REMITTANCE BARDS:
THE PLACES, TRIBES, AND DIALECTS OF PATRICK WHITE AND MALCOLM LOWRY

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the efforts of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry between the years 1933 and 1957 to "purify the dialect of the tribe." As young writers in the England of the Thirties both felt the language of the English middle class, the pre-dominant dialect of English fiction, to be exhausted. Some time in the Forties, both chose to live and write in isolated places where they believed there to be English dialects which possessed a vigour and a contact with reality absent in the England they had abandoned. The texture and structure of their subsequent writing demonstrate the effects of this choice of locales.

My introductory chapter surveys the concern of both novelists, up to the end of the Fifties, with language, class, and place, and addresses the biographical facts relevant to these concerns. This discussion establishes the formal, linguistic, and ideological parameters of my approach to these novelists. The body of the thesis is divided into two sections: the first deals with the period up to 1941, the second with the post-war period.

Part A, chapter I addresses the cultural background and the ideological confusion of young middle-class writers in England during the Thirties. The following three chapters set the early novels of both writers in this context. Part B begins by establishing the post-war literary milieu in England from which the fiction of White and Lowry offers a sharp break. The following five chapters consider the continuing influence of Thirties dilemmas on their approach to form and the use of language, the attempts of both writers to find formal means adequate to their readings of the contemporary world, and their progressive break with literary realism.

The conclusion evaluates the literary results of these struggles with language: in particular, the degree to which a creative use of dialect has extended the range of the English novel during a period characterized in England by caution and retrenchment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Introduction

To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray, -- these are the things that make men happy ... The world's prosperity or adversity depends upon our knowing and teaching these few things: but upon iron, or glass, or electricity, or steam, in no wise.

John Ruskin, Modern Painters

England is the country and the country is England.

Stanley Baldwin, On England

Dylan Thomas once described himself to an American audience as a "remittance bard."[1] The epithet, though wittily placed, is not quite just. The point about remittance men is that the income which allows them to indulge their vices in distant places must come not from abroad but from home. Thomas was simply following that line of English poets and novelists who have toured America in search of much needed cash. However outrageous his behaviour, no respectable relative was sufficiently scandalized to pack him off to the colonies. However appealing to him was the notion of remittances, no-one was prepared to pay to keep him out of England. The life of Malcolm Lowry, on the other hand, is a late classic in the remittance man tradition. Malcolm Lowry was a true remittance bard.

The youngest son in a wealthy, Methodist, Liverpool family, Malcolm Lowry decided early in life to rebel against the "virtues" of his background. He would have no truck with respectability, church going, money making, sobriety, and filial piety. So he fled abroad to exotic places and ended up in one of those English-speaking backwaters which remained for Lowry's tribe, the English Imperial middle class, right up to the Second World War "the colonies." Throughout Lowry's travellings from 1933

on the unpurged image of his father tormented his soul while the steady remittances his father sent him helped to slake his prodigious thirst.

To the Lowrys of Liverpool Malcolm was a wastrel, a drain on the family resources and patience regarded with mixed annoyance and puzzled affection. That writing might be regarded as a serious occupation seems never to have occurred to Arthur O. Lowry, Malcolm's father. In 1942 Arthur Lowry wrote his son a letter which reveals an unabashed philistinism in remarks such as these:

> I aspire to no literary effort in this letter but just to simple plain facts.
>
> I admire your literary gifts but literature deprived of simple human facts is not the food a father's and mother's heart can feed upon.[2]

To the end of his life, Lowry played the role of unrepentent prodigal to A.O. Lowry's version of the stern but potentially forgiving father. Lowry senior saw the relationship in explicitly Biblical terms, urging his son in the letter already quoted to "Read the story of the Prodigal Son." Malcolm Lowry played the congenial role of prodigal long after his father's death.

As with all prodigals and remittance men Lowry never completely freed himself from the background he took such pains to flee. He remained a prisoner of the family, the class, and the place in which he was born. We misunderstand the man and his writing if we fail to grasp the fatal flaw in his rebellion: Lowry remained dependent on all that he rejected. Even as a married man in his thirties, Lowry was prepared to write begging letters to his father which offer the contrition and self-abasement demanded by the holder of the purse strings. At the same time he despised everything his father stood for. Lowry had none of Earnest Pontifex's scruples when it came to accepting money from sources whose values he repudiated. Like Samuel Beckett, his near contemporary, Lowry was both kept and strangled far into adult life on a long parental leash. Even Lowry's poverty -- Lowry always had a romantic and bourgeois-baiting enthusiasm for the trappings of poverty -- rested upon an unearned income. As Earle Birney, the Canadian poet and Lowry's friend at Dollarton, notes in the margin of his copy of Lowry's Selected Letters against Harvey Breit's impassioned introductory piece on Lowry's financial distress:

> his poverty was never 'complete'; he had an allowance from his father, small, but significant in the thirties, and after 1947 an increasing income from books. He lived free of rent and taxes at Dollarton. His poverty was the result of his alcoholism.[3]

Patrick White's life story, considered in the remittance-man tradition, has an unfamiliar twist: unwilling to fit into the colonial grazier world of his parents, he was supported in London throughout the late Thirties by remittances from Australia. Born in London in 1912, three years after Lowry was born, White spent his childhood in Australia and was sent back to England at age thirteen to be educated, or "ironed out" as he himself has put it, at a militaristic public school, Cheltenham.[4] After coming down from Cambridge in 1935 White was no more able to return to his class, the Australian version of the English country gentry, and act out the expected role as grazier than Lowry, when he came down in 1932, was able to return to the bosom of the provincial Imperial middle class to cultivate an interest in the fate of oil and cotton stocks. White, like Katherine Mansfield before him, began to write as a reverse remittance man. Far from being sent to "the colonies" for alcoholic or other scandalous reasons, he was maintained comfortably in London by a puzzled but

tolerant father unsure what to make of the cuckoo hatched in an otherwise tidy nest: an artist. White's homosexuality does not seem to have been a problem for his family as was Lowry's drinking, if only because it was more easily ignored. The fatal brand of separateness that made White an outsider in his family, his class, and his country was neither drunkenness nor homosexuality but the mere fact of being an artist.

At any rate, it is hardly surprising that White should have chosen like so many other Australian writers and artists between the wars to settle in London where he wrote pale poems, derivative novels, and unstaged plays. There is a photograph of Patrick White in a Time-Life study of Australia and New Zealand published in 1964 in which we see a stylishly dressed urbane figure against a background of modernist paintings and bric-à-brac.[5] This same book also contains a series of photographs of the White family sheep station, "Belltrees."[6] As White's autobiography, Flaws in the Glass, reveals, "Belltrees" is one of the several farms of "the White brothers," Patrick's father and uncles, whom we see in all their Edwardian confidence -- wealthy, decent, masculine, decidedly of the governing class -- in a photo-

graph in Flaws in the Glass.[7] What is striking is the similarity of the Whites of "Belltrees" in 1964 to the solid Edwardian group in Flaws in the Glass. In both groups we sense an unassailable stability, a fixed conviction of belonging to a superior class, and a supreme confidence that one's family and its privileges will endure in spite of time and change. Depicted at dinner on resplendent mahogany, the modern grazier Whites might have leapt from the pages of one of their cousin's novels set in the 1910s. It is significant that the Time-Life book does not allude to the connection between the novelist and the graziers. To outward appearances White has escaped their world; he is no longer identifiable with his origins. Yet in his fiction of the Fifties and Sixties White returns again and again to the vanished world of Edwardian colonial graziers. In his novels the world of "the White brothers" continues to figure as a point of stability, although contemporary history is everywhere recorded as a series of savage declensions.

Like Lowry, then, White never completely freed himself from his origins. And as with Lowry, the period in which he first asserted his independence of his background

was one in which he relied upon remittances from home to finance his self-expression. White made his break with family, class, and nation during the late Thirties when he set himself up as a writer on the faintly raffish borderland between gentility and bohemia on four hundred pounds per annum remitted. Ebury Street, where White lived on coming down from Cambridge, was still stylish in the Thirties, though declined from its former splendours. Situated where Belgravia slips into Pimlico, it had been elegant enough in the pre-war period for George Moore to have rooms there. Osbert Sitwell recalls visiting Moore there around that time.[8] Ebury Street is chosen by Virginia Woolf in The Years (1937) as a suitable place in 1914 in which to install an upper-middle-class bachelor of taste.[9] Certainly, Ebury Street was not in the late Thirties quite as raffish and bohemian as White paints it in Flaws in the Glass.[10] White's distortion of his Ebury Street milieu is not merely the result of his romanticism. White declasses Ebury Street in retrospect because there for the first time in his life, he had been able to put a distance between himself and his "tribe." Ebury Street allowed him to make his first telling gesture of independence, even if his flamboyant denial of origins was made possible

by a generous allowance from home. Having made this gesture White was able to return to Australia in 1947 without fear of being swallowed by family and class. He had transcended the rebel's need to announce his rebellion by means of an aggressive style. Henceforth he would express his flamboyance in his writing rather than in his way of life. He bought a small farm outside Sydney at Castle Hill, a semi-rural suburb in those days, where he set himself to cultivate humility. The White of this period stares at us mournfully from beside the flank of his "illicit cow."[11] At Castle Hill, White was able to observe his former tribe from a safe distance.

Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry at crucial points in their careers both left the London milieu in which, however marginally, they were on their way to becoming established as minor novelists who might yet produce major work. They moved as far as possible from the city which until the Second World War was the intellectual centre of the English-speaking world. They did not content themselves with a cottage in the Sussex countryside and the option of commuting to London. They did not choose to settle in any of the favourite watering holes of expatriate English literati around the Mediterranean littoral. The Mediterra-

nean was very popular in the Twenties and Thirties among writers who, like Norman Douglas and the Australian Martin Boyd, found the English-speaking world "chaste and castrated" (the phrase is Ezra Pound's).[12] As Cyril Connolly's narrator observes in The Rock Pool (1935) one could tour the South of France in the Thirties by following the colonies of writers in the various towns.[13] White, evidently, found such a lifestyle attractive after the war, more attractive anyway than that offered by an exhausted England. He narrowly rejected the life of a Hellenic beach-comber in favour of Australia in 1946-7.[14]

Nor can White and Lowry satisfactorily be grouped with all those English writers from public schools and Oxbridge who travelled abroad in the Thirties in search of exotic locales with which to compare a moribund English civilization (so it was widely perceived). Such expeditions, as Paul Fussell shows in his Abroad, were all the rage in the doom-ridden Thirties.[15] Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Robert Byron, Evelyn Waugh, and Peter Fleming -- all made such journeys and wrote them up for a receptive public. The travels of White and Lowry in this period had different motivations and different outcomes from those of these others. White and

Lowry wrote no travel books proper, although their first novels have something in common with the genre. Ultramarine (1933), like many Thirties travel books, describes an uncomfortable and hazardous journey to out-of-the-way places undertaken by a young middle-class Englishman. Like so many of their generation, White and Lowry felt European civilization to be in imminent danger of collapse. But they were less sure than Auden or Waugh or Robert Byron of their own place within that guttering civilization. They were more profoundly drawn to worlds outside the normal understanding of educated Englishmen than were these others. Between school and Cambridge both abandoned for a time the comforts of upper-middle-class life and took up menial occupations: White as a "jackeroo" on outback sheep stations, Lowry as a deckhand on a freighter. These descents into the labouring classes signal that White and Lowry were seriously seeking some alternative to "civilization" as their education had taught them to understand that term. Neither Auden nor Isherwood made such descents, and even Orwell did so primarily for research purposes. White and Lowry were drawn to the primitive and the proletarian not merely as something to observe but also as a possible way of life. At any rate, in the Thirties they were not

interested merely in describing foreign or exotic experiences to a middle-class English audience.

White and Lowry were by no means unusual in their desire to flee England as it was in the late Thirties. The title of Osbert Sitwell's book written at the end of the Thirties, Escape with Me (1939), bespeaks the mood of a generation of English intellectuals eager to discover some part of the globe not "made and governed in the image of Manchester or Detroit."[16] Whether from horror of the ghosts of grandfathers, of reigning dullness, or of impending bombs, England by 1939 was widely held to be a place to get out of. White and Lowry are unusual in the unlikely places for which they traded a depressed and depressing England. Both chose places where they could expect to find little in the way of literary communities or significant new reading publics. White, of course, had the attraction of a remembered landscape to pull him back to Australia. But no less than Lowry he found the inhabitants of the desired landscape intolerably dull. And more than Lowry, who always preferred nature to culture, the rough-and-ready to the polished, White missed in Australia the "civilized surroundings" he had known in London.[17]

It was a landscape without figures to which he chose to return. It is worth considering just how unlikely were British Columbia and Australia as places of residence for Lowry and White in the Forties. They were backwaters inhabited,according to both writers, largely by philistines. They were bourgeois in the sense in which bohemians and dandies understand the term. They were provincial and John Bullish. And they were those parts of the English-speaking world least tolerant of each writer's particular "vice." Lowry, the drunk, chose to settle in British Columbia where, despite the fortunes made by Vancouver businessmen in the Twenties running rum to prohibition America, liquor laws that Lowry's Wesleyan father might have dreamed up, and the hideousness of what passed in the province for drinking establishments meant that drinking was decidedly "beset" for a "self-respecting drunkard" like Malcolm Lowry.[18] White, the homosexual, chose to set up house with his Greek lover in Australia at a time when Greeks were considered black and "poofteroos," if they were suspected, were altogether beyond the pale.[19]

Much of what White has written about life in Australia and Lowry about life in Canada is so scathing

that one is forced to wonder how or why either managed to endure his long stay. There is a quality of hysteria in both cases. White's survey of contemporary Australia in "The Prodigal Son," an essay written in the Fifties that is part apologia, part manifesto, recalls T.S. Eliot's "immense panorama" of the modern world in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth."[20] Everywhere there is ugliness, futility, the sprawling emptiness of a fallen democratic world. Eschewing Eliot's empyrean tone, White piles image upon image of the ugly, the banal, the fatuous. For White, like Eliot, the dung-heap of modernity is built up out of the leavings of democracy, and Australia with its levelling and rancorous democratic spirit is the most fallen of possible worlds. The cult of the average that satisfies the paltry desires of the common man produces inevitably for White a cultural wasteland. Such an authorial attitude is to be found, sometimes concealed, sometimes overt, in all White's Australian fiction. At times, White seeks to distract our attention from this ideology by his public statements in favour of the Australian Labour Party and by his determination to depict ordinary Australian life. But his formal method, his style, his narrative stances have always been at odds with such democratic statements.

White's method has been not to depict but to aestheticize ordinary experience. In "The Prodigal Son" White makes clear that his intention from his arrival in Australia was to render from a symbolist perspective and with high romantic colourings the traditional material of realistic fiction. His problem was that he found Australia as it was quite unsuitable for the kind of art he had in mind to produce. In White's aestheticism which finds expression above all in his style we find most clearly evidence of his distaste for the common experience of Australia. It is as though the style is designed to hold at arm's length the vulgar matter of the narrative.

Lowry's loathing of Canadian urban life is Jeremian in the violence of its expression and in the range of its condemnation. His incessant railings against Vancouver exceed the licence we allow a drunkard thwarted in his addiction by the puritanism and provincialism of British Columbia in the Forties. Reading his later work, one feels that his love of the Canadian landscape was achieved at the expense of an injustice to Canada as a whole. Lowry's love of Dollarton was in inverse proportion to his hatred of Vancouver. It is as though he could only express the one in terms of its negation of the other.

Lowry needed Vancouver at close hand to stand as a ready example of all that was wrong with the modern world so that Dollarton by contrast might be invested with the numinous aura of a wholeness that had elsewhere succumbed to the fragmentation of modern history.

Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry share a dualistic habit of mind which infects not only their handling of character but also their ability to see whole their adoptive countries. White's Australia is either a landscape which encourages mystical possibilities or the endless banality of suburbia. Lowry's Canada is either the unspoiled wilderness of Dollarton or the infinite squalor of downtown Vancouver. Both writers, it is true, experimented with various means of including these dualities within larger wholes, but neither ever managed to shuck off his initial dualistic response to the country in which he had chosen to live and write. Given their common contempt for the societies they found in their respective backwaters and given the novelist's need of a rich social life on which to draw, why did White and Lowry remain so long in such unlikely places?

The simple answer to this question is that both writers were averse to society in nearly all its contemporary forms and preferred uncluttered nature. Such an explanation at least serves to account for the extraordinary degree of isolation they accepted. Lowry almost entirely cut himself off from the outside world, protecting his hard-won domestic bliss in a squatter's shack on the beach at Dollarton. White settled down on a small farm outside Sydney, cultivating a stormy but intermittently blissful domesticity while raising dogs, goats, flowers, and vegetables. A major source of their satisfaction with their respective backwaters is suggested by the bucolic activities to which they turned: milking on illicit cow, building a makeshift pier, growing cabbages, observing the seasons. In a world of technology, utility, motion, and masses we detect the ring of a Ruskinite litany. White and Lowry are fighting their way back against the dirty stream of contemporary history and have, it would seem, stumbled on still unspoiled worlds of organic virtue.

Yet there were still plenty of rural backwaters in the England of the Thirties loaded with charm, history, and thatched cottages. Moreover, the modern world had

unequivocally reached both British Columbia and Sydney by the outbreak of World War II. White's semi-rural retreat was engulfed during the Fifties and Sixties by the red brick march of suburbia. Lowry's shack at Dollarton faced an oil refinery which belched through the war years, oiling the machinery of a civilization bent on self-destruction. There was, however, a signal advantage that Dollarton and Castle Hill enjoyed over an English cathedral town or a pleasant backwater like Zennor, a town which Auden favoured as a holiday spot and in which White wrote Housman-like poems in the mid Thirties.[21] The advantage was simply that modernization had gone further in England, its presence was felt more ubiquitously. This meant that it was difficult in England by the Thirties to find any place where the traditional ways not only lingered on as quaint relics of the past but also possessed more than a remnant of their former life. The connection between the past and present had been too sharply broken. It was possible to mourn the old ways but not to offer them as constituting a still viable way of life.

In England during the Twenties and Thirties the process of the eradication of traditional ways of life

was more or less consolidated. The old organic world was expunged from the countryside by the new towns, ribbon developments, modern factories in the south, mock-Tudor suburbia, and arterial highways. This is the process opposed most vehemently by Lawrence in the Twenties and Leavis in the Thirties. But it was opposed also by a large number of Thirties writers who did not at all share Lawrence's conservative politics. It was opposed, for instance, by C. Day Lewis, George Orwell, and John Betjeman, to compile a promiscuous list. It is clear that English writers of the Thirties felt that a point of no return had been reached. Modernity was triumphant and only a few pockets of tradition, a few last outposts of the old organic order, remained to be mopped up. In Australia and in British Columbia the process had not gone so far. White and Lowry deliberately positioned themselves on frontiers between two worlds: the traditional rural world in which man supposedly felt himself to be part of natural process and the modern world in which man is alienated from natural process. Fifty years previously, as Raymond Williams observes in Culture and Society (1958), D.H. Lawrence had found himself on just such a frontier at Haggs Farm where he loved Jessie Chambers, the "Miriam"

of Sons and Lovers.[22] At Haggs Farm, Lawrence was able to observe and evaluate the new reality from the standpoint of a vanishing reality. The advantage of Dollarton and Castle Hill for Lowry and White was that these places offered what Haggs Farm had offered Lawrence: a perspective from within an intact organic order that was threatened but not yet on the point of being squeezed out of reality. In England by the Thirties Williams' "frontier," a word which suggests a demarcation between separate and roughly equivalent forces, had collapsed. According to Leavis by the early Thirties the organic community of the old England "had so nearly disappeared from memory that to make anyone, however educated, realize what it was is commonly a difficult undertaking."[23]

Yet Leavis claimed not only that its traces were detectable in England but also that such communities continued to exist outside England. Scrutiny writers were wont to use two books in particular as evidence that such a thing as "the organic community" had ever existed and that its passing ought to be considered a loss. One of these was Stuart Chase's Mexico, a work which Lowry knew and admired. Chase's book was attractive to

Leavisites because it suggested that in the organic quality of Mexican peasant life was to be found an answer to the ugliness, the frenzy, and the dislocations of modern life. In other words, Mexican peasants with their poverty, their illiteracy, their superstitions, the handicrafts, their subsistence agriculture provided an attractive alternative to the utilitarian-industrial kind of life that Manchester and Detroit were successfully exporting all over the world. "Mexico," Chase asserted, was "one of the last stands of the handicraft age,"[24] and this was enough to recommend it to disgruntled observers of the modern world, Lowry among them.

That Lowry shared Leavis' and Chase's notions about the organic virtues of Mexican peasant life is shown not only by the echoes of Chase's book in Under the Volcano (1947) but also in an article which Lowry had typed during his second visit to Mexico in 1945-6 and which he used as working notes for a novel uncompleted at the time of his death, "La Mordida." The article is entitled "Vanishing Enchantment" and it attributes the loss of the old Mexican sense of the beauty and enchantment of the world to prosperity, to ugly modern

architecture, and to tourism.[25] Its author liberally quotes from the English journal, Country Life, as evidence in support of his claim that traditional rural life offered the Mexican peasant a sense of at-homeness in the world and kept alive his sense of wonder. In this somewhat grotesque transposition of English nostalgia for the world before industrialism to Mexican conditions we find the kind of longing that drew Lowry to Mexico in the mid Thirties.

The second book Leavis and his followers used as evidence that the organic community was not a myth but an authentic part of the English past was George Sturt's The Wheelwright Shop (1923).[26] Leavis quotes a passage from this work in his Culture and Environment (1933) which reveals the shape of the nostalgia that afflicted Leavis, Lowry, and White. The passage is worth quoting:

> The men, unlettered, often taciturn, sure of themselves, muscular, not easily tired, were in a sort of way an epitome of the indomitable adaption of our breed to land and to climate. As a wild animal species to its habitat, so these workmen had fitted themselves to the local conditions of life and death.

> Individually they had no special claim to notice; but as members of old-world communities they exemplified well how the South English tribes, traversing their fertile valleys, their shaggy hills, had matched themselves against problems without number, and had handed on, from father to son, the accumulated store of experience. If one could know enough, one might see, in ancient village crafts like that of the sawyers, the reflections as it were of the peculiarities of the countryside -- the difficulties and dangers, the daily conditions -- to which these crafts were the answer.
>
> ... they themselves, you found, were specialists of no mean order when it came to the problem of getting a heavy tree -- half a ton or so of lumber -- on a saw pit and splitting it longitudinally into specified thicknesses, no more and no less. What though the individual looked stupid? That lore of the English tribes as it were embodied in them was not stupid any more than an animal's shape is stupid. It was an organic thing, very different from the organized effects of commerce.[27]

This is precisely the world of Stan Parker at "Durilgai" in Patrick White's The Tree of Man (1955). Stan Parker, White's pioneer small farmer, is "muscular", "taciturn", and on the face of it "stupid". In "Durilgai" we see a community composed of peasants of English stock (except for the Irish) in the process of fitting itself to a habitat. When Sturt claims that

"the peculiarities of the countryside" are reflected in the lives of the people we may think of White's praise of a novel by the New Zealander Maurice Shadbolt in which White speaks of Shadbolt's ability to convey the ways in which "the tremors and often disastrous eruptions" of the land are reflected in the lives of "its only superficially bland inhabitants."[28] These words are far more appropriate to The Tree of Man than to Shadbolt's pedestrian novel. When Stan Parker teaches young Joe Peabody to fence we see the handing on from one generation to the next of "the accumulated store of experience." Stan's inability to hand on what he knows to his son, Ray, is one of the chief signs in the novel of the breakdown of the organic community under the impact of a rootless modernity. Cut off from his origins, Ray becomes an utterly fragmented being visited in spite of himself by moments of nostalgia for the golden-grained, animal world of childhood.

The same mood of mixed wistfulness and affirmation -- wistful for a world that belongs in the past, affirmative because against all the odds it is alive in the present -- informs Lowry's "The Forest Path to the Spring" (1961). Here the community depicted is less

tribal than in Sturt's or even White's evocations of the organic past. Lowry's "Eridanus" is composed of the outcasts of the modern world: a rag-bag of nationalities. Yet in a curious way these flotsam are joined by a bond that is as nearly tribal as is possible in the modern world. The fishermen and squatters at "Eridanus" have been uprooted, but they are not rootless. They are throw-backs to an older way of life, and as such they are displaced everywhere in a world that has no use for any of the traditional modes of connection. Only in "Eridanus", where they live under the daily threat of eviction and against the grain of contemporary history, can they keep alive the old religious attitudes towards crafts. Here a house is built out of the communal store of knowledge. Here men live "as integral parts in the rural community." Here the members of the community have "fitted themselves to the local conditions of life and death."

In these works composed around the same time and arising out of White's and Lowry's discoveries of what they took to be organic communities we find a similar and quite unexpected sense of affirmation. To turn from <u>The Living and the Dead</u> (1941) or <u>Under the Volcano</u> to

The Tree of Man or "The Forest Path to the Spring" is to turn from novels caught up by the movement of disintegration they trace to novels in which the possibility of human wholeness is not merely suggested but is actively affirmed. In the earlier novels we find intimations of possible wholeness, of ways of life more rounded and satisfying than those that are the norm in a European civilization slipping into the Second World War. Invariably, these alternatives are located outside the worlds which the novels describe and invariably they are unable to resist the furious bias of contemporary history towards disaster which both novels record. In the latter works there is an elegiac tone, a recognition of the precariousness of what has been recovered and that it exists not so much by virtue of place as by authorial act of will or desire. Yet this elegiac tone does not negate the affirmation. The desired alternatives to a civilization on the verge of collapse are not in the latter works merely unlikely and unconvincing gestures. They are the fixed points, the "realities," from which the novelists now write.

The depth of affirmation in The Tree of Man and in "The Forest Path to the Spring" is signalled above all by a new quality in the writing itself. There is a new vigour and a new simplicity in the use of language that is not merely the result of Biblical or epical imitation. The discovery of this new texture of language knits together the various themes I have been tracing. In these works both novelists manage to bring together dialect, place, and tribe. This is not merely a question of their having found dialects more vigorous and colloquial than those of the classes, or tribes, from which they had come. It is the result for both writers of having found places in which language had not yet lost its original and most sacred function of naming things. Language had not yet been corrupted by abstraction and by habit.

In each work certain words achieve an incantatory effect as its author strives by naming to invest with original significance things whose aura has been lost as part of the legacy of expulsion from the organic community. By "aura" I mean the numinous quality that objects possess for those who accept the romantic-

organicist notion that the perceiver is part of the world he perceives, that perception is a creative act rather than the mere passive reception of images. This notion, of course, goes back to Blake and Coleridge and Wordsworth. An echo of Blake's "The Sun's Light when he unfolds it/ Depends on the Organ that beholds it" may be heard in Lowry's "Oh, what light and love can do to four gas tanks at sunrise over the water."[29] White's use of light in Voss (1957) draws directly on the same romantic notion that there is a creative collaboration between the mind, the eye, tricks of light, and the object world. In The Tree of Man and in "The Forest Path to the Spring" White and Lowry strive to create a language adequate to their discoveries of places in which, apparently, the mind is able romantically to feel itself at home with the world of things. They attempt to close the gap between words and the things to which words refer. They aim to create a Coleridgean language of symbols that might suggest the connections between all things and restore poetry to a universe whence it has been banished by commerce and science.

In The Tree of Man the essential words name the few concrete things with which Stan seeks to impress himself upon the wilderness but which are, ultimately, the agents of his inclusion within the world he changes: tree, fire, axe, dog. These words possess only their barest, denotative function as is appropriate in a world of absolute simplicities. Yet, precisely because there is such an equivalence between the words and the few, fundamental objects they denote, the words achieve the epic, incantatory, and universal qualities of Biblical narrative: Stan is the man; Amy is the woman. White, it would seem, has discovered in the very pristineness, the utter absence of sophistication of the outback, the connection he has long sought between words and things, events and meaning. In "The Forest Path to the Spring" the key words are those of elements or natural things or of the secondary effects of natural phenomena: spring, wood, fire, light. Gradually, as we read the story these things cease merely to name things in the world. Instead, they map the infinitely subtle registrations of a particular world on consciousness, on the reader's as much as the narrator's. The narrator of "The Forest Path to the Spring" describes the language of "Durilgai" as much as that of

"Eridanus" in these words:

> If we had progressed ... it was as if to a region where such words as spring, water, houses, trees, vines, laurels, mountains, wolves, bay, roses, beach, islands, forest, tides and deer and snow and fire, had realized their true being, or had their source (HL, 280).

To gauge the effect of this mood of affirmation on the writing of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry we need only compare The Tree of Man and "The Forest Path to the Spring," which were written around the mid Fifties with their fiction of the Thirties and of the early war years. Nothing is so striking in The Living and the Dead as the sense of the inadequacy of available language to the novelist's task. There is an obsessive recording in the novel of the effects of advertising, jazz, and the cinema on the ability of people to think, feel, or act clearly. The novel recognizes reluctantly that it must employ the currency of a language that has been debased by contemporary usage: it is infected by what it records. In Lowry's first novel, Ultramarine, there is a pervasive quality of straining after effect in the dwelling on the exotic names of ships, of places, of characters, and with the racy idiom of the sailors. At one point, after

treating us to a passage of obscene sailors' talk, the narrator discloses to us what sea voyages offer him that he cannot find back home in Liverpool with bourgeois family and "pure" girlfriend: "a selection of the real languages of men."[30] Dana Hilliot, then, like the young novelist, Malcolm Lowry, is voyaging out from the dead, mechanical England of his class and time in search of the Wordsworthian point where language, invigorated by the organic life of the peasantry, touches reality. It is logical that, the English peasantry having long since been turned into factory fodder, Lowry/Hilliot should seek their substitute in the mens' quarters of a tramp steamer: "Fourteen men in a forecastle. How swiftly, how incredibly swiftly they had become a community," cries Dana somewhat prematurely but remarkably revealingly (U. 23). The "community" of sailors on the S.S. Oedipus Tyrannus is, however, reluctant to receive to its manly bosom the romantic and slumming Dana, largely because his dialect does not correspond to theirs. For both White and Lowry in the Thirties access to "communities" or to "the real language of men" was not at all easy to gain. What is clear is their sense in the Thirties of the inadequacy of the dialects

of their own particular tribes to the business of writing novels. Reading White's renditions of the conversation of sheep-obsessed graziers or the letters of Arthur Lowry to his son, which combine platitudes with sanctimoniousness, one can see why.

The problem for both writers was to find an alternative to the corrupted dialects of their tribes. Lowry's tribe was the commercial middle class which was bad enough. That it was provincial and non-conformist was unendurable. The language of Lowry's father is one that has been thoroughly contaminated by utilitarianism. His letters everywhere emphasize facts and express distrust of fancy in the form of Lowry's literary efforts. Arthur Lowry has a habit of making lists and using italics to drive his all too obvious points home. He has a clear preference for whatever is useful and measurable over whatever is complex, vague, to do with the inner workings of the "soul," a word which causes him evident distress. His language is full of pious rhetoric and a general slackness of diction and phrasing. What vigour the non-conformist tradition with its rooting in the Bible and in Bunyan might have introduced

into the language of a Liverpool cotton merchant was undermined by Arthur Lowry's predominantly Victorian and commercial cast of mind. Lowry had none of D.H. Lawrence's advantages in this matter of the colloquial language of the home.

Patrick White had the misfortune that his tribe was divided against itself. He came from a section of the colonial landed gentry which wished to eradicate the taint of "colonial." Hence he was educated in the manner appropriate to a prospective member of the English ruling class. Thus he was left with the problem that in Australia he was suspected as an Englishman with a posh accent and in England he was always "colonial." Given such an internal conflict it is hardly surprising that his style should take various and sometimes contradictory directions. Nor is it surprising that in the Thirties he should adopt the current enthusiasm for the working class and for using proletarian speech to add interest to his writing. But neither the Australian working-class figures in Happy Valley (1939) nor the English working-class figures in The Living and the Dead are convincing. White is simply

unable to make their speech live.

In the fiction that grew out of Dollarton and Castle Hill there is a wholly new sense of the language. Into Stan Parker's world advertising, jazz, and the cinema barely intrude. In Lowry's fiction of the Forties and Fifties there is an obsession with the effects of advertising on sensibility. By foregrounding the advertising messages, by squaring them off in the text, Lowry emphasizes their predatory presence in modern life: this is the dominant form in which language as it is now used eats into consciousness. But this squaring off of the language in its debased contemporary state also draws attention to an alternative sense of the language's possibilities which we find realized in the texts themselves. In "The Forest Path to the Spring" Lowry carefully divests words of the detritus they have accumulated in a utilitarian society. Spring, light, wood, fire -- these words have no <u>use</u>; they serve to please, and, in some Lawrentian sense, they suggest the connection which Lowry held to exist between man's being and the cosmos.

In the opening scenes of The Tree of Man White sets Stan Parker in a world that is meant to recall that of Homer's heroes. Stan's actions are sufficient in themselves; he does not need to interpret them. His world is one of at-homeness between things and self. This feeling of being at home in the world allows a sense of intimate connection between words and things, actions and meanings. Stan's world is commensurate to his desires. So long as he is at the centre of his world Stan is unaware that language can become a problematic, that a gap can appear between the world of actions and meaning. So long as Stan's actions are wholly unselfconscious their manifest meaning is their whole content. They are, thus, not "about" anything, and Stan's world is whole. In Georg Lukacs' terms White has put Stan in the epic world of an integrated civilization as distinct from the modern broken world whose characteristic form is the nostalgic epic: the novel.[31] Hence, the epical quality of the writing in the opening section of the novel. Here the language is appropriate to a pre-lapsarian world before Stan's discovery of interiority. The words tree, fire, man, dog do not indicate any fracture between

self and other. That will come later.

Lowry's Dollarton and White's farm at Castle Hill signify a desire on the part of both writers to bypass the mechanistic bias of modern social organization and to return to a simpler mode of connection that supposedly prevailed when man saw himself not as master of but as part of natural process. As "Eridanus" and "Durilgai," their literary transformations, they belong in a tradition of romantic organicism. In their literary versions of the earthly paradise we may glimpse a large part of the reason that White and Lowry left England and settled not in cosmopolitan Paris or New York but in provincial, philistine backwaters. In place of "society" -- a large body of anonymous individuals connected only by function -- they wished to put "community" -- a small body of individuals organically related to a familiar whole. By discovering some such "tribe" they hoped to establish in their writing a sense of wholeness and connection they felt to be fundamentally at odds with the modern world.

The question, then, is what effect did Canada

have on the imagination of Lowry, Australia on the imagination of White? This sounds very like the arid question: was Malcolm Lowry a Canadian? And something in us definitely protests at this business of nationality. What matters, after all, is not where Lowry wrote Under the Volcano but what use he made of the language in doing so. Here, however, we face a greater aridity than that involved in expropriating Lowry for Canadian literature: that of divorcing the question of language from that of place. When White and Lowry left England for good they were seeking some means of connecting dialect, tribe, and place, feeling these three essentials of the novelist's craft to have some adrift in contemporary England. At Dollarton and at Castle Hill these three, at least for a time, came together in their fiction. This does not make them Canadian or Australian novelists. It means simply that what they were seeking in the first place was a sense of belonging at a much more local level than that of nationality. They were seeking a part of the English past as they understood it which, vanishing as it was in England, they believed might still be intact in some corner of the globe where modernity had not gone

so far as it had in the England of the Thirties. They were both until they found their "Eridanuses" expatriate Englishmen rooting through the world in search of what England had lost.

P A R T A

Reluctant Modernists: Before the War

Complete absence of nostalgia in a modern writer is suspect, suggesting complacent fellowship with the main commercial groups.

D.W. Harding,
"A Note On Nostalgia,"
in Scrutiny.

I

The Thirties

> Why should we be at the start of our two lives when everything around us is losing its virtue? How can we grow up when there's nothing left to inherit, when what we must feed on is so stale and corrupt?
>
> Elizabeth Bowen,
> The Death of the Heart.

> One large intellectual and emotional atmosphere enfolds writers as different as Yeats, Eliot, Hemingway, and Lawrence, and from this distance what the four are doing seems to look more and more like the same thing. They are mounting a rhetorical critique of industrialism; they are prosecuting a perhaps more richly dramatized and lyricized continuation of the complaints of Ruskin, Arnold, and Morris.[1]

Paul Fussell's placing of the four great post-war modernists beside the eminent Victorians with whose thought and literary methods their work suggests such a radical break is less shocking than it ought to be. We are no longer surprised by the conjunction in the avant-garde writing of the Twenties of experimental method and conservative ideology. It does not seem remarkable that modernism in English writing should have coexisted with a profound antipathy to modernity. So we do not balk at the placing of Yeats, Eliot, Hemingway, and Lawrence beside Ruskin, Arnold, and Morris. What separates them is, of course, considerable: their attitudes towards the use of form and language in literary works. What connects them, however, is also considerable. They all share a nostalgia for a time before commerce and industrialism had changed the face of England. They

are all part of a line of resistance to a world in which the old "natural" bonds between man and man, man and things, had been replaced by the "artificial" bonds of money and machinery. The Great War which seems to stand as a sudden chasm between the Victorian period and the modern one did not, after all, create the modern world out of nothing. It merely accelerated the process of the disintegration of traditional forms and practices that the industrial revolution had initiated. Ruskin and Lawrence, Arnold and Eliot, Morris and Yeats -- they are connected above all by a passionate dislike of the mass world engendered by commerce and technology in the nineteenth century and brutally delivered by the Great War.

In this line of resistance to industrialism and its effects both on nature and society we may place, somewhat belatedly, Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry. This becomes most apparent after the Second War when we find them at Castle Hill and Dollarton respectively milking a cow, building a pier, observing the seasons, and writing works which both celebrate a simple life within nature and mourn the passing of such a life from

the world. Here we see their place in that direct line of prophetic voices which stretches in English writing from Blake to D.H. Lawrence and which opposes industrial society from the standpoint of organicist nostalgia. That is to say, the protest against the mechanical nature of modern life which we find in Wordsworth, Ruskin, Hardy and Lawrence rests on a nostalgia for a settled, rural way of life which remained intact in England until the eighteenth century and in which, supposedly, man was organically connected to nature and to a community. Lowry is the clearest inheritor of this tradition in English letters after Lawrence.

We may, then, with reasonable confidence place the writings of Lowry and White in the immediate post-war period. The Tree of Man (1957) and "The Forest Path to the Spring" (1961) complete a line of fictional mournings for the traditional "organic" English countryside which runs through North and South (1855), The Mill on the Floss (1860), Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), and Women in Love (1920). I say "English" countryside although The Tree of Man is set in Australia and "The Forest Path to the Spring" in Canada because White and Lowry simply

transpose parts of the English past to these far-flung corners of the globe. Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry, then, have extended the line of prophetic organicist nostalgia from the between-the-wars period in which the last traces of the old organic England were expunged from the countryside into the post-war period when, according to F.R. Leavis, even the memory of the old order had been lost.

This is by no means the sum of their achievements. In fact, the line of anti-industrial sentiment in English writing has been so broad and so diffuse that little is accomplished by placing within it writers whom we had thought at odds. Our understanding of T.S. Eliot is scarcely advanced by the observation that, like William Morris and Malcolm Lowry, he "mount[ed] a rhetorical critique of industrialism." One must ask what forms these critiques took. Can we say, for instance, that Hemingway and Eliot employed a rhetoric in the same manner as Ruskin or Morris? Moreover, we must allow for a greater degree of ideological complexity and ambivalence in major writers than is suggested by the observation that they share in a spirit of resistance

to industrialism. A writer's ideology is never without contradictions and surprises; it is never simply the neat circle Thirties leftist critics liked to draw around a writer's thought, the radii of their compasses set by a narrowly Marxist determinism. "'Life,' wrote Montagu Slater in The Left Review, "equals the class struggle," as though that were the end of the matter.[2]

The resistance to industrialism that we find in the writings of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry is complicated by their experience as young novelists in the England of the Thirties. In this period, they were faced with the problem of choosing among the squabbling ideologies, styles, tones, cliques, and movements that made up the literary scene. At Cambridge in the late Twenties and early Thirties - Lowry went up in 1929, White in 1932 -- dandies, hearties, and socialists competed for the attention of undergraduates with their struttings, their roarings, and their rantings. The ghost of the Nineties lingered in Housman's rooms, below which a young Patrick White waited hoping for a visitation. The Georgians were laid to rest in Granta in 1929, but were to require further exorcizing (White

was still very much a Georgian when he published his first thin, private volume of poems, The Ploughman and Other Poems, in 1935.[3]

"Modernism" was idolized, criticized, condemned outright, envied, and emulated throughout the decade. Here was a ghost that would not go away. In the late Twenties and early Thirties, Eliot's influence dominated the advanced undergraduates at Cambridge. We may see his influence behind the poetry in the rival undergraduate literary magazines. The Venture and Experiment, which flourished in the years in which Lowry was at Cambridge. Lowry published in both the more experimental and modernist Experiment and the more conservative Venture, although he clearly favoured the former (neither magazine, it should be noted, was as advanced or as conservative as my distinction and Experiment's rhetoric might suggest). In the course of the Thirties, it became increasingly fashionable on the literary far left to vituperate against Eliot's ideologically conservative form of modernism. In 1938, Eliot was accorded a mock obituary in New Verse where the Auden poets published and where in the same year White placed an Eliot-inspired poem.[4]

As late as 1949 John Davenport, Jack Lindsay, and Randall Swingler, all prominent Thirties literary leftists, were attempting to lay to rest Eliot's irritating ghost in an editorial note in an issue of Arena which includes a short story by Lowry written in the Thirties:

> Tradition and culture: the words ring like a cracked bell; and indeed the dreary ritual reminds one of a middle-class funeral, even down to the sherry. The loved one died of sleeping sickness -- encephalitis lethargia, caused by the T.S.E. - T.S.E. fly.[5]

Such a strong desire to have a living author buried suggests a nervousness on the part of the would-be grave-diggers. The stubborn prestige of Eliot, in spite of his political heresies, is confirmed by such adolescent rebellions.

Criticism thrived in the Cambridge of the Thirties, and the most influential critics placed Eliot firmly at the centre of any understanding of modern poetics. I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, and William Empson all have a bearing on the work of White and Lowry, although neither novelist set out systematically to shape his novels according to their critical desiderata.

Richards' notion that the problem of the absence of religious belief is a formal problem in modern poetry, has an obvious bearing on our understanding of the function of mysticism in the later work of both writers.[6] Mysticism in Under the Volcano and in Voss (1957) serves as a means of controlling the immense disorder that is modern life. "The mystery and the poetry" of which White speaks in "The Prodigal Son" (1955) is a means of holding together in a work of art a disintegrating experience: the ugliness, futility, and banality of contemporary life.[7] White has simply transposed the wasteland vision of post-World-War-I England to that of Australia in the Fifties. There is a clear connection here to "the mythic method" of The Waste Land (1922) which Richards helped to explain to the young writers of the Thirties.[8] William Empson's witty notion that the proletariat served Thirties leftist writers in place of the peasantry of pastoral, that "the middle-class intellectual who joins the communist party is joining the shepherds," has an obvious bearing on White's method of turning Australian small farmers into literary peasants and Lowry's rustification of the fishermen at Dollarton.[9]

At Cambridge throughout the Thirties the traditional "sporadic warfare" in the universities "between athlete and aesthete" continued to simmer.[10] Coming from philistine backgrounds which they detested equally, White and Lowry could feel little fellow feeling with the athletes, or "hearties." Lowry, however, who had a deep-rooted horror of effeminacy, found the muscular, drunken, brawly, and sporting aspects of heartiness attractive. Effectively, he renovated heartiness by stripping it of its philistinism and substituting the seaman for the country squire as its model of dress and mannerism. White had none of Lowry's repugnance against effeminacy; hence his attraction to aestheticism was unequivocal. He adopted, at least by his Ebury Street days in the late Thirties, the manner of the dandy. In his early writing, we see, though not unequivocally, the attraction to the mandarin style of the Twenties aesthetes that went with dandyism.

By 1933 there was already a politically charged climate at Cambridge. The political quietism of the Twenties was giving place to a vogue for left-wing politics and the same undergraduates who had cheerfully

strike-broken in 1926 were now schoolmasters with new degrees and newly Marxist politics. An interest in politics that went beyond Conservative club balls was no longer considered boring. In the course of the Thirties the claim of politics on the attention of young English writers became more and more pressing. Poets like Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender felt obliged to "retreat from liberalism" and join the Communist Party.[11] Young undergraduates like the poet John Cornford and the Marxist critic Christopher Cauldwell went to Spain on the Loyalist side and were killed. Significantly, their deaths took place "abroad"; at home, despite the fierceness of the rhetoric, the stakes were not so high. In Cecil Day Lewis' Starting Point (1937) and in White's The Living and The Dead (1941) characters leave for Spain and probable death as the novels close. On the continent "the hard, ferocious theologies of nationalistic and revolutionary idolatry" took root;[12] in England at the universities young middle-class intellectuals affected varying degrees of commitment to ideology, usually on the left.

There is inescapably an air of unreality about the leftist politics of English upper-middle-class writers and intellectuals in the Thirties. It is not simply a question of their safety, their lack of immediate involvement in the business of killing and dying by which on the continent political matters were settled. In the First War Graves, Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen had painstakingly learned a language of reality appropriate to the trenches and so separated themselves from the romantic enthusiasms and empty rhetoric with which Rupert Brooke had entered the war. In Spain, John Cornford repeated Brooke's pattern (admittedly he had little time in which to learn Gravesian truths and he did write one fine Auden-influenced poem on the war).[13] More tellingly, George Orwell failed to find a language adequate to the sense of reality he undoubtedly gained in Spain. No-one struggled more determinedly than Orwell to write honestly and empirically about political events, and Homage to Catalonia is widely held to go right to the heart of the Spanish confusion by its attention to particulars and the direct force of its colloquial language. Yet at the crucial moment, describing the battle scene, Orwell

falls back on the language of public-schoolboy slang.[14] There is scarcely more sense of reality here than in the language of an Eton schoolboy describing an O.T.C. battle in the school magazine. Grahame Greene describes the problem thus:

> We were a generation brought up on adventure stories who had missed the enormous disillusionment of the First War; so we went looking for adventure.[15]

Green is speaking about the impulse behind the Thirties fad of travel books, but he touches on a deeper dilemma. How were these young bourgeois from public schools and Oxbridge to touch not "adventure," the stuff of boys' fantasies, but "reality," the world of men? As Christopher Isherwood has pointed out, many among his generation felt themselves to be not quite men, to have missed or failed the decisive "Test" of manhood posed by the First War.[16] In their politics, in their enthusiasm for the proletariat, in the romantic obsession with Spain, the writers of "the Auden generation" revealed their view of themselves as inadequate, ineffectual, removed from the hard, clear detail of the real.

Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry share the common sense of unreality, of being isolated by class, education, and speech from the hard world of historical facts, that we find among the young middle-class writers of the Thirties. Both novelists adopt in their fiction a formal orientation that in a characteristically Thirties fashion attempts to address this problem: they follow the journey of a young bourgeois intellectual away from his self-enclosed world of sensibility towards the "real" world of things and actions. This is the form adopted by W.H. Auden in The Orators (1932), by Lowry in Ultramarine (1933), by Edward Upward in Journey to the Border (1938), and by White in The Living and The Dead (1941). There is, of course, no specific formal method which connects these four writers. They are linked by their common problem as bourgeois of finding a way out of the self as understood by the liberal tradition into the historical world for which the Thirties literary-left felt a conscience-stricken attraction. Ultramarine, written before the disillusioning events of the late Thirties, is prescient in its scepticism about the ability of bourgeois intellectuals to step outside the limits drawn around their consciousness by class and to touch the "real" world

of the working class.

We must avoid easy generalizations about Thirties writing and its relation to history. The viewpoint which asserts that "the crucial point of difference between the writers of the Thirties and their immediate predecessors has more to do with history (content) than with literature (technique)" is simplistic.[17] This view is predicated upon the assumption that in good writing content may be divorced from technique. The view is too facile and has too often been attacked to be once again consigned to the dust-bin of literary history. To the extent that we may generalize about the Thirties -- and most such generalizations work by ignoring all influences in the decade other than Auden's -- we may say that much of the serious new writing in the period was directed at finding formal strategies ("techniques") by which to explore not only the impact of history ("content") on consciousness but also the impact of consciousness on history itself. This, of course, suggests a shift from the more unabashed concern of the writers of the Twenties to devise a battery of techniques for pursuing consciousness into the obscure regions where it is fur-

thest removed from history. But it does not suggest that literature was jettisoned in the interest of preserving the ballast of content. New Verse, which published the best of the new writers, maintained a consistently high standard and, although Auden and Spender set the tone of its contributors, its editor, Geoffrey Grigson, recognized the literary merits of rightists like Pound and Lewis. New Writing, whose editorial policy was avowedly leftist and which went out of the way to publish the works of foreign communists and local workers, generally gave prominence to writers like Christopher Isherwood evidently on the grounds of their attention to form and style rather than the purity of their politics. The Left Review, to which Cecil Day Lewis went over out of communist enthusiasm, was certainly guilty of allowing political partisanship to interfere with literary discrimination. But The Left Review did not determine the literary political tone of the decade; it merely added an important stress. Countering that stress throughout the decade was Eliot's Criterion, and somewhere uneasily in the middle was Leavis' Scrutiny.

In other words, the Thirties was probably no more homogeneous than any other decade. There was, it is true, a distinctive tone to the decade central to which was a new interest among bourgeois writers in left-wing politics. But also important in the setting of this tone was the movement we know as "modernism." The young writers of the Thirties were purposefully modern. There was no attempt to revive the Victorian novel or Georgian poetry (even Julian Bell's preference for the eighteenth century has a modern ring in what it negates, romanticism, if not in what it affirms). These writers chose to pursue the point at which consciousness entangles itself in history. This was a pursuit at the level of form, not of content, and one in which White and Lowry participated.

The important shift that occurred in Thirties writing was that away from the aestheticism of the Twenties towards a revived realism, towards the use of the vernacular, and towards historical kinds of discourse. This was a movement away from the emphasis on sensibility we find in the novels of Virginia Woolf. But it was not seen by Auden or Spender or Isherwood as a retreat from modernism. They felt, not unjustly, that they were

building on modernism, putting its techniques to their own purposes. Woolf herself followed her own instincts in the Thirties, extending the modernist-symbolist line, and her work is as much a part of the Thirties as is that of Auden or Day Lewis or Waugh or Greene. Woolf actually sponsored many of the young leftist poets in the production of their first collective magazine/manifesto, New Signatures (1932). The New Signature poets had none of the Bloomsbury reverence for "states of consciousness," but Mrs. Woolf, whose views on poetry were as conservative as her views on fiction were advanced, does them an injustice when she chides Auden for his allegiance to "raw fact."[18] Auden and his followers were no more indifferent to subjectivity than was Woolf: "all genuine poetry," wrote Auden, "is in a sense the formation of private spheres out of a public chaos."[19] Mrs. Woolf could hardly have disagreed. The Auden writers were merely more guilty about their subjectivism than Woolf, more reluctant to give it unchecked expression.

In the early Thirties, Woolf's fiction was moving further into the self, pursuing in a high, lyrical prose, the elusive "reality" within. Meanwhile, Christopher

Isherwood was developing a narrative method that appears to give very little away about the inner stuff of subjectivity. Isherwood's narrators have a naivety that hollows them out, makes them wholly receptive to external events. And Isherwood's style has a transparency that causes his language to efface itself before what it records. Isherwood uses a language that is without literariness, artificiality, or lyricism. Yet William Bradshaw, the narrator of Mr. Norris Changes Trains (1935), is no more an inhabitant of the world of "raw fact" than are the characters in Woolf's The Waves (1931). Bradshaw is a neurotic and isolated young English bourgeois, trapped by his self-imposed role as observer, whose dangerous objectivity conceals an underlying complicity with the demented and surreal world of late Weimar Germany. The very simplicity of Isherwood's style draws attention to the duplicity and strangeness of the world he records. His style -- for even the attempt to arrive at stylelessness is a kind of style -- is the antithesis of a Grosz cartoon which we so readily associate with the period Isherwood records. Grosz exaggerates, caricatures -- rather like the cartoons of wealthy dinner parties we

find in The Left Review -- because the events he deals with have their own exaggerated, surreal quality and because he works in a German tradition of expressionist distortion. Isherwood underplays, and the same events force themselves through his cool prose like sudden, startling explosions: insidious, because unexpected, assaults on the reader.

Isherwood's understated style is very English. In a sense, he is preserving his public-schoolboy calm in the face of the beastly sort of conduct one might expect of foreigners. Isherwood's distaste for the excessiveness of German popular-literary style is also English: "the murder reporters -- the jazz writers had inflated the German language beyond recall."[20] He himself eschews the journalistic habit of allowing content to dictate tone. His prose style is exactly calculated: it is neither journalistic nor "mandarin" -- that is, concerned with its own performance, over elaborate. His narrator's manner is cool and subdued so that we feel the force of the atrocities that are part of German life as they well up suddenly into his detached consciousness, striking at his, and our, unreachability.

By perfecting his stripped style, his unobtrusive narrative manner, Isherwood avoids the mandarin detachment of Woolf and the sloppiness of journalistic prose, both of which he sees as inadequate to the peculiarly fantastic tenor of events. Isherwood's prose in this novel is a superb medium for the rendering of the horrific political events of the Thirties.

Isherwood's own prose avoids the dangers it courts. Mr. Norris is a work of fiction, not merely an historically accurate, impartial account. It has the compression and intensity, the attention to form, that we demand in the novel. In the middle and late Thirties, documentary went a long way to replacing literary realism in English prose writing. Historical kinds of discourse served increasingly among English prose writers to record the enormity of political events.[21] Neither White nor Lowry succumbed to this kind of writing. Their commitment was to imaginative prose-fiction, not to journalism or history. They wanted, of course, to register in their fiction the impact of history on the consciousness of the individual and to trace the movement of consciousness, however tentatively, out towards the actuality of

political events behind the jerky, abstract stream of newsreel images. Isherwood's kind of prose was not to their purposes. They needed a style more openly difficult, more layered in Lowry's case, more mandarin in White's. And they needed to master a variety of techniques which they could apply in their fiction more self-consciously than Isherwood applies techniques to his.

Both novelists required formal strategies, what Lowry calls "design-governing postures," specific to their understandings of the relations between the inner world of consciousness and the outer world of things and actions.[22] They sought some formal means of reconciling an antagonism in the modern English novel between these two worlds. In the middle Thirties when they began to publish their early writing the pendulum which describes the alternations in prestige of these two worlds seemed to have lodged violently at one extreme: that which asserted the historical understanding of man's being. Novelists increasingly were turning to reportage and travel-writing. Poets were anxious to eject the timid, Prufrockian sensibilities of bourgeois intellectuals

out of their self-enclosed universes into the real.[23] Elyot Standish in White's The Living and The Dead is a somewhat belated representative figure of this type: he is Prufrock seen through the eyes of an historically-minded, politically conscience-stricken, Thirties writer. Dana Hilliot, the hero of Lowry's Ultramarine, is another of those Thirties bourgeois intellectuals self-consciously seeking a way out of his neurotic preoccupations into the rough, real world of men and action.

Looking back on this period in a 1940 essay, "Inside the Whale," George Orwell blames the influence of politics on Thirties novelists for the poverty of their productions.[24] In this essay, Orwell discloses his own unexpected attraction to the political indifferentism of the Twenties and to the novelist he considers to represent this tendency in the Thirties, Henry Miller. Orwell means that the aestheticism of the Twenties produced works more likely to survive than the politically conscious Thirties. He himself had attempted unsuccessfully to work symbolist and modernist techniques into his early fiction and had only lapsed into realism and historical reportage when these experiments had proved unworkable.[25] Orwell, then,

set out to be both historical and modernist. Unable to assimilate modernism to his essentially realistic talent, he turned reluctantly to historical prose (Homage to Catalonia), Edwardian realism (Coming Up for Air, 1939), and, after the war, to the moral fable. In "Inside the Whale" Orwell reads his own failures back into the novel-writing of the decade.

Orwell is correct in saying that the politically conscious Thirties did not produce novels of the quality of the politically quietist Twenties. But he is wrong -- prompted by his own quirky political conscience and his own limitations as a novelist -- in attributing this falling off in quality unreservedly to politics. The Communist Party in the Thirties never exercized the absolute hegemony in literary politics which he ascribes to it.[26] Nor were Thirties novelists simply seduced en masse away from their duty to formal perfection by the harpies of ideology. The novel in England in the Thirties moved towards realism, historicism, and even at times towards politically motivated didacticism. But this generalization must allow for so many notable exceptions, by novelists as diverse as Virginia Woolf

and Evelyn Waugh, that it is unworkable. Davenport, Swingler, and Lindsay, somewhat belatedly but no less fervently, spoke for a tendency in Thirties English writing when they wrote that they "disbelieve[d] in the divorce of art from society.[27] In doing so, they spoke for The Left Review and for communists like Montagu Slater. But they did not speak for the majority of Thirties bourgeois leftists if their statement may be taken as a call to writers to neglect formal questions in the interests of social ones. Auden preached a didactic, socially activist poetics, but his own poetry in the Thirties was equivocal, obscure, technically difficult: what the socialist realists would have called "formalistic." Stephen Spender joined the Communist Party at one point, briefly and equivocally, but he was always aware that political correctness and good writing were not the same thing.

The problem for serious novelists in the Thirties was not that they were overly concerned with politics but that they were overshadowed by the great modernists who had preceded them. Greene, Isherwood, Upward, Maugham, Henry Green, Rex Warner -- none of these

novelists produced a Ulysses or a Women in Love. None produced a novel as likely to last as The Waves (1931), The Years (1937), Finnegan's Wake (1939), or even Wyndham Lewis' Revenge for Love (1937). They represent a minor line, but not a negligible one. Their novels suffer little by comparison with those of Aldous Huxley or the Sitwells, for instance. It was these minor novelists who established the tone of the decade in fiction. This tone saw man as a social and historical being but there was no movement in the Thirties to return to the journalistic kind of novel-writing represented by Wells and Bennett. Their major achievement was less in what they produced than in what they made possible. It was the historical consciousness, even the political consciousness, of the Thirties which made possible Under the Volcano. It remained for Lowry to reconcile the competing claims of history and modernism, a reconciliation which no English novelist in the Thirties was able to achieve.

The Thirties was the crucial formative period in the development of both White and Lowry as novelists. In this period, they assimilated, without ever quite committing themselves to, the prevailing literary and

political tone. They took from the Thirties not only the preoccupation with historical events but also the mood of longing for an organic past which had not died with Lawrence in English cultural thinking. It is this grounding of their thought in a specifically English ideology that prevents their fiction from being readily assumed by the modernist current which is resolutely internationalist and which never strenuously took root in the English novel.

In the Thirties, the voice of organicism was more muted than in the Twenties because of the resolutely "progressive" tenor of the latter decade. With fascism on the continent so loudly on the side of the instinctual and the organic, leftist intellectuals were understandably reluctant to follow Lawrence into battle against a mechanical England. It did not help Lawrence's cause that, as Stephen Spender notes in The Destructive Element (1935), his theories had been "seized on by the Nazis, who hail Lawrence as the English writer whose theories are most sympathetic to them."[28] In the Thirties, the allure of the irrational had faded. It was more fashionable to adopt a Marxist rationalism than a Lawrentian instinctualism. Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, whose rightist politics had

not seemed outrageous in the Twenties, by their propagandizing for Hitler and Mussolini and for the cause of cultural organicism made themselves the political pariahs of the Thirties, although Geoffrey Grigson's respect for Lewis as a writer meant that he had an occasional forum in New Verse along with Auden and Allott and Spender. Lewis, who later decently changed his mind about Hitlerism, in his notorious Hitler (1931) defended the perverse ideology of national socialism in terms of its commitment to a racial organicism:

> We feel the love and understanding of blood-brothers, of one culture, children of the same traditions, whose deepest social interests, when all is said and done, are one: that is the only sane and realistic journey in the midst of a disintegrating world. That, as I interpret it, is the national socialist doctrine of Blutsgefuhl.[29]

The leftist critique of this version of Nazi ideology is one that can easily be turned against D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot: "The 'culture' of the traditionalists is entirely synthetic, the result of nostalgia for an imaginary past."[30] The leftist intellectuals of the Thirties felt like Lewis, Pound, Lawrence, and Eliot, that they inhabited "a disintegrating world." Spender was later

to write that he used the word "political" in this period to signal "a fatality which [he] felt to be overtaking our civilization."[31] However, in order not to despair over the wreckage of contemporary civilization he chose to look not to the reactionary myth of an organic cultural wholeness ideally located in the past but to a socialist future. There is not the sense in Thirties writing that we find in the Twenties of history as chaos and decline which can only be escaped by retreating into the perfect orders of art or the past. The writers of the Thirties, those at least of the Auden group, were inclined to accept the Marxist faith that history can be ordered by human action and they went tentatively about the business of effecting such orderings through their art.

White and Lowry, although it seems odd to think of them in such a context, fall belatedly into "the Auden generation." They too were born between 1904 and 1915, were educated at public schools and Oxbridge. They too were moved to contemplate the socialist future which, given the collapse of the liberal democracies in the face of fascist aggression, was widely held to be

desirable, if not inevitable. It was partly the feeling that socialism offered the only viable alternative to fascism and partly a typically Thirties confusion of the proletariat with the peasantry which led White and Lowry to turn to the working class as a possible way out of a dying bourgeois culture. Like other middle-class writers in the Thirties White and Lowry approached the working class and its putative future with misgivings and evasions.

Auden's "A Summer Night" (1934) is a characteristically evasive treatment of the coming socialist England: the poem is more intent on the bourgeois freedoms that might be lost than on whatever might be gained. Even a doctrinaire Marxist like Edward Upward, who shows in his political parable Journey to the Border that he is convinced of the rightness and inevitability of Marxism for contemporary bourgeois intellectuals, gives few indications of what a Marxist revolution would actually achieve in social terms. Characteristically, Upward is primarily interested in Marxism as a panacea for a troubled, intensely isolated consciousness which cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality. Marxism for Upward's hero provides

a bridge to the real world not a means of changing that world.

However short-lived or equivocal was the leftism of Auden's generation, it was this group that established the literary-political tone of the Thirties. Auden and political poetry has become as fixed an idea of the Thirties as the black-and-white photographs of the Jarrow marchers or the jerky newsreels of goose-stepping fascists. And we think of the kind of poetry Auden initiated as being not only political but also sympathetic to technology in a way that distinguishes it sharply from the poetry of the Twenties. The Lawrentian view that industrialization, by despoiling the countryside, had broken the organic bonds of the old order and savagely degraded English life was not compatible with the new tone. Auden and his followers looked on industrial landscapes with acquisitive rather than antagonistic eyes: here was a source of images for a new poetic. Eliot had employed the imagery of modern urban life in the symbolist manner: to evoke states of soul. Lawrence had imaged the eruptions of industry across the face of England. In the Thirties,

there is a shift in the attitudes towards technology implied by the use of its imagery. Much of the imagery of decay we find in Thirties poetry is attached not, as in Lawrence, to the countryside assaulted by industrialism but to factories and farms made idle by depression. The new attitude is very neatly caught by Anthony Powell in At Lady Molly's (1958):

> "You have a nice landscape here"...
> "Do you think it nice? ... You know these days I scarcely notice such things. Once I might have done -- should have done, certainly, in my romantic period. I suppose by "nice" you mean undeveloped. Give me something a bit more practical. You can keep your picturesque features as far as I am concerned. If English agriculture was organized on a rational -- I do not even say a just -- basis, I dare say there might be something to be said for the view from this window. As it is, I would much rather be looking at a well-designed power station. Perhaps, as being more rural, I should say a row of silos.[32]

To gauge this new mood we may compare Lawrence's "The Triumph of the Machine" (1929) in which "mechanical man," having raped the natural world, reaps apocalypse with the poems of Auden and Spender from the early Thirties. In Auden's "Consider" (1932) we find "silted harbours, derelict works," and "strangled orchards."[33] Despite the

poem's teasing metaphysical and psychological allusions, Auden is clearly attacking an economic order that has allowed such massive decay, and he attacks it not because it is industrial but because it is capitalist. Similarly, in C. Day Lewis' The Magnetic Mountain (1932) the "cursed towns and devastated areas" are symptoms of a generalized illness infecting English culture which, despite obscurities, is largely economic in its aetiology.[34] In part, the Auden poets' enthusiasm for technology rested on their lack of exposure to the North where the industrial revolution had permeated nearly every corner of life and where Lawrence's sense of the ugliness of industry had been sharpened. The new factories that appeared in the South in the between-the-wards period were generally clean and efficient in the modern manner, devoted to light industry rather than heavy as in the North. The enthusiasm of the Auden poets for technology was directed at the new technologies that had grown out of the war -- wirelesses, electricity, aeroplanes -- not at the coal-fired mills of nineteenth-century Manchester. In Stephen Spender's poems we even find a distinctly Futurist quality of exultation at the prospect of advanced technology. "The

Express" (1932), "The Landscape Near an Aerodrome (1933), and "Pylons" (1933) attach the poet's lyrical enthusiasm not to images of nature but to images of technology.[35]

The ambivalence about technology on the part of Thirties writers is best expressed in a passage from George Orwell's The Road to Wigan Pier (1937):

> The industrial towns of the North are ugly because they happen to have been built at a time when modern methods of steel-construction and smoke abatement were unknown, and when everyone was too busy making money to think about anything else ... But since the war, industry has tended to drift southward and in doing so has grown almost comely. The typical post-war factory is not a gaunt barrack or an awful chaos of blackness and belching chimneys; it is a glittering white structure of concrete and steel surrounded by green lawns and beds of tulips ...
>
> A belching chimney or a stinking slum is repulsive chiefly because it implies warped lives and ailing chimneys. Look at it from a purely aesthetic standpoint and it may have a certain macabre appeal. I find that anything outrageously strange generally ends by fascinating me when I abominate it.[36]

There is no indication in this passage that Orwell is an unlikely convert to Futurism or the Bauhaus, despite those "glittering white" factories. Orwell's point is the one

made by Blake and Lawrence in their different ways: that the origin of ugliness is not in the world of things, natural or artificial, but in the mind of man. For Lawrence, the ugliness of the nineteenth century was the ugliness of commerce and utilitarianism which had spilled out over the world. This is the same recognition that will allow Lowry in his late stories to fit an oil refinery into a paradisial scene. Paradise, like hell, is in the mind of man. In the course of the nineteenth century a hellish view of reality squeezed the paradisial one out of England and transformed the face of the country in its own brutal image.

This triumph of spiritual ugliness in the mind of the English middle class -- for commerce and utility were the values of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and the England they had created -- made the actual England, even where it had not been despoiled by industrialism, seem tainted. By the end of the First World War the presence of industrialism seemed to Lawrence inescapable in England. Orwell confirms this view in Wigan Pier where he accounts indirectly for the quality of hysteria in the critique of industrialism mounted by those English writers who stand

in the organicist line:

> But quite soon the train drew away into open country, and that seemed strange, almost unnatural, as though the open country had been a kind of park, for in the industrial areas, one always feels that the smoke and filth must go on forever and that no part of the earth's surface can escape them. In a crowded, dirty little country like ours one takes defilement almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys seem a more normal, probable landscape than grass and trees, and even in the depths of the country when you drive your fork into the ground you half expect to lever up a broken bottle or a rusty can.[37]

Orwell's surprise that patches of an England prior to the industrial scene still exist reflects the thoroughness with which the nineteenth-century cast of mind had permeated English consciousness. The natural scene seems to him "strange, almost unnatural" because one of the effects of industrialism had been to consign that world to the realm of myth. As industrialism grew more pervasive in English life, so the old order became mythical, became the uneasy ideological product of a class divided against itself: one part seeking in an idealized traditional England a compensating image for the world the other part had brought into being.[38] Orwell is surprised to discover intact a part of

what the myth asserted had entirely vanished. For Lawrence and Lowry, contact with this older world was essential to their writing because each had committed himself to an open form whose seemingly fragile structures required access to an existing organic order.

Ultramarine seems the least organicist of Lowry's novels with its rather tedious enthusiasm for the ship's engines. We tire of Lowry's obsession with the engines after he has suggested their musical possibilities and exhausted their symbolic ones. We are surprised, then, to discover at last that the engines serve to make an organicist point. Lowry treats them as the features of a Wordsworthian landscape rather than the brute objective manifestations of a mechanical world:

> the jiggering levers began to keep time to a queer tune Hilliot had unconsciously fitted to their chanting, and he saw that at last the interdependence of rod grasping rod, of shooting straight line seizing curved arms, of links limping backward and wriggling forward on their queer pivots, had become related to his own meanings and his own struggles. (U, 158).

In this passage the mind of Dana Hilliot at last fits itself to the external world and solves the problem of

the bourgeois intellectual in the Thirties unable to make contact with "reality" as well as the problem of the novel's unity. Dana effects a Wordsworthian marriage of the mind of man to the goodly universe of things. Lowry, however, has updated Wordsworth's "goodly universe"[39] so that it is able to include mechanical objects. On this marriage, the novel's unity hangs. Here Dana Hilliot, the Thirties neurotic would-be hero, cures his ills: he touches reality in its contemporary forms; he has his first manly orgasm ("shooting straight line seizing curved arms"); and he discovers that order in the external world depends on his ability to project outwards an inner order.

The marriage is an unsatisfactory one for Dana as for the reader. There are a number of deliberate allusions to perversion and masturbation: "limping," "wriggling," "queer." If order in external reality is to depend on Dana's subjective orderings, then inevitably it is going to be flawed. Inevitably also, Lowry is unhappy with this kind of solution. The chief motive of the voyage is to discover an organic unity that no longer exists in England. But the ship on which he voyages remains a part of England and the post-industrial world. To

attempt to fit this world into the perspective of its chief resisting ideology is a brave but somewhat desperate solution to a Lowrian, and Lawrentian, impasse. For the moment, it is the best that Dana, and Lowry, can do, and it is an improvement on all those lists of new technologies we find in Thirties writing.

Despite all the pylons, wirelesses, aeroplanes, and locomotives that announce the new age throughout the poetry of the Thirties, the voice of organicism was by no means stilled in the decade. We may hear it insistently behind the leftist rhetoric of C. Day Lewis. In his "Letter to a Young Revolutionary" (1933) Day Lewis advises the prospective Communist: "You must break up the superficial vision of the motorist and restore the slow, instinctive, absorbent vision of the countryman."[40] Day Lewis, one of the most dedicated and durable of Thirties communist writers, ended the decade in the English countryside writing nature poetry and translating Virgil's Georgics. We may hear the voice of the organic community clamorously in John Betjeman's poem, "Slough" (1937), in which the poet wishes that the modern world might destroy itself with the very technology by which it has laid

waste the old but not quite extinct world of "the plough," of "cabbages," and of "the earth":

> Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
> It isn't fit for humans now,
> There isn't grass to graze a cow
> Swarm over, Death!
>
> Come, bombs, and blow to smithereens
> Those air-conditioned, bright canteens,
> Tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk, tinned beans
> Tinned minds, tinned breath.[41]

We may also hear the voice of the organic community raised very stridently indeed in the early writings -- propaganda is the more exact word -- of F.R. Leavis. In a 1930 pamphlet, Mass Civilization and Minority Culture, Leavis attacks the organs of mass opinion-making and mass entertainment -- radio, cinema, and the newspapers -- with a rancorousness that anticipates Patrick White's treatment of the same in The Living and The Dead (1941).[42] In Culture and Environment (1933) Leavis instructs English teachers in schools to instil in their students reverence for "Tradition" and for "the organic community" while sharpening their critical skills by having them analyse the language of modern advertising in the spirit in which the church fathers analysed the Gnostic texts.[43]

We may even hear the voice of organicism, admittedly at a somewhat queered pitch, in the "mortmere" fantasy world which Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward invented as schoolboys and whose symbolism W.H. Auden took over. "Mortmere" is the traditional English village with its stock characters -- vicar, squire, assorted eccentrics -- transposed into the nightmare world of between-the-wars England.[44] That is to say, the nightmare quality in "Mortmere" has its origins not in the authors' view of the English past but in their view of contemporary reality. Both were too young to have experienced at first hand the pre-war world of order, stability, continuity -- thus was it portrayed to Isherwood -- but its myth troubled them. The world of their youth they felt to have been defined nowhere more clearly than in The Waste Land: the world of their young manhood, the Thirties, was one in which a second war was widely expected. Thus a great gulf seemed to separate the world "between the wars" which they had inherited from that mythical England which had apparently existed prior to the First War.[45] The bizarreness of the "Mortmere" version of the English past derives from the chiliasm

of its authors which they have simply projected backwards into history. Thus, in the very distortions of "Mortmere" we may discover a fascination with the quaint "organic" England of myth and a horror at the actual England caught between two catastrophic wars and profoundly unconfident about its formerly secure place in the world.

Finally, we may attribute at least in part to organicist nostalgia the continued prestige of D.H. Lawrence during the Thirties. Lawrence's organicist mission was explicitly taken up by Gerald Durrell in his Black Book (1935). Lawrence also turns up in heroic guise in Auden's The Orators (1932) where he figures as a possible healer of the neurotic soul of the young Englishman. This is an early work of Auden's whose political implications the poet later repudiated.[46] Yet Lawrence also turns up heroically in Day Lewis' "Letter to a Young Revolutionary."[47] Lawrence's ghost stalked and troubled the Thirties. It is found in White's first novel, Happy Valley (1939). This ghost would not be exorcized because, in spite of the living man's political heresies, his uncompromising view of the

sickness of English culture after the 1914 - 18 war -- Lawrence actually proposed the winter of 1915 - 16 as the point at which "the spirit of the old London collapsed" -- concurred with the view prevailing in the Thirties, a view shared by the political right, left, and the several shades of opinion between.[48]

Even as unromantic a writer as George Orwell draws in spite of himself on this line of organicist nostalgia. In the course of the Thirties, Orwell's attitude to the encroachment of factories and suburbs on the remaining rural scenes became more and more hardened in opposition. In Coming Up for Air, Orwell discloses his hankering after the Edwardian village life which had been swallowed up between the wars by housing estates and the new towns, Slough among them. Thus were the traces of the old world, mourned by Hardy and Lawrence, eradicated from England. In Wigan Pier, Orwell discloses his ambivalent feelings about progressive politics and organicist nostalgia in a passage that pinpoints an ambivalence that runs right through Thirties writing:

> I do not in a sense "want" to return to a simpler, harder, probably agricultural way of life. In the same sense I don't "want" to cut down my drinking, to pay my debts, ... etc., etc. But in another and more permanent sense I do want these things.[49]

In other words, Orwell found himself longing for what his always cantakerous political conscience told him was reactionary and, in the context of the Thirties, dangerous.

Despite all this ambivalence, one mood was general and unequivocal in the Thirties: the mood of profound pessimism about the future of western civilization. The young middle-class writers of the Thirties felt that their civilization had exhausted itself. They agreed with older writers like Wyndham Lewis, Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf that the old, secure order had not survived the Great War. And political events on the Continent convinced them that what was left of bourgeois civilization was doomed. Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that socialism seemed a more attractive proposition than fascism if indeed one's privileged, cultured way of life was destined for the capacious dust-bin of history.

The attractions of Marxism for "the Auden generation" lay less in a general will among intellectuals to transform society by collective action with the proletariat than in a common desire to discover order in a world that seemed to be flying apart. Marxism answered the same essentially religious need that led Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene to Catholicism, T.S. Eliot to Anglicanism, and W.H. Auden through Marxism to an Existentialist variety of protestant Christianity.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, then, suggested an unlikely but seductive church to a generation which found the Twenties "philosophy of meaninglessness" inadequate to a decade of economic depression and the rise of fascism.[50] Among the several churches that vied for the allegiance of intellectuals in the Thirties -- money-reform, nationalism, Catholicism (Anglo and Roman), pacifism, and Freudianism -- Communism was by far the most successful in recruiting acolytes among young writers from White's and Lowry's background. This is so much the case that literary histories of the Thirties too often approach the decade by tracing the flirtations and copulations of writers with Marxism.[51] George Orwell even claims that

"for about three years .. the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under Communist control."[52] The claim is exaggerated but it suggests the seriousness with which Marxist doctrine and the role of the Communist Party were taken during the Thirties. Neither White nor Lowry crossed the portal of this most dogmatic of secular religions, but both lingered on the steps sufficiently to learn the ritual gestures and genuflections. The historical progress of the Spanish civil war serves in Under the Volcano (1947) as a central structuring device and as a continuous moral resonance. White attempted in the Thirties to create in his fiction credible working-class characters who offer a real alternative to a bankrupt bourgeois civilization. In the post-war fiction of both writers, we find working-class characters, but now they are seen through ideological perspectives native to White and Lowry rather than through the fasionably leftist ones with which they toyed in the Thirties. In their later fiction, we find sympathetic sailors and washerwomen, but, mercifully, we find no sentimentalized or idealized proletarians.

The interest in the working class that we find in the early fiction of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry is not merely the sign of a Thirties leftist piety adopted by both writers in spite of their dislike of industrialism and the classes, both exploiters and exploited, which serve it. Both were concerned in the Thirties to extend the range of the English novel outside the narrow class limits to which it generally confined itself. There were novels of bourgeois life in the Thirties, novels of aristocratic life, novels of the life of the "millionaire bohemia," novels of working-class life (lots of these, usually written by bourgeois writers), and there were novels written about the struggles of young bourgeois intellectuals to escape private neurosis and public disintegration by embracing the communist cause. But there are no English novels written in the Thirties which show, as the Victorian novel had done, society as a dynamic whole. Mill-owners' sons might choose to write about the lives of the workers in the family factory -- Henry Green does this very well indeed in Living (1929) -- but they could not show the actual constantly shifting relations of class, the way in which

an individual may move through the classes changing inwardly and outwardly as he does. Even Marxists like Edward Upward could not show, as could Lawrence who straddled two classes, how the desired leap across the classes might be achieved. Upward could not conceive what the world actually looks like to a working-class man or woman; certainly, he could not conceive that the road between the classes might be physical rather than mental. Intimacy of touch unites Durrant and Louisa in Lawrence's "The Clergyman's Daughter" (1914). The only English novel that includes a whole social range conceived as a complete and changing totality is Ralph Bates' The Olive Field (1936) which, tellingly, is set in Spain.

Ideologically, both Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry are the heirs of D.H. Lawrence, although White's mandarin style and Lowry's habit of Joycean word-play at times obscure this debt. Both, of course, were influenced not only by Joyce's techniques but also by his attention to the novel as an achieved and independent form. Lowry and White both have their moments of linguistic

self-consciousness of which Leavis would not have approved. Yet neither manages to achieve the Joycean desideratum of authorial self-effacement. At crucial moments, each parades his passions, his moral viewpoints, with Lawrentian fervour through his fiction. Neither unreservedly wants to cut his fictional worlds adrift from the actual business of life or the authorial voice that demands to interpret life for us, to make us aware of its strangeness,its beauty, its flux. Even when the authors do not speak to us directly -- and White has an unnerving habit of doing this -- we can feel the nervous energy of authorial ideology disrupting the surface of the text. In both writers, the most explicit textual interruptions are occasioned by the author's hatred of modern life and his nostalgia for a vanished order.

II

Happy Valley

1939 was not a year in which to start a literary career.

E.M. Forster.

Experiment and adventure are indicated, the boom of the twenties has been paid for by the slump of the thirties; let us try then to break the vicious circle by returning to a controlled expenditure, a balanced literary budget, a reasoned extravagance.

Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (1938).

In his first novel, Happy Valley (1939), White's debt to the Victorian novel is strongly in evidence. The novelist selects representative figures from all strata of a given society. He stands outside that society and views it as a whole. The characters all fit neatly and inevitably into a class society whose structure is seen as permanent and unquestionable. The novelist is concerned that his readers should make moral discriminations about the lives of his characters. The narrator does not hesitate to judge explicitly the particular actions of the characters. Moreover, like the narrator of the Victorian novel, he presents himself to us as an observer upon whose judgements we can safely rely. This habit of the narrator of making judgements and of drawing attention to role as an unfolder of events whose outcome he knows in advance is annoying in a novel with evident pretensions to being modern (surely Barry Argyle is overcomplimentary in likening the effect of authorial presence -- the author's viewpoint, with much justice, here conflated with the narrator's -- to Brecht's "alienation effect": the effect of White's intrusive narrator on the reader is soporific rather than alienating).[1] Less

frequently and less expertly White uses dramatic contrasts to invite us to make moral discriminations among the various responses to life of the characters.

White's grasp of the social range he attempts to encompass is seriously flawed. His working-class characters in particular are very unsure in their execution. Chuffy Chambers, the melancholic simpleton, is a caricature with the illusion of psychological depth thrown in. The townspeople are mere stereotypes: red-faced, mindless publicans and a malicious and nosey chorus of housewives. The bourgeois Belpers are Dickensian humours without the master's touch of gratuitous life. Even they have more life than the novel's central characters, the timid seekers after more than provincial bourgeois life has to offer, Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne.

With rural figures proper White's touch is surer. The Furlows are confident sketches of a kind that White has since developed with considerable comic effect: the ineffectual squatter and his socially ambitious wife. Sidney, their dissatisfied daughter, and

Hagan, her braggart lover, are more than well-drawn. They have real energy, a life of their own. These types also will reappear in White's fiction. The wilful, sexually attractive and aggressive woman given, like Emma Bovary, to the confusion of life with romantic fantasy will reemerge as Maman Courtney, Elizabeth Hunter, and, comically, as Amy Parker. The later versions of the type, however, will possess rich and complex inner lives in a way that Sidney, for all her Mallarmean reveries, does not. This line of romantic heroines, which ends as self-parody in Eddie/Eadith Twyborn, joins in a complicated dalliance with a line of Australian proletarian heroes: the red rogue males from Hagan to Don Prowse. Hagan's life is all on the surface, yet he is a no less successful characterization for that. It is fitting that this type of pure maleness, of Ned Kelly swagger, should have no inner life as it is fitting that his female counterpart should become, in Elizabeth Hunter, all inwardness and sensibility. In the love affair between Sidney Furlow and Clem Hagan we find the first, faltering steps in a flirtation White's fiction will trace between the Aussie "bloke" and the European "lady"

which will end in The Twyborn Affair (1979) not with a marriage but with a rape.

There is a Thirties context to White's depiction of these lovers. This is noticeable at the level of style. Sidney Furlow belongs in a symbolist novel. She is locked inside her sensibility and sees the external world as brutal and crude. Yet she is troubled by a Thirties conviction that she ought to somehow to make contact with the real, which she associates with the figure of the foreman, Hagan. Like Dana Hilliot in Lowry's Ultramarine she is drawn to the working class, not out of Marxist enthusiasm but out of a conviction that working-class life has a more trenchant grasp of reality than bourgeois life. She is guilty about, or dissatisfied with, her self-absorption, her addiction to inwardness, and sets out to embrace the world of fact. Hagan stands for reality and the vernacular in the sense in which the sailors on the Oedipus Tyrannus do. His language is earthy, direct, colloquial. His world is active, sensuous, heterosexual. He lacks the Thirties bourgeois hero's self-division, his sense of sexual guilt, his neurosis. Hagan suggests to White a means

of drawing on the strengths of realism, particularly its use of colloquial speech, without slipping into journalism or being obliged to abandon the treatment of subjectivity.

Significantly, at this early stage of his writing White is most at home with station life. His feel for the Australian squattocracy has given rise to his most successful pictures of Australian life. The splendid mansions of the rich squatters White has lovingly recreated. At the heart of these mansions lie the glittering chandeliers that signify transcendence of vulgarity and greed in White's symbolic language which habitually assigns sensibility to the rich and leisured -- provided they are uncontaminated by commerce -- and "reality" to the poor and labouring. The outback homesteads which the squatters visit rather than inhabit have an innocent "organic" charm. Even the coarse and greedy squatters with their sheep-obsessed sons are thoroughly convincing. White knows their world from the inside and he has the renegade's malice towards his own class. With suburbia, the typical mode of modern Australian life, White has always been ill-at-ease, often insensitive,

sometimes hysterical, unable to decide whether the form appropriate to its depiction is the pastoral or the satire.

Happy Valley is not unsatisfactory, however, merely because of White's obvious predilection for station life. The novel is unable to achieve what, as its realistic form attests, it sets out to do: to provide a convincing picture of Australia as a whole. The problem lies in White's attitude to Australia. He is unable to give a sense of life to Happy Valley because he cannot respond positively to the Australianness of the place. It is difficult to see why White chose to set his first novel in a place for which he clearly has so little sympathy. The truth, one suspects, is less that he is drawing on his childhood memories of a beloved landscape than that he is making use of the period he spent as a "jackeroo" on sheep stations between public school and Cambridge. In this period, White began tentatively to write fiction. In this period, he discovered how abhorrent to him was the life of a grazier. Like the young Lowry who signed on as a deckhand on a freighter to the East before going up to Cambridge, White returned to Australia after Cheltenham seeking a broader experience out of which to

write than that which his education had afforded him. He was seeking a sense of reality that he had not found inside the class from which he had come and to which he was expected to return. Happy Valley lacks the sense of detail that remembered landscapes possess. Like the sea in Lowry's first novel, Ultramarine, it is simply a place outside England to which a young writer has turned hoping to escape the limits of his background. It is an exotic and unpleasant locale, rather like Graham Greene's Mexico, in which White sets his conventional characters and action hoping that they will look more interesting by association.

In Happy Valley there is no deeply felt influence of the landscape on the inhabitants; the town is merely a scab on the face of the earth. White draws attention through his loquacious and portentous narrator to the absence of any organic connection between man and place. The landscape is generally uninspiring; the architecture is ugly and ephemeral; the populace is bland and, in small ways, malicious. White's lack of sympathy with the Australian society he depicts is nowhere more in evidence than in his chorus: the conspiracy of jealous

housewives who spy on Hagan. These women represent in their joylessness and envy the moral norm of the town. Instead of the living characters of the realistic novel, fully particularized yet representative of those forces in society that make for change, White gives us stereotypes and caricatures, exaggerated cartoons of the qualities he finds most widespread and repugnant in Australia.

In the course of the novel, White's centre of interest shifts perceptibly from the valley and the lives of its inhabitants to a metaphysical vagary: Life itself conceived in the round. Oliver and Alys seem at first to be prepared to pitch themselves against the hideous constraints of Happy Valley life. They are defeated, however, not by the place but by what Oliver -- and apparently White himself -- see as some bias towards disorder in the scheme of things. Happy Valley becomes less a town than a symbol for the wretchedness of life. At times, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that White chose the place for its very nastiness in order to objectify his bleak vision of the human lot.

Part of the problem lies in a conflict between

White's moral concern and his evident distaste for life. The moral concern is manifest in the novel's sketchy and heavily biased presentation of a number of opposed responses to life: the self-sacrificial resignation of Hilda Halliday, the equanimity of the Chinese characters, Sidney's strong urge towards sensual life, Oliver's and Aly's life denial, the detachment of the boy, Rodney Halliday. Among these unappealing alternatives we are supposed somehow to choose how life should be approached. Although the narrator is eager to nudge us at various times towards one or another of these moral possibilities, White himself is too confused to come down firmly in favour of any one. The novel's evident moral sense is not informed by a moral decisiveness.

White's distaste for life is manifest in the novel's clear sympathy with Oliver Halliday who must bear the main part of the burden of the novel's equivocal quest for fullness of life. We are hopeful when the horrifying detachment he displays during the still-birth which opens the novel gives way to a tentative commitment to joy which alone promises escape from the miserable constraints of the place. But Oliver and Alys surrender

to a narrow moralism and fail to take their chance to escape from Happy Valley. This retreat from flux, change, the possibility of growth is endorsed not only by the narrator whose judgements are generally indistinguishable from Oliver's but also by the shape of the novel. The corpse of Ernest Moriarty blocks all roads, except that of suicide, that might lead out of Happy Valley.

There is, of course, the escape of Sidney and Hagan to Queensland, but there is every reason to expect that their journey towards a less constricted form of life will be no better fated than that of Starlight and his gang from a much earlier Australian "happy valley" in Rolf Boldrewood's Robbery Under Arms (1888). White has already dwelt at length on Hagan's egotistical manner of love-making. It is more than likely that Sidney will find her dreamy girlish fantasies raped by his brutal heterosexuality. Certainly, it remains doubtful whether Sidney, the romantic heroine, and her vain-glorious lout will produce anything beyond sex-war and sex-disgust, hard labour and babies. There is no escape from Happy Valley for the brave or for the timid. Oliver and Alys at the end of the novel drive towards

neither intensity of living nor sexual fulfilment. Protected, like their crockery, against breakage, change, movement they carry their Happy Valleys with them.

Given the novel's pervading sense of entrapment it is significant that, despite the plethora of lovers in Happy Valley, White is unable to offer us any enactment of successful sexual love. The short-lived affair between Oliver and Alys is intellectualized and half-hearted, its transports coyly described and unconvincing. There is a recoil from sexuality on White's part that is apparent even in this, his first novel. Despite the presence of Lawrence brooding over the novel's uncertainties, White is unable wholeheartedly to see sexuality as a potentially redemptive human encounter. It is this inability to see love-making as an opening of the individual towards a full acceptance of life -- however much White might want to see sexuality as such, he cannot show it as such -- that prevents White's lovers from escaping their Happy Valleys and finding the intensity of living they desire.

There is a second reason for White's inability

to confine himself to a realistic treatment of Australia. He is clearly unhappy with the range of social types it offers and with its lack of social life in the sense of the meeting of civilized minds. The novel's only "polished mind[s]," Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne, are spurious in their intellectuality.[2] Even so, they, like the boy Rodney, become outcasts in a community where indifference is the norm and outright brutality not uncommon. Instead of the mannered treatment of colonial social life at which White eventually will prove adept, Happy Valley offers us comic scenes of low life, the bar scenes and the race meeting, with which White is not fully at home. It is unfortunate that White has attempted in the realist manner to encompass a whole society. He has none of the Realists' grasp of the dynamic nature of social life. "At Happy Valley," the narrator obligingly informs us, "man was by inclination static."[3] The problem does not lie in Australian society which at no stage of that country's history since 1788 could be described as "static." The problem lies in White's response to a society which fails to provide him with the "civilized surroundings" which, as "The Prodigal Son"

makes clear, he considers at this stage of his career essential to the business of writing. White sees Happy Valley as static because he cannot interest himself in Australian social life and has chosen ungenerously to focus the whole society through an unrepresentative microcosm. In other words, Happy Valley is not an Australian novel at all; it is an English novel set, like so many novels by young Englishmen in the Thirties, in a foreign land. As White notes in Flaws in the Glass, he finished Happy Valley in St. Jean-de-Luz "because everybody wrote some of whatever it was abroad."[4]

White has tried to encompass the whole range of Australian society within "an unrepresentative microcosm." The problem does not lie in the peripheral bearing of the outback on Australian society as a whole. The problem lies in White's attitude to the variety of social types that make up his microcosm. The source of the problem becomes clearer if we compare Happy Valley with an earlier version of outback life, Such Is Life, written in 1903 by Joseph Furphy. Furphy, with none of White's educational advantages, manages to produce what White cannot: an encompassing yet complex picture of Australia as a whole

by focussing on a small and isolated part.

Despite its sparce population, the outback has traditionally figured prominently in the Australian imagination. In The Australian Legend Russel Ward, borrowing from the frontier theory of American history and literature, suggests that the outback and its small towns, not what Furphy calls "the spurious and blue-moulded civilization of the littoral,"[5] saw the development of distinctively Australian attitudes and the genesis of a national literature.[6] It is true that Furphy discovered in the mid-nineteenth-century Riverina a dynamic exchange between forces that were already in the process of transforming Australia. Such Is Life locates the shaping of the Australian character -- democratic, cooperative, male -- not merely in the class war between those who own and those who work the land but also in the responsiveness to the peculiarities of the Australian landscape of those closest to it apart from the Aborigines: the bullock drivers, boundary riders and small farmers scraping a living in the outback.

In Such Is Life Furphy makes use of, rather than

succumbs to, the "democratic realism" of his narrator, Tom Collins. He sets Collins' "offensively Australian" preferences for local landscape and types against his Shandean enquiries as to the ultimate purposes of life.[7] In Happy Valley the narrator's forays into metaphysics arise from an authorial discontent with the flatness of outback life. Furphy's ironic method achieves a far more complex and, at the same time, a less abstract picture of that engaging, perennial problem, life as such, than does White's fumbling method. Furphy also achieves a far more convincing and extensive version of Australia than does White. Such Is Life, for all the metaphysical bumptiousness of its narrator, tends towards the concrete: the myths of Australia -- the superiority of its democracy, the inevitability of its material and social progress, the unique and sacred quality of its male friendships -- are exposed to the light of slyly introduced facts. Happy Valley, despite its realistic impulses, tends towards the abstract: the novel's interest keeps sheering away from the details of social life towards untestable and metaphysical graspings after the meaning of life. White simply finds Australia too banal to hold his attention.

A comparison of White's Belper and Furphy's Collins is instructive. Belper's Micawberish optimism is the whole of the man. He is a caricature and his sanguine view of the future prospects of the continent are unequivocally ridiculous. We do not need to have the point driven home by his eventual ruin in the collapse of the Salvage Bay Pearl Company. Collins is immensely attractive, so much so that most early commentators assumed that he spoke for the novelist. Yet Furphy has remained acutely critically intelligent. He has so shaped his novel that its intricate and deceptive structure rather than obvious parody deliver the pricks of Tom Collins' airy nothings. Furphy has fully objectified a very complex, contradictory, and, curiously, a very Australian part of himself: the pose of a supremely naive optimism in the face of life that hides a profound ontological puzzlement. H.P. Heseltine has rightly drawn attention to the abiding concern among Australian writers with the "terror at the basis of being."[8] White merely imposes his metaphysics on the structure of the novel, seeing no connection between ultimate questions and the limited world of Australian outback life. Furphy's interest in

metaphysics springs from his concern with human suffering and his recognition that his unassuming, outback characters possess a dignity in their own sufferings that is distinctively Australian. Furphy has fully embodied his rage at human suffering and ignorance in the intricate structure of the novel.

In Happy Valley White has not yet mastered the the novelist's trick of giving his characters fully rounded life by projecting onto them potentialities of the self. Sidney Furlow is a partial exception to this failing. Her mixture of sensuality and sensibility is clearly attractive to White. It is a trait often discernible in White's writing. At this stage, White has not yet managed to separate himself from, and thus give independent life to, her type, perhaps because he is unwilling to acknowledge how much of himself has gone into her portrait. Oliver Halliday's tendency to withdraw from life into cerebration is a quality we shall find throughout White's writing. It is manifest in a certain dryness, cerebrality, and self-consciousness in his prose, a certain physical distaste especially noticeable in his treatment of sexuality. In Happy Valley this nervous

reserve triumphs over the novel's equivocal search for a richer mode of life than that available in the place itself. In later novels, White will learn to use this quality creatively as a strategy of style rather than fear it as the expression of an underlying disorientation towards life which threatens to swallow his work. In Waldo Brown in The Solid Mandala (1966) the quality is explored with the fascinated control of a perfectly dramatic creativity.[9]

Instead of life Happy Valley presents us with ideas, and often objectionable ideas at that. Most disturbing is the novel's endorsement of Oliver Halliday's "mature" moral position. The reader is badgered into agreeing with Oliver's discovery that life is somehow stacked against our chances of happiness by an arbitrary fate or, more troublingly, by a Manichaean will to chaos in the face of which we must "accept." We are led to this disputable viewpoint less by the novel's dramatic testing of a variety of responses to life than by the heavy-handed manipulation of a melodramatic plot. Despite the novel's pretensions to offering us a psychological study at least of Oliver Halliday, unity is achieved entirely by external action. The characters

are linked not by the impingement of their lives on the subjectivity of others but by a creaky plot full of reversals, surprises, and recognitions whose climax is a murder which might well have been culled straight from the Sunday newspapers. By using a narrator who parades his ideas, and by relying on a melodramatic plot, White undermines his evident interest in interiority which, properly pursued, might have led him to write a genuinely "modern" novel instead of a pot-boiler with pretensions.

White, in this first novel, displays none of that deft handling of point of view that we expect in the modern novel. He is aware that the formal centre of interest in the modern novel is not external action but consciousness: hence the importance of Oliver Halliday in the novel. But Happy Valley is not, in the Jamesian sense, a psychological novel. Oliver Halliday is neither sufficiently interesting nor sufficiently well-drawn to provide an adequate centre of consciousness in the novel: a complex, minutely registered, responsiveness to events which is embedded in the drama and through which the action might be focussed. Instead of relying on a single such consciousness White adopts the chatty,

reliable, judgemental narrator that bedevilled the Victorian novel. White's narrator is almost as prone as are Trollope's to letting us know how the narrative is getting along. We have become used to this kind of thing since Wayne Booth taught us to bear with novelists who "tell" as well as those who "show" and since John Fowles resurrected the Victorian narrator in The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969).[10] White, however, lacks both the Victorian's confidence in a set of moral norms shared with his audience and the more recent novelist's acknowledgement of and delight in the sheer artifice of novel-writing.

The use of the narrator in Happy Valley is thoroughly awkward. We object, in reading the novel, not only to the way in which the narrator forces his judgements on us but also to the kinds of judgements to which he is given. We object to his habit of reducing a character to a stereotype: "Mr. Furlow hadn't a mind" (HV, 83). We object to his anti-feminist asides disguised as Oliver Halliday's thoughts: "There is something distinctly nauseating about love in its obese blonde aspect" (HV, 126). We object to his less-than-inspiring philosophical speculations: to being told that there is

"a mystery of unity that surrounds the earth" (HV, 166). We object because nothing in the novel justifies the statement. We object, finally, to his persistent presence, to such buttings in on the narrative as "I repeat ..." or "But as I have said before ..." (HV, 10, 219).

Despite the novel's traditional structure, it is clear that White has read his Joyce and Woolf and has attempted to assimilate the modernist techniques of their novels. Like many Thirties writers, White has taken techniques drawn from the modernists of the Twenties and has simply thrown them erratically into his otherwise conservative novel. In particular, White has made use of stream-of-consciousness, a technique which, unfortunately, he uses without confidence. We see this lack of confidence in White's habit in Happy Valley of introducing his sallies into stream-of-consciousness in the second person. This mannerism, apparently a concession to the reader, quickly becomes annoying. Most disturbingly, the novel mixes together characters without any inner life at all, crudely drawn caricatures like the Belpers, and ponderously conceived dissociated sensibilities -- Oliver owes much to Eliot's Prufrock -- who seem oddly out-of-place

in an otherwise traditional novel. It is as though we were to find Gradgrind and Bounderby stalking around in The Waves.

White has not, however, simply taken his plot and some of his characters from the Victorians and his techniques and the rest of his characters from the moderns. The problem lies deeper: he cannot choose between the traditional realistic view of man as a social animal whose consciousness is shaped by a palpable social and physical world and the modernist view that man's ontological condition is isolation and that "reality" is not a given but a problematic. Hence, the form of the novel is divided against itself. White has followed the nineteenth-century realists in attempting to depict a society as a whole even in a provincial microcosm, yet the characters in Happy Valley are not in any way shaped by social exchange ("In Happy Valley, the people existed in spite of each other" [HV, 28]). Each treads a circle around a central privacy -- towards the madness of Ernest Moriarty, the self-enclosed perfection of the Chinese girl, Margaret Quong, or merely around the emptiness of Vic Moriarty.

White simply cannot commit himself to the more whole-hearted subjectivism of Joyce or Woolf. Stream-of-consciousness in Ulysses is not used simply as a means of entering more deeply the lives of particular characters. It is a recognition in form of a relativist and subjectivist mode of construing reality. Its thoroughgoingness as the decisive formal principle in Ulysses signals a radical shift from the naively materialist assumptions that underlay naturalism. Despite the novel's wealth of characters, its felt sense of a complex and comprehensive social world, and its density of naturalistic detail, we find that the external world serves to present through a set of symbols the inner world of consciousness. The astonishing variety of set-down things in the novel serves less to stress that the world "out there" is objectively real than to show how that world is refracted through each individual consciousness. In Happy Valley, White attempts to give his central characters the kind of inner life that Stephen Dedalus or Mrs. Ramsey have by using the stream-of-consciousness technique. But the world that Oliver Halliday and Alys Browne inhabit is the substantial, unproblematic world of the Victorian

novel. At least, its problems lie not in deciding whether or not it is "real" but in coping with its banality.

There are similar difficulties with White's use of Lawrentian symbolism. There are unmistakable echoes of Lawrence in White's description of Hagan killing a snake, rich with phallic suggestivenss, and in Sidney's passionate horse-riding that reveals her unacknowledged feelings for the overseer. The problem is not merely that the symbols are derivative. They have no life in themselves. Lawrence's snake in his eponymous poem and and the horse that Gerald Crich rides against the locomotive in Women in Love, whatever else they may mean, are quick with their own marvellously particularized life. White's symbols are never more than obvious and self-conscious symbols. The state of Vic Moriarty's alternately erect and wilting cyclamen is tiresomely predictable. As with the interior monologue White has imposed on his formally traditional novel a technique he has borrowed from a writer for whom form was the means by which whole new ways of registering experience could find expression in the novel. The symbols in Happy Valley do not amount to a central structuring principle.

Rather than follow Lawrence in building his novel organically through his use of symbolism White has relied on a melodramatic Victorian plot. The traditionalist and modernist influences that meet in the novel are at odds with one another.

Happy Valley, in short, is a failure. The novel has none of the expansiveness of realism, none of the reluctance we find in Tolstoy to close life within the circle of aesthetic form. Yet the novel lacks Jamesian concentration; the details are not all worked into the overall design. The novel clatters with its borrowings from T.S. Eliot: Prufrockian voices and clumsy versions of the objective correlative. Its interest lies in what it shows of White's ambitions, his determination to draw on the full range of the genre and the language, and in what it shows of the uncertainties that are giving rise to formal problems, those ugly jarrings of unassimilated influences.

In its central confusion of purpose, Happy Valley is very much a Thirties novel. It is a novel written by a young man clearly overshadowed by the

great modernists of the Twenties who perfected such radical techniques for exploring the inner world of consciousness and for expressing the jumbled contents of the unconscious. Hence, the novel's habit of quoting these methods, a habit that also distinguishes Lowry's first novel Ultramarine and Graham Greene's Eliot-inspired early novels. At the same time, Happy Valley displays a characteristically Thirties suspicion of unchecked subjectivism. Oliver Halliday, like the hero of Edward Upward's Journey to the Border, is eager to escape the circle of himself and find some fruitful connection with reality. Similarly, White is eager to tame the more extreme tendencies of modernism by setting them in an essentially realistic novel. White wants to believe that health and wholeness are found by engaging with reality, if not in the usual Thirties manner by political commitment, then by a Lawrentian commitment to passionate sexual love. But he cannot convince himself, or us.

III

The Living and The Dead

When one sees to what unhappiness, to what peril of extinction centuries of cerebration have brought us, one sometimes has a curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at which point we went astray.

Graham Greene,
Journey Without Maps.

Language, the medium through which he [the Thirties poet] operates, is nowadays in the midst of a severe crisis -- a crisis probably more disturbing than has occurred since the Elizabethan Age.

Peter Quennell,
A Letter to Mrs. Virginia Woolf (1932).

White's second novel, The Living and The Dead, although it was not published until 1941, is more properly a Thirties novel than Happy Valley. The apocalyptic mood that pervades the novel is one that was widespread among English intellectuals after 1937 as events in Spain and Eastern Europe made it clear that another world war was inevitable. The feeling that another war was coming, the feeling of being "between the wars," had been common among English writers throughout the Thirties. It is found as early as 1928 in Evelyn Waugh's Decline and Fall. In the course of the Thirties, the response to this sense of doom changed with the deepening terror of political events. In the early Thirties, pacifism was popular. This gave way to the Popular Front mood of active resistance to fascism. After 1937 there was great enthusiasm for armed struggle against the fascists in Spain. With the Hitler-Stalin pact and news of communist duplicity in Spain, the mood changed to one of resignation and disillusionment. Few English writers responded to the outbreak of war with Germany as enthusiastically as had the generation of 1914. None wrote of feeling, as had Rupert Brooke on enlisting in 1914, like swimmers "into

cleanness leaping."[1] The Living and The Dead belongs precisely to that period after Munich and before the Blitz. Like novels as different from itself as George Orwell's Coming Up for Air (1939) and Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts (1941), it deals with the slide of an exhausted English civilization into the Second World War and is written from a viewpoint which accepts both the inevitability of that slide and its fatal impact upon the continuity of English life.

In the larger context of Thirties cultural history, the centre of moral concern in The Living and The Dead -- a sense of disgust at the moral bankruptcy of the English bourgeoisie and the "civilization" for which it had once stood coupled with a frantic search for alternative moral and social orders -- may be said to be at the heart of the Thirties dilemma. The mood of disillusionment with the favourite alternative moral orders of the Thirties that we find in The Living and The Dead places the novel at the close of the decade. Like Auden's "September 1, 1939" and George Orwell's "Inside the Whale" (1940), The Living and The Dead judges the enthusiasms, the idealisms, and the dreams

of the decade from the outside. But White is more nostalgic than either Orwell or Auden for whom the leftist posturings of Thirties intellectuals have been thoroughly exposed by events. For both, in spite of their differences, the decade was "a low, dishonest" one, on the literary left as well as on the literary right.[2] White is still closer to Thirties leftist enthusiasms than either of these. His mood is not unlike that of Evelyn Waugh in Brideshead Revisited (1945) who looks back with undisguised nostalgia to the world of Oxford dandies he had known in the Twenties. Waugh is aware that the world in which such a life was possible has vanished for good, but it seems to him infinitely more desirable than the mass world which has replaced it. White is aware that the naivety which made possible the enthusiasm of Thirties intellectuals and writers for the working class is no longer tenable. But he doesn't want to let go of that naivety.

In its evocation of the London of the late Thirties, The Living and The Dead fixes itself unequivocally in this period. The London of the Thirties where gentility mixed with bohemia and intellectuals sought to

purify themselves of their bourgeoisness by contact with the working class or by commitment to revolutionary action pervades the novel. White has clearly drawn on his Ebury Street days in creating the novel's world of self-involved intellectuals and tarnished, but by no means shabby, gentility. So convincingly does The Living and The Dead capture the atmosphere of London in the Thirties that it is difficult to think of the novel as having been written by an Australian, even an expatriate. The Englishness and the smartness of The Living and The Dead seem to have contributed to White's repudiation of the novel.[3] The novel suggests a direction as a writer he chose soon after and very firmly not to take.

In Flaws in the Glass, White disparagingly describes himself in the late Thirties as "chas[ing] after a fashionable style" and as "paying lipservice to the fashionable radical views."[4] We may gain hints of this would-be fashionable White from several sources. There is a poem by White, "The House Behind the Barricades," which was published in the summer 1938 issue of New Verse. This is a poem entirely representative of its period. The poem describes the threat of violent poli-

tical action to a wilfully self-enclosed consicousness content to feast on memories of a more sensuous past ("Desert now the hall where we ate peaches in their season").[5] In the poem's apocalyptic conclusion, the time-bomb of present political evil ticks away the dying moments of a world in which the individual could look languorously inward, ignoring "the actual plane." White's style is intended to be as fashionable as his politics. It is true that the influence of Eliot is stronger than that of Auden, a fatal mistake by 1938 (the next issue of New Verse included an obituary for Eliot by Charles Madge on the grounds that Eliot's "relation to the world of letters and the public [is] such that the obituary [is] in fact the proper form in which to discuss him").[6] Nevertheless, the poem is unmistakably "modern" in the sense that it shows in its form the influence of modernist experiment: a Prufrockian voice and the objective correlative. White has come a long way from the pale Housman imitations of The Ploughman and Other Poems. He has shucked off his belated Georgianism, his preference for images of nature over those of modern urban life, and the wistful air of adolescent melancholy that

hangs over the early poems. He has put behind him his Housman-like habit of considering death sub specie aeternitatis and has made it immediate, realistic, even smelly: the province of contemporary politics rather than the abstraction, mortality, observed with a resigned, classical detachment. The Ploughman suggests a direction that would have proved fatal to White, one bound up with his attraction as a young man to Housman: the direction that leads to nostalgic pastoral and to the metaphysical pessimism of adolescence. Auden refers to this direction when he remarks that "to my generation no other English poet [than Housman] seemed so perfectly to express the sensibility of the male adolescent."[7] The Patrick White we glimpse behind "The House Behind the Barricades" is not quite up to date, but he thinks he is, or very nearly. The most revealing aspect of this poem is what it tells us about where White is heading, about what he thinks it is to be up to date. By "a fashionable style" he understands "Prufrock": the long, hesitant sentences of an exhausted sensibility. But the poet has a Thirties prejudice against willed self-enclosure within sensibility. He is eager to toss his Prufrock into the sordidness of the actual.

There is a portrait of Patrick White done in this period by Roy de Maistre, the Australian painter, which tells us how far White has to go before his feet settle firmly on "the actual plane." In this painting, we see a quite different Patrick White from the rustic figure we see in the photos of the Fifties. De Maistre's White displays none of the "humility and simplicity" to which the post-war White lays claim.[8] This White is elegantly groomed and suited, at home in stylish surroundings. The telling detail is the silver-tipped cane over which the prominent right hand drapes itself languorously. De Maistre shows us a young Patrick White who has the unmistakable air of the dandy.[9] Again, White's notion of what is fashionable is behind the times. The New Verse poets of 1938, although they did not actually affect cloth caps, preferred to identify themselves sartorially with the working class rather than with the Twenties dandy.[10] Typcially, they present themselves to us in open-necked sweaters and tweed jackets, or perhaps trench coats and scarves en route to China. Auden smokes a cigarette with proletarian fierceness rather than Mallarméan languor. MacNeice holds a pint at the Fitzroy.

The Patrick White in De Maistre's portrait, for all the largeness and awkwardness of hands and ears, has the dandy's elegance and the dandy's disdain. He is putting a little metaphorical smoke between himself and the world.

White evidently wants to have his cake and eat it. He wants to be seen to have adopted the fashionable radical politics. He wants to precipitate his fretful speaker in "The House Behind the Barricades" out into the square where "the people" march and shout and die, presumably cut down by fascists. At the same time, he wants to employ the style and the narrative perspectives that had been fashionable two decades previously. He wants to speak from the point of view and in the language of Prufrock. This is the White of de Maistre's portrait: determined to possess a style, but not absolutely confident about the style he has chosen. The features clash with the manner: the hand on the foppish cane wants to look delicate, but cannot disguise its largeness and bluntness. The question is: what effect will this stylistic indecision have on the writing?

By "a fashionable style" White means, as far as his writing is concerned, the techniques of modernism. These are much more in evidence and much more successfully worked into the novel's design than in Happy Valley. There is no mistaking the powerful influence on both the texture and the structure of the novel of Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Lawrence. These presences are so strongly felt in reading the novel that one feels at times that White has simply written a belated, derivative, and second-rate Twenties novel. It is as though someone has stitched together fragments of several novels by Huxley, Lawrence, and Joyce and thrown in phrases snatched promiscuously from Eliot and Pound for colour. But this habit in the novel of quotation, which arises from White's having borrowed rather than assimilated the techniques of writers he respects, is not sufficiently pervasive to sink the novel. The line "A blueness that has drenched the robe of God" from a poem in The Ploughman is deplorable in its echoing of the early Yeats because it is not surrounded by the work of a writer who has come into his own strength.[11] It stands out like the single felicitous phrase in a dull undergraduate's essay and smacks of plagiarism. In The Living

and The Dead, White has not yet managed to swallow his literary father figures, but he has begun to struggle with them.

The presiding literary genius of The Living and The Dead is T.S. Eliot. Elyot Standish -- the Christian name gives away the show -- like the speaker's of Eliot's early poems, is a "dry brain" conscious of belonging to a rotting and fragmented civilization who waits with Tiresian indifference for improbable signs of new growth.[12] Happily, White has learned to use with a new assurance his ransackings of Eliot's poetry. In particular, he uses jazz motifs as a kind of counterpoint in the Café Vendôme section and attempts, not wholly unsuccessfully, to work jazz rhythms into his prose in his depiction of Wally Collins, the saxophonist.

Like the early Auden and the Graham Greene of England Made Me (1935), the young Patrick White is convinced that Eliot's poetry, particularly The Waste Land, holds the key to cultivating a distinctively "modern" style. In Auden and Greene, this debt to Eliot is most obvious in the obsessive use of urban imagery and in the

Eliot-inspired phrases that run through their early work. The seediness of Greene's urban landscapes owes directly to Eliot. In Greene's early fiction, we find very strongly the sense that The Wasteland had defined once and for all the condition of contemporary man and had established a language in which the modern world might adequately be depicted. In the late Twenties and early Thirties young writers, seeking a point of view as well as a style, were still very much under the spell of the Twenties' "philosophy of meaninglessness" of which The Wasteland stood as the definitive expression. Quite early in the new decade, however, most abandoned this "philosophy" in favour of one or another of the various solutions to the problems of meaning and commitment that competed for the allegiance of Thirties intellectuals. For writers on the left, appalled by Eliot's politics, Auden replaced Eliot as the distinctively "modern" voice, the man whose style dominated the period.[13] White's bowing down before the toppled god of T.S. Eliot seems, thus, a rather belated gesture. White's "fashionable style" would seem to be passé.

Yet there is a curious rightness in White's

choice of a master influence and tone given the time in which The Living and The Dead was written. By viewing the late Thirties from the perspective of 1941 White is able to stand outside the blind enthusiasms for the various solutions to the problem of meaning and political action that were fashionable in the Thirties. The Living and The Dead captures the precise moment at which the dreams of the Thirties broke up as a whole civilization seemed on a point of being swept for ever down the gutter of history. What had seemed serious and mature now seemed merely shoddy and silly. The communist lamb was lying down with the nazi tiger. Auden and Isherwood had bolted for New York. White himself dalled in bars not far from the one in which Auden wrote "September 1, 1939." He even considered staying there. The moment of commitment to the serious business of defeating fascism had not yet arrived. The voice of weariness and disgust that we hear so insistently in The Living and The Dead, the voice that reminds us of the Eliot of "The Hollow Men" (1925) and the Pound of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920), is appropriate to this bankrupt and guttering civilization. The disillusion and disgust that dominate the novel connect

the early phase of the Second World War to the aftermath of the First. The old gods, whether pre-1914 liberalism or pre-1939 socialism, lie smashed. A huge and probably final assault on the dignity of the individual has once again been loosed on the world. Thus, the tone of Twenties' despair and the influence of Twenties writings in The Living and The Dead are not merely the result of White's chasing after outmoded fashions. The novel filters its Twenties borrowings through a late Thirties awareness. White is making use of, not merely succumbing to, his influences.

After the fumbling experiments with a modernist style in Happy Valley, The Living and The Dead seems assured in its drawings on Eliot, Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. White has evidently put himself to school to good effect. He has learned from Joyce to present entire sections of the narrative in terms of the sensibility, though not necessarily directly through the eyes, of a particular character. In these sections, external events and things contribute to a total picture of the character's inner world. In other words, in the symbolist manner, environment suggests states of soul.

More important, the style of these sections serves the same end. Even the narrative voice loses impartiality and becomes involved in the registration of sensibility. White has learned, chiefly perhaps from Virginia Woolf, to subjectivize time not merely by having his narrator announce, as in Happy Valley, that time is not always measurable by the clock but by focussing the action through the consciousness of each of the characters and by paying careful attention to the effects he is achieving at the level of the phrase. Connie Tiarks' fall from the mulberry tree is particularly well handled. By couching her fall in one long spiralling sentence composed of a series of phrases, spaced to measure Elyot's breaths and packed with sibilants and participles to register his horrified response, White allows Connie to crash less through the actual air than through the fascinated attention of the observer:

> That was before she began, it happened at first slowly, her fingers slipping as surely as a fruit off its twig, her dress the downward flare that brushed his face, he saw, the rushing was the white dress, the head that tumbled with the sickness of a fruit, her voice stretched out in air.[14]

At times, it is true, the novel's debts to Eliot, Woolf, and Joyce are obvious to the point of embarrassment. White's use of symbolism in The Living and The Dead owes much to T.S. Eliot. It is as striking as was the debt to Lawrence's symbolism in Happy Valley. In the latter novel, we find in a less polished form, the same choice of image, the same phrasing, even the same recoil from physicality that we find in the early poetry of Eliot: "Once as a child he [Elyot] had stuck a caterpillar with a pin, watched the writhing and a green liquid" (LD, 140). White, of course, is trying to make his image resonate with projected emotional content. He is trying clumsily to arrive at a version of the objective correlative. Similarly, the staked dog that Eden Standish and Joe Barnett find on the beach reminds us of the corpse of a dog in Ulysses which Stephen Dedalus observes while walking on a beach (White will return to the image of a canine corpse washed up on a beach in The Vivisector [1971]).[15] To compare Joyce's dogsbody with that of White is forcibly to be impressed by White's penchant for overcharging his symbols. Joe Barnett's little terrier must not only stand for the whole, wounded world, she must also be offered to us without a touch of humour,

without, for instance, Joyce's genital-sniffing live dog who reminds us that life frisks on in the midst of death. For all the obsessive concern in The Living and The Dead with "the substance of things," the novelist seems curiously unconcerned with things in themselves. We never gain the sense, as we do in Lawrence, of the discrete, particular existence of things that are uniquely themselves, whether a lobster on tiptoe or a woman combing her hair in the sun.

Allowing for these failures in assimilating influences, The Living and The Dead remains a major step forward. White has successfully employed the central modernist strategy for organizing narrative: the shape of the novel is governed less by the desire to trace a sequence of events than by the desire to register the impact of events on consciousness. White has put behind him his former total reliance on external action as a means of unifying his fiction. In Happy Valley White aimed at the neat rise and fall of a plot that imitated a significant human action. In The Living and The Dead, the entire action is contained within the retrospection of the central character, Elyot Standish, who thinks

back over various events, jumbling their chronological order according to their subjective importance as he walks home from the station at which he has just seen his sister, Eden, off to the Spanish War. This does not mean that the whole novel is focussed through the consciousness of Elyot Standish. His enclosed sensibility does, however, frame the whole so that we view a disintegrating civilization through a consciousness which cultivates a pose of detachment from its corruptions and its enervation but which offers no way out. This technique has something in common with Eliot's use of Prufrock as a dissociated sensibility who might stand as a representative figure for a whole civilization. Prufrock's enervations are those of his times. But White has employed the technique in a peculiarly Thirties manner. Elyot Standish is like the speaker of "The House Behind the Barricades" who hears the call of actual suffering, who senses a substantial world outside the boundaries of his cultivated and inward-looking sensibility. The novel, like the poem, enacts the Thirties effort of young middle-class intellectuals to break out of the confines of their class and education and to touch the "actual plane." White's use of this framing technique has something in common with Malcolm

Lowry's use of Jacques Laruelle, the film director whose major works were accomplished in the Twenties when artists worked on a grander scale than in the late Thirties and whose by now played-out consciousness dominates the opening retrospective chapter of Under the Volcano. Like Lowry, White in The Living and The Dead is trying to arrive at some total response to the between-the-wars period, to contain its contradictions within a single work. This means filtering the perspective of the late Thirties through the methods of the most expansive and daring period of modernism: that immediately after the First World War.

By using Elyot Standish as a framing perspective without allowing his consciousness to control our view of the novel, White achieves a form that demands a complex response to the novel's moral concerns. Effectively, he gains the advantages of using an unreliable first person narrator: an oblique approach to the novel's moral concerns that forces the reader to work. Yet he does not have to adopt the wheedling ways -- alternately charming, bullying, and self-effacing -- by which such narrators try to gain the reader's confidence. The

narrative of The Living and The Dead is organized around chunks of consciousness -- Elyot's, Eden's, Joe Barnett's -- that intersect without actually touching one another. That is to say, the same events are filtered through each of these consciousnesses so that we see the characters both from the inside and from the outside. This is not to suggest that White's method is as radical as, say, William Faulkner's in As I Lay Dying (1930) where external narrative is entirely dispensed with. The Living and The Dead retains an omniscient narrator who all too frequently wanders into the narrative assuming the divine right which such narrators habitually confer on themselves of nudging the reader towards the appropriate moral judgements. The novel also retains a clear sense of the objective world of events outside the characters' private preoccupations and inside which the characters, as inescapably social beings, are forced to act and have their being. White does not, as Virginia Woolf does, allow subjectivity to blur the edges of things. Despite White's new emphasis on consciousness and the notion advanced in the novel of "the ultimate separateness of soul," The Living and The Dead contains no Beckettian private universes hermetically sealed against the world (LD, 149).

Although The Living and The Dead is focussed through an intensely private and self-absorbed consciousness, the novel is not at all solipsistic in form. In fact, the novel's form serves as a critique of solipsism by allowing us to view through the self-involved and "dead" eyes of Elyot Standish the attractiveness of more open forms of living to which he cannot commit himself. White is trying to arrive at a characteristically Thirties compromise between the private and public worlds. Hence his modernist tendencies, which reinforce the private bias, must reach a modus vivendi with the clearly social bias of the novel. The effect is much the same as in those Thirties poems and novels which strive to reach a compromise between allegory and history or in all those Thirties travel books which bring together reportage and fable or even in Stephen Spender's September Journal (1939) which links the break-up of the author's marriage to the outbreak of war. For the writers of the Thirties, the conflicting and apparently irreconcilable demands of the private and the public worlds had somehow to be juggled into a harmony. This is true even for the young Dylan Thomas whose poems may be found in New

Verse alongside those of Auden and Grigson and Allott and Spender. White's compromise by any standards is by no means undistinguished.

A second formal advance on White's part is his ability in The Living and The Dead to use symbolism for structural ends. Specifically, he has learned to use symbols to draw contrasts among the various responses to life of his characters. The Bristol box made of glass that Connie Tiarks gives Elyot and which he associates with Muriel Raphael is opposed by the shaped objects in wood which Joe Barnett makes in his working world. The brittle, cerebral lovers and the life-avoiding Connie are thus set against the makers, the committed, the life-affirmers. The glass box allows White to achieve aesthetic coherence while exploring a disintegrating experience, an achievement which is only partially marred by White's determination to overdraw his symbol.

By locating The Living and The Dead in the London of the late Thirties rather than outback Australia White chooses to confront directly the disintegrating tendencies of modern life which he had skirted in his

previous novel. It is White's recognition at the level of form of the fragmenting tendencies of contemporary reality that distinguishes The Living and The Dead from other late Thirties and early Forties English novels. This is not to suggest that it is a more accomplished novel than, say, Brighton Rock (1939). The Living and The Dead is, however, a serious, if not entirely successful, attempt to engage with a stream in the English novel whose full flowering in England was brief and which was generally regarded by English novelists with suspicion. That stream, of course, is modernism.

The novel in England during the Thirties -- Greene, Waugh, Elizabeth Bowen, Anthony Powell are representative -- was in general formally unadventurous. Elegance of style and tight formal organization were in favour; difficulty and dislocation were out of favour. Novels were supposed to be "modern" in the sense of being post-Jamesian, without Victorian looseness or garrulous Victorian narrators. An unobstrusive use of symbolism was acceptable and novels were supposed to be psychologically sophisticated. But few novelists -- obvious exceptions being Lowry and White -- set themselves

to master the specific techniques of the great modernists: stream-of-consciousness, multi-layered meaning, "poetic" prose, expressionism, syncopated dialogue. Generally speaking, we may say that in the Thirties the radical tendencies of modernism, particularly its radical subjectivism, were tamed and were adapted to the modest, and often openly didactic, purposes of Thirties novel writing. The novelists of the Thirties went a long way towards patching up the divorce between serious fiction and the reading public that modernism had rudely encouraged in its more outrageous and public-hating phase. Modernist techniques sometimes appear unexpectedly and disjointedly in Thirties novels. George Orwell's attempt at a Joycean use of expressionism in the Trafalgar Square scene in A Clergyman's Daughter (1935) is an extreme example of the undeniable but usually unfortunate attraction of modernism as a body of techniques for a writer whose native talent lay in the field of reportage and realism, one more characteristic of the Thirties.[16] The piece, apparently modelled on the "Nighttown" scene in Ulysses, bears the same kind of relation to the novel as a whole that cancer bears to a living organism.

Such a close identification with the major phase of literary modernism as that to be found in The Living and The Dead is not characteristic of the novel in the Thirties. Most Thirties writers glanced back respectfully over their shoulders from time to time at Joyce and Eliot and Lawrence. But those, like Virginia Woolf, who saw themselves as uncompromising modernists keeping alive the tradition of avant-garde experiment were in an eccentric minority. Evelyn Waugh describes his generation of novelists as overshadowed by the great modernists who preceded them.[17] Waugh sees his contemporaries as consolidating the achievements of the Twenties, but not continuing the line of experiment. It is true, as Waugh suggests, that novelists in the Thirties were generally content to work in a minor key. The serious talents were anxious not to be out of date -- to be, that is, Victorian -- but neither were they willing to "Make it New."[18] Graham Greene's Stamboul Train (1932) illustrates the point. Greene pokes fun at Q.C. Savory, the Edwardian novelist in Thirties proletarian disguise about the business of writing a Thirties travelogue, who blusters about "morbid introspection" in modern novels and rails

against Joyce and Lawrence.[19] Greene evidently sides with the formally, sexually, and psychologically exciting moderns. But, apart from some montaged dialogue and passages of interior monologue timidly introduced in the second person, Greene's novel is formally undaring. Greene's treatment of sexuality is far less explicit and far less fundamental than Lawrence's. As to psychological interest, he scarcely matches Conrad or James. He is not prepared, as were Joyce and Woolf, to use radical formal experiments to probe the depths of subjectivity. Greene's gestures to modernism are routine. In The Living and The Dead White looks back to the modernism of the immediate post-war period with a, by late Thirties standards, singularly fixed and resolute stare.

It would not, however, be accurate to depict White valiantly and single-handedly swimming against the tide of Thirties conversatism. That White feels about the modern world as Eliot did when he created "Apeneck Sweeney" is made clear by his horrified portrait of the saxophonist, Wally Collins. But such a recoil from the modern world has been commonplace in English writing at least since "Dover Beach" (1851),

to stop at a convenient point. The mood may be summed up by George Orwell's image of a ghastly sausage into which George Bowling bites in Coming Up for Air. Inside this sausage lurks the whole ersatz mess of modernity.[20] What distinguishes the specifically "modernist" endeavour from the work of Orwell or Waugh or Anthony Powell is the effort to arrive at an aesthetic that faces the full extent of the damage that has been done. This means acknowledging that where neither social structure, nor values, nor beliefs, nor language itself possess stability the forms of art must become problematical. In Mallarmé's words: "dans une societé sans stabilité, sans unité, il ne peut se créer d'art stable, d'art définitif."[21] This is why, as Frank Kermode has observed, "the great experimental novels of early modernism -- Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Musil, for instance -- are all characterized by a kind of formal desperation."[22] What Waugh and Powell and Rebecca West acknowledged only at the level of content, Joyce, Woolf, Wyndham Lewis acknowledged at the level of form.

White seems, in The Living and The Dead, to

have set himself firmly in the camp of the moderns. We feel on first reading the novel, particularly in the insistent echoes of Virginia Woolf, White's desire to "oppose the waste and deformity of the world" -- the phrase is Rhoda's in Woolf's The Waves (1931) but it could be Elyot Standish's -- by fitting the form of his novel to the flux of consciousness and to moments of "illumination" rather than by seeking some shape in the chaos of external events.[23] Yet the precise bearing of modernism on The Living and The Dead remains uncertain. At times, the very obviousness of the debt is a drawback. There is a constant sense that White has snatched a line or an image and thrown it into his novel. White's habit of using the disconnected faces on a city street as a symbol of alienation is too clearly drawn from Eliot and Pound. Even the phrasing and the iambic metre have been lifted in a line White borrows from Pound: the poet's "the apparition of these faces in the crowd" becomes, rather disappointingly, "the unrelated faces of a crowd" (LD, 332).[24] More fundamentally, White cannot arrive at a wholly modernist notion of form because his grasp of the ideological components of

modernism is confused by his allegiance, however equivocal, to the leftist politics of the Thirties.

White's attitudes to the past, to history, to consciousness, and to political action are different in certain fundamental respects from those of Eliot, Woolf, and Joyce whose techniques he has assiduously emulated. For Stephen Dedalus, history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awaken.[25] For the speaker of White's poem, "The House Behind the Barricades," and for Elyot Standish, self-consciousness is the nightmare from which they are trying to awaken into the real world of historical activity. Thus White returns, in a typically Thirties fashion, to the Marxist origin of the trope: for Marx the memory of the dead generations weighed in the brain of the living like a nightmare.[26] White, like Marx, wants to shake his memory-haunted, self-obsessed, removed characters out of their neurotic self-regard so that they might engage with the actual world of things and people and of history. Similarly, Edward Upward in Journey to the Border guiltily snatches his neurotic hero away from the reveries in which he doubts the reality of the external world and cures him with the

sight of an honest-to-God steamroller.[27] Steamrollers are evidently too substantial to allow even the most flighty of subjectivities to convince themselves that the external world is filled exclusively by the contents of their own consciousness. The steamroller fortifies the young man and prepares him to meet history head-on by joining the Communist Party. The same process leads Eden Standish through contact with the actual things made by Joe Barnett to volunteer for service in Spain.

White's response to the modern world is of the Thirties in that it is not consciously predicated of a nostalgia for an ideal of wholeness located in the past as were Eliot's, Lawrence's, and Pound's. The novel suggests that the condition of civilization it describes is historically caused and may be altered by the commitment of individuals to -- to the terms are deliberately vague -- life, love, action, socialism. The Living and The Dead is not in any strict, or even vague, sense a Marxist novel. It makes no common cause with the revolutionary proletariat; nor does it understand history in terms of dialectical materialism. The novel does, however, see the working class as a source of

hope by contrast with the debilitated and nerveless bourgeoisie it depicts. In the Lawrentian terms that the novel endorses, the only source of life remaining in England after the First World War is to be found in those sections of the working class that retain some contact with the old vital and organic way of life of the English peasantry. The middle class is shown to be sick, diseased, neurotic, and bound for a speedy extinction -- an essentially Lawrentian view of English civilization that had considerable appeal between the wars.

White departs most radically from Eliot, Joyce, and Woolf in his evident moral concern, in the presence in the novel of a peculiarly Thirties form of leftist didacticism. The formal expression of this didacticism is found in White's unfortunate determination to have the novel's moral centre fall on an idealized proletarian figure who makes his stand in favour of life by volunteering to fight for the Spanish Loyalists.

As symbolism was at odds with Orwell's essentially realistic talent, the proletarian piety which White adopts in The Living and The Dead is

decidedly at odds with his markedly ironic talent. White apparently feels obliged by the pressure of the times to identify "life" with the working man (again there is a Lawrentian suggestiveness in the terms that complicates the Thirties bias). One wishes, merely on the grounds that White's workers are so embarrassing, that White had cultivated Waugh's contempt for those bourgeois writers who "suck up to" the working classes.[28] Julia Fallon, admittedly, is not unconvincing family servant, perhaps because she is drawn from White's early experience; such simple working people with an innate respect for "the substance of things" recur in his works in roles that would have brought them into contact with a wealthy child. Reading Flaws in the Glass one is impressed by White's obvious regard for the servants he knew as a boy as much as by his icy indifference to his immediate family.[29]

When White steps outside the limits of working-class life familiar to him, he finds himself in trouble. The Barnetts are too obviously drawn from literature rather than life, a practice which, when done unsentimentally, can offer comic possibilities as Waugh has well demonstrated. But Joe Barnett is intended as the

embodiment of working-class virtue, which is bad enough. That we are supposed to take him seriously as a lover for Eden Standish is simply ridiculous. In appearance and manner, he might well be Ham Peggotty. Unfortunately, White clearly intends that we should take him seriously as a Lawrentian working-class hero -- with the essential addition of a Thirties political conscience -- rather than as a Dickensian sentimentalized buffoon. Joe has something of Dickens' gawky boy's respect for his "betters," a deference which the bold front of his socialism cannot altogether conceal. For all White's determination to depict a credible working-class family in the Barnetts, the dialogue he gives them never extends beyond the comic or the pathetic; often, unfortunately, the modes are mixed. Joe's last words to Eden,"' You might say as it's all right. It'll always be all right by me,'" ought to sound poignant in their manly understatement (LD, 329). In fact, they have a comic tone not unlike that of Barkis' famous proposal in David Copperfield: "'Just say Barkis is willing.'"[30] Joe Barnett is not only unconvincingly drawn, too slender a characterization to carry the moral weight White

assigns him, he is also sentimentalized. The cutting edge of Joe's socialism is blunted because White's attitude to the proletariat and the future to which it lays claim is decidedly equivocal. Wally Collins, after all, is the novel's embodiment of the contemporary state of working-class culture: Cockney music hall debased by Tin Pan Alley. As a sample of revolutionary activism Joe could only be of comfort to the threatened exploiting class. Not only is he the sort of quality-conscious producer of artifacts favoured by William Morris, as distinct from the alienated industrial worker, he also does his revolutionizing safely outside Britain.

The Living and The Dead, in short, is sympathetic with but not wholeheartedly commited to the working class as a means of escape from the deadness of contemporary civilization. This uncertainty on White's part ought to be reassuring. Good liberals, we prefer doubt to propaganda in politically interested art. Yet the equivocations in the novel do not seem to proceed from any real complexity of political insight. There is none of that doubleness of vision we find in Marvell's political odes. We are not, at any rate, led to expect

complexity of political insight so much as a fully resolved vision. The authoritativeness of the title is calculated to cow us; it promises an apocalyptic division of a whole civilization into a secular version of the damned and the saved. Clearly, the novel is seeking some fullness of life to which it might commit its energies, a fullness in which working-class values, however vaguely understood, must have some part. But what part? And what precisely is meant by the term "life" with which White bullies us? There is a presumption about this essential but undefined term which reminds us of another Thirties Jeremiah: F.R. Leavis. Leavis, at least, knows what he means by the term.[31] But White, because he is unsure precisely what he means by such terms, allows the novel's centre of interest to slip away into vagueness, obfuscation, and sentimentality.

White's problem with his working-class characters is a very Thirties one: his political sentiments clash with his ineradicable bourgeoisness. The mood of the novel is reminiscent of Auden's equivocations throughout the Thirties about the Marxist conviction that the future lies with the working class. In a burst of

enthusiasm for the Spanish left and righteous hatred of fascism Auden penned the line he later deleted from Spain which condones "the necessary murder."[32] The subsequent deletion is significant as is the poet's role as tourist in the war itself. Auden felt, given the times not unreasonably, that bourgeois civilization and liberal culture were doomed and that Marxism was inevitable and probably salutary. But he could not suppress doubts about the desirability of its application. He could not altogether slough off the liberal culture that made the individual rather than the collective the ultimate repository of value. Hence, the tendency of his thought to veer off in mid-poem towards the theories of Freud or Groddeck or merely into schoolboy inanities. White is not a Marxist, not even an equivocal one, and he is writing at a time when the faith of English writers in communism had been undermined by the events of the late Thirties and early Forties and bourgeois individualism was coming back into vogue. Yet he evidently feels, as late as 1941, that it is incumbent on intellectuals to identify with the oppressed and that the working class suggests a source of value unavailable

in a collapsing bourgeois civilization. Like Auden, White is uninterested in the specifics of how to change the civilization revealed to be rotten. Like Auden also, White's equivocations express themselves in his writing in a tendency to sheer away from the central problems posed by apocalyptic thought, if not towards Freud or Marx, then towards a Lawrentian faith in things and in sexual love.

The choice the novel offers us is a moral one in the Lawrentian sense that we are required to choose between various responses to life. More particularly, we are forcibly confronted with the ugliness, anomie, and, fragmentation that is modern life and required to take sides: we must choose between the living-dead, all those who have retreated in the face of life's possibilities, and those who seek "an intenser form of living" (LD, 379). This choice is dramatically enacted through three couples (one notes White's new skill in drawing such contrasts through abrupt cutting and counter-point, a skill drawn from Aldous Huxley -- witness White's use of montaged telephone conversations -- and, perhaps, from the cinema). Elyot Standish and Muriel Raphael

are the living-dead: they are life-denyers, dealers in abstractions, symbols, gestures, words, rather than in emotions or things. They choose isolation. Lest we miss the point that their sickness is of European proportions, White suggests a link between Elyot's detached, mechanical love-making and the rise of fascism: he is "the dictator of her sensuality" (LD, 386). Wally Collins and Catherine Standish are the second pair of lovers. Together they are simply the flesh, the dying animal with its grotesque lusts. In his depiction of these grotesqueries, White seems to have drawn on German Expressionism -- like most of Auden's generation he spent some time in Germany in the early Thirties -- and perhaps on the painterly methods of a youthful friend, Francis Bacon. The scene at the party which Wally Collins and Katherine Standish attend has a distinctly Expressionist manner: exaggerated, violently coloured close-ups, Grosz-like cartoons, facial distortions that reveal the inner ill.

Joe Barnett and Eden Standish are the novel's third pair of lovers. They are White's unlikely life-affirmers. With his face inclined to turn brick-red by

firelight and his mistrust of empty words, Joe has something in common with those phallic groundsmen or miners of Lawrence who rescue salvagable women from the dead middle and upper classes and warm them into a new life of the senses. But Joe lacks some essential quality -- we can only call it "life" -- possessed in abundance by Lawrence's sensitive proletarians. Being less symbolic than Mellors in Lady Chatterly's Lover (1928), Joe ought to be more convincing. But this is not the case. Joe is afflicted by a sense that the world is dying; unlike Lawrence's heroes, however, he can see no way out of the deadness. At least, the novel withholds its wholehearted support from the way out Joe does see. Joe lives, supposedly, in a world in which emotions are genuine and things possess substance. The illness, then, must come from outside himself. Yet he dies, turning his back on the fullness of life he finds with Eden Standish. He chooses death, not in the expectation that his sacrifice might bring a fuller life to the Spanish people but because he must act out the abstractions he reads in the newspapers.[33]

White's failure with Joe Barnett arises from his uneasiness about sexuality as well as class. There is a telling line in the novel, "as lethal as the erotic act," which reveals the direction and extent of the failure: the novel cannot separate sexuality from death (LD, 301). The night which Joe and Eden spend together ought to be the novel's moral centre, the vision of an intenser form of living that White offers us. But that night cannot exclude Joe's vision of the dog with its guts torn out, the bleeding body of the world for which Joe dies. Joe does not die to save this world -- in Marx's terms to "change it" -- but merely to add his death to all the deaths of those who, however hopelessly, feel obliged to resist the living-death by their sacrifices.

We are offered a choice, then, not between real life and half life but between half life and real death. How differently Lawrence saw the problem: that is, to affirm or deny life in the absence of religious belief. For Lawrence, the absence of God forces modern man to find religious meaning in life itself, and particularly in human sexual love. And we are convinced by the love

of Alfred Durrant and Louisa in "The Daughters of the Vicar" (1914) or that of Connie and Mellors in Lady Chatterly, convinced because we can feel the reality, the rightness of the sex. The touching, the tenderness of hands that allows the leap across class -- the incredible leap -- convinces in Lawrence as it does not in White.

There is a morbidity in White's response to sexuality that allows him brilliantly to present the parody of love performed by Elyot and Muriel but prevents him from giving life to what is, after all, the central enactment of that intensity of "life" that we are offered. For Joe and Eden, love leads only to death. Joe leaves England and its living-death not with his lover in search of more life -- a Lawrentian solution -- but for the lonely battlefields of a war whose meaning he has failed to grasp. He dies for a set of symbols: "the apparent fact of Spain" recorded in the newspapers (LD, 288, my emphasis). Eden's love for Joe fails to overcome her feeling that the world lacks substance. She sees the world as "a cold star" (LD, 334). She sees their love-making merely as an attempt to infuse

into "the dying body of the world" their living acts and convictions (LD, 334). After their night together which fails to warm her into life she flees from a tinkers' camp "as if someone had lived there too fully" (LD, 353). Her decision to follow Joe to Spain is a suicide. It is prompted by the message that spring brings her of the necessity for the individual organism to submit to the obscure purposes of the larger design, that is, by dying. The novel is more than half in love with the death it promises to oppose.

One feels in The Living and The Dead the novelist's earnest desire somehow to oppose the deadness of contemporary civilization and to fasten on some means escaping into full humanness, into joy. At the same time, one feels White's recoil not only from sexuality, but also from life itself. The word "world" in the novel comes to mean not so much the world of social relations -- the usual sphere of the novelist -- but the material world itself understood in a theological, more specifically in a Manichaean, sense. The novel cannot offer the substantiality it craves. We are presented in the midst of the general decay of a culture with a single

point of value: the love between a working-class man and a disenchanted bourgeois woman. Far from redeeming the deadness,however, this love serves only to underline its pervasiveness. Death insinuates its presence all too easily into even the most intimate moments of love. The recoil from materiality and sexuality is too strongly felt in the novel to allow "the flesh" to provide access to fullness of life. The novel cannot settle on a way out of the living-death it delineates with mingled fascination and horror. The problem lies in the novel's confusion about whether what it opposes is the condition of the world at a given historical moment or the world itself: the world of things that pass.

This indecision on White's part leads not only to a confusion of purpose but also to a suspiciousness in the novel as to the value of its own endeavour. The novel consigns among the dead all those who offer the symbol of a thing or an emotion rather than the reality: the dealers in words, symbols, gestures, abstractions. At the same time, the novel converts the world it deals with from something real -- a complex and ever-changing whole composed of material facts,

social relations, and private thoughts -- into something abstract: a dying piece of matter adrift in space onto which man is thrown. Unable to discover any substance in the world, the novel can only offer us the gestures and symbols it condemns. Hence, the self-enclosedness of The Living and The Dead, the sense that the novelist has found himself trapped within a circle of what he most wishes to transcend: words. This sense of entrapment is strongly present despite White's evident and fashionably Thirties desire to condemn solipsism in favour of contact with "the actual plane." The Living and The Dead offers us symbols about symbolism such as the Bristol box (LD, 266). The characters -- Catherine and Eden Standish in particular -- are uncomfortably conscious of their lives as "narrative," or "symbol," or "hieroglyph." Their lives are composed of gestures void of meaning; they offer others the symbols of emotion rather than real emotions; their words have no connection to things. The novel, unable to find a way out of the impasse it describes, is forced into an extreme self-consciousness. We are offered not a critique of a charade posing as life, but a charade

posing as a novel. The Living and The Dead comes dangerously close to being what it most deplores: an enclosed world of self-reflexive words.

The problem lies not in linguistic self-consciousness per se, but in White's uncomfortableness at this stage with such an approach to novel-writing. He has not yet arrived at the insight that will allow the more playful attitude to language that we find in the later novels from Voss on: that is, that there are creative possibilities in acknowledging that the novel is as much "about" language as it is "about" life. There is nothing inherently sterile in such playfulness. It rests on the recognition that language is, after all, absolutely integral with life. It is White's inability in The Living and The Dead to find any substance in lived actuality that leads him to the agonized separation of life and langauge. The novel's failure lies not in any "solipsism" of its form -- that is, in willed self-enclosure -- but in White's inability to find an appropriate form for his vision of the dangerously solipsistic tendencies of the culture he describes. He fails here because, in spite of the

formal assurance of The Living and the Dead, in spite of his preference for moral judgements and his wavering Thirties faith in history, his own vision of life is fatally tainted by repugnance.

In The Living and The Dead, White struggles against the isolation, anomie, self-absorption which he sees at the heart of the illness of contemporary civilization. He looks for ways out. He turns to the working class as a possible source of moral regeneration, but lacks understanding of working-class life. He turns to a Lawrentian vision of salvific sexuality where he is even less at home. Finally, and in spite of all the novel's confident air of modernism, he falls back on the traditional realistic form of the bourgeois novel: lurking behind Elyot Standish's retrospection is a Familienroman in which the Standishes are representative figures of the English middle class in its period of decline. In the background of the lives of the Standishes we are aware of the slow curve of historical catastrophe: from Edwardian complacency through the First War, the uneasy prosperity, the Crash, and the frantic slithering into the Second War. White departs from his

modernist models by his deliberate historicizing of human experience, by his shaping of the novel so that we feel directly the impact of history and class on individual consciousness. While he has made use of the modernist techniques designed to express an intense subjectivism, White has not abandoned the other view of man's place in the world, revived during the Thirties, which stresses man's inescapably social and historical condition. As an historical novel The Living and The Dead traces the process by which England moved from being a social order in which individuals felt themselves to be part of a dynamic reality capable of sustaining meaning and value to being a world of isolates looking inward on their own fragmentation. Edwardian Mr. Goose is able to believe that "Man is fundamentally good, it's circumstances that rots him" (LD, 41). By the late Thirties, such optimism is unthinkable. England has become an "elaborate charade that meant something once, a long time ago. When the figures, the gestures were related to enthusiasms" (LD, 228). Thus, despite White's choosing a form for his novel which draws attention to the isolation of consciousness, the claims of history are allowed to find

their own formal expression. The fragmentation of the Standishes as individuals, as a family, and as a class, is rooted in historical process. The traditional novelistic form which traces a family through two or three generations is used by White as though it implies no contradiction of the more modernist formal properties of the novel which centre on Elyot's consciousness. The two formal tendencies exist side by side.

White's attitude to history is complicated by his bleak vision of human nature. There is an inevitability about the lapse of Edwardian confidence into the apocalypticism of the Thirties that arises less from White's recognition of the impact on human consciousness of specific historical conditions than from a Manichaean suspicion that man has some innate bias towards evil and chaos (certainly, the revelations of the concentration camps -- a central concern in White's post-war fiction -- seem to confirm rather than undermine White's view of where man has been heading since 1914). Again, we find two unresolved attitudes towards man's being in the world, one not fully acknowledged, existing side-by-side in the novel just as traditional realism exists

alongside formal experiment. White's irresolutions express themselves as ruptures in the fabric of the text, not always unhappy ones, so that we are aware of unconscious intentions working against the conscious shaping process of the novel. Like Elyot Standish, White has difficulty "forcing shape into the shapelessness of his material" (LD, 265).

What is most germane in this novel to White's future development as a novelist is his consciousness that the central problem he faces formally is that of reconciling his moral seriousness with his intensely self-conscious preoccupation with language. The Living and The Dead rightly locates the source of its own formal problems in the impasse reached by the civilization it describes. The English language, as White sees it in this novel, has been infected by the inability of English culture to connect meaning and event, symbol and referent, word and thing, gesture and emotion. This corruption of the word is felt ubiquitously: the newspapers translate the deaths in Spain or China into empty abstractions; the inn at which Joe and Eden spend the night fails to

provide the "Hovis" it advertises, reminding Eden of the gap between sign and signified. The novel, seeking substance rather than the empty sign, is thwarted wherever it turns within English life: everywhere gestures, shadows, abstractions in place of reality, everywhere words in place of things or emotions. The novel confesses its own defeat. In a culture where aridity has become so pervasive, there can be no place for the writer who seeks to point the way to an attainable intensity of living.

IV

Ultramarine

No-one goes to Liverpool for pleasure.

Graham Greene,
Journey Without Maps.

"One is sometimes reminded that he is the son of a Liverpool merchant, born in or about the docks."

Horace Vachell,
The Hill (1905).

"despite your rhetoric, you may yet be saved."

Malcolm Lowry,
"Satan in a Barrel".

Early in life, Malcolm Lowry had Stephen Dedalus' desire to fly the nets of family, nation, and religion. For Lowry the three nets were one. The joined presences of his father and his father's God stalked him everywhere in England. Here was a threat not merely to his imagination but also to his life. The origins of Malcolm Lowry's self-destructive urges, according to Douglas Day in his biography of Lowry, lay in the "threatening super-ego" which A.O. Lowry foisted on his son.[1] Certainly, Arthur Lowry, as father, businessman, Christian, pillar of the community (roles which he acted out with the fervour of an Old Testament prophet), managed to implant in his son a pentateuchal set of moral prohibitions which throughout his life lay between his desires and their fulfilment. At eighteen, hoping to trade his oppressive family for a Conradian community of seamen, Lowry shipped aboard a freighter for the Far East. Thereafter, the details of his life are well known: the drunken undergraduate of literary but not academic genius became the drunken bohemian genius-in-the-making of London and Paris who became the drunken exile in New York and Mexico working on the great novel that seemed increasingly improbable. Throughout the late

Thirties, Lowry moved further and further from England, pursued all the while by the tormenting image of his disappointed father and the saving, and inebriating, remittances. Then came the seemingly miraculous transformation of the drunk into the great novelist. In 1940 Lowry settled in Dollarton, British Columbia, with a new wife. Only then did Under the Volcano emerge from the chaos of the early versions. In love with his life and the world, Lowry discovered at Dollarton a joy in living that enabled him to transcend his compulsions long enough to produce one assured masterpiece. Then the old demons returned and dragged him down.

The above sketch is intended to suggest the Malcolm Lowry of legend: the doomed, tormented genius who swaggered and swigged his romantic way to an early and appropriately alcoholic death. It has an uncanny resemblance to the standard version of the life of Dylan Thomas. In Lowry's case, unfortunately, the legend has got in the way of the work, as literary legends have a habit of doing. Lowry's literary reputation rests almost exclusively on one novel alone which is read as much for its biographical interest as for its literary

merit. Too often Lowry's critics have encouraged this lop-sided approach by concentrating on Volcano while ignoring the rest of his fiction or dismissing it as apprentice work or as negligible stuff whose failure owes to the writer's alcoholism.[2] The habit among readers of approaching Lowry's "masterpiece" in terms of the clichés of his legend is pernicious and ought to be opposed. In this respect, Lowry's critics have a clear duty to encourage a habit of thought which sees the work as literature rather than biography, which sees the man as a writer rather than a "genius." The view of Lowry as "a great author who happens to have written only one great book" does nothing to advance such a habit of thought.[3]

An impediment to Lowry's reputation as a major literary figure has been Douglas Day's biography, Malcolm Lowry (1973). Day's biography is in many ways commendable: its weight of detail is impressive; its critical insights are frequently trenchant. Day's Lowry is not simply the Lowry of legend. Yet the biography must be blamed for its contribution to the legend. Day cannot avoid the temptation to sidestep the complexity of the life by high-lighting those details which illustrate the neat curve of melodrama:

the early promise, the rising action complete with reversals, the climax, and the sad denouement. The chief problem with Day's biography is the kind of link it suggests between the life and the work. Day adopts a Freudian language and method which describes the motive forces behind both the life and the work in a few simple formulas: conversion, anxiety, fixation, neurosis. The same infantile anxiety about maternal separation that made Lowry an alcoholic made him an artist -- Day doesn't state this quite so baldly, but he implies it.[4] Douglas Day gives us a Malcolm Lowry who touches his era only at the level of generality. Day makes the connection between Lowry's anxieties and addictions and those of other major twentieth-century writers such as Dylan Thomas and Hemingway.[5] Yet he never allows that Lowry's anxieties have the particular shape of his generation: that of the Thirties. They arise from Lowry's unconscious for whose contents only his particular family is responsible. Day's Lowry is not a man shaped by a particular time but by a type of the artist: one of those whose lives are parables that tell the tragedy of spiritual nobility in a materialistic world. Lowry becomes a kind of Christ masquerading as

a delinquent, and Volcano becomes a timeless work of genius.

The truth is that Malcolm Lowry was the product of a particular historical period and in his work responded to a particular crisis in English culture. He shares in that remarkable homogeneity of background which distinguishes the writers of "the Auden generation." Like Christopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden, Graham Greene, Cyril Connolly, and Evelyn Waugh, Lowry was born between 1900 and 1910, was educated a a public school and began to write in the late Twenties and early Thirties.[6] His writing bears the impress of the same historical events as all these: the Depression, the politicization of English intellectuals, Spain, the igominy of the period leading up to the Second War. In matters of form and style his early writing shows the influence of the group of dominating figures of the Twenties against whom all the serious young writers of the Thirties had to measure themselves. Lowry's works are not timeless; they are rooted in a specific historical experience. We misunderstand the man and his writing if we see his life merely as a struggle against his own family, his private demons.

By escaping England, Lowry was escaping more than the punishing super-ego represented to him by Arthur Lowry. As early as 1933 when he published Ultramarine Lowry had come to identify the repressive system of values and denials of which that "super-ego" was composed with a whole class: the English commercial middle class from which he had come. Moreover, he had come to attribute what he saw as the increasing moral bankruptcy of between-the-wars England to the supremacy of this class. By his various efforts to put as much distance as possible, preferably marine, between himself and his father, Lowry was responding not merely to the self-punishing image of the father which he had constructed as a child but also to the civilization which he saw not unreasonably as exhausted. We may agree with Douglas Day that Lowry's lifelong response to an infantile paternal image was evidence of a chronic and deep-rooted unhealthiness in Lowry's psyche. But in Lowry's disgust with the England of his day, a disgust he shared with many of the writers of the Thirties, we find a sign of a fundamental healthiness. Lowry's instinct for health and wholeness was not able to be satisfied by the kind of life that passed for "normal" among his class, in this England.[7]

We must remember that Malcolm Lowry came from a particularly despised section of the English ruling class: the provincial, non-conformist, commercial middle class. Although from a wealthy background, educated at a public school and at Cambridge, Lowry could not disguise the stigma of his provincialism any more than could White, the Australian. White's family, at least, were not "in trade." Nor, exactly, was Arthur Lowry. Yet as a Liverpool cotton-broker he fell unavoidably into the doomed section of the great divide in the English class system between the professional and the commercial middle classes. And he had educated his sons not to become gentlemen, but to enter the family business. Lowry was sent not to one of the great public schools where commerce and everything to do with the industrial revolution were despised but to the mildly non-conformist Leys. Arthur Lowry's efforts to prepare his youngest son for a "useful" life were wasted. By refusing to enter the family firm, Lowry was simply following the "higher" aspirations of the English middle class since the middle of the nineteenth century: that is, to deny the centrality of commerce and industry to England's position in the world by embracing the

ideology of the feudal aristocracy.[8] It is commonly the function of defunct ideologies to conceal the sordid origins of wealth and power: thus the conquered continue to rule in the minds of their conquerors.

Gentry values had even insinuated themselves into the stubbornly bourgeois mind of Arthur Lowry. Undoubtedly, he wanted his sons to be gentlemen as well as businessman, hence Cambridge. Caldy, the wealthy suburb in which he chose to raise his family had a carefully manicured Tudor appearance.[9] John Betjeman contemptuously refers to this imitative architectural style as "Sham Tudor."[10] Betjeman writes as a Tory eager to defend traditional English architecture against "Ghastly Good Taste" by which he means the urge among the middle classes to emulate the styles appropriate to aristocracy. Arthur Lowry, however, had no intention of giving up business in favour of country life. He was unashamed of his commercial success. He remained faithful to his lower-middle-class-Methodism. This is the background against which Malcolm Lowry rebelled. The Cambridge that Lowry entered in 1929 despised the origins of his family's

wealth (this is as true of the Leavisite clique as it is of the traditional gentlemanly dons). Lowry was hardly a model undergraduate, yet he emerged from Cambridge with friends from backgrounds more acceptable than his own, with an accent he kept through the worst days of his dereliction, and having put behind him once and for all the stain of his provincial origins if we accept Donald Horne's definition of English provincialism:

> Provincialism is to live in or near an industrial town to which the industrial revolution gave its significant modern form.[11]

Lowry emerged from Cambridge a gentleman. He never thereafter bothered himself with the values that had made his father and nineteenth-century England rich: work (as his father understood that term), thrift, and capital accumulation.

Malcolm Lowry, then, did not simply rebel against his family: he staged a strategic retreat from the attitudes of the class of which is family were representative. Lowry rejected commercialism, industrialism, utilitarianism, and non-conformist piety. In other words, he rejected the nineteenth century and joined that

line of protest that we find in English cultural history which opposes the mechanical nature of modern life from the standpoint of organicist conservatism. In following this line, Lowry was defending the cultural interest which was most inimical to his own background. Lawrence faced a similar problem, but, as he himself demonstrated, the working-class family can more readily be assimilated by the organicist tradition than can the commercial, middle-class family. From William Cobbett to Raymond Williams, the virtues of English cultural critics have managed to find in, or foist on, the working class, have been those of the peasantry.[12] The popularity of the Communist Party among English bourgeois intellectuals in the Thirties may partly be explained in this light. As William Empson observes in Some Versions of Pastoral (1935), proletarian art is merely a modern variety of pastoral.[13] For Thirties communists like Cecil Day Lewis -- who ended up poet laureate with a taste for Hardy and Meredith -- the working class suggested eighteenth-century virtue as much as post-industrial, revolutionary fervour.[14] At any rate, it could be agreed upon in the Thirties by a conservative Aglican clergyman like Dean Inge and a

socialist historian like R.H. Tawney, also an Anglican, that the present deplorable condition of England was unthinkable without the nineteenth century.[15] By rejecting his own family, then, Lowry joined with a large body of Thirties establishment critics -- one encompassing Oxbridge communists, Bloomsbury intellectuals, Anglican socialists, and Tories -- who blamed the commercial middle class for the present condition of England. For Lowry, as for other Thirties writers, the sprawling ugliness and misery of England in the Thirties was the result not so much of a periodical crisis in world capitalism as of the whole industrial world spawned by the nineteenth century and by the Northern, mercantilist bourgeoisie.

Douglas Day sees not only the life but also the writings of Malcolm Lowry in terms of the cramped language of his (Day's) Freudianism. Day's Lowry occupies throughout his life an enclosed space in which the significant figures remain those of infancy. For Day, Lowry staggers from tragedy into farce because he never managed to free himself from his infantile fixations. In Lowry's writing, according to Day, the figures of parents and siblings, seen through the distorting eyes of arrested childhood,

shadow-box one another behind the screen of a neurotic egotism that increasingly blocks out the external world. Day's Lowry, in spite of his charming moments, is a pathetic, overgrown child who managed somehow to produce one work of "genius" before his various demons swallowed his talent. The bulk of the post-Volcano fiction, in Day's view, shows the maunderings of a mind no longer able to snatch experience and fashion it into art.[16] Such a reading, by stressing Lowry's relations with his family at the expense of those with his class and times, fails to grasp the meaning of Lowry's struggle with the language.

Day romantically -- although his specific terminology is Jungian on this point -- perches the artist between the conscious and the unconscious.[17] Lowry's task as a writer, then, was to impose linguistic order on the chaotic contents of his unconscious. But language, for Lowry, was much more complex than this: it was no less than the totality of spoken and literary possibilities among which he must choose in order to write. It was not the means by which order might be imposed on some content other than itself; it was the content as much as the medium of writing. And the speech of his class as embodied

in his family was not adequate to his needs as a writer. It was not the sort of stuff into which he could work clean lines as the engraver works in metal. He needed a language specific to his idea of himself as a novelist. As Brian O'Kill puts it:

> We can surely see that the development of a unique idiolect was a crucial part of Lowry's self-conscious process of self-determination, that his exploration of different modes of language, from the vulgar to the bombastic, was an attempt to widen his range of linguistic consciousness, and a rebellion against the basic language of his mercantile evangelical middle-class English family.[18]

Lowry's family was provincial, commercial, non-conformist. This meant that his background acquainted him with a use of language which was contaminated by utilitarianism, a pious rhetoric, and a general slackness of phrasing and diction. What vigour the conformist tradition with its rooting in the Bible and in Bunyan might have introduced into the language of a Liverpool cotton merchant was sapped by Arthur Lowry's predominantly Victorian and commercial cast of mind. In his letters to his son Arthur Lowry frequently invokes the Bible, but there is no trace in his writing of the force and

concreteness of the King James version. Reading the letters, which are held in the Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia, one has the curious sense that Mr. Gradgrind has been set to school by Earnest Pontifex's father.[19] From the former Arthur Lowry has taken a worship of "facts" and a distrust of "fancy" in the form of his son's literary efforts. The businesslike tone of his writing bears the mark of his utilitarian character. Mr. Gradgrind would have approved of Arthur Lowry's penchant for making lists and using underlining to drive home his essential points, and he would have recognized behind the pious expressions a thoroughly materialistic and pragmatic mind. Arthur Lowry's businessman's manner, like his frequent expressions of piety and righteous paternal indignation, is evidently a means of avoiding showing any actual emotion for his son.

With Theobald Pontifex, Arthur Lowry shares the insidious habit of using a narrowly conceived form of Christianity to bully his son into complying with his moralistically posed but essentially self-serving demands. Arthur Lowry's piety, like Theobald Pontifex's, is emotionally impoverished and utterly chilling in its

refusal to accommodate a view of life less limited than its own. Arthur Lowry's Methodism may be said to have preserved the stifled atmosphere of the Victorian clergyman's household despite his Edwardian veneer of sportiness and heartiness. Certainly, his letters to his son recall the appalling letters which Theobald Pontifex wrote to his prodigal son, letters which never doubt the automatic moral authority of middle-class fathers. The reverend Pontifex, in Butler's words, "wanted Earnest to return, but he was to return as any respectable well-regulated prodigal ought to return -- abject, broken-hearted, asking forgiveness from the tenderest and most long-suffering father in the whole world."[20] Arthur Lowry writes thus to his thirty-three year old son:

> Read the Bible story of the Prodigal Son up to where he says "When I came to myself." He didn't try to justify himself in his father's eyes, but said "I will arise and say to my father, "I have sinned" and his father met him half way and forgave him.[21]

Theobald Pontifex urges his son to show "steadiness and earnestness of purpose."[22] He wants to see signs of moral improvement in return for the financial assistance

which he is prepared to offer, itself a means of keeping his son under his power. A few quotes from the letters of Arthur Lowry illustrate the similarity of his thinking to that of Theobald Pontifex in this respect:

> I am very glad to see marked improvement in many ways. The main issue in my mind is that you shew [sic] some contrition for your past treatment of your father and mother.[23]
>
> I hope you will be able to go on keeping your head, shutting your door, and working hard, because that is the only way in which success, either in literature, business, or anything else, is ever achieved.[24]
>
> What I need from you is a frank statement as to your having seen the grave error of your ways.[25]

Nor is Arthur Lowry reluctant to subject his son to the grossest kind of emotional blackmail. He continually reminds his son that his mother is "one of God's angels,"[26] a being of infinite and unworldly purity whom Malcolm has wilfully hurt. The method is the simple blackmailer's one employed by Earnest Pontifex's father. It has the advantage to the blackmailer that the pious rhetoric in which it is couched disguises its insidious intent. Arthur Lowry and Theobald Pontifex would have been dismayed at

the suggestion that they were using emotional blackmail against their sons: their expressions of husbandly reverence were, in their own understanding, sincere. Perhaps the saddest example of Lowry's family's absolute incomprehension of Malcolm is to be found in a brief defense of the family's position by Russell Lowry, Malcolm's elder brother: "he [Malcolm] could, if he wanted, stick to a basically true story, and tell it well," this despite the "embroidery" and "lying" to which, according to Russell, Lowry was addicted.[27]

D.H. Lawrence had an immense advantage over Lowry in this respect of the colloquial language of the home. Lawrence came from that section of the non-conformist working class for whom the language of the Bible was still a vital force in daily life. And this tradition of using the language of the Bible in everyday speech was enriched by the regional working-class dialect. This is, of course, a Leavisite argument but one which, whatever reservations one might have about Leavis, has a truth that cannot be denied.[28] Lawrence took his father's speech into his writing where it remained to the end of Lawrence's life a source of energy, reality, and humour, an alternative

to the dead dialect of the English middle class. What character in Lowry's fiction speaks with the voice of Arthur Lowry?

There is no trace of regional dialect in the language of Arthur Lowry's letters to his son. To have adopted such speech would have made possible a real contact between father and son because such speech naturally carries emotion. It is not a speech that encourages concealment behind piety, platitude, and rhetoric. Arthur Lowry chose to adopt the language of the Edwardian middle-class father: stilted, abstract, dead. And like so many Edwardian middle-class fathers, he was obliged to endure the repudiation by his most gifted son of the values and assumptions that had governed his life. Malcolm Lowry was a representative son of the between-the-wars period in his rebellion against "the Old Man" (Lowry's habitual use of this phrase recalls the contemptuous term of post-war writers for the Edwardian father figures whose rhetoric had sent so many sons to their deaths in the trenches).[29] Given the language in which in the Forties Arthur Lowry couched his letters to his son, it is scarcely surprising that as a young man in the early Thirties Lowry

was anxious to invent for himself an alternative ancestry of sea-captains and hell-raisers, one which might conceivably have engendered a novelist in the Dana, Melville, O'Neill alcoholic line.

Specifically, Lowry needed an alternative language to that of his own tribe: the provincial, non-conformist bourgeoisie. Rejecting the dialect of his own tribe, where in the England of the between-the-wars period could Lowry find a use of the language vigorous and concrete enough for his purposes?

Lowry's education acquainted him with the "standard" English of the upper-middle class -- that is, "educated" English -- and this dialect remained throughout his life the mode into which his own speech naturally fell. This dialect, which is entrenched in the public schools, is distinguished chiefly by its claim to be not a dialect with regional and class characteristics but <u>the</u> correct manner of speaking English. As Raymond Williams has observed, in the name of standard English "thousands of people have been capable of the vulgar insolence of telling other Englishmen that they do not know how to

speak their own language."[30] It is a speech which eschews proletarian vigour and regional peculiarities. It is a speech which claims a monopoly on the coining of new words. It is a speech which detests "Americanisms." It is the kind of speech of people who know instinctively what is "U" and what is "non-U." It is the speech of Bloomsbury, of The New Statesman and Nation, and, for all its piousness about the proletariat, it is the speech of the Oxbridge left in the Thirties. It was not the speech for the young Malcolm Lowry who showed very early a non-U taste for jazz, proletarian speech, and for the English of foreigners. In his writing, we may see his struggling not so much to root out all traces of standard English as to surround it by all the speech forms of which it most disapproves. We may see this struggle in Lowry's determination to tone down or delete the adjectival preference he learned at his public school. "Horrendous," "incredible," "marvellous" -- such expressions are given to characters from whom Lowry wishes to gain some distance such as the Consul in Under the Volcano. Phrases like "'It's a bore,'" or "'he was a damned amusing fellow in spite of everything,'" which appear in the early drafts of

Under the Volcano are deleted in the text.[31] Lowry's American wife, Margerie, was a help to him in this respect. Her marginal comments to the early versions of the novel warn Lowry about what she calls the "stodginess" of this kind of speech.[32]

The difficulty for Lowry in overcoming in his writing the habit of using such adjectives unconsciously ought not to be underestimated. Such linguistic mannerisms are the almost ineradicable legacy of class. George Orwell, despite his detestation both of the upper bourgeoisie and of linguistic imprecision, never managed to eradicate from his writing the public-schoolboy slang, the "beastlys" and "ghastlys," which he acquired at Eton. Yet in the Thirties, Orwell condemned "the poverty of the modern upper-class dialect."[33] "The speech of 'educated' people," he wrote, "is now so lifeless and characterless that a novelist can have nothing to do with it."[34]

Lowry's school was bourgeois rather than upper-class, yet "educated" speech also posed a problem for him. Its range simply wasn't sufficiently encompassing for the kind of fiction he had in mind to produce. Lowry wanted

to deal convincingly with non-bourgeois characters and to draw on non-bourgeois speech patterns; this is clear even of his schoolboy stories.[35] Orwell's inability to master such speech patterns had a narrowing effect on his fiction. In the end, he turned from the novel to the prose fable. Lowry's use of nautical terms, of Norwegian-pidgin English, and of regional dialects signal his desire to avoid such narrowing by including within his fiction dialects other than those of the English middle class. He wants a specificity, a concreteness, and a connection to things lacking in English middle-class speech.

Lowry, of course, never managed to purge his writing of all the stylistic and syntactical habits of his education and his class. Even in the late fiction a phrase like "extraordinary and absurd" will creep into his prose where his narrator lapses into an unconscious mannerism of "educated" speech (HL , 262). It is remarkable to what extent Lowry managed to escape the linguistic limitations imposed upon him by his family, his class and his education. Of all the Thirties writers who dutifully immersed themselves in the working class by volunteering for Spain or frequenting proletarian pubs

Lowry went furthest in his assimilation of working-class speech patterns into his writing. Not that he tried to write as a factory worker might. Instead he used snatches of working class speech to build up syncopated dialogue or as motifs that run through a particular work. It is the precision of Lowry's ear for this kind of speech that distinguishes him from other Thirties writers. Only Henry Green in Living (1929) managed to catch the rythms and cadences of working-class and regional speech with exactness and to work them into his style. The section where the Welsh factory worker bursts into song is very finely done.[36] Lowry went further than Green: he set about mastering various dialects -- sailors' talk, Celtic and foreign version of English -- and he worked them, one on top of the other, into his writing. Lowry's prose is "laminated" rather than merely spiced with dialect.[37]

Louis MacNeice observed in the Thirties: "If one knows only bourgeois one must write about them."[38] The fatal limitation of Auden's followers was that they knew only each other.[39] Hence they were not able to write convincingly about working-class life. Certainly, they never managed to get down working-class speech

patterns nor to enrich their prose with such speech. They existed within the circle described by the linguistic possibilities of their own class, even of their own clique within that class. For Lowry, that circle was too narrowly drawn.

There is an early story by Lowry written while he was still at school. "A Rainy Night," which suggests Lowry's dissatisfaction with the speech of the English middle class and the limited consciousness offered to a would-be writer by a representative figure of that class. The prose of the piece is noticeable for its overuse of adjectives and abverbs whose flatness reflects their use as signs of class rather than as precise descriptive tools. "Still, here in a comparatively unromantic England I once committed a terrible, though I suppose, quite excusable blunder," is a representatively blundering sentence whose diffuseness of impact owes to its superfluity of modifiers ("RN," 138). The story would not be worthy of comment were it not that Lowry is guying this manner of speech. When the narrator of the story exclaims "'It's a perfect beast of a night; you simply can't go dashing around catching boats,'" we are intended to see the

silliness of the man in the silliness of his speech (RN, 143). This may seem no very remarkable narrative strategy, yet it shows that even as a schoolboy Lowry has an ear for the ridiculousness of the mannerisms of his own class and is able to use them for parodic effect. The story shows a very deliberate use of the dialectal characteristics of English middle-class speech. The narrator of Lowry's story is wholly insensitive, but manages to conceal his insensitivity from himself by his conventional expressions of Christian concern: "'Now look here,' I said, suddenly magnanimous in the spirit of the season" (RN, 143). The man is hiding behind his hearty, Edwardian manner. His speech is intended to assure himself that he is, after all, a decent, cricketting sort of chap whose heart is in the right place. He is not unlike Arthur Lowry without the rhetoric of Methodist piety. He has Arthur Lowry's moral horror of drink and his belief in the sanctity of the family. But his essential limitation is his middle classness: he is so unable to see behind the dirt of the starving seaman, Olivsen, to his real needs that he lets the man die without offering the food he himself does not want. In "A Rainy Night" Lowry has already grasped the

insight that Orwell arrives at watching coal miners at work in The Road to Wigan Pier (1937): "you realize what different universes people inhabit."[40] This is an ambiguous statement. Virginia Woolf might just as easily have made it. Orwell is stating that the lines drawn around those separate universes are not those of individual consciousness but of class. Lowry has grasped this and he has found, as Orwell never did, a form and a style in which this perception might be embodied in a work of fiction. The form is that of an unreliable narrator, so far clumsily employed. The style is one which uses contrasting speech patterns -- the Norwegian sailor's set against the middle-class Englishman's -- to convey the separateness of those universes and the way in which language allows the members of a class to inhabit a set of values and assumptions without reflection. The linguistic mannerisms of a class make the attitudes of that class seem "natural" to its members. Lowry as a schoolboy had already grasped that middle-class speech is not the natural medium of serious prose but simply one dialect among the many that make up the English-speaking world.

The two stories written by Lowry as a schoolboy which Muriel Bradbrook appends to her study of Lowry indicate the direction Lowry's fiction will take. But as one would expect they show intention rather than achievement. The dialogue is stilted, the manner self-conscious, the speech of the sailor in "A Rainy Night" unconvincing, the imagery at times grotesque (a golf course is likened to a bald man's head with a few hairs left on top).[41] One image, however, stands out by virtue of its clarity and particularity: "A curtain at the back of my mind reefed up suddenly"("SB,"145). It is the unusual sense of the word "reefed" that gives the image its rightness: one "reefs" up a top-sail on a sailing ship. The word signals the beginning of Lowry's lifelong obsession with nautical terminology, preferably archaic. In these two schoolboy tales, we find already both a reaching back behind and a reaching out beyond the present resources of middle-class English. The Norwegian sailor with his "'Py Jo! Aye forgat'" is an attempt to render in English an experience that lies outside the normal range of English life ("RN," 140). The nautical term with its hint of sailing clippers and vanished romance is an attempt to tap energies

within the language that have gone out of present use. To release this stress dormant in the language Lowry has had to turn to an enclave within English life, the world of ships and sailors, that has not been assimilated by the prevailing deadness of bourgeois England. "Reefed" recalls a time in English life when words were more closely connected to things and men had a more precise, more tactile, sense of reality.

In Lowry's first novel, Ultramarine, the author's need to display his knowledge of nautical terms is almost oppressive. There is an element in this of showing off: Lowry has mastered an esoteric terminology and he wants to impress us, much as the young Auden does with his psychiatric and medical knowledge. Lowry, however, has none of Auden's abstractness or pedantry. Even Auden's schooling in the Icelandic sagas could not give his poetry the sense we find in Ultramarine of a known world of particular things lovingly invoked by names which have a beauty in themselves as sounds as well a rightness in their connection to actual things. Lowry has a craftsman's sense of the tools of his trade. In a single paragraph describing the docking of the ship, Oedipus Tyrannus, we

find: "winches," "runners," "aft," "monkey-knot," "bight," "derrick," "guys," and "docking bridge" (U., pp. 30 - 1). The effect of this kind of passage is not unlike that of reading Hopkins' poetry with its use of Old English metres and diction. We are insinuated into a world where language and reality have not flown apart, where the naming of things summons up their concrete images. The sea gull in Ultramarine "mew[ ]" as did the gulls in The Seafarer (U, 29).[42]

Lowry's use of nautical terms invests Ultramarine with a strong sense of particularity. The derricks and winches are not merely things or names, but things sharply perceived at a particular moment of time. By constantly naming all those things which have to do with the mariner's craft, Lowry reminds us that there is a world other than the abstract and rhetorical world of middle-class Englishmen, a world in which the mind must deal not with ideas that have gone stale and are traded in lifeless language but with things that are particular and are named by the simple, strong words of a particular craft.

> The crane that dived its long arm into the darkness of the hold and brought up the cargo! (U, 62).

This is an "image": something "Hard, Bright, Clean, Particular."[43]

Scattered throughout Ultramarine are metaphors which have a sharp, image-like quality. They flash out suddenly like the images in Pound's Cantos. "The sun bled away behind chalk-white fields," "a shower of sparks, like red blossoms" -- these are not "images" in the strict sense of Pound or Eliot: we do not apprehend them sensuously and intellectually in the same moment (U, 29, 24).[44] Yet they have much in common with the movement in English writing immediately before the First World War known as Imagism. The Imagists strove to revitalize the word. They wished for a closer association in poetry between the word and the object. They detested the flabbiness, the abstractness, the rhetoric of nineteenth-century poetry. They favoured the hard-edged, the precise, the clear, and the concrete. Above all, they wished to make the reader look directly at the thing, whether subjective or objective. Although Imagism as a movement did not survive the war, its influence in the Twenties and Thirties was profound. The effect of the experience of the trenches on writers was to intensify their contempt

for the empty phrases, the rhetoric, which had sent so many young men to their deaths. The emphasis in Hemingway's writing on things, on economy of language, away from rhetoric towards the object, is the outcome both of Imagism and the war. In the works of Thirties writers as different from Hemingway as George Orwell and F.R. Leavis we find a similar attention to things, a detestation of abstractness. Journalism for the Orwell of Homage to Catalonia is an abuse of language because it makes truth general. Truth is always particular for Orwell, and must be approached empirically. In the middle of the anarchist rising in Barcelona he felt, as Sassoon and Graves had felt in the trenches of 1914 - 18, a hatred of politicians and journalists who fit the stubborn facts of empirical experience to some squalid generalization. Generalities, rhetoric, abstractions, the "self-evident" truths of a Party line, whether Whig-Liberal or Communist -- all these were exploded by those minute particulars which make up the actual experience of individuals during war: an actual corpse, an actual rat, actual cold. Spain strengthened Orwell's allegiance to that English empiricism we find in Blake and Lawrence: the determination to damn all

general truths and pay close attention to particular things.

In Lowry's posture of reverent attention to things, in his desire to bring together words and things, in his avoidance of rhetoric, in his resolute attention to language at the level of the word, the phrase, the sentence, we find a line of dogged English empiricism sharpened by Imagist experiment and by a post-war distaste for Edwardian pompousness. In Lowry's case, the pernicious effect of rhetoric on language and thought is illustrated by his father. In the figure of Arthur Lowry, Malcolm found conveniently writ large the evil that the Victorian-Edwardian bourgeoisie had done to the English language. In Ultramarine we find Lowry voyaging out from the dead language of his class towards alternative tribes, alternative dialects.

The dialect which dominates Ultramarine is, of course, that of the seamen:

> "'You look as if you'd swallowed Pat Murphy's goat and the horns were sticking out of your arse'" (U, 67);
>
> "'... so drunk that he tried to wrap the deck round him for a blanket'" (U, 62).

To young Malcolm Lowry, whose Methodist father's speech was noticeably lacking in metaphor, not to mention obscenity, the attractions of this kind of muscular, colloquial speech were understandable. The idioms of the sailors on the Oedipus Tyrannus are not only more picturesque and vigorous than those of home and school; they are also more playful and ironic. The sailors clearly delight in making unlikely comparisons. Yet the sailors' expressions are the clichés of their own dialect. Sailors do not habitually and casually throw off striking and original metaphors in the course of conversation, any more than do bourgeois. Stock metaphors, naturally circulate within a class dialect, their origin quickly becoming obscure. They are in their own way signs of class allegiance. Lowry is perfectly aware of this, although Dana Hilliott is not. Lowry cunningly filters the sailors' speech through his bourgeois, would-be proletarian, hero. The snatches of conversation above are overheard by Dana who is eavesdropping in the hope of discovering what his ship-mates think of him. He is also engaged in expropriating their racy speech for his forthcoming novel. Lowry thus brings to his novel the energy of working class dialect and at the same time

shows the impossibility for a bourgeois of penetrating the closed universe of working men.

Between the snatches of racy seamen's talk, Lowry inserts parenthetically the thoughts that pass through the mind of Dana:

> '... a selection of the real language of men ...' '... the language of these men ...' '... I propose to myself to imitate and as far as possible adopt the very language of these men ...' (U, 62).

Dana's problem is that, while he wishes to effect a second romantic revolution in literary discourse by shucking off abstractness and reaching the point where language originates in the "real" activities of ordinary men, his mind is cluttered with literary quotation. His desire to adopt the "real language of men" is itself a literary commonplace.[45] He cannot simply step outside the circle drawn round his linguistic habits by a bourgeois education. The sailors are aware of this inability and resent Dana's attempts to imitate their speech. "'You use language all right,'" observes one of the sailors ironically after Dana, anxious to be accepted, refers to his girlfriend as a "Jane," blasphemes, and affects an ungrammatical idiom

(U, 59). At one point one of the sailors contemptuously recalls a captain's son who on his first voyage couldn't learn "the difference between an eye splice and a handy billy" but had learnt to swear (U, 60). To the sailors swear words and nautical terms are the pass words to their class. They are as suspicious of the young bourgeois who tries to break into the closed world of their class by invoking those pass words as Arthur Lowry would have been of a sailor who tried to gain entry to his household by ejaculating: "'Good Lord!'" the expletive favoured by the narrator of "A Rainy Night."

Lowry's intention in drawing on the speech of the sailors is to make the verbal texture of the novel more dense. He is not, of course, trying to write a "proletarian novel." The word itself, "proletariat," is an abstraction that jars uglily when Lowry drops it into Dana's thoughts in the middle of a characteristically concrete set piece of sailors' banter (U, 65). Lowry's workers are neither virtuous nor revolutionary nor even conscious of themselves as belonging to an oppressed class. Lowry does not depict them as offering a more hopeful future than that of contemporary England but as

suggesting a less alienated past. He is closer in his attitudes to working men to William Morris, or for that matter, the Cobbett of Rural Rides (1830), than he is to Marx. This conservatism does not make Ultramarine any less a work of the Thirties than does that of Orwell in Homage to Catalonia (Lionel Trilling has noted the similarity of feeling between that work and Rural Rides).[46] Lowry, unlike many Thirties leftist writers, is honest in his depiction of working men; he does not ennoble them in the interests of ideology. If he is out to exploit them, his motive is linguistic rather than political: he simply wants to raid their vocabulary.

By suggesting that Lowry's interest in the working class is linguistic rather than ideological, I mean to imply that there is more than a trace of aestheticism in his attitude. He doesn't want to change the world by his art so much as he wants to perfect his art by drawing on working-class speech. The sailors' discourse will help him "purify the dialect of the tribe,"[47] which has become too flabby for a serious novelist to make use of. The workers, then, are in Ultramarine for aesthetic rather than moral reasons (which is not to suggest

that the novel has no moral dimension; this is a question of emphasis not of absolutes). At this point, the relation of Ultramarine to other Thirties writing becomes complex. Lowry's problem, like that of so many young writers in the Thirties, is: how is he to resolve a conflict between his aesthetic instincts and the insistent business of politics, how reconcile ideas and form?

In his prose style, Lowry adopts the dominant mode of Thirties fictional prose: that is, the vernacular. This, coupled with his interest in the working-class life, would seem to put him in the anti-aestheticist group. Lowry's sentences are generally short and nearly always syntactically simple. He lengthens his sentences by the simple and unLatinate method of splicing rather than subordinating clauses. His most frequently used conjunction is "and." Lowry's prose is earthy, direct, colloquial, and English rather than Latinate both in diction and structure. The essential simplicity of Lowry's sentences is sometimes obscured by his curious and erratic punctuation. He will thread a number of sentences together into one large umbrella sentence by using colons and semi-colons where periods would be the more obvious

and less unwieldy punctuation:

> The light burning in the forecastle was the lamp of sanctuary; it seemed to Hilliot now that the Oedipus Tyrannus had a manifold security: she was his harbour; he would lie in the arms of the ship, the derricks would fold about him like wings, sleep would bring with it a tender dream of home, of suns and fields and barns: tonight, perhaps, he would talk to Janet again. (U, 43).

This sentence is nothing like a Jamesian long sentence. It doesn't chop backwards and forwards in time, equivocate with conditionals and subjunctives, circle round some elusive perception by a series of subordinate clauses. Lowry's "sentence" is a series of discrete lunges at separate ideas masquerading as a single complex and equivocating insight. Lowry is trying to see difficult and modern by synctactical sleight of hand, much as inexpert free versifiers disguise their pentameters by enjambement.

By imputing to Lowry a "vernacular" prose style, I do not mean to imply that he writes "for the masses."[48] The latter phrase is used pejoratively by Cyril Connolly in his Enemies of Promise (1938) in which he surveys English writing in the between-the-wars period and notes

that in the Thirties the colloquial style of leftists and moralists like Isherwood and Orwell had replaced the "mandarin" style of the Twenties. The "realists, the puritans, the colloquial writers and talkie novelists" of the Thirties, says Connolly, had cultivated a cursive style,lucidity, simplicity, and moral force. He praises them for their good manners, clarity, insight, and discipline. By "Mandarins" Connolly means those who favour "art and patience, the striving for perfection, the horror of clichés, the creative delight in the material, in the possibilities of the long sentence and the composed phrase."[49] This is the style Connolly prefers and to which, despite its admitted drawbacks, he advocates a return in order that literary works of lasting merit might once more be produced in England. In The Living and The Dead White adopts the "mandarin" style, along with many of its specific vices. His sentences are long, Latinate, packed with conditional and dependent clauses, inclined to disappear into mystification and facile profundity. White's prose style has more in common with that of Woolf and Huxley than with that of Orwell or Isherwood. White has Virginia Woolf's habit of word-spinning, of forgetting

the referential business at hand in the process of generating language.[50] Like Woolf, White wants to produce his language out of other language on the magician's assumption that language can be separated from lived experience and that words can be plucked, like rabbits, out of nothing. There is nothing dreamy, onanistic, over-refined about Lowry's prose style. In Ultramarine, Lowry is already working towards a compromise between these two tendencies in English prose style.

Lowry's prose is "vernacular" in the sense that it employs the English in current use by native speakers. It is a prose accessible to ordinarily intelligent readers. At the same time, his prose is deliberately difficult and dense. It is meant to require work on the part of the reader and it is cunningly loaded with layers of meaning. It is, even, as Brian O'Kill points out, highly literary in the sections that present Dana's soliloquies. But O'Kill is surely wrong in suggesting that the language of these soliloquies closely fits Connolly's description of the "mandarin" style: "It is characterized by long sentences with many dependent clauses, by the use of subjunctive and conditional, by exclamations and inter-

jections, quotations, allusions, metaphors, long images, Latin terminology, subtlety and conceits."[51] Examples of all such linguistic usages could readily be found, but they would merely serve to shift the emphasis from the centre of linguistic concern in the novel's economy. Lowry is less interested in the long sentence or even in the "composed phrase" than he is in the charged word. Lowry's sentences are long by accretion rather than design, even in the self-consciously literary Dana-soliloquy sections. Lowry's phrases frequently achieve the hard, gem-like quality of the Image. But Lowry's chief concern is everywhere with the word as a dynamic unity of emotion and thought. It is words as units rather than syntactical sets that provide access to the real for Lowry. Lowry is obsessed in Ultramarine with the names of ships, of places, of nautical tools -- of things. He is, in fact, less interested in the language of the sailors -- the internal orderings of their linguistic system which make possible communication -- than in the specific nautical terms they employ. Their language remains largely closed to Dana; he is unable to penetrate their world by using it. But he does come to know the things of their

world, and this is a knowledge of central concern to Lowry.

By naming these things Lowry hopes to avoid abstraction, and this Lowryan hatred of abstraction seems a characteristically modernist concern. It links him to Lawrence and to Hemingway. But the nostalgic shape of Lowry's interest in particulars separates him from Joyce and from Eliot, the chief modernist influences on his style. Lowry hopes to avoid abstraction by returning to a time when man's life was still connected to the things he used in his daily life. The sailors' world is atavistic: it is not urban, alienated, mechanistic. It has none of the anonymity, the miscellaneousness, the disorder of modern urban life. And their speech is not the demotic language of utility and commerce which is spoken in large cities. Joyce and Eliot were aestheticist in the sense that they made works of formal beauty out of that debased langauge. Lowry is fighting a rear-guard action against the modern world and its debased dialects. Hence the reader is constantly seized in reading the novel not by the formal fineness of a phrase or a sentence but by a word, a derrick or a winch, which flies at him with its obdurate thinginess.

Lowry's achievement in Ultramarine should not be underestimated. In a period when English prose suffered from an overly zealous and hectoring interest by novelists in politics and a concommitant lack of attention to style, Lowry has forged a prose style that has range, density, and vigour, yet which eschews "Proustian onanism."[52] Lowry's prose is flexible and euphonious, capable of employing a range of stylistic manners (though he has none of Joyce's stylistic range), yet without exhibitionism. Lowry never allows his prose to become journalistic. This, of course,is the chief vice of vernacular writing: that it so easily descends to the level of journalism, of advertising, and of the popular novelist. It becomes "vulgar" in the sense of being commonplace or ordinary. Journalistic writing cannot last, and Lowry has no intention of squandering his talent by satisfying the demands of newspaper readers for glib thought in easy prose. If he avoids by his vernacular style a Pateresque or a Jamesian detachment from the herd, he also avoids by his difficulty the bowing and scraping before common taste of a Bennett or a Wells. He also avoids the reportorial bias of much Thirties writing. Lowry never veers towards the

fashionable historical kinds of discourse: the prose of the autobiography, the eye-witness account, and the travelogue.[53]

In Ultramarine, Lowry is already haltingly learning to take what he needs from the various fads, movements, cliques, and styles of the contemporary literary scene. He has learnt from aestheticism what Orwell recognized as its great merit yet could not apply to his own fiction: the determination to take art seriously. Ultramarine takes itself very seriously as a formed work of art. There is no looseness, no bagginess, in the novel. Its structure is "musical" in the sense that the novel is organized around a few refrains ("tin tin tin") and "organic" in that each of the parts has a vital relation to the whole. Lowry uses symbolism and motifs to hold the novel together without relying on a story with a neat beginning, middle, and end.

Yet Ultramarine avoids the specific vices of aestheticism. The novel has none of the self-conscious refinement that we find in Virginia Woolf's novels. Lowry has nothing but contempt for the Bloomsbury kind

of sensibility and the mandarin tendency of its style. Lowry certainly has none of the horror, as Wyndham Lewis noted in Woolf's writing, of the internal combustion engine.[54] One can scarcely imagine Virginia Woolf structuring one of her novels around the thrumming of a ship's engine. And Lowry has none of the smartness of the Sitwells or the tiresome intelligence of Huxley. There is no suggestion in Lowry's writing, as there is in White's, of the dandy.

Dandyism goes naturally but not inevitably with aestheticism. Lowry's problem was to take what he needed for his writing from the latter while avoiding the taint of the former. That is to say, although Lowry's writing clearly shows the influence of aestheticism, Lowry was determined not to adopt publicly the roles of the aesthete or the dandy. At the basis of Lowry's cultivation of a rough-neck, proletarian persona lay his horror of the sexual preferences associated with aestheticism. Cyril Connolly identifies the origin of this association in Enemies of Promise:

> The trial of Oscar Wilde was responsible for a flight from aestheticism which had lasted twenty years. He had himself done much to discredit it by the vulgar and insincere element which he had introduced; his conviction was the climax. From that moment the philistine triumphed and although there were still poets and critics who loved beauty, who were in fact romantic, their romanticism was forced to be hearty. Hence the cult of beer and Sussex, of walking and simplicity which ended with Masefield, Brooke, Squire and Gould.[55]

Lowry's horror of homosexuality led him to adopt a hearty version of romanticism, for inescapably he was a romantic. He was also a lover of "walking and simplicity." There is a telling resemblance between the Taskersons in Under the Volcano, Lowry's idealized family of hearty, beer-drinking, hiking, wenching poet's sons, and the Georgians Connolly ridicules. Lowry may be said to have revived "the cult of beer and Sussex," and to have made it heartier than ever by substituting the ritual of gin for that of beer and turning the beer into a chaser.

Lowry could not, however, identify his interests with those of the "hearties": the rugby-playing, rowing, and hunting types found in Oxbridge between the wars, the kind who in the late Twenties might keep a bulldog

named "musso" in affectionate but non-serious diminution of Mussolini. This variety of heartiness had too much in common with Arthur Lowry's combination of athleticism and philistinism. In a letter to David Markson Lowry described himself, somewhat exaggeratedly, as "coming from a huntin' and shootin' family near Liverpool, who weren't interested in literary matters."[56] Lowry's problem as a young man was to prize apart the athletic and the philistine aspects of heartiness. Despite his carefully cultivated muscles and his love of golf, swimming, and weight-lifting, Lowry rejected both the muscular Christianity of his father and the equally muscular sportiness of the Cambridge "bloods." He set about becoming a muscular aesthete.

Unfortunately for Lowry, the ruling forms of reaction against heartiness at Cambridge were unacceptable for one reason or another. Dandyism was tainted by effeminacy. In the Twenties, dandies like Brian Howard and Harold Acton had stood for art against philistinism. At Oxford, Howard had intoned The Waste Land to the "herd" of undergraduates passing below his rooms in token of the dandy-aesthete's commitment to beauty.

Their decadent life-style is nostalgically recreated by Waugh in Brideshead Revisited (1945). A less sympathetic anatomy of their life-style and its influence on between-the-wars England may be found in Martin Green's Children of the Sun (1976).[57] Green's viewpoint itself draws on a line of English cultural criticism that has its roots in the Cambridge of the Thirties: the line of opposition to upper-class mandarins whose chief spokesman has been F.R. Leavis. Leavis had the advantage, given Lowry's prejudices, that he was anti-Bloomsbury and anti-decadent. But Leavis was too narrow, too puritanical, too lower-middle-class, to provide a stylistic model, personal or literary, for Lowry. Leavis lacked the effeminacy of the dandies and the philistinism of the hearties. Unfortunately, he also lacked a sense of humour.

Leavisism, which might have been expected to attract a colonial like White or a boy from a provincial, non-conformist background like Lowry, carried off neither. To both, Leavis' dislike of style for its own sake was unpalatable. Both possessed a native playfulness that was foreign to Leavis' uncompromising moralism.

The Oxbridge communist sympathizers of the Thirties were no more atractive to Lowry than were the Twenties dandies. Ideology was not Lowry's preferred intoxicant. At Oxford and Cambridge in the Thirties cliques of what Orwell called "the Nancy Poets" set the literary-political tone.[58] This tone had no appeal for the obdurately heterosexual Lowry: the working class it idealized was an abstraction; it was dominated by upper-class homosexuals who could readily accommodate dandies like Brian Howard now dressed up as a leftist; its notion of the proper function of art was more avowedly didactic than was Lowry's. It is significant that Lowry published his undergraduate work, with one exception, in Experiment, which stood for no particular style, clique, or political view, but for good writing that was modernist and experimental.

In the warfare that sporadically broke out at Cambridge and Oxford in the Twenties and Thirties between aesthete and athlete, Lowry, as an artist, sided with the former, however much he borrowed the muscles of the latter. Lowry wanted to produce a work of fiction that would last because of its attention to form and style, its pursuit

of perfection, its rendering of its content rather than the content itself. "Beauty" was a word he would have found embarrassing because of its suggestions of Bloomsbury elegance, of the Nineties, and of Wilde. Yet, if we consider "beauty" to be the inevitability of the formal relation of parts to whole in a work of art, this is precisely what Lowry is after in Ultramarine.

Formally, the novel's major debt is to Joyce, the Joyce of The Portrait of the Artist (1914). There are two preliminary points raised by this debt. Firstly, Lowry is wiser than White in choosing as his modernist model not a poet but a novelist. In The Living and The Dead White's "modernism" much of the time involves little more than his habit of quoting T.S. Eliot without acknowlèdgement. Lowry has understood that the modernist determination to bring to prose fiction the energy and concentration of poetry does not mean that the novelist should simply insert passages of derivative and bad "poetry" into his narrative. It means organizing the whole structure of the novel organically and "musically" -- in a loose not a strict sense -- rather than according to the neat pattern of plot (the equivalent in prose of

the iamb which Pound likened to the beat of the metronome).[59]

The second point raised by Lowry's debt to Joyce is his refusal to acknowledge the extent of his debt. Lowry chose to exaggerate his debt to Conrad Aiken in order to conceal his more essential one to Joyce. Lowry even took to claiming that he had not read Ulysses entire until after the publication of Volcano.[60] Lowry chose Conrad Aiken as his literary father figure because he felt that eventually he could swallow him. This is precisely what he did. We know by his own admission that Lowry plagiarized certain words and phrases from Aiken. "Thrumming" in Ultramarine and "dithering" in Lunar Caustic (1963) are taken from Aiken. But they are surrounded in the plagiarizing texts by writing that has subsumed their original force. Lowry is simply stronger than Aiken, and he knows it. In his own words, he has "killed" his mentor.[61] Lowry evidently felt Joyce's enormous power as an influence. So he approached Joyce circuitously via lesser writers. In the end the ploy worked. Joyce is present but not threatening in Volcano; he is dangerous in Ultramarine.

In Ultramarine, Lowry has taken more from Joyce than the technique of montaging dialogue. Essentially, Lowry tries to achieve the same kind of authorial distance between himself and his autobiographical hero, Dana Hilliot, that Joyce achieves with Stephen Dedalus in The Portrait. And his method is the symbolist one Joyce perfected in that novel. Lowry reveals through changes in style and symbolism rather than through explicit authorial comment, the various stages of his hero's movement towards self-awareness. The early scene in which Dana looks into the engine room is a suitable illustration of Lowry's Joycean method. The sight of the row of pistons turning suggests to Dana's unconscious troubling sexual thoughts which are recognized at the level of language ("the penetrating shaft") (U, 24). Thoughts of sex invoke religious anxieties and the imagery becomes hellish. Hell begets its opposite, God, and Dana contemplates the curious interrelation of above and below. The ship's bell rings the refrain, tin, tin, tin, which, like Proust's madeleine, jolts Dana's involuntary memory and carries him "behind the screen of time" back to schoolboys (U, 25). There is the familiar Clongowes "smell of peat smoke from the

fens" and a Greek tag to show that Dana is showing off. That he is, like Stephen Dedalus, rather precious. Now Dana resurfaces from "the yellow sea of his consciousness" and the nagging thoughts of sexual fear and doubts about masculinity reappear (U, 25). Just as Dana senses "what was wrong with him" Lowry breaks the narrative with three periods and the possibility of the moment remains unrealized (U, 26).

The scene, then, is self-contained: it has its own internal "musical" organization, complete with "submarine notes" and a change of "key" (U, 25). The language takes on the colouring of Dana's flow of thought. The progression of the piece works largely by sound association (the bells of the ship recall the school bell) and the use of motif and symbolism. The use of stream-of-consciousness is not yet assured, but it is effective. Above all, Lowry manages to convey Dana's priggishness without clumsy novelistic methods. We never feel his presence at our elbow nudging us towards this or that opinion as we do in White's early novels. We recognize the sickly air of romanticism around Dana as we do around Stephen Dedalus and so are not surprised when Dana has

his occasional, muted epiphanies.

Lowry, then, has "Joyced [himself] in his own petard" (HL, 41). The borrowings from Joyce are far more thoroughgoing and far more unconcealed than those of White to Eliot in The Living and The Dead. Joyce permeates the novel. Yet somehow, Lowry gets away with it. Having so completely assimilated his Joyce, the novel is his own. He can even afford to be playful in his borrowings in a way unthinkable for White. There is a genuinely funny version of "Jabberwocky": "The rooty drip of manly blood, the surging sea outweights" (U, 116) and jocular echoes of Eliot and Hopkins (U, 133, 117). Lowry is more of a Joycean than is White or any Thirties English novelist. Yet Ultramarine is not merely a belated early modernist novel. In its central concerns, in the authorial anxieties it reveals, it is very much a novel of the early Thirties.

The young English intellectuals of the Thirties shared in a mood of radical disenchantment with the culture that had produced them. The generation we know as "the Auden generation" felt itself to be overshadowed by the war it had just missed and from which England had never

quite recovered. A more accurate description of this group of young writers than "the Auden generation" which puts too much weight on a particular set is Anthony Powell's dismissive but telling phrase: "the post-post-war generation."[62] This rubric allows us to include writers who shared a common experience but who saw its meaning as differently from Auden as did Orwell, Greene, and Powell himself.

This generation, born around 1910 when Virginia Woolf's famous change in human nature supposedly occurred, could just remember the pre-war period.[63] They were aware, less by memory than by report, of a falling away in the quality of English life between their infancy and the present time. Their own world was more cramped, more grey, more uncertain, than the pre-war world. The cause of this decline was generally attributed to the war, and the habitual stance of young intellectuals in the Thirties towards the First War was one of guilty fascination. They were guilty because they themselves had missed out on the experience which had absolutely separated the old world from the puzzling modern one while their older brothers, whom they had been taught to revere, had passed through that experience and in large numbers

had been consumed by it. None certainly had returned unchanged by the furnace in which he had been forced to walk.

The generation of the Thirties, then, were aware of the generation which had come immediately before themselves, the idealized older brothers who had not returned, as an absence. Christopher Isherwood describes the common sensation among his circle of having failed "The Test."[64] They weren't quite men. This theme is taken up in Ultramarine in the relationship between Dana and Andy, the ship's cook. From the start Dana hero worships Andy; he is the kind of worshipper who cannot conceal from himself an element of resentment of and contempt for the hero. His attitude has all the marks of sibling rivalry. Knotted into Dana's complex of feelings towards Andy is an intense jealousy of the older man's sexual prowess. Andy's masculinity is irreproachable; he doesn't have to boast about his conquests. Dana is a virgin, a syphilophobe, and quite possibly impotent (entering the brothel Dana refuses to "try [his] weight," a phrase which looks forward to Bill Plantagenet's admission in Lunar Caustic that he cannot "lift" his

"weight").[65] Dana's secret cause of contempt towards Andy is the latter's lack of a chin. Dana seems to feel that chinlessness implies, if not sexual impairment, at least an unattractiveness that precludes sexual conquest (a flimsy argument, given that all the sailors' sexual relations are with prostitutes). The emotional climax of the novel occurs when Dana throws at Andy his chinlessness. Here Dana makes the discovery that Andy had lost his chin in the war. Andy, then, is the idealized older brother of all Lowry's generation, the cause of their feelings of inadequacy and guilt, who, having passed "The Test," holds the key to manhood. In Dana's desire to be accepted by Andy as a man in his own right, we see the desire of a whole generation to confront the myth that had caused them to feel demeaned.

Feeling themselves to be inadequate, neurotic, over-shadowed by their mythical older brothers, doomed, the young writers of the Auden generation looked on contemporary history as a nightmare. But how could they awaken from a nightmare that was not fantasm but reality? They could not escape into the self which they felt to be fatally infected by the outer ill. They were determined

not to retreat into art for its own sake. They decided, then, that they must make history itself less of a nightmare; in the language of the fashionable Marxism, they must change the world. And they would do so through their art. Auden, before he decided that poetry "makes nothing happen," preached a parable art: not a crude didacticism but an art whose aim was to make humans better.[66] Precisely how the fashionable fictional modes of Thirties fiction -- Kafkaesque fantasy, social realism, the eyewitness account, the symbolic landscape -- were going to achieve this betterment was open to question. The direction that fiction would take, away from subjectivism towards history -- that, at least was clear.

Ultramarine is a Thirties novel in the sense that it is explicitly concerned with the efforts of a young bourgeois intellectual of the period to break out of the limits of self and touch the "real" world. In Dana Hilliot we find embodied the naive idea common among young middle-class intellectuals in the Thirties that the workers, being closer to "reality" than the bourgeois, held the key to psychic health. The former public schoolboy, racked by sexual guilt, convinced that his education

had permanently marked and damaged him ("ruined" is Auden's word), saw revolutionary politics as a means of making contact with the world outside his fantasies and fears.[67] For Edward Upward, the simple expedient of joining the Communist Party could turn neurotic bourgeois into healthy revolutionaries. Here was the key to Auden's cypher of psychic wounding. Happily, Lowry never suffered from the delusion that the mere experience of working-class conditions could peel away the layers of class attitudes and free the neurotic from his illness. Dana's neuroses are not magically cured by deck-swabbing. If the crew came to tolerate him in the end, they do so not because he has ceased to be a bourgeois but because he has proved his pluck.

Like Isherwood's Mr. Norris Changes Trains and Upward's Journey to the Border, Ultramarine is a nearly autobiographical account of a young intellectual's venturings outside the prescribed limits of class and background. Dana, like Isherwood's William Bradshaw, is seeking to escape from the Edwardian fathers who ruled the English middle class. Both are troubled by a "stupid inner check" to happiness which they owe to those daunting paternal

figures (U, 32). Lowry's novel lacks the familiar Audenesque trappings of borders, conspirators, fascists, and airmen (all these will appear in Volcano), but the essential features of its landscape are those of the Thirties: journeys, neurosis, the workers, the test, and manliness.

There is another link of Ultramarine to the Thirties context which needs to be mentioned. Lowry's novel may be considered as a kind of Thirties travel book, although its use of language has nothing in common with that prose form, Ultramarine brings together three models of travel writing that exhaust -- perhaps explode is the better word -- the possibilities of the genre. On the first and most obvious level, the novel is the record of a trip abroad. It describes foreign customs and has plenty of "local colour" (a quality which, much to Lowry's annoyance, a publisher's reader praised in Under the Volcano).[68] Tsjang-Tsjang -- a kind of Shanghai with Liverpudlian details -- is not as exotic as Tibet or Guyana or Liberia where, respectively, went Robert Byron, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene. Nevertheless, in the classic manner of the travel book, Lowry has his not-very-intrepid narrator, Dana Hilliot, move gradually

into the interior, facing dangers and discomfitures along the way, remarking on the curiosities he encounters, and making discoveries about himself and his own culture by reference to these oddities.

Dana Hilliot differs chiefly from other Thirties travel writers in his lack of gentlemanly reserve when it comes to describing his own discomfitures and fears. Greene and Waugh certainly mention the ferocious bugs that assault them, but their prose remains cool, their attitude stoical. Dana's obsession with syphilis is certainly not typical of English travel writers. At any rate, the other don't tell us of their fears in this respect. It is also true that Dana lacks any specialist's knowledge of the area in which he has chosen to travel. We find none of those brilliant amateur discussions of foreign architecture we find in Robert Byron. Yet the bars and brothels of Tsjang-Tsjang are a passable substitute, and Lowry describes them with an enthusiasm and an eye for exotic detail that distinguishes the true travel afficionado. The cots full of puppies that the nervous brothel customers must pass are distinctively Lowrian: sinister, infinitely squalid, almost surreal, yet thoroughly convincing. Lowry is already

showing that talent for describing bars that will allow him in Under the Volcano, to make a seedy Mexican bar stand as a quintessential representation of a whole culture, something enduring and, in its singularly seedy fashion, magnificent. These bars are offered to us with the same pride of discovery with which Robert Byron gives us such esoterica the great chorten on the chief temple at the Gyantse monastery in Tibet.[69]

One of the advantages Dana Hilliot expects to gain by travel is the experience of an excitement wholly lacking in the dull round of his young bourgeois life thus far. He wants to escape the neat rows of houses in which his aunts and uncles live and the prospect of the neat row of graves in which their unexceptionable corpses lie. He anticipates such excitement as a matter of course in out-of-way places. One of the insights he gains by travel is that travel is largely a matter of enduring long stretches of boredom. Dana's discovery points to a difficulty for travel writers: that is, how to make a tedious experience interesting. Lowry's solution to this problem is a characteristically

Thirties one: he turns the journey of Dana Hilliot abroad into a journey inward. Thus Lowry draws on the second mode of Thirties travel-writing.

Graham Greene, faced with writing a travel book about his journey through Liberia, confronted a boredom more absolute than any Lowry endured scrubbing decks en route to the Far East. His problem was: how to write an interesting account of an unbearably tedious journey. He solved the problem, as Paul Fussell shows in Abroad, by the simple expedient of "conceiv[ing] the journey as a metaphor for something else."[70] Greene turns the African coast into an immense paysage moralisé. In other words, he makes the topography of Liberia stand for a map of the human mind, much as Auden had done with the map of England in the Thirties. But Greene's map of the mind had more in common with Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902) than with Auden's mixture of jejune politics, fashionable psychology, and mere schoolboy smartness. Greene's "country of the mind" has both the simplicity and the resonance of Conrad's original metaphor.[71] Journey Without Maps asks what sort of innocence lies behind the seedy littoral of the present state of European civiliza-

tion, of the present state of the author, representative of a seedy generation. The device which makes possible this multi-layered exploration is a simple one: memory. The journey into the hidden Africa releases memories which take us deeper and deeper into the mind of the author.

Greene, of course, was not the only Thirties writer to adopt this method of making a journey by a sophisticated traveller into a primitive country bear back ironically upon the civilization of the journeyer. Waugh does this brilliantly in A Handful of Dust (1934) where Tony Last travels absurdly into the heart of the primitive and discovers there a mad, fundamentalist Christian who forces him endlessly to read Dickens. Lowry takes up the method in Volcano where the deeper the consul moves into the heart of the Mexican horror, the more clear become the outlines of a European darkness. In Ultramarine Lowry, like Greene, has mastered the Conradian method of making a journey outwwards simultaneously a journey inwards. The device which makes this possible for Marlowe, for the narrator of Journey Without Maps, and for Dana Hilliot is memory. The further Dana

moves from the ship behind the littoral of the docks into the heart of the brothels, the more tantalizing become the memories of youth and innocence and the more improbable his dreams of future domestic happiness with Janet. As with both Conrad and Greene, the journey into the hidden continent releases memories which takes us deeper and deeper into the mind of the narrator and the heart of his civilization.

The third mode of Thirties travel writing which Lowry draws on in Ultramarine has already been discussed: that is, travel downwards through the class structure. That depictions of the working class could be termed "travel" writing in the England of the Thirties is indicative of the gulf that separated the classes in this period. The cleavage that separated the classes seemed to Thirties bourgeois writers to be a very terrible one, yet one many longed to cross. This crossing was seen as very painful but potentially saving. One set about it much as Christian sets about discovering salvation in Pilgrim's Progress. One gave up one's clothes and privileges and faced starvation and death. This is certainly how Orwell saw the crossing as we may judge by Down and

Out in Paris and London (1933). Few went as far as Orwell to unmake themselves as bourgeois, but all the writers of "the Auden generation" saw the working class as a separate world, a world towards which one journeyed painfully. Orwell's conclusion to Down and Out reveals that he, writing in the year in which Ultramarine was published, like Lowry, recognized the possible application of travel writing to the problem of describing working-class life in a work of fiction:

> It is a fairly trivial story, and I can only hope that it has been interesting in the same way as a travel diary is interesting.[72]

Unlike Orwell, Lowry makes no apologies for writing a novel whose "story" might be said to be slight. His concern is with language and form charged with the kind of intensity that is possible in the novel.

PART B

Pastorals and Apocalypses: After the War

Reality was on the other side
of the Channel,surely,

Siegried Sassoon,
Sherston's Progress
(1936).

I

The Post-War Context

It was not surprising that the new novelists of the 1950s should be resolutely unexperimental; it was unlikely that they would be published if they were not.

Robert Hewison,
In Anger.

I don't want to write an experimental novel to be read by people in fifty years, who will say, ah, well, yes, she foresaw what was coming. I'm just not interested. I'd rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore.

Margaret Drabble
quoted in Bernard Berganzi,
The Situation of the Novel.

Voss was published in 1957. Among English novels it is contemporary with Kingsley Amis' I Like It Here (1958), John Braine's Room at the Top (1957), William Golding's Pincher Martin (1956), L.P. Hartley's The Hireling (1957), Iris Murdoch's The Bell (1958), Anthony Powell's At Lady Molly's (1957), Angus Wilson's The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot (1958), and C.P. Snow's The Conscience of the Rich (1958). The list is not exhaustive, but it is representative of serious English fiction in the Fifties. There has been considerable critical dispute in the last twenty years about the merits of this body of fiction. Several American critics have condemned post-war English novelists for their traditionalism and for their reluctance to employ modernist techniques.[1] English novelists and critics have defended the traditionalism of the contemporary English novel on the grounds that traditionalism is fine in itself and that the interest of English novelists in character and plot, Victorian as it may seem, reflects social realities in England.[2] Malcolm Bradbury has claimed that there are in fact modernist orientations in the post-war English novel if only one looks hard enough.[3] By and large English writers have accepted the American charge

of dullness in the English novel and in English society, but have expressed satisfaction with a society that lacks the dangers and bizarreness of American society.[4] American reality, being "incredible," justifies the frenzy distortions, and outrageousness of American writing; English society, being homogeneous, orderly, and traditional, is more properly reflected in a restrained fictional manner.[5] The English mood is summed up by the disgruntled hero of Amis' I Like It Here who dislikes "abroad" and likes London although he wishes it were still the London of the eighteenth century. Hence his approval of Henry Fielding who is:

> the only non-contemporary novelist who could be read with unaffected and wholehearted interest, the only one who never had to be apologized for or excused on the grounds of changing tastes. And how enviable to live in the world of his novels, where duty was plain, evil arose out of malevolence and a starving wayfarer could be invited indoors without hesitation and without fear. Did that make it a simplified world? Perhaps, but that hardly mattered beside the existence of a moral seriousness that could be made apparent without the aid of evangelical puffing and blowing.[6]

Amis' preference for the eighteenth over the twentieth century is a preference for the literary virtues of "clarity, common sense, emotional decency and general

morality."[7] Opposed to these values, according to Amis and his iconoclastic hero, are the modernist ones of psychological depth, stylistic difficulty, religious obscurity, and an excessive concentration on form at the expense of matter. For Amis, the eighteenth century was an extroverted and intelligible world in which the writer was able to address an intelligent audience in readily understood terms. In choosing to admire the eighteenth century Amis clearly feels himself to by kicking against the pricks of contemporary literary fashion, much as Julian Bell did by his cult of the Augustans during the romantic and revolutionary Thirties.

Amis' antipathies, which encompass an astonishing variety of cultural pieties from tramps to folk dancing, are meant to be iconoclastic. Amis speaks for a new mood in English literary culture that emerged in the post-war period which was trenchantly opposed to the élites which had dominated literary England up to 1939. Amis was lower-middle-class and grammar-school educated. If White and Lowry in the Thirties had been somewhat on the outskirts of the generation whose members drifted effortlessly from public school to Oxbridge to the centres of literary

London, Amis and the new young men whose viewpoint he represented were blatantly and self-consciously unfashionable. We may understand Amis' antipathies better if we see them in terms of the favourite causes of the Thirties against which Amis and so many of the new writers in post-war England were in open rebellion. Communism was opposed by these writers not merely because of disillusionment with the Soviet Union but because its champions in England had been the upper-middle-class Bloomsbury set who were now railing against the welfare state as they had railed against fascism in the Thirties. Stephen Spender, who had abandoned liberalism for communism when such gestures were fashionable, was concerned in the late Forties about what he called "the diminution of England to our Welfare State."[8] Spender's mercurial changes of political allegiance did not at all exclude him from access to the columns of paying journals, those which in literary London remained in the Forties and Fifties as firmly in the editorial hands of public-school educated mandarins as they had been in the Thirties. Prominent among these journals was Horizon, edited by Cyril Connolly whose 1938 call for a return to aestheticist and mandarin literary values was now

being heeded among the survivors of the Thirties generation. As Spender observed in 1945:

> A certain discouragement haunts sensitive people today because they envisage the possibility of a society organized in such a way that it is completely independent of the values which are maintained by art. There seems to be the possibility of a self-sufficient, materially successful kind of world, an organization of machinery producing other machinery which could dispense altogether with what we call culture.[9]

One may readily detect behind Spender's repugnance against a materialistic, mechanical, and socialist society the reappearance of those "conservative, pastoral and genteel values with which the mandarin felt at home" and which, in the Thirties had been grafted onto a patrician enthusiasm for the shepherds dressed up as latter-day proletarians.[10]

It is easy to see why the literary-cultural-political milieu of the Thirties was repugnant to many of the younger writers who emerged out of unprivileged backgrounds after the Second War and who, turning for models to Leavis, Lawrence, and Orwell who had been unfashionable in the Thirties, began in the early Fifties to assert a new stress in the English literary scene. To the new

writers -- Cooper, Amis, John Wain, John Braine -- the Auden generation had been discredited by the events that had shaped their own perspectives. Having preached the need for a war against fascism in the Thirties, Auden and Isherwood had made themselves conspicuous after 1939 by bolting for America. Auden returned to England in 1945 in the uniform of an American officer and proceeded to expound the advantages of America and of religion.[11] The Labour Government which initially had the support of the newer writers aroused small enthusiasm among Thirties communists and fellow-travellers who were little interested in the practical business of democratic socialist compromise. The mood of post-war Britain was sober and in this milieu the flamboyant figures from the between-the-wars period were out of place. London's dandies, as Cyril Connolly complained, were "in exile."[12] The new men preferred the anti-dandies Orwell and Lawrence to those of the dandies, like Waugh and Betjeman, who chose to remain.

If England seemed to the anti-dandies a "nostalgic and regressive culture" by 1945, their own preferences for the Leavisite and Orwellian virtues of decency, patriotism, provincialism, and common-sensical empiricism may

hardly be described as avant-garde.[13] In fact, the anger of the new young writers was directed as much at whatever was foreign, modern, and difficult as at what they felt was decadent in English culture. The antagonism to the old mandarin élites employed the Leavisite rhetoric of opposition to whatever was tainted by cosmopolitanism or by too close an identification with America. Amis' antagonism in the Thirties cult of abroad is characteristic:

> The new Graham Greene, like most of the old Graham Greene's, was about abroad. Extraordinary how the region kept coming up. There must be something in it: not all the people who thought so were horrible. A couple of months there would be like learning to drive or making a determined start on Finnegan's Wake -- an experience bound in itself to be arduous and irritating, but one which could conceivably render available a rich variety of further experiments.[14]

One notes apart from the complacency of the thought in this passage the slackness of the prose. One can scarcely imagine Lowry using a phrase like "not all the people who thought so were horrible" without self-consciousness, or ironic intent. But Amis intends us to identify with the amusing smugness of his hero and his prose style is intended to make us enjoy his vicious sallies against

smart attitudes as Anthony Powell's similarly approving use of upper-class dialect is intended to cajole us into endorsing his narrator's monstrous contempt for the poor.[15] One notes also the easy attitude taken towards the reader. Amis assumes that his reader will share his hero's prejudices. The humour of the piece depends upon the assumption of a body of norms regarded as obvious by author and reader alike. The pleasure of the exercise lies in poking fun at departures from these norms. Amis assumes that his reader will share his hero's suspicion of foreign places and modernist novels that make demands on the reader. By thus assuming a shared body of norms and prejudices with his audience Amis implies the superiority of the literary culture that existed prior to the nineteenth century and romanticism. But Amis' moral world has little substantial in common with the eighteenth-century world of Fielding and Smollett which he admires. Amis does not make the kinds of moral demands on his reader that Fielding or Smollett make. The latter may have inhabited an ordered world view which allowed them to assume a fixed body of moral norms, but they applied those norms to what they saw as general human problems not merely to the championing

of petty prejudices. Amis evidently seeks to sidestep the problem for the modern writer of the break-up of the reading public into serious and popular sections by addressing serious issues, as he sees them, in accessible prose. Hence the appeal of the eighteenth century when clarity, common sense, and morality were not at odds. But Amis does not have an eighteenth-century audience to appeal to. He must content himself with addressing those who, like himself, are eager to look back from the present unsettling world to a more robust and straightforward one. Amis' nostalgia is for a necessarily simplified eighteenth century, the sort of world Tony Richardson evokes in the immensely popular film of Tom Jones (1963). Given the reactionary nature of this appeal, it is not surprising that Amis' tone and moral content together with the xenophobia that becomes more marked in his later fiction should have more in common with the late Victorian and Edwardian Little England movement than with Fielding and Smollett.

Amis' preference for the eighteenth century, which suggests a means of castigating the present from the standpoint of a more reasonable age, is actually merely a symptom of a general mood of nostalgia that pervaded the

post-war English scene. Sometimes the preference was for the Edwardian period, sometimes for Victorianism or the eighteenth century -- whatever the age nostalgia deferred to, the same dissatisfaction with the modern world and its characteristic literary modes may be discovered beneath the rhetoric. The mood is one of regression, the desire of a whole culture to deny the disasters of the present by fixing the attention on some less troubling past. It is a mood reflected in the stories of Elizabeth Bowen, particularly those in The Demon Lover (1945) which trace the decline the English middle class in the interwar period and which mourn its vanished gentility and assurance. It is a mood of longing for childhood reflected not only in the stories of Elizabeth Bowen but in the manifesto of the angriest of the Angry Young Men, Look Back in Anger, where Jimmy Porter prefers Edwardian colonels and nursery games to the angst of living in "the American Age."

In October Ferry to Gabriola (1970) Malcolm Lowry quotes Hermann Hesse to the effect that "the dream of a lost paradise [is] the worst and most deadly of all dreams."[16] Lowry himself was by no means free of nostalgia for the Edwardian period or for childhood. In one of his

late short stories he exactly captures the mythical life that was supposed to have existed up to 1914:

> that expansive feeling of great riches and peace, that purring roaring feeling, yet somehow quiet as a Rolls Royce engine, of life being at a sort of permanent flood, as if there had never been a first world war, let alone a second one, which was like an evocation of 1913, of those truly pre-war days from which he retained only this curious yet powerful sensation, when with his parents he must have visited London or Dublin, or at least Weston-super-Mare, at the age of five.[17]

However strong Lowry's desire was for the lost world of 1913, he never pretended that the great disruptions that had seized on the world after 1914 could be ignored. In his attempts formally and linguistically to grapple with these disruptions Lowry places himself among the modernists. And this places him at odds with the English novelists in the post-war period.

Graham Greene in Stamboul Train introduces a comic Edwardian novelist lingering into the modern world railing against Joyce, Lawrence, and "morbid introspection."[18] In the Thirties any young novelist serious about his grasp of his craft was obliged to show himself acquainted with the experiments of modernism. In John Wain's Hurry On Down

(1953) a comic modernist novelist is introduced to complement Greene's ridiculous Q.C. Savory. Wain's Edwin Froulish is a caricature of the modernist novelist as Savory is a caricature of the Edwardian one, and the comic quality in both rests upon their having misjudged the tenor of their ages. Edwin Froulish, with his addiction to flashbacks, stream-of-consciousness, world play, punning, absurdly allegorical plots, symbolism, symphonic structure, and his dislike of realism and characterization, is clearly as out of place in the English literary scene of the Fifties as Q.C. Savory was in that of the Thirties. Wain's prescription for Froulish is unabashed in its endorsement of traditionalism: "a course of Thackery, that's my prescription."[19] That is to say, cure the disease even by killing the patient.

The radicalness of the shift away from modernism and experiment in the Fifties is indicated by the literary fortunes of C.P. Snow. Despite F.R. Leavis' violent Jeremiads against Snow as a literary-cultural phenomenon, Snow was regarded as a serious novelist in the post-war period.[20] Leavis regarded Snow as the visible embodiment of the "technologico-Bethamite" nightmare that was gripping

England: a contemporary Bentham dressed up as an Edwardian popular novelist for the purpose of debasing cultural standards. Certainly, by his taste for popularizing science and by the slackness of his literary standards, Snow shows himself the direct heir of Wells and Bennett. His thought is banal, his diction pompous, his attention to the language generally slack, his tonal variety non-existent. It seems astonishing that in the Fifties, half a century after the battle between the novel as journalism and the novel as art had been fought and decisively won, Snow should be allowed to occupy "an important place in [English] culture" merely because he is so impeccably a novelist of ordinariness.[21]

Reading Snow's massive sequence, Strangers and Brothers, one is impressed by the inappropriateness of documentary to reality since 1914, the year in which the hero of the whole sequence, Lewis Eliot is born. Snow's method of realistic record in journalistic prose is adequate neither to the historical experience it hopes to record nor to the private experiences of individuals which Snow does not regard as his province and accordingly largely ignores. Snow sees himself as what White would call a

"factual" rather than an imaginative writer.[22] His allegiance is to historical experience as it impinges on our public not our private lives and he aims at the truthfulness of the most prosaic kind of realism. There is nothing self-advertising about his inventions and if he must lie, as all novelists must to some degree, he lies, as Zola puts it, "in the direction of truth."[23] Snow is suspicious of the concentration on interior life that is represented by the writing of Proust and Joyce. He speaks for the ordinary, the outward, the social. What is objectionable in all this is Snow's suggestion that by doing so he is a more honest "realist" than, say, Proust or Woolf. Behind this claim lies Snow's positivistic assumption that "the world" is the one knowable through the senses and no other. Snow never acknowledges that there may be more than one "world" far less as many worlds as there are subjectivities to invent them. Nor has he grasped that because the invented worlds of the novelist are never precisely the ordinary one of our common habitation, the novelist must rely on his ability to imagine as well as his ability to describe and record. Finally, Snow is a limited novelist because his notion of reality is impoverished by his refusal to see

that history in our century has changed the real. Reality is not what it was, or seemed to be, in 1913. That "reality" was exploded by two world wars and by means of mass destruction that lifted whole peoples out of history.

It is to this attenuation of reality in the contemporary novel that Lowry refers when he observes that "nothing indeed can be more unlike the actual experience of life than the average novelist's realistic portrait of a character."[24] The Wells-Gallsworthy notion of character as something fixed, predictable, determined mechanically by class and background -- this is what Lowry means by "the average novelist's realistic portrait of a character." In the Fifties, C.P. Snow was producing characters according to this model as though "reality" had remained static since the Edwardian period, as though Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf had not charted realities other than the ordinary, external one, as though surrealism, expressionism, fascism, the bombing of civilian populations -- all the monstrous, bizarre, and unreal events of this century had not exploded the orderly social world of 1910 which had, so it seemed in retrospect, manufactured "character" and "reality" as smoothly and unreflectively

as it had manufactured Rolls Royce engines. Snow's nostalgia for the Edwardian age is more dangerous than Lowry's because it ignores more. Hearing stories of the lost Edwardian world, Lewis Eliot, Snow's autobiographical hero, is swept away by "the imaginary land which exists just before one's childhood. Often as I heard them I felt something like homesick -- homesick for a time before I was born."[25] This is a nostalgia not merely for a prior age but for a mythical world confused with the paradise of childhood. It represents "the worst and most deadly of all dreams" because the dreamer seeks not merely to recall some richer reality than that of the present but to deny reality itself as a process of endless change.

C.P. Snow's novels do not offer a fair representation of English fiction in the Fifties. Snow's realism rests on a narrower construal of the real than that which motivates Lawrence Durrell, Angus Wilson, or Iris Murdoch. But Snow is not obviously out of place in the decade as were Wells and Bennett, as far as serious younger novelists were concerned, in the Thirties. Snow's fiction is part of the climate of formal conservatism that marked the Fifties. In the context of a literary culture that reacted

against the experimentalism of the between-the-wars years by stressing the ordinary, the common-place, and the moderate, Snow figures not as a sport, the ghost of a literary straw man knocked over in long-settled disputes, but as a serious, if flawed, practitioner of the art of the novel.

Underlying the Fifties preoccupation with moderation, a revived realism, and traditional English mores was a profound antipathy on the part of the new generation to the generation of the Thirties.[26] For working- and lower-middle-class writers, newly emerged from grammar schools and the war, the politics, the styles, the manners of the Thirties seemed irresponsible and discredited. Chiefly, of course, there was a dislike of Bloomsbury among writers whose backgrounds were not upper-middle-class and who did not share the Bloomsbury pieties of refinement, sensibility, politeness, and aestheticism. Charles Lumley in John Wain's Hurry On Down speaks for the new viewpoint in a passage charged with the characteristic Fifties contempt for "the expensive young men of the thirties" with their precious enthusiasm for the proletariat:

> [Charles] thought ... of all the expensive young men of the thirties who had made, or wished to make, or talked of making, a gesture somewhat similar to his own, turning their backs on the setting that had pampered them; and how they had all failed from the start because their rejection was moved by the desire to enter, and to be at one with, a vaguely conceived People, whose minds and lives they could not even begin to imagine, and who would in any case, had they ever arrived, have made their lives hell. At least Charles thought with a sense of self-congratualtion, he had been right about <u>them</u>, to despise them for their idiotic attempt to look through two telescopes at the same time: one fashioned of German psychology and pointed at themselves, the other of Russian economics and directed at the English working class.[27]

Wain's judgement on the enthusiasms of the Thirties generation is compelling: the leftist politics and amateur psychologizing of the Auden group <u>were</u> jejune. The upper-class intellectual could only play at being a revolutionary. But there is also an element of posturing in Wain's dismissal of the commitments of a whole generation. Wain substitutes the posture of an aggressively common-sensible ordinariness for the more flamboyant posturings of the Thirties. Tellingly, Wain despises the fads of the Thirties because they are foreign. His conviction that to be English is to be unassuming, sceptical, and untheoretical

is offended by the Germanness of Thirties psychologizing, the Russianness of Thirties economics. The narrowness and knowingness with which Wain dismisses the fads of the Auden generation is less forgivable than what he condemns. Julian Symons, comparing the enthusiasms of the two decades in his study of the Thirties, remarks:

> behind the movement at this time [that of Thirties leftist politics] were the most generous impulses of humanity, impulses more valuable by far than the barren knowingness of the Fifties. It is better to be waiting for Lefty than to be waiting for Godot.[28]

Symons concluding remark is misdirected. Beckett's play is a far superior thing to Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty (1935), to which he compares it. The judgement that it is "better" to be waiting for the proletarian revolution than to be waiting for some ultimate purpose is not a literary one. Yet Symons' characterization of the Fifties as a knowing and ungenerous period is a trenchant one. Certainly, Wain's judgement on the generation that preceded his is ungenerous. But if we are to judge English literary culture in the Fifties we must look not to the avant-garde and cosmopolitan Beckett (who remarked of one of John Osborne's plays that it was "unspeakable") but to

the representatively English writers of the decade.[29]

Unfortunately, the new young writers of the Fifties tended to associate modernism with an exhausted mandarin cultural milieu left over from the discredited Thirties. William Cooper in his Scenes from Provincial Life (1950), establishes the new anti-Thirties and anti-modernist tone by deliberately stressing lower-middle-class and provincial values and by recording in journalistic prose ordinary life. The novel consciously opposes by its content, form, and style the Bloomsbury values expressed in the novels of Forster and Woolf. Cooper's novel is set in a small town rather than a fashionable London suburb or a country house. The novel refuses to employ the strategies of inwardness of the various stylistic mannerisms of modernism, Cooper does not pay the kind of attention to his use of the language that we expect of novelists after Joyce and Hemingway. Above all, Cooper evokes the familiar. In doing so, he helped to define the notion of realism that was to dominate English fiction throughout the decade. It is a mode of realism defined most succinctly by the English art critic and novelist John Berger:

> Realism deepens rather than extends, deals with ordinary and familiar not strange or exotic vision.[30]

It is difficult to see how Malcolm Lowry or Patrick White could have felt at home in such a milieu.

Berger's stress on the visual as a means of receiving and construing the real is instructive not merely because it reflects the art critic's natural bias but also because it reminds us how vivid is the visual sense in the post-war novels of White and Lowry by comparison to those of their English contemporaries. Cooper, Snow, Sillitoe, Angus Wilson -- all these put the familiar at the foreground of their attention. Their realism is not of that demanding variety that sets out to make the familiar strange so that we look at things with the intense visual concentration that D.H. Lawrence demands. Their world is less familiar, than tired. We see only what has already been seen and interpreted, made ordinary by its reception through previous unreflective eyes. Even when these novelists deal with "abroad" they look at the world through steadfastly uncomprehending English eyes. Meg Eliot, the heroine of Wilson's The Middle Age of Mrs.

Eliot, leaves England by plane reading the Mill on the Floss much as Graham Greene in 1938 had carried Trollope and Cobbett throughout his Mexican journey in order to ward off the shock of the unfamiliar. We may compare passages from the two works. The first passage is from Wilson's novel:

> surely Maggie's tragedy would work its old spell upon her. She turned the pages rapidly, reading the familiar scenes more quickly to force them into life. It was no good; farmhouses, lawyers' parlours, fields, woods and fatal river -- Worcestershire seemed lost forever.[31]

Greene in The Lawless Roads (1938), reading Cobbett's Rural Rides as he journeys into a Mexico he finds increasingly loathsome, reflects on the English village:

> There was nothing in this country as beautiful as an English village -- but then beauty is only an emotion in the observer, and perhaps to someone these forests and crags, these withdrawn and gentle Indians, abandoned churches ... might be given an effect of beauty.[32]

The passage taken from The Lawless Roads is inconceivable in Lowry's Mexican fiction. The fascination of Mexico for Lowry lies in its unfamiliarity, its unlikeness to England. It is a new world that asks to be

interpreted in terms of categories of its own. Lowry, of course, is aware of the difficulties in attempting to interpret without resort to prior categories, but he never simply falls back on the familiar habits of reading a world in terms of his Englishness. The cultural baggage that he realized he could not unload, the legacy of class, education, and nationality, he introduces ironically into his fictions. The attraction of distant places for White and Lowry in the post-war period lay precisely in the opportunity they offered the novelist to explore the problems of interpreting worlds. Both are aware of, but not imprisoned within, the previous interpretations of the worlds they have abandoned and the worlds they have chosen to read.

For the narrator of The Lawless Roads and for Meg Eliot in Angus Wilson's novel, the unfamiliar is so disconcerting that they must retreat before it into the comforting world of English fiction before 1914. Both recognize that the desired England is unavailable in contemporary reality. It is not to be found in England any more, far less in Mexico. Yet the world rediscovered in Cobbett, in Trollope, even in Elizabeth Bowen, remains

familiar and therefore consoling while the actual, the present, is hopelessly unreal, unreadable, and distressing. It is not interesting enough to elicit the kind of anguished reading of an unfamiliar world that Lowry attempts in Volcano and White in Voss. The world affirmed by Wilson, Amis, Cooper, Hartley, and Powell in the Fifties is a "familiar and recognizable world": it is not the world ripped apart by genocide, aerial bombardment, or the threat of nuclear war, but the world received through the English literary past, a world which is more "real" than the actual contemporary one. This is not to say that these writers deny the other world or even that they exclude it from their fiction. But their whole effort as writers in terms of their employment of form and style constitutes an attempt not to confront but to avoid those aspects of reality which threaten the familiar England they wish to preserve.

The attempt to exclude the extreme, the disruptive, the radically private from the purview of the novel, the avoidance of technical difficulty, the attention to common-place lives, the emphasis on realism, moderation, clarity, reasonableness -- all this has been seen as merely

a swing of the pendulum of modern British fiction, a necessary corrective to the strategies of modernism which had become not avant-garde but predictable.[33] Yet the English literary scene in the Fifties remains an impoverished and nerveless milieu, however reasonable may seem its objections to the cultural scene it superceded. Bloomsbury mandarins may have ignored the lives of working- and lower-middle-class Englishmen, but they were aware of, and often politically and morally involved in a world they rightly felt to be disintegrating. The English novelists of the Fifties too often avoid directly confronting whatever threatens to explode from within their deliberate curtailments of the real. They do not confront, for instance, the great violences that had become an inescapable component of reality at mid century. Certainly, we do not feel in their novels, as we feel in Volcano, that furious, uncompromising search for appropriate "design-governing postures," however broken, surreal, distorted, by which to represent a world given over to its own destruction. Lowry's formal daring -- which is the same thing as Frank Kermode's formal "desperation" -- shows how spurious is the claim that by the Fifties modernism had become a "stylistic

backlog."[34] A novelist, if he is to be really new, must be as radical as reality, and this is what Lowry is after: not the mere copying of "maldigested and baleful" influences, but the application of modernist postures to the now.[35]

It is inaccurate to say, as Brian O'Kill does, that by retreating to Dollarton Lowry isolated himself from the main literary and historical trends of his time.[36] Lowry's work after 1940 engages with an historical experience that threatens to negate the idea of history itself. This cannot be said of any English novelist in the Fifties unless, like Malcolm Bradbury, we consider Beckett an English writer.[37] By his determination to make the formal properties of his fiction adequate to the unparalleled stresses of the now, Lowry establishes his connections to the vital trends in writing in English since the war. The essential links are to Eliot and David Jones in England and to Thomas Pynchon in America, writers who have kept alive the vital attention of the modernist maker of literary works to language. White's place among these writers is less assured than is Lowry's. White's linguistic means is more limited. Yet, while English fiction was attempting to connect itself to the less demanding world that obtained

before 1914, White was steadily moving his fiction away from realism and the allegiance of the novelist to nineteenth-century notions of character, representation, and materiality. Voss is not merely an historical novel set in the mid-nineteenth-century; it is a fiction which allows White to set side-by-side in the same frame different literary kinds: factual reportage, nineteenth-century realism, pastoral, apocalyptic. Both White and Lowry, by their exploratory attention to form and language, respond to the violences and disruptions of their time as their contemporaries among English novelists do not. Yet neither simply falls back on the old mandarin habits of English novel-writing: their modernism does not go with a concentration on upper-class sensibility.

Writing of the problems of expressing the violences of the Second War, William Sansom recorded in his diary:

> The experience is too violent for art to transcribe, there will never be an adequate reportage to convey to posterity a living idea of the truth of such experience ... [T]he results of violence and its reflections may be written down -- but never the core of the violent act itself. In the first place, language fails.[38]

Yet if language fails in the face of violences like the bombing of Guernica or Dresden or Hiroshima, then the act of terror is successful in its assault not merely upon bodies but also upon the cultural values which language guards and contains. The problem for all writers since 1914 has been "to evoke a response that would have some degree of adequacy to the unparalleled situation in which writers [are] involved."[39] The tragedy of our century has been the enormity of events and the paucity of their reverberations. They must reverberate in language or we might as well as Dr. Vigil puts it in Under the Volcano "throw away [the] mind" (UV, 6). White and Lowry demand to be evaluated in terms of their attempts to respond adequately, formally and linguistically, to the assaults upon consciousness by modern methods of warfare, by technology itself which, after 1914 began to direct its energies against man.

White and Lowry differ signally from the English novelists of the Fifties in the use they make of their own conservatism as formal strategies in their fiction. In the Thirties both novelists drew on the tradition of organicist nostalgia which they inherited from D.H. Lawrence.

In the Forties and Fifties they introduce into their novels the selfconsciously literary world of pastoral in order to measure the distance travelled by the actual modern world into terror and chaos. As Paul Fussell points out in The Great War and Modern Memory (1975) this is precisely what Edmund Blunden does for the First World War in his Undertones of War (1928). Stan Parker's "Durilgai" and the idyllic Mexican scene through which Hugh Firmin and Yvonne ride in Under the Volcano are, like Blunden's pre-war England, "pastoral oases" which serve as an "ironic gauge" of how far we have travelled into a mechanical and inhuman modernity.[40] But unlike Blunden, and unlike the English novelists of the Fifties with the partial exceptions of Murdoch, Durrell, and Golding, White and Lowry employ alongside the conservative forms their nostalgia requires more radical form which recognize the brokenness of the present. We may find in the novels of Amis and John Wain a grudging approval of the lost organic world of ruralist myth and a trenchant dislike of what J.B. Priestley calls "admass":

> This is my name for the whole system of an increasing productivity, plus inflation, plus a rising standard of material

> living, plus high-pressure advertising and salesmanship, plus mass communication, plus cultural democracy and the creation of the mass mind, the mass man.[41]

What we will not find is the setting of one world against the other as literary kinds: as modes of writing and as ways of construing the real. We do, of course, find the past as expressed in favoured literary texts set against the present. Murdoch and Wilson in particular use the world of the Victorian novel as a gauge of the dislocations and unfamiliarity of the present. But we do not find in these writers those sudden unnerving shifts of style, those violent shelvings of unmatched forms one against the other, that we find in the novels of Lowry and White. Even in Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954) which neatly inserts a modernist apocalyptic allegory into the frame of Ballantyne's The Coral Island (1858) to explode from within the genteel assumptions of Imperialist and pastoralist myth, we do not find those disconcertingly sudden shifts of style, manner, and form that we find in Voss or Under the Volcano.

In a sense, White and Lowry in the post-war period remain more properly between-the-wars novelists

than contemporary novelists. Since the Fifties, the term "contemporary" has come to be used to describe those writers who are not "modern" in the sense outlined by Stephen Spender in The Struggle of the Modern (1963)[42]. Spender views the Thirties, the decade with which his own writing has by now become associated, as a period of formal consolidation after the great modernist experiments of the Twenties.[43] The "contemporary" writers, as he sees it, those like C.P. Snow who look back to Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, are, unlike the writers of the Thirties, actively opposed to modernism. Spender's distinction between the two tendencies is a telling one and his analysis of English literary history is essentially correct. Suggestively, Spender claims Under the Volcano for the decade of the Thirties: the novel he says, belongs to that decade whose literature is more "restricted" than that of the Twenties yet not reactionary as is that of the Fifties.[44] Lowry, who had little time for Spender's literary-political set ("once a scout ... always a communist," he writes in Volcano of 1930s Cambridge) might not have quibbled with Spender's placing of his novel (UV, 172). Certainly, he felt that English literature in the post-war period was moribund. Moreover, Lowry's historical sense in Volcano is very much of the late Thirties and his

symbols and myths have a specific historical context as was characteristic of that decade: they are not intended primarily as universals as in Joyce or Eliot.

Yet it is a procustean effort that too rigidly confines Lowry's fiction to any decade, to any specific literary or historical context. One can only do so by lopping off too much that is central to his work. If his use of myths and symbols has an historical specificity, it is also intended to universalize. If he shares the Thirties faith in the proletariat, he lacks the jejune, public-schoolboy communism of that decade. If he embraces political causes with a Thirties enthusiasm, he also shows a debt to Twenties aestheticism. If he continually seeks some means of escape from the exhausted world view of the English bourgeoisie, he also asserts in his fiction the grandeur and expansiveness, even in its decline, of the spirit of bourgeois liberalism. If he may be said, like Lawrence, to have taken over the pastoral tradition from the mandarins who in England had long laid claim to it, he is also

capable of becoming lyrical over technology and of using pastoral for parodic purposes (Blunden would never do this although he recognizes the fatal shearing away of post-1914 England from the old order which had sustained the pastoralist myth). Lowry belongs above all in that modernist tradition which in each decade has striven to find some adequate formal and linguistic response to the now. His struggle has been to find signs valid for the historical moment and for his consciousness of the presence of the past in that moment.

In this sense, the debate between "contemporary" and "modern" writing is an arid one. "Contemporary" in this sense means formal reaction and implies the inadequacy of the works in question to the history they attempt to record. C.P. Snow's novels do not rescue historical seriousness from the modernist experimenters: they merely substitute historicism for fictionality. The great moderns -- Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lewis, Lawrence -- sacrificed neither history nor form. They discovered ways in which historical experience could be embodied in its appropriate form. And this is what White and Lowry struggle to do: not merely by repeating the forms of Joyce or Eliot, but

by updating them, by making them adequate to the now.

Behind the concern of Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry with form lies the impress on their whole beings of the enormous historical events of the mid century. But those historical events are never simply "reported": they are precisely registered in formal terms.

If White and Lowry belong to the Thirties, they do so by their struggle throughout their careers as novelists to map both the world of dreams and the actual world. For them, the two words have fatally merged in contemporary historical experience and it is their business as writers to trace the jumbled dealings of the two. At the forefront of their attention as novelists they place the ambiguous relations between imagination and reality. The forms of their fiction embroil themselves deliberately in the usurpation of the real by the fantastic to which Norman Mailer refers in Of a Fire on the Moon (1970):

> The Twentieth Century was a century which looked to explain the psychology of the dream and instead entered the topography of the dream. The real had become more fantastic than the imagined.[45]

II

The Aunt's Story

L'exactitude n'est pas la vérité
Paul Matisse.

In the opening section of The Aunt's Story (1948) the narrator, reflecting on the names of the homesteads in rural Australia indulges a familiar Whitean habit of generalization:

> Someone had called it this [Meroë], and no one in the district remembered why. It had been accepted along with the other exotic names, Gloucester, Saumerez, Boscobel, Havilah, Richmond, and Martindale, that have eaten into the gnarled and aboriginal landscape and become part of it. It was the same with Meroë. No one ever debated why their flat daily prose burst into sudden dark verse with Meroë. Meroë, they said,in their flat and dusty accents. Although the word smouldered, they were speaking of something as unequivocal as the hills. Only the hills around Meroe had conspired with the name, to darken, or to split deeper open their black rock, or to frown with a fiercer, Ethiopian intensity. The hills were Meroë, and Meroë was the black volcanic hills.[1]

Among the exotic names that bestow an uneasy grace upon the crude colonial mansions we find three stolid English ones, and among these one of the author's own Christian names: Patrick Victor Martindale White. White thus acknowledges his own ambiguous placing in the Australia he describes. In Flaws in the Glass he lists the stations owned by his father and uncles: "Edinglassie," Muswellbrook,

"Saumarez, Armidale, "Belltrees," Scone. White's family, "the White brothers," in the photograph in Flaws in the Glass assert by their confident postures and their English suits, their satisfaction with themselves as a property-owning clan.[2] Yet the names of their properties somehow possess the places they denote as the Edwardian family group does not.

By dropping one of his names into the narrative, White suggests something of the complexity of his feelings about his Australianness at this stage without adopting the hysterical tone or making the ingenuous claims we find in "The Prodigal Son." There is a curious self-consciousness in this entry of the author, however slyly, into his fiction. It suggests a persistent habit of White's of using names to disturb the realistic surface of his novels. In The Living and The Dead we find a too-good character named Harry Allgood. In The Aunt's Story we find a pastry cook called Jack Frost. In The Tree of Man a passing digger relates to Amy Parker a small narrative that has no relation to the larger narrative which deals with Jack Horner who "sits around and spits" (TM, 209). In Voss, we find a harlequin figure composed of shadows and patches

of light named Jack Slipper. Barry Argyle suggests that White's habit of butting in on his narrative has a Brechtian "alienating" effect on the reader.[3] In Happy Valley such drawings of attention to the novel as artifice were the result less of authorial design than of narrative incompetence. In the post-war fiction, however, White's style and narrative method deliberately take on anti-illusionistic postures.

This new narrative strategy in White's post-war fiction must be seen in terms of his concern to find some adequate means of reading the Australian continent. Such a reading demands an authorial recognition of the distance between the topography of the place itself and the various categories in whose terms the place has been interpreted. The names are signs on maps which have been drawn up in terms of notions about spatial relations, perspective, property rights, and nature whose appropriateness to the world they refer to has not been tested. The novel itself, by its refusal to represent unselfconsciously, announces that it is finally another map: one that reads the others.

In the quoted passage, we note that the land-

scape has accepted the names. The aboriginal ancientness of the Australian continent need not stand in awe of what colonials call "the Old World." The land, moreover, is receptive to the "dark verse" of the names; its inhabitants -- at least, its European inhabitants -- are not. Their lives are the stuff of prose: they live on the surface of things. They are content with the semantic rather than the symbolic function of words. It is the land that smoulders, that possesses depth; on the lips of the Australians even the rich suggestiveness of "Meroe" is lost. Theodora Goodman, however, is not mired in the prosy stuff of their world. Her mornings thrill with the songs not of local birds nor of English imports but of "bulbuls," thrushes made poetic by a Persian name. Theodora Goodman, who responds to the poetic possibilities of words with the inwardness of her being, is the medium by which White returns to his remembered Australia: not the exotic Australia of Happy Valley but the pastoral Australia of White's boyhood. He returns to an Australia before the great splintering of modernity has entered its closed world. This return links him to a number of post-war English writers for whom the shapes of nostalgia were those of

childhood and of the period immediately before World War I. But White's nostalgia has a harder edge: it is an aesthetic strategy rather than the result of having reached an ideological impasse. White does not retreat into the mythical order that supposedly remained intact until 1914 so as to avoid the fierce ruptions of modern history and ignore modernist experimental advances in fictional form. He employs the myth of an unspoiled order to gain a vantage point from which to trace the bias towards disorder of the modern world.

In the opening section of the novel, White returns to the rural Australian scene of Happy Valley with a new responsiveness to the place and a new fictional method by which he hopes to make Australia possible for art -- for the imaginative kind of art he has in mind to produce in contrast to the "factual" mode he considers common in Australian writing.[4] He remains dissatisfied with the range of social types Australian society offers him. But his fiction no longer suffers from his frustrated efforts to find some way out of the narrowness imposed upon it by that lack of social range. In Happy Valley, White's symbolist aspirations, suggested in his drawing

of Sidney Furlow, were in conflict with the realistic attention to the commonplace he clearly disliked but which he felt was appropriate to the place. White was unable to hold at bay that ordinariness as Sidney Furlow was unable to ward off the aggressive intentions of Clem Hagan. Hence the sense of entrapment and impasse that closes the novel: White, like Sidney, feels a little sullied by the brutal seduction he has courted. The coarse and brutal aspects of Australian life carry off the enclosed, feminine world of sensibility as the novel closes, leaving Happy Valley to its miserable irresolution. In The Aunt's Story realism has no seductive power. It remains in the novel as a view of the world discarded by Theodora Goodman and by White as irrelevant. The novel's central concentration is on consciousness, on Theodora's long ôdyssey into the self from which there is no home-coming. The intact, limited, extroverted world before 1914 is the novel's and Theodora's point of departure.

In The Aunt's Story White has made creative capital out of his ambivalence about fictional form and the suitability of Australia to the kind of fiction he admires. He has built the novel on a recognition that the

epic forms appropriate to unbroken societies such as that of pre-war, rural Australia are not appropriate to a full rendering of modern experience which, by its very nature, is a broken one. The first section of the novel set in Australia before 1914 embodies, with certain equivocations, the moral and mimetic tendencies discernible in both White's earlier novels. The middle section of the novel, set in between-the-wars Europe, wholly submits to the modernist impulses with which we found White struggling to come to terms in his previous novels. In the final section of the novel White achieves, for the first time, a balance between the main conflicting impulses in his fiction.

The "Meroë" section of The Aunt's Story, as the dust jacket to the original Viking edition promises, is written in "the best tradition of modern English narrative." Certainly, White writes with assurance, with none of that strain we find in his earlier attempts to assimilate the more esoteric techniques of modernism. We are securely in the world of the modern novel if by "modern" we mean attention to craft and style and an emphasis on states of consciousness. In other words, White is attentive to the way the thing is done without allowing considerations of

form or style to get in the way of what is being said. The narrative proceeds not according to a line of action but in terms of the unfolding of Theodora's sensibility. Because of this unfolding of Theodora's consciousness and because of White's ability to have us see through Theodora's eyes we do not object to the flatness of the other characters any more than we object to the lack of attention Joyce pays to Stephen's sisters in the Portrait: the consciousness of the central character is sufficiently engrossing. Frank Parrott, the blustering squatter, is a favourite Whitean type, but because we see him in the main through Theodora's sexually disappointed eyes rather than through the asides of the narrator he has a curiously touching life of his own. At any rate, it is a relief not to be told that he doesn't possess a mind.

The chief advantage for White of concentrating on a single consciousness is the unifying perspective such a method allows. The symbolism no longer seems wilfully imposed on the material as it does in the earlier novels. We discover Theodora as a sensibility of infinite subtlety and responsiveness through the novel's symbols: the red eye of the little hawk, the grub in the rose,

the filigree ball. Even very minor characters such as the Man who was Given his Dinner are invested with a strange, rich life in the novel because we meet them through the endless, delicate reverberations to which they give rise in Theodora's mind. The unity of the section is unquestioned: form, idiom, style, symbolism all develop organically around the controlling centre of Theodora's consciousness.

The formal unity and simplicity of the "Meroe" section are entirely fitting to the period and the place: Edwardian Australian society. White deliberately stresses the unity and roundedness of the life by his style and selection of imagery much as Peter Weir does with the pre-war outback world in Gallipoli (1982). White is clearly at ease describing this world. With remarkable economy, he encompasses the range of social types afforded by the place. The country houses nourish not hard-riding gentry but red- or hatchet-faced farmers preoccupied with sheep and acres. Civilization in such a milieu means race meetings and, at its most grandiose, vice-regal visits. The Sydney bourgeoisie, lacking the opera, contents itself with its solid furniture, dinner parties, flirtations, and a thoroughly provincial culture. Pearl

Brawne marks White's first descent into the Sydney demi-monde. She is one of those sexual misfits or victims for whom White has an instinctive sympathy and who provide access to a declassed milieu which allows White to bring together the eccentrics and visionaries he favours because they refuse smoothly to be inserted at any fixed point in the Australian class hierarchy. Like Nance Lightfoot in The Vivisector (1970) Pearl Brawne is the whore with the heart of gold, the cliché White somehow manages to endow with a marvellous sense of life. We feel White's sympathy for the seduced country girl who must act out the role of "the flesh," who is destined to bruise yet who somehow thrives on adversity. White's sketches of the servants in the grazier's household are swift but assured. Even a minor portrait such as that of Gertie Stepper, the snappish Cockney servant at Meroë, is lively and convincing. For all its narrowness this is a society that presents to the view no uncertainties about where it is headed, no metaphysical anxieties, no self-doubts, no inner antagonisms. It is a life lived on the surface by limited but credible characters who sense no abysm within the self. It is a thoroughly materialistic and self-confident world.

Yet the uncertainties are there although they are never permitted to take centre stage. They become more apparent as the First World War approaches. At intervals the report of a murder or a suicide disturbs the calm, dull routine of colonial life: Mr. Buchanan, the owner of Audley prior to the Parrotts, shoots himself; Jack Frost, the pastry cook, kills his wife and three little daughters before committing suicide; Theodora toys with the thought of killing her mother. Such events are deliberately understated: made unreal by being reported second-hand gossip; made fabulous by the addition of a mistress who bathed in milk; or made ridiculous by the nursery-rhyme name of the infanticide (there is also a Jack Frost in Furphy's Such Is Life). It is as though the convention of tragedy which allows the artist to contain and give form to the violent and terrifying aspects of life cannot exist in such a world except as its comic obverse: farce. When old Mrs. Goodman dies at last Theodora hurtles down the stairs to stand on the back porch unsure whether she must act out a tragedy or a farce. How can she bring home to her decent, suburban neighbour, Mr. Love -- another distancing name -- that real death exists outside the columns in the

newspapers from which source he informs her in neighbourly fashion of "a vile murder in Cremorne" (AS, 123). Death is as incidental to this busy, orderly world as the fall of Icarus is to the placid world in Bruegel's painting: Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.

Australian pre-war life presents an unshakeable facade which denies the possibility that uncontrollable forces might erupt into daily life. Tragedy must be reduced to its proper proportions as farce reported in the pages of "Truth" because tragedy suggests that death in its unacceptable forms -- murder and suicide -- might be after all a function of life. Mistresses who bathe in milk are deplorable because, like real death or grief, they suggest a Dionysian lack of restraint which might crack the brittle face of the ordinary. Personality in this world is that which is safe, fixed, predictable. Despite the pretensions of the squatters and their wives to being a colonial landed gentry, this is a bourgeois world whose virtues are the bourgeois ones of reliability and constraint and whose notion of character rests upon a static bourgeois notion of personality as the manifestation of class and possessions. White has perfectly adapted the form of

"Meroe" to the life of the place. The foreground is almost entirely lacking in events. We learn of the monstrous and shapeless impulses of life only via gossip or as reported speech. History, the narrative of events "in serial form," occurs outside Australia as Europe lurches towards war (AS, 83). White has made us feel in these opening chapters the static quality of pre-war life, its emptiness which, like the filigree ball, waits to be filled with apocalyptic fire.

We view this solid-seeming world through the eyes of a personality that even in this opening section is fragmenting. We feel that we are in the world of the Bildungsroman, the novel of development, because of the increasing persuasiveness of Theodora's insights into the world around her. Theodora is by far the most sensitive and receptive consciousness White has yet conceived. She registers external events, however slight their apparent consequence, with a minute responsiveness. Moreover we are persuaded that she grows through suffering towards a wisdom stored up in "that solitary land of the individual experience" to which we are given privileged access (AS, epigraph). However, we are able to measure her maturation

only by her own subjective standards, by the power of her insights to convince us. Theodora moves not towards reconciliation with the community and the adjustment of her private world to the demands of external reality as, say, Hans Castorp does in The Magic Mountain (1924) but towards a more and more radical isolation. It is true that we build up a picture of a palpable social and physical world in which Theodora has her being, a world constantly confirmed by the narrator. Yet this world exists alongside a separate and eccentric view of its contours gradually established in Theodora's mind. The effect is disconcerting: we are never quite sure whether we are in a novel by Galsworthy or in one by Faulkner.

Yet to say that White has mixed together two radically opposed styles of novel-writing, each resting on a different construal of reality, is to suggest a lack of control which is not present in "Meroe". We are not back in the muddle of Happy Valley in which characters drawn from symbolist sources flounder in a realistically conceived world otherwise peopled by characters who belong in the Victorian novel. In The Aunt's Story, rural Australia is filtered through a sensibility that possesses

the subtlety and spaciousness of one of James' or Woolf's female characters. By focussing the life of the place through such a consciousness -- one more interested in the symbolist properties of names than in the objects to which they refer, more interested in the shapes which the mind confers on matter than in mere facts -- White has arrived at a means of framing an experience he still finds signally lacking in the qualities he wishes to explore in his fiction: richness of texture, depth, the poetic possibilities of life.

In the first section of The Aunt's Story, White does not abandon realistic form. In reading "Meroë" we recognize a sharply present world of things, detailed and diverse, that is independent of Theodora's perception. Yet increasingly in this section of the novel, Theodora does not meet and accede to the demands of the "real" world. As Theodora's contact with reality becomes more tenuous, the society around her becomes more and more prey to materialism. Her father, George, who shares with her an interest in spiritual odysseys is bought out by his spiritually unventuresome squatter neighbours. His own odysseys to Europe are financed by the sale of his paddocks

until the last remnant of the land that had supported his gentility is sold to the arriviste brewer who marries Una Russell. Thus is the link between the landed colonial aristocracy and the English gentry finally severed. The bourgeois world entirely swallows the old order. From genteel to commercial, from stable to energetic, from ordered to incoherent -- everywhere the Australia of "Meroë" lapses from the fixed, aristocratic forms of colonial life into the ugliness and vulgarity of the modern world.

This movement of decline is registered in the novel not only by the progressive alienation of Theodora Goodman from a world whose banality oppresses her sensibility but also by the formal movement of the writing away from the epic mode towards the modern ironic mode. By focussing the novel's concern with the Homeric theme of voyaging through Theodora Goodman, White is able simultaneously to evoke the two senses of "epic" Georg Lukacs outlines in The Theory of the Novel: in the Homeric age before the dawn of philosophy man was at home in the world through which he journeyed; in the modern world, after the metaphysical spheres have been broken, man must go in search of meaning through a world no longer adequate to "the soul's inner

demand ... for wholeness."[5] In "Meroë" the Homeric allusions at first serve to establish the stability of the grazier world as Theodora, already nostalgically, views it. This world is unbroken, limited but whole. Theodora herself is destined to embark on the modern odyssey "from which there is no return": the journey into the self once the fatal rift between inner and outer has been discovered (AS, 82). Sensing this, in a passage rich with Homeric suggestion, Theodora grasps that her mother, like Penelope, is fated never to embark: "her world had always been enclosed by walls, her Ithaca" (AS, 82). Theodora, however, must leave this intact world because, between her mother's time and her own, the genteel way of life that had made it possible has been broken down. Henceforth, the memory of the heroic world, preserved in the form of the Homeric epic, can only enter the modern world as irony. As Theodora journeys inward, away from a world in which she can no longer feel at home, so the Odyssean references take on a new resonance in the novel. We are moved towards Joyce's use of Homeric myth in Ulysses in which the outrageousness of the parallel calls attention to the very fracturedness of modern life.[6]

Eventually Theodora's private universe blocks out the external world as we move into the second section of the novel. The two worlds, inner and outer, begin to fly apart and to stand in a more and more violent opposition. In "Meroë" this flying apart is already noticeable. The outer world becomes more and more dependent for its shape on the mediation of Theodora's consciousness. Theodora can accept the power of illusion which makes a ragged shawl held by a Syrian peddler a splendid thing and which rescues the hills from their "shapelessness" (AS, 22). Without this shape-conferring grace of illusion we would be back in the world of Happy Valley where the ordinariness of the place and the limited range of ways of seeing offered by the totality of available social types oppress author and reader alike.

At Meroë George Goodman read the Odyssey and invested the life of the house with an epic quality: journeys and returns, the magic of names ("'Have you ever thought, Theodora ... about Nausicaa, the name?'"), the timeless ritual of days caught in the calm surface of the place (AS, 59-60). In the between-the-wars Europe in which Theodora seeks adventure in the second section

of the novel "the ghosts of Homer and St. Paul and Tolstoy wait[ ] for the crash" (AS, 133). The forms on which European civilization was built -- the epic form of the heroic outward phase, the call to inwardness of Pauline epistles, the realist epic in which inner and outer meet -- have suffered a decline into a modern world of Mrs. Rapallos whose pomp is that of clowns and circuses. Adventuress (in the vulgar sense), imposter, American -- Mrs. Rapallo is the vulture feeding on the past of Europe. While Theodora adventures in search of meaning, Mrs. Rapallo adventures in search of bric-à-brac.

What strikes us most forcefully in reading "Jardin Exotique" is not the radicalness of the content -- the decay of European civilization was, of course, a hackneyed theme by 1948, although in the Twenties a Jew would have been a more likely figure of the vulture than an American -- nor the difficulty of the prose, but the sheer assurance of the writing. We feel a new confidence in White's writing from the first line of The Aunt's Story, but there is little adventurous in "Meroë." In the middle section of the novel the prose enacts the implosive consequences of the break-up it records in the world

of events at the same time working out an appropriate idiom in which to convey what is now apparent in Theodora as incipient schizophrenia. The prose style, in its endless crystalline bifurcations, submits to, rather than seeks to contain, the fragmentation of the content. This is not to suggest that there is anything lax about the prose style. White has exactly calculated a response at the level of form and style to the great splintering of reality in our time to which Henry Miller refers in the epigraph to this section of the novel.

One is reminded of Orwell's essay, "Inside the Whale," which endorses Miller's ability simply to accept the imminent crash of bourgeois civilization.[7] Orwell has in mind Miller's ideological posture; Miller's prose, while impressive at times and appreciated by Orwell for its force, is not at all radical in its techniques. Miller, unfortunately, was inclined to substitute the kind of romantic gush we find in Lawrence Durrell passing as modernist prose for genuinely experimental and difficult writing. White has gone far beyond Miller in this respect. There is nothing cursive, uncontrolled, dithyrambic in his writing. He forces the reader to attend to his prose

with the kind of wary responsiveness that the writing of Wyndham Lewis demands: this is writing that constantly assaults its reader, lays ambushes for his slack moments, refuses to get on with the business of telling a story.

At the same time, White has found a means of dealing at the level of language with both history and consciousness, as neither Miller nor Orwell were able to do. Miller simply ignored history in the interest of pursuing the flux of individual experience. Orwell, despite the symbolist impulses he could not entirely suppress, determined to engage with history in his writing in a direct and politically motivated fashion. In "Jardin Exotique" White attenuates the connection between "the personal" and "the universal" in order to give expression to the full complexity of the relations between consciousness and history. Theodora's disintegration as a personality is not caused by historical events. The bearing of external tensions on her inner illness is tenuous at best. We are aware of two parallel movements of collapse, and that outside Theodora's skull is conveyed far less movingly than that within. White's prose has become a fluid vehicle that slips effortlessly between the sub-

jective and the objective worlds so that we are often not quite sure which we are in. To trace more closely the differences in style between the two sections of the novel, I shall examine two thematically related passages, the first from "Meroë," the second from "Jardin Exotique":

> "Theodora, I forbid you to touch the roses," said Mrs. Goodman.
> "I'm not," cried Theodora. "Or only a little. Some of them are bad."
> And they were. There was a small pale grub curled in the heart of the rose. She could not look too long at the grub-thing stirring as she opened the petals to the light.
> "Horrid, beastly grub," said Fanny, who was pretty and as pink as roses.
> Theodora had not yet learned to dispute the apparently indisputable. But she could not condemn her pale and touching grub. She could not subtract it from the sum-total of the garden (AS, 14).

> Theodora crunched across the sharp gravel, towards a bench, to sit. The air of the jardin exotique was very pure and still. Shadows lay with a greater hush across its stones, as if the abstracted forms to which the shadows were attached could only be equalled by silences. The garden was completely static, rigid, the equation of a garden. Slugs linked its symbols with ribbons of silver, their timid life carefully avoiding its spines.
> Notre jardin exotique, Monsieur had said, but his pronoun possessed only diffidently. It was obvious enough now, Theodora knew. This was a world in which there was no question of possession. In

> its own right it possessed, and rejected, absorbing just so much dew with its pink and yellow mouths, coldly tearing at cloth or drawing blood. The garden was untouchable. In the white sunlight that endured the cactus leaves, Theodora looked at her finger, at the single crimson pin-head of her own blood, which was in the present circumstances as falsely real as a papier mâché joke (AS, 133-4).

We recognize the outlines of the garden at Meroë in the jardin exotique of the Hôtel du Midi. Both are symbolic: at their hearts lies the Blakean symbol of the sick rose which stands, according to preference, for the theological problem of the place of evil in the scheme of things or the psychological problem of what happens when we cannot express our sexual desires. In the first garden Fanny abhors the grub which suggests that life might present her with complexities beyond her preferred emotional shallows. Theodora, by her fascination, indicates her acceptance of the place of suffering, ugliness, and sexual want in life as a whole. In the second garden the slugs which timidly avoid the "spines" of life (signifying phallic sexuality and pain) represent to Theodora her own life, or rather her own avoidance of life. The garden is a symbolic landscape. We recall her rejection of both her

suitors. By this time, not merely suitors but also life itself conceived as a necessarily painful series of engagements with others have become for Theodora quite abstract: "as falsely real as a papier mâché joke."

We may relate such symbolic reverberations to the larger symbolic structure of the novel, showing how this structure in turn contributes to the unfolding of Theodora's consciousness. Thelma Herring has made this kind of connection.[8] It is true, as Herring shows, that Theodora returns in the jardin exotique to the people and scenes she knew in Australia and that the novel possesses a unity which rests upon the continuity of Theodora's personality. Yet something quite different is being attempted in the two sections of the novel, a difference manifest in the different demands the two passages make on the reader's attention at the level of the use of language. This difference cannot adequately be accounted for by White's attempt in the second section of the novel to find an idiom by which to express Theodora's disintegrating sensibility.

In the first passage we are in an immediately

recognizable narrative world. We watch objects in the external world being turned into symbols by the narrator so that we might catch a glimpse of what is going on inside the young Theodora's mind, a process which is concluded by an explicit generalizing comment. The narrator is doing much of the work for us. We learn from the responses of the two sisters to the rose much about their different personalities. We shall henceforth expect them to act in accordance with the expectations here established by White and we shall not be disappointed. We gather from the imperative mood of her interdiction that Mrs. Goodman has an impatient and partial nature. We have the sense of a solid, predictable external world in which Theodora moves about, a world in which objects may be turned into symbols to serve the purposes of character drawing or narrative unfolding but one in which they will continue to exist as objects.

In the second passage, we have lost this reassuring sense. It is true that the narrator still speaks of Theodora's actions and thoughts in the third person and we still note the generalizing voice. Yet we have lost a clear sense of the separation of the subjective

and objective worlds. The outside world now moves through Theodora as much as she can be said to move through it.

Between the two gardens, Theodora's inner life has progressively separated itself from the world around her. At the conclusion of the "Meroë" section, Theodora had come to accept that "there is no lifeline to other lives" (AS, 12). This acceptance does not enrich Theodora's inner life. It "hollow[s] her out" (AS, 125). Henceforth, she will have to rely on her imagination to invent the others who will serve in lieu of relationships. In the course of her wanderings through Europe a qualitative leap in isolation occurs so that Theodora loses contact not only with people but also with the physical world itself. Now she must walk through a surprising and fragmented world. In Europe she enters reluctantly into the age of symbols in which, all substance having disappeared from the world of things, the objects of that world can serve only as equivalents for states of soul. The memory of the simple world of childhood and Australia where the roses were real and fleshy cannot sustain her. By the time she finds herself in the Hôtel du Midi the garden is "untouchable." Its living objects have been frozen into

neat, mathematical equations. Hence the static quality of the garden: it is dead, bereft of the living presence of the mind. Theodora has abolished nature.

Theodora's problematical connection to the external world has a bearing on a central problem for modern aesthetics: both problems rest on Kant's notion (the words are Walter Sokel's) that there is an "inexorable estrangement between man and nature."[9] Theodora's odyssey enacts that long journey of the modern mind into the self away from a world in which man no longer has an assured place. Nor does she discover any access to meaning within the self; there is no ladder to supernatural knowledge within, merely an emptiness that cannot be filled, an unbearable bias towards collapse. Her problem, then, is to fill the void within the self which has been cut off from both the natural and the supernatural worlds. Theodora does this by peopling the void with illusory others who leap fully clothed from her imagination, the embodiments of her own variegated soul. Theodora, accordingly, has much in common with the modern artist for whom Kant abolished both the mimetic and the revelatory theories of the source of the artist's visions.[10]

There is some indication in the novel that Theodora's sensibility is to be understood as that of the developing artist. As in the Künstlerroman, Theodora must pit her consciousness against the philistinism of the "bourgeoisie" (a flexible class category in Australia) if she is to grow in the subtlety and complexity of her insights. She lacks only "the artist's vanity, which is moved finally to express itself in objects" (AS, 56). Like the Symbolists, Theodora seeks to discover a pure function for words. That is, she refuses the utilitarian and puritanical notions of language that are obtained in a "bourgeois" civilization. Discussing the name, Nausicaa, with her father, Theodora is interested only in what the name suggests by its sound qualities. She is unconcerned with its referent. The name does not mean, it is: it is "an arrow ... tipped with white. A swan's feather" (AS, 60). The name Meroë with which Theodora is so in love is taken not from the brief reference to such a place in Herodotus whom George Goodman reads, but from Shelley's Witch of Atlas and from Yeats' "Under Ben Bulben." "What the sages spoke" was a symbolic language, the Mariotic alphabet.[11]

As the external world becomes more problematical for Theodora she tries to believe in objects in themselves, stripped of all mental content: "There is perhaps no more complete a reality than a chair and a table" (AS, 129). Theodora, however, can no more discover the quiddity of things than could Elyot Standish. She must lie in bed, her feet pressed against the iron rail, in an attempt to remind herself that there is some substance in the world of things (this is a trait she shares with Rhoda in Woolf's The Waves).[12] Theodora is not granted any epiphanies, neither the Joycean variety in which the inner radiance of the object is manifest, nor the Woolfian sort in which the object shines with projected mental content.

The objects in the jardin exotique are symbolic in an abstract and chilling sense: they no longer participate in a fruitful union between the mind and the world of things. They are not part of a world which Theodora's mind can touch and be touched by. The garden is static, frozen in its independence of mind. It is static because Theodora has withdrawn from it. Yet the garden does not possess the objectivity Theodora's withdrawal ought to confer on it. Its "pink and yellow mouths, coldly tear[ ] at

cloth or draw[ ] blood." This is life of a kind, of the same distorted, exaggerated kind as that possessed by the chest of drawers whose drawers by morning light seem to Theodora to be "loll[ing] tongues" (AS, 138). Although Theodora, increasingly schizophrenic, has severed the connections between self and world, the grotesque forms of her inner life force themselves upon the world of things. Her soul in torment twists the world to its own shapes. Her subjectivity spills into the jardin exotique.

In expressionism White has found the mode perfectly suited to his needs in "Jardin Exotique." The violent distortions of expressionism allow him to give some sort of form to Theodora's radically disoriented perception of the world. Realism would be inappropriate as a means of embodying Theodora's way of seeing. Nor would symbolism, of the kind he employs in The Living and The Dead, be appropriate. White wants a strategy which allows him to regard objects not as correlatives for emotion but as expressions of emotion.[13] Expressionism, by its violence, its distortions, its gothicism, is ideally suited to delineating a schizophrenic's rending apart of subject and object. Her sensibility having been

driven inwards away from reality, Theodora's emotions run riot across the world she has abandoned. Shapes, colours, lines -- these are no longer the means by which the perceiving subject builds up an orderly and differentiated picture of the world. They are the fluid vehicle of expressivity. At the same time, expressionism allows White to embody his own acutely negative response to contemporary European civilization in a manner that realism could not match. As Walter Sokel has observed of the German context: "a largely negative attitude to society leads away from realistic observation to exaggeration, distortion, shrillness, and abstractness, qualities which reappear in Expressionism."[14] White's visits to Germany as a young man were evidently influential as were those of Malcolm Lowry. Both took away with them formal strategies and perspective which were to appear much later in their development as novelists. Expressionism informs Under the Volcano and the German section of Riders in the Chariot (1961). Expressionism is a marked quality in White's style. It is noticeable in his chromatic effects, his penchant for distortion and for close-ups of anguished faces, his obsession with fragmentation and extreme individuality. His transcendentalism, his contempt for the

bourgeoisie, his atomistic view of the modern age -- all owe something to expressionism.

There were expressionist tendencies in The Living and The Dead, but in the middle section of The Aunt's Story expressionism has become a central strategy of style. This is most notable in the quality of violence that suddenly insinuates itself into the prose as Theodora's perception of the world becomes fearful and distorted: "she could not escape too soon from the closed room, retreating from the jaws of roses, avoiding the brown door, of which the brass teeth bristled to consume the last shreds of personality" (AS, 133). Theodora's fantasies at times take on a momentarily fixed form in which illusion and reality, the grotesque and the ordinary, coexist in the same frame, rather in the manner of a surrealist painting. But Theodora's fantasies have less in common with the surrealist method of mixing dream life with everyday life than with the expressionist method of filling the depicted world with the distortions of a waking life that cannot separate its visions of the souls within other lives and things from actuality. Theodora's fantasies imply no liberating release of the unconscious. They are the stuff of madness not of dreams. And the extreme violence of these fantasies links

them to the savagely expressive works of Munch and Kirchner: "That is all very well, and true, Monsieur Durand, Theodora would have said, but you forget how you bared your teeth one morning in the glass, and wondered whether their desperation would bite, or whether your tongue, branching suddenly and peculiarly from your mouth, might not be uprooted by the hand like any other fungus" (AS, 225). A surrealist might well have painted a petit bourgeois man looking into the mirror while a fungus grows out of his mouth. But White's method is the expressionist one of distortion not the surrealist one of absurd collocation. One of White's finest pieces of caricature is the description of Mrs. Rapallo making her entrance which has not only the violence and distortion but also the jerky sense of line, the chromatic expressivity, and the cluttered composition we find in expressionist paintings:

> She was put together painfully, rashly, ritually, crimson over purple. Her eye glittered, but her breath was grey. Under her great hat, on which a bird had settled years before, spreading its meteoric tail in a landscape of pansies, mignonette, butterflies, and shells, her face shrieked with the inspired clowns, peered through the branches of mascara at objects she could not see, and sniffed through thin

nostrils at many original smells (AS, 149).

The organization of this little scene is deliberately painterly. We see Mrs. Rapallo from the outside as a bizarre organization of details, shifting forms, and colours, moving through space. The expressionistic style in which this scene is presented is meant to be set against other, more nostalgic painterly styles employed in the novel. General Sokolnikov's picture of himself lying with his shirt open, waiting for tea while peasants manhandle a cow outside his window suggests Russian realism in the pre-revolutionary period (AS, 168). Despite such realistic vignettes, however, the expressionist influence in the style and form of "Jardin Exotique" is omnipresent. It is found in the aggressive expression of emotion, the abstract use of colour (although the Expressionists were generally less violent colourists than White is), in the preoccupation with extreme psychological states, and in the deliberately artificial use of language, the self-consciousness of the syntax. This last quality was present in an unresolved and, from the reader's point of view, annoying form in White's early novels. Now White uses the self-consciousness of his language to distance the reader.

The style eschews the traditional mimetic aim of prose fiction of reconstructing the "normal" world. The style collaborates with the assault upon commonsensical construals of reality launched by Theodora's intense subjectivity.

There is a final expressionistic influence (one that the Expressionists drew ultimately from the Gothic) discernible in White's habit of conferring life on inanimate objects, particularly on the Hôtel du Midi. The effect, with its implied preference for the inorganic, is an unusual one in English writing. Wyndham Lewis manages the same effect in Tarr (1914). White's technique in "Jardin Exotique" has a similarity to Lewis' manner of writing with a grossly distorting painterly eye which is nonetheless acutely attentive to minute details of visual impression. Compare:

> Behind the vines, pipes, and plaster patches, under the pressure of its inner life, the rear of the comfortable hotel began to expand. It reassured, like the breathing of eiderdowns in childhood, or the touch of hands. But it was only just tolerated by the sceptical, dry, chemical air of the jardin exotique in which Theodora sat. From the garden the hotel was making the best of things (AS, 135).

> As trade grew the small business had burrowed backwards into the ramshackle house: bursting through walls and partitions, flinging down doors, it discovered many dingy rooms in the interior that it hurriedly packed with serried cohorts of eaters. It had driven out terrified families, had hemmed the apoplectic concierge in her "loge", it had broken out onto the court at the back in shed-like structures: and in the musty bowels of the house it had established a broiling luridly lighted roaring den, inhabited by a fierce band of slatternly savages.[15]

White could have encountered expressionism through such English sources as the "Nighttown" scene in Ulysses or Gudrun's dance before the cattle in Women in Love or the plays Auden and Isherwood wrote for the Group Theatre in the Thirties. In its loosest sense expressionism may even be said to encompass the storm scene in King Lear or the witch scene in Macbeth. It is more likely, however, that White was directly influenced by Expressionism in its more precise sense: that of the modernist movement in German art and letters from around 1910 to the mid Twenties. Lieselotte, the passionate German girl whom Theodora imagines in hell, presumably because of her sexual irregularities, points in an expressionist manner, although it is Theodora's not Lieselotte's soul which "look[s] out,

flaming" from the canvas (AS, 162). The expression of tormented souls through "screaming canvases" has been a favourite subject of expressionist painters from Edvard Much to Francis Bacon. Theodora's interpretation of Lieselotte's painting recalls her earlier discovery amid the dead symbolic forms of the jardin exotique that "the soul ... must forsake its queer opaque manner of life and come out into the open" (AS, 134). That is to say, the soul must learn to express the terrors of its isolate existence in the world of people and things in which it cannot possibly feel at home. Unable to express herself as the artist does, in made objects, Theodora expresses her inner life in the distorted shapes of her illusions which she fixes onto the hotel guests. In a sense, like the novelist, she invents the characters who fill her world.

It is hardly surprising that White took from his German experience in the Thirties a vivid sense not only of the enormity of events in our time but also of the extreme formal strategies by which avant-garde artists have sought to express those enormities. How safe and simple Australia must have seemed after the war, and we can feel White's nostalgia for the simple forms of Australian life

and landscape along with his revulsion by the banality of the place in "The Prodigal Son." What is surprising is that White should stress in Riders in the Chariot the similarities rather than the differences between post-war suburban Australia and the nightmare of Germany in the Thirties. Man's propensity for cruelty is universal, as the crucifixion of the Jew, Himmelfarb, in a Sydney factory yard is meant to remind us. We should also expect that White would find the hectic and fragmented forms of expressionism appropriate to the treatment of a disintegrating Europe but not to a homogeneous Australia in which "the great millenium of dissolution, the epoch of ideas," has not yet arrived (AS, 160). In The Aunt's Story, this is in fact the case: in Australia, as in the Bible or in Homer, people continue to "come and go" (AS, 192). In Europe, they simply rot or consume themselves in decadent forms of sexual passion or nostalgia -- either way, their real life is all on the inside, inseparable from the sickness of the soul which twists the actual world into the shapes of its illness. This is the world Theodora prepares to leave at the end of "Jardin Exotique." As the section closes the Hôtel du Midi and its cast of derelict, between-

the-wars characters, who are partly real, partly figments thrown up by Theodora's imagination, are consumed on the bonfire of their own lusts and illusions. This is White's mode of expressing the final heave of an exhausted Europe into the great rending down process of the Second World War as the consul's death in Volcano is Lowry's. Both novels straddle the war years and give expression symbolically to the historical debacle of the time. Both internalize the events they describe: take them out of history and throw them into the psyche of an individual whose suffering is representative. At the close of "Jardin Exotique" Theodora Goodman leaves behind the corrupted symbolic forms of a Europe that has lost all contact with the meanings that once lay behind its habitual symbols:

> The forms of the jardin exotique remained stiff and still, though on one edge, where they had pressed against the side of the Hôtel du Midi, they were black and withered. Their zinc had run into a fresh hatefulness. (AS, 246).

Theodora puts behind her the Europe of The Living and The Dead: the world of "metal hieroglyphs" that point to no meaning (AS, 246). She resists the call of a Greek innocence represented by Katina Pavlou, the loveliest of her creations, as White resisted the appeal

of Greece after the war. She is overcome by "an immeasurable longing to read the expression on the flat yellow face of stone" (AS, 246). In other words, she is returning to Australia where there are forms simple enough to be read. Yet Theodora Goodman leaves Europe in possession of a sensibility of immense complexity and creative power. She is the most fragmented and isolated of consciousnesses yet out of the sealed universe of her inner life she is capable of weaving visions. And this is necessary if White is to return to Australia and create there, not in the Europe for which he feels such a manifest distaste, the rich and self-conscious art of which he has by now proved himself a master. Theodora has learnt the trick that will henceforth sustain White as an Australian writer: the trick of giving independent life to one's illusions, of allowing the mind to fill the void of the poverty-stricken "real" world with its own inventions. This is the meaning of her letter to the Parrotts; "the time has come at last to return to Abyssinia" (AS, 251). For there were always two Meroës: the first is that of the sour earth of a new country; the second is the land where names have the pure meaning of musical notes which is not in Australia, of

course, nor in Africa, but in the heart.

In the final section of The Aunt's Story, "Holstius," White sharply disentangles the outside world from the world of Theodora's consciousness. White's familiar, intrusive narrator, whose prejudices are all too clearly those of the author himself, makes a comeback, and we find his shrill, abusive presence especially disconcerting after his virtual absence during the "Jardin Exotique" sequence. The narrator's primary purpose is to heap scorn on the normal world from which Theodora has withdrawn and to bludgeon us into siding with Theodora against the pettiness, the small-mindedness, and the cruelty of the "normal." It is difficult not to object to this narrative loading of the dice. We may concur with the narrator's evident repugnance for the Frank Parrott who complacently consigns his sister-in-law to a "home." But should we feel obliged to condemn Frank because he enjoys his breakfast? If White's narrative stance in this final section of the novel were simply the result of his having fallen back on the traditional method of nineteenth-century realism, we should have to dismiss the novel as a whole as fatally flawed by an authorial

failure of nerve.

What we may too easily overlook in evaluating the style and narrative method of "Holstius" is the effect of this new tone on the novel's complex development in terms of a variety of styles and narrative modes. The narrator of "Holstius," by condemning the normal world, reinforces its felt presence. We are no longer made to look out on an unconvincing and grossly distorted world from within the confines of Theodora's skull. Nor does the prose, by its calculated aggressions, collaborate as in "Jardin Exotique" with the delusions of a schizophrene. The return of the bullying Whitean narrator and of a conventional narrative method in which people "come and go" and time runs more-or-less by the clock reminds us that, while there are certainly two worlds with competing claims to constitute "reality," we do have a choice as to which side we shall support.

In this brief section, White establishes the narrative method on which he will build his subsequent novels. For all its obvious limitations it will prove a remarkably flexible instrument. Into the final stage of

the unfolding of Theodora Goodman's odyssey White has cunningly inserted a vignette of Australian squatter life. Here, in sharp contrast to the expressionist distortions of "Jardin Exotique" the normal aspects of life are exaggerated. The rubicund, middle-aged Parrotts are deliberately wicked caricatures of ordinary life, but they are not at all distorted. We see them warming their bums, plotting how conveniently to dispose of Theodora, and eating their breakfasts, and what is terrifying in all this is not the frangibility of the normal, but the capacity for malice of ordinary people. White has chosen to present the lives of the Parrotts as comedy of manners, specifically bad manners. The very solidity of their world is emphasized so that we find all the more shocking the unbearable loneliness of the aunt who asks: "why is this world, so tangible in appearance, so difficult to hold?" (AS, 266). This method of setting in terms of style normal social life against the life of isolates and eccentrics will find its completion in Voss and Riders in the Chariot. In Voss, the journey of the expedition in the interior of the continent, another symbolic journey into the self, is interspersed with comic scenes of bourgeois life in Sydney. White in

his post-war fiction approaches from a new direction the Thirties problem of finding some method by which both the inner world of subjectivity and the outer world of social activity can be given expression in the same text.

In The Living and The Dead White had addressed this problem in a characteristically Thirties fashion by tracing the tentative movement of young bourgeois intellectual away from his self-enclosure within sensibility towards actuality. By "actuality" White in that novel understood, again in Thirties fashion,not only engagement with historical process but also a sense of connection between the mind and the substantial world of things. Unfortunately, White was unable in The Living and The Dead to give concrete form to that "actuality." Elyot Standish dabbles his toes in the real world outside his skull but he is loath to dive in. To do so would be to submerge his fastidious egotism in the great flowing of the real. In The Aunt's Story, White recognizes the claims of both sensibility and actuality, of the individual and the social, not by attempting to lead the former to the latter but by prying the two worlds as far apart as possible.

The narrative method that makes its appearance in "Holstius" represents a major breakthrough in White's fictional development. White pushes to their extreme stylistic expressions the opposed modes by which the two worlds, that of inwardness and that of exteriority, are given form in fiction. The strategies of inwardness are pitched against those of outwardness. At the same time a single, slender bridge between the two worlds is suggested by the child, Lou Parrott, who inhabits her parents' world of cheerfully extroverted normality yet who sympathises with Theodora's wholly inward world of terrifying ruptures. Lou anticipates the function of Laura Trevelyan in Voss as a link between radically alternative worlds. By exaggerating the distance between the social and the psychological, White has found a way out of the impasse reached by English writers in the Thirties who hankered after history but who could not abandon sensibility. White is able to employ in the same text both the strategies of "factual" -- that is, realistic -- prose fiction and those "imaginative" strategies derived from symbolism. White's method may be understood by using a musical analogy.

In "Holstius" White uses a musical analogy to

render Theodora's attempt to bring together in a continuity of being the fragments of her world. As a movement of a symphony knits together its various themes, Theodora hopes to connect not only the disintegrating pieces of her personality but also the discrete objects that make up a troublingly dissociated external reality. This desire, while appearing to abolish all distinctions whatever including the fundamental one between "inner" and "outer," completes the process of Theodora's estrangement from the world of things and of people who "come and go." The apocalyptic blaring of the trumpet-notes of corn signals that inside Theodora Goodman's skull self is about to swallow world (AS, 249). Thus the world of things which previously she had sought to disinfect of mental projections is about to become wholly mental. The music of the corn is oceanic in the sense of being an undifferentiated whole whose parts do not possess integrity. The music enacts Theodora's effort to efface herself, to submerge her integrity as an individual ego in an undivided vastness. Theodora does not "hear" music in the ordinary sense: she intuits a wholeness larger than self, larger than the world of separate things whose fragmentariness torments her, and this

wholeness can only be likened to music. She senses, in short, being itself: the corn "was" (AS, 250). The verb to be here requires no complement. This is a music which threatens to "hear" Theodora.

White has previously used music in his novels to suggest a means of escape for his characters from the overweening demands of ordinary life. Oliver Halliday in Happy Valley found release from his indecisions and dissatisfactions by listening to Bach. In that novel, one felt the desire of the author along with the character somehow to rise above the flat surface of Australian life into a pure, aesthetic mode of art. White felt then that Australian life was so sordid, so materialistic, that only a realism of bare externals could adequately depict it. At the same time, his frustration with such a realism -- one which his prejudice constrained him partly to adopt -- drove him to gesture towards a language not of signs but of symbols. The music of Bach suggested a transcendental music, one unable to descend into and take root in the place. In The Aunt's Story the two worlds, or two ways of construing reality, which we might call the quotidian and the transcendental, exist within the same frame: the quotidian

is felt in the thoroughly outward lives of the Parrotts which is rendered in a fact-oriented prose style; the transcendental is felt in Theodora's wholly inward life which is rendered in a variety of self-conscious styles that employ the techniques of symbolism and expressionism. Hence there is none of that straining beyond the reluctantly realistic framework of the novel towards a preferable, but unavailable, symbolic language of music.

The music of The Aunt's Story is not found in some transcendent and ideally unified art form other than the novel reference to which casts an ironic light on the squalid and fragmented lives of the characters, but in the novel's organization according to musical principles. That is to say, music is grasped as a mode of organizing conflicting elements in a composition. The structural principles involved, which are worked out in the "Holstius" section of the novel, are hinted at in Theodora's reverie on the train as she travels across America returning to her antipodean Abyssinia:

> Sometimes against the full golden theme of corn and the whiter pizzicato of the telephone wires there was a counterpoint of houses. Theodora Goodman sat. The outer side of the incessant train she could read the music off. There were the single notes of houses, that gathered into gravely structural phrases. There was a smooth passage of ponds and trees. There was a big brass barn. All the square faces of the wooden houses, as they came, overflowed with solemnity of living, a passage of days. Where children played with tins, or a girl waited at a window, or calves lolloped in long grass, it was a frill of flutes twisted round a higher theme, to grace, but only grace, the solemnity of living and of days. There were now the two coiled themes. There was the flowing corn song, and the deliberate accompaniment of houses, which did not impede, however structural, because it was part of the same integrity of purpose and being (AS, 253).

Theodora's music is not White's. She is less interested in thematic variation than in the unifying properties of harmony. Yet she does not achieve the unity of being she seeks by merging her personality in the near monotone of the corn song. Her personality remains a persistent "discord" in the harmony she intuits because she cannot entirely shuck off the face that must face others. She cannot control "the violence of personality" (AS, 254). The "music" adopted by White in The Aunt's Story, particularly in "Holstius," is one extremely tolerant of dis-

cordancies. Immediately before the passage in which Theodora gathers "the gravely structural phrases" into "the same integrity of purpose and being" we find a heavily dialogued passage, replete with realistic details, which deals with the amount of bacon, kidney, toast, and gravy Frank Parrott can squeeze onto his fork. White, in contrast to Theodora, is interested in thematic variation even at the expense of harmonic resolution. The novel repeats as parody themes it at first treats in terms of non-ironic conventions. The pastoral theme introduced at Meroë is parodied by General Sokolnikov's idyllic memories of pre-revolutionary Russia and by the evocation in the final section of the novel of life on a small farm in the American middle west during the Depression. The chief unresolved thematic discord in the novel is the conflict between the inner and outer worlds which is manifest tonally in the novel as a stylistic counterpointing of realism and symbolism.

The two worlds are, in the words of Holstius who is himself one of Theodora's illusions, the "irreconcilable halves" of human experience: reality and illusion which constantly trick one another into assuming fresh shapes (AS, 272). The Parrotts' solid-seeming, external life

cannot dissolve Theodora's wholly inward life. Nor can Theodora deny the substantiality of their world merely by tearing up her tickets home and by repudiating her name (names for Theodora have always tended to betray the spiritual possibilities of words by fastening them to things). In "Holstius" we find White's first attempt to arrive at a coherence that permits diversity of styles and chromatic range without simply imposing unity.

Paul Klee observed during the First World War, with profound implications for modern art movements, that "the more horrifying the world becomes ... the more art becomes abstract; while a world at peace produces realism in art."[16] The organization of The Aunt's Story neatly illustrates this dictum. Unlike the German Expressionists after the First War, White after the Second was able to return to a land at peace, a land whose complacent air of certainty, whose faith in the materialistic, cried out for realistic treatment. In The Aunt's Story war-threatened Europe is treated abstractly while peaceful Australia is treated realistically. Yet Theodora carries her own war inside her, and her return to Australia suggests a means by which modernism may be carried back to Australia. White will set in Australia the figure of the outcast,

the madman, the visionary, the violently fragmented being who seeks a unity more encompassing than any offered by the "normal."

Not until Voss does White treat Australia itself abstractly. Theodora Goodman is a freak in the Australian landscape. She is a means of making Australia possible for art. By her allegiance to the imagination, to the point of schizophrenia, Theodora suggests that art, by accepting that its pictures of the word are not the world itself, liberates inventiveness and thus makes possible the bringing of the rich forms of the imagination to an impoverished reality. Theodora accepts the fatal, but also redemptive, ambiguity of the real when she at last brings together all the figments or illusions she has foisted on the world. Her imagination gives birth Platonically to a final other: Holstius, who teaches her to accept both halves of experience. For illusion and reality cannot be reconciled. One constantly deludes the other into taking fresh shapes. There can be, then, neither solidity nor permanence for Theodora, merely submission to the endless process of dissolution and reformation of the forms that leap from the imagination as well as those which proceed

through the external eye. Between these two worlds -- inner and outer, imaginative and real, subjective and social -- White's fiction will hitherto move.

III

The Tree of Man

Pastoral masks a conflict.

William Empson,
Some Versions of Pastoral.

Patrick White returned to Australia in 1947. Unlike previous returns this one, allowing for jaunts abroad, was to prove permanent. The eventual result of repatriation, as Guy Innes had promised the young novelist in London, was to bring "'the colours ... flooding back onto [White's] palette.'"[1] The immediate result, however, was a period of creative self-doubt during which the novelist cultivated his antipodean garden raising flowers, vegetables, dogs and goats.[2] The Tree of Man (1955), issuing from this period of uncertainty in which White found himself outcast from the civilized and polished milieu of his London days, marks a new direction in White's writing.

The new direction is indicated most clearly in the style of the new novel. At first reading, the style of The Tree of Man seems less impressive -- certainly, it is less adventurous -- than the style of the previous two novels. We find in The Tree of Man a tentativeness in the use of language which is puzzling after the difficult but assured prose of The Aunt's Story. We step disconcertingly from a novel which employs self-consciously a variety of styles to one in which the tendency of style to become an end in itself has been "humbled" (in "The Prodigal Son,"

with this period of his writing in mind, White speaks of "the state of simplicity and humility" as "the only desirable one for artist or man").[3]

The new "simplicity" of style in The Tree of Man does not mark a regression in White's development as a novelist. Nor is the style as "simple" as his statement would have us believe. White has set out in his writing to grasp an entirely new experience; accordingly, he addresses newly perceived problems of form and style. The early, experimental phase of White's writing has given way to an "epic" phase, encompassing The Tree of Man and Voss, in which White sets out deliberately and self-consciously to discover an appropriate form and idiom for his reading of the Australian experience.

In following this new course, White gradually transcends the minor English novelist who wrote Happy Valley and The Living and The Dead. The former novel, despite its Australian setting, was very much the work of a Thirties English novelist struggling to show his mastery of the expected influences, particularly Joyce and Lawrence. In his following two novels White becomes more

assured in his use of modernist techniques and more cosmopolitan in his subject matter. The Tree of Man reverses the apparent line of this development. It is as though White has returned to the nineteenth-century realism that informed Happy Valley and repudiated the modernist techniques he had attempted to impose on the traditional form of the novel. The Tree of Man seems less adventurous in form and style than The Aunt's Story. We are puzzled that White has suddenly retreated from the increasingly abstract and anti-mimetic bias of his fiction towards the realistic form and the convivial narrative manner of the nineteenth-century novel. We protest not only at the novel's evident nostalgia for a pre-modernist form but also at its nostalgia for a pre-industrial way of life. At first reading, The Tree of Man makes C.P. Snow's novels seem up-to-date. Yet within the epic form and despite the novel's nostalgia, White has managed to achieve a modern voice and a freedom from the mere imitation of techniques that marred the early novels.

Towards the end of The Tree of Man, Stan Parker attends a production of Hamlet in Sydney. Watching the play, the old man ponders his own unresolved life and his

lifelong difficulties in discovering the meanings of words:

> Was this Hamlet, he asked, coming and going throughout the play, a white, a rather thin man in black? That we have been waiting for. Is this our Hamlet? With poor knees. The words he had read, and was remembering, tried to convince the old man. Once he had known a horse called Hamlet, a bay, no, an old brown gelding, a light draught, that belonged to an old cove, Furneval was it, or Furness? who would drive into the village for groceries, flicking at the flies on Hamlet with a whip. That was one Hamlet. Or standing in the feed shed, in the trench coat that he had hung onto after the war, till it became green, the buttons had dropped off, and it was separated from its origin, but that morning, or in fact many mornings, as he mixed the good bran and chaff, the real Hamlet floated towards an explanation, or was it fresh bewilderment?[4]

The style of the passage has a beguiling tentativeness which encourages us to take at face value the preference White states in "The Prodigal Son" for simplicity and humility as an artist and as a man. In the same article, White speaks of his desire in this novel "to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words."[5] Certainly, the style of The Tree of Man has a simplicity, a tentativeness, and an evenness that is quite absent in The Living and The Dead or The Aunt's Story. As interior monologue the passage quoted above is less adventurous than much of the writing in Happy Valley. The "he asked" is a conces-

sion to the reader by a novelist apparently no longer willing to tax his reader's attention with the minimal difficulty of following a stream of conscious thoughts as they occur in the subject's mind. The use of the pluperfect tense is an unnecessary reminder by the narrator that this is a reportage. The repeated use of the interrogative mood stresses not only that the old man is maundering, but also that the narrator is determined to remind us of his tentativeness about fixing in words the essence of Stan's conscious life ("or was it fresh bewilderment"). At the same time, the narrator does not hesitate to ascribe with obvious confidence a moral essence to the man; the epithet "good" which modifies "bran and chaff" serves not only to evoke the simple bucolic virtues which would naturally appeal to the old man but also to intimate the narrator's agreement with Stan's pastoral values. The narrator has a habit of endowing characters and objects with the same epithet: Mr. Denyer is "a rather floury man, but good" (TM, p. 101). Evidently, the humbling of style goes together with a set of no-nonsense, bucolic values which the narrator is eager to endorse. In fact, the narrative method in this novel drives home with a rather heavy hand

the author's new-found humility. It is as though, his nerve having failed after the uncompromising demands The Aunt's Story made on the reader, White contritely offers us a thoroughly straightforward and reliable narrator and an uneducated and unsophisticated central consciousness. In place of intellectuals and mystical madwomen we are given Stan Parker, a simple man who cannot "interpret" the literary Hamlet because his mind runs after "the old brown gelding." We should be wary; White's judgemental narrators, like his Australian versions of pastoral, generally prove to be deceptive.

The gelding is, of course, the most unlikely conceivable embodiment of the name "Hamlet" and thus suggests the point at which Australian life asserts the full extent of its divorce from literary kinds, whether pastoral or tragedy. Furthermore, the outback horse with its ironically literary name is owned by "an old cove" whose own half-remembered name contains an obscure literary joke: H.H. Furness and F.J. Furnivall were nineteenth-century scholars whose fields included Shakespeare studies, philology and bibliography. The joke further establishes in a sly Furphian fashion, the incongruousness of European

literary forms in the Australian context. Shakespeare has suffered a series of declines from the living man who wrote for living men, to a canon of holy scripts attended by pedants "flicking at" metaphorical flies, to a neutered horse in rural Australia. It would seem, then, that White considers Australian life inimical to a high literary mode, and Australian landscape as a "Great ... Emptiness" in which civilization can make its appearance only in the form of grotesquely located relics from a richer past, the occasion for irony.

Such a view would account for White's apparent decision to abandon stylistic and narrative difficulty and the rendering of complex sensibilities: White is bored by Australia, writing of it with great and evident reluctance. The style and structure of the novel are deliberately made undemanding because the society has not deeply engaged White's interest. The "joke" is thus seen to disclose a concealed narrative level which directs irony at the narrator's disarming tentativeness as well as at the pastoral idyll which the narrator's honest adjective, "good," endorses. Such a concealed narrative level, reflecting authorial exasperation with Australian ordinariness, is

suggested by many of the more hysterical phrases in "The Prodigal Son." In the novel itself, it is suggested in an apparently unselfconscious aside by the narrator describing the touching and timeless goods on display in the general store at Durilgai: "They could have been painted on the wooden backing by some awkward brush that had not yet learned the dishonesties of art" (TM, p. 101). The question is whether White himself is more "dishonest" in this novel than his awkward narrator, humbled style and general tentativeness would suggest.

The overwhelming impression in reading the novel is not that White is bored with the life he treats but that his interest and involvement have been quickened. One feels in reading The Tree of Man that White has at last achieved what he so anxiously wanted to achieve in The Living and The Dead: a direct, passionate, and morally serious rendering of lived actuality. In the earlier novel the Lawrentian impulse to make the novel "the one bright book of life" was thwarted not only by a countervailing tendency of White's towards a preoccupation with style, but also by the prevailing deadness of the culture on which the novel drew.[6] White could not find in the England of

the Thirties the living connection he sought between outward gesture and inward emotion, between signs and things signified. Consequently, the novel retreated into what White himself deplored: a sterile self-reflexiveness and a plethora of styles. In The Aunt's Story, White solved the problem of his dissatisfaction with European civilization in its contemporary state by viewing it from within an increasingly schizophrenic consciousness. In doing so, he was forced to abandon the world of social living which had sustained the realistic tendency of his writing. Only in the non-European sections of The Aunt's Story does his realism assert itself and his prose-style, instead of drawing attention to itself as in the middle section, become sufficiently "transparent" to give shape to a felt density of the life it reflects. This same "transparency" of style in The Tree of Man suggests that White has at last become sufficiently engaged with a culture capable of nourishing the moral and mimetic bias of his writing to abandon his contrary bias towards experimentalism and difficulty.

It is true that The Tree of Man we find for the first time in White's writing the possibility of man's integration into the natural world. The novel enacts in

its slow curve, its evocation of seasonal growth and decay, the lives of the Parkers. Their life together grows, achieves its brief perfection, and withers following the same organic pattern as Amy's rose bush. Even death is part of this circular process. As the novel closes Stan's grandson, recalling his dead grandfather, walks through the bush-filled gulley that is all that remains of the virgin land Stan cleared in the beginning. As he walks he puts out "shoots of green thought" and the novel ends with the triumphant assertion of circularity: "in the end, there was no end" (TM, p. 499). This discovery of organic process allows, for the first time in White's writing, a reconciliation, however short-lived, between "inner" and "outer." Stan's initial desecration of the bush with axe and fire makes him part of the world he changes. Stan at this stage has the purely representative inner life of essential Man and he meets Nature at its most pristine and, as the Biblical echoes make clear, Edenic. The opening of the novel offers us a vision of prelapsarian simplicities, of a life before the inevitable decline of civilization into gesture, abstraction, the separation of man and world, inner and outer, life and language. In evoking this idyll

White's prose aspires towards a style of absolute simplicities, that is, towards the appearance of stylelessness. Words possess only their barest, denotative function. Yet, precisely because there is such an equivalence between words and the few, fundamental objects they denote -- tree, axe, man, dog, fire -- the words achieve the epic, incantatory and universal qualities of Biblical narrative: Stan is the man; Amy is the woman. White, it would seem, far from writing out of frustration with Australia, has found in its pristineness, its utter absence of sophistication, the connection he has so long sought between words and things, events and meaning.

There are, then, two irreconcilable views of Australia in whose terms the novel might be read. We find in the novel the view we found in Happy Valley of Australian society and nature as fundamentally impoverished and inadequate for a novelist seeking depth in characterization and poetic intensity in style. Yet we also find in the novel a wholly new view of Australia as a place whose pristineness makes possible an essential connection between man, nature, and language. In this view Australia, unlike Europe, allows the novelist to carry into his writing a

living sense of the language that ordinary people use in everyday speech. These opposed views are suggested in the following two passages from "The Prodigal Son":

> In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of all possessions, in which the rich man is the important man ... and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves.
> It was the exaltation of the "average" that made me panic most, and in this frame of mind, in spite of myself, I began to conceive another novel.[7]

> Writing ... became a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words. I began to see things for the first time. Even the boredom and frustration presented avenues for endless exploration; even the ugliness and bags and iron of Australian life, acquired a meaning. As for the cat's cradle of human intercourse, this was necessarily simplified, often bungled, sometimes touching. Its very tentativeness can be a reward.[8]

The genesis of The Tree of Man in White's own words lay in his dissatisfaction with the ordinariness, the banality, and the ugliness of Australian life. Yet, in the process of writing the novel White found new "avenues for exploration," by which he means exploration not only of Australia but also of the business of novel-writing itself.

"The Prodigal Son" discloses an irresolution on White's part about the material that has given shape to The Tree of Man. Such irresolutions thwarted his desire to achieve formal unity in his first two novels. In the post-war novels, however, White is more aware of, and more in control of, his own divided allegiances. He sets out to draw on two opposed tendencies in his previous fiction which we may loosely call realism and symbolism. The two tendencies and their problematical relation to one another are sketched in "The Prodigal Son":

> Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to suggest in this book every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life since my return.[9]

White proposes, then, in the realist manner exhaustively to treat ordinary life. At the same time he seeks in the symbolist manner to discover "the mystery and the poetry" which transcend (lie "behind") the ordinary. His intention would seem to be to bring together what Harry Levin calls "reality" and "richness."[10] Levin had in mind Joyce's

bringing together of realism and symbolism in Ulysses. In the Australian literary context one might say that White seeks to arrange an unlikely marriage between the concentration on ordinary life including its sordid details we find in, say, Kylie Tennant and the Mallarmean abandonment of the ordinary in favour of mysticism and a symbolist poetic we find in the poetry of Chris Brennan. White, it would seem intends a celibate cohabitation for the marriage partners. The phrase that links the two streams, "[b]ut at the same time," is telling: the conjunction stresses the opposition between the two while the adverbial phrase promises that both will be integral parts of the novel's design. In The Tree of Man, then, White sets out to find some means of reconciling the conflicting claims of imaginative and factual writing by attempting to discover in the common experience of his countrymen aesthetically rich and spiritually significant experience.

When White tells us that only "the mystery and the poetry" made bearable his life in Australia we glimpse the distance he puts between life as it is (the "ordinary") and life as it might be (the "extraordinary"). By using

"poetry" as a synonym for whatever is more than ordinary, White intimates that the opposition may be grasped in literary terms. That is to say, the mysterious, the poetic, and the extraordinary are to be approached not as possible ways of living but as possible ways of writing. The mystery that lies behind life is thus not a function of life itself but a necessary part of the process of writing, necessary, that is, for White writing in a place whose ordinariness he claims to find "unbearable." White seeks an aesthetic richness unavailable to him if he were to confine himself to a realistic treatment of Australia as it is, at least as it is in his view. Where Martin Boyd, similarly ambivalent about Australia, chose to live in Europe, White chooses to stay put and discover in the process of writing about Australia the richness lacking in the place itself. Yet White does not follow Chris Brennan who turned his back on a galling reality in favour of a purely symbolist one. Both the ordinary and the poetic, the real and the more than real, are admitted into The Tree of Man. Effectively, White has smuggled the techniques of symbolism into the realistic epic. The success of this operation may be judged by

comparing White's novel, which proposes itself as a national epic, with Henry Handel Richardson's similarly ambitious trilogy, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony (1917, 25, 29), which was long considered that fabulous monster: the Great Australian Novel. The question is, which approach is more adequate to a fictional reading of Australian reality: White's "marriage between life and imagination" which does not hesitate to invent or to give a poetic intensity to the prose used to record commonplace lives, or Richardson's autobiographical and documentary version of realism which tends to equate reality with sordidness but is loath to depart from the historical-novel form?[11]

Richard Mahony shows the kind of debt to nineteenth-century European realism that reviewers have attributed generously but misleadingly to White's novels.[12] White himself, it is true has encouraged the view which sets his novels squarely in this context.[13] The obvious progenitors of Richard Mahony and, if we are to believe White's enthusiastic reviewers, The Tree of Man and Voss are Balzac and Tolstoy whose expansive, epic, and realistic novels provide formal models for these twentieth-century interpreters of Australian reality. However cautious we must be about placing

White in such a lineage, Richardson clearly sees herself as a continuer of this line.

Richard Mahony offers us a world so profligate with realistic details, so minutely realized, that we feel we could enter its bustling life. Its central characters reveal themselves to us through the record of their thoughts and actions so that we feel we know them and identify with their struggles and sufferings. Its minor characters, while not always sufficiently differentiated, are generally convincing and contribute to the novel's total picture of a realized social world that is dense, complex, and particularized. Mahony himself is a powerful characterization in the realist manner. In him Richardson has combined a Balzacian sense of character as something wedded to, formed by, revealed in, the web of social living with a romantic sense of man's inward soul wherein he must thresh out metaphysical as well as moral conundrums and wherein desire refuses to be limited by possibility. Richardson represents a social world that is expansive in form and profuse in detail, and by this we mean that she is a "realist." Her intention is the realist one of representing things as they are and avoiding literary conventions

which get in the way of close observation of things.

Yet the precise nature of Richardson's realism is problematical. Richard Mahony mixes together elements of naturalism, of the historical novel, of psychological realism, and of what Georg Lukacs calls the "epic" quality in the novel.[14] For all the apparent conviction of her realism, Richardson cannot find within the range of realistic modes she employs a form that exactly and exhaustively fits her reading of life in Australia. There is an essential uncertainty of purpose underlying the novel's assured surface, one that reveals the limits of realism as a means of expressing an all-national experience.

Richardson's most obvious debt is to the historical novel. The characters in Richard Mahony are "typical": that is, they represent general historical trends without ceasing to be individuals.[15] Richardson is able to isolate the trends in society that make for historical change and to embody those trends in characters. Thus Purdy is representative of the increasingly capitalistic and speculative tendency of colonial life after the failure of the Eureka rebellion. Mahony himself embodies not a trend that

is active in the colonial scene, a significant tendency in contemporary history, but an historical trend that has already exhausted itself both in the Old World and in the New. This historical trend is that of gentility, a set of codes and assumptions that confer on Mahony a more admirable sensibility than is otherwise available, as Richardson sees it, within the range of colonial social types. Mahony embodies Richardson's romanticism, her preference for a type who resists the ordinariness of bourgeois reality. Mahony is one of those who demand that the word "reality" imply more than it does in a world where human relations are governed by the cash-nexus.

Mahony's search for something more than is to be found in the world as it is makes him more appealing to us than either the worldly, democratically friendly Australian types he despises or his wife, Mary, whose worldliness is common-sensible and who suffers with absurd patience the indignities his unworldliness forces on her. Mary merely exasperates us by becoming a patient Griselda. Yet we never cease to admire Mahony, the colonial Quixote who, while not quite a tragic figure, is never wholly ridiculous.

The enclosed, contemplative, static, orderly life which Mahony seeks through all his uprootings is the ideal towards which the novel gestures. Nostalgia for such a life holds up the novel's implicit structure of values. Such a life, of course, is no longer part of reality. It has been driven into the realm of dreams, of illusion, by the modern bourgeois world in general and by colonial money-grubbing in particular. Its force as a still-desirable way of life is felt in the novel not as something achievable but as some ineradicable trace in memory or desire of a fullness in living that drives Mahony to be dissatisfied with life as it is. When Mahony learns of his fortune he determines to be found in Australia a house of leisure, culture, and amateur intellectual inquiry. He desires to retreat from the boisterous squalor of the colonial scene into an enclave of gentility. He seeks, that is, to conceal the origins of his new wealth by presenting himself as "the _ne plus ultra_ of colonial society": "the leisured man of means."[16] Mahony, however, cannot come to rest in his "Ultima Thule." The clamour of the everyday erupts not only into the house but also into his retreat within the house: the library in which he indulges

his gentleman's taste for metaphysics. The life of the mind disdaining the world is no longer possible, either in England where gentility merely signifies rank or in Australia where the upper end of the English class system never took root. Richardson herself clearly prefers Mahony's world of genteel values and romantic yearnings to the Australian world as it is. It is indicative of her pessimistic reading of Australian history that she places at the centre of her novel the representative of a defunct social order who declines in fortune as lesser figures, representing the triumphant bourgeois order, rise. Like White in Voss, Richardson places at the centre of Australia's historical destiny a figure who is a failure in terms of the dominant cultural self-image yet whose reaching out beyond the as-it-is towards spiritual conviction is crucial to that culture's potential for growth. But unlike White, Richardson cannot really believe that the fallen bourgeois world can be transcended. Her faith in her romantically conceived hero is weaker than White's in Voss. Mahony is the lonely and doomed champion of spiritual values in a thoroughly bourgeois world. It is inevitable, then, that he shall not settle in his "Ultima Thule." The enclosed world of a vanished gentility which

he attempts to establish there can be given form in the novel not as a fact but as a longing. It is the idealized absence that holds together the novel's structure of desire.

The origins of this desire most probably lie in Richardson's memories of her father as a man of culture and leisure placed securely above the squabblings of the colony by a stroke of fortune such as Mahony's. Nettie Palmer plausibly conjectures that the family's long slide down the social scale left Richardson with the kinds of memories that trouble Cuffy Mahony in The Way Home (1925): traces in the form of dream-like images of the Grand Tour on which both character and author were taken as children. Cuffy's "stories" of European sights are regarded as lies by the Australian children to whom he tells them. Thus we glimpse a possible source of the antithesis between hard-headed colonial reality and European, particularly German, romance which runs through Richardson's fiction. Significantly, Richardson escaped her shameful provincialism through art. She owed her student sojourn in Liepzig to her promise as a musician. She owed to her status as an artist her jealously guarded London retreat

wherein even her husband reverently deferred to her desire for privacy. It is not surprising in view of Richardson's experience of falling from genteel poverty into lower-middle-class distress that the earlier state should come to be associated with romance or invention and the later state with sordid reality. Nor is it surprising in view of her lifelong attachment to German romanticism that she should set art in opposition to the bourgeoisie. What is surprising is the extent to which she submits her own art to a particularly reified form of bourgeois realism. Richard Mahony is her most "realistic" novel in the sense in which she understood the term. Its romantic affinities are swamped by a painstakingly prosaic realism. Its pedantic historicism, its oppressive detail, its method of construction by the wholesale lifting of material from diaries, letters, historical documents -- all point to Richardson's failure to produce the work of transcending genius to which, as her obsessive studies of romantic genius show, she once aspired.[17] Believing herself after her Liepzig period a failure in her own romantic terms, Richardson settled for "realism" as she conceived it -- truthful, factual, historical, unadorned, prosy -- faute de mieux. Unable to

produce a transcendent work of genius, Richardson manufactured her great novel of Australian life mechanically out of the reality that was available to her.

The formation of the minor characters in the novel is indicative of Richardson's method as a whole and of the assumptions that underlie her approach to novel-writing. The background of Mahony's life is peopled by a number of minor characters each of whom, by virtue of a single dominant characteristic, neatly illustrates a typical trend of colonial society: Ocock's capitalism, Hempel's methodism, Zara's desperate snobbery. Although each of these characterizations is thus crudely held together by a single component linking personality to class, each has just enough complexity to hold the reader's interest. In each of these characters we find a surface that has all the marks of individuality: the bundles of greed, generosity, blindness, and insight that make up personality. But beneath these superficial characteristics we invariably find a single trait illustrative of the character's position in the social order. Thus we find Zara's snobbery at first infuriating, later pathetic, but never surprising. Her fate is inevitable given her position as an unmarried middle-class woman of a certain age, educated but without private means, in

a society that values wealth far more than the sort of culture she has to offer.

There is nothing in these characters of the "organic" blending of the general and the particular that Georg Lukacs sees as the distinguishing mark of the "type" in realist literature.[18] They are, in Lukacs' terms "average."[19] That is to say, they are wholly immersed in "the banality of everyday life"; they are not imbued with the romanticism by which the great realists, particularly Balzac, created a poetic and dynamic world out of the "sordid prose of bourgeois life."[20] The minor characters in Richard Mahony, because of this "average" quality and because of their mechanical formation, have a tendency to become mere caricatures. They are reduced at times to synecdohic signs which refer to some social tendency.[21] Thus flashy dress signals the socially mobile upwards and potentially dangerous, those who embody in their empty display the rootlessness of capitalism. Purdy's characterization, which initially promises a complex and engaging portrait, declines into a mechanical identification of sign -- his loud dress -- with character. In the end, Purdy is no more than the emptiness of the colonial mania

for speculation which he represents. Richardson's determinism is apparent in the drawing of these minor characters: it is class, abetted by a few other socially given determinants, that makes character. Even Mahony's ghosts retain beyond the grave the characteristics and limitations of their former positions in the Victorian class structure (RM, 805).

In other words, we are given what Lawrence called "the old stable ego -- of the character."[22] This ego -- the I compounded of the codes of class, race, and religion that makes for consistency of pesonality -- remains intact through Mahony's degeneration into insanity. At the end of the novel, Mahony is reduced to what Richardson sees as the essential components of character: the scraps of gestures, postures, and attitudes which signal that he remains a gentleman. We do not find in Mahony those "allotropic" shifts within consciousness we find in the characters of Lawrence, Woolf, and Patrick White.[23] Richardson's characters are determined by unchanging given outside themselves. Their consciousness is, as Lawrence said of Galsworthy's characters, "class-bound."[24] They are never open in the moment-by-moment play of

consciousness to change, growth, possibility.

Recent criticism of Richard Mahony has downplayed the debt to naturalism noted by the early commentators.[25] Critics have concentrated instead on the shaping process that has gone into the novel. A unifying structure of motifs, analogues, and symbols has been unearthed in order to defend the novel against the charge of naturalistic shapelessness.[26] Brian Kiernan has suggested that the landscape at Barambogie, scene of Mahony's first major breakdown, is treated expressionistically.[27] Yet, bearing in mind White's use of expressionism and symbolism in his Australian fiction, we are impressed by the exhaustiveness of the realism in Richard Mahony, the heaping up of facts, and the absence of any countervailing stylistic or formal methods.

The frequent references to horses and heat in the novel are more readily seen as adding to its weight of documentary detail than, as is Ken Stewart's view, contributing to its symbolic unity.[28] Similarly, the heat, the house, the swampish lake, the mill and its whistle at Barambogie serve less to convey "expressionistically" Mahony's

state of mind than to build up, detail by naturalistic detail, an exact picture of the hideousness of the reality which Mahony is unable to escape. His madness and isolation do not spill into the world of things as in White's expressionistic "Jardin Exotique"; rather, the world as a collection of material facts insinuates itself into Mahony's madness. The mill whistle, at first an annoyance, later a torment, finally becomes the scream with which Mahony crosses the Rubican of sanity.[29] Nor are the analogues Ken Stewart adduces unnaturalistic.[30] The plethora of drunks in the novel merely indicates the frequency of alcoholism in nineteenth-century Australia. Moreover, Richardson treats alcoholism not as a moral failing but as a disease which entirely removes the sufferer's freedom. Agnes Ocock can no more resist her compulsion to drink than can John Turnham resist the course of his cancer. Richardson follows naturalistic principle in consistently denying to her characters any measure of control over their lives.

Richardon's method of piling up analogues to Mahony in the misfits, failures and eccentrics who clutter the background of his life, far from disciplining

the novel's errancies, points to her difficulties in achieving organic unity. The novel fails to grow organically around the centre of Mahony's consciousness because Richardson's bias towards chronicle inhibits her ability to discriminate among particulars. The novel's shape derives from the mechanical turn of fortune's wheel. The drunken carter who unsuccessfully sues Mahony at the beginning of the latter's fortunes points too obviously, too mechanically, to what Mahony himself will become. The full turn of the wheel is fated by the a priori shape of the novel which is itself drawn from the record, memorial and recorded, of the life of Richardson's father.

Still less convincing than the claim that the novel's symbols are systematic rather than sporadic is the claim that Richard Mahony possesses "symphonic" structure.[31] Even in her novels most directly concerned with music, Maurice Guest (1908) and The Young Cosima (1939), Richardson uses her knowledge of music to add interest to plot and character rather than to organize her fiction on the method of the Wagnerian motif. Richardson is no Australian Proust. Her method of organizing her novels is generally slip-shod. She is too fond of

realistic detail for its own sake to make us aware in each particular of the coherence of the whole. The structure of Richard Mohany is shapely only in the sense that it follows the curvilinear form of Mahony's fortunes, allowing for the odd peripety. The presence of structure or of symbols is not, in any case, proof that the novel is not naturalistic. Much the same structural principles and the same pattern of symbolic resonances that we find in Richardson's novel may be found in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie, (1900). But symbolism proper, the method of organizing a novel around the states of consciousness of its characters rather than around action, is necessarily excluded from Richard Mahony because Richardson cannot transcend her notion of "truth." Richardson suppresses her romanticism on the grounds that it conflicts with her realism. She refuses to stray from the accumulation of material facts whose purpose is to give the novel the felt density of real life. She reins in any tendency towards style as an end in itself; her prose is intended to offer an unselfconscious representation of material and social reality (Richardson according to Dorothy Green was critical of Christina Stead, and Patrick White for their

self-conscious writing and "phrase-making").[32] In short, the novel eschews the free play of the imagination. It refuses to invent. It sticks rigorously to the facts. And sinks beneath them.

Richardson's problem is that she cannot discover any connection between Mahony's romanticism and Australian reality. This inability has a fatal consequence for her realism. Realism, in Georg Lukacs' understanding of the term involves a dialectical interplay between subjective and objective, and this, of course, is our actual experience of the world: inner constantly modifies outer and vice versa. Richardson gives us a realism which is true to appearances and a realism which is psychologically true. But she cannot give us a realism which recognizes the constant interchange between the two. And she cannot infuse her realism with a romanticism that criticizes the fixity and narrowness of bourgeois reality yet avoids the danger of simply flying away into the isolated self-consciousness of the romantic hero. Richardson's romanticism is at odds with her realism. In Mahony's characterization she constantly strains away from the flat surface of the world he reluctantly inhabits. But she

cannot "marry" reality and imagination. In Richard Mahony the romanticism serves to give scope to what the novel's naturalism ultimately denies: man's desire for meaning. Mahony is brought low not by the gods but by their absence. They have fled not only the metaphysical spheres but also the imagination. They can be called back only in the pathetic and ludicrous form of ghosts. In short, man is a conditioned being; the space of his imagination has been savagely curtailed by nineteenth-century science. The limitations of style, structure and characterization in Richard Mahony are bound up with Richardson's acquiescence in spite of herself in the determinstic bias of nineteenth-century materialism and its literary offshoot, naturalism. The imagination, then, cannot take root in Australia because its position in the human world itself has become untenable. It is thus not surprising that Cuffy, the only hope for the future of the aesthetic impulse in the colonial wilderness, is pictured cringing in the most confined space he can find as the novel closes (this posture becomes habitual with him in the short story which takes up his subsequent fate: "The End of A Childhood" ends with even less suggestion of hope for the realization of his

hinted genius than does the novel).[33] The failure of Richard Mahony is ultimately a failure of nerve, a failure to believe in the capacity of the imagination to build a world out of what White has called "the bags and iron of Australian life."[34]

The similarities between Richard Mahony and The Tree of Man are striking. Both depict relentlessly "the unrelieved ugliness ... of the colonial scene" (RM, 384). Yet their depictions are qualified by moments of equivocal enthusiasm over the possibilities of that "scene." Both novelists follow Marcus Clarke and Joseph Furphy in suggesting that the beauties of the landscape are to be found in its very peculiarities: its unfamiliarity to English eyes ("wierdness" is Clarke's word).[35] Both novelists choose as central characters men whose "roots in this world don't go deep" (RM, 444). Both marry these men to women whose practicality, mundaneness, and realism hinder the expansive range of their imaginations. Both Mary Mahony and Amy Parker resent and misunderstand the parts of their husbands they cannot reach: their unworldliness. Both novels are concerned with the problem of the alienated consciousness -- including but not exclusive-

ly that of the artist -- in Australia. Both novels offer comprehensive views of the range of classes in Australian society during significant periods of Australian history.

The differences between the two novels are, however, more fundamental. Richardson's realism is far more committed to facts than is White's; her sense of history is more precise; her grasp of the class nature of Australian society is more sure. At the centre of Richard Mahony are historical events whose influence on the development of Australian society are decisive: the effects of the gold rushes on settled, hierarchical colonial society, the rise of capitalism, the periodic crashes attendant upon speculation, the gesture of frustrated radicalism at Eureka. At the centre of The Tree of Man we find natural rather than historical events: flood, fire, drought. These events in their timelessness and universality partake of the quality of myth. They are symbolic battlegrounds on which self and world in their eternal aspects confront one another. Herein lies the essential difference between the two novels. White's conception of character does not rest on the unquestioned assumption that identity is manufactured in a mechanical fashion by history, class

and environment. These three "externals" are granted their shaping influence; nature, in particular, etches itself into the psyches of White's characters. Yet White throws his characters, at least those of his characters who count, into his symbolic fires in order to see what remains after all the socially given components of character have been rendered down: pure essence or pure absence. His characters tend to seek a core of selfhood which is prior to society, nature and language. Hence, our feeling that too many of his characters seem to drop into the world intact (Stan Parker is fathered by an outrageously mythic figure: the rollicking blacksmith as Jehovah). Whether or not White's Stan Parkers and Theodora Goodmans find the essences they seek, the rest of his characters, those whose identity rests upon externals, simply dissolve in the alembic in which White dips all his characters. In his concern to break down character as a convention premissed upon a fixed notion of society, White moves progressively beyond realism.

There are, however, differences between the two novels at a more fundamental level than that of characterization. Any number of novelists, as Malcolm Lowry

once urged a dubious publisher, "can draw adequate characters"; White, like Lowry, is out to tell us something new about apocalypses.[36] One way of approaching these differences is to consider the handling of time in the two novels. Richard Mahony is written almost entirely in the present perfect tense. It is as though Richardson held a camera on Mahony's life and simply let it run, showing those who enter the frame of his life but not using flashbacks or introducing sub-plots. Thus a whole journey to Europe is necessary to tell us the essential facts about the backgrounds of the Mahonys which minor dislocations of the chronological order could have achieved more economically. White also follows the temporal span of a man's life. But the external passage of time is subservient to the disordered, subjective experience of time (White imaged his scepticism about clock-time in his two earlier novels by marble mantle clocks). Time for both Stan and Amy is the mixture of memory and anticipation that sometimes flows, but more often moves jerkily as the mind deserts the acts and objects of the present to fumble after those of the past. Yet, after all, the novel has a level of narrative time that offers us beginning, middle and end

in a neat enough package, one that contains the jumbled private experiences of time. Even here, however, there are passages when time manages to "clot[ ]" (TM, 180). These clottings are "scenes" in the painterly, rather than the dramatic or cinematic, sense.

Within each of these scenes there may be action but there is little or nothing in the way of narrative progression. Our experience of reading the novel diachronically is interrupted as we become aware of the pictorial quality of the writing. The experience of reading the novel may be compared to that of walking round a picture gallery examining in turn, say, depictions of the fourteen Stations of the Cross. Each canvas depicts a fully self-contained moment, yet the whole sequence constitutes a story, a completed action. Each of the several stations is as important in itself, as fit an object of contemplation, as is the sequence as a whole. Moreover, each station resists the forward impetus of the story. Each deliberately arrests the contemplator, refuses the linear bias of his notion of time. The temporal links between each stage -- how Christ got from His first to His second fall -- are of no consequence at all in the act of contemplation.

Thus the novel opens with a canvas of pioneer life: here is the untouched bush; and here in the centre is a little clearing where the man is building his make-shift house. Thus the newly-wed Amy Parker looks back on the ramshackle place in which she has lived as "a shining scene, with painted houses under the blowing trees, with the carts full of polished cans in which the farmers put the milk, with blue smoke from morning fires ... (TM, 21). Thus the peasant studies of Amy in the Realist manner: Amy gathering mulberries, or the explicitly pointerly description of Amy milking:

> She sat with the bucket between her strong legs, her buttocks overlapping the little sawn-off block she had always used as a milking stool. What saved her from appearing ludicrous was the harmoniousness of her rather massive form beside the formal cow" (TM, 229).

In a more expressionistic manner is the scene in which Ray Parker pursues an unknown girl through a park at night. By emphasizing the angularity of the shapes and the clear-cut distinctions between white and black, White foregrounds the briefly glimpsed face of the girl "with its blurry, moon-geography" (TM, 393). White carefully focusses our viewpoint not through Ray's eyes but from a point behind

him so that the effect of the scene is pictorial rather than visual. We recognize Ray as an alienated and threatening figure in an urban study, someone on the outside staring down passages or streets into lighted windows or open doors that will not give him entry. What is painterly about the novel, however, is not merely White's habit of suggesting painterly styles in his descriptions of figures in a landscape but his method of composing elements in "scenes." I will examine in detail two of these scenes, one apparently realistic, the other flagrantly symbolist.

In the first scene Amy Parker and her friend, Mrs. O'Dowd, ride to Wullunya in a spring cart to meet their husbands who have been rescuing people from the flood. The narrative line seems perfectly straight-forward: the reluctant Amy is persuaded by her adventurous neighbour with heroic pictures of Stan; they drive off as Mrs. O'Dowd tells a diverting story; they are accosted by three young blades in a sulky; Mrs. O'Dowd vanquishes the accosters; they are saved from revenge by the arrival of a policeman; Mrs. O'Dowd tells anecdotes of a personal nature as the journey is concluded. The passage is replete with realistic detail: the horse's flatulence, the inflamed nose of

one of the accosters. The dialogue exactly registers the earthy colloquial speech of the Irish woman and Amy Parker's more timid vernacular. Although the brilliance of Mrs. O'Dowd's brogue lifts the writing out of the quotidian (Amy herself is "exalted out of her dull life" by all the talk of circuses), the whole piece reads as realistic prose offering a lively representation of ordinary life (TM, 79). Looked at more closely, however, both the style and the narrative organization prove less concerned with representing than with cutting clever and playful figures.

The scene opens with a burst of heightened, lyrical prose that can be scanned thus: "They were riding down to Wullunya/in O'Dowd's spring cart,/all ajingle on the yellow road,/lashing the water with their wheels/the horse, tossing his thin mane,/struck at the surface (TM, 75). The gay movement is carried forward by the repeated anapests, shading at the close of each "line" into iambs. For Amy the journey means increase of life; accordingly it is couched in an exuberant poetry which throughout the novel signals those moments in which life seized a person in great, irresistable gusts. Thus Stan connects his blacksmith father with the God of the Prophets in prose

that surges in a flurry of anapests and iambs: "At Willow Creek, God bent the trees/till they streamed in the wind like beards" (TM, 6). Behind all this, of course, is Housman's poem in A Shropshire Lad (1896) from which the novel's title is taken. The poem blows "gusts of doubt" through the life-avoiding Thelma: "There, like the wind through woods in riot,/Through him the gale of life blew high;.../The tree of man was never quiet:/Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I" (TM, 389).

Poetry is not merely a means of signalling excess of life in the characters; it is also a means of lifting the writing out of the flatness of a prose that aims simply to represent a world and to record the vernacular speech of the local tribes. White's attitude to the Austral-Irish tribe, of whom the O'Dowd's are representative, has much in common with Lowry's attitude to seamen in Ultramarine: he wants to make use of a more vital and self-delighting language than that of standard upper-middle-class speech. Mrs. O'Dowd offers him a version of English that is not only direct, colloquial and earthy but also one that employs style selfconsciously. Mrs. O'Dowd's intention is not merely to convey information but to

entertain by the manner of her speech. The word "ajingle" in the passage quoted above introduces the circus theme which will be taken up in the style of Mrs. O'Dowd's narrative aside. This is a set-piece of comic Irishness. Mrs. O'Dowd's mispronunciations, solecisms, irrelevancies, digressions, and absurd details are rendered in a self-delighting language. The style "performs" in its own circus fashion, mixing clowns and "acrybats," monkeys and elephants, high and low. The performance leaves Mrs. O'Dowd fully in control of past, present, and landscape. Above all, she is in control of Amy Parker for whom the "tinsel" words have transformed the dowdy world (TM, 76). We watch through Amy's dazzled eyes the sodden world become strange and marvellous. Her mind paints the world with circus colours: "From out of the varnished leaves the sun was bringing the greeny-golden balls of oranges, to juggle with. For a moment. And exit" (TM, 76). In the act of visualizing we are made aware that White is not merely imitating the "real" world; he is the juggler whose command of words -- the "balls" of style -- allows him to create the illusion of reality.

By now, Amy's romantic expectations of life have been thoroughly roused. As the women proceed she waits for some evidence of unrestrained sensuality to burst into the arena of the flat landscape ("some entrance of animal life" [TM, 76]). She is not disappointed; Mrs. O'Dowd's words have conjured up "three flash young coves." In the ensuing altercation the words are all Mrs. O'Dowd's, but we see through Amy's eyes. The neighbour woman's mixture of flirtation and contempt is for Amy a "delirious tight-rope" which she sees imaged in a taut fence wire "on which the rain was running beads" (TM, 77). Faint-hearted Amy cannot "walk the wire" with her friend. She has not the power over illusion that words confer; for all her romanticism, she is a creature of prose. Mrs. O'Dowd, however, is a master illusionist. At the last moment she performs her most fantastic trick: out of nothing but words she magics the heroic proportions of her husband. O'Dowd is a figure straight out of Irish myth: "'This is a very big sort of man, let me tell yer, with muscles on um like the pumkins, an fire coming through the nose for the likes of you" (TM, 78). With the fortuitous arrival of Constable Halloran the "illusion" of the three young coves which has been threatening to become too real is discharged. One of

White's more dreadful puns -- "the sulky became rather surly" -- signals the return to flat prosiness and the familiar world (TM, 79). Realistic detail dispatches the brief, bright spell: "Mrs. O'Dowd, sunken in her carapace of stiff bags, denied the possibility of circuses" (TM, 79). The reader, along with Amy, is roughly thrown back into the ordinary world.

In this "scene," then, White deliberately draws attention to his writing as performance. But he does not entirely abandon his realistic purpose. Rather, he enacts in style the way in which Amy sees the world. The language "struts" with the flash emptiness of all circuses as we see through Amy's romantic fantasies. Amy's world, like Emma Bovary's, is meretricious, and White's prose, in giving form to that meretriciousness, is charged with an objective but manifest irony. At any rate, the writing, however playful, is dense, and forces the reader to ignore chronology -- how the narrative as a whole is being advanced -- in favour of the rich composition of colours, light and illusion that is brought to life. The bright balls of oranges are suspended in the air; the bird-cage hangs miraculously from the acrobat's teeth; in the

foreground the horse of the women prances; in the background the sulky is a fast-moving chariot. All this movement is in the arrangement of colour and line (note the use of wires, ropes and rings to give us intersecting verticals, horizontals and circles). The canvas thus framed holds our whole attention; it is quite static. That is to say, it is an object of contemplation in its own right before it is part of any larger narrative whole.

The second scene I shall examine is that in which Stan Parker rescues Madeleine from the burning house, Glastonbury. Here White's symbolist intention is so overt that the passage does not make completely satisfactory reading on a realistic level: the house is too obviously a spatial representation of Stan's mind. White draws attention to the symbolic quality of the fire more explicitly than he does with the flood. It soon becomes clear that the purpose of the fire is to destroy more than trees, houses, and the vanity of the men who fight it. It attacks the very fabric of the real world. The fire consumes identity to the extent that identity rests upon the assurance of having a fixed place in an ordered social world, a place signified by possessions ("each man remem-

bered his own house ... which until now he had considered solid, and all the objects he had accumulated, and without which he would not have been himself" [TM, 173]). The fire at Glastonbury has the function of the masonic rituals in The Magic Flute.

The fire threatens the very centre of the human community, the signifying operations that generate cultural meaning. The men who ride from the fire to Durilgai "to be in the centre at least" find only the signpost, the post office, and the store (TM, 174). Here they find intact the absolute minimum of the communal means of exchanging messages and goods. The men are allowed to fall back on this centre because its vulnerability has been so thoroughly exposed. Their sense of identity which rests on their place in a social order is only as "solid" as the possessions which uphold it. They will move no further in the direction which threatens dissolution of personality. Significantly, for White as for Richardson, the post office on which the men fall back is the hub of the outback community. Richardson leaves Mary Mahony in an isolated rural post office at the close of Richard

Mahony. In such communities post offices allow the circulation of that minimum of necessary messages without which it would not be possible to speak of a "community." Stan Parker, unlike the men, is prepared to move beyond the framework of the community and beyond its signifying operations. Stan worships the fire precisely because it promises to render down that part of himself which depends upon externals. White describes the Stan Parker who stares into the fire as a "worshipping man" (TM, 178). Stan chooses apocalypse. We recall that God promised Noah that after the flood would come the fire. After the destruction of form would come the destruction of substance.

Amy's nudge sends Stan into the burning house so that he might rescue her romantic fantasies of Madeleine. But Stan obeys a private compulsion. The house "open[s]" itself to him with the implied promise that it contains possibilities, sensual and otherwise, which he has been unable to realize in his life so far with Amy (TM, 178). He abandons the ordinary world, and with it his wife, with a line that neatly parodies the manly understatement of the Australian "bloke" convention: "'I'll have a go'" (TM, 179). Thus sloughing off his everyday persona he steps

into a "houseful of poetry" where Hamlet and Madeleine wait for him in the eternal rooms (TM, 179). Inside the house objects have become part of a symbolic landscape, and Stan must struggle to separate the actual from the poetic nature of his mission. His problem is to advance not only temporally and physically into the house but also into the self, into interior space. For a moment, he is overwhelmed by the symbolism; the inward journey beckons. Time is "becalmed in the passages"; the cupboards are clogged with the detritus of the past (TM, 179). He stands becalmed among these timeless and impenetrable passages until snatched back into "the desperate situation" (TM, 180). Now his ordinariness, his "reality," is oppressive to him. He is the working man in his "cloddish boots" standing at a loss in a room where mirrors and furniture are designed to reflect the splendour of their owners. He remembers that he is the common man come to rescue the trapped, upper-class girl, and he is nervous that his clumsy words will spoil their introduction. In mounting towards the purity of the upper rooms, he is again engulfed by the mysterious quality of his mission. The fire has consumed the real: it has burst the solid Victorian furniture; it has shrivelled up the "prettiness"

of upper-bourgeois life; it has exposed the secrets of the rich.

The fixed, normal world in which identity rests securely on class and possessions has succumbed. All objects are now "without reflections"; they do not give back to the viewer evidence of his place in the world (TM, 180). Stan steps over the hank of hair that once supported vanity and breaks into "the heart of the house" where his consummation ("climax") waits (TM, 180 - 1). He meets not a solid woman but an embodiment of poetry: Madeleine is all Heraclitean flow. The fire has entirely swallowed the ordinary world. The "papier-mâché globe that the girls used to learn the capitals from" has gone "up in a puff" (TM, 181).

Madeleine, then, is the imprisoned princess, Rapunzel, who waits in her tower with her long hair flowing. She is Stan's trapped vision of poetic possibility waiting to be released. One could even read the passage in Jungian terms: Stan confronts in the figure of Madeleine his anima, the veiled woman, with whom he must effect a coniunctio oppositorum in the alchemical flames of transmutation.[37]

However, although she appears to Stan to be composed of shimmering fire and although, like Hamlet's Ophelia, she affects a touch of madness, Madeleine is a real woman. She waits to be rescued: that is, restored to the real world. Madeleine is a bourgeois princess and Stan a very proletarian knight. They must negotiate the doors that separate the classes before passing through the fire into the real. The introduction of the class theme restores a realistic element to the narrative. The language they must use, which encodes the class barriers that divide them, almost betrays Madeleine into referring to "the servants' staircase" (TM, 182). This, in any case, is closed to them: the rooms in which the maids have been "contained" lead only to "dead ends" (TM, 182). Stan Parker and Madeleine cannot return to the real world as lady and proletarian. They are forced to grapple with one another as man and woman.

Madeleine and Stan, like Sidney Furlow and Clem Hagan and like Eden Standish and Joe Barnett, are sexually stirred by the distance between the classes. The upper-class woman of sensibility, beauty and constraint waits to be ravaged by the no-less-willing proletarian in his

clumping great boots. In White's two early novels this attraction found its appropriate, if unlikely, expression in the sexual act. In both cases, White clearly intended us to see this leap across the classes as essentially healthy, though whether for social, sexual or psychological reasons was not quite clear. In both cases also, White's attitude towards this union was ambivalent. His sexual politics of healing were in conflict with his sexual and ideological instincts: hence the association with the death principle of the love between Eden and Joe. In The Tree of Man, White neatly sidesteps his ambivalences.* He shifts the terms of the union from those of sex and class to purely symbolical ones. Stan and Madeleine are joined only when they put aside desire. Not their flesh

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* We must be grateful to White for his forthrightness about his homosexuality in Flaws in the Glass. By "ambivalence" I do not mean to suggest that White was ambivalent about his homosexuality. As White himself makes clear, he has used his homosexuality to project both sexual roles out of his own nature. This has certainly been a great dramatic advantage. It has not, however, obviated his essential ambivalence towards heterosexuality which is here at issue.

but their bones meet (language which looks forward to the violently unworldly lovers in Voss). Thus the sexual aspects of the marriage of opposites are swallowed by the symbolism. As the twined lovers descend the staircase the inessential fleshly beauty of Madeleine is discarded while her essential, inner beauty -- the poetic self Stan has projected onto the girl -- is appropriated by Stan. Stan emerges from the fire, if not purified into a final shape, at least refined. He has discovered a selfhood more fundamental than that which is offered to the world as personality. He has uncovered the poetry so long imprisoned within him. The empty husk of Madeleine is cast aside on the grass, "dry-retching" out of her own nothingness (TM, 184).

For a moment in the midst of the fire the immense distances between the classes are negated. But White does not trouble himself or us by attempting to show lovers from antagonistic classes struggling towards health and wholeness in a sterile social order. Stan and Madeleine return to their former lives, once again separated by all the endlessness of space between the classes. They were allowed to meet not as human beings but as trembling symbols winding down a Jungian staircase. After being thus

turned into symbols they are simply dumped back into reality and into their familiar roles as socialite and cow-cockie. As with Mrs. O'Dowd after her circus piece, the language suddenly refuses to hold them up. But Stan Parker has made off with something of permanent value. He has stolen out of the rich butcher's house the spiritual essence of gentility to which the colonial upper orders aspire. He has grasped the sense of beauty that alone can make leisure, wealth and refinement "genteel." In literary terms the Australian common man has broken out of the prison-house of realism. The outback proletarian hero has ransacked the country house -- admittedly an imitation -- of the old order and made off not only with the beautiful daughter but also with the high style that has traditionally belonged to the rarefied consciousness of the leisured upper classes. Stan does not, of course, "make off" with Madeleine. He returns to his prosaic world wherein he is irrevocably married not to "richness" but to "reality." Yet the symbolism in the fire scene belongs not to Madeleine but to Stan. The objects in the burning house are charged with emotion and significance that have their origins in Stan's states of consciousness. In <u>Happy</u>

Valley the working man, Hagan, was attracted to the beautiful Sidney Furlow but could not enter her inner world wherein her reveries had a Mallarméan languor. In The Tree of Man the inwardness belongs to the crude, inarticulate worker. Madeleine's beauty and the sense of spirituality suggested by her formal perfection are qualities that reside in Stan's mind. She herself returns to a "reality" infinitely more squalid, vulgar, and empty than Stan's life with Amy. In this scene White stakes his claim to the conventional matter of Australian realism and asserts his right to do with it as he will. In this sense "reality" and "richness" have been joined at the level of style and narrative stance. The techniques of symbolism have been applied to the traditional matter of realism.

The two "scenes" discussed above are thematically linked. Yet each has an air of self-completion. We visualize them after we have read the novel not as links in a narrative chain but as fully realized compositions, as vivid arrangements of colour and line on a flat space. They are like paintings in different styles. The first scene is realistic, but with a lively selfconsciousness in the execution. The flat surface is given depth and

movement: the illusion that what we are seeing is actual life. Yet, in an anti-mimetic fashion, the writing insists on drawing attention to the means by which the illusion is achieved. White refuses to make his prose "transparent": that is, to efface his writing as Richardson does before the representation. White reminds us that realism is a stylistic convention without actually foregoing the pleasures of representing. The deliberate splurges of colour heighten a drab reality, but they do not deny that there is a reality "out there." The second scene is symbolist in the sense that the reality of nature has been thrown out in favour of that of the imagination. The world of objects is depicted but without the conviction which lies behind Richardson's represented worlds: the conviction that all objects participate in a single, unequivocal, external reality. The house, its rooms, and the things within the rooms are correlatives for states of feeling. We see the trapped princess as the essence of poetry and desire. The rescuer hesitates as he seeks a path to the centre of what is obviously a private maze. And as he advances he encounters not things but symbols.

By putting such a weight of symbolism onto Stan Parker in the burning house scene, White signals a major new tendency in his writing. Depending on one's critical prejudices this tendency marks an advance or a regression. At any rate, it remains the major critical bone of contention about his achievement. What is at issue is that allegorical bias in Voss, Riders in the Chariot (1961) and The Solid Mandala (1966) which subordinates the credibility of the characters to an overtly symbolic design. For those who like their realism neat White's flouting of the contingent world of our common habitation is deeply offensive. The Tree of Man is not, like the later novels, allegorical. Stan Parker's credibility is not prejudiced by his association with Adam Kadmon or Christ or the holy fool archetype. Yet in the burning house White makes a break with the traditional realistic notion of character more radical than any before in his fiction. In "Jardin Exotique" the style refused to represent transparently the external world. White's purpose there, however, was to enact by stylistic inversion Theodora Goodman's movement into schizophrenia. The style of the piece was a rhetoric subordinate to the representation not of the world but of

a particularly distorted world. In The Tree of Man the style is throughout more circumspect. We have to look closely to notice the gestural and playful qualities by which White draws attention to his writing as performance. There is a slyness in the curbing of style in The Tree of Man as there is in the ordinariness of the characters. In placing his art inside a frame he finds restrictive, that of the colonial experience, he appears to have humbled his excesses and strengthened his moral and mimetic biases. He has done nothing of the sort.

By suspending Stan's credibility as a realistic character White implies his absolutist notion of his own powers as a writer of fiction over the worlds he invents. White returned reluctantly to Australia and has not ceased to grumble about the place to this day. Like Richardson, he finds Australia unsympathetic as it is. Unlike Richardson, however, he does not restrict himself in his writing to the "as it is." He invents, and in invention lies his consolations. We find in The Tree of Man the poetic play which is wholly absent from Richard Mahony and which is, as Schiller pointed out, the sign of aesthetic freedom.[38] It is not that White simply snips

the string that holds the world of art to the actual world and watches it vanish into pure space. But he is always aware of the distances between words and things, between the world in the mirror and the highway along which the mirror moves. He finds in these distances not a source of anxiety as in the early novels but the enabling condition of play, of imaginative creativity, of invention. In the marriage between life and the imagination he effects, the imagination is clearly the male and dominant partner. Hence, White's railings against Australian novelists for their "journalistic" allegiance to dreary facts. Hence, his self-delighting language. Hence, the artificial quality of his novels: they are artifacts, shaped objects, "crystalline," in Iris Murdoch's word.[39] And hence, White's readiness to override the credibility of his characters. His characters are not copies of real people like Richardson's; they are possibilities begotten by the imagination on aspects of the self. Thus, they suggest "the <u>form</u> of life rather than its material reality."[40] White gives us not events transcribed from the newspapers but the inner meaning of events.

White tells us very little about the effect of

the war on Stan Parker. What we need to know is conveyed through the symbolism surrounding the house at Glastonbury. In the fire before the Great War, White gives form to the great smash-up of the Victorian-Edwardian world in which objects served to consolidate character and class was permanent, inevitable, fixed by the will of God. Shortly after the fire, Stan packs with O'Dowd for the trenches. When he returns the class system is, of course, intact in Australia but its structure has been irrevocably altered. Before the war the class structure was blurred in its details by colonial social mobility and vulgarized in its upper reaches by imitation. After the war the top end of the structure, the aristocratic way of life that had been aspired to rather than achieved, has been lopped off. The rich butcher leaves Glastonbury uncompleted on hearing of his son's death. The dream of the colonial newly-rich of transforming themselves into imitation English gentlemen has been banished. The staircase opens onto the sky and the bricks crumble beneath it. That absence is accompanied by profound misgivings on White's part. It underlies the formal difficulties and occasional hysteria of the latter half of the novel. It undermines the secure

foundations of Stan Parker's world. The personal God who had once "reached down, supposedly, and lifted up" has been consigned with the rubble of Glastonbury to nostalgia (TM, 204). In Glastonbury itself "unreason" abounds; a swaggie has smeared the walls with his excrement (TM, 219). Stan finds that "whole rooms of his mind" have gone: there is no way back to the stuffed cupboards of youth or the rational top storey that held up the whole edifice (TM, 221). The world is less convincing than it was formerly: "In that peacetime he was still diffident of accepting anything as solid, factual, or what is called permanent" (TM, 217). Stan has grasped that reality is a construct, something shored up by social acceptances, and that henceforth, the inevitable tendency of the structures in whose terms we construe reality is towards collapse and fragmentation. Among those structures is the notion of "reality" on which the traditional realistic novel is premised. In breaking with the traditional novel and its preferred manner of picturing a world White turns to symbolism, a selfconscious style and the organization of his novels into painterly scenes. All these techniques are designed to prevent our looking through the novel to the "real" world. There is

quite enough in the invented world to occupy our attention.

We can, then, read The Tree of Man as a series of scenes, or synchronic moments that resist the diachronic movement of the text, much in the manner (and with similarly painterly overtones) in which we can read Women in Love.[41] Yet The Tree of Man has a level of narrative organization that subsumes these scenes, these moments of temporal "clotting." At the diachronic level The Tree of Man, like Richard Mahony, follows the curve of a single man's life from young manhood to death. In White's novel, however, the curvilinear form of the narrative, unsupported by Richardson's narrower notion of the real, is considerably more complex and problematical. In The Tree of Man, we find three distinct curves of narrative which give the appearance of being tucked one into the other like Chinese boxes.

The first of these levels is simply that of Stan's life from early manhood to death. It is a life of few events, a life which does not reveal itself to us through external action. The major "actions" which impinge upon Stan's life -- the Great War and the murder of

his son, Ray -- are not foregrounded; consequently, we are aware of their impact only as Stan experiences them inwardly. The flood, the fire and the drought are less actions than symbols. Their purpose in the narrative is neither to create the suspense of conventional plotting nor to disclose Stan's character by showing how he behaves. Rather they are means of breaking down the solidity of the external world, of negating the notion that there is a single, common-sense reality -- social and perceptual -- which manufactures and sustains character. The very paucity of events in Stan's life gives the novel's shape a symmetry lacking in Richard Mahony. Stan's life, like Mahony's, follows the pattern of fortune's wheel: he accumulates goods and standing in the community, then slowly loses them. Stan, however, experiences no drastic reversals. He is so little attached to the world and its opinion that he hardly notices the slipping away of his prosperity. Because his participation in history is so marginal there is no need to crowd the background of his life with socially representative types. The Tree of Man lacks the clutter, the incoherence, the narrative waywardness of Richardon's novel. The overwhelming impression of symmetry

in the novel rests on the simplicity of its primary level of narrative organization: the fortunes of Stan Parker.

The second narrative level of The Tree of Man is that which describes the curve of natural process. The four sections of the novel follow consecutively the seasons from spring through winter. The novel's coda completes the circle by pointing confidently to spring. Thus Stan's life is not negated but completed by his death. His life is at last fully contained within the process of organic growth and decay. This cyclical pattern confers meaning on what seemed, in the middle of things, a mere confusion. Stan dies in the very centre of his garden having discovered the intimacy of his participation in natural process. Consciousness is seen to be, after all his strugglings to understand, not only the source of puzzlement but also the source of delusion. Consciousness always asserted the separateness of the perceiving ego. Given this separateness, the conscious ego was obliged to "read" meaning into objects rather than enter into a loving bond with the things of the world. Hence, Stan's failure to teach his son, Ray, to respond with wonder to the little lizard: he himself cannot wholly escape the Cartesian ego that views

the world transitively (TM, 227). Dying, Stan Parker enters into the rapt intransitive apprehension of nature that is the mode in which the mad boy, Bub Quigley, acknowledges the world. By accepting that life is a business not of knowing but of unconscious struggling, Stan imposes a unity on the randomness and confusion of his life. He is at last fully integrated into nature along with the ants, and the cabbages, and the mountains. The slow curve of Stan's life as a social being is thus inserted into the more fundamental curve of his life within nature.

The Tree of Man possesses an organic unity that is absent in Richard Mahony. In place of Richardson's endless, unassimilable realistic details, White offers us a few interconnected symbols of natural growth and decay: the rose bush, the garden, the makeshift house. Richardson sees nature as landscape not as process. Mahony cannot enter into any union with the Australian landscape because he remains to the very end a discrete, perceiving ego who views the world transitively. Protected by his goggles and his outlandish outfit, he stalks through an increasingly barren, dusty world which, unredeemed by the imagination, he makes a very hell. Even the English landscape for

which he so longs in Australia is thoroughly conventionalized, a fact which in part excuses the lamentable clichés Richardson employs in describing the first sighting of the English coastline in The Way Home. Exposed to actual English rigours, Mahony soon paints the Australian climate in nostalgically warm colours. Mahony can be at home nowhere in the world because neither he nor Richardson can see how the mind can be joined to things. Mahony's dualistic habit of thinking drives him further and further inwards, prising apart inner and outer until the cleavage between the two is unbridgeable. His spiritualism widens this cleavage. Richardson herself endorses Mahony's dualism in her writing: hence her inability to dialectically connect inner and outer, materialism and spiritualism, realism and romanticism. As George Lichtheim summarizes Lukacs' position in History and Class Consciousness "materialism and spiritualism are the thesis and antithesis of a debate which has its origin in the failure to overcome the cleavage between subject and object."[42] The solution is to transcend the barren terms of the opposition if not by Lukacs' Marxian praxis then by White's romantic union of thought and reality: that is, by the imagination.

The third level of narrative organization in The Tree of Man is the hermeneutical. By this, I mean all Stan's efforts to decipher various puzzles: what is the meaning of the play Hamlet; what do the words of the Bible or the events of life or the symbols of nature disclose to us about the nature of God? Stan, then, is concerned to uncover hidden meanings in several texts: Hamlet, the Bible, the world. This narrative level has the form of a quest. Stan seeks the answer to a riddle, which answer the narrator withholds from him until the very end of the novel. The riddle is not the hermeneutical quest itself: that is, what meaning is concealed beneath the surfaces of texts? The riddle is the equally complicated problem: whether there is, in fact, any meaning hidden in words or things, whether that is, the world has depth. The question must be put in this particular form because of the curious manner in which the narrator goads the generally reluctant Stan to interpret events as though they concealed some latent truth. Stan is from the start an unwilling interpreter (TM, 6 - 7). Stan is as ready as the next man to take on trust a world of mere appearances which he can hew and shape to his own ends. The narrator, all the while assuring us of the simplicity and rightness of

Stan's world, persistently undermines the solid basis of that world. The flood forces Stan to ask for the first time whether "the solidity of things ... was... assured" (TM, 71). Moreover, the narrator slyly slips into Stan's flooded world an augury of his coming confrontation with hermeneutics: among the objects that float by his boat is "a Bible open at Ezekiel" (TM, 71). Stan is in the position of a man bullied by a cunning and smooth-tongued schoolmaster into deciphering the scrawls of the pub-loungers who, with whip and stick, "eras[e] and writ[e], in their private codes" in the dust (Tom, 101).

In his youth and strength there is little need for Stan to interpret. His actions, like those of Homer's heroes, are sufficient in themselves. His world is one of at-homeness between things and self. This feeling of being at home in the world allows a sense of intimate connection between words and things, actions and meanings. In Georg Lukacs' words he inhabits the epic world of an integrated civilization as distinct from the modern, broken world with its nostalgic epic, the novel:

> There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness' for the soul. The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic.[43]

For the young husband and land-clearer the pre-war colonial world is sufficiently complete; it is commensurate to his desires. His actions are not "about" anything. Their manifest meaning is their whole content. With increasing maturity Stan finds that the solidity and permanence he had assumed in the external world cannot be relied upon. The gap between inner and outer has appeared and the meanings of things are no longer obvious. In other words, Stan has fallen into the broken post-Edenic world where everything becomes text, and he must learn to "read." Nature becomes a set of signs which point to some immanence. Looking back on this period from his time of complete disillusion, Stan sees it as one in which "each leaf and scroll of bark was heavy with implication" (TM, 351). For then he was "bowed down by belief"; the weight of God's presence was heavy in the world (TM, 351).

God, however, is at best a substitute for a world in which man is fully at home, one which gives up its store of meaning without any struggle. There is no God in Stan's pre-interpretive Eden: its "silence was immense" (TM, 3). God makes His appearance only when Stan has fallen into the conviction that the world is a text whose meaning is always latent. Stan turns to God to fill his post-lapsarian legacy: the hermeneutic gap. Metaphysics, however, cannot get Stan back to Eden. Seeking evidence of the nature of the divine in the condition of the world Stan arrives not at one God but several. The pale, Christian God of his mother's pious hopes is shaken into nothingness by the gusty God of his father, the God of the prophets Who bullies man into acknowledging His inscrutability. Later an immanent deity contends with a purely transcendent. In the absence of any sure method of interpreting the evidence of the world, the guises of God proliferate. Stan becomes less and less at home in the world as his belief increases that there must be some sort of God, some meaning locked into the stony face of things. The narrator traces the progressive break-up of Stan Parker's world through the flood, the fire and the war.

One by one, the struts of Stan's world are knocked away. His sure sense of self, language, meaning as a set of givens cannot survive the uprooting of all fixity, all stability, all permanence from the world that once radiated from him. The death of his son, Ray, collapses his confidence in his ability to "hew[ ] a shape and order out of ... chaos" (TM, 275). Amy's adultery removes all the struts that have become necessary to hold up his world. The last strut of all is God. Stan spits at the absent deity (TM, 333).

Stan Parker now comes into "the desolation of reality."[44] His world is one of objects that disclose no latent meaning. There is nothing behind words, signs, things. He enters the milk bar of Con the Greek where permanence is the ersatz marble of counter tops, where mysticism is the chant of "the mathematics of success" (TM, 336). Here youths and girls communicate in "secret languages or ... signs"; but the key to these ciphers is all too obvious, even to Stan (TM, 339). The various fruits of Con's milk bar suggest not natural fruition but lewdness. Even the ice-cream dispensers -- "the snakes of spoons and the little cups" -- partake in the general

concupiscence (TM, 339). Stan by this stage of his life can "see an object as it [is], and interpret a gesture as it [is] meant" (TM, 405). He refuses to interpret. He attends the play Hamlet the meaning of which his mother had expected him to uncover. Watching the play he is merely "bombarded by words" that make too little sense (TM, 416 - 7). He loses consciousness with the consoling thought that "nothing ... is so complicated as this play" (TM, 417). Stan now occupies an empty space where words, signs, gestures proliferate but point to nothing, to no hidden meaning capable of holding them up. It is an emptiness that waits to be filled.

Stan Parker's hermeneutical quest ends triumphantly with his mystical experience in the garden. The narrator, having for so long teased Stan with the promise of meaning beneath the surfaces of things (and us with the promise of meaning beneath the surface of the text), at last delivers the longed-for revelation. Stan, we are told, discovers that "One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums" (TM, 497). That is to say, all phenomena share a single substance; division is mere illusion. The world is not merely charged with God, it is God.

Stan unlocks the secret principle of monism that solves his hermeneutical problem, and ours, by the logic-chopping trick of conflating the hidden with the manifest. The objects in the garden are "incredible" not because they disclose any hidden meaning, not because there is anything behind them, but because they _are_ (_TM_, 497). The leaf in which Stan ecstatically "believe[s]" is not a symbol (_TM_, 496). It does not point beyond itself to a God Who, as a transcendent referent, underwrites the symbolic meaning of all earthly things or, as an immanence, discloses His hidden presence in things. The leaf _is_ God. The novel, then, has come full circle from a world sufficient in itself as matter to a world sufficient in itself as idea.

This moment in the garden -- like St. Augustine's, although with theological conclusions of which the saint would hardly have approved -- is the "_moment_ of interpretation" that gives sense to Stan's life considered as a whole narrative.[45] It is the moment that gives sense to the novel. It holds together the interlocking levels of narrative organization. This is the point that holds up the novel's structure and allows us to discover a coherence in all the novel's particulars, even such seeming narrative

delinquencies as the story of the man from Denilquin.

It is difficult not to find the interpretive moment that concludes Stan Parker's quest too neat, too satisfying. We recall that the narrator has already warned us that "revelations are never conveyed with brilliance as revealed" (TM, 404). Yet the novel achieves closure by appealing to a revelation that we must take on trust or not at all. And if we choose the latter, must we not reject the novel also? It is difficult not to conclude that Stan Parker's mystical experience, like Mahony's spiritualism, expresses an authorial structure of desire: Stan stumbles fortuitously on a variety of mysticism that solves not only his problem of belief but also the novel's problem of achieving formal unity. Dying, Stan Parker simply dissolves all divisions whatever into a monism. Such an extreme means of achieving unity suggests the force of the centrifugal pressures that White seeks to contain. The problem, as Leonie Kramer has suggested, is to discover why the novel is so passionately concerned with wholeness and oneness.[46] We may discover a means of solving this problem if we regard The Tree of Man as a novel

rather than a philosophical tract. Put simply, White's philosophical standpoint cannot be equated with that of Stan Parker, even if we could extract from Stan's various positions a single viewpoint. White's central concern is not with the ontological categories "wholeness" and "oneness" but with the aesthetic categories coherence and unity.

In White's early novels we found a desire to achieve formal unity which was persistently thwarted by a variety of disordering authorial uncertainties and ambivalences. There were ruptures in the formal organization of the texts. These "ruptures" were accounted for in terms of a number of different critical approaches. There was the purely formal problem. White's desire to achieve organically unified form was checked by his selfconscious determination to be modern and experimental. The preoccupation with language was marred by an excessive self-consciousness. Another way of putting this problem is to say that White was caught between two dominant literary father figures: Lawrence and Joyce. From the former, White took his moral concern and his desire to be open to life. From the latter, he took an emphasis on style

as an end in itself. There was the problem of the cultural context. White's desire to achieve in his novels a balance between man's inner life and his social being was prejudiced by the increasing fragmentation of the bourgeois world between the wars. Hence, the nostalgic preference for organic connection to a substantial, "actual" world. Hence, also the increasing alienation of the central characters in the three early novels. There was the sexual problem. A distaste for heterosexual love-making worked against the conscious desire in the first two novels to follow Lawrence in pointing to a passionate love relations between a man and a woman as the essentially healthy and life-affirming way out of the deadness of contemporary civilization. This unconscious distaste for sexuality frequently shifts into a Manichaean disgust with life itself. There is an element of recoil from matter that creeps into White's descriptions of love-making and is felt as a tendency towards dualistic metaphysics that wanders uneasily through the early novels. In these various splittings of the organic unity of the early novels we find unconscious, or simply unworked-out, elements disrupting the conscious attempts of the author to achieve

full command of his material.

We may arrive, then, at a tentative explanation of the sense of relief we find in the early parts of The Tree of Man, the sense of having stumbled at last on a rooted way of life. The return to Australia after the war was a turning away from the complexities of the modern world, a return to organic simplicities: to dogs and goats and vegetables and flowers. It was a deliberate turning away from "the Gothic shell of Europe" to a simple, unbroken world where meaning seemed intact, where words and things, inner and outer, were not flying apart. There is, however, a selfconsciousness in the depiction of these simplicities -- White offers us not stylelessness but Biblical parody -- that indicates his awareness that Castle Hill was not Australia but a tiny and threatened enclave within Australia. Hence, the hysteria in White's descriptions of the encroachment of suburbia on the Parkers' farm. Hence, also the decisive effect on the tone, unity, and movement of the novel of the entry of history, the narrative of radical disruptions, into the timeless world of Durilgai. The entry of history into Stan Parker's world signals the entry into the novel of

the same disruptive forces that were found in the earlier novels.

The Great War breaks up once and for all the organic unity of Edwardian colonial life. Thereafter, even the pastoral outcrops of the old order are doomed. The war allows Ray Parker to make his first decisive break with the Edenic youth that will continue to torment him. By attacking the old German farmhand, Fritz, Ray takes on the rootlessness and brokenness of modern life. Henceforth, he will only recover his sense of being at one with the physical world through the barely disguised homosexuality of his wrestlings with the Greek boy, Con, and with the stable-hand, Curly. Above all, the war dispatches the nostalgic dream of establishing in the New World the English model of genteel country life. Returning to Glastonbury after the war, Stan finds what Hero Pavloussi, returning to her Greek island, will find in The Vivisector: excrement in the sanctum of the old order.

The mystical experience that closes the novel holds together a disintegrating experience. It reveals, ideologically and aesthetically, the force of White's

desire for unity. It also reveals the refractory nature of the divisions it seeks to heal. In narrative terms, Stan's mysticism provides the comic ending otherwise unavailable. It has the function of the emissary who gallops up with the king's pardon just as the dire hangman is tightening the knot on the hero of the melodrama's neck. Yet White has not simply shoved "ideas" into his novel at the last moment to prevent its structure from falling apart as Richardson does with spiritualism in Richard Mahony.

Stan Parker's mystical experience is to be approached in terms of the quest by which Stan seeks it out. For Stan, this quest is hermeneutical; for White it is conducted in terms of style and narrative organization. The problem for author and character, put simply, is to learn to read the common Australian world. It is appropriate that Stan's life should be crowned and rounded off by such a richness of the imagination. Stan discovers the something more than reality as it is, that which Mahony never quite grasps. And he discovers it in the most common objects of his everyday life -- in his apparently impoverished Australian world. He learns to "believe" in

the ants, and we recall that long before Amy had found Mr. Gage, the artist, staring fixedly at an ant in the road. The substance of Stan Parker's "mystical experience" is simply that the world of things _is_. What separates White's depiction of the "self-sufficient character of the external world" from, say, Robbe-Grillet's (for whom also the world is neither significant nor absurd, but simply _is_) is merely White's affirmative tone.[47] Yet that tone is all. It is the necessary addition to the ordinary world of a "fiction." The fiction is necessary because it enables White to write out of what he considers a poverty. Such fictions are bound neither to transcendentalism nor to materialism. White's fictions truly marry life as it is with the imagination's "might be."

IV

Voss

At that time it had not yet become clear to me that the present age was not one in which it was possible to write an epic.

Iris Murdoch,
Under the Hat (1954).

In Voss the soul of man "goes out to seek adventure."[1] Unlike Stan Parker, however, Voss does not fall from a state of original at-homeness in the world into the modern condition of estrangement, that condition which leads man to seek in adventure the full roundedness of life which is no longer given as a birthright. For Voss the inner and outer worlds, far from being closed within a totality of meaning, are essentially opposed. They have not merely drifted apart as the result of some Fall located within history, they are eternally opposed principles. Initially, Voss sees in this dualism the means by which man might liberate himself from his "human" element, that is, the part of man which is rooted in the world of appearances, of things that change. From the start Voss is resolutely committed to the world created within the mind of man by will, the world of pure idea. In the course of his adventures, however, he comes slowly to desire some sort of reconciliation of the divisions he sets up. Voss, then, is an epic of the broken modern world in which the absence of intrinsic meaning in actions and things is taken for granted as a starting point to a search for restored wholeness.

In The Tree of Man White traced the emergence of Australia into this brokenness. In order to show Australia coming into the modern world White created a mythic time outside history in which colonial life could be equated with the truly epic world of Homer and the Bible. White's own desire for the vanished unified world he summons up is made clear not only by its tell-tale placement in the rural, pre-war milieu to which his fiction turns again and again for nourishment but also by his determination to shape the novel according to the pattern of organic process. White sets out to offer the organic unity of the novel's form as a consolation for the disjointedness of modern life. Modern life, however, insinuates its disruptions even into Durilgai. Even Stan Parker's simplified world proves too hectic, too fragmented, to be rounded into a seamless, organic whole.

In Voss we can still feel the disruptive energies of authorial ambivalences about sexuality, class and fictional form working against a manifestly conscious desire to impose design on all the novel's parts. Yet the fissurings of organic form are no longer "unconscious"

as they are in White's early novels. The novel's structure is built on an acceptance rather than an avoidance of brokenness. This is not to suggest that Voss is shapeless. It is White's most carefully, and cunningly, structured novel. Its structure is designed to test the various ideas, mystical, organicist or aesthetic, in whose terms men seek to read a design into the world. As the expedition moves into the heart of the country we become aware of a general bias towards shapelessness in the country itself, one which undermines the traditional models inside which we are accustomed to construe reality and in whose terms traditional novels are constructed. The fixity of the class structure, the stability and predictability of character, temporal linearity, crudely causal historicity, transparency of style and coherence of narrative organization -- all are deliberately broken up by White as the countries of the mind wrestle with the actual country. In Voss White foregrounds the recalcitrance of life against fictional orderings. Yet the novel achieves a symmetry of parts to whole unequalled in his previous fiction.

In Voss we no longer feel, as we do in the

early novels, that White is rooting through all the disorderings of modern life in search of forms of symmetry. In Happy Valley and The Living and The Dead White constantly made unconvincing gestures towards sexual, political or interpersonal commitment which disclosed the stumbling young writer's hope that in some enriched form of actual living he might find a source of unifying shape for his fiction. At the same time, even in the early novels there was a tendency towards a preoccupation with form for its own sake. In The Living and The Dead there was a contradiction between White's determination to be formally experimental and an essentially moralistic impulse to advocate in the novel a more intense mode of living than that available in contemporary reality. In his third novel, White deftly sidestepped rather than resolved this contradiction by moving the novel's controlling point-of-view inside the consciousness of a woman who progressively retreats from actual life. Formally, The Aunt's Story is a brilliantly sustained flirtation with shapelessness that avoids flagrant indiscretion by subserving its stylistic dislocations to Theodora Goodman's madness. The brokenness of style

in the novel is a rhetoric that serves to express Theodora's intensely private version of reality. In The Tree of Man White again skirts the problem of his conflicting desires for formal unity and moral seriousness by turning away altogether from modern life and its ruptures. In Stan Parker's simple world, White sought a means of organically unifying his novel. The failure of this attempt was less important than the success of a countervailing tendency in the novel towards stylistic selfconsciousness. The novel moved signally away from referentiality towards self-reflexity. In Voss White strengthens this line in his fiction, Voss is supremely conscious of itself as artifice.

In Voss White deliberately and without regret projects the "myth" that reality is an "unbearable chaos" which is, as Frank Lentricchia observes, "the enabling condition of the modern sensibility."[2] That is to say, the novel's preoccupation with its own formal means rests upon an authorial assumption that the world of social relations is chaotic and that it is to art itself that we must turn for ordered and serene version of things. In this sense White builds on his achievement in The Tree

of Man, although in that novel he tended to connect such orderings with Stan Parker's mysticism rather than with the aesthetic impulse itself. In Voss the serenity that form confers is to be sought not in actual life, nor in natural process, nor in mystical illumination but in the formal disposition of the novel itself.

White has not excluded traditional elements from Voss. The novel clearly owes a debt to the nineteenth-century realist manner of presenting surfaces. Voss is visually rich, profusely detailed, and bustling with convincing, solid-seeming characters. White represents colonial bourgeois life so accurately and so effortlessly that we never pause to doubt this busy and extroverted world that is held before our eyes. In the Sydney sections of the novel we feel at times that we are in the world of the Victorian novel. Mr. Bonner is as solidly present to us as a Dickensian businessman. Rubicund, rotund, platitudinous -- he is made manifest in his utterly vulgar, yet somehow affecting, externality. And he has the Dickensian touch of the single mannerism -- his habit of jingling the coins in his pockets -- that fixes in our minds the essence of his characterization.

Laura Trevelyan, in her uncertain beauty, her moral integrity,her critical intelligence, her sensitivity, and her capacity for suffering, has much in common with George Eliot's heroines. Above all, we are provided with the familiar, judgemental narrator of the Victorian novel, although the narrator of Voss, lacking his Victorian counterpart's confidence in values shared with his audience, is inclined to bully rather than jolly us through the narrative.

The traditional elements in Voss are not limited to similarities of style and characterization to the Victorian novel. Despite White's stated aversion to the form, Voss has at least a family resemblance to the historical novel. After all, White recreates an historical event with the aid of the diaries and journals of the explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt. It is true that White scorns the facts wherever they prejudice his fictional purposes. The essence of the historical novel, however, lies not in its "antiquarian" interest in history but in its discovery in the past of those typical trends which, while characterizing the historical peculiarities of an age, produce the present. This is precisely what

White has done, and, as with Walter Scott, White's conservatism has allowed him decisive insights into the historical process by which the bourgeoisie established its unheroic rule. The philistinism and materialism which so distress White in post-war Australia are traced in Voss to the levelling effects of laissez-faire capitalism. The possibilities for self-enrichment afforded by the colony transform Edmund Bonner from a hungry immigrant lad into a too-solid citizen whose daughter marries into the local gentry and whose niece presides over an artistic salon. In Voss the characters, taken together as a social whole, point to what Australia will become. At the same time White has taken pains to derive their individuality from the mid-Victorian world to which they belong. He has even taken pain with the costumery. Voss himself is the novel's "world-historical" figure, although he is more at the centre of the action than such figures generally are in the historical novel (this centrality of Voss gives the novel much of its epic quality).[3] The debt of Voss to the historical novel can only be brushed aside if one confuses, as White himself has done, the historical novel with the "documentary" novel.[4]

That there are traditional elements in Voss cannot be disputed, but their presence serves White's devious and parodic purposes. In the Sydney sections of the novel White gives us a version of realism as in the Rhine Towers piece he gives us a version of pastoral. The closer we look at the realism of Voss the more we become aware of the reservations on which it is built. The world of the Sydney bourgeoisie is realistic in the sense that it gives a detailed presentation of appearances not in the more fundamental sense of realism which involves giving form to a dynamic interaction between social whole and individual. The Bonners and the Pringles possess no significant inner lives (with the exception of Willie Pringle who is kept in the background). They are social beings in the limited sense that their quirks and posturings are the signs of their class positions. Willie Pringle's difference, the inner resources which allow him to become an artist, are signalled by his inability "to interpret the symbols of his class, and thus solve the mystery of himself."[5] The "selves" of his family and their circle are simply the conventions of class, race, religion from which they never stray. We

do not find in them, as we find in the characters of Dickens, Thackery and George Eliot, the abundant individuality which releases itself through particularizing mannerism. Mr. Bonner's habit of jingling the coins in his pocket tells us that he is new-rich and vulgar, and that, it seems is all we need to know about him. The world of the Bonners and the Pringles is not the world of realism at all. Nor does White intend it to be. It is a narrative straw man which White promptly knocks down and proceeds to trounce with his wickedly ironic style.

Why does White put himself to the trouble of setting up such a straw man? The answer to this in part is that the method allows him to employ a variety of voices, tones and styles in the novel. More particularly, White deliberately sets out to expose the hollowness of the traditional notion of character. White invokes what the Guyanese novelist, Wilson Harris, has called "the novel of persuasion" in order that he might explode it from within.[6] White gives us in the Bonners and the Pringles what look like traditional, realistic characters: substantial, credible, with a fixed position in the

class structure, predictable in behaviour and attitudes. He "persuades" us of their reality by a careful selection of details: dress, dialogue, mannerism, possessions. Yet these characters are empty. The extent of their humanity is the extent of the conventions which govern all their thoughts and actions. Mr. Bonner is the dead husk of the traditional notion of character, and he is allowed into the novel only as parody. He is like a character in a Victorian novel who has been shipped to the antipodes where he has "done nicely"; but in the process of shipping he has lost the expansive individuality we expect of characters in realistic novels. White has deliberately sucked the content out of character as a form appropriate to the Victorian novel and to Victorian confidences. The Bonners' world is not meant to disclose any inner meaning. It is the world of mere appearances frozen by bourgeois complacency into the illusion of permanence. And hollowed by authorial fiat.

Formally, Voss gives the appearance of being two radically different kinds of novels placed uneasily side by side. The first deals realistically with the rise of a bourgeois family. The Bonners, having put

behind them their lowly origins, are cheerfully new-rich. We follow their further rise, through the marriage of their daughter Belle, into the colonial version of the landed gentry. Their niece, Laura Trevelyan, knocks the family a rung or two back down the social ladder by adopting an illegitimate child and by accepting a position as a school-teacher. However, by virtue of her role as midwife to the colony's tiny cultural élite, she promises a rise more glorious, if less tangible, than her cousin's. If there is nothing in the novel of the inevitable curve of fortune we expect in the Familienroman, it is because there is no question in this milieu that the star of the bourgeoisie is on the ascendant. This "novel" deals with a social world which it pictures as aggressively normal and external. Its favourite style is comedy of manners; its favourite technique is dialogue; its favourite narrative stance is an intrusive contempt for its characters.

The second "novel" deals allegorically with Voss' expedition into the heart of the country. The members of the expedition are meant to be seen not only

as characters but also as types. As a totality they make up a single allegorical figure: Man as he journeys not through the physical world but into the self. In this "novel" the conventions of class are parodied and inverted. The characters cannot assert their identity by what they own or what they think, if what they think is merely what is expected of them. They are obliged to confront one another with their essential selves, their inwardness. Where this is lacking they simply dissolve. In this "novel" the favourite style is a self-consciously "lyrical" writing; the favourite technique is the intercalation into the narrative of set pieces of visual symbolism; the narrator's favourite stance is that of an impassive wisdom signalled by the gnomic sayings he drops into the narrative. To gauge the difference between these two "novels" I shall examine two representative passages. In the first passage the narrator describes the Bonners' house in Sydney, in the second passage he describes a sunrise during the wet season in the interior of Australia.

> The comforts, both material and spiritual, so conveniently confused in comfortable minds, inspired the merchant's residence. Of solid stone, this had stood unshaken hitherto. As a house it was not so much

magnificent as eminently suitable, and sometimes, by pure chance, even appeared imaginative, in spite of the plethora of formal, shiny shrubs, the laurels, for instance, and the camellias that Uncle had planted in the beginning. The science of horticulture had failed to exorcize the spirit of the place. The wands and fronds of native things intruded still, paperbarks and various gums, of mysterious hot scents, and attentive silences: shadowy trees that, paradoxically. enticed the eyes away from an excess of substance. Moreover, the accents of poetry were constantly creeping in through the throats of doves, and sometimes young ladies might be seen, sampling strawberries from the netted beds, or engaged in needlework in a little latticed summerhouse, or playing croquet with the military, but later, in the afternoon, when the hoops made long shadows on the crisp grass (V, 151 - 2).

About the same hour, Voss went to the mouth of the cave. If he was shivering, in spite of the grey blanket in which he had prudently wrapped himself, it was not through diffidence, but because each morning is, like the creative act, the first. So he cracked his fingerjoints, and waited. The rain was withdrawn temporarily into the great shapelessness, but a tingling of moisture suggested the presence of an earth that might absorb further punishment. First, an animal somewhere in the darkness was forced to part with its life. Then the grey was let loose to creep on subtle pads, from branch to branch, over rocks, slithering in native coils upon the surface of the waters. A protoplast of mist was slowly born, and moored unwillingly by invisible wires. There it was, gently tugging.

> The creator sighed, and there arose a contented little breeze, even from the mouth of the cave. Now, liquid light was allowed to pour from great receptacles. The infinitely pure, white light might have remained the masterpiece of creation, if fire had not suddenly broken out. For the sun was rising, in spite of immersion. It was challenging water, and the light of dawn, which is water of another kind. In the struggle that followed, the hissing and dowsing, the sun was spinning, swimming, sinking, drowned, its livid face a globe of water, for the sun had been brought down again, and there was, it appeared, but a single element. (V, 277).

In the first passage the narrator's contempt for the world he describes is all too obvious. The narrator forces his judgements on us. We find his presence too strident, too much at the forefront. It is as though White does not trust us to arrive at the correct attitude towards the Bonners' world. Hence, rather than let the material speak for itself, he mediates it jealously through his censorious narrator. In the first sentence we are told that "comfortable minds" confuse material and spiritual comforts. The sole function of the parenthesis in the sentence is to allow the narrator to consign the Bonners, along with all those guilty of the cosy materialism of the colonial bourgeoisie,

to the lowest circle of White's Hell: the circle of the spiritually slothful. The insistent irony in the passage is designed to hector the reader into accepting an underlying distinction between the spiritually torpid and the spiritually adventurous. The adverb, "conveniently," suggests a school-masterly sarcasm intended to bully us into accepting what is after all a contestable judgement. Why should a house not be designed with comfort in mind? The narrator evidently hopes to persuade us to his anti-luxurious viewpoint with his snide tone. The "so" is a gratuitously snide intensifier of "conveniently." The specification of Mr. Bonner's position in the world ("the merchant" has the exact ring of "tax-gatherer" in the Bible) drives home a point already well made. The narrator will not stop jabbing us in the chest to make his point. Even "residence," with its neat parody of an objectionable social usage reminds us of Edmund Bonner's mixture of self-satisfaction, false discretion and his place in the social scale just below those secure enough honestly to own a mansion. All this lobbying by the narrator merely detracts from the essential gracefulness of the sentence. If we remove everything placed between commas

the sentence makes its point with elegance and wit. The verb, "inspired," with its suggestion of poetic afflatus is masterly. At once, we grasp the vantage point from which the narrator's thunder bolts are being hurled. The muses who inspire the Bonners' world are not the nine of poetry but the pasteboard saints of the fallen modern world. The echo of a saccharine, middle-class piety ("all the comforts of home") is set delicately against the echo of a vanished order in which Apollo's muses inspired far other worlds than these.

The rhetoric of the passage is governed by an underlying distinction between the bourgeois complacency described and some vague, poetic intensity of life which is alluded to but not stated. This distinction allows the narrator continually to measure the Bonners' world against a richer, but unspecified, mode of living. Invariably this measuring works to the prejudice of the Bonners. Allowing that the house has been built of "solid stone," the narrator immediately hints of some threat to its solidity: "had stood unshaken hitherto." What is in store: earthquake, bulldozers, apocalypse? We are not told, but we gather that for all its appearance

of permanence the house of Edmund Bonner is built on sand. The narrator turns his attention to the too-easy task of deflating the Bonners' social pretensions by the parodic use of a social register: "as a house it was not so much magnificent as eminently suitable." The closing phrase precisely captures Edmund Bonner's taste for language that bolsters his self-importance by eschewing content. Magnificence is beyond Bonner's scope. The best he can manage is a house that draws attention to his wealth without being ostentatious. Bonner is conscious of his own middling status: he is flattered by the condescension of the colonial aristocracy and not above the bourgeois pleasures of gardening. If these qualities make him more human, they nevertheless fail to blunt the narrator's disdain. Behind the narrator's contempt for Bonner's circumspection we may detect White's contempt as a grazier-scion for the commercial classes. Although White has publically repudiated the politics of his class in favour of the Australian Labour Party, his disdain for the new-rich is more aristocratic than socialistic. White's genteel but inverted snobbery approves of ladies who masquerade as cooks but never bourgeois who masquerade as ladies.[7] We may also detect behind the narrator's

jibes at Edmund Bonner White's recognition that in the bourgeois fear of magnificence and display lies a fundamental challenge to aestheticism. Like Katherine Mansfield in puritan, provincial, turn-of-the-century New Zealand, White longs in the colonial cultural wilderness for unashamed splendour.[8] He longs for excess of imagination over prudent materialism.

With the concession that the house at times "appeared imaginative," the narrator seems grudgingly to allow the Bonners some small merit. The concession is hedged about, however, with endless qualifications: "by pure chance," "even," "in spite of." Moreover, this imaginative quality is not the result of Bonner's gardening but of "the spirit of the place" which resists his efforts. This "spirit" is deliberately kept vague. We sense what it is by what it negates. It is opposed to whatever is rational, planned, orderly, contained. As a natural force it is opposed to "the science of horticulture." As a supernatural force it is difficult to "exorcize." The verb, "exorcize," recalls the opening spiritualistic metaphor in which the muses were driven out by the bourgeois "comforts." The spirit of the

place is evidently more resilient than the poets' nine. It continues to preside over the imagination, waiting only for someone sufficiently poetic to inspire. The native trees that intrude on the formal garden are the avatars of a life of the imagination that has no place in the Bonners' world. They are at once sensuous and poetic. They exude "hot scents" while encouraging "attentive silences." They are mysterious, "shadowy," somehow insubstantial. They "entice" the mind away from all that is rational and substantial towards the mysterious and poetic. Even their names are hidden from us. They are "things," or "various gums." Thus we glimpse not only the indifference of the colonial bourgeoisie to what they displace but also the more shadowy, more poetic, relations between words and things that obtain in the world the Bonners exclude.

The narrator, then, objects to the substantiality of the Bonners' world, to its limited, formal, self-containment. Against their world he sets a suggested rather than a stated way of life which is mysterious, sensuous, poetic, spiritualized. Just as he seems about to draw in more precise detail the richer world he proffers,

he shifts tone radically. The "accents of poetry" that creep into the garden bring with them not the "spirit of the place but an altogether debased type of poetry. This poetry speaks not through the authentic warblings of native fauna but through the throats of imported birds. The line itself thrills with an ironical Tennysonian accent as White stresses the r. sounds and the long vowels. With the doves come young ladies engaged in appropriate mid-Victorian recreations: needlework or "sampling strawberries from the netted beds." The poetry that is to be heard in Edmund Bonner's garden is a pale, safe variety whose sweets, contained by "nets," are soft-centred. It is the kind of poetry, conventional and limited, that Ralph Angus recalls with slight nostalgia when discussing with Turner the altogether dangerous poetry of Frank Le Mesurier. The poetry of the Bonners' garden poses no threat to the world that Angus, the Bonners and even the floatsam Turner "know": that is, the substantial world of conventional acceptance. Le Mesurier's poems are designed purposely "to blow the world up" (V, 251).

In the second passage the obtrusive narrator

is not to be found. The material is allowed to speak for itself, and does so with great vividness. The writing achieves its effects through the use of myth, Biblical allusion, and through imagery. The experience of reading the piece is altogether different from that of reading the first piece. We read the first piece chronologically, guided through linear time by a narrative voice eager to tell us who are the villains and what they are up to. The second piece reveals layers of meaning one within the other. Our preference for linear time is constantly thwarted as we are moved backwards or sideways in time. We are not hurried along on the surface of the narrative but are forced inward. The language itself arrests us, holds our attention as a performance rather than as a medium.

On the literal level White describes a sunset as seen by Voss on a rainy day. By focussing what we see through Voss' perception, White suggests the scope of the man's egotism more successfully than by narrative comment. Voss regards his mind as the origin of all motion in the world. The sunrise is <u>his</u> "creative act," and when he sighs a breeze is sent out into the expectant

world. Behind Voss' arrogance lies the romantic recognition that the mind is the active partner in the marriage into which it enters with the outside world. The classical expression of the theme is found in Wordsworth's preface to The Excursion: "For the discerning intellect of Man/When wedded to this goodly universe/In love and holy passion, shall find these/A simple produce of the common day."[9] At Rhine Towers under the growing spell of love, Voss finds his own benevolent mood spilling onto and redeeming the world he seeks to repudiate: "For a moment everything was distinct. In the foreground some dead trees, restored to life by the absence of hate, were glowing with flesh of rosy light" (V, 175). Long before entering the deserts, then, Voss has grudgingly accepted the phenomenological truism that the mind is part of what it sees. In the rising sun scene Voss tests the limits of this truism. He makes the scene dependent on his mind not only for its life, colour and form but also for its very existence. Voss creates the world anew and the great scene is utterly dependent on what he puts into it. The "masterpiece" of his creative powers is the addition to the dull scene of an "infi-

nitely pure, white light." This light spills not from the rising sun but from Voss' desire. Such light is to be found nowhere in nature which splits whiteness into the colours of multiplicity. The light of the mind seeks to make the world over in the image approved by Voss. This moment of absolute creative self-assertion gives way as the sun struggles upward and Voss' nerve apparently fails. Given Voss' failure to hold up the world created out of his imagination, we are left with the actual, fallen world. We move downwards as the passage closes through the hierarchy of the elements until the world is composed entirely of water.

Through the piece White threads a complex pattern of allusions. Most obvious are the allusions to Genesis, 1, i-iv. Before the creation, the author of Genesis tells us, "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Voss in his role as prospective creator confronts "a great shapelessness," and watches the light of dawn move "upon the surface of the waters." Voss' "infinitely pure, white light" recalls the light which issued from the original divine fiat. Voss, then, is usurping the

creative role of deity. This becomes something of a habit with him. Later he comes to see the sunsets as celebrations of his own "divine munificence" (V, 330). Presumably, it is his own hand that "daub[s] flat masses of red and yellow ochre" on the skyline at dusk (V, 330). In the passage that describes the sunrise White uses Biblical allusions to enact the way in which Voss egotistically views the world. By doing so he does not have to rely, as he does in the Bonners' garden piece, on explicit narrative comment to distance his viewpoint from those of his characters.

There are, however, troubling complexities in White's use of allusion in this passage. Voss, unlike the God of Genesis whom he emulates, botches the world he makes. More troublingly, the Genesis account is not the only myth of origins alluded to in the passage. The allusions to Genesis are complicated by allusions to Plato's Timaeus. There are Platonic suggestions in the cave itself. Voss is like the man in Plato's myth of the cave who stumbles out of the dark cave in which the mass of humanity is confined into the light of the real. Voss is even referred to as "the superior being in his

cave" (V, 277). The obvious Platonic allusion is to Timaeus. In Plato's version of beginnings the demiurge fashions a rational cosmos out of the original chaos of the elements. Plato is more conscious of the problems of evil and limitation than is the author of Genesis. He attempts to account for these problems by his notion that the demiurge allowed inferior ministers to copy the perfect original he himself had made. This account seems to explain the shortcomings in Voss' version of creation. Voss is simply an inaeduate copier. The Platonic myth seems more closely to agree with Voss' version of the creation than does the Genesis myth. For Plato the world was created not ex nihilo as in Genesis but out of a primordial chaos. This would seem to explain White's use of the word "shapelessness." There is, moreover, a Platonic ring to the word "receptacles." In Timaeus Plato suggests that the demiurge used a containing vessel (ὑποδοχή = cup or receptacle) as the nurse or matrix of becoming.[10] However, we cannot merely substitute Plato's version of beginnings for that of Genesis. Although Plato allows for an element of necessity and imperfection in creation he nowhere

suggests that the created world was formed by malice. There are such suggestions in White's account, and their function in the narrative is deeply disturbing.

For Voss to create is to punish. He senses the earth concealed in the great shapelessness as a presence "that might absorb further punishment." The primal act in Voss' version of the origin of things is not the giving but the taking of life. He hears somewhere in the darkness an animal being murdered. The use of the passive mood ("was forced to part with its life") points to a malign purpose working behind the creative process. Thus the greyness that displaces the darkness is "let loose" upon the as-yet-formless waters. This greyness, being a mixture of light and darkness, chaos and form, ought to be the stage through which the world passes into its finished state. Yet Voss sees it as some malignant thing that "creep[s]" and "slither[s]." The imagery suggests a view of the creative process as the loosing of brute violences upon the world. The world described in the passage never emerges, as does the world in Genesis, into a clear distinction between light and darkness. Its final state is a mixture of

light and darkness in which the former is the dominant component. Suffering and incompletion are the conditions of this world as it is. To be a creature is to be controlled by unseen forces ("moored unwillingly by invisible wires").

White, then, does not merely allude to the myth of origins in Genesis in order to place us inside Voss' skull in a dramatic and economical fashion. He gives us two separate versions of beginnings, then cunningly undermines both. At this point the allusions are no longer an economical means of revealing Voss' consciousness. The attention of the writing is overly concentrated on the allusions themselves. Had White wished merely to deflate Voss' pretensions to divinity, a simpler handling of the allusions would have been far more effective. The passage refuses to make in a straightforward manner its rhetorical point: Voss imitates Jehovah and falls short. White seems less concerned to reveal character than to indulge in a "stylistic caper" to pile allusion upon allusion in order to overwhelm us with the sheer literariness of the writing, and to force upon us a self-conscious manner of reading.[11] The chief problem in

coming to terms with the passage is the way in which the writing is so overtly concerned with how it shall be read. The writing resists our attempts to make sense, to order, to give coherence, to extract meanings. Yet we are tantalized with the prospect of meaning somewhere below the slippery surface of the narrative. We are tempted, teased, puzzled, sent off on wild goose chases -- but we are never quite illuminated. As soon as we feel we have grasped the meaning of the piece a new narrative voice creeps in or some new allusion is insinuated into the writing confounding what has gone before. We feel that we are being set up. We feel that in striving for a specious density of style and allusiveness, White has lost track of his properly novelistic purposes: the making of a recognizable human world. The writing seems to be about nothing but itself.

If we are to grasp what White is doing with his manner of writing we must work through, not around, the tribulations to which he subjects us as readers. Our difficulties in reading are not the result of uncertainty of purpose on White's part. The obscurity and difficulty of the writing are deliberate. White

deliberately slows down our passage through the narrative. We are forced to experience the language in a painstaking and provisional manner. We are forced to participate in the process by which the language generates meaning. Thus we are made not merely readers but also writers of the novel. Like Voss watching the sunrise, and, of course, like White himself, we build up meanings out of literary texts. The passage not only invites interpretation, it is itself an exercize in hermeneutics in which Voss, with obscure and subversive purpose, interprets Plato and Genesis. Moreover, by its sly inversions of orthodox readings of the Bible and by its intimations of hidden meanings, the writing invites subversive reading. The writing colludes with Voss' subversive habits of thought. In order to address these problems we must backtrack, looking at the passage in terms of a third level of allusion which is intimated rather than stated and which partly relies for our recognition on our noticing the clues towards such a reading scattered through the novel as a whole. That is to say, we must risk the hermeneutical circle: our understanding of the passage is premised upon an understanding of the novel as a whole while our understanding of the novel as a whole is premised upon

our understanding of the part.

Watching the sun rise Voss is first aware of a "liquid light" which precedes the fiery emergence of the sun itself. There is an implied distinction between Voss' "infinitely pure, white light" and the ordinary light of day, a distinction which is not at all present in Genesis. The God of Genesis makes light as part of nature. Voss seeks a pure, undivided light which is outside nature, not something created along with grass and trees and animals but an eternal principle which is superior to and opposed to creaturely things. Voss' light originates in his own mind as desire, and it shows the characteristics of its origins. It is "infinitely pure," undivided, and uncontaminated by the mixture of light and darkness which is found in nature. This light has much in common with the Gnostic world of light, the undivided world of purely spiritual being. Voss, in fact, consistently sees himself in Gnostic terms: as one struggling out of multiplicity into unity, out of matter into spirit.[12] As the spiritual man he considers himself an "alien" in a world in which matter and spirit are fatally mixed to the advantage of the former. In the

division of the expedition into "oil" and "water," the earthy men and the elect, Voss is preeminently the elected one: he who knows. Like the Gnostics Voss lays claim to a "knowledge that comes with sovereignty over every province of illusion" (Frank Le Mesurier hears Voss make this claim telepathically shortly before the leader blasphemously intones his own divinity: "'I am I am I am ...'") (V, 246). Like the Gnostics Voss is a God-opposer. He pits himself against the God of conventional Christianity. Also like the Gnostics he has a taste for subversive readings of Christian narratives, as Palfreyman finds to his discomfiture. In Voss' view, the hero is not the Christian underdog but the rebel against divine omnipotence and conventional religiosity. As the expedition moves into the desert even Voss' followers are persuaded by his delusion to see him as a Gnostic version of the Godhead. Thus they cease to "question why the supreme power [by which they understand Voss] should be divided in two" (V, 264). At the height of his delusion Voss hears Laura Trevelyan telling him that "'Man is God decapitated" (V, 358). This may mean either that man is the bleeding Godhead somehow fallen into matter or that he is the torso of divinity with the essential, intellec-

tual component missing. Either version implies a radical dualism and may be read satisfactorily in Gnostic terms. Although Voss and Laura have "drift[ed] together at this point, they discover by sharing their "common flesh" not healing and wholeness but "hell" (V, 358). At the very moment of their consummation the antagonism between fallen matter and "pure" white light becomes most intense (V, 359). Near the end of his life Voss finds himself "launching into the fathoms of light" (in the description of the sunrise light is also likened to water, perhaps because both possess a simple unity) (V, 372). The Gnostic bias of Voss' thought encourages a subversive reading of the novel.

What does it mean to read subversively? For the Gnostics interpretation meant penetrating the surfaces of texts to discover the esoteric meanings beneath, meanings which orthodox Christians considered blasphemous. The Gnostics perfected an allegorical method of Biblical exegesis which neatly inverted orthodox readings. They violently misread the Old Testament in order to cast Jehovah in the role of villain. They deliberately engaged in interpretative warfare against

both Rabbinical and Patristic authority. Their heroes were the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Cain, and Esau: all those who opposed the maker of this world. Voss, like the Gnostics, opposes "that God in whose benevolence and power [Laura Trevelyan] had received most earnest instruction" (V, 5). His God is discovered within the self, and his presence is signalled by "a sense of almost intolerable beauty" which visits him at times (V, 11). Like Shelley's "deep truth," another version of the Gnostic hidden God, Voss' God is imageless ("never did such experience crystallize in objective visions" (V, 11)).[13] Voss' readings are subversive in that they always set themselves in oppositon to those of authority and orthodoxy. He asserts his truth and defends his self by kicking all father figures, human or divine, in the face. He asserts his creative powers by slyly attacking the God of Genesis. He misreads Genesis so that its God becomes a malicious incompetent. For Voss, as for the Gnostics, "to interpret is to revise is to defend against influence."[14]

Voss' attitude towards language and interpretation has much in common with that of the Gnostics.

Voss tells Mr. Bonner that he has been "compelled into this country" not because he cannot bring to mind a less strong verb or the more usual English preposition, but because the expression, for all its clumsiness, precisely conveys his meaning (V, 16). To the merchant and the sheep-obsessed graziers Voss' words are "demoniac" because they refuse to confine themselves to the expression of acceptable opinions (V, 59). Voss consistently exploits the capacity of words, particularly misconstrued foreign words, to disclose double meanings. He even "acquire[s] a wife by simple misuse of a tense" (V, 256). Like the Gnostics, he is far more interested in the figurative than in the literal meanings of language, and he enjoys veiling his metaphysical allusions in apparent misconstructions and awkwardnesses. He holds the true meanings are withheld from those who take words at face value. He considers that only an élite of spiritual seers is capable of discerning the hidden meanings which he himself infallibly recognizes. With this happy few he prefers to communicate by telepathy, thus transcending altogether mere words.

In Voss the writing displays many of the

characteristics we find in Voss' own attitude towards the use of language. We are constantly being teased, tempted, or bludgeoned by the promise of revelations about to be made. The writing constantly intimates that there are meanings deeper than the obvious. How, then, do we unlock the meanings cunningly locked into the narrative? We may try Voss' key. If we look at the rainy sunrise passage with Voss' Gnostic bias in mind the Biblical allusions are seen to disclose unexpected double meanings. The writing, by its sly inversions of orthodox readings of the Bible and by its intimations of hidden meanings, invites subversive interpretation.

Voss clearly fails in his attempt to emulate the Creator, and we assume that this is inevitable and right given the presumption of the attempt. Yet in his own view -- one which the passage seems to endorse -- Voss botches his creation of the world no more than the original Creator. The world for Voss is at best "half-created," the result of an incompetent and incomplete attempt to knock into shape the primal chaos. Watching the daily formation of the world out of chaos and darkness, Voss sees himself as collaborator with,

as parodist of, or as challenger of, the Creator of Genesis. Which role he ultimately prefers it is difficult to tell because we remain uncertain as to how seriously he takes his pretensions to divinity. Certainly, he has his moments of self-doubt. For a moment at least he seems determined to usurp the creative prerogative of deity. Yet as a world painfully struggles out of the void it becomes clear that Voss is not the only "divinity" whose creative efforts are being called into question.

At the mouth of his cave the would-be creator senses concealed within the general shapelessness of night the presence of the earth. The earth has not yet emerged from chaos. Unlike the God of Genesis, Voss is a somewhat nervous creator. He stands shivering, wrapped in a blanket whose greyness partakes in the prevailing indefiniteness, the reluctance of things to come into form. Voss cracks his finger-joints as he waits for evidence of his creative powers to appear. In Genesis the Creator speaks and each act of creation is thereby complete. The world thus brought into being is "good." Voss is a more tentative creator. He has difficulty beginning, and what he makes is incomplete.

Voss cannot quite pull his world out of darkness and the void. Its highest stage is that of a mixture of light and darkness: greyness. The God of Genesis illuminates a world and fills it with the teeming life of species. Voss cannot create particular things with their appropriate forms. The best he can manage is a "protoplast of mist": a vagueness promising more vagueness. The passage closes with an image of the world sinking back into the torpor from which Voss has failed to rescue it. The creator of this aborted world is not, like the God of Genesis, well pleased with his work. He is, however, "soothed" by "the natural sequence of events," presumably because its bias towards disorder confirms his prejudice about the nature of material reality.

Voss stages in his own clownish fashion, then, a version of Genesis. Thereby Patrick White stages a parodic version of artistic creation. Using words he pulls a world out of nothing. But, as with Voss' summoned world, it is not created ex nihilo. It is a world made up out of the words that have made previous such worlds, and by its distortions and deformities it suggests both the inescapability and the resentment of influence.

White keeps apart the two main directions in Voss -- towards traditional realism on the one hand and towards a modernist species of allegory on the other hand -- because he wishes to examine their adequacy to a central problem for the novel: what conventions or forms will serve in the business of making fictions out of Australia; how shall a new continent be "read"? For the Australia which he confronts in Voss is not yet a world. It is a circle whose circumference is ungauged, on the edge of which huddles a tiny outpost of Englishmen clinging to the conventions of "home." It is a blankness waiting to be written on. To read this place in terms of the models provided by the traditional novel, particularly by the Victorian novel with which the action of Voss is contemporaneous, is to imitate the imitators: the huddling Englishmen. The colonial social world is one in which the fixity, hierarchy and air of permanence of the Victorian class structure can appear only as travesties. White is prepared in Voss to question this structure in terms of the "realities" it excludes and cannot comprehend (and what conceivable position could the Australian Aboriginals occupy in such a structure?).

It is indicative of White's radicalness that the blacks in Voss are not, like the gypsies in Victorian romances, simply placed outside the circle of prejudice that defines the limits of reality (Heathcliff's gypsy origins in Wuthering Heights contribute to his demonic qualities). They too read the world in a consistent, structured and conventional manner. They compete on equal terms with the Bonners, the Pringles and Voss to define where the real begins and ends. The confidence of the Victorian middle class that the real world is substantial, particular and proprietary does not obtain in White's New World. In this world "reality" must be fought over rather than taken for granted. Hence White introduces the familiar, Victorian forms and confidences only to debunk them. Yet, while he has scooped out the stuffing of the Bonners' world, he has not done so merely to endorse Voss' equally confident and equally narrow construal of the real.

It was necessary for White to make as opposed as possible the worlds of Voss and Mr. Bonner. These worlds are competing interpretations of Australia: the Scylla and Charybdis between which the novel steers its

deft way. Each is a totality, something complete within itself, that claims to "contain" the continent (the suggestive pun is Richard Poirier's with American novelists in mind).[15] The merchant "contains" the country as a totality of material facts and things, a whole that can be mapped, carved up and turned to profit. Voss "contains" the continent as a metaphysical totality, a pure idea which his will imposes on reality. "'The map? ... I will first make it,'" he tells Mr. Bonner (V, 19). Both views rest on self-serving notions of perception. Each sees only what suits his epistemological purpose: Voss sees only the architecture of matter; the merchant sees only its flesh. The problem is: whose eye is sufficiently encompassing to see the continent as a whole without excluding whatever fails to fit neatly into his system?

White has created in Voss a figure who chooses the most extreme isolation of mind open to him: radical exile from the community and rejection of its materialistic vision of the land. Unlike ordinary Australians Voss refuses to settle for no more than a small square of the country's unprepossessing face. While merchants like Bonner set up stone monuments to an unattainable

permanence on the fertile periphery of the country, Voss is determined to pit the vastness and ugliness of his own nature (Laura describes him thus in the course of their queer courtship [V, 83]) against the identical qualities he expects to find in the central deserts. While squatters like Sanderson and even small-holders like Judd attempt to enclose themselves within their acres, Voss is determined to contain within the compass of his skull the entire resistant continent. First he must cleanse "the doors of perception."[16]

Voss "cleanses" his perception by adopting the Blakean policy of closing the eye which passively receives sense data and opening the living eye of the imagination. His object is to create not to see a world. Voss is very much a "visionary" as defined by Northrop Frye with Blake in mind: "a visionary creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this one become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism."[17] This, at least, is how Voss sees himself. Unfortunately, Voss' mind plays Lockean tricks on him, storing up the images of the German castles of boyhood as abstract generaliza-

tions which he foists upon the Australian landscape. Voss has an unBlakean disdain for particulars. He is also, in a sense in which Blake according to Frye was not, a mystic. Voss' mysticism is of a particularly crazed and blasphemous stamp. As such it is exactly suited to White's purposes.

Voss' heresies are essential to his -- and White's -- scheme. If the land is to be grasped as something more than a geographical presence, a first and ultimately daring leap of the imagination must be made. The man who would make such a leap must reject not only the materialism of the community which reduces landscape to economic units but also its conventional religiosity which is complicit with this reductive way of seeing. Mr. Bonner's God is as limited, as conventional, and as boring as his garden. He never tempts the merchant to visualize the world with the eye of the imagination. Voss' God, on the other hand, is utterly beyond restriction: He is his own self unbound. Voss intends to usurp the very throne of divinity. "Atheismus," as he sententiously informs Laura Trevelyan, "is self-murder" (V, 85). For Voss will deify the self. Such

divinity is to be attained by unseating the pale God of Christianity and installing the human will on the throne.

In this endeavour the empty land will prove both collaborator and reward. Its very ugliness, its absence of the sensuous, will encourage the spirit to attempt the infinite. Only when the spirit (in Voss' terms "spirit" may be equated with either genius or will) has become as limitless as the Godhead it has toppled will it prove equal to the metaphysical possibilities of the continent. The scope of Voss' daring is thus commensurate to his task: his making out of the bare bones of the country . . . a version of Australia that is agreeable to visionary and artist rather than farmer and merchant. If Voss is to supplant the curtailed interpretation of Australia propaganded by squatter and merchant he must first dispatch their comfortable deity. Orthodox, materialistic Christianity serves the purposes of those who read in the scrutable face of their God approval of their proprietary and utilitarian conception of the world. The world to them is not a text to be read in search of metaphysical disclosures but a topography to be mapped, divided, and farmed. Nature to them is not a

book between whose lines are intercalated moral lessons and anogogues but a blank slate which, once inscribed with the cartographer's coordinates, offers commercial opportunities. Such a megalomania as Voss' does not hesitate to wrestle with divinity. It is tempting to connect Voss with the favourite romantic figure of the God-opposer: Prometheus interpreted with a Gnostic gloss as by Byron or Shelley. Voss, however, is locked in struggle not with a still potent Jehovah but with the deity of the colonial bourgeoisie who is merely a wind-bag full of platitudes. This unworthy opponent must be done away with not because He retains the power to terrify mens' hearts, but because He supports the structure of conventions that holds together a thoroughly materialistic society. This God throws an unendurable limit around the imagination.

Voss, like Stan Parker, though from a different angle, assaults the barriers to the free play of the imagination that go with the English system of classes as established in the colony. Stan makes off from the blazing house of gentility with the essence of poetry leaving the absurd, imitative edifice to collapse.

Voss' notions of the scope of the imagination are rooted in the German romanticism which teaches him to disdain burgher conventions and burgher materialism. He makes off with the only redeemable part of the bourgeois world through which he stalks his contemptuous way en route for the interior and his own fires: Laura Trevelyan. Laura is the passive, female germinative principle fertilized by his male, creative will: she brings forth the colony's infant culture. Stan Parker was at a loss what he should do with the poetry he grasped momentarily in the burning Glastonbury. The embodiment of that poetry, Madeleine, was too inconsequential to be fertilized by his richer but uncrystallized imagination. Voss not only clears a space for the imagination in Australia, he also settles it. Frank Le Mesurier and Laura Trevelyan with her tiny "salon" set about the business of cultivating the garden of vision Voss marks out in the wilderness of the colonial philistia. Laura's protégé, Willie Pringle, discusses with her as the novel closes how the artist might overcome the "inherent mediocrity" of Australians as a people (V, 441). Frank Le Mesurier, poet and dandy, abandons words altogether

in favour of the great silence of death. Yet he leaves behind poems that are the true because visionary record of the expedition. His poetic, like the self-conscious aesthetic of Willie Pringle, is a means of creating beauty out of the common Australian world. His solution anticipates by its terminology the structural principles that Lowry arrived at by building his pier at Dollarton: the poem "was always changing, as the world of appearances which had given him his poem. Yet, its structure was unchanged" (V, 138).

Voss is not an artist himself. He is, however, "genius": the inspired visionary of romantic theory whose faithfulness to the ideas of transcendence and unity offers the only possible mode of escape from the alienation of mere living in a fallen bourgeois world. Voss sets out on his expedition confident that man can occupy the space vacated by the Christian deity, recapture his lost essence, and thus render his life meaningful. He fails, but he leaves behind him those who will assert vision in the face of the Australian materialism, transcendence and beauty in the face of the swinish populace (these oppositions, of course, like the neo-

Platonic one between the "male" creative principle and the "female" receptive one reflect authorial prejudices). Voss also leaves behind him a "myth" which in time will engender a mode of writing other than the debased modes -- documentary, journalism, diaries, letters -- with which the novel is littered. The novel images its scepticism about "writing" by the various pieces of paper that are ripped, torn, and scattered as the expedition proceeds into the deserts.

Voss, then, offers us not so much an "interpretation" of Australia as a denial of the possibility of ever arriving at any final interpretation of Australia, of the world, or of literary texts. The expedition is thwarted in its desire to inscribe its legend on the country by the discovery everywhere of writing: of messages, languages, inscriptions that resist decipherment. A definitive interpretation of the cave drawings or the Aboriginal dialects or the meaning of the comet is as unlikely as the key to the Revelation of St. John on which Palfreyman's uncle is working. The new world is discovered as a palimpsest of meanings already written in the minds of its discoverers. Homer may serve to

chock a table leg in Brendan Boyle's shack, but his writing surrounds the expedition. Voss is the epic of the broken modern world in which there can be no homecoming, no nostos.

By placing a madman at the centre of his epic White asserts the difficulty for the modern writer in holding up literary meanings. The problem is that where the metaphysical spheres have been broken literary meanings can never be discovered as part of some whole. The symbolic power of words collapses where there is no Word to underwrite their reference. In such a world only a madman can make the connections that were once taken for granted. As George Lukacs has observed in words that apply to both White and Lowry: "from madness come enigmatic yet decipherable messages of a transcendental power, otherwise condemned to silence."[18] At the basis of Voss' endeavour lies an attempt to restore the symbolic function of language by asserting a connection between the world perceived by the senses and the world of ideas. Of course, in Voss' reading, the world as a moralized text does not point to an Augustinian God who holds up meanings and values and underwrites the messages

of Christianity. Voss, with his Gnostic bias, views the world as a corrupted text and condemns its maker, the God of orthodox Christianity. In the vacated throne of this unworthy deity he places his own self unshackled from its human component. This turns out to be the imagination. In the absence of an actual God, Voss offers himself as the transcending ideal which makes possible a literary symbolism. And thus makes Australia possible for art.

V

Under the Volcano

"I'm very fond of uncivilized places. I like primitive peoples. I've just come back from Guadaloupe. Do you like primitive people?

Cyril Connolly,
The Rock Pool.

The arts abhor any loppings off of meaning or emptyings out, any lessening of the totality of connotation, any loss of recession and thickness through.

David Jones,
Preface to The Anathemata.

> The times are late and get later, not by decades but by years and months. This tempo of change ... presents peculiar and phenomenal problems to the making of works, and almost insuperable difficulties to the making of certain kinds of works; as when, for one reason or another, the making of those works has been spread over a number of years. The reason is not far to seek. The artist deals wholly in signs. His signs must be valid, that is valid for him and, normally, for the culture that has made him. But there is a time factor affecting these signs. If a requisite now-ness is not present, the sign, valid in itself, is apt to suffer a kind of invalidation.[1]

David Jones here describes his difficulties between the years 1946 and 1951 in writing The Anathemata. When he speaks of a "tempo of change" that effects the cultural signs with which the artist must work, he means not merely change but also decay. Signs decay in the modern culture because the artist and the society in which he lives no longer share "an enclosed and common background, where the terms of reference [are] common to all."[2] More particularly, in a society which no longer accepts a sacramental order as the basis of its signifying operations, it is inevitable that many of the traditional resonances of signs will be lost. For the writer, the signs that he must make valid in his work are words. In In Parenthesis

(1937) and The Anathemata (1951) David Jones struggles to restore to the words of the tribe their function as signs in terms of a mythus which, while no longer a cultural given, remains buried within the words themselves. He strives "to lift up valid signs."

The problem to which David Jones refers in his preface to The Anathemata is one that is familiar to us from T.S. Eliot's treatment of it in Four Quartets (1943). Like David Jones, Eliot is disturbed by the loss of resonance in words that no longer function as culturally valid signs in a fully sacramental world view. As in David Jones' "makings," we find in Four Quartets a pervasive sense of the deterioration in contemporary culture of the linguistic tools with which the maker must work: "Words strain,/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,/Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,/Will not stay still."[3]

Eliot's stated task in Four Quartets is to "purify the dialect of the tribe." By this he means more than the poet's obligation to use words as precise instruments of thought, as calculated parts of syntactic wholes,

and for exactly registered effects of colour and sound. Thus employed, poetic language resists the tendency of the everyday usage of words, particularly by politicians, the media, and by advertisers, to debase the linguistic currency, and such resistance, of course, is a large part of Eliot's endeavour. But Eliot also desires to restore to the word its lost value as religious sign. This means resisting at the level of language the whole bias of contemporary civilization towards secular thought. Locked into words are the traces of their belonging to a world that was not secular, that did not place at the centre of its mythus the modern gods of utility, commerce, and technology. The poetic effort of both David Jones and T.S. Eliot is directed at recovering the signifying power that words possessed when they were the agreed upon instruments of meaning in a community rooted in a particular place and with an acceptance of the sacred. In this line of linguistic endeavour lies Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano. Lowry pays the same kind of attention to language at the level of the word, the phrase, and the sentence that we find in the works of Jones and Eliot. More importantly, Lowry strives to restore to the word

its former function as a sacramental sign.

> "But d.t.'s are only the beginning, the music round the portal of the Qliphoth, the overture, conducted by the God of Flies ... Why do people see rats? These are the sort of questions that ought to concern the world, Jacques. Consider the word remorse. Remord. Mordeo, mordere. La Mordida! Agenbite too ... And why rongueur? Why all this biting, all these rodents, in the etymology? (UV, 218 - 19).

Geoffrey Firmin's defense of his drinking against the reasonable objections of his friend, Jacques Laruelle, rests on a view of the relation between language and reality that is radically at odds with the thinking of a secular and materialistic age. Geoffrey does not address his friend's objections at all. The issue of whether or not his drinking makes him a burden to his friends is not one that the consul chooses to bother himself about unduly. The singular importance of a drunkard's life is not to be measured in terms of conventional social and familial expectations, nor can it be expressed in the hackneyed phrases that reflect prevailing norms. Jacques Laruelle expects the consul to show remorse; the consul asks him to consider the word "remorse." He does not ask what the

word means or enquire what bearing it may have on his case. He merely launches into what seems like a drunkard's wayward exercise in etymology. The Latin root of remorse is, of course, mordere (to bite), whence remordere (to bite again), the English form remorse (regretful remembrance), the stranger verbal form remord (to visit with affliction), and the Spanish La Mordida (the bribe or "bite"). But the French rongueur (rodent or gnawing animal) derives from rodere (L. to gnaw) and the Old English agenbite has no common derivation whatever. Its origin is literary: Lowry has borrowed it from Stephen Dedalus and given it to the consul.[4]

Why, then, all this biting, all these rats, clustered around the various forms of the word remorse? And why do drunkards see rats? These are the questions, according to the consul, with which the world ought to concern itself. The consul's speech is not merely a drunkard's digression, mixing undergraduate arcana and garbled schoolboy Latin with Mexican slang. The consul is trying to suggest to Laruelle that there is a reality behind the words which the ordinary sense, the standard definitions of the words, do not allow us to apprehend.

Delirium tremens induce hallucinations of rats because rats signal a stage in a mystery to which drunkards and cabalists have access. They point to a reality hidden from those who regard language merely as a means of describing the world received through the senses. The words are connected not by their common etymology but by the nameless experience around which they all hover.

There is a Joycean touch in all this, especially in the choice of "agenbite," which makes us think that Lowry is being playful rather than metaphysical: that the words point to no reality, either transcendental or mundane, but to themselves. We recall that in the Portrait Stephen Dedalus felt that in the "vague sacrificial and sacramental acts" of the mass his will went "forth to encounter reality" only to lose his faith in the sacrament that connected the signs of the liturgy to the "reality" they stood for.[5] At the end of the Portrait he goes forth to encounter "the reality of experience" and finds, in Ulysses, that the connection between the verbal orderings of experience by the artist and experience itself are problematical.[6] Stephen Dedalus encounters not "reality" but language, and Joyce's

attitude to the connection religious belief had made possible between sacramental sign and "reality" is ironic rather than, as in David Jones or T.S. Eliot, nostalgic. There are passages scattered through Under the Volcano which suggests a very Joycean sense of language not as a system of signs pointing to some transcendent referent but as a self-enclosed world making connections internally by puns.

> Mr. Quincey's words knocked on his consciousness -- or someone actually was knocking on a door -- fell away, then knocked again, louder. Old De Quincey; the knocking on the gate in Macbeth. Knock knock: who's there? Cat. Cat who? Catastrophe. Catastrophe who? Catastrophysicist. What, is it you, my little popocat? Just wait an eternity till Jacques and I have finished murdering sleep! Katabasis to cat abysses. Cathartes atratus ... Of course, he should have known it, these were the final moments of the retiring of the human heart, and of the final entrance of the fiendish, the night insulated -- just as the real De Quincey (that mere drug friend, he thought opening his eyes -- he found he was looking straight over towards the tequila bottle) imagined the murder of Duncan and the others insulated, self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion (UV, 136).

The Joycean influence behind such passages is evident.

The words are connected less by sense than by sound. The language serves less to describe a world, subjective or objective, than to draw attention to itself as a performance. The connection between "cat" and "katabasis" is one established by the word-juggler's sleight-of-hand, and one that asserts the power of the novelist to invent rather than represent, to make out of words a world that is its own place. The passage is self-consciously literary. The character Quincey recalls to the consul the writer De Quincey and the question arises as to who is the more "real": the writer who hallucinated the imaginings of a previous writer or the character in yet another writer's imagining who bears the literary name and may be an hallucination in the consul's mind. "Even almost bad poetry," concludes the consul when mescal-sodden, "is better than life" (UV, 287).

Yet for all the Joycean playfulness and self-consciousness in the use of language in Volcano, Lowry's attitude towards words is essentially religious. In Ultramarine Lowry sought to restore to a few tribal words the connection they had once had to things. In Volcano he seeks some means by which the Word, not just

those words which retain a link to the organic community, might regain its full power as a sacramental sign. The consul as drunkard, visionary, cabalistic manipulator of words, stands in a special relation to Truth. He seeks through puns and through magic to recover the Word, the source of all meaning and that which guarantees the signifying power of ordinary words. Without the Word to underwrite their essential poverty, words slip and fail. They lack grace. In the absence of any hierarchical relation to Truth, meanings multiply endlessly, pointing always to the promise of revelation but revealing only enigma. The secular use of words has turned language in upon itself. But locked into words is the memory of their long cohabitation with the metaphysical. In the consul's drunken interior monologues we find that the connection of words with the metaphysical spheres is constantly being implied by puns that probe the realities behind language, that imply mysterious links between the most unlikely phenomena: between cats and cat abysses.

Under the Volcano, then, shares with the "makings" of T.S. Eliot and David Jones a concern with the sign in a religious sense. Each of these writers

shows in his works how the loss of a transcendent referent -- that is, the God to Whom all signifiers had pointed when the metaphysical spheres were still intact -- has impoverished the language, and each tries to revivify the sign by appealing nostalgically to a religious system of belief. In Lowry's case the religious belief appealed to is not orthodox, Christian, or even part of the European heritage. Lowry employs an esoteric and magical branch of Jewish mysticism, the cabala, which centres its thought and practices on obscure interpretations of the Talmud and on numerological manipulations of the letters in the words of the Talmud. The advantage of this system is twofold: it allows Lowry to raise the problem of interpretation of cultural texts and artifacts; it suggests a deity whose presence is problematical and whose purposes obscure and possibly malevolent. Lowry needed a God for the formal and linguistic purposes of his writing. But his Methodist upbringing left him with a distaste for the orthodox God of Christianity. The God of Under the Volcano is opposition, an ineradicable bloody-mindedness in the scheme of things which the consul cannot dismiss or avoid. By making the consul a black

magician of sorts Lowry inverts the deity of Jones and Eliot. But even the God of d.t.'s, of hallucinations of rats, the god of abysses, is a God Who makes possible connections. He is the God of Whom the Consul's black visions, dark conceits, and puns are the outward signs.

Under the Volcano belongs in the context of the modernist effort to rescue for literary use the dialect of the English tribe which had been infected by a general collapse of cultural signs and practices first acknowledged by the romantics. The sense of a collapse of values, signs, and practices became acute immediately after the First World War and deepened in the interwar period. This is the context out of which Eliot wrote the passage in "East Coker" which castigates not only his own failings to make the language precise (surely overstated) but also the shabbiness of a culture which has so debased the stock of words out which meaning must be generated that the affective and linguistic life of the tribe has become a "general mess":

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -- Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l' entre deux guerres --

> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way
> in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling.[7]

In Parenthesis was written between 1927 and 1937. Four Quartets was written between 1936 and the early years of the Second World War. Under the Volcano was written between 1936 and 1946. Together with Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920) and Eliot's The Waste Land (1925) these works cover the period in English cultural life between the conclusion of the First World War and the lapse into the Second. These works are written out of what Wyndham Lewis calls "the social decay of the insanitary trough between the two great wars,"[8] and the amount of time expended on their making indicates the difficulties the makers faced in wresting satisfactory forms out of the general decay. The problem was "to lift

up valid signs" out of words that were subject to increasing abuse not only from the purveyers of a mass culture, the journalists and politicians, but also from the jejune half-truths, the outright lies, and the propaganda that emanated from a thoroughly corrupted middle class, from the fashionable left as well as the complacent centre.[9]

Behind this sense of a decay in the tribal dialect lay a reactionary nostalgia for an ordered, hierarchical society in which the artist addressed a small élite audience who shared a common stock of signs and values, a common frame of reference. Lowry, of course, did not share this reactionary myth, nor did he desire to address a vanished élite. He did, however, view nostalgically the pre-industrial cultural order in which, supposedly, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a common frame of reference united those who belonged to an organic community of unalienated workers and makers rooted in physical actuality. Moreover, he shared the belief of David Jones, Pound, and Eliot that in pre-commercial and technological communities the artist was not obliged to struggle against the whole tenor and bias of his age to make his signs valid. In Under the Volcano Lowry

addresses a linguistic problem that was centrally of concern to each of these makers and which lies behind their formulation in the inter-war period of a number of related strategies which we group under the rubric Modernism.

Mauberley, In Parenthesis, Four Quartets, Under the Volcano -- all of these works deal not only with the problem of language in a declining culture but also with the most direct threat to the survival of the culture and its language: that is, with modern warfare and specifically with the increasingly mechanical nature of its means of destruction. The "tempo of change" in the means of death after 1914, particularly the tactic of the aerial bombardment of cities, was seen as a direct threat to cultural continuity and to civilized life in any form. These works deal with modern warfare at the point at which it most crucially touches the civilizing acceptances that enable artistic makings: they register the impact of technology on language. In so doing, they resolve a conflict between two warring tendencies in between-the-wars writing which was felt at the time to pose an irreconcilable contradiction: that between aestheticist and propagandistic art. To the committed leftists of the Thirties, the attention to form and the

mandarin style of the modernists of the Twenties seemed an arid aestheticism. To those who felt that the artist had an obligation to change a world that was clearly rotten, aestheticism with its concern to transcend the taste of a particular historical phase by its attention to form, could only distract the artist from his social responsibilities. Lowry himself was not immune to this Thirties distaste for aestheticism, this unruly desire to engage directly with historical process. In "June 30th, 1934!" and in the early short story version of Volcano, both written in the mid Thirties, we find a tendency towards political parable and didacticism. We also find evidence of Lowry's belief that he ought to strip his prose style of any mandarinism, any air of aestheticism.[10.]

In the Preface to The Anathemata David Jones notes that there is a sense in which all art is propaganda: the sense in which "any real formal expression propagands the reality which caused those forms and their content to be."[11] What separates modernists like Eliot, Pound, David Jones, and Lowry from the ruck of Thirties leftist-oriented, modern writers is the acknowledgement in the

former that it is by his critical attention to form that the "maker" engages with and transcends the particular historical stresses of his time. The distinction between aestheticism and didacticism or historicism is an arid one if it implies that the artist must choose between the pursuit of beauty in purely formal terms and the pursuit of reality in its untidyness and nowness. The problem is to find some appropriate formal means of registering the now. For the modernists, language itself is registered in the work as part of the general problematic of modernity not as an unselfconscious means by which that problematic can be expressed. In the between-the-wars context this means acknowledging the extent of the threat posed by military technology to the culture and to its language.

David Jones in In Parenthesis traces the process by which the relentless mechanization of warfare during the 1914 - 18 War, particularly after the battle of the Somme in 1916, killed the organic folk character of battle and the ancient, primitive, creative sense that language had possessed when Roland rode to war. In that venerable and, after 1916, vanished order in which the life of the

folk was rooted in their immediate habitation, even the language of battle had a liturgical quality. The language then was rooted in the actual and in the sacramental. T.S. Eliot in "Little Gidding" is concerned in the face of the bombing of London to summon up that which alone asserts the continuity of a particular people inhabiting a particular place. He gives us a "symbol perfected in death."[12] The symbol of the Rose for which English men once fought has been kept alive by the cultural memory of their deaths until not their particular politics but only their participation in the history of the English people is left. When all the dross of time and faction has been refined in the memory of the succeeding generations, a perfected symbol remains impervious to time. This sacramentalized sign is the memory of the race which the poet holds up against the threat at this particular moment to the survival of the English as a people persisting through time in this place, this England. Malcolm Lowry in Under the Volcano enacts symbolically the collapse of the Spanish republic and the rush of a burnt-out European civilization into the Second World War. At the centre of Lowry's novel is a concern with the effects of the

bombing of civilian populations on the values and practices of a Europe that is already spiritually bankrupt. Like David Jones and T.S. Eliot, Lowry seeks to measure the damage done to the cultural signs with which the maker must work by the tactics and technology of modern warfare.

In his 1938 novel, The Professor, Rex Warner describes the aerial bombardment of cities as "the violation of a whole people, the tearing of a civilization out of the fabric of history."[13] In a number of literary works written around 1939 we find precisely this sense of the threat posed to civilization by the waves of bombers that the dictatorships were readying to unleash against the democracies. The mood is less one of terror than of resignation. It is the mood of those who know some great horror to be imminent and unavoidable and who have exactly measured the extent of that horror. We find this mood in George Orwell's Coming Up For Air (1939) where bombers take practice runs over an already exhausted civilization. These are British bombers and they signal not merely the threat from the Nazis but also the corruption of English values and of official language by a wholly technological attitude to waging war. When

a British bomber accidentally bombs British civilians the authorities are concerned about the lack of damage inflicted.[14] Where the object of warfare is merely to inflict the maximum of damage, attention to the claims of the individual is obsolete. In Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts (1941) planes flying low over a village pageant signal the coming break in the continuity of English culture which the villagers enact. In Graham Greene's The Lawless Roads (1938) the narrator, returning from a Mexico he has loathed to an England for which he has longed, discovers amid the preparations for the bombing of London and the evacuation of citizens that "Mexico is a state of mind."[15] In other words, the barbarism and violence, the open assaults upon civilized values, that made up the Mexican scene have become part of European history. The barbarism that Western man had once confidently consigned to savage places, to otherness, is now discovered within the consciousness of the civilized narrator. In Conradian fashion otherness is found within the heart of the civilized.

For Orwell, Greene, Woolf, and the Patrick White of The Living and The Dead, the lurching of Europe into

the Second World War made inevitable the break-up once and for all of the values, practices, and acceptances that had made "civilization" possible. The whole tottering edifice of European culture was falling apart and with it was disappearing a world in which the individual had some intrinsic value, in which there was some sense of continuity between past and present, and in which cultural experience could be recorded as history other than as apocalypse. As Auden puts it in "Danse Macabre":

> It's farewell to the drawing-room's mannerly cry,
> The professor's logical whereto and why,
> The frock-coated diplomat's polished aplomb,
> Now matters are settled with gas and with bomb.[16]

In Under the Volcano, imagery of birds, clouds, and aeroplanes represents the terrified apprehension in the minds of Europeans during the late Thirties of the sudden scattering of warplanes out of the sky as the expected opening act of a new war.[17] Again and again the Mexican skies erupt with images of the Blitzkrieg: clouds come "surging up the sky"; black ugly birds come "swarming out of the southeast"; a plane "with a shattering and fearful tumult ... slam[s] down upon" the

characters (UV, 10, 13, 190). As the consul moves closer and closer to his death and the novel to its symbolic enactment of the outbreak of the war, the sky becomes darkened and crowded with more and more threatening images of destruction. Lowry himself clearly recognized the element of cliché in his enactment of the approach of war by piling up images of the Blitzkrieg. He even parodies the convention when the consul sees an observation plane as an attacking fighter plane and the language takes on the tone of a boys' adventure story:

> oh Jesus, yes, here, here out of nowhere, she came whizzing, straight at the balcony, at the consul, looking for him perhaps, zooming... Aaaaaaaah! Berumph (UV, 208).

Behind the preoccupation with aerial bombardment that we find in Volcano and in other novels and poems of the late Thirties lies the raw memory of the fascist bombing of civilian populations in Spain. At Guernica the fascists impressed upon the fractured pieces of human bodies the simple and terrible message that henceforth the logic of war would be the logic of available technology. At Guernica the restraints upon brutality that the European powers, with whatever lapses, had observed since

the religious wars of the seventeenth century were blown out of history along with the limbs and minds of the bombed civilians. Through the newsreel reportage of the Spanish war, footage of which is relayed to Mexican cinemas in Volcano, an image of the likely opening acts of the coming war was insinuated into the consciousness of Europeans. A more compelling image of the war was offered by Picasso's Guernica.

Picasso's painting is more compelling because it registers not merely the terror of the event as it occurs in the present but also the violence it wrecks upon the past. For Picasso, the bombing of the Spanish town signalled the breaking into shards of the already fragile structure of European high culture. In the painting the broken pieces of the classical inheritance, the received tradition, lie smashed because a military act has denied the possibility of a stable and orderly world to which the definitive forms of a classical art are appropriate. Picasso does not simply spit on "Art" as the Dadaists did in the face of the First World War. He registers the damage done and the breakage; the painting receives the full force of the attack. Yet the work

is controlled, itself a "classical" piece which achieves a permanence as art alongside the works whose memory it records as frozen gestures, distorted grimaces, stilted images.[18] While recognizing that a human act has denied the humane assumptions that make great art possible, the painting proposes itself as an assertion of the humanity that the bombs attempt to negate. By concentrating on form, on aesthetic concerns, rather than propagandizing, Picasso asserts the absolute, if threatened, value of the human against fascism.

In chapter XI of Volcano the Consul's wife, Yvonne, and his brother, Hugh, leave a cantina and enter a wood. It is dark and a storm is gathering, so Hugh uses a flashlight which, piercing the obscure and tangled scene, becomes an image of a searchlight in an air-raid probing the night for a "target" (UV, 331). Just outside this cluttered and chaotic scene is a "ruined Grecian temple, dim, with two tall slender pillars, approached by two broad steps." This temple is "perfect in its balance and proportion (UV, 331). By plunging into the wood, Hugh and Yvonne leave behind this memento of a serene classical order as Theodora Goodman leaves behind

the heroic simplicity of "Meroë" when she embarks on that long odyssey into the broken modern world in The Aunt's Story. Hugh and Yvonne move stumblingly into the drunken and fragmented modern world in which the classical balance between inner and outer which made possible a serene and whole art has been tipped beyond righting. The little temple is a relic, something beautiful but no longer part of reality, whose introduction into the novel at this point is intended to stress the horror and dislocation of the recorded world into which the novel now descends.

In following Hugh, Yvonne, and the consul towards their several apocalypses, the novel submits to the great forces of disorder it registers. The syntax becomes knotty and disjointed; images proliferate chaotically like the churrigueresque details on the Mexican cathedrals; the writing becomes selfconscious, even at times self-parodic. Lowry's little Grecian temple suggests a stylistic counterpoint to the distorted mode in which contemporary reality must be expressed as those girls with their perfectly calm classical profiles in Picasso's paintings in this period suggest a contrast to the minatours, bulls, and gored horses which register

the great upheavals of the mid century.

In Under the Volcano Lowry, like Picasso in Guernica, is giving form not so much to a particular historical event, the bombing of the Spanish town or the entry of Europe into the Second World War, as to a series of events whose deepest meaning is an assault upon history itself. At the centre of these events is the tactic of the aerial bombardment of cities out of which evolved during World War II the practice adopted by the democracies as well as the dictatorships of "saturation bombing" and the eventual use of atomic bombs against civilians. In a very real sense, the policy of bombing cities has come to threaten not only "civilization," the cultural and material life of cities, but also history, the continuity of the race itself. In Under the Volcano Lowry confronts the problem that Picasso met in executing Guernica: how can the artist respond to such a threat to the historical being of the race without descending into apocalyptic or propaganda? How can that quintessentially humane and civilized activity, the production of a painting or a novel, make aesthetically significant form out of the negation of its own meaning? Lowry is seeking

some means by which art can respond to "the tearing of a civilization out of the fabric of history."

Like David Jones, Eliot, and Picasso, Lowry places at the centre of formal attention in his "making" the problem of how the literary past shall be received into this text. In the work of each of these artists, we find a tendency towards over-explicitness in the drawings on the past which is clearly not the result of unassimilated influences. In Four Quartets Eliot renders Mallarmé's "donner un sense plus pur aux mots de la tribu" as "to purify the dialect of the tribe."[19] Eliot is not merely paying homage. He is signalling that so long as the chief concern of the poet is to redeem the language in the present he must rely on the memory of those makers who have made words "pur" in the past. The quote asserts both the continuity of literary achievement in the face of historical decline and the irreversibility of that decline.

In Picasso's Guernica we find painterly quotations in the form of gestures and images which deliberately recall past treatments of Picasso's sub-

jects: massacre, apocalypse, mourning women. Anthony Blunt, in his study of the painting, traces the tradition behind such gestures as that of the anguished, thrown-back head from Greek and Roman representations of Dionysiac rituals through Renaissance treatments to Poussin and Ingres.[20] By distorting this gesture beyond anything found in its sources Picasso, like Eliot, both recalls the post as tradition, and asserts the savage falling away that the present constitutes from that past. Lowry's literary quotations are too numerous and too quickly worked into the texture of the novel to be quoted at length. The novel's encyclopaedic allusions have been traced elsewhere.[21] What is significant in Lowry's quoting in Volcano, however, is not so much the number of quotations as the explicitness with which they are introduced: "Regard: the plantains," thinks the consul echoing Prufrock; "The uncontrollable mystery on the bathroom floor," he intones, echoing Yeats (UV, 65, 146). The playful parody apparent in the second quotation indicates Lowry's purpose. This is no unconscious lifting by a young novelist overshadowed by his commanding literary father figures. It is a sign

of Lowry's acknowledgement that the novel is "text": a literary enterprise worked over and made out of previous texts. The writing is thick with language that announces by its literariness its indebtedness to other language. And this explicitness, this selfconsciousness, asserts both the connection of the novel with the past and its severance from that past. The novel is part of the literary tradition, yet it must give form to, propagand the reality of, a world that has broken off all meaningful contact with its own past.

As the novel closes the Consul climbs what is clearly a literary mountain, one concocted out of Dante and Faust. His pockets full of dried fruit and grain that will not sprout and "the Hotel Fausto's information," he images the novel's overloaded literary indebtedness (UV, 374). And he is "utterly weighed down" beneath the burden he carries: the luggage of all that past which he must carry about with him as the last heroic individual, the champion of consciousness. So the mountain which has "no substance, no firm base," crumbles beneath him and he falls through not a literary but an actual apocalypse: the tanks and bodies and villages of a world

bursting apart in the agony of war. The images of apocalypse in this piece are drawn from previous apocalypses and visions of bodies falling into hell. But the relation between these quoted apocalypses and the actual historical one is precisely that which Anthony Blunt describes in Picasso's Guernica:

> It is singularly appropriate that in Guernica Picasso should have drawn on a manuscript of the Apocalypse, for, if in certain fundamental details the picture is related to traditional representations of the Massacre of the Innocents, its character is Apocalyptic. It belongs, indeed, to a great tradition in European art, which runs from the Spanish manuscripts ... through the tympana of Burgundian Romanesque churches, to Dürer, Michelangelo, Jean Duvet, Bruegel, and El Greco in the sixteenth century, all of whom painted the Apocalypse or the Last Judgement as symbols of the evil of the world and the doom which must befall it. In these paintings the artists were not concerned to show the beauties of nature or the nobility of man, but, on the contrary, the evil of the world and the brutality of human beings. They therefore felt at liberty to underline the ugliness of the created universe, to distort the human figure, and to invent monsters to create their meaning. They were restrained in the expression of their horror by the accepted artistic conventions of their time, but Picasso, who had broken down these conventions, was able to go further, to use more violent distortions, to disrupt the bodies of human

> beings and animals in a much more drastic manner. In his Guernica the expression of horror is even greater than in the models which he followed.[22]

Lowry also employs selfconsciously conventions, those forms in which artists and writers traditionally have treated apocalypse and damnation. Lowry's wood recalls the woods of Dante and of The Waste Land.[23] Like the painter he breaks down and goes beyond those conventions. His disruptions and distortions are more drastic than are those in Dante or Goethe or Marlowe or even in the depictions of the violences of war by Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves, the poets of the First World War. Immediately after the consul and Hugh leave the dying Indian by the roadside, Hugh has a vision of war which combines the sense of horror we find in the war poets, who generally worked in a realistic mode, with the violent disruptions and displacements we find in surrealist paintings. Even Dante's image of Ugolino and Ruggieri in hell, the former devouring the brains of the latter, is not so expressive of horror nor so drastic as Hugh's vision:

> --Something like a tree stump with a tourniquet on it, a severed leg in an army boot that someone picked up, tried to unlace, and then put down, in a sickening smell of petrol and blood, half reverently on the road; a face that gasped for a cigarette, turned grey, and was cancelled; headless things, that sat, with protuding windpipes, fallen scalps, bolt upright in motor cars; children piled up, many hundreds; screaming burning things (UV, 248).[24]

There is a deliberate echoing of the language of the press despatch in this series of sentence fragments, appropriate because Hugh is a journalist. In chapter VI Lowry consciously adopts a journalistic style "to represent Hugh himself," as he puts it in his letter to Jonathan Cape.[35] But in expressing Hugh's vision of contemporary and impending battle-fields Lowry does not stress the journalistic style. Despite the syntactical allusion to Hugh's profession, there is none of the flatness of prose style, the emphasis on facts, that we find in political journalism. Lowry does not attempt to describe or record an historical event, rather he arrives at a form which registers by its dislocations the impact of history on Hugh's consciousness. In Under the Volcano Lowry engages with the historical events of the late Thirties without

adopting the factual modes of discourse that were fashionable in English writing in that period. Lowry eschews the documentary, the eye-witness account, the journal, or the factual record because of their inadequacy to the event. Where he does employ such modes, as in those stylistic registrations of Hugh's perception of the world in chapter VI, Lowry's intention is parodic. Hugh's journalistic use of language, like the versions of pastoral scattered through the novel, are designed to gauge the distance travelled by the modern world away from the possibility of any kind of intelligible recording.

Lowry's method of registering war in his novel is opposed to the characteristically modernist mode established by Hemingway. Hemingway responded to the horror and unreality of the Great War by perfecting a style so stripped, so attentive to things and to names, so concrete, that his novels offer a critique not only of war itself but also of the language that made possible the murderous stupidity of modern warfare, the language of the English newspapers that presented the slaughter of 370,000 men in the battle of the Somme as a near victory.[26] Hemingway's method of understating terrible

events which serves to remind us how abstractions betray the particular squalors and sufferings of war, became fashionable among leftist English writers in the Thirties, so fashionable that in Enemies of Promise an exasperated Cyril Connolly runs together passages from Hemingway, Isherwood, and Orwell to make a typical prose passage for 1938.[27] This is the style with which Lowry himself experimented in the mid Thirties as Brian O'Kill has shown. In moving away from this style in the late Thirties and early Forties -- precisely the period encompassed by the writing of Volcano -- Lowry did not merely turn back to the older "mandarin" line of English prose fiction, if we mean by "mandarin" the elevated style, upper-class interest, and concentration on sensibility rather than social being against which the English novelists of the Fifties were in rebellion.

Lowry's method of responding to war is to stress by his style and imagery its unreality. Lowry seizes on the unreality of a world which reduces human beings to heaps of "things." The objects in Hugh's vision are disposed with the deliberate flouting of commonly accepted reality which we find in a surrealist

painting. Pieces of human beings assume the positions of living persons. A severed leg and a tree stump are interchangeable: part of the same unreality. Most insistently, by its drastic manner of depicting violence as an assault upon the real, Lowry's warscape implies its connection with Picasso's Guernica. There are, of course, severed limbs disposed throughout Picasso's painting whose postures grotesquely parody living forms. Lowry takes a common image of war imagery like the wounded tree -- one need only look at the photograph of Passchendaele in Fussell's The Great War to see why the image occurs so frequently in modern war poetry -- and distorts it to the point where it is no longer part of any recognizable "reality."[28] Lowry thereby develops a trend that Paul Fussell discovers in the writing about the First World War: away from chronicle towards invention. As Fussell puts it: "the general human impulse to make fictions had been unleashed by the novelty, immensity, and grotesqueness of the proceedings."[29] But Lowry goes further than any of the writers touched on by Fussell. Grave's Goodbye to All That (1928), for instance, invents rather than strictly records as

Fussell, countering the common interpretation of the work, observes; but Graves is sly about his departures from the facts.[30] Even Erich Maria Remarque who expressionistically distorts his descriptions of the war in All Quiet on the Western Front (1928) is restrained by comparison to Lowry's assaults upon "sequence and unity and transition and causality."[31] By his drastic means of expressing a world in which the massive bombardment of cities and the incineration of children is possible, Lowry asserts his fundamental commitment to confronting at the level of form the deepest implications of reality in our time.

In order to express the disruptions of contemporary history, Lowry turned to literary modes that were current in the Thirties but were less prominent than the historical modes of discourse. Lowry turns to surrealism and expressionism. Surrealism enjoyed a considerable vogue in advanced English literary circles in the late Thirties and its influence may be felt particularly in the poems of David Gasgoyne and Dylan Thomas. New Verse, which published these poets, and Eliot's Criterion devoted articles to the phenomenon of surrealism.[32] Nevertheless,

despite its revolutionary tendencies in France, surrealism was not considered politically serious in England. Lowry would have encountered expressionism through his schoolboy passion for Eugene O'Neill. He would certainly have encountered expressionism as a young man studying in Germany. He later claimed to have been well-read in expressionist drama even as a boy and he remained a lifelong afficionado of German expressionist cinema. In England in the Thirties, the influence of expressionism was negligible. Certainly, no English novelist of the decade could say of his novels, as Lowry was to say of Volcano, that "the influences that have formed Volcano are in a profound degree and largely German."[33] However, Auden and Isherwood used expressionist techniques in the plays they wrote for the Group Theatre, demonstrating that the methods and perspectives of expressionism had a possible application in the left-wing English drama. In their works the utopian politics that in the German expressionist drama appear alongside an exaggerated despair at the condition of the world were subordinated to a more complex and Brechtian notion of the formal possibilities of a didactic drama. The importance of this

English expressionist drama for this discussion is the link it suggests between the radically disruptive "design-governing postures" in Volcano and a Thirties concern to adapt a range of modernist techniques to the registration of contemporary historical stresses.

There was also a cult of allegory in the Thirties which has a bearing on Volcano. Lowry was not the only young English writer in the Thirties familiar with Edwin Muir's translations of Kafka. W.H. Auden and Rex Warner were notably concerned to turn the methods of allegory to contemporary political as well as psychological purposes. Auden quickly established a familiar Thirties allegorical terrain of borders, mountains, forests, underground mines, and journeys by train and aeroplane all of which may be readily recognized in Volcano. The mysterious silver mines in Volcano, like the underground mines in Auden's moralized landscape, retain their Thirties assocations with both the unconscious and with capitalistic speculation. In the earliest versions of Volcano we find a straightforward political allegory which represents the failure of the democracies to intervene on behalf of the Spanish republic. Vestiges of this political fable, fleshed out

with Audenesque machinery, remain in the final text.

These literary modes were not dominant in the Thirties. David Lodge's observation that there was a tendency in prose writing in the period towards "historical kinds of discourse" is a trenchant comment on the signal failure among English novelists to find adequate formal means of expressing the acute and confused political stresses of the time.[34] At the beginning of the decade, Evelyn Waugh, observing a coronation in a "remote place," noted: "It is to Alice in Wonderland that my thoughts recur in seeking some historical parallel for life in Addis Ababa. It is in Alice that one finds the peculiar flavour of galvanized and translated reality."[35] For Waugh in 1930 the surreal was a quality of reality elsewhere, whose place in England was the unthreatening one of literary whimsy. However much the old order of English life might have succumbed to the turbulence of the modern age, Waugh was confident that in England traditional norms were still recognized. Hence his delight in noting foreign departures from those norms. By the end of the decade the recognition that a surreal quality had entered into European reality could scarcely be

avoided. In The Lawless Roads, Graham Greene discovers in the crazy, overloaded style of Mexican decoration images of gas masks, Lewis guns, and flame throwers.[36] As the signs of the European present galvanize the Mexican scene, Greene turns to Trollope as a link to the English past before the world became hideous, surreal and threatening. European political life has become as absurd, as violent, and as deceptive as that in Addis Ababa or Mexico. But few English novelists were willing to make their writing as surreal as contemporary history.

Wyndham Lewis, who was not afraid brutally to expel "Trollopian figures" from the Twentieth-Century landscape, and who, apart from Lowry himself, wrote the only work of English fiction that attempts in modernist terms to arrive at a response to the Spanish war, alludes to the problem for English writers in The Revenge for Love.[37] Margot Stamp, the leftist-bourgeois anti-heroine of Lewis' novel, finds on crossing the border into Spain as part of a gun-running mission that her unconscious, "the sur-real," spills into the objective world, much as does Theodora Goodman in the exotic garden at the Hôtel du Midi.[38] Lewis refers to a "brutal invasion of

the external plane by the internal plane" as the mode in which political events in the late Thirties were expeienced by the individual.[39] Inversion, deception, disruption, disconnection, the fantastic -- these are the qualities both of dreams and of the actual, of the unconcious and of history at the mid century. As Andre Breton observed: "the admirable thing about the fantastic is that it is no longer fantastic. There is only the real."[40]

The problem Lowry faced in Under the Volcano was to be as fantastic and surreal in his writing as history without altogether foregoing the demands of form. The chief metaphor by which Lowry expresses this problem is that of the drunken Indian on his horse whom Laruelle connects with the Consul: "this maniacal vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled, somehow almost admirable, this too, obscurely, was the consul" (UV, 23). Here Lowry alludes to the bearing of the methods of the fantastic and the surreal and the distorted on the formal organization of the novel.

Lowry is not, of course, a surrealist in the sense that he rebels against the conventions of prose

construction in the extreme manner in which the early Surrealists rebelled against all norms of logic and versification. Volcano is in the main syntactically coherent, and Lowry's surrealist impulse to make metaphors by yoking absurdly unlikely things is generally restrained by an English reluctance to take such things too far (one detects Wodehouse as much as Breton or Louis Aragon behind Lowry's bizarre metaphors). The dithyrambic, anarchistic, and black-humouristic tendencies in the novel are formal strategies subservient to an ultimately historicist purpose rather than radical assaults upon our expectations that words in novels are obliged to generate intelligible meanings. The novel's chief debt to surrealism is found in Lowry's use of the Consul's hallucinations to suggest states of mind which, originating independently of social, moral, or rational norms, appear to apprehend truths that are not those graspable by conscious intellection. Lowry's method of commingling internal and external reality in describing the Consul's hallucinations also owes something to surrealism. This is not to suggest that in Volcano Lowry employs surrealist strategies as Auden and

Greene employed the techniques of T.S. Eliot in their early work: taming the radical possibilities of the techniques by placing them within forms that are less broken than those of the source. Lowry employs surrealistic perspectives and orientations to express a reality that is going out of control. As a novelist he refuses to upset the however precarious balance that attests to his formal control. Volcano is, in fact, formally elegant. But the disruptive tendencies are allowed to strain against the centripetal bias of form. The tension between centripetency and centrifugence is neatly imaged by the Ferris wheel from which those possessions of the Consul which guarantee his identity fly out. Thus the ordering myth of cabalism cannot hold together the pieces of a world or a personality flying apart. Lowry's formal method, then, is drastic but not anarchistic.

This observation also applies to Lowry's use of expressionism in Volcano. Lowry makes explicit his debt to the German expressionist cinema of the Twenties, and he works images from his favourite expressionist films into the novel's texture and structure.[41] Jacques Laruelle's house with its crazy towers and its faded

"zebra stripes" recalls the sets in Robert Weine's The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919)(UV, 194). The "flying boats" on the carousel at the fair recall those in Fred Murnau's Sunrise (1927) (UV, 216-7). The banked streets and distorted heights of the Consul and Laruelle as they wander about the fair recall the deliberate distortions and odd camera angles that were characteristic of expressionist films. The fair itself changes in appearance from gay to frantic to sinister depending on the mood of the characters, exactly as the fair in Sunrise does. Lowry adopts the expressionist techniques of giving life to inanimate objects. Thus the tents on the outskirts of the fair have a queer life of their own (Patrick White has a similar and disorienting habit of bestowing life on umbrellas in his fiction). Most of the expressionist references and techniques are concentrated in chapter VII, but throughout the novel the surroundings have an expressionist habit of taking on the distorted shapes of the inner lives of the characters. Mescal makes the undergrowth, not the drinker, drunk (UV, 332).

Expressionism, then, determines the form in specific passages in the novel but not the form of the

novel as a whole. Lowry selects those methods and perspectives of modernism which suit his particular purpose: that is, to stress the irrational and anarchic qualities in contemporary experience. The Hemingwayesque minimalism and objectivity with which he had experimented after Ultramarine are not to his purposes in Volcano. That style would not allow him to give expression to the peculiarly dream-like and unreal quality of the late Thirties. Lowry takes the most radical strategies available to him, those of surrealism and expressionism whose influence on English writing was never profound, and he turns them to the problem of giving form to the guilty, obsessive historicism of the Thirties. In doing so, he goes further than any English novelist among all those who began to publish between 1930 and 1950 in keeping alive the radical programme of early modernism. His task as he sees it is to find new fictional means, new "design-governing strategies," by which to express the real as he found it in his own time. His programme is the Lawrentian one of finding "a new form, a new approach to reality itself."[42] For "reality" had changed between 1914 when Lawrence wrote his famous letter to David Garnett outlining a new

approach to the reality of the individual and 1942 when Under the Volcano emerged in its definitive shape from the chaos of the early drafts.[43] Surrealism and expressionism provided means by which that shift in reality towards the absurd and the terrifying might be registered. As Lawrence under the impact of the First World War had moved away from the realism of Sons and Lovers (1913) towards the modernism of Women in Love (1920), so Lowry under the impact of the Second War moves towards more drastic and unEnglish modes of modernist disruption than those with which he had experimented in the Thirties. As Keith Alldritt has observed of the bearing of modernism on Lawrence's fiction:

> Lawrence was no more a fluent or natural modernist than England was a natural breeding ground for Dada, surrealism or existentialism. In Lawrence's career the modern signifies the loss of the particular cultural synthesis that his greatest novels record.[44]

In Ultramarine Lowry had mourned the passing of the pre-industrial English "cultural synthesis," yet he had done so not in terms of the formal strategies of realism but by adopting a modernism which, if not quite fluent, was determined. When the forms of that modernism

no longer seemed adequate to the prevailing dislocations of the real, Lowry sought a style among the modes then fashionable in English writing: his prose became pared, realistic, overtly historically oriented. Volcano, Brian O'Kill has observed, is a triumphant return to an openly "mandarin" style, and this is true if we define "mandarin" as difficult and linguistically sophisticated rather than merely upper-class prose.[45] The overloaded style of Volcano, the range of stylistic resources Lowry employs, set Volcano apart from contemporary English fiction. Volcano has nothing essential in common in terms of its use of language with the English novel in the post-war period. Far from showing a nostalgia for the Victorian novel as do several post-war English novelists, Lowry looks away from English fictional styles and manners to find the drastic formal means he requires.

Nevertheless, at the centre of Under the Volcano lies a characteristically Thirties preoccupation with a specific set of historical events. Lowry's distinctive success in Volcano is to have successfully combined this historical specificity with a modernist method. In other words, he has combined the Thirties interest in political

activism with a Twenties desire to arrest the work's formal involvement in the present. Partly this is the result of the gap between the events embodied in the novel and the date of its completion. In the course of working the novel through its various shapes Lowry refined almost out of existence the violent emotions that attach to particular historical actions. In the process of shaping and rendering events Lowry purged them of the qualities of pity and terror to the extent that those emotions excite action. In this sense, Lowry followed Stephen Dedalus' proscription against the exciting by the artist of powerful emotions in the reader. For Stephen, Aristotle's pity and terror (eleos and phobos) should be by the static nature of the art object. "Improper art," says Stephen, is "kinetic"; "the aesthetic emotion ... is ... static."[46] Lowry echoes Stephen's definition when Hugh Firmin, reflecting on his failure to intervene on behalf of the dying Indian, considers the bus' other passengers:

> in these old women it was as if, through the various stages of Mexican history, pity, the impulse to approach, and terror, the impulse to escape (as one had learned at college), having replaced it, had finally been reconciled by prudence, the

> conviction it is better to stay where you are (UV, 249).

Hugh's view of this stasis is regretful. He is the Thirties type of the kinetic individual and his writing is appropriately the antithesis of the aesthetic: the journalistic. Stephen Dedalus, steeped in a Nineties aestheticism, would pry the work of art loose from all contact with contemporary history that might move the reader towards action. Stephen's aesthetic is anti-didactic. History for Stephen is a nightmare from which he wishes to awaken, not into a redeemed version of history itself (one in which Ireland were free of the English hegemony), but into the contemplation of aesthetic objects whose formal perfection rescues them from time.

Lowry's method is aesthetic but not anti-historical. That is to say, the novel's aestheticism addresses an historical impasse and the novel's historicism is aestheticized. There is no idle paradox here. Put simply, where historical events threaten the possibility of art, merely to produce a work of art that so confidently announces its commitment to form and its relation to a literary tradition, is both an aesthetic and an

historical assertion. Where a technology threatens the survival of the race, merely to assert the claim of a work to permanence of interest by virtue of its concentration on form, is to make a moral assertion: it is to assert the continuity of the species and the likelihood that humans will continue to appreciate whatever is beautiful. It is a human assertion pitched in the face of man's rage in our time to expunge his presence from the world. The work promises to persist "till change has broken down/all things save Beauty alone."[47]

In Under the Volcano we see at work a mind that struggles not to escape from history's stubborn shapelessness by creating perfect forms but one which goes out to meet that shapelessness. Lowry's strategy is to filter the sprawl of historical process through a single consciousness which, much as it craves order, is extraordinarily open to randomness. The Consul is not, like Richard Mahony, a "type", one in whom a significant trend in history is acted out, if by this we mean that his typicality determines his characterization. In the Consul history is acted out as endless possibility in the minute decisions of a given consciousness. It is true that the

Consul, like Mahony, is a representative figure of a doomed cultural trend. Yet we never feel that his human possibilities are exhausted by that trend. The complexity of history is not simply squeezed into the narrow space of a single mind. We may see the Consul as the once heroic phase of bourgeois individualism fallen into decline. We may see him as the "older brother" of the Auden generation who passed through the "Test" of the First World War from which he emerged scathed but with a fascination for his younger brother. Yet the Consul, by virtue of his insatiable individuality, remains larger than any such identifications ("the danger of identifications," wrote Samuel Beckett, is the production under the guise of criticism of "carefully folded ham-sandwiche[s]").[48] In the earliest drafts of Volcano, the Consul is a "type" in the most restrictive sense: the representative of a dying capitalism, sympathetic to fascism, and about to be consigned to the gutter of history.[49] In the course of pursuing the final version of the Consul through the drafts Lowry allowed his own ambivalences to play around his character. His rentier status becomes less despicable than pathetic; his bourgeois

individualism becomes both his doom and his fascination. Even his cynical defense of fascism becomes not merely a sign of his corruption but the articulation of a possibility within the bourgeoisie that has been arrived at by the whittling away of its former generosity of spirit. The modern historical experience of terror and decline presses in upon the Consul's consciousness, yet, far from evading that pressure, he moves out to encompass its diversity without simplifying. History, for Lowry, is not a distraction to the artist as it is for Stephen Dedalus; it is the point at which reality in its great process of endless change touches the mind of the individual.

Lowry, then, sees history as a particular kind of nightmare: not merely as the sheer weight of the past in the mind of the individual but also as the horrified recognition in consciousness of the direction of change in the present. In the Thirties, to be aware that history as it was unfolding had some direction was to be aware that that direction could only be towards a deepening horror. It is Lowry's triumph in Volcano to have inscribed this sense into the drawing of his character yet to have used his added historical perspective -- like the White

of The Living and The Dead Lowry has the advantage of writing after events had confirmed his reading of the Thirties -- to distance the writing from the passions of the period, from its fierce theological intensities. This is what we mean when we say that the novel "aestheticizes history": Volcano gives us that sense which history has in the making of being open to possibility, of not possessing a preordained shape; yet Lowry gives history a form, one that is discovered in retrospect when the actual shape of events, where they were heading all along, stands revealed.

Brian O'Kill has written on the bearing of the events of the late Thirties on the finished text of Volcano:

> Volcano is almost completely a rejection of history and public life. Lowry began the novel as another topical work, full of political allusions and a note of strident urgency, but by 1940 his topicality had become already outdated, his warnings and portents of doom obviously belated. An important political element survives in the novel, but it deals with the politics of 1938 in detached and ironic retrospect, as a symptom of eternal political activity rather than as a live issue.[50]

This is true only if we accept the spurious distinction

between the historical and the aesthetic as Cyril Connolly did in Enemies of Promise and Orwell did in "Inside the Whale" and as Lowry himself did up till 1942 when the novel emerged in its definitive state at Dollarton. To discover how Lowry merged the apparently conflicting claims of history and form we need to look at the novel's attention at the level of its linguistic consciousness to the bearing of contemporary history on the break-up of the "cultural synthesis" in English life that had once connected dialect, tribe and place.

In Ultramarine Lowry sought escape from the pervading sense of unreality in the England of the Thirties. This sense of unreality was most acutely felt by the novelist in the loss of meaning, of resonance, and of precision from middle-class speech. Ultramarine enacts a voyage of the young novelist away from this cultural and linguistic impasse. The young hero's search for a language of reality, simplicity, and connection to things points to a lack of such qualities in the language left behind in England. The plethora of Old English words in Ultramarine indicated Lowry's nostalgia for a time when, supposedly, the tribe had been rooted in a particular

place and when words had stood directly for the things -- tools and natural processes -- which the tribe used in daily life. In Under the Volcano Lowry again views the English cultural impasse from without. But Mexico is not for the Consul a means of escape as was the sea for Dana Hilliot. In the course of his voyage Dana discovered that the image of the England he was fleeing was impressed upon the means of escape. The ship was composed of a number of closed linguistic universes: small worlds whose customary shibboleths excluded the outsider. In Volcano this recognition is the novel's starting point. The outlines of an English cultural malady are written into the cultural landscape of Mexico. In Mexico, as in England, signs, messages, images proliferate, and behind them there is a nothingness: an absence of signification.

In chapter VI Hugh recalls a hawker he had met in London trying to sell hot dogs on Oxford Street. The man had been unable to sell a single hot dog. The problem was the "newness" of his wagon and the difficulty of selling anything so unEnglish on Oxford Street. The man could not sell his hot dogs because, being American and summer-like by association, they emitted inappropriate

signs in an English winter. Yet all around the man "the monstrous deceptions" of the advertising signs "twitched on and off" (UV, 152). On the wall of an adjacent church "a figure of Christ on the cross had been removed leaving only the scar and the legend: Is it nothing to all ye who pass by?" (UV, 152). Dwarfed by the indifferent, meretricious front of English life in the Thirties, confronted with a visible sign of the "nothing" behind all the messages, religious and commercial, of modern England, the wretched costermonger was failing because he had not grasped how to manipulate signs. Until Hugh advised him to try selling outside the Fitzroy, favourite water-hole of London artist bohemia in the Thirties. There he would find people undismayed by exotic signs.

Yvonne also knows "the darkness of a world without meaning" (UV, 266). Standing in Times Square in New York once she had watched the illuminated news on the Times Building: "news of disaster, of suicide, of banks failing, of approaching war, of nothing at all, which, as she gazed upward with the crowd, broke off abruptly, snapped off into darkness, into the end of the world, ... when there was no more news" (UV, 265). Again there

is a sense of the world in which messages proliferate wildly, so that the whole world is received as a stream of images on a skyscraper watched by a rapt audience who fail to perceive the nothingness behind all these signs. The problem is that the dead, anonymous, urban faces watching the succession of images do not mask lives capable of vivifying by a creative act of the imagination what they see. Yvonne herself, watching an aristocratic family with whom she identifies her forebears in a film cannot decide whether they are romantic heroes or "static dead symbols of selfishness" (UV, 267).

Mexico for the Consul for Hugh and for Yvonne is a constant visual assault. Everywhere there are messages, symbols, hieroglyphs, signs, warnings, images. And all of them are couched in a language that is largely inaccessible to both characters and readers. The gardens are crowded with plants that are riotous, exotic, and, for all their beauty, threatening in the violence of their colouring. Everywhere there are signs in Spanish warning possible offenders of the dire penalties consequent upon even minor infringements of regulations. The threat is made more palpable because we can only glimpse,

not clearly construe, the language of the warnings.

In chapter V the Consul, suffering from a "horripilating hangover," surveys his garden. His reflections are rendered in a passage which may be read as Malcolm Lowry's defense of his own baroque and overloaded style in Volcano:

> Such chaos as might exist even lent an added charm. He liked the exuberance of the unclipped growth at hand. Whereas further away, the superb plantains flowering so finally and obscenely, the splendid trumpet vines, brave and stubborn pear trees, the papayas planted around the swimming pool and beyond, the low white bungalow itself covered by bougainvillea, its long porch like the bridge of a ship, positively made a little vision of order (UV, 128).

The Consul, then, prefers his own disordered domain to the vision of order offered by distance and a trick of perspective. Yet his mood of self-approval at having let his garden run riot is dispelled when he walks down to the new public garden that truncates his property. In this second garden he finds

> certain evidence of work left uncompleted: tools, unusual tools, a murderous machete, an oddly shaped fork, somehow nakedly impaling the mind, with its twisted tines glittering in the sunlight, were leaning

> against the fence, as also was something else, a sign uprooted or new, whose oblong pallid face stared through the wire at him. ¿Le gusta este jardin? it asked ...
>
> ¿LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?
>
> ¿QUE ES SUYO?
>
> ¡EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN! (UV, 128).

Why is this sign so terrible? Why do the tines of the fork "impale the mind"? Why is the kemptness of the public garden, its air of being "carefully kept," so disturbing to the Consul? Partly responsible for this emotion apparently so in excess of its occasion is the Consul's particular condition of intoxication: being hungover, details strike him with a hard clarity. Secondly, the Consul's construal of the sign, convinces him that, far from being a cause for self congratulation, his neglect of his garden is a cause of shame. Feeling "hemmed in" by the suburban scene, he abandons the bottle of tequila in search of which he had entered the undergrowth, and turns back towards the public garden (UV, 129). There is a further reason for the Consul's alarm: he cannot with any confidence decipher the signs that confront him.

("Not that he had any intention of 'verifying' the words on the sign which certainly seemed to have more question marks than it should have") (UV, 129). The tools too are somehow hieroglyphic: they suggest obscure, possibly murderous, purposes other than their proper ones of gardening. The problem is: to what or to whom do all these signs that press upon the consciousness of visitors to Mexico point? How are they to be interpreted?

It seems clear that part of the attraction of Mexico for Lowry was the promise it offered of an outpost of organic community life lost in England. Certainly, this was the view of Mexico propagated by Stuart Chase from whose book on Mexico Lowry borrows in Volcano (Lowry's aside in chapter I that the High Life building in Mexico City was pronounced "Eetchleef" echoes Chase exactly (UV, 15).[51] Moreover, Lowry's interest in the article on Mexican architecture by Eduardo Bolio Rendon suggests that as late as 1945 - 6 he shared the Mexican's opinion that a distinctive light had fallen on the organically rounded lives of the peasants and craftsmen in the little villages when the buildings were organically related to the natural scene and living was irradiated

with poetic meaning. Mexico, then, offered a simplicity and a sense of connection to reality Lowry felt to be absent in Europe. This is the Mexico represented in the novel by the old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o'clock in the morning and who tries to rescue the Consul from his persecutors, those who represent the dominant and threatening aspect of Mexico. Watching this old woman and mindful of the visions induced by alcoholism, the Consul proclaims his self-justification by epiphany: "'if you look at the sunlight there, ah, then perhaps you'll get the answer, see, look at the way it falls through the window: what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning?'" (UV, 50).

Such epiphanic moments require no interpretation or decipherment. They are not ambiguous signs written in an unintelligible script. Their meaning lies in the identification they imply of the perceiver with the perceived. However, they account for only a small part of the Mexican experience. The rest is a map that cannot be read, a confusion of signs that cannot be interpreted, a language in an obscure script that cannot be deciphered. In the bar of the Farolito at

Parian in which the Consul sits drinking mescal and reading Yvonne's letters until his death the various puzzles become more and more convoluted, the prospect of epiphanies more and more remote. The barman's name is Sherlock but he is no interpreter (UV, 344). Here the Consul traces on the counter of the bar an ambiguous map of Spain in alcohol, a map whose double meaning will lead those who construe it according to their own dark purposes to condemn and kill the map-drawer. Here the Consul retreats with Yvonne's long-lost letters into an inner room, "one of the boxes in the Chinese puzzle" (UV, 343). By this stage of mescal intoxication the Consul cannot accurately read even the signs of the English language in his wife's hand: "the words kept blurring and dissembling, his own name staring out at him: but the mescal had brought him in touch with his situation to the extent that he did not now need to comprehend any meaning in the words beyond their abject confirmation of his lostness" (UV, 345).

He can, however, discern the presence of literary influences behind Yvonne's habitual clichés: "Yvonne had certainly been reading something" (UV, 346). So has the

Consul. His mescal-jumbled stream-of-consciousness is littered with literary allusion. It is not Mexico he confronts but the world interpreted through the worn tags of his education: "In Parian did Kubla Khan" (UV, 338). The gulfs and crags of Shelley and Coleridge interpose themselves between the actual Mexico and the Mexico in his mind. The language of Mexico which he struggles to interpret is the language of Calderon and the Mexican cathedrals and the revolutionary murals: it is an overloaded, literary language appropriate to his romantic sensibility. Interspersed among the various literary influences in whose terms the Consul construes Mexican reality are violent and terrifying images that are both hallucinations thrown up by his alcohol-unleashed unconscious and surrealistic depictions of a world spinning out of control: "The Consul now observed on his extreme right some unusual animals resembling geese, but large as camels, and skinless men, without heads, upon stilts, whose animated entrails jerked along the ground" (UV, 341). Such images, part Yeatsian visions, part surrealism, remind us that the Consul's hell is not Mexico, but the projection of his alcoholic and literate fantasies onto the reality at hand. The Consul cannot

construe a world because the categories and signs in his fevered imagination persistently get in the way of the world "out there."

Now indeed the Consul "sees through a glass darkly" ("with his dark glasses on [things] appeared for some reason clearer") (UV, 364).[52] He continues erratically to read Yvonne's letters while the background barroom voices impress themselves disconnectedly upon his consciousness. Snatches of conversation between fascists, drinkers, and madmen mingle with his delirium: a man cries that it was Mozart "what wrote the Bible"; others boast of their murders (UV, 365). The Consul procceds in his mind's eye to interpret obscurely a painting, Los Borrachones, which he had seen in Laruelle's wall. In his reading the painter depicts the increasing lack of differentiation among the damned. The damned souls are merged into a hellish jumble while the pure spirits move towards a state of perfection and wholeness. To be damned, then, is to fall, as the Consul is now falling, into a cacaphony of indistinguishable and incoherent voices babbling inanities. The voices of the bar crowding in upon the Consul are now seen to be fractures

of his own being: "failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution" (UV, 361). This is hell: this dumping ground of husks and shells and chattering demons of the cabala. Hell is simply language fallen into an utter chaos.

Now we may see the function of the cabalistic references in the novel. Why all this biting in the etymology of the word remorse, the Consul had long before asked Laruelle? As a cabalistic interpreter of the holy texts the Consul had assumed that behind all the words in the text of Bible, of world, even of Peter Rabbit, lay the nameless source of all names, the silent source of all language. All words, then, were signs which pointed to this withdrawn referent whose presence was felt in the endless coincidental connectedness of language. The presence of the divine was locked into the word as a kind of paranoia to be deciphered by the labours of those who worked with language, attempting to restore the fragments of particular names to the lost whole from whence they derived. In the Farolito the Consul's fatal errors are revealed. By rejecting the world he has rejected the meaning that promised to make out of words sacramental signs. He sees only words, not the truth behind words.

He descends into a welter of language. He is locked fast by the jibbering voices that proceed from his own fragmented being.

The Consul produces his cigarette packet which is stamped with wings, the insignia of hermes, god of interpretation (UV, 362). But he can no longer interpret; he cannot discover the truth behind signs. He sees only a chaos of signs and hears only grabled voices that speak of no underlying referent. The voice of the madman who cries, "'You got to study deep down to know that Mozart writ the Bible,'" is a parody of one of his own voices, a grotesque echo of what he once believed (UV, 365).

So the Consul climbs his symbolic mountain. He wears goggles and he is muffled against the cold. That is to say, he is protected against reality. He is weighed down by the "meaningless muddled ideas" he has pilfered (UV, 374). And he appropriates for himself the ambiguous word, pelado, a Spanish idiom for exploiter and and exploited alike. The Consul is imprisoned within the language of Mexico which he cannot decipher. He is the prisoner of signs. His Mexico, like his England, is

not a place but a language. He wanders through the world encased within this language of his education, his class, his time, his voracious reading as Dana Hilliot wandered through a world he could not touch because of his own clamped linguistic carapace. Under the Volcano is not a novel about Mexico. The land the Consul explores is called hell, and it is found within the heart of man. There is a way out of hell: the way of a redeemed language, the way which does not always see the face of the interpreter in the interpreted world. This way is glimpsed by the Consul and Yvonne in the brief idyllic scenes of life in British Columbia where the old dream of a language connected to an organic community is reinvoked. In these idylls the Consul's script is legible, he and Yvonne do not communicate by lost mail, the words employed are simple and are surrounded by an aura of simplicity and reality. This is the idyllic world Lowry holds against the actual, the language of connection and reality which he holds against the various broken dialects of unreality. We are reminded of Paul Fussell's defense of the adequacy of Edmund Blunden's pastoral language to the reality of the Great War in Undertones of War:

> With language as with landscape, his attention is constantly on pre-industrial England, the only repository of criteria for measuring fully the otherwise unspeakable grossness of the war.[53]

Blunden unfortunately has only one language to hold against a world falling apart; Lowry has his several dialects.

VI

Lowry's Post-Volcano Fiction

The truth of all these marks -- whether they are woven into nature itself or whether they exist in lines on parchments and in libraries -- is everywhere the same: coeval with the institution of God.

Michel Foucault,
The Order of Things.

The truth in words, not words themselves.

St. Augustine,
On Christian Doctrine.

The world is emblematic.

Emerson,
Nature.

If the book of nature is so corrupt that no moral lesson can be drawn from it and no anagoge read into it, symbolic language must be a sham.

James Rieger,
The Mutiny Within.

After completing Under the Volcano Lowry published no substantial work of fiction until his death. On his death in 1957, he left a considerable body of manuscript material in varying degrees of readiness for publication. Out of this material three posthumous works of fiction have appeared: Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (1961), Dark As The Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (1968), and October Ferry to Gabriola (1970). Of these only the first, a collection of short stories, was at the time of the author's death in a state approaching that which he considered justified publication. Lowry, of course, never considered any of his texts, even Volcano, to be in a final state; nevertheless, he was, as his publisher notes in the first American edition of Hear Us O Lord, "putting the finishing touches" to the volume when he died.[1] Certainly, taken individually or taken as a whole, the stories in the volume stand by their own merits.

At least one of the stories in Hear Us O Lord, "The Forest Path to the Spring," is as fine a thing as Lowry ever wrote. "The Forest Path," considered in isolation from the bulk of Lowry's post-Volcano fiction

trenchantly refutes the claim that what remained to Lowry after Volcano "was only the inevitable deterioration of his art."[2] There is here no tiredness in the writing, no maundering after previous triumphs, no harking back to favourite phrases or Lowrian obsessions that repetition has worn down to cliché. At every level of the story's economy the attention of the novelist to his use of the language, to the verbal doing of the thing, registers the confidence that something "really new" has consummately been brought off.

In "The Forest Path to the Spring" Lowry updates the "new form, [the] new approach to reality itself" which he had embodied in Volcano. Volcano gave expression to the drastic disruptions of the period out of which it emerged yet maintained that precarious equilibrium by which Lowry meant form, the ordering of a chaotic experience. In this sense Volcano, like the great modernist works of the between-the-wars period, "expresses a faith in the constitutive power of the imagination, a confidence in the ability of literature to impose order, value, and meaning on the chaos and fragmentation of industrial society."[3] Lowry in

Volcano updates the formal means by which his predecessors had given expression to the reality of the Twenties by allowing more of chaos into his making. At the heart of Under the Volcano lies a recognition that contemporary reality was not merely fragmented and chaotic as it had seemed to be to Eliot, Pound, and Lawrence after World War I: reality itself had become surreal, even unreal. The objective world that impressed its forms upon the consciousness of the individual presented the aspect of a proliferating madness, a riot of obscene and distorted images. Hence the drastic expressive means employed in the novel to register this increase in unreality. Hence also the quality of formal desparation in the novel. As reality becomes more chaotic so, conversely, must the means by which the artist achieves order become more difficult. And Volcano, with its obsessive, intricate allegorizing, its snatching after the orderings of numerology and cabalism, its habit of announcing its own formal problems, is not so much desparate as pathological about order. It is, nevertheless, ordered, in fact, pedantically so.

In "The Forest Path to the Spring" Lowry

discovers "design-governing postures" and signs valid for the reality that emerged after the Second World War. The story is above all a profoundly and radically formulated structural and linguistic response to the period out of which it emerged. In this sense it is misleading to observe as Brian O'Kill does that "after 1940 [Lowry] wrote in isolation from the history and literature of his own age."[4] It is true that the late fiction, including "The Forest Path," can as O'Kill puts it scarcely "be related meaningfully to trends in contemporary fiction," if by those trends we mean what passed for serious literature in contemporary England.[5] With the poets of the Movement, with the fashionable new novelists, or with the Angry Young Men Lowry has nothing whatever in common. With the English writers of his own generation, the Auden group, now dutifully genuflecting in more orthodox churches than that of communism ("Bully-boys and schoolmasters now go to church, instead of Communist meetings," as Lowry puts it in "Through the Panama") he is equally at odds (HL, 78). The problem was not that Lowry deliberately isolated himself from contemporary history or literature; even at Dollarton where the mail was erratic Lowry wrestled with the

"Partisan Reviews, Kenyan Reviews, Minatours, Poetry mags, Horizons, even old Dials" whose contents he claimed not to understand.[6] He could have no truck, however, with the way in which reality as he grasped it was registered in the fashionable literary trends of the period. Of the English literary scene in the Forties he wrote: "English talent has all run to literary criticism ... [T]he national ethos just at present ... has become so feeble when anything threatens that seems to be just the answer to their prayers, they'll do their damnest to kill it" (HL, 75).

Lowry's late fiction belongs in a more vital context than that of English fiction in the late Forties and the Fifties. Lowry belongs in the tradition of those writers, English and American and Irish and, for that matter, Australian, who have struggled to arrive at a fully modernist response to the peculiar stresses and disruptions of our time. Lowry takes up Pound's injunction to "Make it New" and applies it to a world in which chaos had assumed more menacing and pervasive forms than in the period after the First World War. Lowry recognized as the decisive components of reality in the period after

1945 the final global phase of the expansion of industrial capitalism as it set about uprooting and ravaging whatever parts of the world it had so far failed to despoil and a military technology that threatened to efface not merely civilization but also the species from the world. In "The Forest Path" Lowry achieves what he set out to achieve throughout his late fiction: to "lift up a valid sign" in the face of a near universal chaos of values, structures, and meanings. As Volcano sought to give expression to the horrors of aerial bombardment of cities, the late fiction seeks some formal means of responding to evils as apocalyptic as genocide and the deliberate preparation for nuclear war. Like writers as diverse as Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot, and David Jones Lowry seeks to bridge in his fiction the tragic disparity between the enormity of events in our time and the paucity of their reverberations.

In "The Forest Path to the Spring" Lowry assuredly achieves what he otherwise achieved only fitfully and partially in his post-Volcano fiction: in a world where whatever was left over from previous orders suggestive of permanence was being uprooted his work establishes

itself as a permanent "making" by its very openness to the endless minute changes of reality. Lowry extends to its conceivable limit in this story that Lawrentian opening of works of fiction to the great fluctuant process of the real. The story is the consummation of a tendency in English modernist fiction towards radically open form as Ulysses is the consummation of a contrary tendency towards enclosing the novel as a finished art-object whose permanence is a function of the novelist's determination to pitch his work as a perfected form against the unruliness of experience.

Lowry's concern in his late fiction as in his early fiction may best be expressed in his own words when he speaks of the "unstaunchable impulse to create order out of chaos."[7] Throughout his fiction the impulse to create order remains a constant, but the means by which order is grasped at change. In a human world which was flying apart with increasing ferocity the problem of arriving at any order whatever became more and more pressing. Lowry's enormous difficulties in getting his post-Volcano fiction into any sort of shape must be seen in terms of his unflinching refusal to sidestep

the problem. What sort of orderings are possible or permissable now? -- this was the question that harried him. We must allow for the failings, the uncertainties, the directions wrongly taken, the repetitions, and blatancies of the late fiction. All these Lowry himself acknowledged.[8] Yet he claimed for all these a vital function in the work considered as a whole. Herein rests Lowry's claim to have discovered something "classic," by which he meant really new.[9]

"'Why is this world, so tangible in appearance, so difficult to hold?'" asks Theodora Goodman in The Aunt's Story (AS, 266). The problem to which Theodora refers is precisely that raised by Malcolm Lowry in Dark As The Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid: what happens when an obsessive subjectivity radically questions the world of our common habitation? The world in any human mind is never, of course, an exact replica of the "actual" world: that which we take it on faith exists prior to and independently of our perception. We see at best a picture of the world, and that picture is built up out of givens of which we are not conscious. It is a map whose features are supplied by the language of our culture

and by social acceptances. White and Lowry are concerned with what happens when a particular consciousness is unable to take for granted the world of appearances, when private "realities" continually superimpose themselves upon the barren forms of the ordinary.

Both Theodora Goodman and Sigbjørn Wilderness, the narrator of Dark As The Grave, are troubled by their inability to take at face value the world which to others seems to require no interpretation. The meaning of the observed world is obvious enough to more normal people than Theodora and Sigbjørn: it exists. But for those whose inner eyes constantly trace other possible maps of the real the world out there is an obscure text which invites interpretation. Both are heterodox and idiosyncratic, at times even paranoiac, interpreters. The world to them is never something obvious but always strange and riddling. It emits signs which demand to be deciphered but which provide no sure means of access to understanding. Beneath the obvious lie obscurities and enigmas. Behind its seductive signs lie not epiphanies but puzzles. Yet Theodora and Sigbjørn are obliged to pursue these riddles that will not be unknotted because

the brittle surface of "reality" cracks under their too-penetrating gaze. They simply cannot hold up the ordinary world. They are those fated to search for "meaning" even if the end of all their searching is merely a terrifying absence that is discovered to lie behind all the clues, signs, and messages they have diligently followed up.

The form of Dark As The Grave is that of a simple quest for meaning. Sigbjørn Wilderness sets out on a journey to Mexico to meet an old friend who has figured as a character in a novel, The Valley of the Shadow of Death, he has recently written. This man, Fernando Marquez, has come to stand in Sigbjørn's mind for all that is most noble and true in the world. Sigbjørn also wishes to "verify the words on the sign," the sign being that which has figured in The Valley and on which were inscribed three ambiguous sentences in Spanish. In the course of this journey, Sigbjørn Wilderness encounters a number of signs, messages, clues all of which intimate hidden meanings but which refuse to be read in any intelligible or consoling fashion. By planting these signs in Sigbjørn's, and the reader's way, and refusing epiphanies, Lowry calls into question

the ways in which novelists and men habitually interpret the world. He also calls into question the traditional kinds of relations we assume to be proper between lived reality and invented worlds, between life and art. The novel may be seen as a profound meditation upon language and reality which takes the form of a quest.

Part of the difficulty Sigbjørn experiences in reading signs is occasioned by his decision to journey away from the familiar. His home is in Eridanus, a small community of fishermen and boat-builders near Vancouver, British Columbia. Here the speech employed is that of pre-industrial England. The inhabitants of Eridanus have not been evicted from the organic community and they continue to speak its dialect. In Mexico, Sigbjørn recalls an old neighbour at Eridanus whose name was William Blake and whose "speech was such, or so he persuaded himself, as Wordsworth dreamed to record, humble and good as plates on a farmhouse shelf" (DG, 110). Certainly, the man speaks a language that is simple, lively, and intimately connected to things; "'They're crabs wot jump!'" he exclaims, his cockneyism failing to prejudice the organic virtue he possesses in Sigbjørn's eyes (DG,

110). This man is a trustworthy messenger and guide whose simple directions point the way "home." He is the antithesis of the burned house which stands for the young lovers as a sign of future doom. Tellingly, by contrast to William Blake's simply spoken message, "disaster's message [was] without word" (DG, 110). The symbolic language of paradise speaks through things and the words that name things; that of hell is mute: it gestures through absences.

In Volcano, Lowry inserted among the descriptions of the riot and unreality of Mexico brief idyllic passages which point the way to a possible future "Eridanus" in British Columbia. This paradisial world which is glimpsed but which cannot as yet be inhabited stands antithetically to the contemporary worlds the novel evokes. In London and New York the signs that once pointed to the deep realities which hold a culture together now point to nothingness. Everywhere there are messages but no meaning; everywhere there is mere gesture and emptiness. Mexico, which to Stuart Chase had suggested by virtue of its organic culture a way out of the Western impasse, merely compounds the problem. The unreadability

of Mexico is a function not merely of its otherness but also of its likeness. That is to say, the Consul, Hugh, Yvonne, and Laruelle have difficulty interpreting the cultural signs of Mexico because they are unfamiliar. The local architecture, fauna, landscape, and language point to cultural givens which are not accessible to Europeans. Yet there is a sense in which the difficulty in reading the Mexican cultural signs is implicated in the cultural impasse reached by Western civilization. In New York and London, the old meanings of Christianity, gentility, and service are no longer widely accepted. Their reality has been replaced by a grubby and valueless modernity. Where their signs persist they indicate an absence like the scar on the crucifix on the Oxford Street church where Christ had been. The Western capitals, like Mexico, present the aspect of a world in which messages proliferate but cannot readily be interpreted. In the riotous images and messages of Mexico, Lowry shows us a world that is unreadable not so much because it is unlike ours as because it is horribly similar.

The Consul's Eridanus, then, was set against the universal unreality of the late Thirties in a way that

stressed its unavailability in the present. It is a part of the English past that has somehow miraculously survived and which the Consul and Yvonne might rediscover if only they could escape the present. It is like the village that Graham Greene glimpses hidden in a valley as he journeys into the heart of his Mexican darkness in The Lawless Roads: the village represents the "consciousness of something simple and strange and uncomplicated, a way of life we have hopelessly lost but can never quite forget."[11] Greene makes no attempt to descend into the village. Lowry places Eridanus outside Mexico. It is true that he evokes the Stuart Chase face of Mexico -- Mexico as a garden unspoiled by commerce and technology -- in the passage in which Hugh and Yvonne ride hired horses through an idyllic landscape. But here the idyll is a selfconsciously literary one, meant to recall the English idylls whose language the writing evokes ("they might have been in England, exploring some little-known bypath of Devon or Cheshire" [UV, 110]). The actual Mexico of Under the Volcano is a land of slavery and oppression whose generous impulses are crushed by the fascist mentality that rules the country. The idyll through which Hugh and Yvonne romantically ride is part

of a world that is "always within the binoculars of the police" (UV, 106).

In Dark As The Grave, Lowry does not merely establish a contrast between a lost wholeness located outside the novel's action and the present brokenness. Eridanus is now part of the present. The name, "Eridanus," indicates a place that exists in the lived world. It is a fact away from which Sigbjørn Wilderness travels into more and more disconcerting enigmas. In Dark As The Grave to leave Eridanus is to leave a world in which signs point to things and things point to the larger wholes in which they participate. Language in this world is rounded and whole, not broken off from the sources of its signifying power.

Sigbjørn's problems with signs begin as soon as he leaves Eridanus. The plane which carries the Wildernesses down the West Coast stops at Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. At each stop Sigbjørn finds a Kilroy graffiti, familiar in the post-war period, inscribed on the wall in the men's toilet. This repetition of the sign strikes Sigbjørn as being somehow sinister. The

last message, "Kilroy passed a stone here. El Grafe was watching," seems to him particularly sinister, even frightening, and to presage the threatening and indecipherable signs he anticipates in Mexico (DG, 31). Curiously, Sigbjørn finds both the presence and the absence of messages disturbing. He asks his wife whether she has noticed any Kilroys in the women's toilet. He is deeply distressed by the absence of alcoholic symptoms he observes in a Mexican acquaintance whose dissipations are belied by his healthy appearance. So terrifying does he find this absence of signs in the sinister John Stanford that he reflects that "if he really understood what Stanford meant, he would go mad on the spot" (DG, 220). Sigbjørn must somehow cope with messages from cloacal regions that seem to follow him down the continent, with messages in Spanish he cannot interpret, and with a figure he feels to be diabolical yet who seems to be healthy. The problem lies less in what these signs, or absence of signs, portend than in why Sigbjørn must compulsively look for signs, messages, portents, omens, coincidences. Why, after all, should the man Stanford mean anything? Why must Sigbjørn Wilderness always sus-

pect that behind all signs, even the innocent and meaningless ones, must lie some meaning?

Sigbjørn is, of course, a novelist and consequently shares with his creator that "unstaunchable impulse to create order out of chaos." He cannot resist the impulse to make connections between apparently unrelated phenomena. Nor can he resist the impulse to read meaning into the apparent randomness of experience. He is an indefatigable pursuer of epiphanies, and like all good novelists is not above scattering puzzles about in order to make his epiphanies possible. The goal of his hermeneutics is a metaphysical one: he seeks to find whether all the signs that crowd upon his consciousness proceed from some ultimate referent. Hence, his terrified apprehension that, should he grasp the meaning behind John Stanford, he would go mad on the spot. John Stanford has come to stand in Sigbjørn's mind for all that is sinister and evil in reality as Fernando Marquez has come to stand for all that is most noble. If some ultimate meaning lies behind John Stanford, then, it must be that the gods exist, but are the devil. Such discoveries must wait for Mexico. In the meantime there are hints,

possibilities, coincidences, omens, intimations of revelations about to be granted. In Los Angeles airport, Sigbjørn waits behind the barrier to board his plane. The simple act of standing in a queue seems to him charged with significance, a significance he cannot quite pin down:

> so that it seemed that for them too, Primrose and he, just beyond that barrier, lay some meaning, or the key to a mystery that would give some meaning to their ways on earth: it was as if he stood on the brink of an illumination, on the near side of something tremendous, which was to be explained beyond, in that midnight darkness (DG, 43).

In Mexico, Sigbjørn finds as anticipated that "latent operatic air" of a reality more heightened, jumbled, frenetic than the familiar one (DG, 72). Mexico is still the surreal world of 1936. Yet the bizarre quality of Mexican life no longer has the prestige of novelty and has consequently lost the capacity to shock. The violent colours, shapes, distortions do not press upon Sigbjørn Wilderness' consciousness with the startling report with which they pressed upon the Consul. Their very strangeness has become familiar. The cantinas, pulquerias, churches don't excite Sigbjørn as they do Primrose to whom Mexico has the spell of the exotic, of

some extravagant foreign language she wishes to penetrate. The Consul notes an "inordinate number of ill-advised signs ordering one to drink ice-cold Coca-Cola" (DG, 73). The Coca-Cola signs signal not only that American capitalism has invaded Mexico -- a process bemoaned by Stuart Chase, Eduardo Redondo, and Lowry himself -- but also that Mexico, by becoming familiar, has lost some of its former power actively to engage the imagination of the novelist. The images of the place drift passively through his mind. They are not charged with the accretions of consciousness.

Mexico has become, if not more readable, then less tantalizing in its unreadability. Sigbjørn reflects that the "thought of Mexico's foreigness" will rescue the place from its essential dullness in his wife's mind (DG, 175). For Sigbjørn himself the world, including Mexico, is "curiously dead," no longer a fit dwelling place for the imagination (DG, 175). Mexico is merely another part of a reality that is insufficient as it is to tempt his mind towards marriage with the world of things. It is this failing in reality to supply the necessary creative afflatus that might rescue the world from

its deadness that atracts Sigbjørn to drink. Alcohol adds something to reality. It makes a bus drive "more than a bus drive" (DG, 176). By this addition, it makes the poverty-stricken actual world adequate to the artist's imagination. We recall that in Eridanus such alcoholic redemptions of the real were unnecessary. The world of things was creatively joined to the imagination. Merely by naming, the artist asserted the magical properties of things: their connectedness to man's mind and to the cosmos. In Mexico, the names are more beautiful than the towns when not invested with alcoholic magic: "the names were the only beautiful things for the towns were all the same, the country was flat and dusty" (DG, 197). For Sigbjørn the tawdry glamour of Mexico has vanished leaving a world which announces its own vacancy. The "luminous name" of their hotel, the Hotel Cornada, has been reduced by electrical failure to the holophrastic, significant sign: "Hotel Nada" (DG, 73).

It is perhaps no coincidence that in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 (1963) the disk jockey Mucho Maas is haunted by a dream in which he sees the metal sign in the used car lot at which he once worked.

Inscribed on the sign are the letters N.A.D.A. which signify the National Automobile Dealers' Association. In Mucho's nightmare the sign says simply "nada, nada, against the blue sky."[12] Pynchon would seem to have borrowed from Lowry the image of a sign which advertises the fact that, like all the innumerable signs in modern life, it points to nothing. The implied connection between Lowry and Pynchon is worth pursuing because it suggests that, far from being cut off from the significant literary tendencies of his time, Lowry was astonishingly sensitive to what was really central. While his English contemporaries were turning away from the difficulties and disorientations of the present to an insular tradition enfeebled by their own provincialism, Lowry's priority was consistently with the condition of the language now. In his concern with language and with the failure of language to provide the contemporary writer with valid signs Lowry stands in a central modernist tradition. It is indicative of Lowry's centrality to this tradition that his late fiction should have anticipated so many of the formal and thematic concerns of Thomas Pynchon.

The Crying of Lot 49, like Dark As The Grave,

concerns the search of a person for the meaning she believes to lie behind the signs that proliferate in contemporary life, particularly in California. As Mucho Maas' used-car lot sign indicates, Pynchon is also concerned with the great blankness that is to be found where Truth once resided. Oedipa Maas, the heroine of Pynchon's novel, is disposed, like Sigbjørn Wilderness, to look for the hidden meaning of signs where none may exist. Even the graffiti in lavatories seems to her significant and, like Sigbjørn, she suspects that the repetition of some sign in different parts of the country suggests some dark and far-reaching plot. Everywhere she turns in modern American life she encounters signs, words, and symbols that imply the promise of hierophany. Oedipa wishes to recapture the signifying function that words possessed when they stood in special relation to the Logos, when the marks of God's presence were inscribed into language. She has not grasped that in a world that has banished the divine "There is no Logos, there are only hieroglyphs."[13]

Oedipa feels herself always to be on the point of being admitted to the mysteries that words intimate. Yet she is not granted the moment of illumination she

seeks, the moment so bright that the experience of epiphany it signals cannot be carried back into the normal world. She discovers a multiciplicity of "clues, announcements, intimations," but no "central truth" by comparison to which she might legitimately describe the signs that pointed to that truth as "dross."[14] She must face another, more terrifying, possibility than her suspicion that language will always fail to convey the absolute because of its inadequacy to the experience of Truth: the possibility that there is no absolute. It may be that the symbolic function of language has foundered because of the absence that is to be found in place of a transcendent referent. This is the possibility that lies at the heart of her husband's self-laceration: as a disk-jockey he sees himself as high-priest in a religion of pop-culture whose faithful are unaware that his messages contain no meaning. It is the possibility of nothingness that lies beyond the terror of the sign: "nada, nada, against the blue sky."

Sigbjørn Wilderness' concern in returning to Mexico is to "verify the sign," and this involves a metaphysical as well as a cultural problem for the would-be

interpreter. He is thwarted in his desire for meaning not merely by the fact that the sign is written in a foreign language and embodies alien cultural acceptances but also by the fact that it is simply language. "'¿Le gusta este jardin? ¿Que es suyo? ¡Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!'" (DG, 140). Why are the difficulties of interpreting this sign so significant, even threatening, to Sigbjørn?

Sigbjørn Wilderness is in fact pleased that his original interpretation of the sign may have been erroneous. This mistranslation suggests to him a means of withholding information from his Consul (Sigbjørn is clearly Lowry himself and the novel he has written, The Valley of the Shadow of Death, is obviously Volcano). Sigbjørn sees that by retaining the mistranslation he can "have my Consul think that's what it means at first" (DG, 141). This reflection leads him to the exhilirating recognition of his Godlike powers as an author: "For did not, conceivably, God himself move within His own creation in just such a ghostly fashion, and how should we see Him, when we dimly sense that he has the power at any moment to cut us out altogether from His strange dark manuscript?" (DG, 142). The significance of the

sign, then, lies less in what, literally construed, it says than in its ability to indicate some shadowy presence behind it, hinting and yet withholding access to meaning. For may not God have survived His own death by leaving clues and signs locked into the world and into words so that men continue to yearn for Him? And is this not precisely the way in which the reader experiences the traces of the author's presence in a novel: as a ghostly paranoia who lays clues for the gullible pursuer, who promises revelations, hierophanies, epiphanies but always at the last moment withdraws.

As he stands waiting for departure at the Los Angeles airport, Sigbjørn overhears some people "conversing in a language that sounded vaguely transliterated" (DG, 36). This language seems to Sigbjørn clumsy and inexpressive, "yet it was susceptible, he reflected, of explanation" (DG, 36). The overheard language, despite its awkwardness and foreignness, is construable by those patient enough to learn the rules by which it generates meaning. It is opposed to the "private esperanto" of the Wildernesses which, though employing standard English, is untranslatable into any common idiom. The words of the

lovers' private language, being rooted in their life at Eridanus, are not mere hieroglyphs but have the status of religious signs: they point to the wholeness from which the modern world has descended into a myriad shattered fragments. Outside Eridanus words become hieroglyphs, sometimes treacherous and always enigmatic. Sigbjørn is forced to seek for clues by which he can hope to decipher these hieroglyphic scrawls and teasing messages. A pun in the word "carnation" suggests to him how it is possible that a murderer can raise such innocent flowers: the clue is the root "carne" locked into the word's etymology (DG, 137). Even clichés seem to him potentially charged with meaning if only the key to their decipherment can be discovered. Out of a hackneyed phrase like "the lowest ebb" he worries the "clue" buried in the "platitude" (DG, 77).

What is the origin of all these clues? What epiphany is granted Sigbjørn as a reward for all his attempts to solve puzzles? On the morning of the day in which Sigbjørn concludes his quest by tracking down Fernando Marquez, the quester is overwhelmed by the conviction that "there was tremendous meaning in all this, indeed

meaning in all our lives" (DG, 234). But what is this meaning? Fernando has been killed. Sigbjørn cannot even translate the Spanish word for dead and thus turns his discovery of his friend's death into a comedy of errors. The image he takes away of the death of this man who symbolized everything noble that was left in the world is that of a garish funeral monument in a Mexican cemetery constructed out of mirrors. By this monument is an empty bottle; there is a man asleep by a grave; outside the cemetery is a sign: "'It is forbidden to ride bicycles in the cemetery'" (DG, 244). There is no meaning here, nor any in the ruins of the ancient city Mitla which they visit the next day. This ruin, approached by enduring the attempts of contemporary Indians to sell their fake idols, attests to the former brilliance of Zapotecan culture. Yet the meaning of the place, its purpose, is indecipherable although it is clear that the place was concerned with death. They wander among the ruins and find the "remains of painted walls, delicate works of filigree without explanation, as if they were the work of some master novelist labouring in conjunction with a sculptor, the whole thing as inexplicable, as mysterious as God himself" (DG, 247).

Here in this indecipherable "library" strewn with hieroglyphs, walking among pillars "whose significance had long been forgotten," Sigbjørn discovers an unbearable evocation of our time" (DG, 247). Broken, unsupported, its meanings forgotten, pointing to nothingness -- Mitla is an image of the modern world through which we walk trying to piece together the fragments of what seem to have been messages long ago.

The clues that Sigbjørn finds scattered through his search exist, then, because language has not forgotten its long coexistence with the deity. Language has intimations of a higher reality built into its memory which Sigbjørn, like Oedipa Maas, pursues through puns, mistranslations, misconstruals, signs, lingustic slips. The consuming desire of the questers to discover meaning colludes with the metaphysical bias of language to establish plots and hierophanies where there is nothing but blankness. Language has played a trick on them: having known the Logos, it seduces them with the promise of what it can no longer provide. It occurs to Oedipa Maas that the man of whose will she is the executrix may have survived death "as a paranoia; as a pure

conspiracy against someone he loved."[15] It dawns on Sigbjørn Wilderness that he himself is the victim of just such a paranoia. The God he pursues is, like himself, a novelist who leaves clues, lays plots, creates patterns, hints at hidden causes, and implies that every thought, word, deed and object has meaning. To learn to read his "strange dark manuscript" which is the world is to learn to read any text and involves the same conundrums. How can the reader disentangle his own face from what he sees? How can he know that he sees the world as it is rather than some "hideous superposition of reality" that he has crazily projected onto the place? How is he to avoid creating the meaning he seeks? Sigbjørn Wilderness, indefatigable pursuer of epiphanies, cannot prevent himself from misinterpreting Mexico. On the map of the place he superimposes the maps of his education, his reading, his culture, his expectations. Looking at the mountains and valleys of Mexico, he sees not the place itself but a fantastic Shelleyan symbolic landscape. Walking amid the ruins and mosaics of a land that has become a palimpsest of indecipherabilities, the Wildernesses bear about as much relation to their surroundings

"as a couple of Hottentots on Salisbury Plain 'doing' Stonehenge" (DG, 246).

> What it came down to, Ethan thought, at the end of this fourth year of the atomic age people had come to disbelieve in the future so thoroughly that the creation of the permanent, or the excellent, no longer seemed worthwhile (OF, 227).

Ethan Llewelyn, the hero of October Ferry to Gabriola, here alludes to a problem that is central to any understanding of Lowry's post-Volcano fiction: how is the artist to create what Sigbjørn Wilderness in Dark As The Grave calls "reasonably permanent form" in a world whose condition is one of radical temporariness? (DG, 156). The problem is central to Lowry's aesthetic, and if we are to grasp its bearing on the successes and the failings of the late fiction we must acknowledge both the romantic background from which Lowry derived his aesthetic terminology and the impact of contemporary history on his working out of that aesthetic.

The telling phrase, "reasonably permanent form," occurs in Dark As The Grave where it is used in a context that recalls Shelley's aesthetic thinking. Sigbjørn

Wilderness holds to the very Shelleyan notion that the mind of the author during the creative effort is like "'a man continually pushing his way through blinding smoke in an effort to rescue some precious objects from a burning building. How hopeless, how inexplicable the effort! For is not the building the work of art in question, long since perfect in the mind, and only rendered a vehicle of destruction by the effort to realize it, to transmute it upon paper'" (OF, 154). The origin of this notion is to be found in Shelley's "Defense of Poetry":

> the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness ... [W]hen the composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.[16]

The act of creation, then, for Shelley, Sigbjørn Wilderness, and for Lowry is the necessarily compromised attempt to get down in an imperfect medium a perfect idea. Only the idea or conception, being Platonic, is permanent: "perfect in the mind." The realized work of art is part

of nature and hence part of the business of change and decay. For Shelley, this process by which the poet repeats the creative paradigm of a fall from an ideal unity into division is unfortunate; for Lowry, it illustrates the Lawrentian principle that works of art should emulate the transience of organic life. For Lowry, works of art should rejoice in their very impermanence. The natural principle of universal change is not opposed in Lowry's thinking to the aesthetic disideratum of beauty. An acceptance of change is in fact essential to the building of houses, piers, poems, and of novels. Part of their beauty for Lowry lies in their impermanence:

> they'd never looked upon their little beach cabin, however beloved, as a permanent thing. That impermanence, indeed, the ramshackle tenuity of the life, were part of its beauty. The scene, too, that confronted them through their casement windows was ever-changing; the mountains, the sea never looked the same two minutes on end: why then be afraid of change? (OF, 171).

There are, then, two kinds of change which concerned Lowry in the period after 1940, one consoling, the other threatening. The threatening kind of change is that to which Ethan Llewelyn refers when he speaks of the

loss of faith in the permanent and the excellent attendant upon living in "the atomic age." By this kind of change Lowry means the accelerating pace of social, moral, and linguistic decay in our century. As Eliot, Pound, and Lawrence felt that Europe after 1918 had reached the nadir of baseness, so Lowry felt that the 1939 - 45 war had "blast[ed] away an old age and let[ ] in a worse one" (DG, 181). The appalling ugliness of this new age is given expression in October Ferry as the Canadian beer hall into whose decor all the mental depravity of the times has been concentrated. This world is truly the worst and last of all possible human worlds and the kind of change it represents is one in which Lowry sees an urgent threat to all those productions of the human spirit, those artistic makings, which strive to be lasting and worthwhile.

The second kind of change that concerned Lowry, the change of which man need not be afraid, was that which occurs within nature. The lesson Lowry drew from natural process was not that things die and cease to be but that they change into other forms. Moreover, the beauty of natural things cannot be separated from their changeableness. According to the Taoist metaphor Lowry

employs in "The Forest Path" as the One flows into the Many and returns to its source, so the sea flows into the sky and returns as rain to the sea, and so life flows into art and art flows back into life. In this cyclical pattern according to which the forms of all things flow into other forms without disturbing the integrity and continuity of Being Lowry found a consolation in the face of death as well as the structural metaphors by reference to which he built his late fiction.

Lowry's chief metaphor, or "design-governing posture," after 1940 was provided by the rickety pier which he built on the beach at Dollarton. Its great structural virtue according to Lowry lay in its "simplicity, lightness, and freedom from top hamper."[17] The pier thus stands antithetically to the churrigueresque Mexican cathedral architecture which Lowry used as a structural principle in Volcano. The pier is uncluttered by ornament. It possesses an organic unity of the utmost simplicity: the parts are perfectly related, functionally and aesthetically, to the whole. In a Mexican cathedral the parts are not thus integrally related to the formal unity of the whole structure. In October Ferry, Lowry abandons

the metaphor of the cathedral and, as Muriel Bradbrook has observed in her study of Lowry, adopts that of the pier he built at Dollarton.[18] The pier represented to Lowry most cogently the integrated world of "beloved chores, objects, tools" which he inhabited at "Eridanus" (OF, 181). And the pier, as something useful made by his own hands and as something beautiful in its own right, impressed upon Lowry the importance of structure over both style and content. Against all the destructive energies that were thrown at it the pier survived, held together by its stark geometry. On the modernist architectural principle that "less is more," Lowry strips the structure of the novel of that riotous proliferation of details that characterized Volcano (OF, 167).

Lowry has not returned to the pared, Hemingwayesque style of "June 4th, 1934." His style in October Ferry is still much of the time "overloaded." That is to say, the style draws attention to itself by its excessiveness. His use of Latinate diction, for instance, is intended not so much to extend the range of the novel's linguistic interest as to indulge a baroque taste for excessive detail. It is the ugliness

of the English forms of these Latin derivatives that puzzles: "delimitate," "recalcitrating," "verticity" (OF, 171, 192, 291). Why not "delimit" and "recalcitrant"? And what exactly is a "mood of verticity" in the latter context? The prose of October Ferry is anything but pared. The sentences are frequently long and convoluted, thick with punctuation of obscure purpose. The writing, in fact, mixes various styles: the mandarin style Lowry adopted after 1940 with his long standing preference for the language of common speech, versions of pastoral with parodies of his own previous stylistic mannerisms. Yet at the level of structural organization, Lowry has simplified his approach to novel-writing.

"Modern architecture should be structural," reflects Ethan Llewelyn thinking not only of his little cabin but also of the oil refinery across the inlet (OF, 167). What are the structural properties of the house, the pier, and the oil refinery that allow Lowry to find in all three both aesthetic satisfaction in contemplating them as objects and models for his own fiction?

The refinery would seem to be the least

likely of possible aesthetic objects. With its nocturnal flambeaux of infernal aspect, its contribution to a war-waging industrial capitalism, its illuminated sign announcing its diabolical allegiances -- the refinery was a visible symbol of the great rage for ugliness and destruction that Lowry felt to be at the heart of the modern world. Yet "once accepted as part of the landscape," the refinery becomes in Ethan's eyes "an entity aesthetically pleasing" (OF, 158). Ethan converts the refinery from an ugly industrial instrument into an aesthetic object by a simple trick of inclusion. He makes it part of the external scene to which, by a Wordsworthian act of desire, he has married his mind. The inlet considered as a whole scene provides "the outward correspondence of [his] inner nature, when [he is] blessed with love" (OF, 17).

In other words, the refinery is not merely an image of the external world received passively through the eye: it is clothed in the mind's projections. It is grasped by the imaginative act that grafts the mind of man to the world of things. At the heart of Lowry's opposition to the contemporary world is an opposition not between nature and artifice but between the world

considered as a collection of dead objects and the world made living and "real" by the imagination. The refinery is "real" because it has been included in a world in which man can feel himself at home. This is what Ethan Llewelyn means when he says that "it was humanity ... that had given Eridanus its beauty, not nature alone" (OF, 198).

The antithesis of Eridanus is not technology or industry or the "cash-nexus" but unreality. Whatever is merely abstract, the product of the analytic mind rather than the joining imagination, is unreal. Life in cities is unreal because it offers pictures of things in place of actual things ("it was as if they had exchanged sunlight on water for photographs of sunlight on water" (OF, 191)). Vancouver, which for Lowry had the soul and aspect of Portobello Road, stood for Lowry as London had stood for Wordsworth: it was a world so cluttered with signs, messages, phenomena that the mind could not take it all in, organize it into a humanized scene, and become one with it.

This is what Lowry meant by structural simplicity. The scene at Dollarton was a totality of related

objects and features which the mind could apprehend without feeling assaulted by or overloaded with information. And the mind was able to discover the hidden and apparent structural relations which connected everything within view. The rising sun links the trees with the refinery. The moon contains the herons and makes a Japanese painting. The cross braces and struts of the pier cannect the subaqueous world with the moony one, and the whole stirred by the tides emits a sound that is a kind of "barnacly poem."[19] The refinery itself is an "ideograph," a figure that expresses the idea of a thing rather than its name (OF, 158). Everywhere, the unity discovered is that of the mind which moves contemplatively over the scene establishing links between the several features. And these links arise out of the living connection between mind and place.

This is the kind of structural simplicity and connectedness that Lowry strives for in October Ferry. The unity of the novel, such as it is, proceeds not from any "austere classical pattern" which Lowry imposes a priori on the whole, rigidly bolting the parts together so that the done thing stands fixed and permanent.[20]

What unity there is is discovered fitfully as we read the novel, attentive to the special kinds of demands it makes. It is the unity of a single mind moving over a world seeing what it can encompass, what links it can establish among the features of this world, what cannot be included in any unity. This is the process Ethan Llewelyn refers to as "gay salvage" (OF, 80). The mind gathers and stores up the flotsam that comes to hand. That which can be used is fashioned into a house, a pier, a scene, a novel. The parts are tested according to the ability to serve some function in the whole.

The structure, then, does not aim to be permanent in the way a cathedral is permanent by its monolithic resistance to change. Lowry produces not a finished art-object but a kind of ready-made which may be added to or subtracted from. And the resiliance of the structure is a function of its ability not to resist the forces of destruction that are thrown at it. It is, in Lowry's deceptively unassuming phrase, a "reasonably permanent form." This is not to say that the novel is shoddily made or that it sees itself as anything less than a "classic" (Lowry was rightly insistent on this

latter term). But it claims to be a classic by virtue of its very openness to all that is least permanent in reality, by its refusal to tidy up whatever resists the demands of formal elegance.

The chief structural metaphor the novel offers us, then, is that of the pier and the permanence that belongs to things made by craftsmen who work in an organic community. Yet October Ferry is not written out of an organic community as is "The Forest Path to the Spring." The novel's action -- for it does have a skeletal action as well as recognizable characters although Lowry has little interest in such novelistic baggage -- takes place after the eviction of the central characters from their Eridanus and concerns their quest for readmittance. This readmittance is denied them, although the conclusion of the novel sounds a frail and ambiguous note of affirmation.

By his adoption of this quest theme, Lowry apparently intended to repeat the pattern he established in Dark As The Grave. Ethan Llewelyn, like Sigbjørn Wilderness, is obsessed by "signs, portents, and coincidences" (OF, 94). And like Ethan he is convinced that

some hidden correspondence exists between "the sheer multiplicity of the signs and portents and circumstances that hurtled ... about their destinies" and some ultimate reality (OF, 319). He journeys, then, towards some desired epiphany.

In this quest, we may discover the ghost of a conventional form which Lowry evidently sought to embody in the novel. That he was unable to do so to his satisfaction is indicative of the force of the centrifugal tendencies he sought to contain within this form. As in The Tree of Man the quest for meaning exists uneasily alongside a nostalgic pastoral form whose idyllic evocation suggests that life was once sufficient in itself and thus required no explication. In The Tree of Man there is a note of desperation in White's strategy of introducing at the last moment an epiphany which imposes form on the various disorders which threatened to break up the narrative. In October Ferry no last-minute epiphany is delivered. Instead Lowry gives us a kind of anti-epiphany, a "disillumination" which selfconsciously parodies the epiphanic method as devised by Eliot and Joyce (OF, 147). It would seem that in writing the novel Lowry experienced

the same difficulties in holding the material together that White experienced in writing The Tree of Man. But Lowry abandoned the attempt to stitch together the unruly parts of his novel. He let the novel go out of control. This is what he means when he calls the novel "Satanic."[21]

Behind Ethan Llewelyn's interpretive problems lie a twofold endeavour. Ethan is both a metaphysical and a cultural interpreter. By his suggestion that the deity requires interpreters he intimates the Miltonic scope of his ambition: he will "justify the ways of God to man."[22] The problem is to read the ambiguous messages the divinity has scribbled on the word. Ethan cannot dismiss from his mind, however, his suspicion that at the basis of Being, behind all those marks that ask to be interpreted as the signatures of the divine inscribed in the world, lies nothingness. This suspicion is confirmed by his anti-epiphany in the beer hall where, by a mysterious identification of subject with object, he has the reverse of a mystical experience. The terrifying meaninglessness appears to him to have the force of a message. It is as though God exists, but as some nameless horror behind the messages with which He teases us: "In the beginning was

the word. But what unpronounceable Name had visualized the Word?" (OF, 148).

Ethan's role as cultural interpreter is a legacy of his eviction from his pre-interpretive Eden: Eridanus. In this world, no interpretation is called for because signs have not come adrift from the things they signify which in turn participate in a totality of spiritual and material facts. This is the meaning of the speech that is both concrete and symbolic employed by William Blake and by the old men whose conversation the Llewelyns overhear on the bus. This is the condition John Irwin desribes in his American Hieroglyphics when he speaks of the Christian metaphysical tradition of interpretation of Egyptian writing:

> In his unfallen state man did not need a complex, abstract language. He was in such harmony with his environment that he used the language of nature, of natural signs -- that world of objects created by God to stand as emblems of spiritual facts. But since the fall was from simplicity to complexity, the farther man moved from his original state, the more complex and involved his language became, and the more obscure became the old emblematic relationship between a sign and its referent.[23]

In Eridanus, the tracks of the divine are still apparent in the world. Outside Eridanus they point to no graspable referent. What single signifying origin lies behind messages that advertise olives, "GOD IS LOVE," and "Did you ever see a/BALD-HEADED SHEEP?" (OF, 223)? The only means of connecting them is a paranoia that asserts crazily the power of the mind to make the connections valid again. Ethan's paranoia manages to wrest meaning out of advertising jingles and clichés. Thus he restores value to the debased currency of the language ("the best symbol of the age in which we live," he tells his wife, "is a debased coin" [OF, 171]). He treats their journey to Gabriola by ferry as a symbolic descent in terms of the Eleusinian mysteries, expecting to be admitted to a gnosis. He treats a priest casually met as a hermetic guide who informs him platidudinously that faith is a "messenger" (OF, 306). But in the end "nothing was very mysterious after all" (OF, 297). No revelations are made. When the little ferry puts back to Nanaimo Ethan finds inexplicably that "all that had occurred to them during their day, seemed, not merely suffused with a significance, and interrelated, as if part of some unknown system of logic, but leading up to this very

moment" (OF, 321). Yet the content of this epiphany is not revealed. It is, after all, merely a final delusion that connects all the random experiences of the day, that discovers a message behind all the signs, and "a secret language" behind all the coincidences and combinations (OF, 320).

Ethan's role as cultural interpreter, then, collides with his role as metaphysical interpreter. Denied access to an unbroken and pre-interpretive world, he journeys through the scraps, signs, and ruins of the contemporary world. What he finds is an unreadable text inscribed by chance or a malicious idiot. Only by illusion can man make sense of the world he inhabits -- this is the message of the novel. There is, after all, no message from beyond, merely the illusions with which we paint the void. Some, like the cabala, are elegant and consoling. Some, like the paranoiac delusions of the alcoholic, are terrifying. Some, like those of the artist, are pleasing. But we, the readers, should not be fooled: the writings of artist are the most obscure and treacherous of all texts. In Italy, Sigbjørn Wilderness views the literary remains of Keats

and reflects that the private correspondence of the poet has been "transmuted into hieroglyphics, masterly compressions, obscurities to be deciphered by experts -- yes, and poets -- like Sigbjørn Wilderness. Wil --" (HL, 109).

And Malcolm Lowry. And us.

Conclusion

there still remains a certain uncontaminated glory in the fact of race, in the very limits and circumscription of language and territorial boundary; so that one does not feel lost and isolated and self-sufficient. It seems to me that there is this fatal deficiency in all those exiles, of infinitely admirable capabilities, who, through preference or by force of untoward circumstances, have made their home outside the country of their birth.

Evelyn Waugh,
Labels (1930).

There are queer and unique difficulties that ever beset the transplanted.

Malcolm Lowry,
Letter to Gerald Noxon (?),
September 28, 1943, in H.R.C.,
University of Texas at Austin.

In his study of Ezra Pound, Poet in Exile, Noel Stock distinguishes between writers who use dialect inside the texture of their writing and those who merely record it:

> While those who just write in dialect are limited by the comparatively narrow range of their material -- of necessity narrow, no matter how lively -- the writers who make use of the dialect to keep their diction in the living language are in effect extending the language to make it cover wider ground than before, or at least, new ground. These writers incorporate various aspects of dialect or common speech into the very essence of their work so that sometimes these elements are completely absorbed or invisible. They may appear as no more than a tone of voice, a cadence, or a raised eyebrow, or they may be clearly visible.[1]

For both Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry the business of dialect was of central importance to the role they set themselves as novelists. Dissatisfied with the dialects of their particular tribes, they set out in the Thirties to extend the range of English fiction by incorporating into their writing speech modes other than that of the English middle class in its provincial, colonial, or educated versions. White turned to the speech of Australian rural life and, in The Living and The Dead, to the

speech of the English working class. Lowry turned, more enthusiastically, to the speech of sailors, of fishermen, and of craftsmen: all those who kept alive skills and speech patterns dying out of the contemporary English-speaking world.

Throughout the period from the mid Thirties to the late Fifties, while the mainstream of English fiction was retreating into a more and more confined linguistic space, White and Lowry were diligently struggling to incorporate into their writing the dialects of neglected tribes. They did not merely substitute working-class speech for "educated" English, or the speech of "ordinary" middle-class Englishmen for the "mandarin" dialect of the upper classes. They set out to draw on a whole range of dialects including, often parodically, the dialects of the tribes from which they themselves came and which they were so determined to escape. Lowry draws not only on the whole range of living English dialects but also on dialects that belong to ways of life no longer available in the England of the Thirties. And both, of course, employ a wide range of literary styles as well as the various dialects of spoken English.

To what extent, then, may we say that White and Lowry avoided both the "mandarin" habits of much English upper-class fiction, what Lowry calls "that serene semicolon technique style," and the linguistic limitations of the Isherwood style?[2] May we say of their writing, as we may say of Pound's, that dialectal forms, diction, and mannerisms have so thoroughly invaded the narrative voice that they appear merely as "a tone of voice, a cadence, or a raised eyebrow"?

> Not hoard 'em and hold for a rise
> any perfumer
> who wangles to get another's rent hoisted
> κατὰ δόλον ἐπαύξων
> shall be shaved, whipped and chucked out.

The lines are Pound's, from Canto XCVI in Thrones (1959), and they show how consummately Pound kept his diction sunk in the living language.[3] The words "hoard," "wangles," and "hoisted" which a merchant might use in his everyday speech have been seized on and rescued from their debased common currency, yet they do not strain away from the narrative voice. The sentence is inhabited by a voice which shifts its accent and cadence effortlessly and invisibly, with a flawless ear for the exact register required at this word, this phrase, this line in the sentence.

Here we see a signal difference in the way in which Pound, Eliot, and Joyce employ dialect in their writing and the way in which White and Lowry have done so. The great modernist writers, following on what Baudelaire and Laforge had done for Paris, aestheticize the life and speech of great cities, of London and Dublin. They discover a vocabulary appropriate to modern urban life. White and Lowry have habitually fallen back on the established literary vocabulary which deals with rural life and have employed reluctantly the dialects of urban man. Only in The Vivisector (1970) does White acknowledge and release the beauty of a great city. In the period between 1933 and 1957 neither attempts "to create beauty out of city life, and style out of the demotic English which is spoken therein."[4] This is why The Living and The Dead fails to convince: behind its treatment of urban life and speech lies not a Joycean modernism but a nostalgia for pastoral values.

> So it boiled down to this, the folded hands, the ultimate simplicity in the silence of a room (LD, 329).

This sentence is from The Living and The Dead, and we may hear behind its laboured colloquialism the familiar

voice of the Whitean narrator trying to get down in convincing speech an idiom that is foreign to him. Hence the "boiled down": the homely metaphor supposedly appropriate to a simple working-class man which doesn't quite convince. Knowing that the phrase doesn't carry conviction, White has to tell us what his diction cannot show: that Joe Barnett doesn't live by Elyot Standish's abstractions. Joe, White obligingly informs us, "wanted to take the words with his hands, shape them the way they ought to go" (LD, 328).

We can hardly say of this passage that it shows a writer who has incorporated dialect into "the very essence" of his writing. What White himself calls "the chasms created by language and class" are apparent in the uneasiness with which dialect exists alongside the characteristic narrative voice.[5] And that voice is most at home with sensibilities which, if they don't always possess a Woolfian refinement, have typically the detachment, self-absorption, and linguistic competence of White himself. Elyot Standish, Theodora Goodman, and Laura Trevelyan speak White's native tongue. They have inner lives explorable within the limits of

educated speech. The diction that conveys those inner lives is fleshed out not with the sharp actualities of colloquial speech but with poeticisms, symbolism, and a syntax as strained and labyrinthine as their own minds.

If White had not strayed from such a constricted linguistic usage he would have remained a minor Virginia Woolf, his central fictional interests rigidly clamped within an upper-middle-class dialect with other dialects appearing for comic or sentimental interest only. Fortunately, in his Australian fiction he painstakingly breaks with his old dialectal habits. Stan Parker speaks in a dialect foreign to that of any tribe with which White's background acquainted him. Neither peasant, nor grazier, nor servant, nor educated gentleman -- Stan is the Australian common man and he speaks the language of everyday. In giving this man such a powerful craving for meaning and beauty, White denies the upper-middle-class its claim to sole competence in matters of sensibility. It is true that White never learns to work dialect into the texture of his writing as closely as does Pound. The classes in White's novels always remain imprisoned within their separate universes. Yet inside the various

linguistic spaces circum/scribed by those universes, White manages to convey what it is to be conscious irrespective of class, dialect, or tribe.

> He cast again, and the stevedore trapped it by the monkey-knot: the bight of the hawser followed. The hawsers dropped and groaned and were hauled ashore. (U, 31).

> The stars taking their places were wounds opening in his being, multiple duplications of that agony, of that eye. The constellations might have been monstrosities in the delirium of God. Disaster might have been smeared over the whole universe. It was as if he were living in the pre-existence of some unfathomable catastrophe, and he steadied himself a moment against the sill, feeling the doomed earth itself stagger in its heaving spastic flight towards the Hercules Butterfly.[6]

> The abominable impact on his whole being at this moment of the fact that that hideously elongated cucumiform bundle of blue nerves and gills below the steaming unselfconscious stomach had sought its pleasure in his wife's body brought him trembling to his knees. How loathsome, how incredibly loathsome was reality. (UV, 207).

These three passages, taken respectively from Ultramarine, Lunar Caustic, and Volcano, show the dialectal range of Lowry's diction at different stages of his writing. In the first place, the maritime terminology is effective but marred by excessiveness. Lowry's seizing on the speech

of sailors and the jargon of their trade is over-enthusiastic, almost pedantic. What is significant is Lowry's ability to work the diction of his preferred tribe into the texture of his writing. The narrative voice is not hermetically sealed against corruption by the rough dialectal forms. White, who has shown himself attentive to the lively idiom of Sydney's prostitutes ("'Come down by the water, brother ... and we'll root so good you'll shoot out the other side of Christmas'"), rarely allows these dialects to invade his narrative voice.[7] The raciness of such recorded dialects in White's fiction stresses the detachment at the level of style and diction of the habitual narrative manner.

In the Lunar Caustic passage Lowry's diction is more literary than in the Ultramarine passage. The surprising and effective words, "stagger" and "spastic," are drawn not from common speech but from alcoholic and medical terminologies applied to an unfamiliar context. The diction is replete with Latin and Greek derivations, and the voice is unequivocally that of an educated, middle-class, English speaker. The writing achieves its effects by combining pompous phrases such as "delirium of God"

and "doomed earth" with unusual, shocking metaphors: the stars as "wounds," the earth as a "spastic" or drunken man, the constellations as disaster "smeared" over the universe. In abandoning the prose-style of Ultramarine for that of Lunar Caustic Lowry has merely substituted a lively and appealing affectation for a conventional one.

In the Volcano passage Lowry superbly combines a variety of dialects discernible only as minute shifts of diction and inflection, subtle changes in tone and register that follow the declension of a consciousness into despair under the impact of a hideous recognition. The diction is predominantly English middle-class, choked with public-school adjectives: "abominable," "hideously," "loathsome," "incredibly loathsome." Like George Orwell under the strain of battle, the Consul, confronted by this visible sign of his cuckoldry, falls back on the familiar language of school. But Lowry has also employed diction that Orwell would have rejected as affected and "mandarin": "elongated cucumiform" registers not merely the Consul's shocked retreat into a familiar dialect but also Lowry's determination to use as wide a range of conflicting idioms and idiolects as is necessary to achieve precisely

the effects he desires. Hence the sudden shift in diction from the Latinate epithets to the bunch of English words when describing the thing itself: "bundle of blue nerves and gills." The use of Old English- and Old Norse-derived words which retain their concreteness and force makes the image sharp, particular, visual. The language, like a zooming camera lens, takes us close to the object that excites the Consul's horror. Held there, we scarcely notice the synecdohe that makes the part stand for the whole man: it is the part not the man that seeks "its pleasures" in Yvonne's body. This is writing that extends the range of English literary usage.

Both Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry, then, have extended the range of the literary employment of "les mots de la tribu" if only by their common acknowledgement that the English language encompasses a multiplicity of idiolects. Their effort as novelists has been directed at bringing these tribal dialects into literary usage. Above all, from the Thirties through to the late Fifties they sought some way out of what they conceived as a linguistic impasse reached by English civilization in this period.

In Ultramarine and The Living and The Dead White and Lowry sought escape from the pervading sense of unreality in the England of the Thirties. This sense of unreality was most acutely felt by the young novelists in the loss of meaning, resonance, and precision from the language, particularly from middle-class speech. White's novel works within, and is hampered by, the weariness of a culture that has cut itself off from the source of truth and reality that once lay behind its use of signs. The novel records the proliferation of platitudes, advertising falsities, the untruths of newspapers, the empty posturings and gesturings of those committed to jejune political creeds. And White finds no convincing way out of this general collapse of the sign. Lowry's novel enacts a voyage away from this same linguistic and signifying dead-end. The young hero's frantic search for a language of reality, simplicity, and connection to things points to a lack of such qualities in the language left behind in England. This sense of the exhaustion of the signifying power of words increased in the course of the Thirties. It is recorded not only by conservatives like Eliot who sought some way back to the religious use of the sign

but also by leftists like Orwell who saw the fashionable left as part of rather than an alternative to the prevailing deadness. For Orwell the substance of "Spain" was not the word, eagerly adopted as a fashionable symbol by the left, but an immense confusion out of which particular facts had to be snatched by main force. Between these facts and the honest observer lay an obscuring smokescreen and generalities. This same sense is found in Wyndham Lewis' The Revenge for Love which discovers at the heart of the Spanish confusion "the false bottom underlying the spectacle of the universe."[8]

In the post-war period -- in Lowry's case from around 1942 -- White and Lowry discovered the enclaves of linguistic purity for which they had so long been seeking. At Dollarton and Castle Hill they found pastoral hold-outs against the world that emerged out of the 1914 - 18 war which allowed them to view the present from a standpoint which embraced a simpler and consoling past. They did not, of course, merely settle in pastoral retreats and ignore the present as H.E. Bates does in his nostalgic and bucolic stories of rural English life. They used their "pastorals" as a means of measuring the distance travelled

by the actual world towards apocalypse. For neither was under any illusions that the dominant interpretation of reality in the modern world, an interpretation that has shaped the world in its own image, was that of commerce, of technology, and of ugliness. What they needed was a kind of literary Rosetta stone: a means of setting side by side in the one text several apparently indecipherable languages. This collocation allows for a mutual decipherment if we interpret the one in terms of the other. The world of pastoral must be construed in terms of its opposite: apocalypse. The world of epic must be construed in terms of its opposite: irony.

Thus their later work is concerned with the problem of reading. Both novelists confront us with the problem of how we are to read their own texts and they themselves must somehow learn to read the texts of Australia or Mexico or British Columbia. The characteristic form of their novels is that of a quest for meaning. And whatever text must be read always turns out to be already written upon. Thus both novelists acknowledge that the real is always "figured."[9] Voss seeks the heart of the country he regards as a blank slate. He will "map" it.

But the deserts disclose layer beneath layer of writing to those who are prepared to look. Beneath the rational records of the explorers, Colonel Hebden and Voss, lie the more fabulous narratives of bushrangers. Beneath the efforts of the whites to inscribe their legends in the dust, or merely to carve their names on trees, lie the simpler yet indelible messages of the aborigines drawn on the walls of caves. The meanings of these writings are invariably subversive of received truths. In the end the "dialect" of the land is entrusted to the mad boy Jackie who has murdered Voss and who believes himself possessed by the spirit of his victim (V, 415). Jackie is the novel's elusive Hermes by virtue of his association with quicksilver. Significantly, Colonel Hebden who sets out to "apprehend" the boy fails in his attempt: as the narrator puts it, "veils were spread upon him" (V, 416).

Both novelists subvert whatever meanings we propose. Volcano and Voss may be said to be "machines" because they generate whatever meaning the reader likes, without finally endorsing any.[10]

While the English novelists of the Fifties

concentrated on reading the familiar English world in terms of a body of consoling texts, drawn primarily from the period before 1914, White and Lowry set out to read entirely new worlds. In the process of these readings, their novels make assertions about the difficulties of reading not just new worlds but any worlds. We might agree with Gilles Deleuze who in his study of Proust asserts that "travel does not connect places, but affirms only their differences," except that, as White and Lowry show, the worlds we encounter are always read in terms of the worlds we leave behind.[11]

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Dylan Thomas, "A Visit to America," Dylan Thomas Reading, Vol. 4, Caedmon, TC 1061, n.d.

[2] Arthur O. Lowry, Letter to Malcolm Lowry, 22 April 1942, Malcolm Lowry Collection, Box 1-(33), Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia.

[3] Earle Birney, marginal inscription in Malcolm Lowry: Selected Letters, ed., Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968), p. xi. This copy is part of the Earle Birney Collection in the Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin.

[4] Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son," Australian Letters, 1, No. 3 (1958), 3.

[5] Colin MacInnes, et al., Australia and New Zealand (New York: Time, 1964), p. 140.

[6] MacInnes, pp. 52-5.

[7] Patrick White, Flaws in the Glass (New York: Viking, 1981), p. 55.

[8] Osbert Sitwell, Introd., Escape With Me (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 20.

[9] Virginia Woolf, The Years (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 241.

[10] White, Flaws, pp. 52-8.

[11] See photograph in White, Flaws, p. 150.

[12] Ezra Pound, Letter to James Joyce, [Between 6 and 12] September 1915, in Forrest Read, ed., Pound/Joyce (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 45.

[13] Cyril Connolly, The Rock Pool (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954), p. 65.

[14] White, Flaws, p. 123.

[15] Paul Fussell, Abroad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), passim.

[16] Sitwell, pp. 3-4.

[17] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[18] Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 121. All further references to this work in the text indicated by UV.

[19] White notes in Flaws in the Glass that his lover, Manoly Lascaris, was "thought to be 'some kind of black prince'" by the neighbours during the early days at Castle hill. See White, Flaws, p. 138. The term "poofteroos" (Australian slang for homosexuals) occurs in White's The Solid Mandala (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 9.

[20] T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," The Dial, 75 (July-Dec. 1923), p. 483.

[21] Patrick White, "The Ploughman and Other Poems," illus. by L. Roy Davies (Sydney: Beacon Press, 1935), n. pag.

[22] Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 207.

[23] F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933), p. 87.

[24] Stuart Chase, Mexico (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 109.

[25] See "Vanishing Enchantment?" by Eduardo Bolio Rendon in Malcolm Lowry Collection, Box 6-(58), Special

Collections Division, University of British Columbia. For Lowry's enthusiastic comments on this article see the typescript of "La Mordida," typed draft, box 12-(15) where Lowry describes it as "a brilliant article" p. 244. Lowry intended to work the article into the finished novel.

[26] For a representative Leavisite view of Chase, Sturt and "the organic community" see Denys Thompson, "A Cure for Amnesia," Scrutiny, 2 (1933/34), 2-11.

[27] Leavis, Culture and Environment, p. 85.

[28] Patrick White quoted on the dustjacket of Maurice Shadbolt's A Touch of Clay (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974).

[29] William Blake, "What is Man?" in Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 760; Malcolm Lowry, "The Forest Path to the Spring," in Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1961), p. 259. All further references to Hear Us O Lord in the text indicated by HL.

[30] Malcolm Lowry, Ultramarine (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 62. All further reference to this work in the text indicated by U.

[31] Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), chs. 1-4.

Part A: Reluctant Modernists: Before the War.

Chapter I: The Thirties

[1] Fussell, Abroad, p. 151.

[2] Montagu Slater, Quoted in Julian Symons, The Thirties (London: Cresset Press, 1960), p. 76.

[3] T.E.B. Howarth notes that J.M. Reeves "solemnly pronounced the final epitaph of Georgian poetry in

Granta as follows: "I suppose the last word on Georgian poetry has been said a great many times.'" See Howarth, Cambridge Between Two Wars (London: Collins, 1978), p. 69.

[4] Charles Madge, "In Memoriam T.S.E.," New Verse, No. 30 (Summer 1938), pp. 18-21.

[5] John Davenport, et al., Editorial, Arena, 2 (Autumn 1949), p. 3.

[6] I.A. Richards, Science and Poetry (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), pp. 64-5.

[7] Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son," Australian Letters, 1, No. 3 (1958), 39.

[8] Eliot used the phrase, "mythic method," of Ulysses, but it is equally appropriate to The Waste Land. See T.S. Eliot, Ulysses, Order, and Myth," p. 483.

[9] Rev. of Some Versions of Pastoral, by William Empson, New Verse, No. 18 (Dec. 1935), p. 18.

[10] John Wain, Hurry on Down, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), p. 170.

[11] Spender wrote an equivocal apologia, Forward from Liberalism (London: Gollancz, 1937). He notes there that "the liberal individualist who turns towards communism is in a peculiar, isolated position," p. 175.

[12] Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937), p. 274. Huxley suggests that these "theologies" had begun to establish themselves in England by the end of the Twenties. This dating is premature, as Julian Bell's letter to the New Statesman and Nation is belated in claiming that at Cambridge in 1929-30 "the central subject of ordinary intelligent conversation was poetry" not politics. See Julian Bell, "Politics in Cambridge," New Statesman and Nation, 9 Dec. 1933, p. 731. One is more inclined to accept Stephen Spender's statement that "from 1931 onwards, in common with many other people, I felt hounded by external events." See Spender, World Within World (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 137.

This date is confirmed by Samuel Hynes in The Auden Generation as a "watershed" in "the national mood." See Hynes, The Auden Generation (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 65.

[13] John Cornford was a legendary figure in the leftist Cambridge of the Thirties. Hugh Firmin, another product of Cambridge in this period, self-deprecatingly compares himself to John Cornford in Under the Volcano, p. 176. Conford was quite capable of describing in concrete images the reality of the war as he does in "The funeral and the rubbish dump" and "Shells, Women in panic," but his communist rhetoric continually breaks in on the reality. The "one fine Auden-influenced poem" is, in fact, part of a longer, less satisfactory poem, "Full Moon at Tierz," which, unfortunately, is cluttered with abstractions. The penultimate stanzas of the poem, from "Now the same night falls over Germany" to "Freedom was never held without a fight," are quite fine. See Jonathan Galassi, ed., Understand the Weapon (Manchester: Carcarnet New Press, 1976), pp. 38-40.

[14] George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, introd. Lionel Trilling (New York: Harcourt, 1952), p. 91.

[15] Graham Greene, Introd., Journey Without Maps, 2nd ed. (1936; rpt. London: Heinemann, 1978),p. ix.

[16] Christopher Isherwood, Lions and Shadows (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), pp. 75-6, 207. George Orwell shared this feeling. See Richard Rees, George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1967), pp. 145-6.

[17] Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, Journey to the Frontier (London: Constable, 1966), p. 79.

[18] Virginia Woolf, A Letter to a Young Poet (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 26.

[19] W.H. Auden and Cecil Day Lewis, Preface to Oxford Poetry 1927 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927, p. v; rpt., Hynes, Appendix A, pp. 397-8). Although the preface was jointly authored, Hynes attributes the above quotation

to Auden on the grounds that according to Day Lewis the editors wrote alternate paragraphs, Hynes, p. 31.

[20] Christopher Isherwood, Mr. Norris Changes Trains (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947), p. 131.

[21] David Lodge notes that Thirties writing "tended to model itself on historical kinds of discourse--the autobiography, the eye-witness account, the travel log," "Modernism, Antimodernism, and Postmodernism," The New Review, 4, No. 38 (May, 1977), 41.

[22] This phrase is scattered through Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed., Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (New York: Capricorn, 1969), pp. 28, 42, 115, 143.

[23] Michael Roberts notes that the figure of "the returning hero" found in the poetry of Rex Warner, Auden, and Charles Madge "is the antithesis of Eliot's Prufrock," "The Return of the Hero," London Mercury, 31, No. 181 (1934), 72.

[24] George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, ed., Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), I, 518.

[25] See Keith Alldritt, The Making of George Orwell (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), Ch. 1, passim.

[26] Orwell, "Inside the Whale," p. 512.

[27] Davenport, et. al., p. 3.

[28] Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 185.

[29] Wyndham Lewis, Hitler (London: Chatto and Windus 1931), p. 109. Quoted unsympathetically in Quentin Bell Bloomsbury (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 104.

[30] Davenport, et. al., p. 3.

[31] Spender, World Within World, p. 249.

[32] Anthony Powell, At Lady Molly's (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), p. 107.

[33] W.H. Auden, Poem XXIX, Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), p. 87.

[34] Cecil Day Lewis, The Magnetic Mountain (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), p. 50.

[35] Bernard Bergonzi makes this point in Reading the Thirties (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 93-4.

[36] George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), pp. 109-10.

[37] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 20.

[38] Raymond Williams points out that by the late nineteenth century rural England was already a myth, already changed. Yet it was remade by "a triumphant urban and industrial economy... in its own compensating image," New Statesman, 27 September 1974, p. 248.

[39] William Wordsworth, Preface to The Excursion, l.53, Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed., Thomas Hutchinson, rev., Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 590.

[40] Cecil Day Lewis, "Letter to a Young Revolutionary," in New Country, ed., Michael Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), p. 40.

[41] John Betjeman, "Slough," in John Betjeman's Collected Poems, compiled with an introduction by the Earl of Birkenhead (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 21. Betjeman, like Evelyn Waugh, disliked selfconsciously organicist architecture which he considered middle-class. In Labels Waugh pours scorn on the English love of "quaintness" and "picturesque bits," of old oak and Tudor cottages. See Labels (1930; rpt. London: Duckworth, 1974), p. 55. In Ghastly Good Taste (London: Chapman and Hall, 1933), Betjeman depicts English architectural history as a decline from the Catholic-gothic to the contemporary "jazz modern" style. See appended illustration, "The Street of Taste or the March

of English Art Down the Ages," Ghastly Good Taste, n. pag. Both Waugh and Betjeman attack middle-class antiquarian nostalgia from the standpoint of a more radical, openly aristocratic, conservatism. They themselves yearn for the truly organic England before the reformation. In other words, they wish to preserve what they see as the genuine English "tradition" from middle-class attempts to cultivate good taste by emulating their betters.

[42] F.R. Leavis, "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture," For Continuity (London: The Minority Press, 1933), pp. 13-46.

[43] See F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment, especially the chapters entitled: "Tradition," "The Organic Community," and "The Loss of the Organic Community," pp. 78-98.

[44] Samuel Hynes makes this point in The Auden Generation pp. 36-7. The viewpoint is confirmed by a quotation from the Mortmere stories Christopher Isherwood includes in Lions and Shadows: "it has been said that Mortmere rectory does not seem to be the work of an architect, but to have grown as an oak grows, from the soil of the fileds," Lions and Shadows, p. 101. There is clearly an element here of parodying of organicist theory as applied to architecture and by Leavisite extension to literature. Yet there is also an element of fascination with what is parodied: it is at least an alternative to contemporary England. As Hynes observes, again in The Auden Generation, the Mortmere fantasy was another of those Thirties "alternative worlds," like Communism and Fascism. Such worlds "criticize the actual, at least by implication, by offering an alternative for comparison, Hynes, pp. 35-6.

[45] Peter Quennell speaks for the Auden Generation and its feeling of separation from the pre-1914 world in A Letter to Mrs. Virginia Woolf: "Remember that of the placid pre-war universe--how tranquil and how olympian it must have been! Was the pound really worth twenty shillings?" (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 17.

[46] W.H. Auden, foreword to The Orators, 3rd. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 7.

[47] Day Lewis, "Letter to a Young Revolutionary," New Country, p. 41.

[48] D.H. Lawrence, Kangaroo (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), p. 253. The passage in which this phrase occurs is worth quoting in full as it conveys the sense of a radically dislocated world inherited by the two generations that came between the wars: "It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the spring of 1915-16 the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city, in some way perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors." This "Waste Land vision" was as much an inheritance of the Thirties generation as of the Twenties. The former distinguished themselves from the latter largely by stressing that they had been too young to experience the pre-war world. To them it was merely a myth.

[49] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 209.

[50] Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means (London: Chatto and Windus, 1937), p. 273.

[51] See, for instance: John Clark, et. al., eds., Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979); Katherine Bail Hoskins, Today the Struggle (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969); Hynes, The Auden Generation; John Lucas, ed., The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy (Sussex: Harvester, 1978); Orwell, "Inside the Whale"; and Julian Symons, The Thirties (London: Cresset, 1960).

[52] Orwell, "Inside the Whale," p. 512.

Part A, Ch. II: Happy Valley

[1] Barry Argyle, Patrick White (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967),p. 15.

[2] In "The Prodigal Son" White says that writing in this period "had meant the practice of an art by a polished mind in civilized surroundings," p. 39.

[3] Patrick White, Happy Valley (London: Harrap, 1939), p. 115. All further references to this work are in the text indicated by HV.

[4] White, Flaws, pp. 58-9.

[5] Joseph Furphy, Such Is Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 207.

[6] Russell Ward, The Australian Legend (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), ch. 9, passim.

[7] Joseph Furphy, Preface to Rigby's Romance (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1946), p. VII.

[8] H.P. Heseltine, "Australian Image: 1) The Literary Heritage," Meanjin, 21 (1962), 49.

[9] "Waldo is myself at my coldest and worst," Flaws in the Glass, p. 147.

[10] Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), ch. 1, passim.

Part A, Ch. III: The Living and The Dead

[1] Rupert Brooke, "Peace," in Rupert Brooke: The Complete Poems (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957) p. 146.

[2] W.H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," in W.H. Auden: Selected Poems, ed., Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 86.

[3] "I have never liked The Living and The Dead," White, Flaws, p. 77.

[4] White, Flaws, pp. 52, 63.

[5] Patrick White, "The House Behind the Barricades," New Verse, No. 30 (Summer 1938), p. 9.

[6] Charles Madge, "In Memoriam T.S.E.," p. 18.

[7] W.H. Auden, "A Worcestershire Lad," in Forewords and Afterwords (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 332.

[8] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[9] The de Maistre portrait is privately owned.

[10] See photographs of New Verse poets in New Verse, Nos. 31-32 (Autumn 1938), p. 18.

[11] Patrick White, "Lines Written on leaving the Scilly Islands," The Ploughman and Other Poems, n. pag.

[12] T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion," Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 33.

[13] It is true, of course, that Auden himself drew strongly on Eliot and that, however much his ideas were disliked, "Eliot's technical mastery as a poet and dramatist was acknowledged" throughout the Thirties, Julian Symons, The Thirties, p. 140. But the style to imitate in the Thirties--the mannerisms, diction, imagery, habitual stances--was that of Auden. See Karl Shapiro, Essay on Rime (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1945), pp. 34, 41-4.

[14] Patrick White, The Living and The Dead (New York: Viking, 1941), p. 108. All further references to this work in the text indicated by LD.

[15] James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Random House, 1934), p. 47.

[16] See Keith Alldritt on this point in The Making of George Orwell, ch. 1, passim.

[17] Evelyn Waugh, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), p. 3.

[18] Ezra Pound, Make It New (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

[19] Graham Greene, Stamboul Train (London: Heinemann, 1932), pp. 79-80.

[20] George Orwell, Coming Up for Air (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), p. 28.

[21] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Sur L'Evolution Litteraire," Oeuvres Completes de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 866.

[22] Frank Kermode, "The Modern," in Modern Essays (London: Fontana, 1971), p. 48.

[23] Virginia Woolf, The Waves (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), p. 196.

[24] Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 35.

[25] James Joyce, Ulysses, p. 35.

[26] "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 15.

[27] Edward Upward, Journey to the Border (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), pp. 56-9.

[28] Evelyn Waugh interviewed by Julian Jebb in Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, 3rd. ser. (New York: Viking, 1967), p. 114.

[29] "I loved servants like Lizzie, Flo and Matt through their connection with everyday reality," White, Flaws, p. 49.

[30] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 56.

[31] See F.R. Leavis, "Introductory: 'Life' IS a Necessary Word," in Leavis, Nor Shall my Sword (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), pp. 11-37, especially p. 20.

[32] W.H. Auden, Spain, Selected Poems, ed., Mendelson, p. 54.

[33] The Spanish war was inevitably an abstraction for English leftists in the Thirties. Even going to Spain did not necessarily make the war concrete and particular. For intellectuals this was especially true. Julian Bell's comments on the war before he himself volunteered are chilling in the lack of any sense of the reality of war they reveal: "it will be interesting to see if the present British and German armies, apparently small, highly trained and reasonably mobile, are capable of revising the classic tradition [of mobile warfare] sufficiently to avoid another disastrous and uninteresting deadlock [as in the trenches of World War I]. No doubt it will not be too long before we are allowed to make the experiment." Julian Bell, rev. of The Official History of the War, compiled by Brig.-Gen. Sir James Edmonds, New Statesman and Nation, 16 Feb. 1935, p. 224.

Part A, Ch. IV: Ultramarine

[1] Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 64.

[2] Day, Lowry, p. 469; Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne, 1972), pp. 106-7.

[3] Day, p. 471.

[4] Day, p. 64.

[5] Day, p. 64.

[6] Bernard Bergonzi discusses the striking homogeneity of education of the generation of young writers who were emerging in 1935: "These men were born in the first decade of the twentieth century, were at school during the First World War, and began to write and publish in the late twenties: Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, Betjeman, Lehmann and MacNeice, among poets; Isherwood, Upward, Waugh, Greene, Orwell, Powell, Connolly and Green, among novelists. Their educational formation was strikingly homogeneous: all of them went to public schools and, with one exception, to Oxford or Cambridge," Bergonzi, Reading the Thirties, p. 11.

[7] Martin Trumbaugh in "Through the Panama" speaks for Lowry when he observes of his own writing: "Neurosis, of one kind and onother, is stamped on almost every word he writes, both neurosis and a kind of fierce health. Perhaps his tragedy is that he is the one normal writer left on earth," HL, p. 77.

[8] E.M. Forster in 1939 observed that the English middle-class, having "strangled the aristocracy" in the nineteenth century, remained in the twentieth, "haunted by the ghost of its victim," "Mrs. Miniver," in Two Cheers for Democracy (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 292.

[9] Day, pp. 57-8.

[10] Caldy, as Day informs us, was restored in the Tudor manner in 1832, thus anticipating the suburban fad of imitating traditional English architectural styles which established itself from the middle of the nineteenth century. By the between-the-wars period, lower-middle-class housing divisions had adopted the mock-Tudor style, much to the horror of John Betjeman who, as we find in Ghastly Good Taste, was eager to defend what he saw as the genuine English tradition against bourgeois antiquarian prejudice. Lowry's "Inglewood" at Caldy was authentic enough to disdain association with "bypass Tudor," as the housing divisions came to be known, yet, being decently suburban, it denied any pretensions towards the aristocratic manner on the part of its owner. On the "ideal of quaint, aged rusticity" in English suburban architecture from the mid-nineteenth century to 1940 see Martin J. Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 66.

[11] Donald Horne, God Is an Englishman (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970), p. 38.

[12] Terry Eagleton notes that Raymond Williams in Culture and Society took up "The Romantic 'radical-conservative' lineage of nineteenth-century England," Criticism and Ideology, p. 25.

[13] William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, n.d.), p. 6.

[14] Day Lewis, "Letter to a Young Revolutionary," p. 40.

[15] See Wiener, English Culture, pp. 111-6.

[16] Day, pp. 437-8.

[17] Day, pp. 466-9.

[18] Brian O'Kill, "A Stylistic Study of the Fiction of Malcolm Lowry," Diss. Cambridge 1974, p. 18. In my ensuing discussion of Lowry's struggle to wrest a language away from that of his class and background I touch on the prior work of Brian O'Kill. I agree with O'Kill on most of his central points, not least in his dislike of Day's biography. Although several of my points are anticipated by O'Kill, I leave my work as it stands for two main reasons: I arrived independently at the conclusions which agree with those of O'Kill after an exhaustive study of the same manuscript material; my approach is ideological rather than stylistic, so that, I believe, I am able to include these points in a larger framework. I must, nevertheless, acknowledge not only O'Kill's priority but also the excellence of his dissertation. In order to avoid duplication of material I have concentrated my study of Lowry in the Thirties on Ultramarine. The two other works that O'Kill discusses as early fiction, Lunar Caustic (1963) and "June the 30th, 1934" (1975), are closely analysed by O'Kill to show their place in the development of the Lowrian style, O'Kill, Ch. III, pp. 34-54. I am also reluctant to place in the Thirties works which were published much later, and which were subject to intermediate revision.

[19] Arthur O. Lowry, Letters to Malcolm Lowry, 1940, 42 (5 items), Malcolm Lowry Collection, UBC.

[20] Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 505.

[21] Arthur Lowry, Letter to Malcolm Lowry, 22 April, 1942, Malcolm Lowry Collection, UBC.

[22] Butler, p. 216.

[23] Arthur Lowry, Letter to Malcolm Lowry, 7 May, 1940, Malcolm Lowry Collection, UBC.

[24] Arthur Lowry, Letter to Malcolm Lowry, 5 April, 1940, Malcolm Lowry Collection, UBC.

[25] Arthur Lowry, Letter, 22 April, 1942.

[26] Arthur Lowry, Letter, 22 April, 1942.

[27] Russell Lowry, "Malcolm - A Closer Look," Preface to Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry (London: Vision, 1978), pp. 17, 24.

[28] See F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 372-4.

[29] Day associates the Lowrian phrase, "Old Man," with the deity in his wrathful aspect, Malcolm Lowry, p. 349. M.C. Bradbrook points out that "it is the regular term of a ship's crew for the Master," in Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 15. I make no claim to exclusive truth by my own suggestion. The phrase has a Lowrian propensity for discovering layers of meaning. It is noticeable that each critic finds in the phrase what suits his or her critical method: Day sees the vengeful super-ego of Freudian mythology; Miss Bradbrook captures the sense of a particular place that Lowry's language so often recalls; for myself the phrase has an historical ring.

[30] Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961),p. 224.

[31] "Annotated Carbon," Draft of Under the Volcano, in the Malcolm Lowry Collection, UBC, box 8-(7), pp. 203, 8 (according to the pencilled numbers at the top of each page of this draft).

[32] "Annotated Carbon," Under the Volcano, p. 8.

[33] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 158.

[34] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 158.

[35] See the two early stories, "A Rainy Night" and "Satan in a Barrel," which M.C. Bradbrook appends to her Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Life, pp. 138-50. All further

references to these works in the text indicated by "RN" and "SB." For a fuller discussion of Lowry's early stories published in the Leys school magazine, The Fortnightly, see O'Kill, "Liberties of Language: Lowry's Juvenilia and 'Goya the Obscure,'" A Stylistic Study, Ch. I, pp. 1-17.

[36] Henry Green, Living (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), pp. 89-90.

[37] Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Life and Art, p. 121.

[38] Louis MacNeice, quoted in Hynes, p. 268.

[39] As Julian Symons remarks "The most damaging criticism that can be made of Isherwood and his friends is that their deepest desires and longings were connected with public school and university; that, wishing to speak in popular language to a mass of people, they found themselves talking to each other in the language of their public schools," The Thirties, p. 25.

[40] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 34.

[41] O'Kill notes that Lowry's early writing shows a strong influence of P.G. Wodehouse, "A Stylistic Study," p. 3. This would seem to be a Wodehousian unlikely simile.

[42] I.L. Gordon, ed., The Seafarer (London: Metheun, 1960), p. 35.

[43] C.K. Stead, "You Have a Lot to Lose," in Crossing The Bar (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 13.

[44] An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," T.S. Eliot, ed., Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1954), p. 4.

[45] Wordsworth, Preface to the 2nd edition of Lyrical Ballads, in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, p. 734.

[46] Lionel Trilling, Preface to Homage to Catalonia, p. XII-XIII.

[47] T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 39.

[48] Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 71.

[49] Connolly, Enemies, pp. 80-1.

[50] Connolly, Enemies, pp. 49.

[51] O'Kill, "A Stylistic Study," p. 388. O'Kill is quoting Connolly, p. 22.

[52] Connolly, Enemies, p. 80.

[53] Lodge, "Modernism," p. 41.

[54] Margot Stamp in Lewis' Revenge for Love, recalling Tennyson and adopting the "mind-style" of her heroine Virginia Woolf, recoils from anything that is "grossly twentieth-century or anything privy to the internal-combustion engine," Wyndham Lewis, Revenge for Love (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), p. 210.

[55] Connolly, Enemies, p. 47.

[56] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to David Markson, August 25, 1951, Selected Letters, p. 248.

[57] Green makes clear the homoerotic element in dandyism: "At the root of all these phenomena is that worship of the young male adolescent, not yet entangled in the world or in marriage," Children of the Sun (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 9.

[58] Orwell, Wigan Pier, p. 35.

[59] Pound, Literary Essays, p. 3.

[60] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, [May 1952], Selected Letters, p. 319.

[61] See Day, p. 178.

[62] Anthony Powell, What's Become of Waring? (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 23.

[63] Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), I, 320.

[64] Isherwood, Lions and Shadows, p. 207.

[65] Malcolm Lowry, Lunar Caustic (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 20.

[66] W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," Collected Shorter Poems, 1937-1957 (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 142.

[67] W.H. Auden, Poem XXiX, Poems (London: Faber, 1933), p. 88.

[68] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Jonathan Cape, January 2, 1946, Selected Letters, p. 61.

[69] Robert Byron, First Russia, Then Tibet (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 276.

[70] Fussell, Abroad, p. 67. My discussion of Thirties travel writing is indebted to Fussell.

[71] Patrick White, Voss (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 440.

[72] George Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), p. 213.

Part B, Ch. I: The Post-War Context

[1] See for instance: James Gindin, Postwar British Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 11. Frederick R. Karl, The Contemporary English Novel (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), ch. 1; Rubin Rabonivitz, The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). Leslie Fiedler's 1968 comment that "[t]here is no scene in the arts in England" reflects a widespread American dismissal of the arts in England after the war. Fiedler's comment is found in "The Invisible Country," New Statesman, 14 June 1968, p. 810.

[2] See for instance Bernard Bergonzi, The Situation of the Novel (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 57-8; William Cooper, "Reflections on Some Aspects of the Experimental Novel," International Literary Annual, No. 2, ed., John Wain (London: John Calder, 1959), pp. 29-36.

[3] Bradbury suggests that there is no necessary contradiction between liberal realism as practised by English novelists in the Fifties and experiment, thus denying the antagonism between the contemporary and the modern novel. See Bradbury, Possibilities (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 174.

[4] See Bergonzi, pp. 61-2.

[5] Bergonzi, "America: the Incredible Reality," in The Situation of the Novel, pp. 81-103, particularly p. 92-3.

[6] Kingsley Amis, I Like It Here (New York: Harcourt, 1958), p. 185.

[7] Amis, pp. 112-3.

[8] Stephen Spender, "Background to the Forties," in The Thirties and After (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 91.

[9] Stephen Spender, "Prescriptions for a Modern Masterpiece," Penguin New Writing, No. 24, ed., John Lehman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), p. 154.

[10] Robert Hewison, In Anger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 65.

[11] Robert Hewison notes that English writers who had remained in England throughout the war and had participated in the war effort were unimpressed by the new Auden, In Anger, p. 2.

[12] Cyril Connolly, "Comment," Horizon, Vol. 15, No. 87(1947), p. 151.

[13] Hewison, In Anger, p. 3.

[14] Amis, pp. 22-3.

[15] David Lodge's examination of Amis' Lucky Jim as "a literary artefact rather than a sociological document" points to the limitations of the linguistic usage of the contemporary novelists of the 1950s. It is true, as Lodge observes, that "Amis is the most interesting and rewarding of our contemporaries." However, by concentrating on Amis' linguistic means, Lodge merely draws attention to how far short Amis falls of the kind of linguistic concentration we expect in a serious novel after Joyce or any of the great moderns. See Lodge, "The Modern, The Contemporary, and The Importance of being Amis," in The Language of Fiction (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 250.

[16] Malcolm Lowry, October Ferry to Gabriola, ed., Margerie Lowry (New York: New World Publishing, 1970), p. 268. All further references to this work in the text signalled by OF.

[17] Malcolm Lowry, "Elephant and Colosseum" in Hear Us O Lord, p. 116.

[18] Greene, Stamboul Train, pp. 79-80.

[19] John Wain, Hurry On Down (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953).

[20] F.R. Leavis, Two Cultures, Richmond Lecture, 1962 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962).

[21] Bradbury, Possibilities, p. 202.

[22] "Patrick White Speaks on Factual Writing and Fiction," "Notes and Documents," Australian Literary Studies, 10, No. 1 (May 1981), pp. 99-101.

[23] Emile Zola, Letter to Henry Ceard, 1885, quoted by Roger Shattuck, "Why Not The Best," rev. of Friday etc., by Michel Tournier, New York Review of Books, 28 April 1983, p. 13.

[24] Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama," in Hear Us O Lord, p. 85.

[25] C.P. Snow, The Conscience of the Rich (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 49.

[26] "In England [after the war] there was a marked reaction against what had gone before, not only against modernism but Bloomsbury and a particular literary and cultural milieu which had decided class associations," Bradbury, Possibilities, p. 177.

[27] Wain, Hurry On Down, p. 38.

[28] Symons, The Thirties, p. 52.

[29] Samuel Beckett, Letter to Thomas Greevy, July 17 1961. Quoted in Deirdie Bair, Samuel Beckett (New York: Harcourt, 1978), p. 536.

[30] John Berger, quoted in Hewison, In Anger, p. 125.

[31] Angus Wilson, The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), pp. 80-1.

[32] Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), pp. 209-10.

[33] Bradbury, Possibilities, p. 193.

[34] Bradbury, Possibilities, p. 193.

[35] Lowry, Selected Letters, p. 243.

[36] O'Kill, p. 78.

[37] Bradbury, Possibilities, p. 181.

[38] Quoted in Hewison, Under Siege (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 87-8.

[39] Fussell, The Great War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 139.

[40] Fussell, The Great War, p. 267.

[41] J.B. Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes, Journey Down a Rainbow (London: Heinemann-Cresset, 1955), p. 51. Wain and Amis could hardly be described as enthusiasts for

the organic community. Nevertheless, we find in their writings at times a Leavisite note of condemnation of all those aspects of the modern world that destroyed the organic community. In Hurry On Down Wain condemns the "expensive bucolic settings" of contemporary Sussex because they represent Hollywood versions of the traditional England (p. 223). He despises the manicured cottages and cows provided for American tourists and commuting Londoners. He condemns the motorways and cars which have turned England into a metropolis and which have scattered ugly suburbs along the arterial routes. All this is reminiscent of John Betjeman's railings against the encroachments of modern modes of transportation and tourism on the rural scenes in the Thirties. We recall also that Betjeman condemned the "average" man in terms that anticipate Priestley's charges against "admass." Here, if nowhere else, an upper-class élitist dandy and a lower-middle-class representative of decency and the common man could agree. See John Betjeman, Ghastly Good Taste, p. 17. Amis, of course, is suspicious of any enthusiasim tainted by what he sees as romanticism. Yet in I Like It Here he grudgingly approves of organic scene of the Herring fishermen in Southern Portugal working to the strains of a traditional sea shanty, a scene Lowry would have approved of (p. 142). Amis finds the scene pleasing because of the absence of Spencer Tracy and Henry Fonda. Although he proceeds to launch squibs against the legacy of romanticism which had made the scene unrenderable in honest terms because of the idealization of personal vision, the source of his pleasure in the scene lies not in its connection with eighteenth-century reasonableness but in its barely disguised organicist qualities. Curiously enough, even W.H. Auden in the post-war period discloses traces of organicist nostalgia. In a letter to the Theological scholar, E.R. Dodds, defending his decision to stay in the U.S., Auden writes in Humphrey Carpenter's words "The Machine Age had destroyed all sense of community, the village had been replaced by the factory," Humphrey Carpenter, W.H. Auden: A Biography (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 288-9.

[42] Stephen Spender, "Poetic Moderns and Prose Contemporaries," The Struggle of the Modern (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), pp. 116-32.

[43] Spender, The Thirties and After, p. 203.

[44] Stephen Spender, Introduction to Under the Volcano (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), pp. xii-xiii.

[45] Norman Mailer, Of A Fire On The Moon (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 140-1.

Part B, Ch. II: The Aunt's Story

[1] Patrick White, The Aunt's Story (New York: Viking, 1948), p. 12. All further references to this work in the text indicated by AS.

[2] White, Flaws in the Glass, p. 55.

[3] Argyle, Patrick White, p. 15.

[4] "It has always troubled me that so many Australian novelists are content to explore an autobiographical vein instead of launching into that admittedly disturbing marriage between life and imagination ... But this is not what I want of our Australian novelists -- writing so diligently about their Catholic youth, their Catholic lapse. Why it recurs, I suppose, is because Australians are taught to revere the pragmatic, the documentary approach," "Patrick White Speaks on Factual Writing," p.100.

[5] George Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, trans., Anna Bostock (Cambridge: Mass.: MIT, 1977), p. 30.

[6] See Terry Eagleton, Exiles and Emigres (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), pp. 171-2.

[7] Orwell, "Inside the Whale," pp. 526-7.

[8] Thelma Herring, "Odyssey of a Spinster: A Study of The Aunt's Story," Southerly, 25 (1965), pp. 6-22.

[9] Walter H. Sokel, The Writer in Extremis (California: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 8.

[10] Sokel, Writer in Extremis, p. 10.

[11] Yeats writes that "What the sages spoke" was the symbolic language known to Shelley's witch, "Under Ben Bulben," Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 397. In The Witch of Atlas we learn that the witch herself would travel down the Nile "By Moeris and the Mareotid lakes" and that she knows the secret of interpreting hieroglyphics, Shelley: Poetical Works, ed., Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 384. The Meroitic language, although some decipherment was made in 1910, remains "still almost entirely a sealed book," Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: William Berton, 1968), XV, 197.

[12] Virginia Woolf, The Waves, p. 27.

[13] Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting (New York: Praeger, 1959), pp. 45-6.

[14] Sokel, Writer in Extremis, p. 17.

[15] Wyndham Lewis, Tarr 2nd version (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), p. 88.

[16] Paul Klee, quoted in Read, A Concise History, p. 180.

Part B, Ch. III: The Tree of Man

[1] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[2] In Flaws in the Glass White confesses that he considered giving up writing altogether during the period in which he lived more or less isolated at Castle Hill dejected by the indifference of Australian readers to The Aunt's Story. See Flaws, pp. 143-4.

[3] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[4] Patrick White, The Tree of Man (New York: Viking, 1955), p. 416. All further references to this work in the text indicated by TM.

[5] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[6] D.H. Lawrence, "Why the Novel Matters," in D.H. Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism, ed., Anthony Beal (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 105.

[7] White, "Prodigal Son," pp. 38-9.

[8] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[9] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[10] Harry Levin, James Joyce (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 4.

[11] White, "A Conversation with Patrick White," p. 100.

[12] As James Stern notes in his sympathetic article on White's early fiction, "Patrick White has suffered the misfortune of having his work compared with that of such men as Tolstoy, Hardy, and Lawrence," Patrick White: The Country of the Mind," London Magazine, 5, No. 6 (June 1958), p. 49.

[13] "A Conversation with Patrick White," Australian Writers in Profile, No. 11, Southerly, 33 (1973), pp. 138-9.

[14] Barry Argyle describes Richard Mahony as an "epic" in Lukacs' sense of the term in his An Introduction to the Australian Novel (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 241.

[15] See Georg Lukacs, The Historical Novel, trans., Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 34-5.

[16] Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony (London: Heinemann, 1930), p. 519. All further references to this work appear in the text indicated by RM.

[17] On Richardson's method of transforming her source material into fiction see Leonie Kramer, Henry Handel Richardson and Some of her Sources (Melbourne: Melbourne

University Press, 1954). Professor Kramer argues that Richardson's method was what White would have called "documentary." The evidence Kramer enlists in her support seems to me persuasive, although I have not consulted the source material. Dorothy Green criticizes Kramer's view in her Ulysses Bound (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), pp. 161-2. Green has consulted source material that was not available to Kramer, and Green's consultation has been exhaustive. Nevertheless, her conclusions are less reliable than Kramer's because Green approaches the material with an obvious bias in favour of Richardson's spiritualistic interests and a determination to read the novel in terms of that interest.

[18] Georg Lukacs, Studies in European Realism (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), p. 6.

[19] Lukacs, Studies, p. 149.

[20] Lukacs, Studies, p. 149.

[21] In Malcolm Lowry's Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid (New York: New American Library, 1968), the protagonist who is a novelist reflects on his inability to "build up" a character out of a single telling synedoche, p. 10. Lowry himself was contemptuous of this traditional realistic method of character construction.

[22] D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914, in Harry T. Moore, ed., The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence (New York: Viking, 1962), I, 282.

[23] Moore, Letters of D.H. Lawrence, p. 282.

[24] D.H. Lawrence, "John Galsworthy," in Anthony Beal, ed., D.H. Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 129.

[25] See, for instance: Ken Stewart, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Symphony and Naturalism," in W.S. Ramson, ed., The Australian Experience (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), p. 97; Brian Kiernan, Images of Society and Nature (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 46.

[26] Stewart, pp. 97-120.

[27] Kiernan, Images, p. 53.

[28] Stewart, pp. 107-13.

[29] Compare Richardson's naturalistic build-up towards this scream by piling up material details which oppress Mahony but which are not distorted with Lowry's build-up towards the Consul's scream in Volcano (p. 375). In Volcano we are impressed by the jumble of distorted and logically unrelated images which lead up to the Consul's dying scream: this is expressionism.

[30] Stewart, p. 105.

[31] See Green, Ulysses Bound, pp. 162-3; Stewart also draws a connection between Richardson's structural principles and the Wagnerian motif, pp. 104-5; finally, Argyle makes this point in his Introduction to the Australian Novel, p. 248.

[32] Green, Ulysses Bound, p. 479.

[33] Henry Handel Richardson, "The End of a Childhood," in The End of a Childhood and Other Stories (London: Heinemann, 1934), pp. 5-67.

[34] White, "Prodigal Son," p. 39.

[35] Marcus Clarke, "Preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's Poems," in Bill Wannan, ed., A Marcus Clarke Reader (Melbourne: Landsowne Press, 1963), p. 35; Joseph Furphy, Such Is Life, p. 81.

[36] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Jonathan Cape, 2 January 1946, Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed., Harvey Breit and Margerie and Bonner Lowry (New York: Capricorn, 1965), p. 80.

[37] C.G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans., R.F.C. Hull, 2nd. ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 54, passim. White mentions the influence of Psychology and Alchemy on The Solid Mandala in Flaws, p. 146.

[38] Friedrich Schiller, "Aesthetical Letter, 27," in Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical by Friedrich Schiller (London: George Bell, 1916), p. 113.

[39] Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., The Novel Today (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 27.

[40] John Halperin, "Twentieth Century Trends in Continental Novel-Theory," in The Theory of the Novel, ed., John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 377.

[41] On the pictorial and painterly qualities of Lawrence's writing see Keith Alldritt, The Visual Imagination of D.H. Lawrence (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), especially ch. 3.

[42] George Lichtheim, Lukacs (London: Fontana/ Collins, 1970), p. 61.

[43] Lukacs, Theory of the Novel, p. 30.

[44] W.B. Yeats, "Meru," Collected Poems, p. 333.

[45] Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 16.

[46] Leonie Kramer, "The Tree of Man: An Essay in Scepticism," in Ramson, ed., The Australian Experience, pp. 270-1.

[47] Gerald Graff makes this point comparing Thoreau with Robbe-Grillet in his "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough," in Bradbury, The Novel Today, p. 230.

Part B, Ch. IV: Voss

[1] Lukacs, Theory of the Novel, p. 30.

[2] Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 55.

[3] I have in mind here Lukacs' observation that: "The all-national character of the principle themes of epic, the relation between individual and nation in the age of heroes require that the most important figure should occupy the central position, while in historical novels he is necessarily only a minor character," The Historical Novel, p. 48.

[4] Commenting on Axel Clark's biography of Christopher Brennan, White protests "I don't advocate a documentary or historical novel." White goes on to confess in a telling line: "personally I tend to dislike historical novels, and have avoided writing them because of the strictures they impose on the imagination," Patrick White Speaks on Factual Writing and Fiction," p. 100.

[5] Patrick White, Voss (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 60. All further references to this work in the text indicated by V.

[6] Wilson Harris, Tradition, The Writer, and Society (London: New Beacon, 1967), p. 29.

[7] Compare White's amused description of the Athenian ladies of the old aristocracy who pride themselves on their cooking and cultivate postmen with his vindictive description of Lady Kerr in Flaws in the Glass, pp. 185, 227-33.

[8] "When New Zealand is more artificial, she will give birth to an artist who can treat her natural beauties adequately. This sounds paradoxical, but it is true," Katherine Mansfield, The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield: A Selection, ed., C.K. Stead (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 26.

[9] Wordsworth, Preface to The Excursion, Poetical Works, p. 590.

[10] Plato, Timaeus, 48e. trans. and ed., John Warrington (London: Everyman, 1965), p. 53.

[11] Hugh Kenner, Joyce's Voices (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 43.

[12] By "Gnostic" I mean the specific beliefs of the various Christian heresies rather than the Jewish Gnostic thought which Colin Roderick discusses in relation to Riders in the Chariot. See Colin Roderick, "Riders in the Chariot," Southerly, 22 (1962), 62-77. The best treatment of the Gnostic sects in the Christian context is Hans Jonas' The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). Voss is preeminently a "heretic" against orthodox Christianity, and his specific beliefs -- dualism, antinomianism, opposition to Jehovah -- would have made him immediately recognizable as a Gnostic to the church fathers. The chief differences between the Jewish and the Christian varieties of Gnostic thought lie in the more extreme dualism of the latter along with their predilection for blasphemous interpretation of Biblical texts and their habit of treating their systems as truths rather than fictions. The central importance of Gnosticism of whatever stamp in the work of White and Lowry lies in the possibilities those systems of belief suggest for obscure and subversive interpretations. Both writers also use the systems they draw on as ordering myths: that is, as means of holding together disruptive experiences.

[13] On Shelley's Gnosticism see James Rieger, The Mutiny Within (New York: Braziller, 1967). The notion that "the deep truth is imageless," comes from Demogorgon in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, in Shelley: Poetical Works, ed., Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 238.

[14] Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 64.

[15] Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 51.

[16] William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in Blake: Complete Writings, ed., Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 154.

[17] Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 8.

[18] Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, p. 30.

Part B, Ch. V: Volcano

[1] David Jones, The Anathemata (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 15.

[2] Jones, Anathemata, p. 14.

[3] T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 12.

[4] Joyce, Ulysses, pp. 17, 18, 187, passim.

[5] James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 159.

[6] Joyce, Portrait, p. 252-3.

[7] Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 21-2.

[8] Wyndham Lewis' words here, which he intended as a critique of Bloomsbury, may be taken as condemnation of the whole period. Lewis, Rude Assignment (London: Hutchinson, 1950), p. 199.

[9] Jones, Anathemata, p. 23.

[10] Brian O'Kill notes the movement away from mandarin stylistic habits in Lowry's writing in this period. Of "June 30th, 1934!" he notes that in writing the story Lowry follows Arthur Calder Marshall's demand for "clear, precise and economical language," with a basis in common speech and displaying contact with reality. O'Kill draws attention to the Hemingwayesque, paratactic style and the passivity of the protagonist which recalls that of Hemingway's and Isherwood's heroes. O'Kill, p. 38.

[11] Jones, Anathemata, p. 21.

[12] Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 41.

[13] Rex Warner, The Professor (London: Boriswood, 1938), p. 240.

[14] Orwell, Coming Up for Air, p. 226.

[15] Greene, Lawless Roads, p. 197.

[16] Auden, "Danse Macabre," Collected Shorter Poems, p. 105.

[17] In his famous letter to Jonathan Cape, Lowry makes it clear that "[in] the cinema and the bar, people are taking refuge from the storm as in the world they are creeping into bomb shelters," Selected Letters, p. 69.

[18] On Guernica as a "classical" piece see Anthony Blunt, Guernica (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), passim.

[19] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Tombeau D'Edgar Poe," in Mallarmé: Oeuvres Completes, p. 189; Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 39.

[20] Blunt, Guernica, pp. 46-53.

[21] See, for instance, Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1973).

[22] Blunt, Guernica, p. 56.

[23] Northrop Frye discusses the symbolism of the wood in The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957): "The vegetable world is a sinister forest like the ones we meet in Comus or the opening of the Inferno, or a heath, which from Shakespeare to Hardy has been associated with tragic destiny, or a wilderness like that of Browning's Childe Roland or Eliot's Waste Land," p. 149.

[24] Dante, Inferno, trans., John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 401.

[25] Lowry, Selected Letters, p. 77.

[26] Paul Fussell notes that the times reported the outcome of the first day of the Somme offensive with the words: "everything has gone well" and "we got our first thrust well home, and there is every reason to be most sanguine as to the result," The Great War, p. 88.

[27] Connolly, Enemies of Promise, pp. 70-1.

[28] Fussell, The Great War, p. 331.

[29] Fussell, The Great War, p. 115.

[30] Fussell, The Great War, pp. 204-20.

[31] Fussell, The Great War, p. 173.

[32] See, for instance, Roger Hinks, "Art Chronicle: Surrealism," The Criterion, XVI (October 1936), 70-5.

[33] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Clenens ten Holder, Summer 1951, Selected Letters, p. 239. In this letter, Lowry claims to have known about George Kaiser and the "modern expressionist triumphs" as a young man studying in Germany in 1928, p. 238.

[34] Lodge, "Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism," p. 41.

[35] Evelyn Waugh, "A Coronation in 1930," excerpt from Remote People in Waugh, When the Going Was Good (London: Duckworth, 1947), p. 90.

[36] Greene, Lawless Roads, p. 103.

[37] Wyndham Lewis, The Revenge for Love, p. 211.

[38] Lewis, Revenge for Love, p. 289.

[39] Lewis, Revenge for Love, p. 289.

[40] Andre Breton, quoted in Hinks, "Surrealism," p. 72.

[41] On the influence of German Expressionism on Lowry see Sherrill E. Grace, "Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision," in Anne Smith, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry (London: Vision, 1978), pp. 93-111; also Grace, The Voyage That Never Ends (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), passim.

[42] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, Spring 1953, Selected Letters, pp. 330-1.

[43] D.H. Lawrence, Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914, Collected Letters, I, 282.

[44] Alldritt, Visual Imagination, p. 236.

[45] O'Kill, pp. 56, 77-9.

[46] Joyce, Portrait, p. 205.

[47] Ezra Pound, "Envoi," in The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 71.

[48] Samuel Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce," in Our Exagmination Round His Factification, by Beckett, et al. (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 3.

[49] See the manuscript described as "First Novel version (B)" in the listing of Lowry's manuscripts in the UBC collection by Judith O. Combs, Malcolm Lowry, 1909-1957: An Inventory of his Papers, Reference Publication No. 42 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Library, 1973), p. 18. The manuscript itself bears the superscription in Margerie Lowry's hand: "Under the Volcano, 2nd draft nearly complete MS." Victor Doyen correctly describes this draft as the second version of the novel, calling the missing Mexican manuscript the first version: Doyen, "Fighting the Albatross of Self," Diss. Catholic University of Louvain, 1973, p. 65. In this draft, as O'Kill notes, the Consul is a decadent capitalist, "an expatriate rentier who has made money out of Mexican oil and silver, and who unashamedly supports Franco, A Stylistic Study, p. 36.

[50] O'Kill, pp. 78-9.

[51] Chase, Mexico, p. 254.

[52] 1 Corinthians, 13:12.

[53] Fussell, The Great War, p. 268.

Part B, Ch. VI: Lowry's Late Fiction

[1] "Publisher's Note," Hear Us O Lord, n. pag.

[2] Day, Malcolm Lowry, p. 469.

[3] Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 32.

[4] O'Kill, p. 79.

[5] O'Kill, p. 79.

[6] Martin Trumbaugh's lament that he cannot understand all these magazines of which his room is full may be taken as Lowry's. See "Through the Panama," Hear Us O Lord, p. 84. Lowry's complaint in a letter to Albert Erskine that he felt "lamentably out of touch with the contemporary world of fiction" is belied by his very acute readings of contemporary novels elsewhere in Selected Letters, Letter to Albert Erskine, August 12 1952, Selected Letters, p. 322. It is true that Lowry was cut off from ready access to English and even American journals during the war years. But it is difficult to see how English novels written during the Forties and Fifties could have been of any significant creative use to him. His reading of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952) shows how sensitive Lowry was to what was technically demanding in contemporary fiction, Letter to Albert Erskine, May 1952, Selected Letters. pp. 315-9.

[7] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Mrs. John Stuart Bonner, Tuesday, 1942, Selected Letters, p. 42.

[8] Lowry wrote to Albert Erskine of Gabriola: "its character drawing is virtually non-existent, symbols are pointed at blatantly instead of being concealed or subsumed in the material, or better still simply not there at all, it is -- or is as it stands -- repetitious to the point beyond that which you can believe. Its all done on purpose," Letter to Albert Erskine, Early Summer, 1953, Selected Letters, p. 339.

[9] Lowry said of Gabriola that, while it didn't aim to be a "'good' book,'" it "thinks of itself as a classic," Letter to Harold Matson, January 25 1954, Selected Letters, p. 360.

[10] Malcolm Lowry, Dark As The Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid, ed., Douglas Day and Margerie Lowry (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 157. All further references to this work in the text indicated by DG.

[11] Greene, Lawless Roads, p. 229.

[12] Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (New York: Lippincott, 1966), p. 144.

[13] Gilles Deleuze, Proust and Signs, trans., Richard Howard (New York: Braziller, 1972), p. 167.

[14] Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 95.

[15] Pynchon, Lot 49, p. 179.

[16] Shelley, A Defense of Poetry in Shelley's Prose Works, ed., R.H. Shepherd (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), II, 32.

[17] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, Ash Wednesday, 1952, Selected Letters, p. 305.

[18] Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry, pp. 90-2.

[19] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, March 5 1949, Selected Letters, p. 172.

[20] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Jonathan Cape, January 2 1946, Selected Letters, p. 88.

[21] Lowry claimed that in dictating Gabriola his demon had produced one of the most guilt-laden and in places quite satanically horrendous documents it has ever been my misfortune to read," Letter to Albert Erskine, Selected Letters, p. 339.

[22] John Milton, Paradise Lost, I:26, Poems of John Milton, ed., John Carey and Alistair Fowler (London: Longmans, 1968), p. 46.

[23] John Irwin, American Hieroglyphics (New Haven: Yale, 1980), p. 7.

Conclusion

[1] Noel Stock, Poet in Exile (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), p. 5.

[2] Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Seymour Lawrence, November 28 1951, Selected Letters, p. 273.

[3] Ezra Pound, The Cantos (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 665.

[4] Cyril Connolly, The Condemned Playground (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 4.

[5] Patrick White, The Twyborn Affair (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 274.

[6] Malcolm Lowry, Lunar Caustic (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), pp. 20-1.

[7] Patrick White, The Solid Mandala (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 175.

[8] Lewis, Revenge for Love, p. 247.

[9] David Simpson's observation on Wordsworth's poetry and on Romantic writers generally is instructive here: they "worked within the orbit of a crisis in which the figured and the real were coming to be more closely identified. What is regarded as the real has already been figured or possessed by the mind," Wordsworth and the Figurings of the Real (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. xix.

[10] Deleuze in Proust and Signs suggests that Volcano is a machine because it generates whatever meaning the reader likes. Lacking the Logos to hold up its meanings, the modern work of art according to Deleuze "has no problem of meaning, it has only a problem of use," p. 129.

[11] Deleuze, Proust and Signs, p. 113.

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