ASPECTS OF THE QUEST IN THE MINOR FICTION OF MALCOLM LOWRY.

BY

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ABSTRACT

Although Malcolm Lowry is recognized as a major writer largely for the novel *Under the Volcano*, his lesser known works, *Lunar Caustic*, "Through the Panama" and "The Forest Path to the Spring", in *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, are as clearly representative of his place as a twentieth century writer as *Under the Volcano*. These three novellas were intended by Lowry to be a part of his proposed cycle, *The Voyage That Never Ends*, and their relationship to the rest of his work can be clearly seen.

This thesis examines *Lunar Caustic*, "Through the Panama", and "The Forest Path to the Spring", in terms of the clear relationship to the proposed cycle. They are analysed primarily in thematic terms, through an analysis of each novella as a separate entity. At the same time, the integral relationship between them will be shown.

All Malcolm Lowry's work is an attempt to defeat chaos and alienation by establishing identity through the exploration of the various masks of self. This process of exploration can be called the quest for self. Accepting this as a basis, the thesis attempts to define and clearly evidence the aspects of the quest in the three novellas. The process is one of discovering the separate masks of self in each novella, and then establishing the links between each mask and their progressive nature. This should clearly delineate the interconnective nature of the three novellas and their link to the remainder of Lowry's work.
This thesis hopes to prove that the design and pattern of Lowry's operation of the quest, while beginning in despair and chaos, eventually moves to a point of order and redemption, while at the same time showing that in personal and creative terms, the quest and its literary reconstruction are primarily destructive.

In the novella *Lunar Caustic*, despair and chaos prevail and the protagonist fails in his quest for self, although the terms of that quest have been established. Sigbjørn Wilderness, the protagonist of "Through the Panama", moves further towards an acceptance of himself in terms of his past and the disordered world around him. It remains, however, for the nameless protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring", to finally reach a point of self acceptance and of salvation. He does this as a composite figure, made up from his predecessors in *Lunar Caustic* and "Through the Panama", and from Malcolm Lowry himself.
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CHAPTER I

If it were possible to find one man to stand as symbol for twentieth century man, Malcolm Lowry could well be that symbol. His life was almost a parody of the times in which he lived, endured within the context of chaos and disorder. Dispossession and alienation, the things about which he wrote, were an integral part of his own life. He appears very much as the Wandering Jew, forced by circumstance and by something in his own being, to throw himself out into the maelstrom, to try to find some kind of caustic for the wound of his own existence. For long periods in his life Lowry sought to either find or avoid this caustic in alcohol and by moving from place to place, often against his own will. There appears to have been something in Lowry that made him victim, forced him to suffer and to always seek suffering. The paradox is that suffering is the necessary quality to his work, work that would not have had the impact it has if the pain were not so visible. Lowry's peculiar genius derives from his torment, from his own agonizing perception of the necessity for that torment, and from the literary establishment of the conditions and operation of that torment in his work.

Lowry the alcoholic and possessed writer, is also the Lowry of these lines written by his friend Conrad Aiken:
"Music I heard with you was more than music, And bread I broke with you was more than bread." Aiken was Lowry's literary father, and his words say something about Lowry that is often obscured in the bare accounts of a life that on the surface would appear to be one of unrelieved despair and degradation. Aiken's words express very clearly Lowry's intense joy in life, his sense of wonder and beauty, and his ability to communicate that sensitivity to others.

In an article in the special Lowry issue of *Canadian Literature*, George Woodcock advances the brief that Malcolm Lowry can be called a Canadian writer on the basis of the sensitivity to the Canadian scene in his primarily 'Canadian' novellas and stories. This appears to be a rather limiting assessment of a writer who resists placing within any definite framework by the nature of his artistic vision and purpose. No writer can exist within a vacuum of his own particular vision. Lowry is no exception and he does have discernible influences, although they are surprisingly few. He drew from these writers in a manner all his own; taking from them only those elements of their work which directs and compliments his own. Conrad Aiken, Nordhall Greig, and Herman Melville appear to be the writers who most influenced Lowry in a variety of ways and that influence is rarely clearly traceable.

These writers would seem to have given direction to Lowry's

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thinking rather than to his actual writing. Lowry is, in his own way, a writer of his time; concerned with basically the same general themes as his contemporaries. His distinction lies in his method of dealing with these themes and his artistic attitude towards them which remains almost totally unique in conception and execution.

As a writer Lowry cannot be conveniently placed in a school nor can he be labelled with a philosophy. He is not an active existentialist, although there are aspects of existentialism in his work, particularly in the idea of choice involved in the process of the quest for self; nor is he a mystic, although there are strong elements of mysticism in his thematic approach to his work, particularly in Under the Volcano. Lowry just does not fit any specific label, despite the fact that many aspects of his work do come under the headings that critics use to identify movements and techniques. Many devices are present in Lowry's work, but none to the degree that becomes domination or controlling force. Perhaps the best way to place Lowry in workable order is to consider him thematically; for it is in theme that Lowry is basically constant throughout the totality of his work.

Much of the literature of the twentieth century is deeply concerned with the search for identity by man in a disordered world that constantly presents obstacles to fulfilling that search. The quest for identity takes on a more elaborate meaning and method when the individual in search
for self is an artist who hopes to find identity in the works which he creates to define and pattern his own quest for self. The writer must turn to himself to discover his identity in terms of the world which surrounds him: as past and as present world. Within the quest for self the only definite thing is the past and that past is an amalgam of conception and perception that depends on the action of the present. The quest becomes an attempt to establish the past in terms that are recognizable to the present and that can function without stress in the past. The writer, in turning to himself, turns to a presumably heightened and more aware sensitivity and consciousness, and in coming to terms with why he creates comes to terms with himself. He builds his construct hoping to imply order in a place where order did not exist before. Art takes on a double function: that of creating disorder to lead to order and that of resolving for the artist his own conception of personal and general disorder in the only terms available to him. The artist, in this case Lowry, hopes to find his own identity in terms of the search for identity made by his characters as they move through the world created for them.

In the work of Malcolm Lowry the search for identity becomes a search for redemption outside a particularly Christian or religious sense. Redemption is the necessary outcome of the quest for self and can be defined as a process of self-realization or that point when past and present exist in a state of harmony. This redemption or self-
acceptance is an active thing; identity must be sought for, despite the fact that the search is usually a painful one and success is not a surety.

Lowry's vision of the quest operates within what R.B. Heilman calls Lowry's conception of the 'alienated soul'. This is man fragmented and cut off from himself and his external world; finding nothing for himself wherever he turns, either within himself or from the outside world. In the operative world of the quest for self, disorder mirrors disorder. The quest then becomes a search for order for a kind of harmony of outward self and of inward self. The chaos of the external world both promotes and reflects the chaotic nature of the self complicating the search for identity.

What is necessary in the quest is that through a series of progressive changes, the disordered world and the disordered self must be moved into a point where they can co-exist without disruption. This is brought about by the self gradually accepting the necessity of disorder, which consequently allows it to accept itself as functioning properly. This process of gradual acceptance occurs very clearly in the work of Malcolm Lowry.

The quest for self in Lowry operates within a very clearly defined pattern of conditions and responses to those conditions. There is a certain definite emphasis to the

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quest for self in Lowrian terms. It is a never ending voyage, no single step of which may be omitted. Every aspect of the quest is vitally important and the sequence of each aspect is unchangeable. One part of the quest follows another, each a necessary corollary, until the possible final moment is reached and harmonious self-acceptance is a real thing.

Lowry begins the quest for self with Dana Hilliot in the novel Ultramarine. This is Lowry's first novel and the idea of a cycle of novels involving the quest for self had not yet occurred to Lowry. However, Lowry's wife, in her introduction to the 1963 edition of Ultramarine, states that when he had formed the basic pattern for the proposed cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends, he made several revisions within Ultramarine to make it fit more clearly into the cycle. Dana Hilliot has only dimly the basic characteristics that are later shared by all the Lowry protagonists, but the elements of Plantagenet, Sigbjørn Wilderness, and the nameless protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" are clearly in him. Each of these men are artists or have the sensitivity of the artist. Dana Hilliot has only the frustrated desire; Plantagenet is a musician; Wilderness a writer; and the nameless protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is a composer. These men are all on a voyage of self-exploration; both as individuals and as masks of a composite central figure. They each have a specific distance to cover until they are taken over by a successor. Each removal of mask leads closer to the possibility of self-realization, since
with each removal comes greater awareness of self.

The quest is not an easy one and the results of the quest are never given as sure. The self must be harrowed: it must move through the maelstrom of terror and fear until it is purged clean and becomes capable of the necessarily conscious effort that is involved in reaching and living with a state of harmony. The horror of the voyage is cumulative in that its scope becomes increasingly narrowed and intensified. In Lunar Caustic the chaos and disorientation are extreme, but general. In the novella, "Through the Panama" these qualities are more elaborate and somewhat more specific. The cougar in "The Forest Path to the Spring", and the reaction of the protagonist to it, bring all the implications of chaos and disorientation to a very specific point and thereby finally intensify and make real the positive nature of the act of self-acceptance within the framework that has been established.
CHAPTER II

*Lunar Caustic* is Lowry's journey through purgatory. In terms of the development of his work it is the first real step on the quest for self, and serves to establish the methods and problems of the quest. These are worked out in *Lunar Caustic*, although solution does not come until they have been further elaborated in "Through the Panama", and finally resolved in "The Forest Path to the Spring". The conditions of the quest demand of the quester a descent into himself that he may remove each mask of self until the final moment of acceptance. William Plantagenet is the first mask of the composite self and truly begins *The Voyage That Never Ends*.

Dante's purgatory is for him a true reflection of man's condition on earth. So too, is Lowry's purgatory in *Lunar Caustic*. The two do not have the same closeness as do the *Inferno* and *Under the Volcano*. The strict parallels are not there; however, the tones do correspond and the chaotic and complex world is as evident in *Lunar Caustic* as is it in the *Inferno*. Plantagenet, the protagonist of *Lunar Caustic*, is drawn to the hospital as his place of purgatory. Like Dante, Plantagenet must endure the experience of forced self knowledge as part of a necessary stage in the process
of self-realization. Plantagenet's purgatory is the whole world, including the hospital as well as the heat-ridden city outside it. For Lowry, the world is a madhouse; it is one colossal Bellvue with a good view of hell, a public hospital where the lost cannot stay. It is a place where refugees are not wanted; the world cannot care for them. There is just not enough for everyone. Even those who can care, have no time to care, and no space. Hell is everywhere, but manifests itself most clearly in the hospital.

It is the nature of Lowry's man that he must seek salvation, seek the peace that lies through and beyond him, somewhere beyond the terror and the madness and the open horrors of the barranca. Lunar Caustic was originally entitled The Last Address, and in its initial form was completed before Under the Volcano.\footnote{Malcolm Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, June 22nd, 1946. H. Breit and M.B. Lowry, eds., Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, New York, 1965, pp. 113-14.} Lowry, however, was never completely happy with Lunar Caustic or with its position in The Voyage That Never Ends. It is, however, the most similar in manner and concept to Under the Volcano than any of Lowry's other works. The hospital in Lunar Caustic has all the horror of the barranca, with an even greater intensity because it is prolonged and the conception of its force is much more emphatic and less brooding. Plantagenet in the hospital is the Consul alive at the bottom of a barranca, that is the world.
His suffering is therefore heightened and elaborated to a pitch of intensity that is not matched in Under the Volcano.

It is not volition that takes Plantagenet to the doors of hell anymore than it is volition that leads the Consul to the barranca. They are both doomed through a 'tyranny of self', to fulfill the quest and to search for whatever salvation there may be, lasting or false. Plantagenet must go forward into hell in order to escape damnation. He is linked to Melville's Ahab, "...stumbling from side to side on the careening bridge, 'feeling that he encompassed in his stare oceans from which might be revealed that phantom destroyer of Himself.'" The act of destruction that occurs on entering hell is presumably the act of creation; the act of creation is to enter the hospital and to find the answer to the unanswerable:

...I am sent to save my father, to find my son, to heal the eternal horror of three, to resolve the immediate horror of opposites! (p. 17)

The Consul has gone into the barranca and reappeared as Plantagenet. He will suffer yet one more purgatory on the voyage of self in "Through the Panama", before finding peace and resolution of opposites in "The Forest Path to the Spring".

Lunar Caustic is a statement of man alone seeking an-

swers to the mystery of existence in himself. Plantagenet is completely alienated, cut off from active power in effecting any elaboration or change in his own surroundings. The storm that he endures is the storm of his own soul, motivating the search for self without knowing what self is or what it may be. He is in a void and is doomed to a kind of extinction in the terror of the outer hell which surrounds the inner hell of the hospital. Plantagenet is enduring Dante's downward voyage to hell and the dark city is the dark forest that pulls at him and at the same time paralyzes him and whatever direction he may have had.

The first chapter of *Lunar Caustic* brings Plantagenet to the hospital. The technique of this chapter, later complemented in the final chapter, is fragmentary, developing chaotically to stress the disorder and hell-like qualities of the city as metaphor for the world. The signs, and the advertisements and fragments of experience, contribute to the idea of a living hell. The terror and fear of Plantagenet are given through the disorder of the fragments of experience seen by him.

Plantagenet, who likens himself to a ship, is described by Lowry as a ship leaving the harbour on a still morning and is then driven by the storm into desperately trying to find the harbour. (p. 16) In the Lowry mythology the ship becomes microcosm for man and Plantagenet, since he is a ship, becomes microcosm for man adrift in a maelstrom of self, frantically trying to find a place of peace and refuge
where redemption is not only possible but probable. His harbour in a disordered world is a saloon, a place of darkness and terror, a miniature hell; it is one that offers hope, however brief, in alcohol. The repair is made, but it is not lasting and Plantagenet must wander like the Jew until he can find redemption. He is looking for something, looking for sight, seeking sanity as a function of his madness. He is surrounded by heat and noise, the groans of the city that is hell, the place which he must go through to reach the purgatory of the hospital. Everything that surrounds him as he moves round the circle of his own consciousness has its own malignant and macabre purpose and life, always hostile and malevolent. He moves from tavern to tavern and from the gloomy depths of one of them, 'the sound of moaning, and a sound of ticking'. The horror of Plantagenet's voyage is intensified by the pursuit of time, but the pilgrimage must be played out and Plantagenet must circle the hospital until he can finally enter its doors and begin the functional part of his voyage. The old woman, a tattered and corrupted Virgin, guards the doors of purgatory and like the Virgin '...for those who have nobody them with'; she is too late to intercede for Plantagenet and the letter which she sends that might be for him is too late. Salvation must come from himself. The letter will not be delivered, and communication between the two will break down and fail despite his terrible need for it. In hell, lack of communication and consequent loss of identity, is accepted fact. Plantagenet is in hell and it
surrounds him irrevocably. In his search for his 'phantom destroyer' which is himself; Plantagenet must carry his quest in the vivid hell of the external world where heat, war, and death, are counterpoint to his own condition.

The church, as a place of God, offers no relief because it is only a place within hell and it demands the desecration of alcohol which has taken the place of God. (p. 17) Salvation is not in the church, but in the bottle because it is through alcohol as a reliever of self that the possibility of salvation will come. It is alcohol that disintegrates Plantagenet to the point where he must finally accept the hospital as a place where the 'horror of opposites' may be resolved. The note, however, is ominous because the ship goes on the rocks and the 'dithering crack' of the hospital door is not indicative of hope. (p. 17)

Plantagenet, in the quest that takes him from saloon to saloon, finally 'finds' the hospital. It is the house of the mad where presumably, with the horror of drying out, he will find the mask of Plantagenet and move to another Plantagenet, changed, and perhaps prodded to salvation by the change. Within the hospital Plantagenet will have to undergo the cauterization of his soul. He will have to destroy himself and in that act of destruction, create a new self. He must, for the voyage to be effective, come to total self-acceptance.

Chapter two of Lunar Caustic sets a somewhat different scene than the first, contrasting and complementing the pre-
vious vision of emphatic and unrelieved hell. This is still
hell, but it is in a lower key and the horror slowly accretes
through mild understatement and effective imagery.

The hospital, hell or purgatory, is established within
its surrounding world. It stands next to the river and be­
side the power house. Below it, down by the river bank, is
the broken coal barge that becomes a recurring symbol of in­
ternal and external chaos within the novella and a reflector
of Plantagenet's experience. The malign nature of this ex­
ternal world is relieved by a patch of green grass that of­
fers growth and the possibilities of redemption within the
destructive elements of Plantagenet's breakdown. Contrasted
to this are the pleasure boats with their nostalgic gaiety.
A gaiety that has in it a hint of the terror and despair of
the human condition:

...boats which seemed as they nudged
and nibbled ceaselessly at the
suicidal blackness of the stream to
tell tender tales of girls in the
summer. (p. 18)

The pleasure boats, despite their jaunty air, have in them
all the possibilities of the coal barge:

...Sunken, abandoned, open,
hullcracked, bollards adrift,
tiller smashed, its hold still
chocked with coal dust, silt
and earth through which emerald
shoots had sprouted. (p. 18)

reflecting the disorder and despair of Plantagenet and his
world. It is a disorder and despair that is unrelieved by
hope. The abandoned coal barge becomes an adequate symbol
for Lowry's man and his condition of immedicable chaos and
terror.

The coal barge rests at the river's edge, the river being metaphor for the harbour and containing all the varied aspects of the sea. The river and the harbour become a frame of reference for Plantagenet and the other patients in the hospital. The patients are expressive of some aspect of the plight of those condemned to seeking identity in a place of madness. For Plantagenet, the link between himself and the river and the harbour is strongest because at times he sees himself as a ship. The contrast is directly applied between the ships that move on the harbour and the hopeless static state of the coal barge broken at the harbour's edge which parallels Plantagenet's condition within the hospital.

In Lowry's complex personal mythology ships have a special place: symbolic of man and his being, they are also qualities of hope and some aspect of man's condition that is not always hopeless. For the patients in the hospital the ships in the harbour offer the possibility of relief, a tenuous connection with reality,

...If there was a ship unloading there it seemed to them she might have some special news for them, bringing deliverance. (p. 18)

that, however, has nothing concrete about it and offers only a kind of hope:

Every so often, when a ship passed there would be a curious mass movement toward the barred windows, a surging whose source was in the breasts of the mad seamen and firemen there, but to which all were
tributary: even those whose heads had been bowed for days rose at this stirring, their bodies shaking as those roused suddenly from nightmare or from the dead, while their lips would burst with a sound, partly a cheer and partly a wailing shriek, like some cry of the imprisoned spirit of New York itself, that spirit haunting the abyss between Europe and America and brooding like futurity over the Western Ocean. The eyes of all would watch the ship with a strange, hungry supplication. (pp. 18-19)

This hope is too easily lost or betrayed as the ship leaves:

...there was a dead silence in the ward and a strange foreboding as though all hope were sailing with the tide. (p. 19)

These are the lost souls in purgatory, restless and damned by their moments of hope and trapped in a world from which there is no escape save in death. Plantagenet joins the crew of this vast and purposeless ship without a captain, seeking the answer to his quest in the cauterization of his own soul as one of the lost souls of purgatory. Everything here, except his fellow patients, is malignant; from the doomed coal barge to the gasworks that is crouched to spring and devour. Everywhere is terror and despair and the barranca has literally become the world. Plantagenet must fulfill the terms of the quest within the inescapable confusion of a gigantic refuse pit.

The patients of the hospital are men without hope. Trapped and afraid, they feel the terror of a world where the
safety of the ship of man is always a perilous thing and where the edge of the barranca is always just underfoot. Facing the open sea, which reflects their condition, is always an act of terror. The world is a place out of balance with itself and the asylum gives refuge to those whose disorder too actively mirrors their external world.

Plantagenet and his fellow patients are aliens in the spiritual abyss given physical form by the city of New York which in itself symbolizes the city of man and by extension, the City of God. It is a place where supplication and salvation in their old sense have become meaningless terms. Salvation and possible redemption in this place is, literally, a caustic thing. Salvation and intercession no longer exist as passive qualities; man must enter the asylum and cauterize his own soul to find the manifest forms of possible redemption.

Plantagenet must himself begin the process of establishing his own identity. This occurs primarily in moments of his own terror at his condition or in terror at the condition of others. His search for self is incredibly painful and not at all sure of success. There is too much around him and in himself that stands against the success of his quest.

The novella at this point moves directly to Plantagenet himself. He awakens in hell, surrounded by the sounds of hell which are, to his alcoholic mind, the sounds of a ship. (p. 19) In his identification with the sea he gives himself the name of a ship, the S.S. Lawhill, and hears the steady
doomed tone of Frere Jaques, the rhythmic endorsement of his place and condition. Plantagenet's alienation is complete at this point. He is not man; he is ship and he is on that ship conscious of the, '...racked, trembling, malodorous body' that he is. (p. 19) This bodily condition is in counterpoint to the condition of his soul which is in a similar, though more intense, state. Hell, given physical body by ship and city, exists only as Plantagenet, as the state of his soul intensified perceptively by alcohol. Alcohol is the only way to come at the complete despair that is the lot of twentieth century man for whom Plantagenet is the collective metaphor. Alcohol brings Plantagenet to the point where, through his complete disintegration, he will be able to reaffirm his identity.

The sounds of the hospital reflect the disorder of the external world given in Chapter One:

As day grew, the noise became more ghastly: what sounded like a railway seemed to be running just over the ceiling. Another night came. The noise grew worse and, stranger yet, the crew kept multiplying. More and more men, bruised, wounded, and always drunk, were hurled down the alley by petty officers to lie face downward, screaming, or suddenly asleep on their hard bunks. (p. 19)

Plantagenet is a shattered mirror reflecting a twisted image. There is no pattern to events, no principle of order or stability; Plantagenet is a fractured man when he awakens from the alcoholic nightmare to face the reality of the living
nightmare of the hospital:

He was awake. What had he done last night? Played the piano? Was it last night? Nothing at all, perhaps, yet remorse tore at his vitals. He needed a drink desperately. He did not know whether his eyes were closed or open. Horrid shapes plunged out of the blankness, gibbering, rubbing their bristles against his face, but he couldn't move. Something had got under his bed too, a bear that kept trying to get up. Voices, a prosopopoeia of voices, murmured in his ears, ebbed away, murmured again, cackled shrieked, cajoled: voices pleading with him to stop drinking, to die and be damned. Thronged, dreadful shadows came close, were snatched away. A cateract of water was pouring through the wall, filling the room. A red hand gesticulated, prodded him: over a ravage mountainside a swift stream was carrying with it legless bodies yelling out of great eye-sockets, in which were broken teeth. Music mounted to a screech, subsided. On a tumbled bloodstained bed in a house whose face was blasted away a large scorpion was gravely raping a one-armed negress. His wife appeared, tears streaming down her face, pitying, only to be instantly transformed into Richard III who sprang forward to smother him. (p. 20)

This is the total alienation of Plantagenet.

It is madness and a kind of horrible sanity. Here is the clarity of Lowry's vision of the world. What hope can there be for Plantagenet when the horror is so vivid and emphatic and so distorting of self? This is more than a
season in hell; it is hell. This is the vision of the alcoholic mage, the man who has abused his powers, and who suffers the penalty of this abuse. Where can the mask be, where can the self be, in this kind of nightmare? Plantagenet is lost in time and space, imprisoned in the place of his own damnation. Salvation, if it is possible, will lie in his ability to create himself away from this place and to build out of this destruction of self, a new self. By doing this he will set his world back on its proper axis.

Plantagenet awakens to see Kalowsky and the boy Garry. These are his companions in hell and aspects of himself, elements of his own character. As mirror images they are terrifying in themselves, and in the fact that they are himself: the boy, an innocent, and the old man, the victim of the experience of living.

Garry is the artist. His stories attempt to put an order to the reality of his highly disordered world and succeed only in emphasizing the fragmentary nature of that world.

"I'm Garry," said the boy. "My father makes moulds on terra-cotta...One day one of the pipes collapsed and the terra-cotta burst and collapsed. It was fallen through and reached the shore. It was condemned." (p. 20)

However, he attempts to create out of the destruction that surrounds him, possibly, therefore, he is not evading reality, but seeking it out. The link with Rimbaud is explicit, and so too is the link to the idea of the artist in
general. These two, Garry and Kalowsky, lead Plantagenet through the rest of the tale. As Virgil is perhaps an aspect of Dante as well as guide, so Garry and Kalowsky perform the same function for Plantagenet. The whole world is a condemned building, full of condemned people; they are condemned to seek salvation in themselves, to follow the harrowing of their experience into hell, and hopefully out again.

After the meeting with Garry and Kalowsky, reality of a sort impinges, and Plantagenet realizes that he is in a hospital. It is hell, but it is also a hospital, and the sounds of hell can be identified and placed in their proper perspective. Garry as artist and Kalowsky as wandering Jew, share their experience with Plantagenet and in so doing their experience becomes more manifestly his experience and their function as distorted mirror images of Plantagenet becomes much clearer. They are lost souls, one and all, the world's wanderers, the damned and the innocent. The tools of the quest for identity have been set up. With the image of Battle moving in and out of the last section of this chapter, black and luminous with his power and vitality, Plantagenet can begin the harrowing of his soul in the attempt to come to himself in the core of madness and purgatory.

The function of the doctor in Lunar Caustic is somewhat obscure. His relationship to Plantagenet is clearly one of guide, or at least sympathizer. Yet if Lunar Caustic is a type of Purgatorio as Lowry conceived it, the doctor is not
present enough, nor forceful enough to be Virgil. However, he does lead Plantagenet at least closer to himself through urging him to recognize his condition. He can offer no final solution, but as that final solution must come from Plantagenet himself, the doctor does not have to be a positive force. Salvation for Lowry is an individual thing, and must be won or lost alone.

The doctor does lead Plantagenet to a statement of his external condition in order to mirror for him his own internal disorder. (p. 24) Shaken and alone, Plantagenet is stripped to his bare self. He has none of the conventional relief valves that allow man to avoid the horror of his condition by hiding himself in his external world. There is no hole for him to get into and he must face the process of burning off the old self when it is vulnerable and weak. His internal world and external world are one constant hell that cannot be avoided. The hospital is like a ship, and looking out from it Plantagenet sees the broken coal barge:

Amid ships where the hull had split, a mass of wet iron balanced. He glanced away - the tangled object had become a sailor sprawled broken on the deck in brown, shining oil-skins. (p. 25)

a vision of things polluted, broken and despairing, with a hanged man hovering over the building. The agony of his position is manifest to him with slow, feeling horror:

Staring out at the river his agony was like a great lidless eye.
Darkness was falling; through the clearing haze the stars came out. Over the broken horizon the Scorpion was crawling. There was the red, dying sun, Antares. To the south-east, the Retreat of the Howling Dog appeared. The stars taking their places were wounds opening in his being, multiple duplications of that agony, of that eye. The constellations might have been monstrosities in the delirium of God. Disaster seemed smeared over the whole universe. It was as if he were living in the preexistence of some unimaginable catastrophe, and he steadied himself a moment against the sill, feeling the doomed earth itself stagger in its heaving spastic flight toward the Hercules Butterfly.

The images are all of searing disruption and the malignant horror of his condition. The stars presage the burning of Plantagenet when he too must retreat like the Howling Dog. And as the constellations might have been monstrosities in the delirium of God, man is that monstrosity, and the state of man is one of disaster and the resultant madness and despair. The stars, seat of man's wonder, do no more than give to him the mirror of his own condition, lost in the universe and lost in himself. The universe is a symbol of Plantagenet's vast disordered self and as he is the ship, he is also the earth that 'staggered in its heaving spastic flight'.

Time, never a safe thing for Plantagenet, begins to move again. Never changing his state of Limbo, it never-
theless permits him to exist without total madness in that it does not entirely cease for him. He is aware now that he can leave the hospital when he wishes to; that he is not externally trapped and that his is not the dignity of full madness, only the possible dignity of the drunken Mage whose agony of self is sufficient qualification for madness and despair at what might have been. (p. 26)

Garry tells Plantagenet the story of Pompeii, again an image of disorder and decay, told in a hurried fragmented manner. Everything, even creation, has collapsed and behind everything is Battle's 'ole man of the mountain' the leader of the assassins and here a symbol of death. (p. 27) Death hovers over the whole novella as the final quality, the mask that cannot be escaped or concealed in alcohol. It is part of the harrowing of self that death cannot be evaded, that the fact of death must be accepted as the protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" accepts it in the body of the cougar. Death is implicit in the disorder that surrounds Plantagenet: the fall of Pompeii and Garry's vision of the collapse of the hospital. (p. 27) With death, hell will cease to exist, and so death becomes a familiar, although like the old man of the mountain, it will choose its own time. In contrast to this is the picture of Kalowsky:

...pursing his lips continuously in and out like a dying fish. What was that film Plantagenet had seen once, where the shark went on swallowing the live fish, even after it was dead. (p. 27)
This is the nervous reaction of the already dead and doomed, who live despite the fact that they are dead. The previous image of the stars reinforces this; a doomed earth continues to move and therefore live despite the fact that it is doomed. So too, the Lowry man, doomed as he is, must continue to move across his place in time: his quest for self is inexorable.

In their place of hell, Plantagenet is linked to his mirror images of Kalowsky and Garry by a kind of purpose which he suspects is that of the release of death:

...they were drawn together in a doleful world where their daydreams mingled, and finding expression, jostled irresponsibly, yet with an underlying irreducible logic, around the subject of homecoming. (p. 27)

They are drawn together as the lost souls in purgatory are damned together, seeking each others company to wait, in familiarity and despair, for whatever is coming. There is always, with the waiting, the horror of hope as counterpoint in a vicious masquerade. Plantagenet, in his function as seer, sees the reality of their situation and the problem of their madness:

But trying to explain their whole situation to himself and his mind seemed to flicker senselessly between extremities of insincerities. For with another part of his mind he felt the encroachment of a chilling fear, eclipsing all other feelings, that the thing they wanted was coming for him alone, before he was ready for
it; it was a fear worse than the fear that when money was low one would have to stop drinking; it was compounded of harrowed longing and hatred, of fathomless compunctions, and of a paradoxical remorse, as it finally were in advance, for his failure to attempt finally something he was not now going to have time for, to face the world honestly; it was the shadow of a city of dreadful night without splendor that fell on his soul; and how darkly it fell whenever a ship passed! (p. 28)

Here Plantagenet is like the Consul and the paragraph might almost have been taken from Under the Volcano, for here is the central problem of Lowry and his masks; the terrible need to know self and the equally terrible and equally powerful desire not to know self. The unknown compunctions, the remorse, the harrowed longing and hatred, are all elements of the quest and all evidence of the necessity of a caustic, of an active search, whatever may precipitate that search. Plantagenet must jump into the barranca and not be thrown; at the same time he must not. The madness lies in the point in between and is, if anything concrete, a failure of recognition and of acceptance, which presumably is what facing the world honestly implies. The shadow of the city, a shadow of despair, is that of a place without God. Paradox is everywhere and perhaps there is no hope, for God is in man and if man is mad and in despair, what then is God who is made in man's image? Death will perhaps come for Plantagenet before he has harrowed himself and there will have been no
purpose in his quest; nothing binds him to his self. If it does, the occupational therapy will have been of no avail.

The occupational therapy is the aimless process of trying to unalienate the too deeply alienated. Reality and reason have no validity here and purposelessness seems to be the keynote of experience that has no final outcome. The therapy will do the patients no good and the attempt at communication through semaphore, like any other attempt at communication is doomed to failure. (p. 29) In a world where all is the disorder of the alcoholics dream of a fluid and plastic world things change their shape and being at will. (p. 30) The natural world takes on the neuroses of man:

...even Nature herself is shot through with jitteriness, the neurotic squirrel and the sparrows nibbling the dung where the octroons, the creole and the quadroon have galloped past in the black dust... (p. 20)

It becomes a place where, for man and specifically for Plantagenet, the horror of imagination and being merely play over and over to him the cacaphony of his own distorted experience:

...bleed so that he will not have to hear the louse of conscience, nor the groaning of imaginary men, nor see, on the window blind all night the bad ghosts - (p. 30)

He is surrounded by the obscene old men, obscene in their living death and the pointlessness of their existence as he sees it. And from them he learns a kind of hopelessness:
...Plantagenet, watching them, gradually thought he understood the meaning of Death, not as sudden dispatch of violence, but as function of life. He stood up, as if to strike off an enemy, then let his hands drop limply to his sides. (p. 31)

The patients move about the hospital as in nightmare world that moves but gets nowhere; they walk and walk in purposeless motion as doom ridden as Kalowsky, the wandering Jew:

...the confused story of his wandering seemed to be following the weary pattern of their walk... 
And Plantagenet thought that their trampling might have been an extension of that wandering; it was as if an obscure, yet cogent necessity had arisen out of their meeting, like some meeting at the day and place of judgement, for them to make an account as best they could, to cover again the steps of their life to this encounter at what was, perhaps, the end. (p. 33)

It is on the day of judgement that Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, finally will be able to rest, and it is on that day that man will be able to rest free of terror and quest. Plantagenet too, is the Wandering Jew. He is linked to Kalowsky as an aspect of himself and faced with making an account of himself; to go into himself and identify his wanderings, he lays bare his soul to himself. Throughout this section and in contrast to it, Battle runs with his terrible hell-driven vitality and Garry, out of the manifest destruc-
tion and disorder that surrounds him, creates his own version of reality where the elephant, a Lowry symbol of strength and continuity, is captured and negated by man. (pp. 34-35)

Plantagenet has now reached a stage in his voyage through purgatory: a half-way point of the move towards self-realization and perhaps salvation. Unfortunately Lunar Caustic has only eleven chapters; were there twelve, it would be far easier to tie up the tale neatly and break it down handily into working divisions that would fit a symbolic whole. In a sense this seems to be possible, at least roughly, since there appears to be a definite break at the end of Chapter Six. Continuity does not change, but the tone and approach become more general. The horror and terror of Plantagenet's plight become almost academic and therefore lose the immediacy of the first six chapters. This is perhaps not a serious failing since the intensity has been established and Plantagenet's condition is clear. It is the operation of this condition that seems to weaken. The pattern becomes less emphatic, more vague and undirected. The symbolism is not only less obvious, but less positive, and the design of intensity for the tale seems to demand that the whole remain positive until the reader is able to identify completely with the condition of Plantagenet. Lowry's purpose, the cauterizing of the human soul, seems to waver. The hopelessness of Plantagenet's condition is there, but in a much more amorphous manner than before. The basic problem would appear to be that Lowry did not complete the tale him-
self and had reworked it several times. The fragmentary nature then, probably derives from this. He planned the novella as part of the cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends, to provide the Purgatorial compliment to the Inferno of Under the Volcano:

I wrote another short novel called Lunar Caustic in 1936... which has never seen the light. Under the Volcano was originally planned as the Inferno part of a Dantesque trilogy called The Voyage That Never Ends. Lunar Caustic was the purgatorial part, but was to be much expanded.  

The expansion was never completed and it becomes tempting to work with Lunar Caustic in terms of what it might have been rather than what it is: a piece of work that has moments of unrelieved intensity, but which is not always consistent with its apparent purpose and therefore has some very solid weaknesses.

The weaknesses of Lunar Caustic, however, do not detract from an examination of it in thematic terms. Lowry's purpose is reasonably clear and the elements of quest in Lunar Caustic are there and clearly there. The barge, like the lives of the patients, is smashed and broken in Garry's story. This counterpoints the nature of the puppet show whose reality is the reality of the hospital, manipulated and

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controlled by uncaring forces. (p. 35) Prior to the show the
horror of the outside world is again reflected in newspaper
headlines and fragments of news stories. (pp. 35-36) This
complements the disorder of the patients who are a mirror
image of the outside world and gives to the puppet show,
despite the doctors words

"It represents a definitely
socializing influence, giving
the patients an opportunity
to get together and control
their usual tendencies for
emotional outbursts...Then
too, the patients have a
common experience which they
can share later and talk
about. It is sometimes
moderately successful." (p. 37)

a total meaninglessness in terms of the patients. As the
world of the hospital is without Christ, so too is the puppet
world and the show is a senseless exercise in pointlessness
except for Plantagenet who is only too aware of its sinister
overtones. (p. 37) For him the puppet show reflects the
disaster of his own experience. While boring Kalowsky,
Garry and the other patients, it is a vivid version of reality
for Plantagenet:

The hand of the blind giant
rose again. Judy was Captured. As the hand plunged
about reaching for Punch with
a weird accelerated motion
which cast glowering shadows
on the wall, it struck
Plantagenet that the drama
was being diverted from its
course by some sinister
disposition of the puppeteer's; he sensed, or thought
he did, the doctors increasing discomfort, as of god, he thought, who discovers all over again that man is not long to be trusted with the strings of his destiny. Was it only his imagination, or was the puppeteer trying deliberately to frighten them? (p. 39)

The blind giant is fate, or God, or the destiny of man, a thing that he is unable to control or direct. The other patients are indifferent to their fate, but there is struggle left in Plantagenet, still the half unconscious urge to be subjected to the caustic of madness and consciousness, and the fear of that subjection:

...nor was he frightened now so much by the hand, or the shadows, which partook of the familiarity of his delirium, as by that fact. He had the curious feeling that he had made a sort of descent into the maelstrom, a maelstrom terrifying for the last reason one might have suspected: that there was about it sometimes just this loathsome, patient calm. (p. 39)

This knowledge, and the awareness of the puppet show, leads Plantagenet to his most specific point of awareness as to his condition:

My God, he thought suddenly, why am I here, in this doleful place? And without quite knowing how this had come about, he felt that he had voyaged downward to the full core of his world; here was the true meaning underneath all the loud inflamed words, the squealing headlines, the
arrogant years. But here too, equally, he thought, looking at the doctor, was perhaps the cure, the wisdom and vision, more patient still... And goodness was here too - he glanced at his two friends - yes, by what miracle did it come about that compassion and love were here too? (p. 39)

This is the most positive statement in the novella. Redemption is possible, almost inherent in the human condition, although not necessarily probable. Plantagenet is not redeemed, but the way is open for those in Lowry's vision who will follow him. The barranca is not the end, or possibly not the end, and the Consul in Plantagenet is not in vain. The terror and suffering in man are not final and emphatic. Somewhere, in goodness and love are hope and possibility: the realization of "The Forest Path to the Spring". Despair and terror in the shape of the cougar are not all-powerful; the blind giant and his attendant puppeteer are not all-powerful and their malignancy is limited and controllable. The terror of removal of mask can and does lead to salvation. For Plantagenet, however, relief is only momentary and despair returns with terror and force:

And he wondered if the doctor ever asked himself what point there was in adjusting poor lunatics to a mischievous world over which merely more subtle lunatics exerted almost supreme hegemony, where neurotic behaviour was the rule and there was nothing but hypocrisy to answer the flame of evil, which might be the flames of Judgement, which
were already scorching nearer and nearer...He saw that the doctor, sweat trickling down his face, leaning forward anxiously, was almost exhausted. (p. 40)

The view of the world is not changed despite the possibility of individual salvation, and doom for Plantagenet is as real as ever. Paradise and all that it entails is not yet here, and the doctor cannot guarantee the efficacy of his guidance and ministrations. The condition of man might not be medicable. If the guide is exhausted, and the condition of the world and of hell hopeless, then at this point even the possibility of salvation is remote enough to be non-existent. The ships will drift, helpless in the storm and the harbour will not be reached. Claggart as Virgil and as the doctor of the human soul cannot carry the burden of man's condition and Plantagenet is once more adrift:

With this realization, his mind wandered. He began, as often before, to imagine himself abandoned. The doctor, his last hope, on his final frontier, would have no time for him, or his friends. He saw the plunging hand only as his fate, the hieroglyphic of "they" which was seeking him out, to take him away: now he became Caspar, dodging absurdly from one side of the barge to the other; now he envisaged himself in the familiar role of one driven friendless through hostile country into ever darker corners, more remote hiding places. (p. 40)

The wandering Jew is moving closer to the day of Judgement and totally unable to affect his fate. Plantagenet's
weakness is his dependence on others and his familiarity with the darkness of his own soul. Salvation is personal and individual. At the point of its possibility and the meaning of cauterization that he has been moving towards, Plantagenet fumbles and accepts the horror of his condition rather than make the positive effort at salvation that is necessary to Lowry's view of its function. It must be achieved; the process of unmasking must be conscious and deliberate and it is not until "The Forest Path to the Spring" that the Lowry figure can face the final peace. This final peace has a certain terror to it, implying as it does acceptance of self. Plantagenet, finally, cannot make this acceptance so must fail. He must join, after the puppet show - when the puppeteer takes down his false illusion and goes off with the doctor as lost god and helper - the other wanderers as they move in their motiveless way, accepting defeat and a pale judgement:

Soon, as if the patients had been merely resting on their pilgrimage, the obsequious procession round the wards was resumed...their heads bowed...in that marathon of the dead. The audience had broken up, each man to his inner Africa. (p. 40)

This is the ceremonial march of the already dead, marking a kind of pointless time until they are called to account, each man facing or not facing his own 'heart of darkness', condemned to the meaninglessness of his own lost soul. Hell is everywhere, and being so, is too powerful for the frailty of
the insane or the possessed. The demons of the wrong side of Plantagenet's ambivalence are too strong and he is drawn into the maelstrom almost actively.

The puppet show has re-created reality with a madness that is too strong. The only occupational therapy is vision of self and the vision has been too brief. Plantagenet has lost sight of the attitude to reality that is necessary to his salvation. He has forgotten the terrible need for purgation and the urge that first brought him to purgatory; the need to face the 'lunar caustic' to test his own metal and to bare his soul to the hot iron of total self-realization. He has further moments of clarity, but has at this point lost his chance.

Chapter nine relies on the cumulative horror of merely presenting Plantagenet's predicament in terms of his relationship with his fellow patients. It is a chapter of desperation and one of counterpoint and harmony: the workings of Plantagenet's mind in contrast to the songs he plays on the piano. The stories of Garry, told with increasing desperation, balanced by the songs of Battle, are vital, alive, and so for Plantagenet, disrupting. Each element moves against the other elements in a parody of being and creativity.

Plantagenet plays a type of music which belies his condition; it is romantic, dreamlike and vocal of romantic yearnings for fulfillment, which are no more than yearnings: Sweet and Low, These Foolish Things, Milneburg Joys, In a
Mist, Singing the Blues, Clarinet Marmalade. He then moves to the hymn Fierce Raged the Tempest O'er the Deep, and to the Death of Ase, in ragtime. Each song obliquely compliments his condition of fear and despair and yet cannot reach the other patients, particularly Battle and the other negroes engaged in the card game. They sense what Plantagenet knows: that this is not right, that there is a sense of falsity in Plantagenet's playing, a betrayal of himself and of the music he plays. They create their own music, much more real, much more vital than Plantagenet's renderings. Theirs, or rather Battle's, is the song of the Titanic unlike any other song of tragedy, although the implications are there. Battle's song mocks the whole tone and meaning of Plantagenet's playing, but more importantly, it is in contrast to the four tales told by Garry in an effort to give Plantagenet the strength that he needs.

The first tale is one of hope and possible peace; it is in tune with Plantagenet's music and as false, with the reality of their condition, and has no effect. (p. 43) The second tale is similar with its 'pretty things' and 'comforts'; there are no comforts for Plantagenet. (p. 45) Garry's third tale is much more to the mood of Plantagenet and that of the theme of Lunar Caustic: storm on the 'angry sea', thunder, lightning and the implication of death. It is death which Garry, as aspect of Plantagenet, cannot face,

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4 See pages 43, 44, and 45 for this song.
and the ending of his tale is of safety and sure harbour: the hoped for image of the early chapters of *Lunar Caustic*. Garry's fourth tale brings in several of the themes of *Lunar Caustic* and has overtones of Melville, specific to Lowry's own symbology.

Presumably Plantagenet is something of an Ahab figure in *Lunar Caustic* and at times a kind of paradigm Melville figure as Lowry conceives him, a man who thinks he is a ship, a man who tries to reconcile 'the immedicable horror of opposites'. These elements come together in Garry's tale of the whale hunt in which Plantagenet substitutes a white whale for Garry's black whale, making explicit the link to Melville and to the whole problem of Ahab and the whale as aspect of consciousness. (p. 45) Behind this explicit link is the note of destruction and the parallel to the coal barge, "all broken and smashed". (p. 45) The whale, a symbol of life and vitality, as well as of destruction, is destroyed as Plantagenet is destroyed and Garry's final tale is consistent with the state of Plantagenet and of his fellow patients, helplessly sucked into the maelstrom and effectively doomed.

Plantagenet must now have his only real contact with the doctor, Claggart, as guide who cannot help, cannot give Plantagenet salvation. Simultaneous with the doctor's beckoning to Plantagenet is Battle's last song:

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All you good peoples come
on down to me. So de debbil
turned over in hell And
began to laugh and grin
Say, yo' took a mighty long
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time comin', Shine,
But yo' welcome in! (p. 47)
which is indicative of Plantagenet's fate. He cannot remain in the hospital and is too soon cast out. "It seems that you can't stay here..." (p. 47) He must leave purgatory, such as it is, and return to the hell of the outside world that is emblematic of his lack of identity. He is booked into Purgatory as Lawhill, and once there goes by the name of Plantagenet, but remains a man in search of identity; completing that search is a process of removal of the false masks of identity the external world has forced him to apply. (p. 47) He fails because the doctor cannot lead him to self-realization and he is unable to find his own way.

He looked out over the huge nervous city above which the last blimp of the day was trailing an advertisement for Goodyear Tires while far above that in still merciless but declining sunlight one word was unrolling itself from the wake of an invisible plane: Fury. He was afraid to leave the doctor and go back to the ward. He was afraid - "the horrors", he said abruptly. "Well - do you see New York? That's where they are. They're out there already waiting, the horrors of war - all of them - already - and all that delirium, like primitives, like Christ's descent into hell. And the tactile conscience, the lonely soul falling featherlessly into the abyss!" (p. 51)

The horrors must be faced; that is part of the act of being,
part of the function of salvation that Plantagenet seeks. The act of cauterization is an act of horror; all the delirium and terror of the feeling conscience and consciousness must be accepted. Hell must be seen and held, and to run away from the vision is to abandon salvation. The protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring", in facing the cougar, does what Plantagenet fails to do: he makes an act of **positive** acceptance. He learns to **know** what is seen. The horror of the barranca must be a known thing and not ultimately of delirium; the soul must be burnt and in the burning rise with the true knowledge of self. Phoenix-like, Plantagenet must rise from his own ashes.

Plantagenet complains to Claggart of the patient's acceptance of their condition: a negative acceptance made by those unwilling to face their own identity:

"But good Christ, Doctor, in this place the people, the patients, are resigned, resigned! Can't you see the horror, the horror of Man's uncomplaining acceptance of his own degeneration? Because many who are supposed to be mad here, as opposed to the ones who are drunks, are simply people who perhaps once saw, however, confusedly, the necessity for change in themselves, for **rebirth**, that's the word."

(pp. 51-52)

The irony is that Plantagenet describes what is basically his own condition. He sees the necessity for his own 'rebirth', but is unable to accomplish it because of the
paradox implicit in his plight. Plantagenet must then accept
his sight, and from this, accept the true mirror of his own
identity. From that acceptance derives acceptance of the
validity of some mitigating force on all the chaos. The
mitigating force is love. Plantagenet is without love, since
in loving Garry and Kalowsky he loves only aspects of him-
self. His horror is pure horror aware only of the barranca
and not of the life that surrounds it. He is unable to
realize that in hell there can be more than delirium. He is
unable to accept acceptance and his inability condemns him.
Because he circles around the problem, Plantagenet defends
only those aspects of himself which lead to his failure,
particularly in the case of Garry's stories which Claggart
feels merely encourage Garry to stay in a dream world (p. 55)
and which Plantagenet feels are symbolic of something of
meaning:

"He likes to tell me those
stories, and some of them
have a queer quality. Have
you thought of the way
they're all about disaster?
It's a kind of prophecy,
perhaps. Perhaps? I know.
I've seen it all a thousand
times in dreams, and when
it comes it will be boring.
Garry sees disaster encom-
passing not only himself
but the hospital, this land,
the whole world...I don't
know, it's funny how people
want to create, and do, in
spite of everything - order
and chaos both." (p. 55)

If Garry is an aspect of Plantagenet, then Plantagenet is
right; the coal barge is broken and chaos is there, and man, as Plantagenet/Garry, will and does create. But Plantagenet's words demand that Garry be only an aspect of himself and not as Garry an individual, whose stories are a retreat from the horror of reality that must be faced, and whose stories of chaos and the retreat from chaos mirror Plantagenet's retreat from what he has to see. The freedom implied in Garry's stories through their concern with collapse and decay is not the freedom of salvation and is not the freedom of Rimbaud, who Plantagenet with unintentional irony, compares him to. (p. 56) Garry creates in a destructive sense out of destruction, which is what Plantagenet is doing, and this kind of creation is self-destructive. The final result of creation, however destructive to the being of the creator, must be creation in a positive sense: the tearing down of self. In the case of Lowry and his many alter-selves, it is to reach a new self that will be more than the old. Each successive destruction will therefore be more creative, since more will be known and greater depths reached. For Plantagenet/Garry to be successful, their creation must be more than horror, more than collapse and decay and the past cannot be 'blasted away'. The caustic process demands a firm past on which to work and a 'possession' that does not end with mere recognition of horror.

In the words of Dr. Claggart, Plantagenet 'escapes' into the nightmare world. (p. 59) Escape is not a caustic process and Plantagenet gains nothing from the 'Palace of
Wisdom* that is the hospital. (p. 58) Plantagenet does not 'learn' from the Palace of Wisdom; he only suffers the experience of it, a suffering that is necessary, but which has to be more than the pure suffering it so obviously is:

"But my God, it's horror!...And it's all there waiting for me: the ghosts on the window blind, the scarlet snowshoe, the whispering of lost opportunities, and all the fury, the anguish, the remorse, the voices, voices, voices; the doll that turns to Ruth, the brownstone - brimstone - fronts transformed into judges, the interminable helpful but - alas - nonexistent conversations, clinching one's case and pointing a solution, a way out into the morning light and freedom, offering an outpost between yourself and death; though only death is there in the morning and the morning is midnight and yourself forgotten, only the gulf is there...The horror not woman, not man, not beast, glimpsed through the bell-sounding darkness of Death Avenue, and posting a letter with hands that were not hands -" (pp. 58-59)

Anguish and remorse are a part of the quest for self, but they are only aspects of identity and not identity itself. The clarity of the alcoholic must lead to something and not turn in upon itself as Plantagenet's does. He seems to be looking into the horror, and despairing there for an answer and lacking any kind of real identity, his search is doomed to failure because he cannot accept a starting point. (p. 59) Lawhill, Plantagenet, Ahab, Ship, Melville, Garry, Kalowsky -
which one - or all? There are too many fragments of Plantagenet, "...the future drones disaster and there is only remorse left for the past, which is a romantic passion..."
(p. 59) The doctor as guide cannot help Plantagenet who will always be either in hell or in purgatory and never reach the paradise he so ineffectually searches for. Without the possibility of help from the doctor, Plantagenet is at the end of his 'night journey across the sea'. There can be no harbour for Plantagenet who is ship and sea, maelstrom and victim of maelstrom.

Chapter Ten is probably the most intense and the most difficult in Lunar Caustic. Here Plantagenet reviews and is subjected to, the passage of all that has happened to him since he has entered the hospital. This cumulative regurgitation is prompted by the storm with all its elements of destruction and growth. The fury of the storm is symbolic of the storm in Plantagenet. The result of that fury, rain, is symbolic of the possibilities that Plantagenet, because he is what he is, must forgo. Here, too, is the consuming need of man to destroy himself that he might resurrect his being into a new form that is the combination of all that he is in those around him.

Plantagenet's madness is the madness of closeness to God, the madness of one who at least momentarily, can see and take into himself the full import of what he sees. This Plantagenet does and the caustic effect is too strong, opening to him visions of perhaps an ultimate madness that
cannot be borne by him as man. What Plantagenet sees is too much for man and it destroys him, making the synthesis an impossibility. There is hope and possibly there is Paradise, but for Plantagenet in **Lunar Caustic**, it is unobtainable. It is a true 'no man's land' (p. 61) where the relief of madness is death and total destruction as symbolized for Lowry and Plantagenet in the white whale of Melville; the urge for self-destruction rather than rebuilding of self out of destruction. Freedom is destruction, it is the wind of the storm and it is the being of Plantagenet, and it is the unity of all the lost souls. (p. 62) Man and his world are delirious "...where everything was uncompleted while functioning in degeneration..." (p. 63) And the maelstrom becomes Plantagenet, with all its confused images of terror and dismay, hopelessness and disorder. Plantagenet and his world are broken and collapsed like the barge which is "...the image of their own shattered or uninformed souls..." (p. 63) and which takes them to the white whale of their destruction:

A seaplane was gliding whitely past, and now it was turning, to Plantagenet suddenly it had the fins and flukes and blunt luminous head of a whale; now it roared straight at the window, straight at him. (p. 67)

and:

There was a furious crash of thunder and simultaneously Plantagenet felt the impact of the plane, the whale upon his mind. While metamorphosis nudged metamorphosis, a kind of order, still preserved
within his consciousness, and enclosing this catastrophe, exploded itself into the age of Kalowsky again, and into the youth of Garry, who both now seemed to be spiralling away from him until they were lost, just as the sea-plane was actually tilting away, swaying up to the smashed sky. But while that part of him only a moment before in possession of the whole, the ship, was turning over with disunion of hull and masts uprooted falling across her decks, another faction of his soul, relative to the ship but aware of these fantasies and simultanities as it were from above, knew him to be screaming against the renewed thunder and saw the attendants closing in on him, yet saw him too, as the plane seethed away northwards like the disembodied shape of the very act of darkness itself, passing beyond the asylum walls melting like wax, and following in its wake, sailing beyond the cold coast of the houses and the factory chimneys waving farewell - farewell - (p. 68)

This is the totality of Plantagenet's madness and his complete loss of identity. This is the soul in quest for self that is finally defeated by itself and by the chaos of its vision and the world that surrounds it. Plantagenet cannot save himself, the terror is too deep and too fatal.

The final chapter is as fragmented as the first. The quest, for now, is over. The 'dead end' has been reached and 'womb' begins again: "...soon there would be nothing at all: no ship, no church, no forest, no shadows, no learning."
It would all be collapsed..." (p. 71) And after flinging his bottle at "...all the indecency, the cruelty, the hideousness, the filth and injustice in the world..." with the "...atrocious vision of Garry flash (ing) across his consciousness, and an atrocious fear.", Plantagenet moves "...drink in hand, to the very obscurest corner of the bar, where, curled up like an embryo, he could not be seen at all." (p. 72)

At the end of the quest, Plantagenet cannot be seen, nor can he see. The hand of the blind giant has come over his eyes, the trip through the 'lunar caustic' has been a failure. He cannot separate himself from the destruction of alcohol which is the agent of his terror and at the same time his saviour from the full implications of that terror. Salvation is not for Plantagenet, but its possibilities are inherent in the cauterization of his soul. Love, the agent of salvation in Lunar Caustic becomes a probability in "Through the Panama" and a fact in "The Forest Path to the Spring" where the acceptance of the love and terror of being come together and form a true and workable salvation.
CHAPTER III

The novellas and stories of "Hear us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, are, Lowry claims, of a piece: belonging together or at least complementing each other and contributing to the total effect:

On the other hand if I can get some of the nonsense out of "Through the Panama" and perhaps the "Elephant" the whole thing does have a very beautiful sound when taken together: and it is a form you can only see when you see the book as a whole.¹

This conception of Hear us O Lord From heaven Thy Dwelling Place is enhanced by the more or less common theme of all of all the tales, and the common nature of their protagonist: Wilderness, Cosnahan, or Fairhaven, who are all aspects of the same consciousness.

There is no point in avoiding the issue of Lowry's identification with his protagonist. It is a possibility in Lunar Caustic but a surety in Hear Us O Lord From heaven Thy Dwelling Place, particularly in "Through the Panama", where Wilderness is so closely identified with Lowry to have writ-

ten the same books and to be suffering the same malaise and terror at his own condition. "Through the Panama" is a search for self-identity through the act of creation as experienced by the protagonist, Wilderness, but this search is inseparable from the search of Lowry, his creator. Conrad Knickerbocker, in an article for the special Lowry edition of *Prairie Schooner*, makes the following statement about Lowry and his work:

> Lowry could not perform the vital surgery of separating himself from his characters. He suspected at times that he was not a writer so much as being written, and with panic he realized that self identity was as elusive as ever.2

This statement, since it is clearly evidenced in Lowry's work and in comments by those who knew him, seems to be a valid one. Lowry is his own protagonist and the search of that protagonist for self-identity through a process of unmasking, is Lowry's search for his own identity in a set of operating circumstances that made it almost impossible for him to make the search successfully. Like Plantagenet, Wilderness, Cosnahan, and others, Lowry's efforts were doomed to failure. The problems of a chaotic world were finally too great, and too vastly manifested. Lowry attempts to come to terms with his horror and bewilderment in

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the guise of his protagonist as he strives against terrifying odds to create meaning and identity out of chaos.

"Through the Panama", is the journal of Sigbjørn Wilderness as he sails from Vancouver to England on the S.S. Diderot. Wilderness is a writer, or at least a man who is trying to write, to create his own experience. The being of that creation is a character in Wilderness's proposed novel, Martin Trumbaugh, who is also a novelist. The identity of Wilderness and Trumbaugh merges; and what was Wilderness's journal becomes Martin Trumbaugh's journal. In both journals, which are one and the same, Sigbjørn/Martin work on a novel or the notes for a novel that is about a writer writing. Complementary to this and mirroring it are the notations in the journal about the land that the ship passes, Mexico and Central America, and the sea the ship travels on. Finally, and more specifically, the Panama Canal and its operation acts as a reflection on the condition of Wilderness/Trumbaugh. Parallel to this element of "Through the Panama" are the 'side texts': Coleridge's, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and a book on the Panama Canal that Wilderness/Trumbaugh is reading throughout the voyage. The final complication is the clear intrusion of Lowry himself, usually in the form of the books that he has written or proposes to write.

There is then, a novella which exists on at least four levels and which cannot be placed conveniently into a specific form. It is called a novella and since that
definition is the least restrictive it is probably the most sensible. It would appear that "Through the Panama" is no more than jottings, possible material for a story. It is fragmented and disjointed, but necessarily so. The form of the story is complementary to the intention and to the theme, which in this manifestation demands chaos as much as it demands order in Under the Volcano. "Through the Panama" is, like Lunar Caustic, a voyage of discovery. The major difference between the two is that where Plantagenet does not survive the storm, Wilderness/Trumbaugh does if for no other reason than that he has Primrose, or the love that is only a possibility in Lunar Caustic. The heightened perception of Wilderness as artist allows him to make a more operative whole out of his experience, although that same heightened perception is largely responsible for his condition.

Lowry is attempting, through his examination of the writer's consciousness, to come to terms with the malaise of the twentieth century that expresses itself in a massive sense of alienation. This alienation is emphasized in those who are trying to create in the midst of chaos, since creation must operate within the context of perception of the state of the world; complicated by an intense symbolism and interweaving of identities in finding the correct or final working one.

There is very evident in Lowry aspects of what has come to be called the 'absurd'. His protagonist, in whatever
guise; Plantagenet, Wilderness, Hilliot, Fairhaven, is al­
ways at loose in a world which for him is overwhelmingly
meaningless and terrifying. There seems to be no hope and
all the forces of the world are malevolent and careless.
The world itself is the 'infernal machine' of "Under the
Volcano", which takes its course despite the efforts of man.
There is in Lowry a sense of wonder that despite his ter­
rrible alienation, man continues to seek identity in this
place where identity can have no ultimate meaning and is at
best a fragile thing, needing continual reshoring.

"Through the Panama" is the record of a search for
identity: a journal which carefully sets down the terrors
and the problems of the search and the factors involved in
it. The familiar Lowry foundations are here. Wilderness,
if not in the acute alcoholic state of Plantagenet in
Lunar Caustic, is very near to it. He identifies himself
with the S. S. Diderot and Trumbaugh much as Plantagenet
identifies with the S. S. Lawhill. Central to each tale is
a storm, both physical and symbolic, a storm which Wilderness
survives as Plantagenet cannot. In each tale the storm is
the point of final resolution and intensity. Theme, however,
is the only common ground shared by Lunar Caustic and
"Through the Panama". Lunar Caustic is a clearly structured
work while "Through the Panama" takes the free form of a
journal or writer's notebook, allowing Lowry to combine the
many elements that he does with some hope of at least thema­
tic wholeness. There are, however, problems with "Through
the Panama" that arise mainly from the form. Clarity is perhaps not a signal virtue, but the confusion of "Through the Panama" makes demands on the reader that may not be entirely justified.

The only order to "Through the Panama" is thematic. The intense weaving of character and event and parallel in the tale is deliberately confusing and fragmented and perhaps has the perverse order necessary to the emphasis of the theme. The problem lies in establishing the theme and the various levels of complimentary identities that flow throughout the tale: here confusion as technique breaks down. Some consideration of the problem is necessary because interpretation of the tale tends to take on the same somewhat fragmentary nature.

As the Journal of Sigbjørn Wilderness, "Through the Panama", begins clearly enough with the departure from the city of Vancouver at midnight on a dark, rainy November 7th. Aspects of the voyage are clear enough: it will have the harshness of the night and already the peace of the beach shack is a precious but lost quality. There is a possible anagram or word play in the name of the ship as comment on the condition of Wilderness: S.S. Diderot, as S.S. Did-he-rot? There is no evidence that the pun is intentional, but it is a probability since part of the theme is the

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3 Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama", Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, New York, 1961, pp. 29-98; p. 29 All future references are to this edition.
decay or possible decay of Wilderness or the 'rot' of the human condition. Perhaps 'will he rot?' is a better anagram for the purposes of the tale. Can man survive and keep his identity in a rotten world? The problem implied in the question, "will he rot or did he rot?", is the problem of the search for identity.

Wilderness, in search of self is immediately drawn into the maelstrom of reflected selves as his journal indicates:

The further point is that the novel is about a character who becomes enmmeshed in the plot of the novel he has written, as I did in Mexico. But now I am becoming enmmeshed in the plot of a novel I have scarcely begun. Idea is not new, at least so far as enmeshment with characters is concerned. (P. 30)

The novel mentioned is that of the story of Martin Trumbaugh, who later takes over Wilderness's journal and the journal becomes the journal of a journal. Trumbaugh, therefore, is the character in the novel who becomes enmeshed in the plot of the novel he is writing.

Wilderness's novel is, in fact, Lowry's novel, "Under the Volcano". But the novel that Wilderness is now enmeshed in, is his novel about Martin Trumbaugh for which he is making the notes in the journal of "Through the Panama." Hence the complexity of evident and possible mirror images. "Through the Panama" is a Chinese box with endless relays of hidden compartments and mysterious components that fit only after several parts that apparently do not belong are found and placed in their proper order.
Disorder, the focal point of Lunar Caustic, is perhaps the key, or one of them, to "Through the Panama". Disorder becomes a means of establishing a place from which to work, observing the methods by which the characters attempt to establish order in their world. Plantagenet fails to achieve the integration of character through disintegration, and ultimately remains in the same condition. Wilderness, however, attempts through active disintegration, to establish his identity within the framework of several possible identities as manifestations of the one discernible central identity which is himself as Sigbjørn Wilderness. He is an alcoholic and writer who, on an ocean voyage, makes a voyage of self discovery. He does this through his relationship with his wife and with his alter ego, Martin; through his examination of the physical and metaphysical elements of his active journey along the coast of Mexico, through the Panama Canal, and into the Caribbean; and through the possible identities with the Ancient Mariner, and the story of the construction of the canal, as parallels. All these complexities, are offered the possibility of resolution and mitigation in Wilderness's notation in his journal: "Turn this into triumph: the furies into mercies." (p. 31) The furies being the demons of self that are implied in the above case which must be known prior to a state of resolution.

Wilderness's journal, that becomes Trumbaugh's Journal, is full of typically Lowrian statements about the condition
of man:

The inenarrable inconceivably desolate sense of having no right to be where you are: the billows of inexhaustible anguish haunted by the insatiable albatross of self.

(p. 31)

This one is expressive of a quality that is Wilderness's above all, his anguish at his own state that is mirrored in the anguish of the Ancient Mariner at the killing of the albatross. Essentially, to relieve his own anguish this is what Wilderness must do: kill the albatross of the old self in order to be able to create the new self that is necessary in the Lowrian framework. The death of the old self is achieved through the creation of the alter ego to that self as given in the character of Trumbaugh. Identity is the one essential in a world of chaos and identity as a writer is doubly important. Lowry, as Wilderness, must seek out and accept his alter egos and in the acceptance find them unnecessary. He must find them in a place of alienation and dispossession. As the Ancient Mariner is haunted by the albatross as symbol of guilt and cannot relieve himself of it until he expiates the guilt by blessing the serpents of the sea; so Wilderness cannot lose the 'albatross of self' until he accepts self through a process of recognition not unlike that endured by the Ancient Mariner in his terror. Wilderness is aware of the many similarities between himself and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and the prose parallel in the poem is used as a prose parallel in Wilderness's journal as comment upon what occurs in the actual journal of both
Wilderness and Trumbaugh.

The journal of Sigbjørn Wilderness now becomes the journal of Martin Trumbaugh as conceived by Wilderness, and the two merge to become aspects of one. Martin allows Wilderness to externalize himself and therefore operate the quest for self. Both men, separately and together, allow Lowry to create the past and the quest in terms of the method given later in "The Forest Path to the Spring". Lowry is both men if only because they are separately writing his books: Wilderness, *Under the Volcano*; and Trumbaugh the proposed, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid*. Wilderness's jotting of Trumbaugh's jotting allows cryptic comment on the voyage of the ship, and on the voyage that is the act of creation and search for self in all the possible images and mirrors of self as they may or may not exist as active qualities within the frame work of the quest.

The shift from Trumbaugh, to Wilderness, to Lowry, is rapid and occurs at random. Essential to the technique is the ease of flow between all three and the final lack of separation between them. They must for the purposes of the story move as one, and the link with all Lowry protagonists is made in the link to Dana Hilliot as early Wilderness or precursor of Trumbaugh and Wilderness, and also as an element of Lowry himself whose early voyage gave the material for *Ultramarine* in which Dana Hilliot is the protagonist. (p. 32) Melville too, is a kind of dark force lurking somewhere behind all the disorder and confusion of "Through the Panama", brooding ob-
securely and heavily in the background.

Because it is in effect, a journal, "Through the Panama" is of necessity a fragmented thing; confused and confusing, often very deliberately. Fragments of ideas, notes, and possibilities are scattered throughout the novella, at random. They do in a way contribute to the direction and purpose of "Through the Panama", but to examine each aspect of these notes would require far too much space and contribute far too little to either analysis or understanding of the novella. If "Through the Panama" is the journal of a writer, we can perhaps ask and expect a mass of information that might or might not be used. However, "Through the Panama" often reads as though it were just that: rough notes for a possible novel on the general theme of the problem of the artist. Despite the nature of the jottings, they seem to give at least echo to the idea of alienation and the search for self in its several forms. The Consul, as brooding past-figure, is almost everywhere, (p. 33) particularly as the S.S. Diderot cruises past the coast of Mexico - which itself is in many ways a kind of manifestation of the plight of the Consul, it reflects the plight of Wilderness as a place where he has been and known the terror of the Consul who comes into "Through the Panama" as a character in Wilderness's last novel, The Valley of the Shadow of Death (Under the Volcano) and takes part in the forming of the new novel, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid. (pp 35-36) The Consul is also resurrected as the John Firmin of the
newspaper clipping (page 33), as someone who precipitates bad luck in killing the albatross. This in turn links the Consul to the Ancient Mariner who is already linked to Wilderness. The numberless refractions of the single experience with all their permutations and combinations continue in ever increasing cycles of complexity. Conveniently, a Mr. Charon is on the ship with Wilderness/Trumbaugh, and although he does not actually conduct the tour of self, he is there with all his mythical implications despite his ordinary exterior. There is little point in going on with any kind of detailed analysis of this aspect of "Through the Panama." It is a confusing novella and until someone offers a detailed analysis of all its elements it is perhaps best to remain with those that are fairly clear and evident of the general theme of the novella and of the cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends.

The theme that is central to "Through the Panama", and which is later more clearly worked out in "The Forest Path to the Spring", is that of the problem of creation within the framework of the quest for identity and is embodied in all the complexity of the writer writing about the writer writing. Part of the quest for identity is within the acceptance of the past and the working out of that past in creative terms by building a fictional construct to establish and in a sense rigidify it in a certain place. This is

George Woodcock, "Under Seymour Mountain", Canadian Literature, No. 8, Spring 1961, p. 5
Wilderness's quest through his use of Martin Trumbough and through his frantic attempts to assess the literature of his day to find a place within it for himself (pp 73-78). It moves also through his involvement with the act of creation which for the artist is his means of definition and assessment of self. Part of this assessment has to come from other people, through recognition by the very critics who lack the soul to be able to recognize.

Another problem in finding identity in what one creates is that the construct can, and does for Wilderness, overwhelm and partially destroy the new mask of self that tries, with continual creation, to further establish itself and create the order that is lacking in its external world. Wilderness is terrorized by his last book, The Valley of the Shadow of Death (Under the Volcano) to the point where he is a "Man not enmeshed by, but killed by his own book and the malign forces it arouses." (p. 38) The quest through creation seems to be ineffective or at least not without its own variations on the theme of hell. Creation becomes very evidently a form of destruction and for Lowry the function of his vision is primarily a destructive thing out of which may come some form of positive resolution:

The book should not be three books but six books, to be called The Voyage That Never Ends, with The Valley in the middle. The Valley acts like a diabolic battery in the middle. Resolution should be triumphant, however. That is to say it is certainly in my
Here is Lowry/Wilderness's proposed cycle with a note of possible positivity at the end. After the self has been torn into, and the masks removed, there is room for the triumph of resolution that does occur in "The Forest Path to the Spring". "Through the Panama" is essentially destructive in its chaotic and fragmentary nature and is a true reflection of the Lowry protagonist at the stage of approaching resolution. As an act of creation, through its form, it comments on the condition of Wilderness as he faces or does not face the 'albatross of self'.

Sigbjørn Wilderness is close to Plantagenet of Lunar Caustic in the often low-keyed, but intense, terror of his position and imagination; which sees the same vague but intense horror of his self:

But I dream of death, a horrible dream, Grand Guignol, without merit: but so vivid, so palpable, it seemed to contain some actual and freightful tactile threat, or prophesy, or warning: first there is dissociation, I am not I, I am Martin Trumbaugh. But I am not Martin Trumbaugh or perhaps Firmin either, I am a voice, yet with physical feelings, I enter what can only be describe -- I won't describe it, with teeth, that snap tight behind me: at the same time, in an inexplicable way, this is like going through the Panama Canal, and what closes behind me is, as it were, a lock: in a sense I am now a ship, but I am also a voice and also Martin Trumbaugh, and now I am, or he is, in the realm of death: this is realm is....full of noseless white
whores and ronyons with pulpy faces, in fact their faces come to pieces when they touch them....Death himself is a hideous looking red-faced keeper of a prison, with half his face shot away, and one shattered leg whose shreds are still left "untied"....he is the keeper of the prison, and leads him or me or it through the gates....he says it is a pity I have seen "all the show"....How can the soul take this kind of battering and survive? It is hard to believe that a disgusting and wicked dream of this nature has only been produced by the soul itself, in its passionately supplication to its unscrupulous owner to be cleansed. But it has. (pp 39-40)

This self is, in Lowry's terms, a product of itself. The external chaos which surrounds it is fully mirrored in the chaos of the dream where identity becomes measured in terms of death rather than life and living, and the fact of self demands penance. This derives from the parallel text (page 40) which is the prose parallel to the last four stanzas of part V of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Then as Wilderness awakes from his dream, the parallel from Coleridge is "The Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew." The direct application of these parallels is not clear except perhaps in the supplication of the soul to cleanse itself, there is the idea that this cleansing must be a painful thing and therefore can be seen as penance, a thing that must come, in a theological sense, before resolution and the implied redemption and salvation that are corollary of resolution in Lowry's vision.
The self-analysis that occurs in the dream is part of the quest for self and leads to an awareness of self that did not exist before on any level.

The theme of the quest is clearly here and operates in the same manner as it does in *Lunar Caustic*:

Sigbjørn Wilderness... could only pray for a miracle, that miraculously some love of life would come back. It has: apparently this retracing of a course was part of the main ordeal; and even at this moment knew it to be no dream, but some strange symbolism of the future. (p. 44)

The course must be retraced and as Wilderness passes by the coast of Mexico, his past, as man and writer enmeshed in his own novel, is given to him almost as on a film where he has the strange feeling of seeing himself, isolated and alone in time and surrounded by the 'infernal machine' of self and chaotic external world. The question 'Who am I?' given as interlineal to the text (page 47), depends entirely on who was I? Particularly: Who was I when that mask of me wrote the novel that now enmeshes me? There is finally, no real way to answer the question 'Who am I?' since 'I' is in a continual state of becoming; inside a time that is in continual state of flux and one which cannot be bound by an identity that is only valid for the second in which it is conceived and then immediately becomes a past state that must influence the states to follow. The voyage, truly, never does end, and must continually repeat itself within a condition where only physical frames of reference really do change.
The basic problem is that self can only be defined under these conditions and these conditions lead to madness or at least to terror and almost complete alienation that must be continually fought in a state of unrelieved despair. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, whom 'agony constraineth', the Lowry protagonist travels from land to land within himself in search of self.

There is no final peace, not even in human love. There is only its possibility and in the very possibility lies the end of the quest: almost by definition something that cannot be finally reached, but whose answer lies in the reaching. Moving on the voyage both begins and completes the voyage and in its first step is its resolution.
"The Forest Path to the Spring" was intended by Lowry to be the final point in the proposed cycle, *The Voyage That Never Ends*. As such it contains the elements, in varied form, of the other works in the cycle and brings these elements to a point of resolution. Many things are offered in the cycle as possibilities in the quest for self, but they are never successfully accomplished in *Under the Volcano*, "Through the Panama", or *Lunar Caustic*. In each of these works, the protagonist, through his search for self, is shown or has made available to him, the possibilities of redemption. However, in no case does he successfully accomplish redemption through the exercise of the quest for self in its varied masks. Human love is the most consistent operative of redemption after self has been burned away, but it is never a complete success until "The Forest Path to the Spring", wherein the protagonist can and does achieve identity and equanimity of self in conjunction with a natural world that is not hostile, and the influence upon him of his love of his wife.

In *Lunar Caustic*, "Through the Panama" and *Under the Volcano*, the natural world is usually in counterpoint to the world of self of the protagonist. It is a place of disorder
and chaos that at least partially accounts for the disorder and chaos of the protagonist's self, and aids in precipitating him towards possible alleviation of the condition. In this world the Consul is far too alienated to be saved by the love of Yvonne, and Plantagenet cannot find love, truly, in his relationship with Garry and Kalowsky. Sigbjørn Wilderness is put on the path to redemption partially through the aid of Primrose, but it is neither complete nor sure. In each of the above cases the quest for self is basically unsuccessful. The masks have been torn away in successive stages and the soul is progressively more naked and more sure, but never completely so. It remains for "The Forest Path to the Spring" to make the completion a sure and positive thing.

In "The Forest Path to the Spring", Lowry is Lowry. It is a long short story, but there is no attempt made to give the protagonist a fictional being. The dedication is to his wife Margerie, and the whole story is a lyrical evocation of Lowry's home on the waterfront at Dollarton, B.C., and the land and sea that surround it. The world that was, at the time of writing, enmeshed in the Second War and the evidences of this world, are never far away. The landscape too, and the sea of the immediate area, are not always evocative of peace and stability. There are demons in this world too; demons that must be faced and accepted. They are faced and accepted and the quest for self here achieves its meaning and, essentially, its validity as a purposeful and possible thing. Redemption through self-knowledge is real and actual,
and occurs for the protagonist. The chaos of self comes to a point of resolution and *The Voyage That Never Ends* can theoretically begin again with a whole new series of masks to be found, identified and torn off.

The protagonist is a jazz musician and composer and hence generically, a creator who complies with his predecessors Plantagenet and Wilderness; who are either creators or those possessed of a creative sensitivity and awareness; giving to their plight its heightened intensity and vigor. He is thus perceptive of his condition and able to examine it carefully.

The first chapter of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is pure establishment of setting with its description of the others who squat on the beach and the place itself. The only note in common with *Lunar Caustic* and "Through the Panama", is the name of the small community of squatters: Eridanus. This name is taken from a wrecked steamer of the 'defunct Astra Line' lying in the inlet (p. 225). The wrecked ship has certain affinities with the broken coal barge of *Lunar Caustic*, although its status as a symbol is not so harsh or so pervasive:

This was Eridanus, and the wrecked steamer of the defunct Astra Line that gave it its name lay round the point beyond the lighthouse...A spare propellor blade upright against the break of the poop had never been removed. Down below water level weight and fulcrum slept in an eternity of
stillness. Grass grew too from the downfallen cross-trees and in the dead winches wildflowers had taken root - wildflowers, spring beauties and death came with its creamy blooms.¹

Eridanus too, is a constellation in the heavens and is known as the River of Life and the River of Death. Placed there by Jupiter in remembrance of Phaeton, who like the Lowry protagonist, suffers fire to prove himself. Here the ship-wreck and the name of the ship provide for Lowry a combination of images that keep current with the main theme of The Voyage That Never Ends and provide some links to other works. The most important element is the combination of the rivers: River of Life and River of Death.

The image here is clearly in harmony with the problems of the quest for self. In the quest, life and death are essential elements. Each old self in the progression of selves must die to make way for the next mask which in turn must give way to the next. If The Voyage That Never Ends is the quest for self as voyage and as quest it combines life and death of self in a never ending cycle even after redemption and salvation have been reached in the moment of resolution. The quest is a continuous thing and the reaching of one of its aspects of fulfillment does not preclude further reaching.

The setting of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is idyllic, but it is surrounded by immediate chaos and the peace of Eridanus is perhaps a momentary thing:

But still we did not see Eridanus as a place to live. The war was on, many of the ships that passed and sent the commotion of their washes over the beach were cargoed with obscenities toward death...The shadow of the war was over everything. And while the people were dying in it, it was hard to be really happy within oneself. It was hard to know what was happy, what was good. (p. 230)

and the,

...calm sunlit face of the inlet turned...into the banks of some river of the dead, for was not Eridanus also the Styx? (p. 230)

This is the world where identity must be actively sought. The world that makes such seeking a necessary thing and where the effort of life is perhaps a probationary test for death. (p. 231) Life is the 'Intermezzo', a connecting movement, only a small part of something larger. The protagonist who lives "on the windrow of the world", will be caught up and carried away in the total chaos, his probationary period in the river of life finished.

"The Forest Path to the Spring" has the gentle intensity of something held onto against impossible odds that never fully make their presence felt. It is a lagoon of calm, on the edge of a maelstrom, that is so calm that it diminuendos the maelstrom, reducing it to a workable size
and in so doing removing much of its terror and obscenity; substituting love and joy as the only possible alternatives to such resounding chaos. In the end, nothing else makes sense and the 'intermezzo' must be lived as symphony because in any other answer lies the madness of Lunar Caustic and "Through the Panama". It is a necessary madness, yet seemingly totally destructive and non-redemptive. Self, perhaps, must be accepted as an island of peace provided that awareness of chaos is not forgotten or reduced to a meaninglessness that it does not contain. Chaos is real, but so too is peace and the joy that is a part of peace; however close to the edge of chaos it may be. Peace and joy stem seemingly from human love and the action of that love that has a chance to operate free of the terror of the Consul's Mexico and the infernal city of New York that so plagues Plantagenet. The 'infernal machine' that mirrors man's alienation and loss of identity, does not really exist here, where there is little to interrupt the gradual assessment of self-realization. The possibilities of fragmentation that do exist, can be faced with courage and total being in a world where identification with surrounding does not imply destruction.

There is in shack and sea as counterpoint of the individual personality, a deep sense of purpose and reality as a breathing part of the whole universe:

And suddenly, as I helped my wife out and tied up the boat, I was overwhelmed with a kind of love. Standing there, in defiance of eternity, and yet
as if in humble answer to it, with their weathered sidings as much a part of the natural surroundings as a Shinto temple is of the Japanese landscape, why had these shacks come to represent something to me of an indefinable goodness, even a kind of greatness? And some shadow of the truth that was later to come to me, seemed to steal over my soul, the feeling of something that man had lost, of which these shacks and cabins, brave against the elements, but at the mercy of the destroyer, were the helpless yet stalwart symbol, of man's hunger and need for beauty, for the stars and the sunrise. (p. 232)

This quality does not exist in Lowry's other work where the physical world merely reflects the terror of the internal world of the protagonist who seeks himself amidst chaos. Here is where the possibilities of self lie: in the harmony of man and nature where the duality of the human experience, the immedicable horror of opposites, can be medicated, despite the existence of the duality as a force of disruption:

One night, coming across the porch from the woodshed with a lantern in one hand and a load of wood under the other arm, I saw my shadow, gigantic, the logs of wood as big as a coffin, and this shadow seemed for a moment the glowering embodiment of all that threatened us; yes, even a projection of that dark chaotic side of myself, my ferocious destructive ignorance. (p. 333)
The 'dark chaotic side' of the self of the protagonist is that in him which is Wilderness and Plantagenet, the seeker after destruction, the man who is under compulsion to enter the hell of his own being and face the horror therein, forced to do so by the gigantic shadow that is the world which makes such search a necessity because it so fosters separation and alienation. In all the vitality of its complexity, the search for self becomes a compulsive act, finally worked out by the protagonist through the 'grace' of his wife:

And it seemed to me that until I knew her I had lived my whole life in darkness. (p. 234)

Here is the force of love that can bring peace and acceptance.

The spring in "The Forest Path to the Spring" is the central image and the place from which life is drawn. As the protagonist goes back and forth for water he is able to assess his world and his own place in it in terms of the journey up and down the path and the extensions that this journey allows him to make. The trip to the spring is like a constant renewal of self; more so in that it is not always positive, and the walk allows visions of the terror in the self that is always there. But it is through this journey that the protagonist renews and eventually finds himself:

Here we were living on the very windrow of existence....and yet it seemed that we were in heaven, and the world outside - so portentous in its prescriptions for man of imaginary needs that were in reality his damnation - was hell, men were killing each other. (p. 243)
The outside world in Lowry is always hell, always the place of terror and the place where the soul is in a constant state of turmoil and seige. This world can transpose itself to the world of the path to the world of the spring and can never be completely ignored:

But a few evenings later, returning homeward along the path, I found myself possessed by the most violent emotion I had ever experienced in my life... A moment before I had been thinking how much I loved my wife, how thankful I was for our happiness, then I had passed to thinking about mankind, and now this once innocent emotion had become, for this is indeed what it was, hatred. It was not just ordinary hatred either, it was a virulent and murderous thing that throbbed through all my veins like a passion... It was hatred so all-consuming and so absolutely implacable that I was astounded at myself... it occurred to me that in some mysterious way I had access to the fearful wrath that was sweeping the world, or that I stood at the mercy of the wild forces of nature that I had read man had been sent into the world to redeem, or something that was like the dreadful Wendigo, the avenging, man-hating spirit of the wilderness, the fire tortured forest, that the Indians feared and believed in still.

And in my agonized confusion of mind, my hatred and suffering were the forest fire itself, the destroyer, which is here, there, all about; it breathes, it moves, and sometimes suddenly turns back on its tracks and even commits suicide, behaving as though it
had an idiot mind of its own; so my hatred became a thing in itself, the pattern of destruction. (p. 243)

The hatred later turns back upon the protagonist to exercise its self-destructive elements. Here is the terror of self, the terrible dichotomy of self: the urge and the necessity to destroy itself in pain and fear. Plantagenet is faced with this, and so, too, is Wilderness, a desire, sudden, and without real volition, to purge the self; brought on by the realization of the terror of self in a chaotic world that operates without reason. It moves as mindlessly as an 'infernal machine', long beyond the control of its human designers and operators. The machine moves as the forest fire with malignant purposelessness, destroying at random without pattern. The self for Lowry is like the fire in that it is virtually uncontrollable, at the mercy of the demon Wendigo that is all that is unknown about the self. The vague but terrible emphasis that so affects the Consul and Plantagenet in their hopeless search for being. It is, too, the demon of self-possession that is fostered by alcohol, opening up vistas of self that usually remain hidden. For Lowry, this inner terror is perfectly reflected in the demonology of the forest fire with all its rootless power.

The protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" has that element in man which causes him to destroy all that in himself which is good; building his 'tower of Babel' that is only a tower of fragmented alienation where each man needs,
but cannot have, the harmony of the rest-cure of the forest and sea-shore. Man is out of harmony with his world, the real world of place and time. All the frantic search for that real world in terms of the false world cannot succeed. Time and space present a vision of horror when they are seen outside their true context, when they are measured against an unnatural world that demands of man that he lose his identity in order to function within it. Identity is in love and in the harmonious relationship, not necessarily with nature, but with the idea of nature. It is in the core of human experience that is in self-realization within this framework. The chaos is accepted and reduced to its proper perspective, choice becomes an operative thing. Renewal is possible and its terms are determined by the world that exists in chaos.

The world outside that of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is a place of filth, the barranca that the Consul was thrown into. Self cannot be found in a barranca; all that is there is the offal of civilization. The quest cannot truly operate under these conditions, only where man is in tune can he be as a man in a true pattern of self-fulfillment. Damnation is real and ever present, but it need not be victorious. The protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring" is able to avoid it by finding what amounts to a healthy self in the 'paradise' of the forest place.

Despite the fact that the forest place is 'paradise' it is not a place without doubt. The possibility that it is a false paradise is always there in a very real sense since it
is separate from what may be the 'actual' world that is outside. It cannot be successfully forgotten or ignored even within the happiness of the idyllic world:

Could one translate this kind of happiness into one's life? Since this was only a moment of happiness I seemed involved with irreconcilable impulses. One could not make a moment permanent and perhaps the attempt to try was some form of evil. But was there not some means of suggesting at least the existence of such happiness, that was like what is really meant by freedom which was like the spring, which was like our love, which was like the desire to be truly good. (p. 255)

Escapism, romanticism, the pale harmony of a wispy nature lover? There are elements of all these in Lowry and in his attitude to the nurtured world of "The Forest Path to the Spring". But there are problems. "The Forest Path to the Spring" is part of the proposed cycle, *The Voyage That Never Ends*. The quest for self is just that voyage, and the implications of continuity are not in the above quotation. Lowry is seeking a kind of fixed status in a place that is "out of this world", away from the conditions that give rise to the Consul, Plantagenet, and Wilderness, and horribly or not, this world does exist and the barranca is there. These are problems the protagonist is aware of, but for him which he can find no solution even within the framework of peace overlooking hell (p. 256). Lowry seems to feel the need for 'paradise', and yet to be always aware that it exists as a
tenuous thing within the centre of hell and is perhaps only a resting place offered briefly, and to few. Yet within the cycle, "The Forest Path to the Spring" is the passage of resolution and salvation where quest reaches some kind of positive point. Perhaps the positivity lies in the ambiguity and the tenuousness of the situation. Perception of self within a context of quest is brief and paradisal, a combination of event and feeling against which the mathematical odds are fantastic. This would make it well won. Part of the problem with "The Forest Path to the Spring" is that it is, or seems, too dearly won in the light of the struggles of the Consul, Plantagenet, and Wilderness. It is too easy, too idyllic, and at the same time, too tenuous. Peace, if it is attainable for these men as one man, should be emphatically positive and clearly attained.

In the season of Spring, the trip along the path to the spring brings to the protagonist the final molding of his position as questing self. Resolution is offered and salvation is achieved. The validity of that salvation in external terms is the problem, how far outside the forest world does it apply and can chaos be so easily met with hope and trust and love?

The going to the spring for water is at first a pleasant chore; a kind of daily regeneration exists in the physical act itself and in the joy of return to his wife. Then it becomes difficult and without joy:

...I had to find something to
irk me in this chore. It was as though man would not be contented with anything God gave him and I could only think that when God evicted him from Paradise it served him right. (p. 260)

At the spring, wait the 'awe-inspiring thoughts' that are perhaps those of despair and terror of self; faced with nothing to make the facing simpler or less intense. These thoughts lead him to consider suicide not in Lowry's terms, a positive act since it affirms the denial of self that he attempt through the quest for self to refute. (p. 260)

Suicide is implicit in the action of the chaotic world and the Consul's death is almost a voluntary thing, something he actively seeks out as he moves toward the volcano. The protagonist's feeling is more than the malaise of a sick world and mixed with it is the joy of return to his wife. But it is a journey of anguish; anguish of the voyage of self backward ceaselessly through the past; a journey that is emphatically meaningless since it is not out of the past as past, that hope and resurrection will come (p. 261). The voyage of past is necessary, but as a series of destructive creative acts, not as pattern or problem for the here-and-now. The past, however, remains as part of the present; a part which must be seen and known.

The cougar on the path is Lowry's symbol for all the terror of the past that is the present of the Consul, Plantagenet, and Wilderness. It becomes the chaos of the demon world that pervades even a substitute paradise with
its faceless menace:

...I must have been afraid in some way of the lion--but at the hill on the spring path been already gripped by the anticipation of a so much greater fear that the concrete fact of even a lion had been unable to displace it. What was it I feared? Lying in bed with my arms around my wife, listening to the roar of the surf we couldn't see, for it was a fierce low tide--I felt so happy that all of a sudden for the life of me I could not give it a name. It seemed something past, and that was what it was, though not in the sense in which I was thinking...It was as though I had entered the soul of a past self, not that of the self that merely brooded by night, but an earlier self to whom sleep meant delirium, my thoughts chasing each other down a gulf. Half conscious I told myself that it was as though I had actually been on the lookout for something on the path that had seemed ready, on every side, to spring out of our paradise at us, that was nothing so much as the embodiment in some frightful animal form of those nameless somnambulisms's, guilts, ghouls of past delirium, wounds to other souls and lives, ghosts of actions approximating to murder, even of my own actions in this life, betrayals of self and I know not what, ready to leap out and destroy me, to destroy us, and our happiness, so that when, as if in answer to all this, I saw a mere lion how could I be afraid? And yet mysteriously the lion was all that too. (pp 263-264)
The cougar then, embodies the terror of fragmented self, the delirium of Plantagenet and the dismay of Wilderness in their frantic search for identity and a way out of their oppressive sense of alienation. It is all the nameless horror of endless hell, where every step is one taken in fear and trembling over the edge of the barranca. The nameless horror is that of existence. The state of being that makes it necessary to make the journey of self is the anguish of being a man and of coming to terms with an existence that seems always to be mere prelude to death. Death, since it is unknown and feared, must be fought; but it has the strange and vital attraction of the unknown. It is as though Lowry seeks to destroy self in order to find the peace and order that must exist in death when the horror of opposites can no longer exist. Part of the anguish is in the attempt to create a construct that embodies the horror and the beauty of existence and which comes to terms with all the terrible dichotomies which exist as corollary to being alive in this world that is either in, or perched on the edge of, hell. The fear and wonder of life are embodied in the cougar. In acceptance of the cougar and acceptance of the fear and wonder of human life is the resolution of the 'immedicable opposites'. Accept death as the end of existence and then there is time and space enough for the acceptance of life and of the creation of life:

At the same time I became conscious of my gloomy thoughts again, but in a
quite different way: how can I say it: It is as if I saw those thoughts at a distance, as if below me. In one sense I did not see them but heard them, they flowed, they were like a river, an inlet, they comprised a whole project impossible to recapture or pin down. Nonetheless those thoughts, and they were abysmal, not happy as I would have wished, made me happy in that, though they were in motion they were in order too: an inlet does not overflow its banks, however high the tide, nor does it dry up, the tide goes out, but it comes in again, in fact...it can do both at once; I was aware that some horrendous extremity of self-observation* was going to be necessary to fulfill my project. (pp 265-266)

The project is The Voyage That Never Ends, and it was here that through the 'horrendous extremity of self-observation' the meaning of the quest was to be found. The building of a construct based on the harrowing of self would be a statement of order in the midst of disorder, and would provide a rendering that would give experience meaning; it would identify the ailing soul and in the process of identity give that soul a validity that it did not have before.

Chapter Seven of "The Forest Path to the Spring" con-

* Italics mine.
tains a basic key to Lowry's conception of his work and its meaning. In this chapter he describes the problems he has with his cycle and its actual creation, all in musical terms, since in the novella the protagonist is a composer and beset with the complexity of ordering his vision and creating within it a construct expressive of all the nuances of that vision with force and intensity. In the physical creation of the vision lies true identity, for the vision must come out of the 'horrendous extremity of self-observation' and proceed of that self observation.

There are problems in the creation of the symphony, problems immediately bound up with self conception and what amounts to the ordering of self:

But despite my prayers my symphony refused to order itself or resolve itself in musical terms. Yet I saw what I had to do clearly. I heard these thoughts ordering themselves as if pushed off from me: they were agonizing, but they were clear, and they were my own... (p. 267)

It is necessary that the composer distance his thoughts, see them reflected in the agony of another created self. Removing the musical to the literary, the intended symphony is The Voyage That Never Ends, and each sequence of the cycle is an extension of Lowry's own personality, as if pushed off, agonizing, and in terms of its own framework, clear. Each figure in each part of the cycle is an aspect of the consciousness that goes to the spring and determines the need
for cauterizing the self in order to present the vision of self that is vital and in need of expression. The symphony must be written because:

....I felt that no matter how grotesque the manner in which my inspiration proposed to work through me, I had something original to express. Here was the beginning of an honesty, a sort of truthfulness to truth, where there had been nothing before but truthfulness to dishonesty and self-evasion and to thoughts and phrases and even melodies that were not my own... Ortega has it that a man's life is like a fiction that he makes up as he goes along. (pp 267-268)

Here is the statement for the need of Lowry's creative construct and also one of the basic artistic or thematic elements. It is implied in the paraphrase of Ortega that Lowry turns into an examination of what is effectively the same central consciousness; the one which he creates in Hilliot, Plantagenet, the Consul, and Wilderness, as it progresses towards some kind of reality by building on its own destruction in its several stages to reach a point of order and final establishment of self in a process that must become, once travelled, a regenerative thing. The force involved is that of removing the layers of self in creative agony:

As a matter of fact I never doubted that it was the force itself that was killing me... and I was in every way delighted that it should, for my whole intention seemed to be to die through it, without dying of course that I might become reborn. (p. 268)
Through the extensive and intense harrowing of self comes peace and acceptance and regeneration which is the most important fact of all. If the result of the quest for self and the terror involved in that quest does not result in the affirmation of self; then the context of quest and the reality of self become initially meaningless things and the whole construct loses what validity it might have. If suffering is a waste of time and energy; if there is nothing to be learned from facing self; then the whole question is absurd and the quest a colossal bad joke with overtones of ironic horror. With Lowry's precepts the movement along the path and all that it implies is valid and essentially good.

The movement along the path becomes an assertion of the validity of the whole quest for self. It is finally a mystical experience that has no definition only a sense of surety and all the possible paths become one, with all their possible associations with the many levels of self. The act of voyaging self that moves along these varied paths in search of identity that is a merging with time:

What if the path became shorter and shorter until I should disappear altogether one evening, when coming back with the water? (p. 269)

The search for self operates primarily in a dislocated world. A world like time is an aspect of that dislocation and chaos, because the world is centered in its own false conception of time. If the self can merge with time then it no longer exists in opposition with time. But there are also the
elements of horror in this for the protagonist and his wife and the inference is not taken up. (p. 270) The path, however, remains a symbol of "cleansing and purgation and renewal..." becoming the basic theme of the proposed opera that has taken the place of the symphony. (p. 271) The new construct will express the whole complexity of place and being in the search for self.

The events of the final chapter of "The Forest Path to the Spring" occur some years after those of the preceding chapters and narrate the return of the protagonist and his wife to the place from which they have moved in a spiritual and a physical sense. The return is described in tones even more lyrical than those used to narrate the actual experience, and the last chapter moves much as the last movement in a symphony towards restatement and elaboration of persistent themes with a final almost ethereal passage of acceptance and affirmation. It is Lowry's finest piece of 'pure' writing; theme and method are combined in a real harmony from which derives the final power of the vision and its construct and finally, the mystical nature of the experience that denies definition.

The idyllic world of the forest path has, essentially, changed little. Some of the inhabitants are gone, but the same mood of place separate from the maelstrom of the world outside, is there. So too, is the path; although the reaction to the old experience has changed:

How wrongly we interpreted
that whole strange experience. Or rather how was it that it had never occurred to us, seriously, to interpret it at all, let alone see it as a warning, a form of message, even as a message that shadowed forth a kind of strange command, a command that, it seemed to me, I had obeyed! And yet, all my heeding of any warning it contained would not have averted the suffering immediately ahead. Only dimly, even now, did I understand it. Sometimes I felt that the path has only seemed to grow shorter because the burden, the canister, had grown lighter as I grew physically stronger. Then again I could become convinced that the significance of the experience lay not in the path at all, but in the possibility that by converting the very canister I carried, the ladder down which I climbed every time I went to the spring—in converting both these derelicts to use I had prefigured something I should have done with my soul. Then of course...there was the lion. But I lacked spiritual equipment to follow such thoughts through. This much I understood, and had understood that as a man I had become tyrannized by the past, and that it was my duty to transcend it in the present. Yet my new vocation was involved with using that past—for this was the underlying meaning of my symphony even my opera...—with turning it into use for others. And to do this, even before writing a note, it was necessary to face that past as far as possible...
without fear. Ah yes, and it was that, that I had begun to do here. (p. 279)

The Voyage That Never Ends is Lowry's attempt to transcend the past in the present. He uses the experience of the past to affect the transcension, to build meaning for the present. The examination of the past through the various mirror images of the single self in its varied forms or masks, effects the transcension through its implied act of tyranny and self-absorption. To affect the transition, the past must be examined in horrifying detail without pity or remorse. The quest for identity in the here-and-now must of necessity, proceed from what has gone before; in the past are the roots of the present. The path leads the protagonist to acceptance of the fact that he must scarify his past in order to establish his present. In this act of acceptance of the necessity of self-examination, acceptance of self has been accomplished. What follows is necessary, but the first act is the most important. Here is the act of salvation, which for Lowry is a positive thing deriving from the positive action of accepting the realization that identity lies in recognition of past identities as they are worked out in Ortega's 'novel of life'. The past must be taken, not as a burden or something which denies identity, but as an affirmation of identity when it is used to establish the present in the harmonious tones of unity of self.

That Lowry himself could not apply what he had apparently learned to his own life, does not invalidate his
establishment of the quest for self. He could not come to terms with his self with the same ease as his protagonist could. The tyranny and terror were with him always, and yet his mirror image succeeds. The forest path is the end result of the quest and that end in "The Forest Path to the Spring", is a positive one. The Voyage That Never Ends is not over; it can never be 'over' but it has reached a point where order takes over from disorder, offering them the possibility of further moves toward harmony of self. The idyllic world can and does exist on the edge of the chaotic maelstrom, but peace and acceptance are there, surrounded by chaos and disorder. What has happened is that self and past are seen in related perspective in a state of present being. The terror of the quest for past has been justified by the harmony of the present.
CHAPTER V

The preoccupations of Malcolm Lowry as man and writer are the common preoccupations of many writers in the twentieth century. The problem is one of identity, and the solution appears to lie in the various forms of establishment of self in a framework of internal and external order within the pattern chosen by the artist. The pattern chosen by Malcolm Lowry is cyclical. In the framework of a series of related constructs, he attempts to build an integrated total construct that will express the conditions of his vision in their clearest and most logical form.

The cycle, The Voyage That Never Ends, remained incomplete at the time of Lowry's death in 1957. Its extant elements clearly evidence the theme of Lowry's cycle, however, in their examination of the problems of the quest for identity through statement of the search for self in individual terms. Lowry reaches the identity of his protagonist through the various masks of that protagonist in his several works. Dana Hilliot in Ultramarine, Plantagenet in Lunar Caustic, the Consul in Under the Volcano, Sigbjørn Wilderness in "Through the Panama", and the unnamed protagonist of "The Forest Path to the Spring", are the several masks of the Lowry figure. The identity of the separate
selves is at its roots, a common one. Each share elements of a single past which is essentially the past of their creator; and each attempt to come to harmonious terms with that past through a kind of self-realizing purgation.

Lunar Caustic, "Through the Panama", and "The Forest Path to the Spring", are three steps in the quest for self. As a writer finding identity in the re-working of his own past, Lowry used that past extensively. The hospital of Lunar Caustic is New York's Bellvue, where Lowry had been as a patient.\(^1\) The sea voyage of "Through the Panama", is one that Lowry took with his wife shortly after the publication of Under the Volcano. The 'Eridanus' of "The Forest Path to the Spring", is Lowry's Dollarton home on the north shore of Burrard Inlet. The Mexico of Under the Volcano and the two unpublished novels, La Mordida and Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid, is the Mexico that Lowry knew; Lowry is writing about himself, but this does not erase the validity of what he derives from seeking, in his work, some clue to his own identity. Lowry regarded the artist as mirror for man and, therefore, while the specific reference of The Voyage That Never Ends is Lowry himself, the general reference is to all men:

The real protagonist of the Voyage is not so much a man

or a writer as the unconscious - or man's unconscious - ...²

The unconscious of the writer or creator that is in the Lowry protagonist, is mirror for the unconscious of man in the twentieth century; surrounded as he is by chaos and the forces of alienation and despair.

The three novellas examined in this paper are evidence of the progressive nature of the quest as Lowry conceived it. They proceed from a point of almost complete negation in Lunar Caustic; through the rather hazy possibilities of "Through the Panama"; to the final redemptive note in "The Forest Path to the Spring". Man can, and does, achieve self-knowledge in its fullest sense despite the powerful forces that disturb the quest for that knowledge. Through the opening of the wound of the past, and the cauterizing of that wound; comes acceptance of self. The past must be known and established in its proper perspective in terms of the present. It must be made to serve the present and not act as an impediment to the growth of the self that is accepted by Lowry, in the title of his projected cycle - The Voyage That Never Ends - as something necessary to life. The self must move, and its movement is accomplished through the removal of the masks of identity that exist in the past.

² Lowry, Letter to Albert Erskine, (Dollarton Spring 1953), Letters, pp. 331-332.
The nature of the quest for self demands that it be, at least initially, a destructive thing. Each aspect of the past must be destroyed before a new self can exist to be in turn destroyed by another new self. The artistic construct that embodies this process of creative destruction, establishes a final, overall statement of creation; although the building of this construct may destroy its creator. Constant, intense self-appraisal can only lead eventually to self-destruction. Lowry, in his inability to remove himself from his work, finally and effectively, destroyed himself.

The implications of Lowry's life and his work are that to be destroyed is not to be defeated, and that to destroy oneself, if one is an artist, is to achieve victory. It was necessary that Lowry live as he did to write as he did; it seems equally necessary that the conditions of his life should have made it impossible for him to complete the literary re-creation of his suffering. The Voyage That Never Ends can never end, at least not by a direct act of will on the part of the voyager. To fulfill its own terms, the voyage must be cut off in mid-stream, ending as it began in an undetermined place at an undetermined time.

Lowry sought in his work to order and control his own existence within the world which gave that existence a framework in which to be, and in terms of the past which determines the present. He failed, if it is a failure, because of the total impossibility of being able to do this successfully, using himself as entire focal point. Such
Such self-knowledge is presumably given only to those who are, 'close to God', and Lowry was not one of the chosen in that respect. The 'Holy Fire' burnt him to death and left The Voyage That Never Ends as a passionate and confused testament to the absurdity and the necessity of salvation through self-acceptance.

He is, finally, a very good writer, and could perhaps have been a great one had his vision not taken the direction which it did, limiting him to only one complete, mature, novel. It is, however, in his vision that Lowry is unique and where his possible greatness lies; the fact that the vision destroys, does not disturb its efficacy.
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