

# Malcolm Lowry Newsletter

Department of English, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario,  
Canada N2L 3C5  
January 1980

Dear MLN subscriber,

Here, finally, is Newsletter #5--a month too late simply because it kept growing and growing and took so much time to assemble.

Some questions:

1. Is the Newsletter of use to you? (If it is, let me know in what way; I'll let the Wilfrid Laurier University Department of English people know--so far they're still paying for it, out of Departmental funds!)
2. Can you order copies for libraries, or get librarians to order--they pay \$5.00 for issues 1 to 10 inclusive. In the new format, and with the bibliographical supplements included, libraries are more likely to want it on their shelves.
3. If you have bibliographical information, please send it to Mrs. Anne Yandle, Head, Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Mrs. Yandle would be happy to receive, too, offprints, copies, summaries, abstracts, etc. for the Lowry Collection there.
4. If you have material (reviews, notes, queries, thoughts, announcements, etc.etc.etc.) please send them to me at the above address (ie: Wilfrid Laurier University).
5. If you know of anyone who might wish to subscribe to the Newsletter, please send their name to me.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Paul Tiessen, Editor

# Malcolm Lowry Newsletter

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Number 5

Fall 1979

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Paul Tiessen, Editor, Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, Department of English,  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario Canada N2L 3C5

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The new method of binding the Newsletter, begun in this issue, will make it more appealing to libraries. The cost to libraries of Numbers 1 to 10 is \$5.00 (Canadian). Individual subscriptions are still free of charge, thanks (again) to the English Department of Wilfrid Laurier University.

I am most grateful for Anne Yandle's coordination of bibliographical material, included in this issue of the Newsletter for the first time. Please send her all bibliographical information not included in William New's Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide, which deals with the period 1927-1976.

To the present, all formal articles submitted for publication in the Newsletter have been rejected as a matter of course. If any change in practice should occur, it will be announced in advance.

In October Wilfrid Laurier University sponsored a two-day "Mostly Jazz" festival which featured, among other presentations, Graham Collier's Lowry-inspired work. Out of that event came James Doyle's present observations on Lowry and jazz. One day (Oct. 13) during the festival Collier and I wondered why the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) had apparently never aired a program he had done for them in Vancouver the year before; two or three days later--after Collier had left town--I received a note from Anne Yandle: "I don't know if the following is of interest: . . . CBC Radio, last Saturday, October 13th, broadcast a programme entitled 'Malcolm Lowry and All That Jazz' featuring Graham Collier discussing the novelist's fascination with Jazz." Mrs. Yandle is trying to purchase a copy of the program for the UBC Lowry collection.

News of Mrs. Lowry's illness, included herein, will sadden many readers. We wish her the best.

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## Bibliography

I would appreciate information for further supplements: offprints, copies, summaries, abstracts, etc. Please send it to me at the Special Collections Division, The Library, University of British Columbia, 2075 Wesbrook Place, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1W5. Thanks to William New and Ronald Binns for providing information for this first supplement. Anne Yandle

SUPPLEMENT No. 1 to William H. New, Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide, compiled by Anne Yandle, October 1979.

The following are annotations for two items not previously seen by New.

1970 B 29

REGER, MURIEL. "Lowry's Quauhnahuac Today." Sunday Supplement Vistas (The News, Mexico City), 31 May, pp. 2-4.

Illustrated commentary on the differences between Cuernavaca in 1970 and Quauhnahuac, as portrayed in Lowry's fiction.

1973 A 4

DOYEN, VICTOR. "Fighting the albatross of self: a genetic study of the Literary Work of Malcolm Lowry." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Louvain. 341 pp.

Attempts to provide a chronological basis for a larger literary study in which the most important individual works are analysed in detail. Traces the gradual evolution of Lowry's work through his fiction, relating the stories to his life in the order in which they originated and developed. Includes, in the appendices, a detailed chronology and a list of persons and characters as they relate to Lowry.

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1963

1 LYTLE, ANDREW. "Impressionism and the Ego." Daedalus, 92 pp. 281-96.

Earlier version of 1966 B 19.

1973

- 1 STANDER, ANTON VIVIAN. "Basic Themes in the Prose of Malcolm Lowry: with special reference to his Drunken Divine Comedy." M.A. thesis, University of South Africa. 142 pp.

General introduction to Lowry and his work.

1975

- 1 ICONOCRIT. "Malcolm Lowry's Mysterious End." Iconomatrix, 1, no. 1 (September), pp. 5-10.

Traces the incidents leading up to Lowry's death.

1976

- 1 BINNS, RONALD. "Self-Consciousness and Form in the Fiction of Malcolm Lowry." Ph.D. dissertation, University of East Anglia. 375 pp.

Analyses Lowry's narrative forms, and examines his different uses of parody and allusion, particularly in relation to his portrayal of versions of a romantic persona. Argues that the demonstrable variety of Lowry's narrative modes challenges interpretations of his work as being naively romantic in expression.

1977

- 1 BINNS, RONALD. "The Lowry Fringe." Canadian Literature, 72 (Spring), pp. 91-92.

Review of Psalms and Songs. Welcomes the publication of June 30th, 1934! and Enter One in Sumptuous Armour but criticises the inclusion of previously published stories and memoirs at the expense of other unpublished but equally important items. Corrects a number of factual errors.

- 2 EDMONDS, DALE. "Mescallusions or the Drinking Man's Under the Volcano." Journal of Modern Literature, 6, No. 2 (April), pp. 277-88.

Published version of 1975 B 13.

- 3 GRACE, SHERRILL. "The Creative Process: an Introduction to Time and Space in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction." Studies in Canadian Literature, 2, No. 1, pp. 61-68.

A formal discussion of Lowry's attitudes as reflected in the technical and narrative strategy of his work.

- 4 GRACE, SHERRILL. "Margerie Bonner's Three Forgotten Novels."

Journal of Modern Literature, 6, No. 2 (April), pp. 321-324.

Describes the novels of Lowry's wife, and comments on Malcolm's influence on Margerie's work and Margerie's influence on Malcolm's work.

- 5 MAKOWIECKI, STEFAN. Malcolm Lowry and the Lyrical Convention of Fiction. Poznan, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 84 pp.

Argues that Lowry's two-dimensional "vague" character drawing is successful and that his subjective attitude effectively supports the artistic designs of his novels.

- 6 PAGNOULLE, CHRISTINE. Malcolm Lowry: Voyage au Fond de Nos Abîmes. Lausanne, Editions l'Age d'Homme, 174 pp.

An analysis of Hear Us O Lord and Under the Volcano, by examining these works, chapter by chapter, and stressing the mirror image between Lowry's life and his fiction.

- 7 PAGNOULLE, CHRISTINE. "To Hell and Back: Violence in Lowry's Under the Volcano." Commonwealth Newsletter, No. 11 (May), pp. 21-28.

Attempts to explore some of the ways in which Under the Volcano expresses the violence that so deeply marks the present predicament of mankind.

- 8 RASPORICH, BEVERLY. "The Right Side of Despair: Lowry's Comic Spirit in Lunar Caustic and Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid." Mosaic, 10, no. 4 (Summer), pp. 55-67.

Describes Lowry's dual role of jester-tragedian, offering the reader the most balanced view of experience he can muster--comic intelligence as an alternative to tears.

- 9 ROBINSON, BRIAN. "A Note on Landscape in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano." Sift, No. 4, pp. 7-11.

Contrasts the physical presence of volcanoes with the spiritual desolation of the novel.

#### 1978

- 1 BERGONZI, BERNARD. "Hell and Heaven." The Times Higher Education Supplement, 17 November, p. 18.

Review of The Art of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Smith. Finds some of the essays good but the general standard uneven. Asserts that Lowry is still only likely to be remembered as a one-book writer.

- 2 DAHLIE, HALLVARD. "The New Land and Malcolm Lowry," in The New Land: Studies in a Literary Theme, eds. Richard Chadbourne and Hallvard Dahlie. Published for the Calgary Institute for the Humanities by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978, pp. 79-92.

- 3 DURRANT, GEOFFREY. "Heavenly Correspondences in the Late Work of Malcolm Lowry." Mosaic, 11, no. 3 (Spring), pp. 63-77.

- 4 DECK, LAURA M. "An interview with Mrs. Malcolm Lowry." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 3 (Fall), pp. 11-18.

Excerpt from 1974 A 2.

- 5 HAGEN, W. M. "Under the Volcano: the Fort Bliss edition." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 3 (Fall), pp. 6-9.

Describes an interesting copy of the first edition with advertisements tipped in for drinking readers.

- 6 LENT, JOHN. "Wyndham Lewis and Malcolm Lowry: Contexts of Style and Subject Matter in the Modern Novel," in Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honour of Sheila Watson, eds. Diane Bessai and David Jackel. Saskatoon, Western Producer Prairie Books, pp. 61-75.

Using the criticism and fiction of Wyndham Lewis as a reference, discusses certain aspects of Lowry's style and subject material in order to demonstrate how these are rooted in the development of the modern novel in the thirties, rather than exceptions to it.

- 7 MARKSON, DAVID. Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning. New York, Times Books, 241 pp.

Expansion of his thesis (1952 A 2) into a wholly self-contained critical narrative. Chapter numbers correspond with Lowry's.

- 8 POTTINGER, ANDREW. "The Revising of Under the Volcano: a Study in Literary Creativity." Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, vii + 284 pp.

Traces the development of Under the Volcano through the succession of versions and their accompanying marginal notes, which seem to record, not only a creative aesthetic development, but also a creative re-vision of his own personality--a movement away from his own neuroses that he achieved by means of his literary engagement. In the final analysis the record of Lowry's revisions is shown as an extremely detailed example of precisely how literary creativity can be understood as therapy.

- 9 SMITH, ANNE, ed. The Art of Malcolm Lowry. London, Vision Press, 173 pp.

Eight essays on the relevance of Lowry's work to our own disjointed times. Includes a memoir by Lowry's brother, Russell.

1. "Under the Volcano--the way it was: a thirty-year perspective," by Richard Hauer Costa.

2. "Tragedy as a meditation on itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano," by Stephen Tifft.

3. "Aspects of Language in Under the Volcano," by Brian O'Kill.

4. "Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision," by Sherrill E. Grace.

5. "The own place of the mind: an essay in Lowrian Topography," by George Woodcock.

6. "The Forest Path to the Spring: an Exercise in Contemplation," by Perle Epstein.

7. "Intention and Design in October Ferry to Gabriola," by M. C. Bradbrook.

8. "Strange Poems of God's Mercy: the Lowry Short Stories," by T. E. Bareham.

- 10 VEITCH, DOUGLAS W. Lawrence, Greene and Lowry: The Fictional Landscape of Mexico, Preface by G. Woodcock. Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, xiv + 193 pp.

Published version of his thesis (1974 A 81).

- 11 WALKER, RONALD G. Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 391 pp.

Published version of the author's thesis (1974 B 82).

- 12 WOOD, B. "Malcolm Lowry's Metafiction: the Biography of a Genre." Contemporary Literature, 19, no. 1, pp. 1-23.

1979

- 1 BINNS, RONALD. "Beckett, Lowry and the Anti-Novel," in The Contemporary English Novel, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer. London, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 18, Edward Arnold, pp. 88-111.

Contrasts the post-1945 fiction of Lowry and Samuel Beckett in the context of structuralist arguments that the modern novel must, by stylistic and historical necessity, be the anti-novel. In the stories collected in Hear Us O Lord, Lowry's best work after Volcano, romantic poses are struck, parodied and then renewed. Strange Comfort comically exploits the process of literary self-mythologising; Through the Panama resists attempts to organise the fragmentary experience it self-consciously conveys. Ghostkeeper, Lowry's last story, possesses an aesthetic coherence in its decomposition of naturalistic technique. The best work of Beckett and Lowry displays the comic virtues of the anti-novel, but in the zigzags of their post-War careers we also see some of the limitations of the mode.

- 2 BINNS, RONALD. "Binns on Miller." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 4 (Spring), pp. 6-10.

Review of Miller's Malcolm Lowry and the Voyage that Never Ends (1976 A 4). Asserts that the book fails to deliver a rigorous and informed discussion.

- 3 BRADBURY, MALCOLM. "Diarist or writer?" The Guardian, 30 August 1979.

Review of Ultramarine, Dark as the Grave and October Ferry. Lowry has become a monument of contemporary British, Canadian and Pan-American fiction. Now that the cult of realism, which dominated the period of Lowry's later career, has faded we can align him with a complex, experimental post-War British tradition. Ultramarine is a very Thirties book; Dark as the Grave involves a partial dismantling of Volcano, reliving the creative experience but substituting fact for fictionalisation. October Ferry, which has a weak editor's note, seeks objectivity, despite a fascination with expressionist montage. Scholars have argued about the editorial process used but these texts are nevertheless essential to the record of an extraordinary writer. Douglas Day's assertion that Lowry was a diarist first, a novelist only by accident, is and is not true.



- 4 COSTA, RICHARD HAUER. "Under the Volcano--a 'New' Charting of the Way It Was." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 4 (Spring), pp. 2-3.

Review of New's reference work.

- 5 DECK, LAURA M. "An Interview with Mrs. Malcolm Lowry." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 4 (Spring), pp. 22-26.

Excerpt from 1974 A 2.

- 6 NEW, WILLIAM. "Russell Haley's Lowry." Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No. 4 (Spring), pp. 20-22.

Comments on the allusions to Lowry in Haley's short story, Barbados--A Love Story.

- 7 REABURN, RONALD. "Eviction from Paradise." Westworld, 5, no. 5 (September-October), pp. 49-64.

Short biographical sketch, with particular reference to Dollarton.

#### Lowry's Mexico

Ronald G. Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel. University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London. \$14.95. 391 pp. 1978.

Douglas W. Veitch, Lawrence, Greene and Lowry: The Fictional Landscape of Mexico. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Canada. \$9 cloth, \$5 paper. 193 pp. 1978.

The Plumed Serpent (1926) was the first important modern novel to emerge from an English expatriate writer's experience of Mexico; Under the Volcano, of course, was the last--and perhaps its dazzling epic qualities have made all other efforts to fictionalise Mexico seem pale by comparison. Mexico has attracted some remarkably diverse literary figures this century: one could hardly hope for a collection of writers with less in common than B. Traven, Antonin Artaud, Evelyn Waugh, Malcolm Lowry or Aldous Huxley. The literary results have been curious, sometimes fruitful, and Lowry scholarship has long neglected any detailed exploration of Lowry's place in the context of modern fiction about Mexico. Now, two studies of this topic have appeared simultaneously.

There is a considerable overlap in the materials studied in these two books, and the critical strategies are broadly similar. Both critics provide an introductory chapter about Mexico, its terrain, its politics, the writers it attracted, and both then launch off into detailed chapter-length studies of Lawrence's novel, Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory (1940) and Under the Volcano. Ronald G. Walker's book is longer and more comprehensive than Douglas W. Veitch's: Walker also includes a chapter on Aldous Huxley's Eyeless in Gaza (1936), a part of which is set in Mexico, and he devotes extra chapters to each of these four novelists' other (mostly non-fictional) writings about Mexico. Walker also includes, as an appendix, an account of The Fields of Paradise (1940), an optimistic account of the agrarian revolution by the now-forgotten writer, Ralph Bates, whom Walker rates highly. Veitch's book is distinguished by a Preface by George Woodcock. For the purpose of this review I want to by-pass Walker's and Veitch's contributions to scholarship on these other novelists, and concentrate instead on their work on Lowry.

Walker emphasises that Lowry was the one major figure to venture into Mexico with few, if any, preconceptions about the country, and that his personal contact with Mexico was much more extensive than that of Lawrence, Greene or Huxley. Furthermore, Lowry, alone of all these writers, formed a significant friendship with a native Mexican. Critics, however, have been sharply divided over Lowry's success in rendering the Mexican locale, Walker observes, and he addresses the problem that "The consideration of setting in imaginative writing involves an inescapable paradox:" is Lowry's landscape mimetic, or purely symbolic? In the last analysis it is composed of both elements, but Walker comes down hard on those critics such as W. H. Gass and Douglas Day who play down the real Mexico, the Mexico of history: "it is a serious misjudgement to dismiss the choice of the Mexican setting as a mere accident of geography. For one thing, the visionary in Lowry found in the landscape and culture of Mexico a willing accomplice for his imaginative designs--something which he did not find in Canada, his other major fictional setting." This may cause devotees of Hear Us O Lord and October Ferry to Gabriola to gnash their teeth, but the overall thrust of Walker's argument is, I think, true. Though the real Mexico triggered Lowry's creative abilities as "a land that lends itself with relative ease to the symbol-making eye of the imaginative observer" it was, Walker argues, the infernal aspects of its landscape rather than the paradisaical that gripped Lowry's imagination. Walker emphasizes that the contrary pulls of a lost paradise and an "infernal reality" are central to the novel, and he examines the significance of the Day of the Dead fiesta, and of the volcanoes, gardens, forest and barranca. As well as examining Lowry's use of landscape Walker looks at the historical dimensions of the novel. The myth of Mexico's past put forward by the Revolution, he argues, inspired Lowry to scrutinize Mexican history in search of events, figures and patterns which would give density to the human conflicts of Under the Volcano. Walker explicates many of these historical allusions, showing accounts of Maximilian and Carlotta, Cortés and Moctezuma, Cortés and Malinche, and of the role of the Tlaxcalans as the traitors of Mexican history particularly interesting.

Walker also looks at Mexico as it was in the late nineteen-thirties, and disputes Douglas Day's claim that Lowry was ignorant of the contemporary political turmoil. He demonstrates convincingly that Lowry did not share the distrust of the Revolution which Lawrence, Greene and Evely Waugh exhibited. All in all, Walker's study of Under the Volcano makes a fresh and useful contribution to Lowry scholarship; he is not afraid to dispute the assumptions of other critics, and he has hard and accurate information of his own to put forward.

Walker complements his analysis of Under the Volcano with a chapter on Lowry's travels in Mexico, arguing that Lowry's brief but traumatic stay in Oaxaca "contributed enormously to the general tone which would eventually dominate Under the Volcano." Here again Walker is persuasive, but it must be said that his book would have benefitted from an examination of the Lowry manuscripts. The MSS. of Dark as the Grave and La Mordida contain rather more about Lowry's earlier experiences in Mexico than Day allows, and these sources should certainly be consulted by anyone seriously concerned with Lowry's biography. I am also slightly unhappy with Walker's attitude to Dark as the Grave as being "perhaps best approached as a travel book." This makes the novel slot just a little too neatly into the overall pattern of his book, and underestimates its value as fiction. Walker's assertion that Lowry was "unable before his death to complete the elaborate incremental process which would have rendered it a satisfying work of fiction" smacks too much of Day's interpretation in his Preface of the chopped-up published version. Though Day is a very readable critic many of his assumptions about the direction of Lowry's later career seem to me mistaken, and it is perhaps unfortunate that his view of what Lowry was trying to do in Dark as the Grave should continue to be so influential.

Walker's account of Lowry's changing attitudes to Mexico is, however, excellent. The end of Dark as the Grave, he argues, "amounts to the fullest expression of Lowry's beliefs in not merely the historical necessity but also the practical efficacy of the Mexican Revolution with regard to its important agrarian reforms." But of course this optimism was grafted rather uneasily and unconvincingly on to the end of the novel, and Walker discerns a further flaw in the narrative: Sigbjørn's rebirth, he argues, is not a genuine resolution of inner conflicts, but merely inferred from the way in which Oaxaca has been transformed since 1938. From this last flash of enthusiasm for the ideals of Juan Fernando, Lowry's opinion of Mexico subsequently declined to the level of Wilderness's peevish comments in "Through the Panama" which, as Walker laconically observes, are the words "of a weary ill-tempered tourist, not the cry of a soul in hell." Though Walker leans heavily on Day's biography for his account of Lowry in Mexico he does put these episodes in Lowry's life into fresh perspective, and again his book can be recommended.

Matthew Corrigan, in a well-known article, saw the edited version of Dark as the Grave as depressingly symptomatic of the 'New illiteracy,' and more recently, in a savage critique of Deidre Bair's recent Beckett biography, Martin Esslin described her book as "a horrifying symptom of the decline of standards in our literary culture" (Encounter, March 1979). Anyone inclined towards pessimism in these matters can find further cause for gloom in Douglas W. Veitch's Lawrence, Greene and Lowry. I began by checking Veitch's quotations from Under the Volcano, then from the short-story, and then I randomly checked those from The Power and the Glory. As a result I have little doubt that the entire book is worm-eaten with quotation errors to a quite astonishing degree; certainly the Lowry chapter is a shambles. All the accents have been omitted from the Spanish words and the placenames. Commas have been frequently missed out, as have exclamation marks and question marks. Semi-colons have been replaced by colons. Words have been wrongly italicised; words which should have been italicised haven't been. Singulars and plurals have been muddled. Passages which should have been separated into paragraphs have been conflated, without indication. Hyphenated words have been conflated. Some passages have been incorrectly broken up into paragraphs. Letters in upper-case have been transformed into lower-case. Apostrophes have vanished. Commas have appeared from nowhere. Words and sentences have been omitted from quotations without indication. It is impossible to distinguish between the ellipses of Lowry's text and Veitch's own extensive use of ellipses to indicate an hiatus. Veitch takes his quotations from the Signet edition of Under the Volcano, which is itself not reliable, but the errors, on inspection, still turn out to be virtually all Veitch's. Here are some samples of the way in which Veitch garbles Lowry's text, set against the first edition of the novel.

VeitchUnder the Volcano

walking over the meadows of  
Saint Pres

walking over the meadows from  
Saint Près (12)

and smell like a brewery their  
only majesty that of tragedy.

and smell like a brewery, their only  
majesty at last that of tragedy. (14)

expectant with one eye open

expectant with one eye half open (44)

sudden peal of bells in a gale

sudden peal of stifled bells in a gale (48)

He saw the dawn again, watched  
the lovely anguish from that  
open door

He saw the dawn again, watched with  
lonely anguish from that open door (200)

Golfe - gouffre - gulf.

Golf = gouffre = gulf. (202)

with its sombre tapestries

with sombre tapestries (288)

the brief self-deceived space of a cigarette	the poor brief self-deceived space of a cigarette (290)
the motives for interferences; really a passion for fatality	the motives for interference; merely a passion for fatality (311)
feeling noble and useful!	feeling thus noble or useful! (311)
A titanic war of thunder	A titanic roar of thunder (324)
circling, like rings of water	circlings like rings on water (336)

And many others. The amount of misquotation is serious because Veitch makes such extensive use of lengthy quotations from the fiction he comments on. What is most reprehensible is misquotation which actually transforms the meaning of a passage:

The sky was blue again overhead as they went down into Tomalin; dark clouds still gathered behind Popocatapetl, their purple masses shot through with the bright late sunlight that fell too on another little silver lake glittering cool, fresh, and inviting before them, Yvonne had neither seen on the way, nor remembered. . . . Unfortunately it turned out to be sunlight blazing on myriads of broken bottles . . . a broken greenhouse roof belonging to El Jardín Xixotancatl: only weeds lived in the greenhouse.

The ellipses and syntax are Veitch's: the reader would be well advised to compare this quotation with Lowry's original text (Under the Volcano, p. 279) to see how Lowry's text is twisted.

The problem is not, I think, simply one of careless proof-reading but merely symptomatic of a general sloppiness on the author's part. There is a blatant error in the first sentence of Veitch's Lowry chapter: "Between 1935 and 1940," we are told, Malcolm Lowry "lived and wrote in Mexico." A few pages later the correct dates are given, but without any acknowledgement of the earlier mistake. Veitch goes on to tell us that the published short-story "Under the Volcano" was the germ of the novel (which it wasn't); he tells us that Lowry's political affiliations in 1936-38 were confused and uncertain (which they weren't--indeed, as Walker points out, Lowry's opinions were radically left-wing and much in sympathy with the Revolution). Veitch also tediously regurgitates the obsolete notion that the influence of the Cabbala is "pervasive" in Lowry's work, though his evidence for this consists merely of some much-quoted lines from Lowry's letter to Jonathan Cape. Richard Hauer Costa surely knocked the Cabbala theory over the head when he observed that Lowry knew little or nothing of the Cabbala when he composed the essential drafts of Under the Volcano in Mexico. Besides, a critic who persists in believing that the Cabbala was influential in Lowry's work ought surely to consider Lowry's very much more sceptical response to the Cabbala expressed in the letter to David Markson of

June 20th, 1951 (first published in Canadian Literature 44, Spring 1970, and reprinted in George Woodcock's anthology Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work).

Other sorts of error may be found in Veitch's footnotes and bibliography. Of those which I have been able to check against the texts Veitch cites I noted the following: Footnote One (in the Lowry chapter) refers the reader to p. 41 of the Selected Letters; the quotation actually comes from p. 67. Footnote Seven cites a quotation "in a letter to a friend written in 1954;" the page reference to Selected Letters is wildly inaccurate. Footnote Fourteen contains a glaring printer's error. Footnote Thirty-Two inaccurately quotes Stephen Spender. In the bibliography Matthew Corrigan's article "Malcolm Lowry, New York Publishing and the 'New Illiteracy'" is erroneously cited as Encounter (July 1968), p. 83; it should be Encounter, 35, No. 1 (July 1970), pp. 82-93. Clifford Leech's article on Lowry and Conrad occurs in a book published in 1968, not 1967; David Markson's Prairie Schooner piece on "Myth in Under the Volcano" occurs not on pp. 339-340 but 339-346. And, although I don't have the originals to hand, the page numbers Veitch cites for articles by Costa, Durrant, New, Tiessen and Widmer differ from those cited in W. H. New's Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide (Boston, 1978). Mistakes in a bibliography are perhaps most reprehensible of all, since for anyone who has to rely on inter-library loan services to obtain material mistakes of this kind may waste weeks of time. Finally there is the problem of the usefulness of Veitch's bibliography: in his Preface to this book George Woodcock salutes the author for having read "all the relevant literature" to do with such an important topic as the Mexican novels of Lawrence, Greene and Lowry. I am not sure when Woodcock wrote his Preface, but his remark doesn't connect with the fact that Veitch lists no Lowry criticism later than 1970, and thus although articles by Richard Costa, Perle Epstein, Anthony Kilgallin and W. H. New are listed there is no reference whatever to the books that each of these critics has published on Lowry. Douglas Day's biography is also unmentioned. This is an extraordinary state of affairs for a book published in 1978. On a purely technical level Veitch's book is, therefore, shoddy, unreliable, and eight years out of date.

As literary criticism Veitch's work much resembles the mighty researches conducted around the inscription of Mr. Pickwick's antiquarian stone. His argument that the basis of Lowry's landscape technique can be found in the short-story's "mixture of gentle and foreboding elements and the close tailoring of perception to character" is so vague as to be applicable to almost any piece of prose fiction. Besides, the assertion that in "Under the Volcano" "the time is 1936, a less dire period than the 1938-9 of the novel" is wrong. Had Veitch done his homework he would have learned that this much-anthologised piece is NOT the original germ of the novel, but merely a post-1940 draft of Chapter Eight, almost certainly the item which

Lowry extracted from his work in progress "as a short story" in March 1941 (Selected Letters, p. 39). This fact has been pointed out on three separate occasions.\* (\*Walker makes the same mistake, but luckily for him he doesn't structure his argument around a false comparison of the story and the novel. See Victor Doyen, "La genèse d'Au dessous du Vulcan," Les Lettres Nouvelles, numéro spécial (mai-juin 1974), pp. 87-122; Brian O'Kill, "Malcolm Lowry," Times Literary Supplement, 26 April 1974, p. 477; Ronald Binns, "The Lowry Fringe," Canadian Literature, No. 72 (Spring 1977), pp. 91-92.)

When we arrive at Veitch's analysis of Under the Volcano, which takes the form of a cumbersome parade of lengthy quotations from the text, his book all too patently reveals its origins in a Ph.D. thesis. His self-assurance is off-putting: "The story of Under the Volcano is simple enough" he breezily remarks--and perhaps it is if, like Veitch, you skip past all the tricky parts, such as the enigmatic Lee Maitland passage at the start of Chapter Ten. The writer argues that "Yvonne and Geoffrey in the novel are the gauges of the Mexican landscape which unfolds dialectically between them" but his emphasis frequently seems highly debatable. For example, the distinction between the "immense scan" of Yvonne in Chapter Eleven and the "selective focus" of the Consul in Chapter Twelve seems meaningless when actually measured against the details of the text. One can easily reverse the distinctions: Yvonne is cognisant of a private and symbolic meaning in the way the signs on the tree stretch out, and this is surely a "selective focus." Likewise, though enclosed within the labyrinth of the Farolito, the Consul's perceptions nevertheless possess an "immense scan" as he glimpses the depths of the ravine, the towering slopes of Popocatepetl, and reviews the ruin of his past life. Yvonne's role in the novel seems over-emphasized in comparison to Hugh's: both, after all, are given three chapters in which to express a point of view. It's perhaps significant that Veitch appropriates Lowry's comment on Hugh ("He is Everyman tightened up a screw"--Selected Letters, p. 75) and applies it, without acknowledgement, to the Consul: "he is Everyman at middle age . . . tightened a few revealing notches."\* (\*In borrowing Lowry's remark Veitch muddles up the metaphor since a notch cannot of course be tightened.)

A major disappointment of The Fictional Landscape of Mexico is that it fails to put forward any relevant knowledge of Mexico beyond that which is already contained in earlier work by other Lowry scholars. Veitch frequently seems unsure about what he really means by landscape: in his introductory chapter he talks of "an investigation which has to consider geography as much as history and social organization." By the time we get to the Lowry chapter this emphasis on geography, however, has largely faded away, except where Veitch deploys his own experience of trips to Mexico to bring us the news that Lowry's landscape in Chapter Four of the novel "is quite literal and factual through (sic) grass houses owe more to Oaxaca than Cuernavaca." Veitch does not disturb the reader with such trifles as

the difficulty that when he talks about Parian (a real place in Mexico) he actually means Parían (Lowry's fictional state) not Parian (the real place). See? By the time Veitch has started to talk of "the social, historical and political confusions" of Mexico one realizes, alas, that the confusions of Mexican history are nothing compared to those which flow which such fertility from the pen of this particular critic.

One could go on quarrelling with this book forever, and I can recommend it to all writers of Ph.D. theses who need to get their teeth into something. I will end by drawing attention to Veitch's treatment of the garden sign--surely an important element in Lowry's fictional landscape. As I remarked earlier, Veitch has taken all his quotations from the unsatisfactory Signet edition. The most notorious mistake of this edition is that it misses out the garden sign at the very end of the novel. Veitch is clearly unaware that the Signet text is corrupt in this respect. The sign builds up in significance each time it reappears in the text so that, as David Markson remarks, it finally resembles "the departing commentary 'y a chorus in Greek tragedy." Veitch, unaware of the sign's importance, gives it scant treatment: at first he briefly mentions it as just "a sign" (when the Consul first sees it in Chapter Five). Secondly, he notes its reappearance in Chapter Seven, commenting of the Consul that "He notices the garden theme on a sign that again predicts his fate. . . ." This in itself is slightly misleading, since the Consul is not a literary critic, and perceives the sign as a laconic private warning rather than as a theme. What "the garden theme" is Veitch fails to explain. Primarily the sign draws attention to the Consul both as Adam--a fairly obvious analogy--and as Faust, the black magician, the destroyer, due to be expelled from the earth into hell. By the time the sign reappears in Chapter Eight, so soon after that ominous opening word "Downhill," it has gained more weight, but on this occasion, as also on the occasion of its final reappearance on the very last page, Veitch ignores its existence. By not giving the sign the attention it deserves, and through his use of a corrupt text which misses out the sign at the end, Veitch manages to arrive at the absurd conclusion that where Under the Volcano is concerned "the landscape of this world cannot have the last word." Ironically, by putting the sign on a page of its own at the very end of the novel, Lowry did just that. A critic who is, in effect, unaware of what the last three sentences of the novel are, surely forfeits any claim to credibility.

By now the reader will have gathered which of these two books on Lowry and Mexico is worth reading and which one should be weighted with empty Tequila bottles and string and cast promptly into the deepest and darkest quarter of the barranca.

August 1979

Ronald Binns  
England



### Lowry and Jazz: Some Observations

In his Notes on a Screenplay for F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night, Lowry expressed his ambition to communicate with "the vast and choosy audience of true jazz lovers, . . . always neglected, and of whom I am one." The screenplay, with its subtle and frequently cryptic directions calling for an intricate blend of visual and musical images, was never produced, and Lowry perhaps thus lost his greatest chance of conveying to the world--or at least to some "vast and choosy audience"--something of his feeling for jazz. Lowry scholars have from time to time commented on the novelist's interest in jazz, but a definitive analysis of his literary use of this music has remained elusive--perhaps partly because of the difficulties involved in relating two very different art forms to each other, and partly because few literary scholars happen to be jazz fans. Perle Epstein's 1970 article in Canadian Literature, "Swinging the Maelstrom," so far remains the most comprehensive exploration of the subject, but the article is limited by the author's apparent lack of detailed familiarity with jazz. A modern British musician, Graham Collier, regularly lectures on Lowry and jazz, and performs his own compositions inspired by the novelist's work, but Collier seems more interested in demonstrating Lowry's prophetic affinities with the jazz of the '70's than in examining Lowry's literary use of the jazz of his own time. So the many questions raised by Lowry's fondness for jazz--particularly the aesthetic problems raised by his attempt to create some sort of interaction between musical and literary forms--remain largely unanswered. I do not propose, in this brief note, to offer a comprehensive analysis of Lowry's use of jazz; but as a jazz enthusiast I might be able to offer some useful information about Lowry's understanding and appreciation of jazz, and suggest some areas in which further research could be profitably pursued.

Lowry's taste in jazz, as is well known, was centred primarily on a few musicians who flourished in the 1920's, most notably the violinist Joe Venuti and guitarist Eddie Lang, saxophonist Frankie Trumbauer, cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, the Belgian guitarist Django Reinhardt and his French violinist cohort, Stephane Grappelly. This list of Lowry's favourite musicians at first strikes a jazz fan as extremely limited, especially because all the musicians are white. This racial bias is very easily explained, however, by the fact that until the mid-thirties strict segregation existed among American musicians, and the major record companies were closed to blacks. The small "black" labels of Harlem, Chicago, and Kansas City had no access to export outlets, which explains why the first jazz records to reach England featured all-white bands. In spite of this practical limitation to his experience of jazz, however, Lowry seems to have gravitated with unerring sensitivity to the records of those few white performers who achieved something of the energy and spontaneity of the great black musicians of the 1920's. This is all the more remarkable in view of the concerted efforts of British and white American orchestras and would-be "jazz composers" to pass off

as jazz an adulterated and commercialized brand of dance music emphasizing mechanical rhythms and stultifying repetition of phrase and melodic line. Even the best white musicians were caught up in the production of this artificial, packaged jazz: most of Lowry's favourite soloists--Venuti, Lang, Beiderbecke, Trumbauer--at one time or another made their living as sidemen in one of the pseudo-jazz big bands, especially that of Paul Whiteman. At the same time, however, these few genuinely creative artists managed to sustain smaller, more improvisational groups, whose recordings were to be included among Lowry's treasured musical experiences.

The connection between the "white jazz" of the '20's and Lowry's writing can be tentatively expressed in analogical terms: some of the free-wheeling, almost chaotic prose of Under the Volcano, for instance, is roughly comparable to the exuberant outbursts of musicians like Beiderbecke and Venuti. Similarly, there are vague biographical similarities between Lowry--or more important, the fictional jazz fan/musician alter egos of his novels--and actual musicians such as the ill-fated Beiderbecke, whose alcoholism and generally frenetic life style contributed to his early death. Both these lines of research, however, may not lead very far. It may be that the analogy between Lowry's style and the jazz concept of improvisation is only a rough similarity, and that further technical analysis may yield no specific insights into the quality of his language. With respect to the question of Lowry's use of biographical material, it is doubtful that Lowry ever had any more information about the lives of his favourite musicians than was generally available from obvious public sources.

One of the most striking features of Lowry's interest in jazz, however, even taking into account the practical limitations imposed on his early exposure to the music, is its extreme selectivity. Not only does Lowry emphasize in his writing a very few musicians, he limits his attention further to a relatively few jazz performances. Joe Venuti's recording of "Going Places," Bix Beiderbecke's "In a Mist" and "Swinging the Blues," Frankie Trumbauer's "For No Reason at All," and a few other titles would seem to constitute the whole discography of Lowry favourites. Further, his references often focus on particular passages in recordings: individual solos, and even four-bar breaks, such as Beiderbecke's break in "Swinging the Blues," which Lowry described as expressing "a moment of pure spontaneous happiness."

This narrowness of focus (especially coupled with the fact that in later years Lowry's taste in jazz seems to have remained fixed on the favourite recordings of his youth) suggests the possibility that in spite of his youthful enthusiasm, jazz was not really congenial to Lowry's aesthetic sensibilities. The essence of jazz is spontaneity and deliberate musical roughness, which qualities the novelist occasionally professed to admire while returning again and again to the momentary musical experience, the polished, almost tonally perfect solo or passage.

Lowry's taste does not seem to have been committed to the concept of the jazz performance as an integral entity, with all its rough edges, imbalances and imperfections. Nor was he interested in a sustained and comprehensive experience of the "hot jazz" tradition, with its wide variety of technical approaches and abilities. Finally, of course, he turned away from jazz almost completely, toward "classical" music with its more rigorous notions of technical and thematic decorum.

One final aspect of jazz, however, which he seems to have found particularly congenial, was the incongruity of mood or tone which it conveyed to him. "There is a certain tragedy and seriousness in jazz," he wrote in his notes for the Tender Is the Night screenplay. ". . . Despite the overwhelming limitations of jazz as music, it nonetheless can convey a seriousness, an anguish of mood--that is almost totally absent in most winnowed and stripped modern music." Surprisingly, Lowry is referring here not to the "blues," which he dismisses rather disparagingly as "folk music," but generally to his old favourite recordings by Venuti, Beiderbecke, et al., most of which are up-tempo and medium-tempo "hot jazz" performances, reflecting an apparent exuberance and spontaneity. Yet Lowry professed to hear an "anguish" in this apparently joyous music: an "anguish" which he attempted to convey in literature (for example) in the manic-depressive conduct of the Consul. Authorities on jazz have claimed to hear a similar paradoxical quality in the music of the '20's and '30's, though it has been most frequently identified with the efforts of black Americans to find temporary release from their historical legacy of oppression. The musicians whom Lowry admired did not share this legacy, although most of them tried consciously to imitate the musical result of it, and many of them, like Beiderbecke and Lang, sustained personal burdens of confusion which undoubtedly influenced their music. Whether recordings like Beiderbecke's "Singing the Blues" or Venuti's "Going Places" do actually express wordlessly some paradox of feeling is a subtle question which eludes objective answer, unless by some particularly sensitive kind of musicology. But it is certain that Lowry heard in this music a reflection of his own paradoxically anguished and exuberant response to life, and with his characteristic urge for artistic comprehensiveness he attempted to absorb the music itself into his fictional vision. The analysis and evaluation of this attempt presents a particularly formidable challenge to the Lowry scholar.

December 1979

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On a tooloose Lowry-trek

To pour brown ale over a grave would probably seem an odd way of paying homage, and is, anyway, almost certainly an offence against consecrated ground. To go on from there to drink real-ale through the hot summer afternoon while watching a welly-boot throwing contest would seem perhaps to be an even odder way of continuing a literary pilgrimage. However, though some people might object, the subject of that pilgrimage would, I'm sure, have smiled down from whatever corner of a heavenly cantina he now resides in. He would perhaps have been embarrassed by our toast to his memory--in tequila naturally--and to our leaving, with brown ale bottle to keep it in place, his own epitaph on the grave:

Malcolm Lowry  
 Late of the Bowery  
 His prose was flowery  
 And often glowery  
 He lived, nightly, and drank, daily,  
 And died playing the ukulele.

Lowry died, in confusing circumstances, in a small house in the village of Ripe, Sussex in 1957. The coroner's verdict, death by misadventure, was supported by medical evidence of "acute barbituric poisoning associated with a state of chronic alcoholism." Few friends attended the funeral but some months later Cambridge friend Martin Case went to the simple grave--MALCOLM LOWRY 1909-1957--and appropriately poured over it a bottle of brown ale.

Lowry was the author of Under the Volcano, considered to be among the greatest novels of the Twentieth Century. The action takes place in Mexico on All Souls' Day, 1938: The Day of the Dead "When the dead are supposed to commune with the living." In Mexico this means a celebration, a fiesta, where children eat candy skulls and skeletons and where an extra place is laid for the departed one's own meal.

No extra place was apparent at the Ripe and Chalvington village fete but Lowry would, I'm sure, have liked the co-incidence of it being held on his birthday, July 28th, in the field behind the Yew Tree pub, where he spent his last evening. It would be nice to report a special Malcolm Lowry prize in handwriting or basket weaving but probably few of those present would know of Lowry, and many would mistake him, as an acquaintance of mine once did, for the man who painted matchstick men! I had fantasised also about finding a first edition of Under the Volcano, or at the least a tattered paperback, but the nearest thing to Lowry and Mexico was a sunbleached copy of Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory: the whisky priest amongst the Mills & Boon Romances.

Ripe itself had no obvious signs of its heritage. No Lowry tearooms, no olde-worlde souvenir shops with Lowry tie-pins. No blue

plaques and no maps or guides to show the faithful the grave--or the pub he'd been barred from. In fact it was in that pub, little changed one suspects since Lowry lived in the village, where we were given final instructions to find the house: "White Cottage? . . . Oh, the Lowry place. Down the lane at the side of the pub."

The current owner of the house directed us to the location of the grave. It's set outside the main churchyard of a beautiful early 13th Century church. It is still, however, in consecrated ground: a fact which seems in contradiction to the sign in the porch: "Malcolm Lowry took his own life in 1957. . . ." The notice had been edited from a blurb about the Canadian film, "Volcano: an enquiry into the life and death of Malcolm Lowry," which had recently been shown in the village. One feels Malcolm would have enjoyed that as well as its showing, dubbed into Spanish, on Mexican Television on the Day of the Dead last year (ed: 1978?).

Before our brown ale ceremony, the grave had on it a small bunch of wild flowers and a handwritten message:

Ages will pass over  
And no one will ever again  
Look at that nobleness  
Or that beauty

The visitors book, though full of addresses of visitors to the church, had few Lowry tributes: "To pay respects to Malcolm Lowry," "In admiration of Malcolm Lowry," and so on. There was, though, one apt quotation:

How like to Man is this man and his fate  
Still drunk and stumbling through the rusty trees  
To breakfast on stale rum sardines and peas.

received January 1980  
originally prepared for a general audience

Graham Collier  
London, England

Records, Books, Scores by Graham Collier

An updated price-list, in Canadian currency:

- Records: Symphony of Scorpions, \$8.00 + \$2.00 post/packaging  
The Day of the Dead (2 LP set), \$16.00 + \$2.00 post/packaging
- Books: Inside Jazz: a guide for the layman (Quartet Books), \$6.00  
Jazz: a students' and teachers' guide (Cambridge U Press) \$10.00  
Compositional Devices (Berklee Press), \$30.00
- Scores: Symphony of Scorpions & Forest Path to the Spring, \$10.00  
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These records, books, and scores can be ordered from Graham Collier,  
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Extracts from Collier's WLU talk on Lowry and Jazz

. . . Essentially I am a jazz musician. One of my hobbies is contemporary fiction and I have always derived a great deal of enjoyment from Lowry's work. That enjoyment is now turning into a passion but I have learned a lot which is relevant to my own work from Lowry. . . . I think that what Lowry got from jazz was the kind of oblique thinking one intuitively gets from a good jazz soloist. . . . Speaking more broadly, I have come to the conclusion that Lowry saw, intuitively, a parallel between his kind of writing and the best of music, be it jazz, orchestral or any other kind. . . .

. . . Throughout the Day of the Dead I have tried to learn from my understanding of Lowry's techniques ("the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and interrelated:" Margerie Lowry to Cape) and also use my own technique of controlling jazz improvisation within a compositional framework--of utilising levels and layers ranging from completely improvised passages to completely written ones, with finely controlled gradations between. . . . To work properly you must find something that has hidden depths, which are capable of being plumbed by the music. That I certainly found in Lowry, and I tried always to suggest in the music another dimension of meaning. . . .

. . . I wanted to avoid purely descriptive writing. I could see little point either in re-creating Volcano--using a straight narrative line, where literary event would be copied by musical happening. I wanted to add another layer, to utilise voice and music together to make a whole experience. By my choice of words (which I drew from all of Lowry's works) and the music I wrote to surround them, I wanted to present a portrait of Lowry the consul perhaps all of us in our struggle between good and evil. . . .

. . . Improvisation of course plays an enormous role in such music, but it is improvisation within restraints set by me as composer/director. . . .

. . . My idea in the piece, as I have already said, was to present a portrait of Lowry as Consul, as Man, as everyman torn between love and death. . . .

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## The Fiction of J. G. Farrell

Margerie Lowry's remark that Under the Volcano "is, perhaps, primarily a writer's book, and one which is likely to influence other writers" (Selected Letters, p. 442) is one which time has shown to be remarkably accurate. Any inventory of Lowry-influenced novelists ought to include J. G. Farrell, whose fiction is gradually becoming recognised as being of major significance in the field of the contemporary English novel. Farrell's first novel, A Man from Elsewhere (1963) is a competent but not particularly startling account of the relationship between a dying writer and a young Communist journalist out to discredit him; it is not as precocious as Ultramarine, but like it it gains a retrospective significance in the light of the later career. Farrell's discovery of Lowry's work occurred (one surmises) soon afterwards, since his second novel, The Lung (1965) is startlingly different and, initially at any rate, seems saturated in Lowryesque narrative strategies. Martin Sands, the hero, fortyish, unemployed, and a bit of a drunk is a clearly recognisable resurrection of the Consul. We encounter him not in Quauhnhuac but in the more mundane landscape of Oxford, England, where he appears as a clumsy embarrassed figure ruefully in attendance at the wedding of his ex-wife. His hallucinatory experiences are distinctly Consular in tone:

The church stood in a quiet square surrounded by houses. They were empty and distant. He remembered them as having been much closer to the church but now, for some reason, they had ebbed away over the asphalt and paving-stones to a respectful distance, leaving the church on its mound in the middle shrieking away into the sky with its ridiculous cement spire. It was this same spire that suddenly, dangerously threw an inky black puddle at his feet, from which he started back in horror; it had so nearly swallowed them, of such infinite blackness that it could not possibly be a mere shadow. Yet on closer inspection it was nothing more.

On occasion Sands's behaviour seems to mimic that of the Consul: engaged in a leaden conversation with his ex-wife Sands suddenly halts:

Sands wound his large frame around a bus-stop. "I'm a python," he said with a deep sigh, "or do I mean a boa-constrictor?"

which sounds much like an echo of the Consul's comment to Quincey, "She thinks I'm a tree with a bird in it." As it develops the novel moves away from Lowry's overt influence: ultimately it is a stylish light comedy and lacks the ornate structuring and metaphysical density of Under the Volcano. Nevertheless anyone who enjoys reading Lowry will probably find The Lung very agreeable, both for its philosophical wit and comic play with literary allusion.

Farrell's third novel, A Girl in the Head (1967) takes a comic look at the romantic condition through the figure of Boris Slattery, another brooding semi-Lowryesque hero, trapped into an absurd and

painful existence against the banal landscapes of Maidenhair Bay, "the cemetery of all initiative and endeavour." Technically A Girl in the Head is Farrell's most experimental work, but to my mind it doesn't quite come off: one senses (perhaps wrongly) a variety of undigested influences--Camus, Beckett, Lowry.

Only with Troubles (1970), which reverts to a calmer, more naturalistic mode, did Farrell really become a writer of real significance in post-War British writing. Troubles is the first volume of Farrell's Empire trilogy, a trilogy which examines stages in the collapse of the British Empire. Troubles dramatises the relationships of a group of Anglo-Irish people who linger on in a huge, decaying hotel while the struggle for Irish independence moves closer and closer to their own private lives. The follow-up volume, The Siege of Krishnapur (1973), which won the prestigious Booker prize in Britain, deals with a set of English expatriates cut off in a remote community at the height of the Indian mutiny. With the publication of The Singapore Grip last year Farrell completed his trilogy (though he has hinted that he may yet add other volumes at some stage in the future). The Singapore Grip once again deals with an expatriate community poised on the brink of a complete social collapse--on this occasion the capture of Singapore by the Japanese in 1942.

The side of Under the Volcano which has inspired Farrell's work on his trilogy is the side which has received least attention from academic writers--that is, the historical and realistic elements in the narrative rather than the symbolic, mythic dimensions. From one angle Under the Volcano is a remarkably political novel, an elegy to a decade of appeasement, betrayal and fractured ideals--in Stephen Spender's words the Consul's neurosis "becomes diagnosis, not just of himself but of a phase of history." It's this aspect of the novel which enables us to meaningfully relate it to Farrell's trilogy, where, similarly, small groups of expatriates lurch blindly to their doom (or their survival), half-aware of the great historical movements occurring at the edges of their private lives.

Technically, Lowry's influence is particularly pronounced in the final volume, The Singapore Grip. Farrell is adept at contrapuntal manoeuvres which serve to highlight the comedy and the absurdity of Singapore's collapse, such as snatches of song, advertisements ("Prevent a Blitzkrieg . . . by White Ants!") and complacent newspaper headlines ("DIFFICULT TO TAKE SINGAPORE, SAYS JAP"). One of the finest of such contrapuntal episodes comes at the close of the novel when one of the characters finds himself in a cinema watching Ziegfeld Girl while planes roar overhead and the city burns on all sides.

One would not want to press the Lowry influence too far: Farrell, like any important writer, has his own distinctive style, and there are striking differences as well as resemblances between his fiction and Lowry's: he is rarely autobiographical in his materials,



he has a brilliant ability to create memorable and diverse characters, he enjoys using documentary data to underpin his inventions, he is happier with neutral naturalistic modes rather than verbal play and attenuated self-parody. Farrell has little interest in Lowry's later work, which spins off into the complex spheres of metafiction. Nevertheless, if Under the Volcano had not existed, Farrell's career would, I think, have been significantly different. Certainly anyone who enjoys reading Lowry should endeavour to get hold of The Lung and The Singapore Grip.

Bibliographical note:

Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur are published in paperback by Penguin books. The Singapore Grip is published in Britain by Weidenfeld, and in the U.S.A. by Knopf.

See also: Bridget O'Toole, "Books," Fortnight (Belfast), 4 December 1970, p. 23; Timothy Mo, "Magpie Man," New Statesman, 15 September 1978, pp. 337-38; Bernard Bergonzi, The Situation of the Novel, 3rd edition, Revised (London, 1979); J. G. Farrell, "Late Lowry," New Statesman, 19 July 1974, pp. 87-88.

August 1979

Ronald Binns

Markson, Smith, New

Markson, David, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano (New York: Times Books, 1978). xiv + 241 pp.

Smith, Anne, ed., The Art of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978). 173 pp.

New, William H., Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1978). xxix + 162 pp.

In the introduction to her anthology, Anne Smith laments that Malcolm Lowry "is yet to become a respectably 'established' novelist." She is probably right. Under the Volcano has established itself, but one great novel does not a novelist make. The literary and academic establishments seem to demand other, almost-great works to set off the masterpiece before an author is admitted to the pantheon. Nonetheless, Lowry studies continue to thrive--just as they thrive for that other one-great-novel-successor-of-Joyce, Ralph Ellison.

If Under the Volcano is a somewhat solitary monument, it is, at least, commodious. Impossible to encompass or categorize from the outside, the novel has room enough for many critics. In most rooms, the critic's boon companion will be the Consul. If necessary, he

can be a model, the man in the novel best able to see "the Carthaginians fighting on his big toe-nail," for whom everything "is perfectly clear, in terms of the toe-nail." Somewhere around the corner grins an author who predicted most of the rooms (and occupants) in his long defense of the novel, included in the Selected Letters (1965).

Like Douglas Day (Malcolm Lowry, 1973) and Robert Heilman before him (in G. Woodcock's Malcolm Lowry, 1971), David Markson chooses to stress the multiplicity of Lowry's masterpiece. No single shape is "perfectly clear." Markson may consider the book a sort of epic, but he is not out to push epic structure as such. His own quest is for the variousness, the layers of that revision-deep work. The danger of such literary archaeology, however, is that one will end up with what seems a table of shards--interesting fragments displayed as fragments.

Since both the introduction and the promotional material with Malcolm Lowry's Volcano compare it to Stuart Gilbert's study of Ulysses, one assumes that Markson had the uninitiated reader very much in mind. He will explicate, chapter by chapter, so as to build awareness of the dramatic and thematic resonances of the text. The study intends to guide and sensitize this "common reader" first. But Markson also wants to analyze major passages deeply enough to interest the critics. Unfortunately, writing for two kinds of readers makes the resultant study a bit less accessible for each. The book succeeds for the common reader only if that individual can will his attention through some real thickets of seemingly disparate comment. Its local successes of explication lead to larger revelations for the critic only if he uses Markson's textual references, cross-references, and index to transcend the narrative-critical sequence.

Since Malcolm Lowry's Volcano is organized as a general guide, the difficulties it presents to the beginning reader are more telling. As in learning a language, such a reader should expect to work to move from the word-motif level to the syntactical-relational level; but he also expects some assistance through the organization and methods of his text. The uninitiated reader of Volcano needs assistance with the "immediate level," major themes and analogies, and some explanation of the perspectival approach that shapes the stylistic surface. Markson early identifies the major thematic threads, sets the scene, and introduces the characters. He organizes his explications by chapter, for convenient use with the novel. But his intensive readings heap too much on the reader's head. As one who knows the novel, I confess that I almost lost the immediate scene a number of times while Markson impressively exploded Lowry's sentences and paragraphs into multiple meanings. Malcolm Lowry's Volcano certainly offers an abundance of insights. If, however, the reader requires a sense of the relational structure on any given level early in his reading of

the novel, he might well want to turn to Dale Edmonds' immediate reading (Tulane Studies in English, XVI), some of the special readings in George Woodcock's anthology (Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, 1971), and Douglas Day's summary of major themes in his biography (Malcolm Lowry, 1973).

Anne Smith's anthology, The Art of Malcolm Lowry, opens with general perspectives on Lowry's life and most important novel. Russell Lowry plainly thinks that the biographers have not yet got to the bottom of his fabled brother's life. To prove it, he untells a couple of Malcolm's tales. If we choose not to accept his view that Lowry was simply "bloody-minded" we can at least grant that all the psychoanalysis or existential explanations of his behavior tend to ignore that portion of blame that is assignable to him. Richard Hauer Costa contributes a useful survey of the early reviews and significant later accounts of Volcano.

It is as a volume of criticism, however, that this anthology deserves respect. Both editor and contributors should be commended for keeping their attention on the whole of Lowry's art, while focusing on stylistic, thematic, and formal aspects of Volcano, "Forest Path to the Spring," and other of the short stories. Even M. C. Bradbrook's attempt to rescue Lowry's mawkish last "novel," October Ferry to Gabriola, earns general significance for supporting, through manuscript examination, some of Matthew Corrigan's and her own earlier assertions (Boundary 2, III; Malcolm Lowry, 1974) about Lowry's place in the development of fiction beyond psychological realism. Interestingly, Bradbrook's placement of Lowry as a bridge between Joycean and metafictional forms is supported and extended by Stephen Tifft, Sherrill E. Grace, George Woodcock, and Brian O'Kill in their essays. Tifft argues that Under the Volcano embodies both traditional tragedy and contemporary reflexiveness. He does not, to my mind, resolve the theoretic difficulties of bringing the two together, but neither does he slight the plot or the consciousness that enfolds it in setting up his thesis. Sherrill E. Grace explores the nature of that consciousness, relating it to Expressionism, particularly in the German films of the Twenties. Her essay is quite valuable as a corrective to the tendency to view Lowry as a natural symbolist. Both she and Woodcock stress that the typical movement of mind is from inside out and back again, achieving a dialectical interplay rather than levels of significance simultaneously constituted in single objects. With a few exceptions, things "mean" in passing, as the mind "expresses" them. One thinks of Chapter Ten, where Yvonne watches a bull being teased and, in turn, mentally teases him into various guises. Or there is the Consul, who sometimes thinks that the world does not know him; at other times, the world knows him too well. The conflict is rarely--and only momentarily--resolved.

Malcolm Lowry is more analogist than symbolist, concludes Brian O'Kill, supported by an impressive analysis of Volcano's language. That he concludes in agreement with several others in the anthology is less a matter of design, I suspect, than further evidence

that Lowry scholars now form a community, each aware of what has been and is now being done.

William H. New's reference guide to material by and about Malcolm Lowry becomes an indispensable bibliography for this community. It includes lists of manuscript material located in libraries, Lowry's major writings in English and in translation, and an annotated list of writings about Lowry from 1927 to 1976. The coverage of material seems quite complete, including entries for unpublished and foreign language critical material. Annotations are full enough to provide assistance and, in most cases, seem both accurate and just. The arrangement of entries by year of publication, however, limits its usefulness for the beginning student. Although New's own introduction and a very thorough index provide some assistance, the most efficient introduction to Lowry scholarship up to 1972 remains the selected, annotated bibliography contained in Richard Hauer Costa's Malcolm Lowry.

The three volumes under consideration here culminate a steady stream of authoritative articles and books published since Day's and Costa's important assessments in 1972-3. They seem to indicate that the major study of influences, allusions, analogues, and archetypes is complete. Scholars are now taking a more wholistic view of Lowry's art. Keeping in touch through the recently founded Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, the community of scholars now seems bound to analyze and establish Lowry's place in the tradition of Western fiction.

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Studies in the Novel

W. M. Hagen  
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#### "Day of the Dead"

Those engaged in teaching Under the Volcano might be interested in using a short (14-minute) film by Charles and Ray Eames, entitled "Day of the Dead," to set up the festival context of the novel.

Through color slides, edited in rhythm with a guitar score, and an intelligent narration by Alexander Girard, "Day of the Dead" explores both the surface celebration and the cultural attitudes towards death. Connections to Aztec paintings, the Don Juan story, and the medieval dance of death are presented in a kind of pictorial exploration of the Indian, Spanish, and Catholic origins of the festival.

The objects used during the two-day celebration are particularly well presented: candy and bread skulls, skeleton dolls, marigolds, paper maché animals, and candles all bespeak an attitude toward the

dead strikingly different from typical Western attitudes. In seeing just how comic the puppet skeletons are, in watching a family prepare for a large party and dance to which the spirit of their lately deceased daughter will come to eat and play, one realizes just how much of the random festivity in Volcano is probably an outgrowth of this day. No tears must make the way slick to the place of rest. The candy and paper maché animals help the spirit through the dark places.

The second day of the festival, November 2nd, is, if anything, more raucous, as families elaborately decorate the graves and picnic on the sites. A colleague tells me that in Mexico City, for instance, officials have had to close the cemeteries on this day to keep the merrymaking from getting out of hand.

Without going into the thematic or symbolic uses one could make of the film, one at least realizes that Lowry responded to the Day of the Dead both from the Mexican festival perspective and the Anglo reaction to it as something grotesque.

The film is available for rental (\$20) or purchase (\$180) from Pyramid Films, Box 1048, Santa Monica, California 90406, USA.

Those interested in further study of the Day of the Dead and Mexican attitudes toward death might well turn to a recently published University of Florida Humanities Monograph (Number 44) by Barbara L. C. Brodman, entitled The Mexican Cult of Death in Myth and Literature. The 89-page study explores the Spanish and Mexican origins of the cult, its present-day manifestations, and the impact of practices and attitudes in contemporary Mexican literature. It has what appears to be a fairly adequate bibliography of Spanish and English-language sources of information.

June 1979

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#### Canadians Learn About Lowry

"Martinis for breakfast, a bottle of gin before lunch--some of the most gifted men and women of our time have been alcoholics. 'I know a great deal about physical suffering,' wrote novelist Malcolm Lowry. 'But this is the worst, to feel your soul dying.' As the World Congress for the Prevention of Alcoholism meets next week in Mexico, David Macfarlane examines the remarkable lives and unnatural deaths of seven people whose drinking problems are over: DEAD DRUNKS." Thus the epigraph/heading of an August 25, 1979 article in Canada's nationally distributed Weekend Magazine. Examined are Janis Joplin, Dorothy Parker, Bob Edwards (Calgary publisher), Brendan Behan, Jim Thorpe (American athlete), William Claude Dukenfield (W. C. Fields), and Malcolm Lowry, "the most incorrigible of drinkers."

## 5 Woodville Road

In the last issue of the Newsletter I listed various discoveries about the house in Blackheath where Lowry lodged during 1928-29, and raised the question of why he came to choose this particular locale. I have since received a letter from Russell Lowry which almost certainly solves the mystery.

Russell Lowry writes: "I knew Malcolm was in lodgings for a while in Blackheath, with one 'Jerry' Kellett, though I didn't know E was for Ernest. To me, as to generations of Leysians he was just Jerry, later one of the recognisable figures in Hilton's composite Mr. Chips. He was also associated with Caldicott, the preparatory school (which is still in existence and not, as Douglas Day states, closed down). . . .

Jerry Kellett retired around the mid-Twenties. I myself left in 1923, so here we enter the field of reasonable alternatives rather than absolute facts. But it seems fair to assume that Jerry, on retirement took--or maybe already owned--the Blackheath house and ran it as a tutorial or cramming establishment. He was a man of great erudition. His main subjects were English and History, though he'd cheerfully teach Greek, Latin or German if a colleague were off sick. He was a strict physical disciplinarian but, in truth, not a very good teacher. Nevertheless I owe him much, including a taste for Chaucer. And I remember him very clearly.

Jerry Kellett and 5 Woodville Road would be an absolute natural as a 'fill in' operation for Malcolm, together with the sojourn in Bonn. Remember that the Pyrrhus had involved his missing an academic year, beginning in October.

I know nothing of the hows and whys between father and Jerry Kellett, but common sense suggests consultations with St. Catherine's over the delayed entrance. Now Tom Henn (later Dr. Henn) who was Malcolm's tutor--and ultimately head of St. Catherine's--had done a spell at the Leys, around 1922. . . . Knowing the Leys he would know Jerry, know of his retirement, know he taught English. I think it very likely that the Woodville Road suggestion came from St. Catherine's to father. Compared with this obvious sequence Nathaniel Hawthorne never gets off the ground. . . .

Finally I don't think the Woodville Road residence would last long. Jerry didn't need the money as badly as, for instance, Aiken. And, as I said, he was a strict disciplinarian."

August 1979

Ronald Binns

## An Interview with Mrs. Malcolm Lowry (Part 3)

This is the conclusion of the interview begun in Newsletter Number 3, and continued in Number 4. It is taken from the appendix to the undergraduate honours project of Laura M. Deck: "Myth as Metaphor: The Odyssey of Malcolm Lowry." The project was completed in May 1974, when Ms. Deck was in her senior year at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Copyright remains with Ms. Deck who, along with Mrs. Lowry, has kindly granted permission to reprint the interview here.

Interviewer: What influence on him was his relationship with Aiken? I know it was really important.

Mrs. Lowry: Yes. I asked him one time I remember, "What has been the greatest influence on his own work?" and he said "Aiken and Nordahl Grieg."

Interviewer: In what ways?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, Aiken's style which was sophisticated and suave and brilliant and poetical. Aiken was essentially a poet and not a novelist of course. And if he could combine the poetic sophisticated style of Aiken with the passion and simplicity of Grieg.

Interviewer: Did he view his style as poetic? Or would you say he was a poet who managed to put it into prose?

Mrs. Lowry: I think he thought of himself essentially as a poet. There is a small book of his poems and like all poets some of them are very good and some are very mediocre. But I think the good ones are first rate. A few of them. Of course, I look at Shelley, all he wrote and what is he remembered for today? Well, he wrote poems constantly. Of course there are almost as many more that he wrote that haven't been published. He was constantly writing poems. He'd be working on the Volcano or whatever and he'd get an idea for a poem and he'd stop and work a day or two on the poem.

Interviewer: If I was to do some reading by other people, would Grieg and Aiken be the most important for me to read or would there be other authors, like Melville, Poe, T. S. Eliot . . . ?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes. I don't think you can get that book of Grieg's anyway called The Ship Sails On; it was only published in England and Lord knows how many years ago--there was only one edition of it and I'm sure you couldn't ever get it. You can get Conrad Aiken, but I don't think you need to read him. Blue Voyage was one that Malcolm got hold of that impressed him so much. Now mind you, I admire Aiken's poetry greatly and some of his short stories, but I wasn't impressed by his Blue Voyage as much as Malcolm was. I don't think you need to read it, really. . . . He was greatly impressed by the

great Russian writers--all of them from Gogol right on down to Chekhov; the whole lot of them--Tolstoy and particularly Dostoevsky. He was very impressed by all of them and he had read them not just once but many times. He was conversant even with Kafka; he was very much impressed by Kafka and certain French writers, certain German writers; he was very well acquainted with all of Goethe even the Conversations with Eddekmann or whatever it was and the Cosmic Affinities or whatever that was. He'd read him all, not just Faust. No, I don't think it's so important for you to read Aiken and you couldn't get hold of Grieg anyway.

Interviewer: What about Faust?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, he's so very important. He uses the Faust legend and the damnation and so on all through the Volcano.

Interviewer: Do you have any certain feelings about it or that it meant a certain thing that it would portray in Volcano?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, I think the Faust legend is simply what it is and he just accepted it for what it is and used it. The Consul is certainly a Faustian character--among other things.

Interviewer: I can't imagine a mind like his. He just must have been truly, truly brilliant.

Mrs. Lowry: He was, he was; absolutely amazing, just amazing. I said sometimes that his mind was just like a fireworks factory somebody dropped a bomb in. He just kept going, never still. Like a racing engine.

Interviewer: You talked about how he said it would appeal to the subconscious of people who didn't even understand it. Did he expect a lot of his readers? Would he expect them to want to delve into the different meanings and levels of his work?

Mrs. Lowry: Of course everyone has their ideal reader who will understand his work and really read it. But as he said, it could be read on so many different levels. And of course that's true that there are various theses that have been written about the Volcano. They will pick one level and mostly harp on that.

Interviewer: Maybe they aren't capable of seeing them all at once.

Mrs. Lowry: Taking them all together and seeing them whole. Well, some have been, but some have been like Perle Epstein's thesis about the cabalistic angle. And Dale Edmundson (sic) mostly does it from the political angle. And Dick Costa is more interested in his style and the way that he thinks that he was influenced by Joyce via Aiken.



Interviewer: I'm familiar with all of these. I haven't really read them. I've spent a semester just reading everything I could get my hands on by Lowry. And I've read some Jung, some things on myth. That's where my interest is.

Mrs. Lowry: Good . . . good. I think that's very good. I think he'd be delighted with it.

Interviewer: Do you think he would have any views on what the role of myth would be in society or in his work?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, he was tremendously interested in it, that's the whole point. He said that all the myths contained great truths that applied to the subconscious mind; they were products of the subconscious mind or unconscious mind. But most of them from whatever country they came had an underlying truth. Or if not factual truth-- truth for the psyche.

Interviewer: Did he read a lot of myths? Was he interested in myths from all over?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, he'd read most of it already and I always had been interested in mythology. My mother had a children's version, a sort of cleaned up version, of all the Greek mythology I started out with when I was a little girl. And then of course I was an amateur astronomer so I knew all the myths connected with the constellations.

Interviewer: Did you teach him?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes. He didn't know the stars in spite of his being a seaman until I taught them to him and then he became fascinated by them.

Interviewer: Do you think that most people in sizing up Malcolm have done him an injustice?

Mrs. Lowry: No, I don't think most people have. I think that in the main he has had excellent criticism. He's had some people who have gone flat out and said he was the greatest writer of the century and the one English writer who is going to still be read a century from now and you can't have much more extravagant praise than that.

Interviewer: But then there are those, too, who only attribute say, the Volcano, that it's the greatest novel about an alcoholic ever written.

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, well you just have to accept that. They can't all agree and some prefer to criticize where others will give credit where credit is due. You just have to accept it. You might as well say the Lost Weekend is the greatest novel about an alcoholic. It's only incidentally about an alcoholic. But to say it's the greatest novel about an alcoholic I suppose you could say that in one way it probably is true because it's a great novel and if it's about an alcoholic then it must be a great novel about an alcoholic. But that

isn't all of it.

Interviewer: Do you foresee or hope that, in the future, more and more people will be interested in him and he will get more acclaim than he has?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, he's had quite a bit already. Yet I think that he will grow in stature. Well, he's taught at practically every university across the country you know. From Harvard to UCLA. I think 17 courses at Harvard alone teach him. He's been translated into many languages of course. And look at all those books. (She motioned to bookshelves.) Everything but Russian; even Polish and Czechoslovakian and I got one the other day from Budapest, Hungary.

Interviewer: Do you think that his way of thinking is similar to the modern French novel?

Mrs. Lowry: No. I think they understand him better. France and America; well, of course he's hardly being acclaimed in England, there are theses being written; I've heard from Cambridge and so on. It took the English a while but they have finally gotten around to accepting him that he was great. But in France they just practically cross themselves when they speak of him.

Interviewer: I wonder why that is?

Mrs. Lowry: I don't know, of course I never did know very much French, and that was just really conversational. I just could get around when we were there. And I can't read French but I've had some of the reviews read to me and I must say they're phenomenal. They just compare him to everybody including Proust, Dante and Shakespeare; the great writers that will live forever.

Interviewer: He must have been very interested in Dante.

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, he was. Of course, he studied him at Cambridge . . . he had to learn to read him in the original Italian and . . .

Interviewer: So he knew Dante very well?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes. Well, look at the various allusions to "in the middle of my life I found myself in the dark woods," with all the cantinas, El Bosque and de la Selva. It was deliberate of course. There isn't a thing in there that isn't deliberate.

Interviewer: Was he ever underconfident about himself? Do you think he realized what he was? Not that he would be boastful about it . . .

Mrs. Lowry: No, he was incapable of boasting; he couldn't

do it, ever. In many ways he was very humble and in certain ways very unsure of himself. Not so much of his talent but himself as a person. For instance, he was an extremely handsome man if you've seen pictures of him. And he thought he was hideous. He had no personal vanity. Absolutely none. And I'd tell him how handsome he was and how beautiful he was and he'd just pat me and say, "Oh, dear, that's because you love me." He had no personal vanity. He was unsure of himself in his looks and as a person even though he had beautiful curtsy (sic) manners. The most beautiful speaking voice I ever heard in my life.

Interviewer: Was he unsure of himself in his writing? Did you have to sometimes reassure him?

Mrs. Lowry: No, he was sure of himself there. I didn't have to bolster him up there. I had to more, as I say, edit and cut and make him stick to the story line and stick to the pace and not go wandering off on it along an imaginary journey. And even then he'd be pretty sure of himself and it would take me a while to say "now this will have to be cut, Malcolm, we just can't use it." Oh, he was in love with words; he would just spin them off.

Interviewer: I'm interested in La Mordida; what was that like? Is the writing in that close to what he achieves in Under the Volcano or is it kind of the beginning stage?

Mrs. Lowry: It's a first draft. I'm trying to nerve myself up to get it out and read it through and see if it could be published. Maybe as a journal. A large part of it is just our notebooks. It isn't even as developed as Dark as the Grave but there's some marvelous stuff in it. Well, it isn't in readable shape at the moment and I haven't been well this last year and a lot has happened and I've been sued and been in the hospital and I've had a terrible year. The next one can't possibly be this bad. So I'm trying to get myself together and get out La Mordida and look at it and see if it could be published. Maybe just as a journal because it'd make an awfully good journal. As late as Mexico of course to a large part and Acapulco as it was then, not as it is now. It was a sleazy little town then. We stayed in a little pension on the beach.

Interviewer: There are seemingly autobiographical elements in the works; would you still label them fiction?

Mrs. Lowry: There are certain autobiographical effects and efforts in practically every writer's work. He writes what he personally knows about as a rule. Unless he's just writing science fiction or something. So I think Malcolm is in the main more autobiographical than most authors, because I think he thought of himself as essentially as a poet and the center of his universe and there is a certain autobiographical element in practically everything.

Interviewer: There still certainly was an element of creation in what he was doing.

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, definitely! Definitely. He wasn't just setting down things that happened to Malcolm and Marjorie; he was using that as a basis to build on, to go on from there. Even in October Ferry to Gabriola, Ethan Llewellyn was in part Malcolm and in part a young lawyer we knew there who was a good friend of ours.

Interviewer: Was he interested in the juxtaposition of things as in Through the Panama when he kind of jumps from one thing to another? What was he trying to accomplish with that?

Mrs. Lowry: I think he was just trying out a new literary form in that. He was always interested in signs and things of that sort. And he always used them. I think he was just sort of having fun, experimenting in Through the Panama. It's a fascinating little journal.

Interviewer: He says some interesting things about writers in there. How serious was he in all of that?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, I think quite serious with his tongue in his cheek. Because you have to remember that I don't think he has been given sufficient credit for being as witty as he was. He was actually funny. For instance, Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession is a tragic story but it is also one of the funniest things you ever read. And Elephant in Coliseum is hilarious. . . . he intended it that way. He once said sorrowfully, "don't they even think it's funny?"

Interviewer: I don't know if I always see it. Like he said that parts of Under the Volcano. . . should be funny.

Mrs. Lowry: Definitely. For instance, when he goes out and falls down in the street and this Englishman comes along and he says, "You're wearing the tie," and that whole scene is hilariously funny. And the scene with the man next door in the garden, Quincey, that's funny, too.

Interviewer: What role does the garden play in Volcano?

Mrs. Lowry: It's the Garden of Eden, the world, the earth, not the world, the earth. And when he says, "Do you like this garden which is yours; see that your children do not destroy it," it's a prophecy of the atom bomb and the destructive stage we're in now. He was dead serious about that, too.

Interviewer: I've noticed a difference in just the way he writes in the letters and in Volcano.

Mrs. Lowry: Well, one's fiction and one is simply an epistle, a letter to a friend or business associate whichever the case may be. So even so, his letters are quite full of blood and thunder and spit

and fire and not just quiet, even when he read (sic) to his agent he had something cogent to say.

Interviewer: Are there more letters in British Columbia?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, yes, there's a large mass more of letters. It's almost as many as were already published. Of course the big gap there was during the time he was writing the Volcano and he did write a few letters to Gerald Noxon, a friend of his from Cambridge who had moved to Canada and who came up to Vancouver two or three times to see us. He was working for the CBC and they'd sent him out there on something or other and we saw quite a bit of him, then when our house burned down we went back east and stayed with Gerald and his wife Betty. And there are several letters to Gerald covering that period which I didn't have when I published the letters. Gerald was in France at the time and the letters . . . it's strange how everybody kept Malccin's letters. They kept them. And when I'd write and ask do you have any letters by any chance, "oh, yes, they had them all." Everybody had kept every letter that he wrote to them and Gerald had them but he had them in his safe deposit box back in Boston. And he couldn't get at them and he was spending a year in France. So I have them now. I don't know whether the university has them or not, but I have them. To tell you the truth I can't remember whether I ever had copies made and sent to the university or not.

Interviewer: Under the Volcano began as a short story didn't it?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, it did. It was published in "Prairie Schooner" in its original form. It's the eighth chapter where they take the bus trip and find the man dying by the side of the road, that's what it is. And I think in that version Yvonne is his daughter and he was her boyfriend or something. It's so long since I've read it. He wrote that, that was the first thing and it was from that he just expanded the Volcano both ways.

Interviewer: Was the Volcano to be kind of the keystone of the rest of what he planned?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, it was to be the Inferno. Lunar Caustic is of course the Purgatorio as it turns out and of course the Forest Path is the Paradiso. The Voyage that Never Ends it was to be called.

Interviewer: How did Malcolm look at Mexico? Was it an Inferno for him or did it have good and bad points?

Mrs. Lowry: Good and bad.

Interviewer: What role did it play for him especially as compared to Canada where he lived?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, he was happier when we were living on the beach in Canada than he ever was before or after in his life because he was more at peace and it was quiet and there weren't a lot of distractions and he loved it. Of course, he was a tremendous swimmer and he swam practically even in the winter. I've seen him walk out across it when there was frost on the porch and dive into that ice cold water.

Interviewer: Was he an outdoorsman?

Mrs. Lowry: Well, he didn't care for hunting. He was always all against that, but we used to take tremendous hikes and he was aware of wild flowers and we were bird watchers. When we were in England we joined the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and went up to the Faroe Islands and spent a couple of weeks up there bird watching where you have to be a member of the Society. And they only let limited numbers of people in at a time--just a few people at a time--because the birds are protected and they're quite tame. And he was interested in the stars and the trees and the earth. On the other hand, he also was fascinated by films in the theater and he wanted to be able to get into the city. He had to get to a library and he had to get to see films and go to the theater and the operas, concerts and music, so he wasn't just a one-sided person. He loved both. He didn't like to live in the city but he wanted to be able to get to it.

Interviewer: In everything he was doing did he mentally file it in a place for future reference in his writing?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, I'm sure he did. For a while we had a great joke while he was writing the Volcano and we'd have some experience or we'd hear some conversation or something and he'd say "That's good, I'd better put that in the Volcano." He'd take notes and also he had the most prodigious memory I've ever known in my life. You never, you can't imagine; he had total recall. I remember one time a professor Earle Birney who was a professor of English and creative writing at the University of British Columbia and Malcolm got into a discussion about who had written certain short stories. And Earle was willing to bet him \$100 he was right. He said, "I teach it I ought to know," and I said "Earle don't bet, you'll lose," and he lost. Malcolm said, "Oh, come on, I'll bet you a bottle of Scotch," but he was right of course. He never forgot anything.

Interviewer: I think Day paints many times an ugly picture of Malcolm.

Mrs. Lowry: He does. I think that Day underestimated him in many ways. I think that he wasn't aware. . . . I think Malcolm was almost beautiful; he had the most perfect features. Look at that portrait. It was posthumously done just from snapshots. But he had, for one thing, he had a wonderful physique and he kept himself in

beautiful condition, he exercised and played tennis, swam and took exercises and kept himself in good condition. He had beautiful skin, it was practically always tan. He had natural pink in his cheeks. He had the most extraordinary blue eyes you've ever seen in your life. They were so blue they just blazed, and his hair was copper colored. That is, it was brown and had copper lights on it. His coloring was beautiful. He had a remarkable smile and beautiful bone structures in the cheekbones. I think he was one of the handsomest men I've ever seen in my life and he was meticulous about shaving every day except when he had his beard and then he trimmed it very carefully; clean shirt every day and all this business about his being so sloppy--I never saw any evidence of it except when he was in his worst stages of being drunk.

Interviewer: How extensive was his drinking? Day talks about him drinking to avoid writing, drinking to try and write. . . .

Mrs. Lowry: Well, most of the time when he turned to drinking it was because he couldn't write and he was desperately unhappy because he couldn't write. So to say that he drank to stop himself from writing or so that he wouldn't have to is absolutely wrong. And also his drinking followed no pattern, he could go years without taking a drink. Then all of a sudden he would just drink for weeks and weeks. Nothing you could predict. And on other times he would just drink socially, just normally, a few cocktails before dinner, and eat dinner and go to bed and read. And just a few drinks like that wouldn't set him off. Very frequently on a Saturday night when he'd worked hard all week he'd relax a little bit and we'd have a gin and orange juice before dinner, and eat dinner and go to bed and read--we always read in bed; sometimes he read aloud to me--he read nearly all of Shakespeare aloud to me in bed. It was quite an experience because his voice was like a trained actor's, it was so magnificent. And his accent was so beautiful. So, that would be that and it wouldn't set him off. It would be some emotional problem that would set him off.

Interviewer: It was just something he would turn to when emotionally upset?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, he was a schizophrenic and a paranoid, there isn't any doubt about that. And he was aware of it, he knew it. We discussed it. And eventually he went to a mental hospital in England and they tried to help him but he was too intelligent, he could talk circles around his psychiatrist.

Interviewer: Was it something that he had a difficult time living with?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes. He did have a very difficult time living with it. For instance, I remember one time when we had gone in town for the winter and taken an apartment in town because it just got too

rough on the beach that winter, there was a lot of snow and we did that sometimes when there was a very bad winter, and he wasn't drinking at all, he was working on October Ferry and working hard and all of a sudden he stood by the window one day looking out and he said, "You see that man on the corner down there. He's been following me for the last two weeks you know, you must've seen him." I said, "Oh, Malcolm, King Lear from 9 to 10, Hamlet 10 to 11, Troilus 11 to 12, there's nobody down there following you." If I could make him laugh I could make him snap out of it. But he really did have these persecution things; "they" were after him. Paranoid.

Interviewer: Which had to do with his being fearful of customs officers?

Mrs. Lowry: Terrified, simply terrified. He would simply almost die when he had to. Actually, he didn't like to travel, he did it for my sake because he knew I wanted to travel so he did it for me and it nearly killed him.

Interviewer: Then it was just part of this complex, this fear of being followed and being watched? Could he set himself apart from it?

Mrs. Lowry: Sometimes he could. He had a terrible fear of traffic, too. I had to steer him across the street or he'd have been run down any old time. He said they all seemed to be coming at him from all directions.

Interviewer: Do you think he was as Day says, in certain ways kind of childlike?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, he was. As I said, he was so extraordinary because he was the most complex human being I've ever known and in other ways he was childlike. There was a childlike simplicity, not childish, a certain simplicity about him. Sense of honor and loyalty, decency.

Interviewer: Was it difficult for him to cope with the real world that lacked this loyalty and honor?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, it was difficult. That's why he said he loved the earth and hated the world. And yet the friends that he had were utterly devoted to him and he to them.

Interviewer: He seemed despondent after you were evicted from Canada and when he heard the pier had been torn down. Did that contribute to his fall?

Mrs. Lowry: I think it did. Yes, definitely. He had a terrible time after we left. You see, we left voluntarily because



we knew that we were going to be thrown off and so we said we'd leave and so we left. And he never was quite the same after that although when we settled down in this little town in rural England he had some good times there but when he heard about the pier going he just couldn't stand it, he had loved that place so much.

Interviewer: That place was sort of paradise for him?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, it was, it really was.

(sics mine; ellipses in original-Ed)

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Mrs. Lowry

It is with deep sadness that I notify Lowry scholars of Margerie Lowry's illness. Priscilla Woolfan, Margerie's sister, has asked me to tell you that Margerie suffered a stroke in mid October. She is now stable and resting comfortably. However, there will be no more interviews with Margerie in the foreseeable future.

Margerie's devoted sister and her own wonderful spirit are helping her through this difficult time. I know that she would appreciate a card or letter from those of you who know her. I will see that she receives them if you send to the following address:

Mrs. Margerie Lowry,  
c/o Betty Moss,  
9808 Tunney Ave.,  
Northridge, California 91324  
U.S.A.

November 1979

Betty Moss  
Northridge, California

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