

Malcolm Lowry Newsletter

Number 2

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The Malcolm Lowry Newsletter is now being sent to Lowry scholars in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, France, Belgium, Spain, Poland, Yugoslavia, Japan, United States, and Canada.

Readers have asked about the cost of the Malcolm Lowry Newsletter for libraries, etc. It is \$5.00 (five dollars, in Canadian funds) for each cycle of 10 issues (ie: for 5 years). Cheques or money orders, payable to the Department of English, Wilfrid Laurier University, should be sent in care of the editor.

There is no cost to individual subscribers. (Although the Department of English, Wilfrid Laurier University provides the financial support for the printing and distributing to individual subscribers, the Newsletter entries do not necessarily reflect the opinion of, and are not the legal responsibility of, the Department or the editor.)

Modern Language Association Conventions

The first MLA seminar on Malcolm Lowry provided such a satisfying opportunity to talk about Lowry's work that many of us wished to continue meeting to provide a forum and a stimulus for scholarly and critical work on Lowry. Since I have had the pleasure of attending all of the sessions, I agreed to write an historical survey of them. In writing the following summary, I have relied on both the papers and my memory of the discussions.

The 1974 session, organized by Eileen Baldeshwiler, included papers given by Richard Hauer Costa, Richard Cross, Daniel Dodson, and Dale Edmonds. Costa devoted his paper to the relationship

between "the ordeals of living and the ordeals of writing" in works he designated as Lowry's "later autobiographical fiction." Citing Lowry's concern expressed in letters to Albert Erskine about "the way it is printed," Edmonds discussed the meaning of the Quauhnahuac sign, the quoted silence, and the "666" sign as "typographical experiences" in Under the Volcano. Dodson presented several possible inconsistencies in Under the Volcano, Geoffrey's age, for example, while Cross explicated many of the novel's "symbolic correspondences" and multiple planes.

I chaired the 1975 session in San Francisco. In response to my request for suggestions about the seminar's design, several people wrote to request that the subject not be limited to Under the Volcano. In fact, although I did not limit the content of the papers, four of the five centered on works other than Under the Volcano. Eileen Baldeshwiler discussed the character of Sigbjørn Wilderness as "mouthpiece for some of Lowry's views on literary and artistic creation" in Dark as the Grave, "Through the Panama," and "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession." Mihai Spariosu applied his concept of "the enactment of fiction," the process in which literature becomes lived or enacted rather than written, to the characters of the Consul and Sigbjørn Wilderness and to Lowry himself. Labelling Lowry a "magic realist" who attempted to capture the "protean nature of life" in his art, Sherrill Grace related Lowry's aesthetics to his metaphysics. Geoffrey Durrant offered a reading of "The Forest Path to the Spring" as a work "in the tradition of Plato, Virgil, Bunyan, and Coleridge" for its spiritual and sacramental view of the world. Dale Edmonds chronicled the nature and amount of the Consul's alcoholic consumption, stressing the positive aspects of drink as "the Consul's mistress, his muse, his God." The discussion period, presided over by Maurice Beebe, focused on possible explanations for Lowry's creative process.

At the 1976 session in New York, which was chaired by Richard Hauer Costa, four of the five papers dealt exclusively with Under the Volcano. Whether this reversal of emphasis was coincidental or revelatory of a change in Lowry's literary fortune, I do not know. In any case, Maurice Phelan discussed Under the Volcano as an "ironic Inferno," while Jonathan Arac utilized Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the elements of Menippean satire as a means for investigating the nature of Under the Volcano. Leigh Holt and Ronald Walker related their success in teaching Under the Volcano to undergraduates using Marlowe's Dr. Faustus to illustrate "the heroic background" and "the kind of tragedy it outlines," and I presented a character analysis of Yvonne. Sherrill Grace explored the thematic, stylistic, and epistemological influence of film on Lowry and went on to define the function of specific films in his works, with an emphasis on Under the Volcano and October Ferry. The discussion was followed by a screening of Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry, the Canadian National

Film Board documentary produced by Donald Brittain and narrated by Richard Burton.

Paul Tiessen organized the 1977 session, held in Chicago, around the subject "Directions in Criticism." W. H. Hagen surveyed the various stances toward Lowry's creative process taken in the major works of Lowry criticism as well as in general critical works on modern literature. In the context of the issue of Lowry's influence on other writers, Dale Edmonds explored the "Fitzrovia connection" between Malcolm Lowry and Dylan Thomas. I discussed the reassessment of Lowry's concept of the physical world as a recent and fruitful direction in Lowry criticism. Paul Tiessen gave an overview of critical discussion of Lowry's work as "cinematic" and then presented Lowry's own theoretical discussions on the use of the term as a context for relating film and literature.

Many of these papers either have appeared or are forthcoming as articles or portions of books. I should add that most panelists probably no longer have copies for distribution and that some participants did not prepare formal papers.

March 1978

Carole Slade
Bronx Community College, City University of New York

Sherrill Grace (University of British Columbia), who had earlier proposed that a Lowry Special Session be held at the 1978 MLA Convention in New York, has decided to drop plans to coordinate such a session this year. However, she welcomes opinions on the question of the future of such sessions.

April 1978

Lowry studies in Japan

Lowry has not been much studied in Japan, though a translation of Under the Volcano came out as early as 1966 (translated by Prof. Hideo Kano and his friends, published by Hakusuisha, Tokyo). In 1975 when Professor Bradbrook stayed in Tokyo for five weeks as a visiting professor at Tsuda College where I belong, she gave a public lecture, "Lowry and Conrad," in May. Stimulated by the lecture, my then colleague, Professor Yuichi Maekawa (he is now at Rikkyo University), wrote an essay on Lowry in Japanese which appeared in the October number of Eigo Seinen (Kenkyusha, Tokyo). It is entitled "Drunken Divine Comedy, a Study of Malcolm Lowry."

As far as I know nothing came out in 1976. Towards the end of 1977 appeared the following two essays:

Ineko Kondo, "Some Notes on Malcolm Lowry's Ultramarine," Tsuda Review, No. 22 (November 1977);

Kazuko Suzuki (Mrs.), "Under the Volcano and Dante's 'Inferno,'" Bungaku Kenkyu (a magazine written in Japanese privately issued by the graduate students of Tsuda College), No. 6 (December 1977).

The former is a study of Ultramarine in relation to The Ship Sails On and Blue Voyage; the latter is a study of Dante's influence on Under the Volcano, observing minute instances not yet pointed out by critics (so I am going to advise her to rewrite it in English).

February 1978

Ineko Kondo
Tsuda College

Richard III

. . . I'd like to know when "Sestina in a Cantina" was written--and why the bartender is called Richard III.

I am a member of the Richard III Society, and we are interested in all matters concerning Richard--even allusions and ephemera.

March 1978

Bernard L. Witlieb
Bronx Community College, City University of New York

Announcement: G. K. Hall & Co., Boston

Malcolm Lowry: A Reference Guide by William H. New.
April 1978. 6x9. xiv, 162 pp. ISBN 0-8161-7884-4 \$18.00

This reference guide provides the first extensive annotated listing of critical writings on the life and work of Malcolm Lowry. It lists all significant books, theses, documentary films, articles, reviews, and letters appearing from 1927 to 1976. Materials from European, North American, South American, Australian, and Japanese sources are included. Entries are fully cross-referenced and indexed by subject as well as by title and author.

Announcement: J. Howard Woolmer Books

I am working on a bibliography of Malcolm Lowry. . . . My book will be a full-scale descriptive bibliography of all books and periodical appearances by Malcolm Lowry. It will be based on the Soho and Pittsburgh Series of bibliographies for format and will be illustrated with illustrations of title-pages and in some cases, such as Ultramarine 1933, of dust jackets. I hope to have it completed by Fall 1978 and it is scheduled for publication by Woolmer/Brotherson Ltd. (Andes, N. Y. 13731) in Spring 1979.

Notification of any obscure or unlikely items would be appreciated.

March 1978

J. Howard Woolmer
Gladstone Hollow, Andes, N. Y. 13731

Just a note about my book on The Art of Malcolm Lowry: it won't now appear until August of this year, because I had been waiting for a contribution from Martin Case, who has been ill. Unfortunately, Dr. Case is still ill and we have had to go to press without his contribution. There is an addition to the book, a memoir of Lowry by his brother, Russell Lowry, "Malcolm. A Closer Look," in which Russell Lowry has set the record straight about a few of the myths of Lowry's childhood, much as described in Russell Lowry's own note in the last Newsletter.

February 1978

Dr. Anne Smith, General Editor,
Vision Critical Studies

. . . I am just now correcting galleys on a 90,000-word study of Under the Volcano called Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning, to be published in April, 1978 by Quadrangle/The NY Times Book Co., Inc. Based essentially on a frequently ripped-off MA thesis I did at Columbia back in '51, but now about four times as long. Dick Costa has seen it, and in the forthcoming Anne Smith collection of Lowry essays calls it "definitive," but Costa is of course crazy. So, I presume, is my publisher, who anticipates a "flop d'estime." Exegesis is the operative word, all the nuts and bolts from Lucretius to Jessie L. Weston. Also an appended reminiscence of Malcolm Lowry, of which only about 1/2 had been in print before. (Editor's note: Markson's book is, I think, now available.)

December 1977

David Markson
New York

Thank you for sending me the Malcolm Lowry Newsletter which I read with interest and a sigh of relief that no new myths are being launched--except perhaps linguistically. "Tackling the aspect of teleological compulsion seen in Lowry's monolithic corpus." Well well--How's that for academic pidgin English! Meaning, presumably, "Why only one big book?", but don't tell a soul, keep it clever!

In this line of thought I can't help noticing the steady growth of that cuckoo-chick, Malcolm's "scholarship." There can be no need for me, the layest of laymen, to remind you, a distinguished University Professor, that scholarship demands, among other things (1) a good mind (2) discipline and (3) work. Malcolm had the first of these undoubtedly, but the second he avoided like the plague and of the third he did none, at any of the half-dozen seats of learning through which he passed. He came down from Cambridge with a dubious "Third"--the equivalent of failure. And he spent the greater part of the rest of his active life in bars, log cabins, bars, prisons, hospitals--& bars. Sources of erudition are few & far between in such surroundings. The things that did go on ticking were his mind, his encyclopaedic memory, his splendid sense of nonsense, and his passion for words. One other thing he had or rather, took, subsidized by a much maligned father. Time. Years & years of it to arrange and rearrange his beloved words. To magpie his way through such sources as he could come across & weave as many bits & pieces as possible into his pattern.

This may amount to genius--but surely not to scholarship. Much effort seems to be getting spent inventing talents that Malcolm did not have while neglecting those that he did. Shakespeare, after all, managed pretty well with "small Latin & less Greek!"

Your shortening of my own letter (in Newsletter Number 1) was a bit unfortunate. I said I was the surviving brother--not the only Lowry survivor. The family is very much alive. Of the Lowrys whose letters have been given to UBC Colin is my son, David is my late brother Wilfrid's son. Neither knew Malcolm. Wilfrid--as in Laurier--how he hated being spelt with an e--was not a very reliable witness. In interviews "off the cuff" he, a charmingly sentimental old man was apt to confuse his own, & his brother's youth with that of his children & even his grandchildren. We found this rather to his consternation, in many conversations. We lunched together regularly until his death in 1974.

Reading through this I find myself asking, on your behalf, who does this character think he is, laying down the law about scholarship, & so on. Good question! Answer, absolutely nobody, but my wife & my sons have enough Honours Degrees to run a faculty of their own so I am familiar with the symptoms.

December 1977

Russell Lowry
Cheshire