions of time into his concept of spatial relativity, and thus finds a means of exploring the relation between a narrator and his protagonist in Dark As the Grave. As W. H. New notes, Dunne's philosophy gives Lowry a means of presenting temporal processes spatially,<sup>17</sup> and this technique stays with Lowry in his advancement through fiction towards the new form. Dunne's collapse of time, and the corresponding collapse of the spatial frame of reference that any moment contains, stresses the centrality of the perceiving consciousness as the only verifiable reality. And consequently, all facts of the phenomenal world are valid

only in relation to the state of mind of the perceiver upon whom they operate.<sup>18</sup> Dunne gives Lowry a means of philosophically venturing into the fourth dimension in order to develop the form of his fiction, but for extending the significance of personal events into universal dimensions Lowry appeals to another philosopher, Ortega y Gasset. Ortega also stresses the centrality of the perceiver, but his point of departure is precisely that which Dunne refutes: facts. For Ortega, life progresses from the fact of being itself and moves into the fact of its progression. Ortega's history is a linear process, not a teleology but more of a tautology; man is "what has happened to him." For Dunne, man is a composite not only of his "past" and "present" experience, but of his "future" experience as well. Both philosophers serve to unlock Lowry's progression of his new form from points of stasis. Dunne's method appeals to Lowry. But Ortega's appeal is to Lowry's values, for both Ortega and Lowry extol the primacy of facts in human development. Clearly, Dunne and Ortega are discordant threads in Lowry's philosophical outlook. But in the philosophical process Coleridge outlines, Lowry finds a method of reconciling them.

In an early letter to Conrad Aiken, Lowry speculates "that maybe I am the chap chosen of God or the devil to elucidate the Law of Series."<sup>19</sup> Later, in the same letter to Albert Erskine where he speaks of his "new form," Lowry again alludes to the "Law of Series."<sup>20</sup> The Law of Series implies both a disconnection

in the flow of time and a repetition of a pattern through time, and is thus an abstraction which locates static and disconnected events within a kinetic development or historical progression. Clearly, the Law of Series is a superstructure upon experience, but events, when collated under the same principle of montage which Lowry so often uses, imply both its application to experience and its individual reality. Although Dunne and Ortega offer Lowry opposing systems of apprehending time, the Law of Series absorbs both their philosophies. Ortega's quanta of events resolve into individual forms which isolate the pattern of the perceiver's history. And Dunne's employment of serial analogies to describe a non-serial process<sup>21</sup> allows the isolation of moments from the continuum of time, and offers as well a means of re-connecting those moments to the whole pattern which contains them. One irony is that the method of presentation that collapses Dunne's argument allows Lowry a means of employing the conclusions that this method leads to. But Lowry was able to subordinate the particular differences between Dunne and Ortega to the concept of time which each philosopher, from his own point of view, seemed to recognise. And in the Law of Series Lowry found a philosophical answer to his problems with conceptualizing the universe. From this philosophical discovery, Lowry deduced, in the manner Coleridge describes, a fictional form which contains it. The canal metaphor in "Through the Panama" most closely hints at this form; the framing devices of Under the Volcano and "Ghostkeeper"

point in a similar direction. But the model in which the Law of Series finds its most apposite re-creation is in the fictional composite which Lowry envisioned as unifying his separate works through an incremental process and a serial progression: The Voyage that Never Ends. Such is Lowry's fictional translation of a philosophical concept, his extension of the journal form from an initial recording medium to a unifying superstructure. And its state of incompleteness is itself a statement upon the continuity in Lowry's approach to the diverse realms of Life and Art.



## NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), 210.

<sup>2</sup> Selected Letters, p. 210. Here Lowry is quoting Ortega.

<sup>3</sup> Selected Letters, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> Selected Letters, pp. 330-31.

<sup>5</sup> Selected Letters, p. 331.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," Boundary 2, 3, 2(Winter, 1975), 416-17, 434.

<sup>7</sup> Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 82-84, defines "form" in terms of the relation between structure and meaning, and notes that the form itself stands in some relation to external nature. He notes that "as shaping principle, it may be thought of as narrative, organizing temporally what Milton called, in an age of more exact terminology, the 'matter' of his song. As containing principle it may be thought of as meaning, holding the poem together in a simultaneous structure."

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, "Malcolm Lowry as Modernist," Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 189-90.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (1973; rpt. New York: Dell, 1975), 430: "Lowry was a great author who happened to have written only one great book."

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," p. 412.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Terence Bareham, "After the Volcano: An Assessment of Malcolm Lowry's Posthumous Fiction," Studies in the Novel, 6, 3(Autumn 1974), 349-62; Muriel C. Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His art and early life; a study in transformation (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974); Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure"; W. H. New Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart (NCL), 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Day, "Preface" to Malcolm Lowry's Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968), xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," p. 431.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> "Solipsism" is the catch-word of a large faction of Lowry's critics, usually the earlier ones. See Richard H. Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne, 1972); Kingsley Shorter, "Lowry's Private Trip," New Leader, Sept. 15, 1969, pp. 14-16; George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror: Literary Solipsism in Dark As the Grave," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1971), 66-70. Later critics, in giving new credence to Lowry's attempt to transcend the traditional autobiographical form, have shown less predilection in equating subjectivity with bad art.

<sup>16</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure", p. 424. Corrigan argues that "the problem with Lowry is that he wants to do his own reflexive consciousness (i.e. the writer's) justice by allowing it to become all that it is capable of becoming; but that he wants that becoming (which as we've seen takes the character beyond mere character into history, and even process) to settle into a normal narrative framework."

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Tiessen, "Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, pp. 133-43, and Under the Volcano: Lowry and the Cinema (unpublished M.A. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1968). Margaret N. Davidson, Malcolm Lowry: The Cinematic Devices

Used in Under the Volcano (unpublished M.A. theses, Washington State Univ., 1969). John Francis Knoll, Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema (unpublished PhD dissertation, Saint Louis Univ., 1972).

<sup>20</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, Notes of a Film Director, trans. X. Danko (1948; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 77-78.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Doyen, "Elements Towards a Spatian Reading of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano," English Studies, 50(1969), 65-74. Sherrill E. Grace, "Under the Volcano: Narrative Mode and Technique," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 2, 2(Spring 1973), 57-61.

<sup>22</sup> Terrence Wright, "'Under the Volcano': The Static Art of Malcolm Lowry," Ariel I, 4(Oct. 1970), 67-76.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: the Phenomenology of Failure," p. 416.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," Boundary 2, 3, 2(Winter, 1973), 409, notes that "Ghostkeeper," in its present state, is far more satisfying than it would be had Lowry completed it.

<sup>2</sup> Margerie Lowry, in an editorial note of "Ghostkeeper," Malcolm Lowry: Psalms and Songs, ed. Margerie Lowry (New York: Signet (New American Library), 1975), 202, notes that "this is not a 'finished' story, it is a first draft, with notes."

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Lowry, "Ghostkeeper," Ibid., p. 222-23. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1971), 128.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Dunne, An Experiment with Time (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 54.

<sup>6</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," p. 415.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama," Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1961), 38. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Terence Bareham, "After the Volcano: An Assessment of Malcolm Lowry's Posthumous Fiction," Studies in the Novel, 6, 1(Autumn, 1974), 352-53.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," Boundary 2, 3, 2(Winter, 1975), 433.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>6</sup> In Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), 268, Lowry notes that Hesse is the writer to whom he feels he bears the closest resemblance.

<sup>7</sup> Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), 94.

<sup>8</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, "The Doctrine of the Point of View," The Modern Theme, trans. James Cleugh (London: C. W. Daniel, 1931), 90.

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Dunne, An Experiment with Time (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 186-88. Dunne gives as an example of the impossibility of perceiving the relation between linear time and identity this analysis:

You begin by studying Jones as a conscious individual. All that you here discover is that he cannot possibly be conscious unless he is serially conscious.

Noting this, you proceed to examine him as an individual who experiences in succession all the states of that which he observes. This involves your making your picture one dimension larger than Jones. Whereupon, the analysis exhibits Jones to you as a conscious, psychical individual travelling along a time dimension. But it gives no indication that he's anything more than an automaton.

You find, however, that, in proceeding thus far in your analysis, you have logically committed yourself to enlarging your canvas by yet another dimension. . . . Continuation of the analysis shows you a series of Joneses each observing the Jones of the next lower term. All these are imperishable except the first; and all are automatons except the last, about whom you do not yet know enough to dogmatize.

. . . the focussing of attention is a function of the ultimate Jones (the last Jones considered in the series) . . .

<sup>10</sup> William H. New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart (NCL: Canadian Writers Series), 1971), 17.

<sup>11</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1971), 126.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (1947; rpt., London: Penguin, 1962), 344.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Durrant, "Death in Life: Neo-Platonic Elements in 'Through the Panama,'" Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, p. 54, points out that this phrase refers to this story, and notes that for the reader of "Through the Panama" "its interest lies in the open exposure of the method."

<sup>14</sup> Arlen J. Hansen, "The Celebration of Solipsism: A New Trend in American Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies, 19, 1 (Spring 1973), 8.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Richard H. Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne's, 1972), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (1973; rpt. New York: Dell, 1975), 430, is an exception. For him, Lowry is a one-shot novelist who, after completing Under the Volcano, had written himself out.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry, New York Publishing and the 'New Illiteracy,'" Encounter, 35, 1(July, 1970), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Day, "Preface" to Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>8</sup> The manuscript of Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid is housed in the Malcolm Lowry Papers, Special Collections Division, Main Library, of the University of British Columbia, Boxes 14(20-38), 15(1-21). This reference, p. 377, and those following, correspond to the pagination of the manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> Dark As the Grave manuscript, pp. 428-29.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Sigbjørn's idea that getting out of bed ". . . symbolized the struggle between life and death" is found on both p. 130 and p. 191; the evocation of Dunne's notion of dreaming in which "sleep means the re-experiencing of one's past, forgetting one's present and prefeeling one's future" (p. 114), recurs on p. 192. Unless the editors were unaware of this repetition,

or unless the reasoning for the selection of admissible repetition was based on the length of the passage, the editing policy for Dark As the Grave must appear erratic.

<sup>11</sup> Dark As the Grave manuscript, p. 371. C.f. the published version, p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> See Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), 331-32.

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968), 1. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," Boundary 2, 3, 2 (Winter, 1975), 413.

<sup>15</sup> See Lowry's note to his readers on pp. 49-50 (manuscript, p. 377) about the relation between the protagonist of Dark As the Grave and the narrator of Under the Volcano. The same type of relationship is operating within Dark As the Grave, and the technique applies outwards to Lowry's other fiction. An awareness of this process qualifies the critical understanding of Lowry's incremental theory of fiction.

<sup>16</sup> See Matthew Corrigan's "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," p. 431; reproduced on p. 8 of this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> See Dark As the Grave, pp. 151-52. Reproduced on p. 63 of this thesis.



#### NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (1947; rpt. London: Penguin, 1962). Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary gives as an obscure meaning of "altered": "thirsty, dried up."

<sup>3</sup> Dale Edmonds, "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the Immediate Level," Tulane Studies in English, 16(1968), 79, concludes that the material is presented enigmatically and that we can never be sure we are dealing with reality. Andrew Pottinger, "The Consul's 'Murder'" Canadian Literature, 67(Winter, 1976), 53-63, examines the relation between the focus of narration and the given facts in Chapter XII and notes that there is sufficient internal evidence to doubt the facts that the reader initially grasps. Unfortunately, his good observations are rather debased when he goes on to argue that the Consul, in fact, really may be a spy. Sherrill Grace, "Under the Volcano: Narrative Mode and Technique," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 2, 2(Spring, 1973), 58, notes that the narrator always mediates between the reader and the book's characters and that it remains unclear how much the narrator has altered. Lowry claims that the effect is intentional. In the letter to Cape, Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), 70, he counterpoints the Consul's dreadful "mania of persecution" against his sense that his readers feel "that he is indeed being followed throughout the book." He further notes of several of his visual images that "these are projections of the Consul and of the futility of his life, and at the same time are right, are true, are what one sees here" (p. 78).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne, 1972), 107.

<sup>5</sup> William H. New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart (NCL), 1971), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968), 141. Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, pp. 57-88. Subsequent references to the Cape letter are to this edition.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 331-32.

<sup>11</sup> See Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (1973; rpt. New York: Dell (Laurel Paperback Edition), 1975), 247-48.

<sup>12</sup> See John Chalker, "'Under the Volcano:' Geoffrey's Unposted Letter" London Review, (Autumn, 1968), 26-33.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Spender, "Introduction" to Under the Volcano (New York and Philadelphia: Lippincott (Signet Paperback) 1966), vii-xxvi, directs the reader to the cinematic technique of Under the Volcano, and this encourages A. C. Nyland, "The Luminous Wheel: The Evolution of Malcolm Lowry's Style," Malcolm Lowry: Psalms and Songs, ed. Margerie Lowry (New York and Toronto: New American Library, 1975), 170-71, to suggest the concept as a fair reading of the text. Paul Tiessen, in Under the Volcano: Lowry and the Cinema (M.A. Thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1968), writes the most interesting criticism to date on the novel's cinematic technique. John Knoll, Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema (PhD dissertation, Saint Louis Univ., 1972), essaying the same ground as Tiessen, perceives Lowry as editor of Laruelle's film. M. C. Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life: A Study in Transformation (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974) launches the potential debate when she extends Laruelle's conception of the Consul as Lord Jim to his own role as Marlow and notes that Laruelle "presides over the whole tale as a shaping figure" (p. 12) although "the book is not just what he sees" (p. 60). W. H. New, Malcolm Lowry, p. 32, hits the point squarely when he concludes that Laruelle, in the act of remembering, "contains" the events of the year before; he finds his way to this not through the examination of the book's narrative technique (c.f. Tiessen) but its structure. Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erie, Ontario: Press Porcepac, 1973), seems to be the critic most excited about Laruelle and the book's cinematic techniques (see p. 131), but he applies his findings, strangely I think, to the book's mythic and symbolic dimensions.

Evidence abounds within Under the Volcano and any reader who looks for it can find it. My interest is less with establishing the point thematically than with extending it into the formal

processes of the book. But Douglas Day's Malcolm Lowry: A Critical Biography, pp. 247-48, indicates that in earlier drafts Laruelle is portrayed as dreaming the events of the year before and then bringing them to life. And a catalogue written by Lowry in the manuscript of Dark As the Grave, p. 286, which shows a part of the relation between Lowry and his characters, indicates the centrality of Laruelle:

In Reality	In the Valley
Bad guilty self plus imagination	The Consul
Self plus imagination	Laruelle
Self plus even less imagination	Hugh
Self plus Primrose's imagination	Yvonne
Self plus Fernando Marquez	Vigil
Ditto	Juan Cerillo

<sup>14</sup> See Sherrill Grace, "Under the Volcano: Narrative Mode and Technique," p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> See Dale Edmonds, "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the Immediate Level," p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Godfrey, "River Two Blind Jacks," Canadian Short Stories, 2nd series, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 301-17.

<sup>17</sup> Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 153, 74-75.

<sup>18</sup> W. H. New, Malcolm Lowry, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> This process is superbly mirrored in Lowry's use of Revelations imagery. Apart from the thematic connections, Revelations corresponds in form to Under the Volcano's temporal processes. St. John's alleged "dream" experience provides the material for his chronicle or journal entry that gives form to what is to come, and in this way, the actual experience follows the record of it in the holy book. Life follows Art here, and Art is based upon the preconceived experience of the later experience. The book and the fact, paradoxically, create one another. The relevant question for Under the Volcano, then, is, does Laruelle create the Consul's story, or does it create him?

Under the Volcano abounds in these types of inversions. Because the form establishes this on the narrative level, the thematic level employs several such possibilities. In the pelado

episode of Chapter VIII, the legal problem arises of becoming an "accessory after the fact" (p. 245). But with Lowry's handling of time, such fine distinctions between before and after are impossible to make. In the metaphorical application of the pelado to the Consul, Hugh and Laruelle are to some extent promoters of his downfall, and yet are after the fact accessories as well.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> Clifford Leech, "The Shaping of Time: Nostromo and Under the Volcano," Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt, ed. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen, 1968), 339.

<sup>22</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 331.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Tiessen, Under the Volcano: Lowry and the Cinema, quote is on p. 84.

<sup>24</sup> Victor Doyen, "Elements Towards a Spatial Reading of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano," English Studies, 59(1969), 73.

<sup>25</sup> Terrence Wright, "'Under the Volcano' -- The Static Art of Malcolm Lowry," Ariel I, 4(Oct. 1970), 67-76.

<sup>26</sup> Sherrill Grace, "Under the Volcano: Narrative Mode and Technique," p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Clifford Leech, "The Shaping of Time: Nostromo and Under the Volcano," p. 228.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Durrant, "Death if Life: Neo-Platonic Elements in 'Through the Panama,'" Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1971), pp. 42-55.

<sup>30</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 75.

## NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup> From "Joseph Conrad," Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Earle Birney (San Francisco: City Lights, 1962), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), 331-32.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Corrigan, "Malcolm Lowry: The Phenomenology of Failure," Boundary 2, 3, 2(Winter, 1975), 412-13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Day, "Preface" to Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (Toronto: General Publishing, 1968), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Richard K. Cross, "Moby Dick and Under the Volcano: Poetry from the Abyss," Modern Fiction Studies, 20, 2(Summer, 1974), 151.

<sup>7</sup> The image is of the Panama Canal in Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama," Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1961), 62.

<sup>8</sup> William H. Gass, "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction," Fiction and the Figures of Life (New York: Knopf, 1970), 3-26. Gass notes that an author's concept of this role need have no connection to how he conceptualizes himself in the real world:

"Thus, so many of the things which are false or foolish when taken to the real world -- in religion or philosophy -- become the plainest statements of what's true when taken to fiction, for in the beginning is the word, and if the esthetic aim of any fiction is the creation of a world, then the writer is creator -- he is god -- and the relation of a writer to his work represents in ideal form the relation of the fabled Creator to his creation." (p. 18)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20. Gass explains:

[The author] may enjoy his alleged omnipotence, his omniscience and omnipresence, but with it, spoiling it, is responsibility. What about all that perfection? Can he take upon himself this burden? Can he assure his readers that his world is good, whatsoever happens? He can explain it no better than the theologian; therefore shortly the novelist who assumes the point of view of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent narrator begins to insist upon his imperfection; apologize, in a gently way perhaps, for his cutpurses, whores, his murderers, and in general surrender his position . . . And when the artist begins to explain that, of course, omnipotence is artistically vulgar, that one must limit oneself to a point of view, he is insisting, for his world, upon the restriction of knowledge to the human, and often only to a few of these, and finally only to rare moments occurring in the best minds. He allows himself to be governed by them, not to govern, as if God stepped down in favour of moving mass and efficient causes, so to say: "This is not mine; I do not this; I am not here." Novels in which the novelist has effaced himself create world without gods.

<sup>10</sup> William H. Gass, "In Terms of the Toenail: Fiction and the Figures of Life," Fiction and the Figures of Life, pp. 55-76.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1971), 128, connects Coleridge to Lowry: "The problem of harmonizing the mind with the outside environment is, of course, a central one in works like Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', which Lowry absorbed so thoroughly as to bind it integrally into the structure and effect of 'Through the Panama'. From Coleridge, Lowry also accepted many of his ideas about the fluidity of time . . ." M. C. Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life: A Study in Transformation (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 125, suggests that Coleridge may inform Lowry's propensity to perceive "both the natural and the invisible worlds in the world of common life." And W. H. New, in "A Note on Romantic Allusions in Hear Us O Lord," Studies in Canadian Literature, 1, 1 (Winter, 1976), 131, suggests that Coleridge's "The Aeolian Harp," where "animated nature / Be but organic harps diversely fram'd," provides Lowry with a parallel between fictional structure and the means by which separate entities, in

the aggregate, make a unified whole in Life. Coleridge thus offers Lowry a method for fictional form: "Coleridge's lines serve both to remind us of the technical structure -- the use of analogies, motifs, images -- that provide this unity, and to focus out attention on the work's intellectual basis."

<sup>13</sup> Samule Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 453.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 454

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

<sup>17</sup> W. H. New, "Lowry's Reading," p. 128. New says of Dunne's book: "Though it had a strong following in the decade or so after its publication, it has been attacked -- for 'spatializing' a non-spatial concept, for identifying the problems of time passing with those of time past, and for interpreting time as itself a process in time -- but such objections did not particularly disturb Lowry. Paul Tiessen shows how Lowry's 'cinematic' technique in works like Under the Volcano, for example, is adopted to presenting temporal flux in spatial terms. Dark As the Grave extends the method and most clearly demonstrates Dunne's idea."

<sup>18</sup> And at this point Dunne's logic caves in. He presupposes the centrality of the perceiving consciousness when he refutes the validity of the phenomena, and the time scheme in which they operate, which this consciousness perceives. But he gives no a priori evidence for the fact of being upon which his experiments with time are predicated. Phenomena are evaluated in relation to a perceiving consciousness; logic demands that this method be reciprocal, and that the space and time-spheres of the perceiving consciousness also be evaluated in relation to the phenomena he perceives.

<sup>19</sup> Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>21</sup> See J. W. Dunne, An Experiment With Time (New York: MacMillan, 1927), 186-87, rpt., note to Chapter II #9. See also note #17 above.

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