THE IMPACT OF TIME AND MEMORY
ON MALCOLM LOWRY'S FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

The aesthetic basis underlying Lowry's work centers around two key ideas, time and memory. Crucial to all of his writing is the need to decipher and to justify the past, both as it is retained in memory and as it recurs in experience. As complex as such a problem is, it becomes more so when neither memory nor experience conforms to the limits or patterns that a conventional view of reality suggests, and accordingly, Lowry required a world-view that could accommodate such apparently irregular phenomena as premonition, coincidence, recurrence and telepathy. This study will examine some of the shapes which reality assumed in Lowry's life, and the means he employed to represent and to understand it through his art. It will also suggest the usefulness of comparing Lowry's approach to existence with the theories of Ortega and J. W. Dunne.

The first chapter considers the nature of time and memory in general and looks at some of the specific treatments accorded these subjects in literature. In addition, it examines Lowry's special metaphysical needs and his search through a variety of doctrines and philosophies, primary among which are Western mysticism and occultism and various Eastern beliefs, for some elucidation of his problems. Throughout, it attempts to keep Lowry's efforts in a perspective of contemporary fiction, since the problems of a universal outlook which he faced and the
solutions he posed, while individual, are neither as unique nor as esoteric as they might at first appear.

Chapter II focuses on some of the solutions Lowry arrived at. It assumes that the disparate body of ideas at work in Lowry's aesthetic can be subsumed, for convenience, within two metaphysical systems--Ortega's philosophy of man and history and Dunne's serial universe. These theories are considered in some detail in an attempt to show that Lowry's conception of the nature and purpose of literary activity parallels Ortega's hypothesis, while his methodology, the execution of his objectives, makes use of serialism.

Chapters III and IV analyze *Under the Volcano* and *Dark as the Grave*, respectively, in light of the above considerations and try to show how these ideas are operative in Lowry's work both on the aesthetic level, in terms of his approach to literature, and also on the thematic and structural levels within the fictive worlds of the novels.

The final chapter is a brief summary, synthesizing Lowry's various conceptions of time, memory, and reality around a general aesthetic theory. It will be seen that Lowry makes free use of a number of different but compatible systems of thought in his writing. Thus the chapter will also consider some of the resultant critical problems which beset his work and the corresponding need, in any evaluation of his art, for critical breadth and flexibility.
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THE IMPACT OF TIME AND MEMORY
ON MALCOLM LOWRY'S FICTION
CHAPTER I
TIME AND MEMORY

Central to all of Lowry's work is the need to recover and to interpret the past in order to establish a definition of self based not on error or delusion but on sound understanding and self-knowledge. This, of course, demands that Lowry be thoroughly conversant with his personal history, and it is primarily through the agency of memory that this history is rendered accessible to analysis. Lowry realized that at any given moment in an individual's existence he is a product of all that has gone before, not merely his own experience, but his collective social and cultural past as well. He found that the reclamation of this experience through literary creation furnished a means of capturing a moment of reality, whether it be past or present, and imposing upon it order, permanence, and intelligibility. If, however, as he also learned, reality itself, in addition to being elusive and formless, threatened real destruction, the transformation of it into art was to deprive it of its harmful potential. Self-knowledge is a prerequisite to both self-development and full participation in the world, but Lowry knew that one's conception of self must encompass the total man including his previous identities; to ignore, to evade, or even to deny elements of one's experiences is to ensure entrapment by them. The process of recovering self and reality is a psychological one that Jung has defined as individuation, a search for wholeness, for an integration of the personality that makes of an individual a unique, indivisible unit,
relatively free of the supportive structures of his social environment.\(^1\)
Such a human being creates his own world and structures it with his own values rooted in his sense of self. This is the basic motivation behind Lowry's aesthetic, determining both his conception of the role of literary art in general and his execution, in thematic and structural terms, of specific works. His own experiences furnish the substance of his fiction, but within the fictive worlds of the novels the characters are themselves preoccupied with time and confronted with the consequences of their respective pasts.

Art has traditionally served in the role in which Lowry casts it. According to Hans Meyerhoff, the quest for disclosing continuity, identity and unity in experience has been a dominant theme of literature and philosophy from at least as far back as St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and the key to the quest has been memory.\(^2\) This search, of course, involves writers in temporal considerations that are more than simply an awareness of the passing of time and of the persistence of thoughts and feelings; it demands some conception of the nature of reality itself, a specific orientation, in fact, towards the universe. Artists tend to be eclectic, however, and rarely do they follow any one philosophy consistently. Lowry is no exception, and he displays a rather discursive metaphysic sharing elements of numerous beliefs. Nevertheless, it proves a valuable exercise to piece together some of the disparate threads of thought as they are inevitably the strands out of which the novels are made. Indeed, as Margaret Church suggests in a study of time and reality in fiction, such a task is an essential element of criticism since "the understanding
of the form, content, thought and motif of fiction depends on the understanding of an author's attitude toward time and space.\(^3\)

Lowry is situated in an intellectual and literary climate in which ideas concerning time are heavily influenced by Bergson and Marcel Proust. Countering the proposition put forward by Kant that defines time as a homogeneous entity, Bergson suggests instead two species of time, one extensive and measurable, like Kant's, the other intensive and unmeasurable; the latter he called duration. In *Time and Freewill*, Bergson claims that Kant's mistake is to confuse symbol and reality. He believes that when we try symbolically to represent duration we inevitably replace it by space; this is the sense of time we have in which we make distinctions and count, the time that a clock measures.\(^4\) In fact, succession is not a property of pure duration which is the form time assumes when the ordering ego or consciousness refrains from separating its present from its former states. Consequently, past and present comprise an organic whole in which one's entire past is constantly in existence, even though one may remain unaware of it. The aggregate, however, is in an unceasing state of change, of growth through "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing so also there is no limit to its preservation."\(^5\) Thus, the character of an individual at a specific stage in his life is "the condensation of the history" that he has lived from his birth to that point.

Bergson's idea of duration saturates twentieth-century literature, though frequently in modified form. His view freed man from the
artificial distinctions that had been appropriated to time, and, in so doing, bestowed a greater stature on man's past. Much of Lowry's writing exhibits this sense of duration, but his outlook differs markedly from Bergson's in at least one respect; Bergson considered time to be irreversible. While the past was accessible to mental recall, it was always past and never repeatable in experience. Since an individual is always changing, he can never be the same person he was when an incident first took place. It is the intervening episodes, therefore, which prevent the recurrence of an action. By a similar process of thought, Bergson denied the foreseeability of the future which would require either a knowledge of all antecedent actions, and he believed this to be impossible, or the experience of all preceding events which would dispel the element of futurity. Though the plausibility of these arguments is strong, they would not go very far in assuaging Lowry's mind since he seemed constantly beset by both recurrence and premonition.

Proust, like Bergson, believed that real time was inner and qualitative, but he focused his attention on the intensity of the past and on how it could be recalled. He felt that because of forgetfulness, because of the practical orientation of life toward the future, there existed no link between past and present until a chance occurrence summoned up a previous experience by reanimating the sensations which accompanied it; during such a situation, one is completely outside of time. In Matter and Memory, Bergson had differentiated between two forms of memory, one which imagines, characterized by spontaneity and capriciousness, and one which repeats, subject to the will of the active intellect. Proust
recognized the same distinctions, giving prominence to the spontaneous, involuntary memory that chance or circumstance occasioned. He regarded intellectual memory, prompted by the will, as capable of revealing only that past which was, in effect, dead: "the pictures which that kind of memory shows us of the past preserve nothing of the past itself." The other, however, by the chain of association it sparked enabled one to experience simultaneously an incident in the past and the present.

The difference between Proust and Lowry is that Proust remembered previous experiences and relived them, but in his mind; there remains a sense of escapism in his approach. Lowry, on the other hand, actually found himself repeating earlier events in his life, going through the same motions, facing the same riddles. Both, however, recognized the role of an agent, a catalyst, in reviving physical or psychological occasions, and Sigbjørn Wilderness' stumbling upon the Calle Humbolt in *Dark as the Grave*, to mention but one example, has much about it of the "madeleine" episode in the "Overture" section of *Swann's Way*. The resulting associationism, based, as Bergson noted, on the similarity and contiguity of separate happenings, impelled each author on his respective survey of the past. The narrator of Proust's novel discovers that the taste of the "petites madeleines" recalled in completeness and intensity the Sunday morning activities at Combray during his childhood. This led to the conception of the whole great work which was to be a recapturing of a succession of lost selves. What he required was a temporal system that could accommodate such an adventure, a cosmic view in which the end was simultaneous with the beginning, and in which each moment, containing
within itself both its past and future, could be viewed in terms of the whole. Memory, sleep, and dreams gave him freedom to roam beyond the logical and psychological conventions of reality and to apply to earlier events a clearer and more precise vision. The similarity between the two authors, in terms of conception, is striking. Each focused on himself, fragmenting his single personality into a variety of characters; each erected constructs of the real and the imaginary to inhabit his fictive worlds. And for each it was a quest for identity. Indeed, Lowry's projected work, *The Voyage that Never Ends*, was Proustian in breadth, comprising five to seven novels focusing on this theme.

Proust was well aware of the obstacles that lay in his path. He realized, for instance, the difficulty of separating the reality of another from what is, in fact, simply a projection of one's own conception of him. He perceived kinds and degrees of reality, since some remembered events have their origin in a valid personal experience while others are simply constructs of the imagination. He knew, too, that the past not only colours and shapes the present but vice versa, that one's immediate biases interfere with and distort memory. Meyerhoff states the general problems of memory quite clearly by asking how different patterns of memory are related to each other at the same time, how one accounts for the sense of continuity that an individual feels between these different contents at different times, and how one explains the relationship of an individual to his total past. His answer to these questions both defines the basic role of memory in literature and also pays tribute to Proust's contribution:
[Remembrance of Things Past] reveals how the reconstruction of the self corresponds to the recapture of time in experience; . . . this quest for time and self assigns to memory a unique function. Memory becomes a symbol for the active, creative, regulative functions of the self. And this creative aspect of memory (in art) discloses a unified, coherent structure of the self, which cannot be otherwise recovered in experience.

Lowry, too, faced these difficulties. He accepted the fact that given the normal role assigned to memory—to recall the past without distorting it—then the value of remembered experience was in the fixed and secure standard it furnished for coping with present reality. But the problem lay in the insufficiency of the premise. Lowry's life made greater demands on a time-scheme. He found that memory, including the peculiar state of dreams which activate stored memory contents, involves a conscious awareness that extends beyond conventional limitations, that the future was indeed as much a part of memory as the past. Accordingly, it became necessary to differentiate between remembered events, present actions, and anticipated experiences, recognizing that all equally affect one's life, modify choices and actions, and limit alternatives, and that an aesthetic was required that took account of these distinctions.

Throughout his poetry, fiction and letters, Lowry's emphasis is on a personal past, much as is Proust's, and the theories of time and memory with which he was preoccupied were primarily those which offered elucidation of the complexities of his own life:

Like a rotten old ladder
cast adrift from a dismantled sawmill . . .
seems my conscience--
hailed out to dry in the sun,
leaning against nothing,
leading nowhere--
but to be put to use perhaps,
salvageable--to be graved,
up and down which
each night my
mind meaninglessly
climbs.12

The image suggests an ordeal resembling that of Sisyphus in its pain,
its futility, its unrelenting pressure to continue.13 Indeed, this need
haunts Lowry's work and dominates such poems as "The Flowering Past,"
Forming, as well, the nucleus of many of his short stories, it appears
in various guises, as the search for identity in "The Bravest Boat," as
the re-emergence of the past in "Elephant and Colosseum," as the relation­
ship of man to his social past in "The Present Estate of Pompeii," and,
finally, as the destructive past which is overcome and put to use in
"The Forest Path to the Spring." All of these draw on a common body of
experiences and confusions--Lowry's; all try to order and understand them
as prerequisites for Lowry's personal salvation.

Although the metaphysical enigmas confronting Lowry were intimate­
ly and immediately pressing, nevertheless Under the Volcano extensively
and Dark as the Grave to a more limited extent, through such devices as
the Faust and Parsifal motifs, expand his thoughts beyond personal con­
siderations to include all time. He agreed with Jung that the artist is
in touch with the immemorial forces common to all cultures, all ages,
and was able, through his use of symbolism and mythology, to bridge the
abyss of time which separated them. Lowry's familiarity with Oriental
philosophy and the Cabbala suggested common archetypal patterns in human
existence to which his symbolism provided access. He, like Jung, believed that "it is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them. It is neither a question of belief nor of knowledge, but of the agreement of our thinking with the primordial images of the unconscious." In this sense, the value of mythological allusions is twofold: they place a present, secular setting within a timeless perspective, and they convey a sense of the continuity and community of all mankind.

These and similar ideas exerted a powerful formative influence on the shape of literary creation in general during this century, although the method that any artist resorts to is, ultimately, the one that meets his unique needs and fosters his particular objectives. Faulkner, for instance, concentrated on the force of an individual's social past, on the impossibility of escaping it, on the inevitability, in fact, of repeating it since "there is no such thing really as was because the past is." In addition, parallels from Shakespeare and Biblical analogies lend to his novels a wide scope. In the same manner, Hegelian philosophy, Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same, mysticism, and occultism inform the works of Kafka and Thomas Mann, both of whom employ circular concepts of time and reality in their fiction. While Lowry knew of these artists and their approaches to the nature of existence, perhaps the most fruitful comparison for setting his views in a perspective of contemporary writing is with Joyce.

In The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, a predominantly personal sense of identity is gradually superseded in Daedalus' mind by
a commitment to his racial past. In *Ulysses*, artificial time is juxtaposed against Bergsonian duration and a Jungian persistence of the legendary past, with Homeric parallels, Irish nationalism and folklore, and linguistic styles furnishing the dominant agents of continuity. Here, clocks and watches abound, though not as extensively as in *Under the Volcano*. The critical time for Bloom is four o' clock when Molly will rendezvous with Blazes Boylan. But Bloom is also capable of a larger vision, of seeing life in terms of a flowing stream, a never-ending cycle of birth, growth, death, decay, rebirth. *Finnegan's Wake* is structured along the lines of Giovanni Battista Vico's cyclical theory of history which comprises a Divine Age, an Heroic Age, a Human Age, and a Recorso. Indeed, Vico's cycles occupy a position in Joyce's aesthetic similar to the place held by Dunne's serialism in Lowry's scheme. These, however, do not exhaust Joyce's techniques; his use of time shows the same diversity of sources and approaches as does Lowry's, and Giordano Bruno's dialectical concept of nature, Einstein's relativism, Dunne's serial view, as well as Asiatic conceptions of cyclical time all contribute to his total outlook.

Lowry's search for a comprehensible order in the world has little of the purely theoretical about it. Time is, in fact, a symbol that man employs in order to approach an aspect of ultimate reality. For most men, perhaps, the symbol is sufficient, and they rest with the delusion that they can not only understand, but can manipulate and control reality, since their necessities, the demands they make on reality, do not exceed the limits of the narrow and closed system in which they operate. In
contrast, as his letters particularly reveal, Lowry's needs were unique and exacting; his life was plagued with irregular, occasionally extremely bizarre occurrences, which made him sometimes regard himself as a character in a Kafka novel. He often seemed to be somehow existing in different experiential realms at the same moment where events such as those narrated in the published fragment of _October Ferry to Gabriola, "The Element Follows You Around, Sir,"_ were prevalent. His desire for understanding led him to Kant, but the _Critique of Pure Reason_ would seem to offer scant solace or assistance. In Kant's philosophy, although a form of consciousness, time is still a linear concept "in which all different times must be located, not as coexistent but as in succession to one another" and which follow each other on the principle of cause and effect. A doctrine of this order has little room for premonition, even less for recurrence. Lowry, however, as Downie Kirk testifies, was firmly convinced of the possibility of such things as telepathy and thought transference. He possessed Jung's _Psyche and Symbol_ and must have known his essay on synchronicity which treats of "meaningful coincidences" that are not based on any principle of causality and that are contained in an irrepresentable space-time continuum. Nevertheless, it seems to be J. W. Dunne to whom Lowry turned. In a letter to Conrad Aiken in 1945, after having recounted some rather strange situations, Lowry goes on to add that "altogether about fifty other odd senseless sad terrifying and curiously related things . . . make me sometimes think (taking it all in all) that maybe I am the chap chosen by God or the Devil to elucidate the Law of Series."
Before a detailed consideration of Dunne however, there is another essential ingredient of Lowry's metaphysic to be noted—this is eternal recurrence, the cyclical basis of existence. While eternal recurrence is not the same as serialism, nor is it even possible perhaps to subsume the containment of one in the other, still, in the uses made of each by Lowry, the systems are certainly compatible. The repetition of experience, the extensive use of mythology, plus Lowry's knowledge of Eastern philosophy, neo-Platonism, occultism, alchemy, and the Cabbala, all help to promote a cyclical view of time and reality. The focus here will be on the contributions of the East, as some of the neo-Platonic symbolism in Lowry's work has recently been examined, and the Cabbalistic framework has been amply filled out by Epstein. Both these streams of thought, in fact, partake heavily of Eastern beliefs. It should be realized that the complexity of Lowry's symbolism precludes any claim that he made a conscious and determined effort to draw images from Indian and Oriental doctrines. Nevertheless, his imagery, symbolism, even many of his techniques are informed by their ideas.

The stages of mystical experience, as Epstein describes it, as a journey through seven palaces, is strikingly similar to the myth of Buddha's birth. During the ordeal, Buddha attains the summit of the world in seven steps, traversing the seven cosmic stories to the seven planetary heavens. In so doing, he transcends time by becoming contemporaneous with the beginning of the world, as the summit is where creation commences. Here, time is both reversible and can be anticipated; knowing past and future, he can move in either time direction.
pertinent corollary of this process is that the abolition of time is
equivalent to the destruction of memory, not just individual memory, but
collective consciousness as well. What this amounts to is a remaking of
the world, representative of ignorance, failure, and suffering, without
history or memory, and, therefore, without sin. The entire process offers
insightful parallels into the purgative function of art as Lowry
conceives it.

Also important in Indian philosophy is the idea that the universe
undergoes cycles of creation and destruction. Each cycle culminates in
a fire which is extinguished by a flood that preludes re-creation. Fire
and water imagery, employed in a similar sense, are of course prevalent
throughout Lowry's work, most particularly applied with reference to his
burned manuscript of In Ballast to the White Sea and to the charred
ruins at Dollarton. To Lowry, each of these represented a cycle of
creation halted by fire, each destruction culminating in a rebirth.

In Hindu religion, the self, Atman, must be realized fully in in-
dividual terms, but, ultimately, it becomes part of an all-pervading
unity. Buddhistic belief, on the other hand, postulates an ever-changing
series of states of mind and matter as the basis of self. In both,
however, self-knowledge allows one to be delivered from "the illusory,
ephemeral world . . . [which] is the world that unfolds in time," and
to attain salvation. Yet even though the historical world, the world of
societies and civilizations, is not of final importance, one cannot, as
the lesson of The Bhagavad Gita makes clear, renounce his historical and
social locus. The world of time is illusory, not because it is unreal,
but because, in terms of cosmic rhythms, it exists only for a flash, an instant. What man needs is perspective, seeing his own life in relationship to the whole, yet, at the same time, carrying the onus of responsibility for that life. It is just this point of view that the Consul lacks in Chapter X of *Under the Volcano* when he tries to minimize the value of human intentions.

The moral ramifications of the Indian attitude appealed strongly to Lowry and complemented the special value which he accorded Chinese philosophy with its basis in ethical imperatives. Rather than an other-worldly outlook, such a text as the *I Ching* concentrates on the need for harmony in this world, a harmony which is attained when man and his institutions move in conjunction with natural law. The principle underlying this concord is Tao:

> Worthy to be the Mother of all things . . .
> ... I shall call it "Great." Being great implies reaching out in space,
> Reaching out in space implies far-reaching, far-reaching implies reversion to the original point. . . .
> Therefore: Tao is Great, the Heaven is Great, the Earth is Great, the King is also Great.
> These are the Great Four in the universe, . . .
> Man models himself after the Earth; the Earth models itself after Heaven;
> The Heaven models itself after Tao. 26

The interrelationship between the human and natural worlds finds expression in the sensitivity Lowry displays, in both his life and his art, toward the environment, in the degree to which he identifies with natural processes, and in the disgust he experiences (as is evident in a story such as "Gin and Goldenrod") at man's despoilment of nature's beauty and
vitality. More important, perhaps, is the fact that "The Forest Path to the Spring," in which Lowry wanted to combine the force and stature common to classical tragedy with the idea of reintegration, should close with the concept of the Tao:

Then we saw that the whole dark water was covered with bright expanding phosphorescent circles. Only when my wife felt the warm mild rain on her naked shoulders did she realize it was raining. They were perfect expanding circles of light, first tiny circles as bright as a coin, then becoming expanding rings growing fainter and fainter, while as the rain fell into the phosphorescent water each raindrop expanded into a ripple that was translated into light. And the rain itself was water from the sea . . . raised to heaven by the sun, transformed into clouds, and falling again into the sea. While within the inlet itself the tides and currents in that sea returned, became remote, and becoming remote, like that which is called the Tao, returned again as we ourselves had done.27

Evident in this passage, and crucial to both Lowry's and Asiatic belief, is the image of the circle. The unity of Tao is also that of the mandala, the magic circle which contains in its centre the fountain-head of life and consciousness.28 The concept involves both the marking off of a sacred precinct, the self, and the movement in a circle around this centre, a rotation that activates all facets of the personality. This type of circularity informs both the structures of Lowry's separate novels as well as the over-all structure of his projected sequence of novels. Like Melville, whose influence on Lowry was especially strong, he recognized that it is only through the stability of its centre that the harmony of the circle can be perceived. In Moby Dick, for instance, the circle represents the universe, totality. Ahab desires to transcend all, to be himself an infinite circumference with no fixed centre, but he learns that this cannot be done. Ishmael, on the other hand, realizes
that through the fixed point of his identity he can perceive the world outside him. Lowry arrives at a similar conclusion, and the fixed points, the centres of his circles, are self-knowledge and love:

Each drop falling into the sea is like a life I thought, each producing a circle in the ocean, or the medium of life itself, and widening it into infinity, though it seems to melt into the sea, and become invisible or disappear entirely, and to be lost. Each is interlocked with other circles falling about it, some are larger circles expanding widely and engulfing others, some are weaker, smaller circles that only seem to last a short while. 29

The restoration of identity, through the reclamation of his past, renders the Lowry persona capable of life and love, and of saying of either of these, "Thy firmness makes my circle just." 30
FOOTNOTES


8Matter and Memory, p. 322.

9Proust, pp. 34-36.

10Meyerhoff, p. 43.

11Ibid., p. 44.


13Jim Barnes has recently studied the Consul as a Sisyphus figure and pointed out numerous parallels between Lowry's novel and the myth, in "The Myth of Sisyphus and Under the Volcano," PrS, 42 (1968), 341-348.


15Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University


23. Ibid., p. 17


25. Ibid., p. 186.


CHAPTER II
ORTEGA AND DUNNE

Stating the aesthetic basis of a particular writer's work is like deducing a formula after the fact; it is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive task. The value of a formula lies in its simplicity and conciseness, its ability to express what is in fact a highly complex and intricate process in a few key symbols and phrases. It is in this light that the theories of Ortega and Dunne ought to be regarded. Considered alone, the insights that they offer into Lowry's art would remain abstract and simplistic. But in conjunction with the somewhat incremental evidence of the foregoing chapter, they furnish a critical framework around which the earlier ideas can be systematically grouped. Focusing on Lowry's preoccupation with the past in terms of Ortega's philosophy of man and history, seeing the irregularities of time and experience in Lowry's life from the point of view of Dunne's serial universe, discloses a consistency of critical approach that can both facilitate and accommodate the discursive genre of intention, method, and metaphor which is Lowry's craft.

Ortega's is an existentialist view that regards man as essentially his own creator. In contrast with inanimate objects, or animals, for which their potentiality coincides with their reality, man determines his own essence. For Ortega, there are only two variables which affect one's being--the I or ego, and the circumstances in which the ego finds itself. Theoretically, man's range of possibilities is infinite, but in practice
he is limited. He first exists, but not in isolation; he exists in a set of circumstances out of which, through his imagination, he invents that which he is going to be. There is an aspect of divinity here, but, unlike God's, man's creation is not absolute since it is limited by its setting: "man is a God as occasion offers."¹ Even with this restriction, however, the corollary condition of freedom of choice pertains. Ironically, this status is itself a constraint; man is "free by compulsion," and "to be free means to be lacking in constitutive identity . . . to be able to be other than what one was."² Man, as it were, invents for himself a program of life which, in conception, is static because he believes that this created character is his real being. But actually the circumstances of life vary, and as they alter so must the character change. Man's life thus becomes a course of "accumulating being--the past; he goes on making for himself a being through a dialectical process of historical reason,"³ that is, a synthesis of past self and present demands, and that produces a new though still fluid personality.

Faced with a prospect of continual change man can only understand himself through historical reason; not only is it in this light that "life takes on a measure of transparency," but, in fact, history is man's only reality. As such, it alone can form the basis of all subsequent life. Everything that man has been determines what he can become; all that he has done, or even failed to do, limits his possible alternatives. In this view, to realize one's potential, it is necessary to centre oneself in the past: "To comprehend anything human, be it personal or collective, one must tell its history."⁴ Quite naturally, distinguishing
one's identity which is buried in one's previous life is a function of memory. According to Ortega, it is precisely the faculty of memory that distinguishes man from the animals. Each of the latter is doomed to begin life anew, each is the first of its type. Man, in contrast, "is not a first man, an Eternal Adam; he is formally a second man, a third man, etc.," and it is memory that both provides him with a record of earlier experiences on which to build and also yields continuity to his existence. Ortega believes that to be fully human is "to be able to continue one's yesterday today without thereby ceasing to live for tomorrow; to live in the real present, since the present is only the presence of the past and future, the place where past and future actually exist."  

Ortega's philosophy places great worth on individual life; it prizes diversity, individuality, and creativity. It also stresses individual responsibility for the way in which that life is spent, for the "destiny" that a man is impelled to follow. Fulfilment is the goal, a personal salvation irrespective of the imposed definitions that family, society, or occupation comprise. Ortega's is an old view that considers these latter, the world in short, dependent upon the former—the reformation, the improvement of humanity and its institutions is consequent to self-knowledge and self-realization. History as a System enabled Lowry to find in Ortega a kindred spirit in terms of the value and validity of individual life, and also, a coherent metaphysical justification for his own special concern—the past. Yet, needless to say, Lowry's was not an unqualified sympathy. One important difference is that Ortega, like Bergson, disbelieved in the repeatability of the past. Ortega states
categorically that time cannot recur simply because man cannot go back to being what he once was. Obviously, an idea such as this needs to be both amplified and modified before it can exhibit any relevance to a novel on the order of *Dark as the Grave*.

Perhaps what is important is frequently not so much what a particular philosophy states, but rather the way in which it gives expression to the ideas it embodies. Ortega is an original thinker because his opinions are the result of a fresh and independent approach, a free and unhampered spirit of enquiry coming to its own conclusions. But his views are not novel; they share the concerns and the assumptions of a great many thinkers. The impact of his arguments on Lowry, however, originates in his metaphors. For example, the representation of life as a ship is common in literature, notably in conjunction with a mystical, neo-Platonic, or Romantic outlook. Ortega extends the image; to him life is not a ship, but a shipwreck. The same figure abounds in Lowry's writing, prose, poetry, and letters:

S.O.S. Sinking fast by both bow and stern
S.O.S. Worse than both the Morrow Castle
S.O.S. and the Titanic
S.O.S. No ship can think of anything else to do when
S.O.S. it is in danger
S.O.S. But to ask its closest friend for help.  

Ortega would consider the desperation that Lowry's letter reveals implicit of hope. Only with peril does man lose his illusions of security and begin to exert, to redeem himself: "Consciousness of shipwreck, being the truth of life, constitutes salvation." The similarity between Ortega's statement and the epigraph from Goethe at the beginning of *Under
the Volcano is immediately apparent.

The image, frequently used by Ortega, which impressed Lowry with the greatest force was man as the novelist of himself. The value of this idea is twofold. In one sense, man makes himself on the order of an artist's creation; in other words man literally writes himself, he is the determiner of the form, the expression of his own life; no matter "whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself." Here life itself becomes an artifact, a record of the confrontation between man and reality. This image appears in Lowry's work through his use of a novelist as protagonist, his autobiographical emphasis, his creating, recovering and recording his own experiences. The other implication of Ortega's metaphor is that man becomes involved in the creation which is his life as does a novelist in his writing, each, creator and creation, being modified, transformed, by the presence of the other. It is in Dark as the Grave that this sense is expressed most forcefully. Man becomes a function of his experiences: "Man is not his body, which is a thing, nor his soul, psyche, conscience, or spirit, which is also a thing. Man is no thing, but a drama--his life, a pure and universal happening which happens to each one of us and in which each one in his turn is nothing but a happening." In a letter to Downie Kirk, Lowry discusses these aspects of Ortega's philosophy:

This probably recommends itself to me partly because if it is true, and man is a sort of novelist of himself, I can see something philosophically valuable in attempting to set down what actually happens in a novelist's mind when he conceives what he conceives to be the fanciful figure of a personage, etc., for this, the part that never gets written--with which is included the true impulses that made him
a novelist in the first place, and the modification of life around him through his own eyes as those impulses were realized—would be the true drama . . . and I hope to finish something of this sort one day . . . It's refreshing to read a philosophy that gives value to the drama of life itself, of the dramatic value of your own life at the very moment you are reading.11

This sense of involvement, of the interpenetration of life and art, was something that Lowry knew well, not only in terms of aesthetics, but also in the day to day realities of his personal life. He was quick to note the similarity between Ortega's ideas in this respect and those of Pirandello. The latter regarded the artist as being somehow caught up in his creation; more than this, in fact, he seemed in some way in conflict with it. Pirandello believed that a character acquired a reality, an identity of its own, a life independent of the work that includes it which nevertheless requires that work to sustain its existence. Here, the author becomes primarily a liberating force, freeing his characters, giving them birth, to act their drama in a way that they may understand it. The complexity of the process increases when those characters are themselves aspects of their creator; then "you who act your own part become the puppet of yourself."12 While acknowledging the profundity of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Lowry felt that Pirandello failed to realize the full implications of his idea, or to carry it far enough. Pirandello stopped short with the idea of art lending order and, therefore, coherence and value to life. Lowry, however, extends the idea as when Sigbjørn, in *Dark as the Grave*, "seemed to see how life flowed into art: how art gives life a form and meaning and flows on into life, yet life has not stood still; that was what was always forgotten: how life
To find confirmation of one's beliefs is more than just a gratifying experience; it is possibly essential. Ortega presented Lowry with a coherent approach to reality, the tenets of which more or less coincided with many of his own. There remain, however, many phenomena active in Lowry's experience which never troubled Ortega but which did intrude into the life of J. W. Dunne. Lowry was intrigued by Dunne's book, An Experiment with Time, which attempts to give a scientific explanation to such matters as recurrence, coincidence, and pre-cognition, and to place them firmly in the normal, not the super-normal or supernatural, world. An artist's technique and his vision go hand in hand. In Dunne, Lowry found a view of the universe which closely paralleled both his theories and his style—his involved structure, his layers of meaning, his conception of reality as a series of "Chinese boxes."

Dunne, an English engineer, became interested for practical reasons in certain occurrences for which modern science seemed unable to account. These practical reasons stemmed from the fact that Dunne found himself experiencing a future event in a dream. It was not really what he could call a premonition of the future; rather, the incident displayed all the normal qualities of a dream, which is generally considered to comprise events that have already happened but remain active in the unconscious mind. It was, in fact, as if he had already participated in the event; the only unusual quality was its displacement in time. Two fundamental questions evolved from this: could such an experience be explained, and,
if one could in some way foresee events, could he then intervene to prevent or alter their outcome? Since neither physics nor metaphysics dealt sufficiently with these problems, Dunne construed his own theory of a serial universe which not only accommodated these irregularities, but showed that they were not irregular at all, that, indeed, they were normal characteristics of both sleeping and waking life.

Dunne's scheme is based on the principle of infinite regression. His basic premise begins with the four-dimensional space-time continuum of modern physics, but he goes on to assume that if time changes at all before the conventional time-fixed observer, then there must be a second time which times it, and a third which times the second, and so on in a series. Pushed to the extreme, one would find "a single multi-dimensional field of presentation in absolute motion, travelling over a fixed substratum of objective elements extended in all the dimensions of time." There will exist an "absolute Time" which times all the moments: "The present moment of this absolute Time must contain all the moments of 'past', 'present' and 'future', of all the subordinate dimensions of Time." From these hypotheses emerge the three fundamental laws of a serial universe:

(1) Every time-travelling field of presentation is contained within a field one-dimension larger and travelling in another dimension of time which covers the past, present and future of the smaller field.

(2) The serialism of the fields of presentation involves the existence of a serial observer.

(3) The focus of attention in any field has the same number of dimensions as has that field, and it is a dimensional centre of the foci of attention in all the higher fields.
Dunne concluded from his experiments that regressions of consciousness, will, and time were perfectly valid and logical, and that they were, in fact, the true foundations of all epistemology. He completely discarded the two conventional views of time length (linearity) and time motion (succession), and saw, instead, man situated within a framework of absolute time in which all times are contained, including the future, which for Bergson does not exist and for Ortega exists only as potentiality, and in which all times are simultaneously active. Past and future incidents produce images in man's mind with approximately equal frequency, and man's attention can range in either direction. But because of ignorance and habit man regards time in linear sequential fashion, and he erects arbitrary barriers that admit the past and the role of memory while rejecting the future.

Dunne's hypothesis is not wholly unlike that of P. D. Ouspensky with whom Lowry was also familiar. Ouspensky, too, believed in a multidimensional universe or cosmos, but his consisted of exactly seven dimensions. Access to these planes of experience depended on the degree of one's psychic development. Ouspensky believed, however, that it was absurd to approach such matters as foresight and telepathy, which are properties of the higher dimensions, by science or mathematics; on the contrary, these things were subjective, mystical experiences and deserved similar means of study. Ouspensky does not seem to have exerted the same force on Lowry as did Dunne. For one thing, the role of the observer, so important for both Dunne and Lowry, seems to be, if not lacking, at least treated in a manner to which Lowry did not respond with the same immediacy as he did to Dunne's "higher order observer."
Indeed, Dunne's concept of the serial or "higher order observer" is especially relevant to Lowry's work. Serialism discloses the existence of an individual soul with a definite beginning in absolute time. This is a superlative general or synthetic observer who is the source of all the self-consciousness, intention, and intervention which underlies ordinary thought. He contains within himself a less generalized observer who is the personification of all genealogically related life and who is capable of thought and prevision beyond conventional human capabilities. Specifically, observer_1 sees field_1; observer_2 sees field_2 which includes observer_1 plus field_1 within its broader view. Finally, the synthetic observer partakes of all the life-lines of everyone else since they are all within his field of presentation. Therefore, every lesser observer is, in a sense, an aspect of the synthetic observer. Basically, "all observation is the observation of a higher order observer." Self-consciousness requires that an individual see himself as an entity in the process of observing, he must be aware of a higher order self viewing the more limited self; like self-knowledge, memories are also the property of a higher order observer.

One of the immediate implications of this concept is that if a serial observer is an aspect of one's self, and if he can experience a "pre-presentation" of the future, then in theory, at least, he could intervene and influence the course of events. This is in fact the case. A higher order observer can and does intervene, but, again from ignorance or habit, conventional man does not recognize his powers. While in reality he may be seeing four-dimensionally, he makes the mistake of
interpreting his view in terms of only three dimensions. What he must learn is that a higher order observer's field must be examined in the light of his broader vision.

The application of these ideas to Lowry's technique practically explains itself. The author fragments himself and structures his experience in a way that each persona becomes, as it were, an observer of a different dimension of reality. Self-knowledge, the goal, requires the recognition of a second self and so on. But each is simply an aspect of the total self whose field of presentation gets broader at each dimensional remove. In a sense, Lowry is the limiting dimension embodying for his fictive world absolute time and maximum powers of intervention, but even this need not be the final other than for purposes of convenience, and Lowry, himself, could be included as simply a part of the scheme, with the reader as observer with somewhat modified powers of interference.

Lowry conveys this sense of being himself a serial element in the short story "Through the Panama" where one finds Lowry writing about Sigbjørn who is writing about Martin Trumbaugh who is writing about Lowry's life in Mexico. As Sigbjørn passes through the Panama Canal he notices a man in a control tower who has assembled before him a complete model of the entire system of locks "and thus is able--ghastly image of the modern world--to see what is happening at every moment." Yet even this man is not the highest order observer:

That man sitting up in the control tower high above the topmost lock who, by the way is myself, and who would feel perfectly comfortable if only he did not know that there was yet another man sitting yet
higher above him in his invisible control tower, who also has a model of the canal locks before him, carefully built, which registers electrically the exact depth of everything I do, and who thus is able to see everything that is happening to me at every moment—and worse, everything that is going to happen.21

A crucial implication of a serial view of existence is that any series must have a first term which stands in a different relation to all the other terms in that it has a beginning and an end. This occurs in the time1 dimension, of which field death is a property. Commentators such as Church and Meyerhoff have pointed out that the idea of death is frequently at the cornerstone of contemporary thought; it is the future, the irreversibility of time-movement toward death, that defines consciousness. But a serial universe defeats this effect of this kind of time, and it fosters the use, in literature, of mythological extension, circularity, and recurrence. Death is not a serial element and appears as the final and inevitable end of life only to a time1 observer but not to any higher order observer.

Ultimate truth is a property of closed systems such as science or mathematics. Dunne intended his philosophy to survive on the rules of such a given system, and, as such, its validity depended on its compatibility with those rules. In an article on Lowry's reading which includes a brief discussion of Dunne's influence, W. H. New notes that while serialism enjoyed some success, it was eventually criticised for treating time in spatial terms, for confusing the problems of time passing with those of time passed, and for interpreting time as itself a process in time.22 An artist, on the other hand, conceives a reality that is not a definition of the world so much as it is a metaphorical expression of
his perception of it. Hence, the validity of the artist's view does not hinge on its conformity to accepted axioms. Thus Dunne's view afforded some writers a useful device; serialism merits consideration, for instance, in *Finnegan's Wake*, and it provides one of the basic frameworks on which Jorge Louis Borges constructs many of his stories. And in the article just mentioned, New goes on to point out how well Dunne's notion of re­gress served Lowry:

Events in time past, relived in the memory, occur simultaneously in time present, which epitomizes in its way the process of "re­creation" that reading a novel involves readers in. But further: Wilderness, [in *Dark as the Grave*] returning to his own and his novel's Mexican past, is still moving through time into the future. Out of his memory of the past he anticipates events in the future, which possess a vivid and objective reality for him and do "happen." On the basis of this "dream" experience, however, the will may exert itself and thus alter the nature of the "actual" experience that subsequently occurs. To Lowry this process was extremely important. Certain as he was that there existed a unity between life and death, body and soul, reality and unreality, he found here a key to the metaphysics that joined them.23

Systems of history, philosophical world-views, and scientific concepts are abstract; they treat of generalities. Ultimately, Lowry is concerned with fiction, which is specific, with the precise combinations of individuals, details, colours, sights, sounds, thoughts, and actions that make up *Under the Volcano* or *Dark as the Grave.*
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., p. 203.

3 Ibid., p. 216.

4 Ibid., p. 214.

5 Ibid., p. 220.

6 Ibid., p. 83.

7 Selected Letters, p. 11.


9 History as a System, p. 203.

10 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

11 Selected Letters, pp. 210-211.


13 Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, ed. Douglas Day and Margerie Lowry (Cleveland, 1968), p. 43.


15 Ibid., p. 157.

16 Ibid., pp. 158-159.

17 Ibid., p. vi.

18 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
19 Ibid., p. 168.

20 Hear Us O Lord, p. 61.

21 Ibid., p. 63.


23 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
CHAPTER III
UNDER THE VOLCANO

"Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel."¹ In the image which ends the first chapter of Under the Volcano are contained all the implications of the roles of time and memory in the novel. The book itself is designed as, among other things, a wheel with twelve spokes, the motion of which, the progression from first chapter to last, "is something like that, conceivably, of time itself."² The temporal movement, however, extends in both directions, forward into the future of the novel and backward into the past, as the bulk of the work unfolds the events of the same day precisely one year earlier. The book concerns itself not only with the personal histories of its main characters, but also through its setting, its imagery, its allusions, and its language, with the collective past and memory of mankind. All of this is placed in a context that implies a sense of futurity. The stature of the characters and the moral force of the novel require at least the possibility of redemption, but it is a possibility that can be realized only through a reconciliation with the total past.

Lowry achieves such a tremendous scope for his novel by a variety of techniques. The action is set in Mexico, itself both a meeting place of the world, as well as a kind of archetypal Garden of Eden, whose history of conquest and exploitation provides a perspective from which to view the fascist rape of Mexico, the Spanish Civil War and World War II. The time is the Day of the Dead when the living turn back to commune with
the past. Like Joyce or Cocteau, Lowry juxtaposes modern, personal life against myth and allegory to stress the continuity, and also the divergences, between present life and a kind of Jungian unconscious or racial past. Citations from Dante and Bunyan contribute to this effect, as do the innumerable references to both Western and Oriental mythology such as David Markson has pointed out in an article emphasizing the textural richness of Under the Volcano. The most extensive and consistently developed motif, however, is that of Faust:

Employing the Faust archetype, Lowry has achieved the sense of ironic dissimilarity and yet of profound human continuity between the modern protagonist and his long dead exemplars; he has also locked past and present together spatially in a timeless unity by transmuting the time-world of history into the timeless world of myth.

Underlying these various allusions is the allegory of the Garden of Eden, furnishing a touchstone of pre-lapsarian harmony and innocence by which man, represented by the Consul, can be measured. But man in the novel is fallen man, expelled from Eden, or worse, consigned to a ruined paradise, like Geoffrey's garden, tangled and chaotic as a jungle, and forced "to go on living there, alone, of course--suffering, unseen, cut off from God" (137). Geoffrey's alcoholism equals the world's drunkenness; his isolation and alienation, his guilt and remorse are also the world's failures; his search for salvation from the consequences of his previous life is also the world's search. The question is one of time. It is too late to recultivate the ruined garden? "Can Geoffrey assume the guilt of the world on his shoulders, is he equipped to perform the Messianic descent; or has he merely become an engine of destruction for destruction's sake?"
The use of myth and allegory does more than just eliminate historical barriers. Particularly where the allusions involve religious or mystical elements a contrast is established between conventional, mechanical time and cosmic time. Seldom has a novelist been as preoccupied with clock time as is Lowry. Clocks and watches abound in the novel, bells chime the hour, even the swimming pool as it filled "ticked like a clock . . . Tak: tok: help: help" (75). The sense conveyed is that of time running out, of an almost existential inevitability of death and of the consequent need for haste. Yet life and death in the novel are viewed in a perspective that includes both as elements of a wider gestalt and that extends far beyond either. Lowry seems to be suggesting the validity and the importance of each time reference. In terms of eternity, man occupies, perhaps, only an interval of a cycle, but this interval is real and constitutes his chance for redemption; as such, it cannot be abrogated or ignored. This accounts, in part, for the irony involved when Hugh, who has remained largely oblivious to the effect of time passing on his life, is asked the time by Einstein, whose view was cosmic and who contributed so much to the diminution of the importance of mechanical time; Hugh could not tell him until he "pointed out the clock which neither of them had noticed" (186).

The breadth and diversity thus given to time allows the twelve hours of the novel to be seen as a steadily expanding entity which comprises progressively a day in the lives of the characters, the respective lifetimes of each of the characters in this day, the history and destination of the race, and, ultimately, the creation and impending
destruction of the universe. Personal salvation is the goal, self-knowledge the key, to establish some kind of harmony in the day which would reconcile the tensions of a lifetime, thus becoming exemplary to a world bent on dissolution; and this is possible only through the effort to recover, via memory, that which has been lost, to restore, through action, that which has been destroyed. That the attempt fails is not as important as that it has been made, for as Hugh realizes, "the past was irrevocably past. And conscience had been given man to regret it only in so far as that might change the future. For man, every man . . . must ceaselessly struggle upward" (112).

The novel contains lengthy expository passages in which the histories of the major characters are revealed. Jacques Laruelle's walk in Chapter I becomes a kind of circumambience of his life with the Cerveceria XX functioning as the hub of his wheel where time is suspended in the co-existence of past and present. Not only is his identity delineated during his walk, but also, the various themes of the novel and the essential background of the action are exposed. The barranca which he crosses, the film Las Manos de Orlac, the book of Elizabethan plays and the letter it contains, all trigger Proustian chains of association in his memory that both revive the previous events, and yet foreshadow the succeeding episodes of the book. In fact, in one sense, the novel can be seen as Jacques' recollection of these experiences.

The ravine recalls to Jacques' mind the Hell Bunker which, in its turn, reanimates images of the Taskerson family, his childhood friendship with Geoffrey, and the breaking up of this over an incident with a girl
on the golf course. Inside the cantina, next to which the same film that was playing a year ago is being shown, Jacques is presented with Geoffrey's volume of plays which reminds him of his reason for coming to Mexico in the first place, his intention to make a film on the Faust theme, and this causes him to note the Faustian overtones of his friend's life. The enclosed letter impels him further to elicit the memory of his love for, and his affairs with, Yvonne. Accompanying his feeling for her, however, there persists a very deep sense of guilt because deceiving the Consul was, in a way, the betrayal of something more than friendship. Geoffrey is shown to have exerted a lasting influence on Jacques' life, an influence that extends further than their brief boyhood encounter would suggest—Jacques' English tweed jacket, his white trousers, his shirt, his tennis shoes, the very fact that he plays tennis, testify to his and Geoffrey's identification, and imply the kind of Cain-Abel betrayal theme that is extensively developed with Hugh. All of these feelings are, of course, reinforced by a perusal of Geoffrey's letter which bears witness to the collective failures of all of the characters and to the forceful validity of what becomes one of the major mottos of the novel: "no se puede vivir sin amar." Jacques' presence has a certain aimlessness about it; he seems as though suspended in a complicated web of events that he is still trying to piece together. It is as if the year has not passed for him, and the impulse needed to instill new purpose and direction in his life is lacking.

A sudden, unexpected encounter with Yvonne shocks Hugh into an awareness of the nature of his life to this point. Rather unconcerned
with time, more or less playing with his destiny, he suddenly awakes to find himself "in the middle of the bloody road of [his] life" (154), not particularly satisfied with his accomplishments, and no longer young, no longer a prodigy. Consequently, he turns inward, but his retrospective survey of his life is, at once, a basically honest attempt at self-analysis that yet retains a quality of rationalization, of self-justification about it. To accept himself he must accept his experience at sea, his insecurity, his insincerity, his one-time anti-semitism, his seduction of Bolowski's wife, and, most importantly, his betrayal of the Consul through the adulterous affair with Yvonne.

Like Jacques, Hugh is ambivalent about his experience with Yvonne; desire and contrition combat each other in his memory. The remorse because of his brother is deep and powerful, but so is the remorse over his own loss. Indeed, almost the only sustained harmony in any relationship in the novel is that evident when Hugh and Yvonne are together—sustained largely because Hugh suppresses what he feels. Their long ride in Chapter IV, while replete with all the more sinister implications of the book—the Malebolge, the horse branded with the number seven, the ruin of Maximillian's and Carlotta's palace, the political and social situations in Mexico and Spain—nevertheless remains somewhat idyllic in nature. A mark of this is the watchfulness and fidelity of the dog that accompanies them and that contrasts so sharply to the pariah dogs that seem to shadow the Consul's every step. During the ride, in fact, Hugh realizes that probably never in his life will he be happier than at that moment.
Hugh's activities are inspired by the memory of his friend, Juan Cerillo, who is a shadowy but ideal figure in the novel. Having worked in Mexico at the dangerous task of delivering money for the Ejido, Juan generously contributed his efforts to the cause in Spain. He becomes a model that feeds Hugh's idealism, his need for action and commitment. It is this need to be involved, for instance, that impels Hugh into the arena at Tomalin. The episode is symbolic of the ritual of life—birth, struggle, death, and rebirth—and it expresses Hugh's inability to be an observer of life, the imperative of participation under which he has placed himself. The same force is apparent during the encounter with the wounded Indian, itself a kind of "contemporary repetition of the Spanish conquest" implied by "the pelado's smeared conquistador's hands" (253). The general paralysis which strikes the other passengers on the bus, the inertia produced by fear and "prudence" and lack of direction, the perversion of the Samaritan ideal, all serve to render the situation painfully, frustratingly unreal for Hugh, as though "a more absolute dislocation of time could not have been created" (284).

In a number of ways, spatial and temporal dislocations have characterized Hugh's life. It is the sense of not belonging that undermines his experience on board the Philoctetes, his ship-mates conviction that somehow his presence is a mockery of their livelihood. The sea voyage, itself, is distressingly out of joint with his illusions of life on a ship. He returns to England expecting to be famous as a song writer only to find that he has been virtually forgotten, his songs printed but never distributed. These and similar circumstances result in the insecurity,
the lack of a real identity that are, in fact, the major forces behind Hugh's various commitments; he is still in search of himself.

The question of identity, however, is at work on a number of levels with regard to Hugh. In one sense, Yvonne, Hugh, and Geoffrey are all aspects of one whole. Together they can be seen as comprising a trinity, or a Cabbalistic triad, or even the composite deity of Hindu belief--Creator, Preserver, Destroyer. In another sense, Hugh is like Geoffrey's son, or, more exactly, the Consul is a kind of father-figure whom Hugh has never forgiven for allowing him his freedom, for robbing his gesture of independence of its element of rebellion. This aspect of their relationship recalls the original short story, "Under the Volcano," out of which the novel grew and where the Consul is Yvonne's father, Hugh her lover. The story emphasizes the essential unity of these three figures in Lowry's mind. On still another level, the Consul and Hugh are alter-egos of each other, and here their identities ultimately merge when Hugh returns the Consul's jacket with, in the pocket, the telegram that implicates Geoffrey with the communists and leads eventually to his murder at the hands of the fascist police in the final chapter.

Ultimately, Hugh is destined to repeat Geoffrey's war-time adventure. At the end of the novel, he has directed his quest for self toward Vera Cruz, the true cross, where, however, he will sail, on what is ostensibly a peaceful voyage, on a ship that actually carries 1,000 tons of T.N.T. for the loyalists in Spain. It is a gesture naive, romantic, eminently altruistic, and futile to the same degree. Hugh's sense of self, and the justification of this self, must be generated
internally. Yet, he remains a sympathetic, even admirable character. Not only is he forceful and vital, but also, Lowry regards him as a kind of Everyman, sharing the hopes, despairs, deceits, and frustrations of mankind. And in his genuine desire to be, to do good, he represents man's hope for the future.

Whereas Hugh lives almost wholly in the present, unaware of the past until his memory is severely jolted, and concerned with the future only as it becomes actual, Yvonne lives for the future alone. Fully conscious of the weight of the past, though not always its meaning, she remains almost anesthetized to the present, sensitive to what is going on, yet at a pitch of emotional intensity which permits her to realize only the unreality of the day's events, their incomprehensibility, and, as a result, their rendering the future she so desires more and more unattainable.

Yvonne's life seems to her much like the film, Le Destin de Yvonne Griffaton, which she began watching when it was half over. The heroine of the film wanders through a city haunted by what are presumably symbols and shadows of the past, but Yvonne remains ignorant of just who these figures are or how they are connected with the present, since the appropriate explanations and events are buried in the beginning of the film. In the same way, she realizes, "so much that conceivably lent some meaning... to her own destiny was buried in the distant past, and might for all she knew repeat itself in the future" (267). At the bull ring in Tomalin, Yvonne recalls meeting Hugh earlier that morning and almost mistaking him in his cowboy clothes for the leading man of
her acting career. Yvonne's life, in fact, shares some of the characteristics of Hugh's, and in the image of herself as an actress in Westerns, she sees the same playing of roles, the same lack of a substantive identity. Standing in ironic juxtaposition, the memory of her publicity agents work, painting her in glamorous and heroic colours, only underscores the unpleasant reality of her life, the unsatisfactory family relationship, the brief movie career begun with promise, her first unsuccessful marriage, her dead child, the period of bewilderment and aimlessness. All this before the Consul. And after, the bright beginning in Spain, the affairs with Hugh and Jacques, both of which, on her part, seem to have been transitory encounters stemming from desperation, infatuation, perhaps simply from contiguity and convenience, the failure to have a child with Geoffrey, and, finally, their divorce. Yet, in spite of all, the love she has for him, the desire to reclaim their lost lives together are strong enough to have compelled her return, as if in telepathic response to the unposted letter that Jacques finds in Chapter I: "come back to me, Yvonne, if only for a day . . ." (46).

While Yvonne recognizes the chaotic nature of her existence the problem is how to break out of it, how to emerge from under the burden of the past, how in her life "to find a meaning, a pattern, and answer" (270). She realizes that what is required is faith in something, in anything, and she grasps the vision of an escape to the north which she and Hugh had earlier, rather jocularly, discussed. Her dream of a home built at the edge of the forest and the sea provides a sense of potentiality, of at least the possibility of regeneration in the novel. The north,
itself, is traditionally identified as the proper realm of the soul, and, added to this, is the function of the sea as a restorative force. Indeed, Yvonne comes to represent these elements in the course of the book's development. The refreshing lift she receives from bathing and swimming testifies to her association with the life-giving powers of water; as an amateur astrologer she is placed in conjunction with the stars and with the creative force of the heavens in general: "Yvonne appeared clothed entirely in sunlight" (78). On the literal level, Yvonne's dream appears almost too idyllic, almost unreal, but on a symbolic level, Yvonne's future would amount to a spiritual rebirth, an ascendancy from both the mundane and infernal tortures that beset them all to a plane of physical and mental harmony. Her house, with its pier into the ocean, is representative of the future, built on piles which are the past: "They would build this pier themselves when the tide was out, sinking the posts one by one down the steep slanting beach. Post by post they'd build it until one day they could dive from the end into the sea" (271). Yvonne's vision is characterized by an integration and wholeness symbolized by the marriage, the love, the concord of man and nature, and monitored by the cyclical regenerative flow of the sea upon which play "the millwheel reflections of sunlight on water" (271).

Having conceived a future, Yvonne's task is to convince Geoffrey of its practicability and its appeal, but this presupposes his desire to be saved. Actually, as Hugh suggests, his very strength, indicated by a physical condition that belies his inner weakness and that enables him to endure so much, prevents him from accepting the aid of others. And he is
almost incapable of acting positively for himself or even of communic-
cating; often, when he intends to act or speak, and even feels that he
has done so, he has in fact performed nothing. One of the reasons for
this is that the Consul functions in a separate dimension of reality
than the others—a reality both larger and less distinct than theirs,
fostered by his alcoholism and his mystical bent, and of which hallucina-
tion, distortion, and dislocations of time and space are requisite
properties.

Much of the past that embroils Geoffrey causes him to see himself
as both the innocent victim and the culpable agent of destructive forces.
A sense of guilt plagues his conscience because of his war experience on
the Samaritan, even though his actual role is never made clear, but, at
the same time, he values the incident since, when charges were laid
against the crew, he, like Lord Jim, was the only member to answer them
and was not only exonerated, but also, decorated for his action. Simi-
larly, a measure of the isolation he undergoes, that of an ex-consul of
a country that no longer enjoys the diplomatic favors of his host
country, is only partly his responsibility. In addition, he is fully
cognisant of Yvonne's behavior, of her affairs with Hugh and Jacques,
and he feels himself betrayed; yet, he also knows himself to be at fault
for having driven her to them in the first place. It is this kind of
dual vision that renders his torment more acute. When he confronts the
sign in his garden, for example, he misreads a section of it as "Why is
it yours?" The implication is that man's position in the garden is gra-
tuitous, he has been granted it not out of right or even merit, though
it is only through merit that he retains it. Geoffrey knows this. In a way, he is a kind of Adam, but unlike the archetype, he is an Adam with memory, with a history of failure that must be accounted for. But while his insight is abnormally penetrating, he is unable to capitalize on it, he "perceives the dim outline of the secret path but has no means by which to unify the fractured themes of his life: the conflicts between love and death, creative and destructive power, and, above all, the duality inherent in the mystical wine."  

The Consul does not simply find himself in a metaphorical hell of drunkenness, but rather, in or headed for a literal hell as a result of his interest in, and his identification with, the mysteries of the Cabbala. The extent of his involvement in occultism is never quite clear to either Hugh or Yvonne, though they are aware of his collection of alchemical and hermetic literature, as well as his intention of writing a book on secret knowledge. Central, of course, to his interest is alcohol. For the Cabbalist, wine embodies the hidden spiritual energies underlying all things, a secret knowledge that has never been revealed to man. Its beneficial nature is shown when Geoffrey saves a child's life by rubbing its stomach with tequila. But he has also misused the wine and betrayed his secret mission; his error is Faust's; in plumbing the mysteries of hell he has been trapped by them. 

Geoffrey's descent has resulted in a diffusion of his identity. The self-knowledge that he requires to reintegrate the fragments of his personality demands a reordering of his past in which the roots of his identity lie, but "how indeed could he hope to find himself to begin
again when, somewhere, perhaps, in one of those lost or broken bottles, in one of those glasses, lay, for ever, the solitary clue to his identity?" (294). Recalling Jacques' picture, Los Borrachones, in Chapter XII, Geoffrey experiences a kind of epiphany during which he realizes that the saintly individuals represented in the painting achieve an increasingly sharper definition of themselves, while those among whom he belongs destroy their own separate reality: "those people like spirits appearing to grow more free, more separate, their distinctive noble faces more distinctive, more noble the higher they ascended into the light; those florid people resembling huddled fiends, becoming more like each other, more joined together, more as one fiend, the farther down they hurled into the darkness" (361). From Chapter VII to the end of the novel, Geoffrey's process of disintegration is a rapid one. It is depicted most vividly, perhaps, when he finds himself hurling madly backwards on "the infernal machine." The scene represents a metaphorical death of self where all of his belongings, all aspects of his ego are stripped away from him: "Everything was falling out of his pockets, was being wrested from him, torn away, a fresh articles at each whirling, sickening, plunging, repeating, unspeakable circuit, his note-case, pipe, keys, his dark glasses he had taken off, his small change he did not have time to imagine being pounced on by the children after all, he was being emptied out, returned empty, his stick, his passport" (225-226). With the loss of the last item, the passport, he is unable to confirm his identity either to himself or to the "phantoms of himself" that surround him in the Farolito. In the end, the only reality he can grasp is that of William Blackstone.
Having previously stated that of the types of alcohol he consumed mescal alone would finish him, Geoffrey, at the Salon Ofelia, orders mescal; and "from the moment of the first sip . . . [he] continues in a visionary state. Because there are no boundaries of time and space in this superconsciousness . . . [he] is aware of all things at all times on many planes." On one dimension, he sees his own existence as coextensive with that of the world, his own death synonymous with its destruction. In the bathroom sequence of Chapter V, foreshadowing a similar incident in Chapter X, he pictures his soul as a town, ravaged, crumbling, with "the light now on, now off . . . the whole town plunged into darkness, where communication is lost, motion mere obstruction, bombs threaten, ideas stampede" (149). As his soul shatters, so does the universe:

Yet who would ever have believed that some obscure man, sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts, was authoring their doom, that even while he was thinking, it was as if behind the scenes certain strings were being pulled, and whole continents burst into flame, and calamity moved nearer . . . Or perhaps it was not a man at all but a child, a little child, innocent as that other Geoffrey had been, who sat as if up in an organ loft somewhere playing, pulling out all the stops at random, and kingdoms divided and fell, and abominations dropped from the sky. (149-150)

In a way, Geoffrey considers himself responsible, not only for foreseeing the disaster, but somehow personally involved on this plane of reality, somehow directing it. At the same time, however, he operates on other dimensions as well; as he sits on the stone toilet of the Salon Ofelia, for instance, he also lives the history of Tlaxcala through the travel brochure, and contributes to the conversation between Hugh and Yvonne taking place in the next room. It is this kind of divided attention and
divided loyalties to different realities on Geoffrey's part that frustrates Yvonne's salvage operations, and their relationship, in the Salon Ofelia, deteriorates to its lowest point, reaching here the opposite extreme from what it was in the Generalife Gardens in Granada.

Geoffrey, in moments of relative calm, has enjoyed visions of a future, an imagined paradise so like Yvonne's as to suggest some kind of thought transference—the same shack in the north at the edge of the forest, the same conjunction of their life, the stars, and the sea in a symbol of harmony and regeneration. But because the past limits the future, Geoffrey's vision remains unrealizable. In Jacques' tower, Geoffrey is offered the choice between life, represented by a trip to Guanajuato with Dr. Vigil, and death, represented by the Farolito in Parián, and he insists on going to Tomalin, rather than accompanying Dr. Vigil, from where he proceeds more or less directly to the Farolito. His inability to choose otherwise, his almost total commitment to destruction, is demonstrated during his two attempts at love-making in the novel. In Chapter III, with Yvonne, he is impotent, incapable of making a pact with life, able to think only of the cantina which would be opening at this hour. In a parallel situation in Chapter XII, however, Geoffrey is able to consummate his attempt with the whore, Maria, and the filth of the Farolito, the threat of venereal disease, carry the over-tone of death: "How alike are the groans of love to those of the dying" (374). Only the death of self through the true act of unselfishness which is love can render salvation possible. But the Consul made his decision in the past, and his declaration in the Salon Ofelia, "I choose
... Hell" (316), is simply facing the inevitable consequences of that choice.

Lowry regulates the movement of his novel through a confluence of language and action both integrated and purposeful. As Robert Heilman describes it, his "whole complex of image and symbol is such as to direct a dissolving order, in search of a creative affirmation, toward that union of the personal and the universal which is the religious." Dominating this imagery is, of course, the wheel. In one sense, already mentioned briefly, the wheel is time, turning backwards into memory. Its twelve spokes stand for the twelve hours covered by the action of the novel, from Yvonne's arrival at seven in the morning to Geoffrey's death at seven that evening. They also infer the twelve months of the year, the signs of the zodiac, or the twelve hours of Adam from his creation to his expulsion from the garden. Such an extension eventually incorporates all time—eternity.

Lowry has also identified the symbol as Buddha's Wheel of Law, eternal recurrence, and a movie reel. The narrative is, itself, circular, returning at the end of the novel to the beginning. There is a certain symmetry involved in this, suggested by the repetition of complementary events, such as the love-making and bathroom scenes cited above, or Yvonne's search for Geoffrey through the bars in Chapter XI which mirrors his search for her through the restaurants along the Via Dolorosa in Mexico City in 1936. As the Wheel of Law, the image combines the idea of the cyclical basis of the universe with the ethical considerations appropriate to individual existence; thus the spokes represent the
twelve practical precepts for the abolition of selfishness and suffering during an individual's historical life.

Finally, as Lowry claims, the wheel can be successfully interpreted as a motion-picture reel. Indeed, the film motif pervades the novel, and, in fact, everything after Chapter I could be seen as a film made by Jacques of his experiences. Lowry admits that "the idea . . . was . . . to try and give a vivid impression of a film actually in progress, a film that one had actually seen, and at the same time a film that, since it had not been made, left every scope for . . . a director's imagination to work in." As is usual with Lowry's images, nothing is imposed here, all is organic, inherent in the total conception. Jacques is a film maker, Yvonne a former actress, and the advertisements for Las Manos de Orlac weave throughout the action. The latter is especially appropriate. A story of a pianist whose hands have been destroyed and replaced with those of a murderer, it presents an image of Jungian man in whom merge life and death, creativity and destruction. In addition, it is a remake of the original film, replaying in 1938 as it was on the Day of the Dead, 1937. The implication is of a repetition with no progression, like the series of pictures in El Bosque. This kind of redundancy gives both a sense of inevitability to the action of the novel, as well as a sense of recurrence underlying the rhythm of events.

Paul Tiessen has noted the fertility of the use of the cinema as a source of both method and metaphor:

That the present cannot escape the past, that the impotence of man's present merges with the guilt of his past, is symbolically best
expressed in a cinematic style where the circularity of the form, imitating the circular motion of the reel, can manipulate the overlapping and merging of time.\textsuperscript{15}

While this occurs throughout the novel, all times being simultaneously active, it appears most clearly in the overlapping of the last two chapters when Yvonne is killed, in Chapter XI, by the destructive powers represented by the horse which the Consul unleashes in Chapter XII. This type of displacement in time is, of course, appropriate to a reader who is an observer, or Lowry's "director," at a further remove than is the actor in the scene, and whose view includes the other's future in its wider vision. Tiessen also adds a negative qualification of film--it is illusion, its scenes a travesty of life, static and fragmented in frames. Such is the condition of man in the novel, imprisoned in separate compartments from which he cannot escape, caught in the grip of the mechanized monster that he has set in motion.\textsuperscript{16}

Like the film, Lowry's other major images and devices evolve naturally from the narrative, but, as is also common in Lowry's work, many of his images convey ambivalent meanings. The ship metaphor of life as a voyage, for example, has its origin in the experiences of all the major characters; its precise meaning, however, varies in each case. In a study of Lowry's sea imagery, Bernadette Wild has noted its increasing complexity from \textit{Ultramarine} which follows the traditions of Conrad, Aiken, Melville and Grieg, where ship and sea form a microcosm of society and the universe, to \textit{Under the Volcano} where the metaphor reveals this quality of ambivalence. For Yvonne, any association with water, including sailing on it, is an enlivening event; for Hugh, it is a type of initiation ritual,
an identity quest which, having been undergone unsuccessfully, remains incomplete and must be repeated from Vera Cruz. For Geoffrey, on the other hand, it represents deceit and betrayal and death. Thus, while Yvonne and Hugh refresh themselves after the bull ceremony, Geoffrey finds the natural waterfall only "suggestive of some ultimate organized sweat" (286).

A similar ambivalence inheres in the image of fire. In one sense, fire stands for creative power, a spiritual force emanating from the heavens. It is also, however, an instrument of destruction. In this role, it goes hand-in-hand with the idea of eternal recurrence, of the continual creation and destruction of the universe. Fire is a purgative agent, eliminating man's record of frustration and failure, and preparing the way for rebirth. And herein lies the fate of the future which Yvonne and Geoffrey have conceived. Clifford Leech has demonstrated that "the book insists on a multiplicity of futures"; the imagined future of a home in the north, the actual shape which the future eventually assumes, and the possibility of some kind of future life after death are all potentially real, all equally a part of Geoffrey's and Yvonne's experience. Because of the failure to reconcile their pasts, their visions remain unattainable, the purge necessary: "The house was on fire . . . everything was burning, the dream was burning, the house was burning . . . the tree was burning . . . the walls with their reflections of sunlight on water were burning . . . the garden was burning, the porch where they sat on spring mornings was burning . . . Geoffrey's old chair was burning, his desk, and now his book, his book was burning, the pages were burning, burning, burning" (336).
From the start, the characters resembled the two old Indians emerging from the tavern, Todos Contentos y Yo Tambien, the one old and lame, trembling under the weight of the still older one he carried on his back. While Hugh, Yvonne, and Geoffrey join Mexico in laughing away their tragic history on the festival of the Day of the Dead, it is the burden of the past that defines them; the impossibility of forgetting this past for more than a brief interval constitutes their torment, poisoning their every moment. Hugh, early in the novel, perceives clearly the Damocles sword under which all their lives rest:

How marvellous this was, or rather Christ, how he wanted to be deceived about it, as must have Judas, he thought ... if ever Judas had a horse, or borrowed, stole one more likely, after that Madrugada of all Madrugadas, regretting then that he had given the thirty pieces of silver back ... when now he probably wanted a drink, thirty drinks ... and perhaps even so he had managed a few on credit, smelling the good smells of leather and sweat, listening to the pleasant clopping of the horses' hooves and thinking, how joyous all this could be, riding on like this under the dazzling sky of Jerusalem--and forgetting for an instant, so that it really was joyous--how splendid it all might be had I not betrayed that man last night, even though I know perfectly well I was going to, how good indeed, if only it were not so absolutely necessary to go out and hang oneself. (115)

Constantly, the inevitability of this result is enforced. Yet, because destruction is, itself, simply a stage of a cycle, the final implication of the novel is affirmatory.

While on one level Under the Volcano is simply a manifestation of Lowry's artistic impulse to create, on another level it is Lowry's attempt at harrowing his own personal hell. He separates his experiences and analyzes each fragment in a search for its total significance, its relation to the whole which is his life. As his entire creative life was
devoted to such a task, it is natural that he should discard nothing that had happened to him. Autobiographical elements are evident in the Consul's alcoholism, his interest in magic, his marriage problems, his accusation of being a communist spy, his northern, British Columbian paradise. They also emerge in much of Hugh's character, and a great deal of Dana Hilliot from Ultramarine, itself an autobiographical novel, contributes to Hugh's portrait. Even Lowry's interest in and involvement with Hollywood appears in the film imagery. The Mexican adventures, the cantinas and mescals, are often precise accounts of Lowry's experiences. Such correlations could be repeated indefinitely. But it is the synthesis of these elements, their integration into an organic whole with the order and consistency of art that enable both Lowry and the reader to know and understand them, to remove the past from the progression of time, to exorcise memory.
FOOTNOTES

1 Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (New York, 1947), p. 47. All subsequent references to this text throughout the chapter will be given internally.

2 *Selected Letters*, p. 67.


4 Anthony Kilgallin, "Faust and *Under the Volcano,*," *CanL*, 26 (Autumn 1965), 54.

5 Epstein, p. 116.


7 Epstein, p. 150.

8 *Selected Letters*, p. 75.

9 Epstein, p. 74.


12 Epstein, p. 27 fn.

13 *Selected Letters*, p. 71.


CHAPTER IV
DARK AS THE GRAVE WHEREIN MY FRIEND IS LAID

In *Dark as the Grave*, Lowry has taken what is implicit in *Under the Volcano* and made it the theme. Here, the autobiographical elements are less camouflaged, the sense of aesthetic detachment not as apparent, the fictive world less a self-contained entity. Similarly, the surface of *Dark as the Grave* is less opaque than that of its predecessor, the machinery more visible. The substance of the story comes from the Lowrys' own trip to Mexico in 1945, as Sigbjørn's notebook in the novel outlines: "For a . . . short novel begin with 1936-37-38 the material in Mexican notebook, which is all the protagonist knows about Mexico etc., but now after writing book [The Valley of the Shadow of Death, i.e., *Under the Volcano*] (unpublished) about Mexico, he is going back there at the end of 1945. . . . Subplot should again be the drink conflict."¹ On this base, the interrelated themes of the tyranny of the past and the efficacy of subduing it through writing are erected.

As with *Under the Volcano*, external action and characterization are minimized. Lowry repeatedly de-emphasized the role of character portrayal in his fiction. What he is after in *Dark as the Grave*, as far as character is concerned, is not the depiction of fully drawn, rounded personalities, but something, to him, more interesting, more valuable; it is "no less than the identification of a creator with his creation—Pirandello in reverse, or, Six authors in search of his characters; or otherwise stated, Every Man his own Laocoon."² Admittedly, *Dark as the Grave* displays little of the density of the earlier novel, but, perhaps,
because of Lowry's unusual writing habits and literary intentions, it is not wholly unjustifiable to consider the book in terms of the projected sequence of novels in *The Voyage That Never Ends*. What seems undeveloped at its present stage may very well have reached fruition in the whole. Another relevant consideration for any critical evaluation of the novel is that it is unfinished. As Douglas Day elaborates in the Preface, much more was to have been made of Stanford's role, of the dream of the wife-slayer, of the Parsifal and Tristan motifs, among others.³ The conflict between clock time, which does not figure so prominently in this novel, and racial or mythic time is presumably another aspect that would have received considerable attention had the novel come to completion in Lowry's hands. Finally, however, a book must be judged as it stands and in spite of the above qualifications, *Dark as the Grave* is still meritorious as the fictive treatment of an aesthetic.

Lowry's protagonist is "Ortega's fellow, making up his life as he goes along and trying to find his vocation."⁴ The problem is that his destiny to this point threatens to engulf him, thereby nullifying the potentiality of his future. Haunting the memory of his earlier trip to Mexico are the effects of the physical and spiritual suffering he underwent, his unsatisfactory relationship with his first wife, the failure to get his novel published, and his overwhelming, all-encompassing fears--fear of heights, fear of discovery, fear of disease, fear of losing his second wife, Primrose, fear of himself. He is naturally reluctant to return to the scene of so much danger and frustration, a hesitancy that stems, in part, from a concern that not only is he somehow tempting
fate by returning, and placing himself in jeopardy, but also, that he is not quite sure that he doesn't want to be so placed; the only fear that does not torment him is the fear of death. Indeed, during their first night in Mexico, Sigbjørn begins to sense "the real positive psychic, if obscure, danger in which he stood and to which he had deliberately, and even delightedly, brought himself . . . for one thing by far the most potent ghost he had to encounter was himself, and he had very considerable doubts as to whether it wanted to be laid at all" (93).

Sigbjørn is aware, however, of the restorative, cathartic effect of writing, of transcribing his history in a way that allows him to control it rather than vice versa. In the first place, he faces the need "to justify himself" to himself. At the same time, he is conscious of having once "transcended his own experience . . . by writing about it . . . turned it to account, made it work" (16). The result however is twofold. Not only is life thus transformed into art, but he also finds that art, itself, becomes a reagent, affecting and challenging the life that gave it form: "An organic work of art, having been conceived, must grow in the creator's mind, or proceed to perish" (154). Accordingly, the events in Dark as the Grave centre around those in Under the Volcano. Within the novel, Sigbjørn, having written The Valley of the Shadow of Death, feels himself identifying with his creation, so much so, in fact, as to become a kind of alter-ego of the Consul. For Lowry, such a situation raised the inevitable questions of coincidence and premonition. Was the earlier novel anticipatory? Or what is the principle behind the incredible coincidences which plagued his return? He regarded Dark as the
Grave as "a sort of Under Under the Volcano or fantasia of the Law of Series." And, indeed, it is Dunne's serial universe that patterns the novel.

A number of time dimensions are operative in the book. The present of the novel, the narrative account of the Wildernesses' plane trip to Mexico and their experiences while there, can be seen as time_3_. Time_2_, then, would comprise Sigbjørn's earlier visit, including among his activities at that time the composition of The Valley. Time_1_ would, consequently, involve the actual episodes of his novel, the actions which the characters undertake within the fictive world Sigbjørn has created. Each of these "times" is one dimension removed from the next and enjoys a "field of presentation" correspondingly larger. Also, each dimension contains within itself its own, limited, past, present, and future.

The characters in The Valley, Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh, play out their fates in the light of their histories of betrayal, drunkenness, failure, and their never to be realized future. But containing all this, though not limited by it, is Sigbjørn, the writer. His dimension, time_2_, embraces, among other events, his first experience in Mexico from which he has selected representative episodes for his novel. Obviously, he is a "higher order observer" than any of his created figures and has considerable powers of intervention in their lives; he can compel or impede their future actions, or cause the repetition of previous ones. In the time_3_ dimension, however, Sigbjørn enjoys a vision which spans all the events of his first Mexican adventure and all which has happened since, including the return trip. Thus, he can reexperience any element from
either of the two lesser dimensions as he participates in those of his own. In fact, he can do more than this. Because he, himself, is not the end of the series, his own view is also contained in a larger one in which his future is active and can be partially anticipated by him. While reflecting over changes he is contemplating in The Valley, Sigbjørn senses that "they were but a prelude to the work that was being created now, or created by another through him by virtue of his return: since at all events it was not a horoscope--or was it?" (58-59). And later, he wakes from a dream with the horrible thought that "he might have been prefeeling . . . the future" (115).

There is a certain similarity between Dark as the Grave in this respect and one of the works of Lowry's literary mentor, Conrad Aiken. In Blue Voyage, Demarest's meeting with Cynthia on board the ship recalls his past, and, at the same time, the encounter possesses an element of futurity about it, of the possibility of a subsequent relationship. Indeed, one finds numerous parallels between these two novels; the emphasis on memory and reminiscence, the use of Eastern mythology, the Parsifal motif, the idea of the quest for self, are all common to both. It is the last concern that is most relevant here. Because of the complexity of self, because of the impossibility of ever capturing the totality of an individual, Aiken defines human reality in these terms: "We are only what we . . . remember and foresee." Lowry goes much further, however, and his vision is more ominous, more mysterious at least, and this is what causes Sigbjørn to feel that he is being written, that he is, at once, both Pirandellian author and Pirandellian character.
Even Lowry does not constitute the limiting time-dimension for his novel. Rather, he occupies merely the time, field of the series, the field which contains the composition of *Dark as the Grave*. Of course, Lowry cannot project the series to the absolute dimension, Time, where one would find Dunne's "superlative general observer"; it suffices that Sigbjørn is conscious of being somehow manipulated. In an analogy reminiscent of the image of the locks in "Through the Panama," Sigbjørn regards his total experiences as a "fantastic tower of music; three oratorios, on the first day one being performed, on the second the second, and on the third, the third, and on the fourth evening, all three being performed at once with different conductors, under the direction of yet another conductor, the composer himself" (180). Seen in this way, the Wildennesses' trip to Mexico "is the book," and writing it, as Sigbjørn realizes, is "the daemon:

His notions of art, while sometimes perhaps not unlike ours, are simply wider . . . I can feel him . . . wanting us to do good, to be good. The trouble is . . . we are liable to get out of hand by taking the bit of his sentences in our own teeth. . . . That, indeed, is his principal headache, because having given us life of a sort, he has also given us a will . . . We might insist on a tragic ending and get it, when what he wants is a happy one. It is at such moments that he burns our house down or destroys three quarters of our life work, just to remind us that he is on the job. Does that satisfy your tragic instincts, he seems to be saying, now then let us see what you do. Perhaps you'll think that that's the end. But with me it is only a beginning. (86)

The ultimate penalty for transgressing against this highest observer carries the same terror that confronts the Consul through the threat of expulsion from the garden. Here, the punishment is ejection from "the book": "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?" (142).

Within this framework, the Wildernesses begin their journey by flying forward into the past. The strangeness of this strikes Sigbjørn, and he recalls once before having composed a poem based on a trip made to the American border from Vancouver in order to meet Primrose and being turned back without seeing her: "He had wanted to give the impression of the bus going one way, toward the border and the future, and, at the same time, of the shop windows and streets flashing by into the past. . . . [But] these shop windows and streets that he was so glibly imagining in the past were in the future too" (14). They exist, however, in a future subtly altered by the emotional upset Sigbjørn undergoes when his goal fails to materialize. Everything he sees is coloured by his disappointment. In the same way, the flight to Mexico is distorted by his fears, his uncertainty, and his rather curious excitement.

Ostensibly, the trip is for Primrose, a kind of honeymoon after five years of marriage that had witnessed and survived a number of severe catastrophes--the burning of their house, the loss of Sigbjørn's book, and a quite serious illness. Sigbjørn's apparent desire for the visit is to have a reunion with his friend, Juan Fernando Martinez. Actually, however, the trip is Sigbjørn's attempt to disarm the spectres that torment him, to purge his memory of all the negative aspects of his life. During the flight, much of his character is unveiled. His fears show through his need to hide in the rear of the plane and his reluctance to
remove his shoes; also evident in his obtuseness to almost everything external to his own consciousness. As a writer, he displays an unusual lack of sensitivity to the details surrounding him, yet, he remains aware of this insufficiency in himself. Indeed, this is an essential aspect of his personality as Lowry conceives it:

Wilderness is not, in the ordinary sense in which one encounters novelists or the author in novels, a novelist. He simply doesn't know what he is. . . . He is not going to be the self-conscious author himself of so many novels . . . even though I have to make him responsible for the Vole. Moreover he is disinterested in literature, uncultured, incredibly unobservant, in many respects ignorant, without faith in himself, and lacking nearly all the qualities you normally associate with a novelist or writer. . . . The Volcano . . . or rather The Valley of the Shadow of Death, appears less as a novel than as a sort of mighty if preposterous moral deed of some obscure sort, testifying to an underlying toughness of fibre or staying power in his character rather than to any particular aesthetic ability of the usual kind. His very methods of writing are absurd and he sees practically nothing at all, save through his wife's eyes, though he gradually comes to see.7

The flight, itself, occupies the first three chapters. Added interest was to have been supplied by the introduction aboard the plane to Dr. Hippolyte who does appear later in a minor role. As it stands, the time devoted to the flight is excessive. Nevertheless, it does serve to outline a great deal of background information about the Wildernesses, as well as to lay bare the nature of their relationship. The strength of their union is stressed, the closeness of their affinity. Yet within the unit they form, the two are at opposite extremes from each other. Primrose is as spontaneous, vivacious, and extroverted, as Sigbjørn is moody, withdrawn, and sluggardly. She is meant to represent, in fact, a kind of life force, a person who, rather than reading or writing a poem,
would live it instead. Still, it must be noted that Primrose, in spite of the fact that Lowry is after something other than verisimilitude in his characterization, remains a rather vapid figure.

Primrose's role becomes more and more essential, however, as Sigbjørn's incredible inertia increases. His intention was to have functioned as "her guide, her Virgil"; instead, he reveals an ever greater dependence on her handling of their affairs. At the hotel during their first night in Mexico, it is Primrose who ventures out for a bottle of habanero, since Sigbjørn is at the stage where to muster even the little courage needed to effect a minor transaction is beyond his capabilities. He loses contact with the present, sinking into a timeless world of self. His assertive responses are limited to what seem almost involuntary reflex actions such as his choice of the ghastly Hotel Cornada as a place of residence. The hotel recalls the film, Las Manos de Orlac, from the earlier novel; it is "a copy of an American copy of a cheap German copy of its own typical Berlin architecture" (75), suggesting, again, a lack of temporal progression, a more or less static repetition that mirrors his own experience.

On the symbolic level, Sigbjørn's descent into self, like the Consul's in Under the Volcano, involves a kind of death as prelude to a harrowing of hell, although here the emphasis is personal rather than mystical or mythical. In an article on "Through the Panama," Geoffrey Durrant elucidates the neo-Platonic elements of that story, many of which are appropriate to the present consideration. According to this doctrine, the flight south of the Wildernesses represents a journey of the soul
from its true home in the north into the world of matter and the senses where it must undergo purification. Sitting in the cantina which had furnished the model for the El Petate of The Valley, Sigbjørn recalls the line, "who once fled north," from the Consul's poem that Hugh and Yvonne found on the back of a menu: "But the Consul had not fled north. . . . And they, Primrose and he, had not fled north either . . . They had flown south, a hell of a way south" (85). Characteristic of this dark world are the fear and lethargy which dominate Sigbjørn's spirit and which only an active effort of the will or the intellect can dispel: "His getting up, as it were, symbolized the struggle between life and death to him" (191). But first, his deterioration continues to the point where symbolic death almost becomes actual; he attempts suicide in the tower in Cuernavaca.

It is on the first leg of their excursion to locate Fernando that the Wildernesses arrive in Cuernavaca, the city of Quauhnahuac in Sigbjørn's novel. At almost every turn, something, a street or a cantina, emerges out of his past to confront him. But the sense of coincidence which strikes him assumes overwhelming proportions when he and Primrose find themselves living in the house of Jacques Laruelle, the tower which figures so prominently in The Valley. What Sigbjørn experiences is the confluence of all three time dimensions; he stands looking down the Calle Humbolt, at the junction of his novel's Calle Nicaragua and Calle Tiera del Fuego: "The Calle Humbolt. The street of The Valley of the Shadow of Death! His street! Street of the Land of Fire!" (120). The same occurrence is repeated in Oaxaca, again centering
around the Calle Humbolt where the Banco Ejidal now happens to be located, extending still further the degree of improbability. Rendering the situation in Cuernavaca even more unreal is the fact that Sigbjørn, while using this setting for his novel, had never actually been inside the tower. The entire incident begins to appear, to him, outside the range of coincidence, to be instead "bound up with some fundamental law of human destiny" (109).

Not only does Sigbjørn find himself, as it were, residing inside his creation, but he also feels himself merging with his characters. In The Valley, he had the Consul, while he was in the tower, refuse Dr. Vigil's offer of a trip to Guanajuato and insist, instead, on Tomalin, the Farolito, and death. Now, Sigbjørn faces the same choice of life or death; he, too, must decide whether or not to leave the tower and go to Oaxaca, the Parián of his novel, where the Farolito is located. By partaking in all the dimensions, all the "life-lines" of his created figures, Sigbjørn functions on a plane that seems somehow beyond the conventions of life, almost as though he had died but still existed: "Here he stood, in the tower of his own creation, surrounded by these ghosts of the past, of his life--it was a dream--and about to set off to meet one of his characters. . . . Death in life" (189).

Sigbjørn had used Fernando as a model for the sympathetic figures of Dr. Vigil and Juan Cerillo in his book. To Sigbjørn, he is stamped with the nobility of his Zapotecan heritage, defined by his strength, his courage, and his loyalty; he is one of those few who could meet the Consul's dictum of drinking with him to the bottom of the bowl. The
memory of Fernando, however, cannot be separated in his mind from that of his other companion during his previous visit, John Stanford. Indeed, the two together are for Sigbjørn what the Consul's familiars are to him, or, in fact, what the Good and Evil Angels are to Faustus. Stanford is associated with the opposite of everything Fernando stands for: "Stanford was hangovers; Stanford was lies; Stanford was the prescience of disaster and its coefficient. . . . Stanford was the past and the difficulty of transcending it" (219). As the identities of Hugh and the Consul, in The Valley, came together through their sharing of Geoffrey's jacket, so here, Sigbjørn's identity tends to blur, to diffuse, through a similar sharing of clothes, into the combined personalities of his two former friends.

The trip to Oaxaca, leading to the meeting with Stanford, repeats the opening image of the novel, the movement into the future which is also the past. The city, itself, suggesting the inevitability of their meeting, is a place where "past and present and future were one: (214). Consequently, all of Sigbjørn's experiences are active and provide a touchstone against which to test his memory. And he learns that some of the tendencies of memory are to invent, to distort, to misrepresent reality: "The past grows . . . and confronts you in all kinds of strange forms" (220). Stanford, in fact, no longer constitutes a threat to Sigbjørn; indeed, if anything, he seems as wary, as embarrassed, as unnerved during their encounter as Sigbjørn himself. As David Benham notes: "Stanford represents . . . the impotence of what might be called the objective past, the past as it is physically manifested in the present, as distinct from
the subjective distortions of memory." The episode liberates Sigbjørn to a degree. For one thing, he realizes that an understanding of self, to be valuable must be honest, and to be honest must involve the total personality, and Stanford is as much a part of his make-up as is Fernando.

A similar fate, however, awaits the memory of Fernando. In Sigbjørn's mind, "no one could be more alive or life-giving in spite of all than [Fernando] was" (223). But, in fact, Fernando has been dead for six years, murdered in the very month in which Sigbjørn and Primrose were married. Faced with this fact, Sigbjørn undergoes a kind of existential awakening that extends the liberation process the meeting with Stanford had begun. He comes to realize that "Fernando was merely the bright side of the same medal: and that medal had equally been forged in hell" (221). Both of his friends represent death, but Fernando suggests the lure, the appeal of death, its sense of ease, of release. This knowledge enables Sigbjørn to view Fernando's murder ritualistically; in a way, his friend was a kind of surrogate for himself, freeing him to the life and creativeness symbolized by his marriage with Primrose. In a state of intense awareness, coloured, at once, by grief and a strange sense of elation, Sigbjørn prays, for himself, for Primrose, for Fernando, and, reminiscent of the Ancient Mariner, for the entire world, including John Stanford. Like his counterpart, the Consul, he turns to "the Virgin for those who have nobody them with," and he is able to find Mary, where the Consul found only Maria, the prostitute.

At one point in the novel, Sigbjørn ponders the nature of sleep
and describes it as "a sinking into one's self . . . reexperiencing one's past, forgetting one's present, and prefeeling one's future" (192). To wake from this dream-state is to undergo a kind of rebirth. In a number of ways, Dark as the Grave can be regarded as just such a dream. Even the structure of the book partakes of this quality. At times, Lowry freezes the action in the manner of Sterne, as when Sigbjørn, in Chapter VIII, stands for a few seconds in the doorway to his room watching Primrose sleep, although his reflections during this moment cover a time-span of five days. Frequently, there is a displacement in time, as, for instance, in the middle chapters of the novel, so that the journey to Oaxaca, about to commence at the end of the sixth chapter, is held in check until the beginning of the ninth. And between, Sigbjørn, in a kind of reverie, relives both his immediate and distant pasts, the excursion to Yautepec, for example, or his writing, or the New Year's celebration.

Actually, many of the separate episodes of the novel have the peculiar nature of a single remembered or dreamed experience. In addition to the irregularities of time and space which seem to characterize the Wildernesses' trip, Sigbjørn is subject to the dislocations caused by alcohol. The torment of a hangover is thus increased as it is accompanied by the memories of other hangovers. It is through these reveries and recollections, into which category Sigbjørn's long monologue with Eddie Kent and Dr. Hippolyte fits, that one learns the details of the burning of the Wildernesses' house and of Sigbjørn's novel, In Ballast to the White Sea, already once saved from a conflagration by Stanford, of the refusal of The Valley by publishers, of their charges of plagiarism and
imitativeness, of their subsequent, highly tentative, tenuous interest in the book, of Sigbjørn's dispassionate attempt to slash his wrists, of the long, almost disastrous sojourn in Cuernavaca.

Sigbjørn possesses sufficient insight to see himself walking in his own dream, but he questions his ability or his powers to intervene in the process of the dream. He recalls having seen a film of *The Fall of the House of Usher* in which the director had taken the liberty of altering Poe's story in order to effect a happy, triumphant ending:

He realized that he was not only walking in this unreal landscape, withdrawn into a daydream, but that this daydream was framed . . . in yet another withdrawal, by the cinema, in which again he was watching a shadow show on a screen, not even then an original story, but as the director had it, a transcript of themes from Edgar Allan Poe. (248)

The question, for Sigbjørn, is whether or not he enjoys the same leeway as this director, and can thus alter the outcome of "this film of his life."

The idea of turning impending tragedy into triumph dominates the imagery of *Dark as the Grave*, appropriately so, as the final note of the novel is the restoration of balance. Indeed, in a sense, the book is intended as a complement for *Under the Volcano*, as Lowry testifies in a letter: "We progress toward equilibrium this time instead of in the other direction." The pattern which seems to underlie all of Sigbjørn's endeavors reflects the cycle of the universe—creation, fire, destruction, water, re-creation. Complementing Yvonne's dying vision in *Under the Volcano*, the Wildennesses actually lose their home by fire. To overcome this, they erect, upon the charred ruins of the old, a new house. Yet,
like the Consul, they are threatened with eviction. To Sigbjørn it appears the greater the effort, the greater the achievement, the greater the subsequent loss and pain: "It was like the tide at Eridanus. The farther it came in, the farther it went out. Each time had a rebuilding, each time had a fire. . . . [The] rhythm had been something like this: starting with disaster, reaction, determination to transcend disaster, success, failure; it had become effort, apparent success, something happens, failure" (169).

Having perceived the pattern, however, Sigbjørn must break it; he is resolved to set his course on an "upward spiral." The whole of the novel, in fact, is organized on the basis of this effort. His first Mexican visit, rather than establishing a foundation on which to build his present and future life, has proved a barrier to self-knowledge and self-fulfilment. Such knowledge as Sigbjørn possesses is merely confusion; his memories persist as his present reality, thereby retarding development. By returning to Mexico and repeating so many of his earlier experiences, Sigbjørn, in effect, is starting all over again from the beginning, but with the advantage of hindsight:

It was as if the funeral pyre had proved inadequate to the phoenix, and he had looked around him for another kind of immolation in the depths of the past. And he would find his old self here in Mexico if anywhere, face to face . . . with everything that that self had imperfectly transcended. (91)

With the reality of Fernando and Stanford recognized and accepted, Sigbjørn must encounter one more, and more potent than either of the former, vestige of the past--the Farolito, "the symbol of death."
Somewhere inside its closed walls and hidden cloisters, its memories of disease, drunkenness, and debauchery, is contained the root of the identity he is seeking, and Sigbjørn is inexorably drawn to it. But he finds the Farolito gone, its entrances boarded up, its name painted out. It has moved to a new location; and since it no longer exists as he remembers it, there is no motivation, no compulsion for him to seek it out. That which has represented death becomes "somehow associated with freedom." Sigbjørn experiences the release, not of death, which he was actually seeking, but of rebirth, of a movement upward from hell into life.

Images of regeneration and growth dominate the conclusion of Dark as the Grave. Largely through the work of Fernando and his employer, the Banco Ejidal, vast tracts of land, formerly arid and waste, have become lush and fertile. Fernando is associated with Parsifal, restoring and revitalizing the earth. But Fernando represents more than this. Through his philosophy, La Vida Impersonal, he embodied the idea that "every man was his own Garden of Eden" (239), thereby inserting into the ideal of rebirth the onus of individual responsibility to bring it about. Coming across the old site of the Banco Ejidal, above which Fernando had lived, Sigbjørn and Primrose find that it is a bank no longer. Rather, "the whole place was in glorious bloom, packed along its entire length and breadth with blossoms and riots of roses" (245). A similar transformation occurs at the ruins of Mitla which the Wildernesses visit before leaving. The appearance of the ruins, which date back to prehistoric times, might suggest stagnation, death, and decay, but, instead, they
convey both a sense of life, of the joys and possibilities of living, and
also a sense of continuity that makes Sigbjorn think of Eridanus, "river
of life: river of youth: river of death," a sense of life going on in a
never ending cycle.

"Le gusta este jardin?" The terrifying implications which this
sign holds for the Consul have been rendered impotent. It is a new year.
Everywhere that Sigbjorn looks testifies to creativity and fruitfulness,
to a harmony between man and man, and man and nature, to "the soil res­
ponding and . . . men living as they ought to live" (254). Oaxaca, with
all its infernal significations has, like Sigbjorn himself, been reborn:
"[It] had become the granary of nearly all of Mexico . . . a field of
young, new wheat . . . a field of ripening wheat dimming to gold . . .
quince and peach orchards . . . The Banco Ejidal had become a garden"
(255).
Footnotes

1 Dark as the Grave, p. 61. All subsequent references to the novel in this chapter will be given internally.


3 Dark as the Grave, pp. xxii.

4 Selected Letters, p. 331.

5 Malcolm Lowry, letter to David Markson, pub. in CanL, 44 (Spring 1970), 54.


7 Selected Letters, p. 331.


In an essay which Lowry found intriguing, Ortega states the appropriateness of the preoccupation with self that he sees dominating literature since Goethe and the later Romantics: "Life is preoccupation with itself."\(^1\) Writers focus their attention primarily on their own experiences, not because their motives tend toward autobiography, nor because it is perhaps themselves that they know best, but because they have made "the preconceptual discovery that life is not a reality that encounters a greater or lesser number of problems, but that it exists exclusively in the problem of itself."\(^2\) The goal is self-knowledge, an identity delineated by the past and future. The value of the present is minimal, since it is, at best, a fleeting instant where past and future merge. Ortega feels that man is rightly oriented toward the future, but because it is always potential, it remains problematical, and man looks to the past for the means and methods with which to handle future situations. For the person like Lowry, however, to whom the past, itself, appears problematical, danger lies in both directions. He suffers, at once, under the "imperative of realization" of the future, and the necessity of "self-justification" which afflicts the memory of the past. To meet this task is a life-long effort; a "voyage that never ends," because it is, in fact, this charge that constitutes the essence of the aware, responsible life: "A man cannot live without justifying his life to himself."\(^3\)
Such a theory goes far toward furnishing an accurate description of Lowry's needs and aims. Certainly, the past, self, and the need to reconcile the two dominated his life; consequently, they determined the way he could approach his art, making of it a tool to turn the past to account. But Lowry's view of existence could not be contained in a conventional scheme of reality. Dorothy Van Ghent claims that when the current of ideas already in force in any age do not suffice to accommodate an artist's life or his work, he is turned inward, to conceive and to test within his own experience a conceptual and aesthetic approach which will allow him to function in the world. Thus, Lowry's vision, and, accordingly, his techniques had to include the irregular phenomena he encountered—coincidence, telepathy, recurrence—and had to reflect the rhythm of life he perceived—alternating creation and destruction.

All Lowry's writing is, in a sense, autobiographical, but to say this is to say very little. His characters are drawn from a limited supply and show a high degree of similarity from one work to another, as do Sigbjørn and the Consul, the Consul and Hugh, Hugh and Dana Hilliot, Fernando, Dr. Vigil, and Juan Cerillo, or, finally, as do Primrose and Yvonne. All are, of course, taken from Lowry's immediate experience, and most, in fact, are aspects of himself. In Dark as the Grave, as he is describing the characters in The Valley to Eddie Kent and Dr. Hippolyte, Sigbjørn identifies Hugh as himself and adds, "I might say the same of all the other characters too" (149). Such extreme fragmentation of his own personality by an author can make character evaluation highly complicated and can lead to the kind of statement that one critic
applies to *Hear Us O Lord* when he finds three protagonists named Wilderness that are not wholly identical and considers this "an indefensible lapse." It has also been said that Lowry's modes of consciousness cannot be thought through and imply only "a profoundly schizophrenic awareness of self." That his conception cannot be seen in its entirety is true, simply because his characters and the world that contains them are, themselves, not limited or finite. Yet, there exist a number of different but compatible systems of character conception, amenable to his world-view, which can be applied with justification to his work and which help to explain his methods.

On the most accessible level, Lowry's method is simply the application of Ortega's "historical reason" by a figure who is also Ortega's "novelist," both creating his life and trying to understand his creation. To accomplish this, Lowry fragments himself into personae, analyzing each fragment as a synecdoche, then reintegrating them into a unified whole. On another level, Lowry's characters can be seen as Dunne's observers. This helps to account for the repeated use of the same figures, the same incidents from one work to another. Each persona becomes a "higher order observer" with a wider range of perception. Here, the ultimate goal is the integration of the personae in a "superlative general observer."

Still another convention into which Lowry's conception fits is the Indian Doctrine of Karma through which the moral consequences of all the actions of a life must be faced, either in one's immediate existence or in a later one. In this sense, each persona is an incarnation, condemned through the failures of the past to be born again into the world of
matter, to repeat, to correct, and to transcend his experiences. All of these devices are at work at once in Lowry's fiction. Each provides a means of approaching wholeness, a total view of self, but even they must remain incomplete because, finally, self can never by wholly apprehended. Indeed, personality, to Lowry, means much the same that it meant to Herman Hesse, to whom Lowry acknowledges his affinity. The protagonist in *Steppenwolf* considers himself more aware than the average man because he defines human nature in terms of a dualism rather than a monism. He learns, however, that life "consists of a thousand selves, not of two, that it oscillates . . . not merely between two poles, such as the body and the spirit, the saint and the sinner, but between thousands and thousands." It is only from delusion, or perhaps convenience, that man regards himself as a unity: "In reality . . . every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities."

The same complexities that beset Lowry's theories of character typify his approach to art in general. He held the belief that art, like the universe, was in a continual process of development, and that any attempt to make it final was to distort, to falsify it. Writing about the short story "Ghostkeeper," Lowry claims:

> The minute an artist begins to try and shape his material--the more especially if that material is his own life--some sort of magic lever is thrown into gear, setting some sort of celestial machinery in motion, producing events or coincidences that show him that this shaping of his is absurd, that nothing is static or can be pinned down, that everything is developing or evolving into other meanings,
or cancellations of meanings, quite beyond his comprehension. There is something mechanical about this process symbolized by the watch: on the other hand, the human mind or will or consciousness or whatever, of which the owner knows nothing at all, yet which has a will of its own, becomes automatically at such moments in touch, as it were, with the control tower of this machinery.  

Perhaps this helps explain why so little of Lowry's work was completed by him; he could never stop revising as the work never stopped growing. Certainly, an awareness of these facts prohibits the facile application of critical distinctions about art and autobiography, the "biographical fallacy," or plot and character development. As W. H. New suggests, Lowry's scheme is vaster than conventional criticism may allow; it is no less than "to try to render all human experience and all its paradoxes of time, place, and perception, in something more emotionally overwhelming than abstract terms."

Such an awareness on the part of the reader also militates against making definitive claims as to Lowry's intentions; it accentuates the partiality of any treatment. In an otherwise fruitful study of Lowry's work, Diane Fernandez faults on just these grounds. She suggests that the apparent threats to Lowry's security--the past, remorse, entrapment in his creations--are in fact accompanied by fears of repentance and reconciliation. By identifying Lowry solely with the Consul, she goes so far as to see impotence and the lack of hope as the central themes of his fiction. Such a view ignores important segments of his life and his art and the roles of love, humour, and affirmation in each. Jung has stated that "a great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal."
the art is, so, too, is its creator. Lowry assimilated everything he read or came into contact with, and in his mind everything was transformed back into primary material for his use. It is in recognition of this fact that this study suggests the relevance of Ortega and Dunne to Lowry's aesthetic. To place *Under the Volcano* and *Dark as the Grave* in the light of Ortega's theories of man and history, to examine Lowry's technique in terms of Dunne's Law of Series, and to postulate as his goal the Indian abolition of memory is merely to suggest useful analogies, parallel vantage points from which to regard, once again, Lowry's work.

Possibly the most productive way to achieve a comprehensive view of Lowry's scheme is to see it in terms of the circle, the mandala concept which, through its motion, brings into play all facets of self and reality and integrates them. The basis of *Under the Volcano*—its theme, structure, and imagery—is circular. The action of *Dark as the Grave*, returning to Mexico and leaving it a second time, defines a circle. In fact the latter novel completes a circle begun in the former, the voyage and return, the movement from life to hell to life. And, finally, these movements are incorporated into the greater sphere of *The Voyage that Never Ends*, culminating in the vision of peace, love, spring, and rebuilding that ends the final work of the series, *La Mordida*:

[It was not forbidden Sigbjørn] to hope that what had died was himself, and what came about through these confusions, these oscillations, these misunderstandings and lies and disasters, these weavings to and fro, these treacheries, these projections of the past upon the present, of the imagination upon reality, that out of these dislocations of time, these configurations of unreality, and the collapse of will, out of these all but incommunicable agonies, as of the mind and heart stretched and attenuated beyond endurance on an eternal
rack, out of the arrant cowardice before little danger, and bravery in the face of what seemed slight to overcome, and heartache, and longing, had been born, darkly and tremulous, a soul.14

Reality remains plural; ultimate reality, if there be such, can never be fully grasped, and the only absolute is uncertainty. Nevertheless, man functions in the media of logical and psychological time, and it is the manifestation of experience in time with which Lowry is concerned. He makes us aware of the force of both times, of their mechanical, racial, and cosmic roles in our lives. He makes us aware, too, of the extraordinary range of memory, the agency through which we reclaim and order manifested experience, and of the "cultural complexity of a human beings store of memory."15 And to do this, he employs our common Mneme which is language, and focuses it on that confluence of time and memory which is the past.
FOOTNOTES

1"In Search of Goethe from Within," p. 135.

2Ibid., pp. 136-137.

3Ibid., p. 152.


6Benham, p. 47.

7Selected Letters, p. 268.


9Ibid., p. 67.

10Cited in Epstein, p. 227.

11CanL, 44, p. 10.


13Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 171.

14Malcolm Lowry, La Mordida, unpubl. TSS I.A.b.l. (x-xlv), Special Collections, University of British Columbia, p. 345.

15Leech, p. 335.
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