

UNDER THE VOLCANO: THE CONJUNCTION OF HEAVEN AND HELL

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ABSTRACT

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Lowry says in his letters of Under the Volcano the novel is a drama of man's struggle between the powers of darkness and light. It is paradisaical, it is unquestionably infernal.

Part I of this paper is an attempt to interpret Lowry's vision in the light of relevant philosophical conceptions of art and life. Part II is an examination of the main theme as illustrated in the motivations and lifestyles of the four main characters. In particular it is a close examination of the text in order to throw into relief, to capture and illuminate the ambivalent qualities of Lowry's horrible and beautiful masterpiece.

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Introduction

Life in Lowry's vision is simultaneously heaven and hell for man. That is what is so unbearable. If life were purely hell there would be no problem - man would simply commit suicide. Instead the dual nature of experience leads man to hope and to despair, to search for happiness and at the same time to wish for death consciously or unconsciously. This is the source of life's tragedy, its painful comedy, and its absurdity. It is the basis of the Consul's schizophrenic alienation, for Hugh's romantic longings and subsequent disillusionment and for Yvonne's terrible love which will not concede defeat. The failure to come to terms with this duality through struggle accounts for the overriding anguish, fatalism and despair in the novel. In Lowry's vision this is the true hell. There is no coming of the Heavenly Jerusalem, no assimilation of the lower by the higher, of Darkness by Light, only a kind of neverending Manichaean opposition between the two principles.

At one level the novel dramatizes man's search for simple happiness and at a higher level his search for the infinite and the eternal, transcending the dualistic experience. The journey is inward through terror to find the secret that lies behind the ruins of self that will restore wholeness and humanity to the human sufferer. Madness and mysticism, both a leap against reason, are two important ambivalent paths to eternity. Other partial solutions to the main conflict such as humour, nature, and art itself are also present.

The heights and depths of experience, the simultaneous

presence of which we call tragic gives richness, value and dignity to human life. Tragedy makes possible the most humane emotions - pity, sympathy, and understanding. The central image is the simultaneous presence of opposites - sunlight pouring into the dark cantina in the early morning as the Consul sits drinking experiencing a kind of "hopeless joy".

Thus the philosophical and psychological key to the novel is that reality lies in the intersection of Light and Dark. The neverending conflict, and its subtle depths of emotion, tone, irony, and meaning as interwoven into the narrative of the novel will be discussed. In particular an attempt will be made to show the tragic ambivalence of each character's lifestyle, the polarities and dichotomies of his hopes and fears as an expression of the larger reality of an existential and cosmic dualism.

Part One

1. Dualistic Philosophy

There are a variety of different conceptions relevant to the dualistic philosophy of the novel.

According to Freud the two most powerful urges or instincts in man are the creative and the destructive - libido and mortido. Rollo May has suggested that both these instincts are a necessary aspect of what he calls the "daimonic". According to May the daimonic is any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person. Sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power are examples. The daimonic can be either

creative or destructive, and is normally both.

The daimonic is the urge in every human being to affirm itself, assert itself, perpetuate and increase itself. The daimonic becomes evil when it usurps the total self without regard to the integration of that self and the unique forms and desires of other human beings. It often appears as excessive aggression, hostility, and cruelty - the things about ourselves which horrify us most and which we repress whenever we can, or more likely, project onto others. But these are the reverse side of the same assertion which empowers our creativity. All life is a flux between these two aspects of the daimonic. We can repress the daimonic but we cannot avoid the toll of apathy and the tendency toward later explosion which such repression brings in its wake¹.

The daimonic needs to be directed and channeled. Here is where human consciousness becomes important² (the Consul's "battle against death for the survival of the human consciousness" (221))³. The destructive activities of the daimonic are only the reverse side of its constructive motivation. If we throw out our devils we had better be prepared to bid goodbye to our angels as well⁴.

We are afraid, says May, of both our daimonic tendencies and our feelings of tenderness which are of course two aspects of the same thing. To be able to experience and live out our

1 Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 123.

2 Ibid., p. 126.

3 Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (1947, rpt. Penguin Modern Classics, 1963).

4 May, pp. 125-126.

capacities for tender love requires the confronting of the daimonic⁵. Thus, in a sense, the Consul can be faithful to both Yvonne and the Farolito. The journey into hell is necessary to find one's self and love.

Similarly a modern religious philosopher, Sam Keen, stresses the necessity for the "Dionysian" way. Western culture has become increasingly Appollonian and the rights of Dionysus must be reasserted. Chaos must have its rights or else vitality is killed by restraint⁶. To be vital one must risk madness. Wine is the principle Dionysian symbol and it is perhaps possible to see the Consul's alcoholism as a revitalization in the quest for the eternal. The Consul is also the ailing divided soul:

"The Dionysian model for man is the healed schizophrenic who is aware of the glory and horror of being human. He is aware of the diverse possibilities within himself, of the underworld of hatred, and the overworld of dreams and ideals, of the hope and the despair. Yet the healed schizophrenic is also in touch with some principle of unity within himself...this must be if we are to distinguish between insanity in which there is no transcendence, only tragedy, and that divine madness in which the individual knows himself to be part of the underlying power which binds together the kaleidoscope of reality."⁷

Unfortunately the Consul's schizophrenia is never fully healed. "Equilibrium is all," says the Consul, at one point, but by the same token it is almost impossible to achieve.

In Eastern religion, with which Lowry was acquainted, we

6. Sam Keen, "Manifesto for a Dionysian Theology", Transcendence, ed. Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 32.

7 Ibid., p. 40.

find a philosophy that abolishes divisions. There is the Chinese symbol of the forces of yin and yang in which the light and the dark lie down beside each other in the same circle, the dark penetrated by a spot of light and the light by a spot of dark. This symbolizes that each must borrow from the other to be complete. In this manner we may see the main struggle between Yvonne and the Farolito in the Consul's mind, as being capable of resolution. The yang force of life is always latent in the yin situation of death and decay. Here is the true dialectic of suffering in the novel.

As Alan Watts points out, the sage seeks no more to obliterate darkness than to get rid of autumn and winter. Virtue and harmony consist in maintaining a dynamic balance with the implicit unity of polar opposites⁸. Perhaps the lack of the recognition of this fundamental unity is meant to be seen as one source of hell in the novel.

Yet there is an echo of lost unity in the novel: "La Despedida" (the split rock). The fact of the creation of male and female leads to perpetual yearning for each other, a thirst for completion which is doomed to be temporary. This is another source of joy and disappointment; ecstasy and despair. The existence of maleness and femaleness, seen ontologically, is one expression of the dynamic polarity of all reality⁹. The best symbol of the procreative vitality in this union is the child. (Children are an important symbol in the novel).

8 Allan Watts, The Two Hands of God (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 54.

9 May, p. 112.

Another important dualistic conception of reality is the contrast between energy and apathy, between wholeness of being and poverty of emotion. We may place the Consul in the latter category, but not with regard to spirit, not in the imagination which is the real man. Also in relation to the Consul's mind, there is the conflict between enthusiasm and irony. As Thomas Mann points out in his discussion of Goethe's "Faust", the urge for the Absolute is the divine in man, and irony the diabolic. The diabolism is of an amusing witty kind, acidulous but not without sympathy for ordinary human need. It makes superior mock of youthful enthusiasm. Mephistopheles is the ironic self corrective to Goethe's youthful enthusiasm¹⁰. Thus we may see not only a division between enthusiasm and ironic diabolism in the Consul's mind, but also in the relationship between the Consul and his younger brother Hugh.

This relationship is also one of Light against Dark, health vs. sickness. Hugh is successful with women, the Consul is not; Hugh is left wing, the Consul right wing. And above all Hugh is spiritual, idealistic, and the Consul, slothful and sensual.

2. Suffering

There is an interesting double movement in the novel - one towards suffering and one away from it, a romanticizing, a self deceptive longing for it, a mystery and holiness surrounding

¹⁰ Thomas Mann, "Goethe's Faust", Essays (Toronto, Vintage Books, 1957), p. 24.

it, and horror of it.

The Consul says of Yvonne: "And perhaps the soul thrived on its suffering and upon the sufferings he had inflicted on his wife her soul had not only thrived but flourished." (76) This is foolish and twisted wishful thinking on the Consul's part. But on a deeper level there is Kierkegaard's insight:

The wish is the sufferer's connection with a happier temporal existence... and at the same time the wish is the sore spot where the suffering pains... The wish is not the cure. This happens only by the action of the Eternal. The wish is on the contrary the life in suffering... The comfort of temporal existence is a precarious affair. It lets the wound grow together although it has not yet healed and yet the physician knows that the cure depends on keeping the wound open. In the wish the wound is kept open in order that the Eternal may heal it.

There is an ironic twist in the main path that leads from suffering to happiness ("No peace but that must pay full toll to hell" (112)). "But it's amazing when you come to think of it how the human spirit seems to blossom in the shadow of the abbatoir... the life of the old alchemists of Prague." (91) This is mostly an ironic self mocking romanticizing of the Faustus story. But the true deeper shade of meaning soon begins to appear: Man loathes the earthly paradise. (137-8) Furthermore, the torment was unnecessary, the Consul even wanted it. (218) His suffering was not genuine, not tragic, largely unnecessary. (222)

Thus, as Kierkegaard points out, falling into despair

1. Soren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 149.

is doublemindedness. Self love and presumption here meet in equal impotence in the limits of the rebellion against God².

But there is a constructive side to this despair as manifested in the Consul's prayer. This is the other pole of the movement in suffering: "There is no explanation of my life... please let me believe that all this is not an abominable self deception... Let me truly suffer." (210) As Kierkegaard says there is but one offense - disloyalty to one's self or the denial of one's better self³. One must penetrate suffering until it yields its explanation. Whether or not it turns out as one wishes it is still the best of all. To narcotize suffering - this is the supreme treason⁴. Discovery of the religious comes when one is most sundered and alone, the fear and trembling in which we begin to be a self. Suffering is a tortured merging of the ideal with the real. At the heart of suffering lies a transcendent mystery, a holiness.

But there is a note of absurdity and tragedy here too. The suffering is also senseless, perhaps undeserved. The Consul knows that he must suffer but never truly understands why. Perhaps God is wicked. Perhaps one must suffer for the sake of understanding - a kind of tragic wisdom. The two poles are not resolved in the novel. But in any case the Consul leans to what Martin Buber says: Faith must encompass not expunge doubt.

2 Kierkegaard, p. 61.

3 Ibid., p. 140.

4 Ibid., p. 22.

Lowry quotes a poem by Anne Wickham in his letters⁵ possibly relevant here as an affirmation behind the grimness in the novel:

God has raised his whip of hell
That you be no longer weak,
That out of anguish you may speak,
That out of anguish, you may speak well

"Ah, how alike are the groans of love to those of the dying," the Consul says. (350) Suffering is the common essence of life, love and death. In love, there is the longing for union, in death the revolt against the terror of separation from life itself. In the Consul both are present at once, he is loving and dying, and the torment is doubled. The profound meaning and paradox of love lies in the intensified openness to love which the awareness of death brings and simultaneously the increased sense of death which love brings with it⁶. To love completely carries with it the threat of the annihilation of everything. This intensity of consciousness has something in common with the mystic in his union with God - just as he can never be sure God is there, so love carries us to that intensity of consciousness in which we no longer have any guarantee of security. Human beings are afraid of the power of love⁷.

3. Madness

Fascination with evil is the fundamental adversary of

5 Selected Letters, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 144.

6 May, p. 99.

7 Ibid., p. 101.

man. Kierkegaard points out that the real terror in anxiety is not death as such, but the fact that each of us within himself is on both sides of the fight, that anxiety is a desire for what one dreads. Thus like an alien force it lays hold of the individual and yet one cannot tear one's self away¹. Madness also results from the desire to play God and be treated as a God. In opposition is to know thyself, that one is only human with necessary illusions.

Madness is also a leap towards total freedom. Reason is impotent when confronted with the depths of existence. Hope and faith are separated from the rational. But the escape into madness also involves terror too. "It ceases to become a refuge and become incarnate in the shattering sky." (80) The characters in the novel live in the fool's paradise of the id: Yvonne wants Geoffrey sober^{up} immediately and the Consul sees his salvation in the next drink. Madness is furthermore a result of the constant oscillation of the pain and pleasure of life. A balance is sought. But human beings are not capable of withstanding the deep emotional changes which are brought into play here. Thus madness is directly related to the theme of the conjunction of heaven and hell. -"a shattering insanity in Heaven." (334-5) All these various shades of meaning, of cause and effect, lie behind the central question

¹ Rollo May, "The Emergence of Existential Psychology", Existential Psychology ed. Rollo May (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 19.

Laruelle asks the Consul concerning his treatment of Yvonne since her return: "Have you gone mad?" As one can see madness is also connected to the absurd.

Self awareness, of which the characters possess a great deal, is a difficult if not impossible solution to impending insanity. Consciousness itself always implies the possibility of turning against one's self. This is the agonizing burden of human freedom².

It is dangerous to know but it is more dangerous not to know. One has an inescapable need to hide from the truth about oneself. It is perpetually a moot question - how much self knowledge a human being can bear. Oedipus is the hero because he is facing his own reality. This destroys him³.

But madness is not absolutely evil. Man must incorporate his devil, or the tree that would grow taller must send its roots down deeper. Rollo May enlarges on this point: To identify with what one has been previously struggling so hard to deny makes one well. One must integrate it through consciousness so that it becomes the source of energy. This overcomes the split the paralyzing ambivalence of the self. And it renders the person more human⁴. This struggle in the novel lies in the Consul's aggression towards others, especially Yvonne, and its resulting guilt. As May says, the denial of the daimonic is in effect a self castration in love and a self nullification in will (the Consul's

2 May, The Emergence of Existential Psychology, p. 84.

3 May, Love and Will, p: 165.

4 Ibid., pp. 139-140.

impotence). And the denial leads to the perverted forms of aggression in which the repressed comes back to haunt us (the Consul's voices).

4. Mysticism

Like madness, to which it is closely related, mysticism has its light and dark sides.

Lowry states in his letters: "The agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in that of the mystic who has abused his powers¹." The Consul is seen as a black magician battling against the elements and nature in a war that is bound to be lost². Lowry recognizes the twisted nature of all magical art, i.e., it looks to the self instead of God for the source and direction of its power. As Huxley observes: the literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pain and terror overwhelming those who have come too suddenly face to face with the *Mysterium Tremendum*. Fear is due to the incompatibility between man's egotism and the divine purity³.

Knowledge is another expression of the daimonic. Knowledge gives one a daimonic weapon over other people. This skates on the edge of the primitive belief that knowledge gives one a special magical power⁴. Sin is the effort to gain

1 Letters, p. 71.

2 Ibid., p. 199.

3 Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell (Penguin Books, 1959), p. 46.

4 May, Love and Will, p. 164.

the knowledge and ecstasy that pertains to angels alone and in making this effort man becomes a demon. The sorcerer repeats the fall. However holiness is an effort to recover the joy that was before the fall⁵. Moreover magic and alchemy are perfectly appropriate symbols for our aspirations towards freedom. To break the chains that imprison one is to experience something like the magical power that commands things to do its bidding⁶.

Man sees the Spirit by the light of his own spirit. Common to all mysticism is the desire to lose the sense of individuality and to merge into the greater whole. One longs for a higher power to take over one's life even if the higher power is only the army or the party organization (as in the case of Hugh). Huxley sees salvation as an escape from self - the annihilation of the ego and the merging into the greater entity which he calls "Mind at Large". However Zaehner sees this as an escape from "the neurotic self" and speaks of a natural growth of the individual personality to its full stature in which soul, mind, and body develop along their own lines not encroaching on one another but balancing one another⁷. Zaehner believes that in the ancient mysteries man sought to escape from himself into ecstasy. The Christian mystery on the other hand is not primarily designed for this

5 Watts, (from Arthur Machen's story "The White People"), p. 151.

6 William Barrett, Irrational Man (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 129.

7 R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism: Sacred and Profane (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 19.

purpose. It is the receiving of Christ quietly into the inmost essence of the soul⁸. The novel dramatizes both sides of this mysticism but leans to the latter philosophy in its ethical and spiritual concept of truth.

The novel is conceived in Dante's terms. Once lost in the Dark Wood, the spiritual condition of hardness of heart, a man can only escape by so descending into himself that he sees his sin not as an external obstacle, but as the will to chaos and death within him. Yet he who would make the descent into the lower regions runs the risk of what the primitives call "the perils of the soul", the unknown Titans that lie below the surface of ourselves. On the other hand he may also be torn apart by Titanic forces within himself if he does not attempt the descent into Avernus to place himself again in contact with the archaic life of his unconscious⁹. As Zaehner points out, true integration of the soul is the natural mystical experience brought under the control of the intellect. At the same time the rational principle finds itself extended by its marriage with the unconscious. Each nourishes the other. Their opposition is evil, and does not provide the harmony in which we can realize the Kingdom of God within us¹⁰.

However when the unconscious invades consciousness we may merge with nature, or be overcome by the devil, or plunge right through to God in our utmost depths, which occurs only when the soul has been purged from sin¹¹. The latter is close

8 Zaehner, p. 26.

9 Barrett, p. 180

10 Zaehner, p. 114.

11 Ibid., pp. 148-149.

to the mysticism of the soul according to Eckhart: to know and to find one's true self, to know one's soul and its true nature and through this knowledge to liberate and realize its divine glory¹².

The alchemical motif in the novel has the following significance: Alchemy is the achievement of inner gold and demands the conquest of the dark and irrational impulses of the soul¹³. Alchemical cosmology is essentially a doctrine of being, an ontology. It stands in close relation to the way of knowledge "gnosis", rather than to the way of love¹⁴. Central to the doctrine of alchemy is the idea of matter and spirit: the form-giving cause corresponding to Pure Act and the receptive substance which is purely passive, complement one another reciprocally; and thus as fundamental and timeless possibilities they cannot be separated from one another¹⁵. The duality of the active and passive poles of existence expressed in the complementarism of heaven and earth, or of planets and metals, is reflected in the relationship of sun and moon and of gold and silver. The sun, or gold, is in a certain sense the incarnation of the active and generative pole of existence whereas the moon or silver incarnates the receptive pole, the materia prima¹⁶.

12 Rudolph Otto, Mysticism East and West (1932; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 98.

13 Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy (1960; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 13.

14 Ibid., p. 27.

15 Ibid., pp. 63-64.

16 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

The highest meaning of alchemy is that all is contained in all, and its magisterium is none other than the realization of this truth on the plane of the soul. This realization is effected by an elixir which unites in itself all the powers of the soul and thus acts as a transmuting 'ferment' on the psychic world and in an indirect fashion on the outward world also¹⁷. In the novel it is suggested or implied that alcohol is this magic elixir, the false substitute for an inner spiritual one, yet containing some elements of the latter. There is a deliberate ambivalence concerning this motif in the novel.

Mysticism holds that the soul has become alienated from God and turned towards the world. Consequently the soul must be reunited with God and it does so by discovering within itself His immediate and all illuminating presence. Alchemy on the other hand is based on the view that man as a result of the loss of his original Adamic state is divided within himself. He regains his integral nature only when the two powers whose discord has rendered him impotent are again reconciled with one another. The regaining of the integral nature of man which alchemy expresses by the symbol of the masculine feminine androgyne is the prerequisite, or from another point of view, the fruit of the union with God¹⁸. Thus in the conjunction of opposites lies a magic, a mystery that is necessary for spiritual evolution.

17 Burckhardt, p. 75.

18 Ibid., p. 149.

5. Determinism

The power of fate as opposed to human choice in determining the actions of the characters seems overwhelmingly strong. There is a great emphasis on inner motivation stemming from the unconscious. Nevertheless the tragic dimension is present: How do human beings relate to the inescapable necessities of human fate? Man can be judged in terms of Sartre's bad faith. Basically bad faith is an attempt to escape from the anguish which men suffer when they are brought face to face with their own freedom. We develop tricks and devices for avoiding it. Irony is one example. We may always adopt an ironic tone to show that we are not really committed to the views we express¹. Bad faith consists in pretending to ourselves and others that things could not be otherwise, that we are bound to our way of life and could not escape from it even if we wanted to².

In the case of Hugh the emphasis on freedom is clear: "The past was irrevocably past, and conscience had been given to man to regret it only in so far as that might change the future." (112) Freedom takes on a new spiritual dimension with Yvonne. "Misunderstood and tragic. Yet with a will of your own. But what was the use of a will if you had no faith." (269) The Consul, of course, is in part a classic case of bad faith. He says with irony, "The will of man is unconquerable, even God cannot conquer it." (97)

1 Mary Warnock, The Philosophy of Sartre (London: Hutchinson, 1965), p. 52.

2 Ibid., p. 53.

Yet on the whole the emphasis is on determinism against the power of human choice. The quote from Bunyan at the beginning suggests predestination. There is a sense of pathos: "The poor old creature (the bull) seemed now indeed like someone being lured, drawn into events of which he had no real comprehension." And there is a sense of wonder and mystery: "What force drives this sublime celestial machinery?" Yvonne asks. (323)

The main emphasis is on insanity both in man and the universe. Yvonne asks of her father's insanity - "What were these things in the face of God or destiny?" (262) suggesting an indifferent universe if not a hostile one. Yvonne's fate is out of her hands: "Her own destiny was buried deep in the past and might for all she knew repeat itself in the future." (269)

The Consul similarly feels himself "being shattered by the very forces of the universe." (149) But he returns to his ironic pose again with a touch of absurdity and maybe something of the truth: "Yet who would ever have believed that some obscure man sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts was authoring their doom." Or perhaps it was an innocent child, he thinks, playing an organ, pulling out the stops at random that was responsible. The real child is inside the Consul. The Consul's voices are symbolic of the deep division in his personality and are connected to madness. As he realizes himself at one point: the act of a madman or a drunkard seems

less free and more inevitable to one who knows his inner condition.

6. Tragedy

A tragic perspective is necessary to go deeper into the meaning of the novel. Chapter 8, the pelado incident, is a tragedy in miniature and Hugh sees it in terms of Aristotle's conception of tragedy: "... in these old women it was as if, through the various tragedies of Mexican history, pity, the impulse to approach, and terror, the impulse to escape (as one had learned at college), having replaced it, had finally been reconciled by prudence, the conviction it is better to stay where you are." (251)

The chanting of the mourners at the opening of the novel on the Day of the Dead is suggestive of the chorus of Greek tragedy and the references to "Antigone" the "Philoctetes" and the "Oedipus Tyrannus" are also significant allusions. Fate is the central theme in Greek tragedy. This tragedy is rooted in human history (the tragic fatalism of Mexico) and not human history alone. What we learn is not character but the mutability of the world, pity and fear in the general human condition.

The quote from Bunyan leads us back to the idea of Christian tragedy. Man determines his own fate through the act of sin. He has a conscious choice of getting on the Wheel of Fortune or not (the ferris wheel).

According to Schopenhauer tragedy is seen as the power

and triumph of evil and blind fate, the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent, the inevitability of suffering. The meaning of tragedy is this recognition of the nature of life and the significance of the hero is his resignation¹. This view may be readily applied to the novel. Yvonne is crushed unjustly, and at the end the Consul shows the courage to face reality, in other words, to admit defeat.

Nietzsche maintains the ideas of the tragic nature of life but for him the necessary response is active: an aesthetic of tragic delight in man's inevitable suffering which the action of tragedy shows us in order to transcend it. It creates heroes but in order to destroy them as a way of asserting the primal unity and joy of life. We see the struggle, the pain, the destruction of appearances as necessary because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will². Is not the Consul's mind itself, the great far reaching activity, "the whirling cerebral chaos", a reflection of this "fecundity" of Nietzsche's theory?

Modern tragedy dramatizes a vigorous tension between man and the order of the universe. The condition of desire unconsciously is that it is forbidden. It becomes devious and perverse and what looks like revolt is more properly a desperate defiance of heaven and hell³. The modern tragic theme is the

1 Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 31-38.
2 Ibid., pp. 38-39.
3 Ibid., p. 94.

dissolution of self in a desire that is beyond all relationship. Aspiration is absolute but it occurs paradoxically within a situation of man on the run from himself⁴. This aspiration which is both creative, and perverse and destructive, is depicted in the Consul's defiant alcoholism and its results. The Consul (and Hugh as well) is certainly on the run from himself.

The novel's tragedy may be seen as inherent. Man's deepest desires are destructive. The active processes of love only accentuate and confirm the pain of existence: their joy is brief and they by nature lead back into the same struggle and wounding. Isolation is all that is known of individuality⁵.

Life is destroyed. The paradox is that only the most intense love of life, the clearest perception of beauty could produce by reversal the ultimate terror. Stability is achieved after the recognition that this is the condition of all life - a collective and overwhelming guilt. (the sign in the garden)⁶.

The isolated beings clash and destroy each other not simply because their relationships are wrong but because life as such is inevitably against them. The fierce animality of sex and death underlies all struggle⁷. Negative experiences are central: the inevitability of aging and death, the ultimate aloneness and responsibility of the individual, the impersonality of nature, and the nature of the unconscious.

A whole group or a whole society may be seen as victims carrying the disintegrating process in themselves. The condition

4 Williams, pp. 94-95.

5 Ibid, pp. 106-112.

6 Ibid, p. 113.

7 Ibid, pp. 116-120

of disintegration is shown by creating a tragic situation and inviting us to laugh at it; creating a ridiculous situation and making it end in tragic breakdown. The dramatic world is one of guilt and illusion, the guilt interlocking and complicated in a series of false personal relationships, the illusion a way of living with the guilt. The only defense against suffering is fantasy. And with the breakdown of a general reality we are offered the man conscious of his unreality as real⁸.

It is uncertain whether Lowry was familiar with Camus' philosophy. The Myth of Sisyphus was published in 1942 when Lowry was in the middle of writing the novel. In Camus' philosophy despair lies in the recognition of the absurd, of incompatibilities, between the intensities of physical life and the certainty of death, between man's insistent reasoning and the irrational world he inhabits. However Camus rejects the notion of suicide and seeks to transcend nihilism and despair. The essential problem is to live within the tensions. Despair is an insidious means of evasion. Man must live like the prisoner who is condemned to die. This is the opposite of the suicide. The Consul, significantly, fluctuates between these two extremes.

Camus says that there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn. We see this scorn in the Consul as he mocks his voices, his demons. Camus continues that the key to the dilemma lies in the movement from despair to revolt. Rebellion, paradoxically,

8 Williams, pp. 143-153.

is an aspiration to order, clarity, unity, and common values. Hugh is the rebel in the novel in this respect. Among most people, Camus states, despair and commitment are shut off by habits which may be interrupted but which will always be resumed⁹. One thinks of Laruelle's activities in Chapter One in this respect.

Another view of tragedy is that failure is a matter of human choice. Suffering is appalling because it is unnecessary. The new tragic consciousness is firmly committed to a different future, to the struggle against suffering which is learned in suffering - total exposure which is also total involvement. Thus the sign in the garden at the end of the novel also points toward the commitment to a different future.

7. Absurdity

Under the Volcano may be compared to the best of Rabelais in its mastery of nonsense. Its verbal nonsense is more than mere playfulness. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language it batters at the enclosing walls of the human condition itself, creating new concepts and new worlds of the imagination. Through nonsense, the arbitrary rather than the contingent meaning of things, the mystical yearning for unity with the universe expresses itself².

9 Williams, pp. 175-183.

1 Martin Esslin, The Theater of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 294-295.

2 Ibid., p. 298.

There is also a magic about nonsense and magic formulae often consist of syllables that still have rhyme or rhythm but have lost any sense they may have originally contained. While nonsense may express a creative urge for freedom from the straitjacket of logic it may also be a sublimation of the impulses towards aggression and violence³. These elements are present in the following:

'Plingen, plangen, aufgefangen
Swingen, swangen, at my side
Pootle swootle off to Bootle
Nemesis a pleasant ride.'

Says the Consul mysteriously. (192)

Lowry says in his letters that he intended the novel to be in part "a gruesome and serious absurdity"⁴.

As Ionesco observes in his essay on Kafka:

The theme of man lost in a labyrinth without a guiding thread is basic in Kafka's work. Yet if man no longer has a guiding thread it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history.⁵

This perhaps aptly describes the perversity of the Consul in the novel. The Consul takes the recognition of the absurdity of the human condition to its logical conclusion - he refuses to take anything seriously, least of all himself and his own death. The Consul is immured in the prison of his own subjectivity. But because we identify with him we choke on

3 Esslin, p. 332.

4 Letters, p. 81.

5 Esslin, p. 307.

our laughter. However we can laugh at the underlying absurdity of the situation. The absurd work makes no pretense of explaining; it shows with anxiety and derision the search for the Ineffable. The dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness, to accept it freely without illusions, and to laugh at it⁶. This is what makes Under the Volcano a gruesome and serious absurdity and a great work of art.

6 Esslin, p. 377.

Part Two

Laruelle - Everyman

As Lowry states in his letters the first chapter serves to establish the terrain of the novel with regard to the powers of Light and Darkness¹. The Hotel Casino de la Selva is pervaded by "a certain air of desolate splendour." It is twilight towards sunset on the Day of the Dead. The atmosphere of death and holiday "somehow inseparable" is part of the tragic rhythm of the setting and of the novel itself. The story is told through the viewpoint of M. Laruelle, the "Everyman" who represents each one of us as readers, and at the same time is a prefiguration of the three major characters.

M. Laruelle is drinking anis because it reminds him of absinthe - ironic sentimentality for the forbidden liquor of a decadent age long ago. For now he is reminded of the tragedy of the Consul, acutely aware that "sickness is not only in body but in that part used to call: soul," as Dr. Vigil philosophizes sadly. M. Laruelle begins to remember the past: "Though tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless it seemed one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value and was not a mere misprint in a communique." (11) And again: "'No se puede vivir sin amar,' M. Laruelle said... 'As that

¹ Letters, p. 58.

estupido inscribed on my house.'" (11) This is the principal theme of the novel. Yet the truths of the past have now become the graffiti of an idiot - tragedy has finally become absurd.

"'Come, amigo, throw away your mind,' Dr. Vigil said behind him. '-But hombre, Yvonne came back! That's what I shall never understand.'" (12)

Ironically M. Laruelle is actually abandoning his sanity because now as the double perspective of the absurd and the tragic is focused on the principal theme and mystery of the book - terrible unrequited love - Laruelle is a man obsessed. For he, too, like the Consul, loved Yvonne, and had an affair with her. Thus he is both friend and betrayer of the Consul.

M. Laruelle is leaving and he recalls the "long, insane, beautiful journey from Los Angeles four years ago." (13) Now there is a sense of emptiness, isolation, and unreality at the moment of parting: "the sense of departure, of its imminence, came heavily about him again, as, childishly avoiding the locked points, he picked his path over the narrow-gauge lines." (13) Here is the first example of the continuous balancing of great emotions and childlike responses, expressing the essential dualism of man, regressed, fixated at a certain point in development (connected with anxiety and destructiveness in the personality) and man as lost, helpless, needing love and guidance.

M. Laruelle is Everyman as well in his further

identification with Hugh and his hopes of changing the world which now "seemed absurd and presumptuous." (15)

For like the modern Everyman, M. Laruelle, too, is profoundly alienated from the world which surrounds him, "but beautiful, there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing as it happened to be, the beauty of the Earthly Paradise itself." (15-16)

M. Laruelle reflects on his failures: "He had acquired a Mexican mistress with whom he quarrelled and numerous beautiful Mayan idols he would be unable to take out of the country." (16) This is symbolic of the absurd, paganism, and sensuality. Mexico is also the Inferno but unlike the Consul, M. Laruelle cannot enjoy it, and he seeks to escape. M. Laruelle continues to explore the darker side of his being: "A black storm breaking out of its season! That was what love was like, he thought: love which came too late. Only no sane calm succeeded it, as when the evening fragrance or slow sunlight and warmth returned to the surprised land!" (16) Love is destructive when it cannot be freely given or returned for it comes too late. Madness also comes from above, "Tonnerre de dieu" - the cycle of nature is upset finally. In man and in nature virtue and harmony consist in maintaining a dynamic balance with the mystical implicit unity of polar opposites. The absence of this fundamental identity is meant to be seen as one source of hell in the novel. "And yet, after all, the storm contained its own secret calm... His passion for Yvonne...." (18) As Perle Epstein says: The

calm at the storm's centre is the path of loving self sacrifice².

M. Laruelle thinks: "these purple mountains all around him, so mysterious, with their secret mines of silver so withdrawn, yet so close, so still, and from these mountains emanated a strange melancholy force that tried to hold him here bodily, which was its weight, the weight of many things, but mostly that of sorrow." (19) Here again we may discern a double movement and significantly the final effect is that of sorrow.

His mind is filled with the memory of the happiness of childhood holidays with Geoffrey. Like the "Hell Bunker" encounter which "seemed to bear some obscure relationship to the later one in Maximilian's palace" many things in this remembrance are invested with a kind of dramatic or tragic irony which later deepens significantly into a kind of tremendous, gruesome cosmic irony or irony of fate. M. Laruelle's thoughts concerning the test of manhood with young Geoffrey, the innocent images and themes of the horse, the drinking, the broken friendship, converge in a process of symbolic inversion. We are back in the present as M. Laruelle barely escapes being trampled by the drunken horseman (the Consul). Again there is the duality "the senseless frenzy but controlled not quite uncontrolled" which gives impulse and impact to the novel. (Laruelle is here, too, identified with

2 Perle Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p. 69.

Yvonne who is killed by a horse at the end.)

Soon, returning to this mad destructive theme, there is "a strange unnatural excitement in the air, a kind of fever." (29) Lightning flashes. Lightning is "celestial fire as an ~~active~~ force terrible and dynamic... The image of the Logos ~~piercing~~ the darkness is universal³." Yet, significantly here the lightning is an uncomprehensible "savage scribble". Paradoxically the people run and laugh in the face of this celestial fire. "Everywhere people were flashing torches" (30) The torch is a symbol of purification through illumination, an emblem of truth⁴. And the truth is then starkly revealed: "Las Manos de Orlac". And M. Laruelle thinks: "an artist with a murderer's hands; that was the ticket, the hieroglyphic of the times. For really it was Germany itself that, in the gruesome degradation of a bad cartoon, stood over him. - Or was it, by some uncomfortable stretch of the imagination, M. Laruelle himself?" (31) Laruelle is again the enigmatical Everyman, this time in the role of a murderer. M. Laruelle glances at the garish picture of the German film star, the "encantadore Maria Landrock", the bewitching sorceress of the time. The fever of the people in the thunderstorm builds up symbolically into the madness of fascism tied to a magic spell.

Then, in a lighter vein, we have the absurd humour of the Consul in the words of Sr. Bustamente, "sitting here

3 Juan E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1962), p. 342.

4 Ibid., p. 344.

drinking: and often, the poor guy, he have no socks." (34)

There is a continuous alternation, a cycle, that forms the rhythm and meaning of the novel, from the beautiful to the comically grotesque to the tragically terrifying, signifying the dynamic tendencies of all contradictions: night seeks to become day, life leads to death - the world of phenomena becomes a system of perpetual inversions.

The novel takes in its scope the Biblical and the mythical: "It was still raining, out of season, over Mexico, the dark waters rising outside to engulf his own zacuali in the Calle Nicaragua, his useless tower against the coming of the second flood." (35) As Perle Epstein states: "The Tower of Babel is a Cabbalistic metaphor for the fact that an attempt to lay hold of the secrets of heaven to pass them on to the uninitiated on earth ends in misunderstanding and anarchy, confusion of tongues, false symbols⁵." Divine vengeance and purification is represented by the flood.

As the tragedy of the Consul (spy, sympatico) looms ambivalently in memory M. Laruelle echoes the reader's question - "But why had this happened?" (37) M. Laruelle remembers the incident of the s.s. Samaritan and the Consul's ambiguous guilt and heroism. As Perle Epstein points out: "Lowry uses the entire Samaritan episode as an allegory of the conflict between good and evil forces during which Geoffrey had mishandled his power and for which Hugh is soon to compensate by giving his life at sea⁶."

5 Epstein, p. 62.

6 Ibid., p. 126.

The Consul's letter reveals sorrow and the retreat and seclusion of the inner self and the interplay of light and dark adding to this sadness: "For myself I like to take my sorrow into the shadow of old monasteries, my guilt into cloisters and under tapestries, and into the misericordes of unimaginaire cantinas where sad-faced potters and legless beggars drink at dawn, whose cold jonquil beauty one rediscovers in death." (41)

Again, the following lines have a deep significance: "Horrors portioned to a giant nerve! No, my secrets are of the grave and must be kept." (41) The words remind us of Joyce's definition of the tragic: "Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause⁷." And, more specifically, in the words of K.A. Meninger: "The alcoholic suffers secretly from unspeakable terror which he cannot bear to face. Furthermore, the alcoholic knows that he does not know the origin of the dreadful pain and fear within, which compels him to self destruction⁸." This is analogous to the universal spiritual crisis of modern man.

Yet death, spiritual death, like the storm "contains its own secret calm": "I wonder if it is because tonight my soul has really died that I feel at this moment something like peace." (42)

Similarly in the rushing of the sea of life itself there

7 James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man (1916; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 204.

8 Karl A. Meninger, Man Against Himself (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1938), p. 167.

is a passive sublime beauty in suffering: "everything jostled and beautifully ruffled and stirred and tormented in this rolling sleeked silver," (43) recalling the metaphor of the beautiful mystery of the "secret mines of silver" in the mountains of Mexico: (19)

The Consul pleads "if I am to survive I need your help" (43) but he will not send the letter. This simultaneous reaching out and holding back expresses the basic paradox or contradiction in the novel. In this ambivalence lies the true reality of hell.

Before there had been a transcendent unity which is now lost, perhaps forever, "the unity we once knew and which Christ alone knows must still exist somewhere." And then the final statement of the religious metaphor: "Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth; not precisely a discovery, I am afraid. You will think I am mad, but this is how I drink too, as if I were taking an eternal sacrament." (45) Love brings pain and guilt but it is also the life-giving force. And the cure for this ambivalence is mescal drinking - a religious act going to the depth of Being.

After reading the letter M. Laruelle slips into a state of deep abstraction. In the cantina the storm over, the candles still burning, there is "a beauty and a sort of piety." But not without a touch of the comic and the faintly absurd: "the barman was giving the younger of the two children an orange: someone went out and, the little girl sat on the orange, the jalousie door swung and swung and swung," (46)

(invisible drunken figures passing in and out?). Yet predominantly, there is life returning, awakening, being purified. M. Laruelle feels the "fresh coolness of the rainwashed air" and hears the sounds of the fair from a distance once more. Thus on impulse, he holds the letter into the candle flame - the further purification, the burning away of old memories, mostly painful. Yet the past will not die without a final arresting "burst of brilliance," (46) a kind of epiphany - the frozen mural of life (children) and death (mourners). The fire itself is described as a death. The image and the theme informing it call to mind Shakespeare's sonnet (73):

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed by that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceivst which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Finally we move from the realm of the personal and into the mystical and the eternal opposition of Light and Dark: "Over the town in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel." (47) This symbolizes the wheel of the cosmos turning backwards, endlessly recapitulating man's spiritual progress and regression.

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Hugh

Hugh is a projection of the younger half of Lowry (the Consul being the other half) in his role of man of action, athlete, seaman, and successful pop musician.

Lowry says of Hugh: he is Everyman tightened up a screw for he is just beyond being mediocre. And he is the youth of Everyman. He is a frustrated fellow whose frustrations might just as well have made him a drunk too¹.

Early in Chapter One Hugh first appears in the Consul's "amiable half bitter description of him". Hugh arouses ambivalent feelings in others. His mask (partially unknown to himself) of adventurer and hero backfires on M. Laruelle who ironically "in half an hour dismissed him as an irresponsible bore, a professional indoor Marxman, vain and self-conscious really but affecting a romantic extroverted air." (14) But significantly, we are told, once they are drawn together by misfortune, the relationship radically changes to one of sympathy and understanding. Gradually Hugh comes to symbolize what is noble and good (albeit somewhat confused) in man. His inward journey to find his true self is at the same time a search for the eternal. He embodies the ideals of revolution, individuality, dignity and courage but always tempered by Lowry's ironic awareness of the absurd. For as Perle Epstein says, Hugh is not prepared to give up his attachment to the material world².

1 Letters, p. 75.

2 Epstein, p. 119.

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The daimonic in Hugh resides in his repressed jealousy and anger in his unsuccessful relationship with Yvonne. Similarly he both admires and hates the Consul who is also his initiator into life. The reverse creative side of the daimonic is his romanticism. The two sides intersect in Hugh's dreams of the spotlight, sex, security, and his manic tendencies. Later on in his self analysis he tries to reject the dark part of himself. But in order to achieve wholeness, as Rollo May points out, one must confront and identify with this rejected daimonic aspect of the self. Thus the rationality and irrationality (foolishness mostly) of Hugh's attempts to ride the bull toward the end of the novel. Perle Epstein points out that this is a spiritual equivalent of the Jewish Cabbalists' interpretation of Jacob's wrestling with the angel as a conquest of his own spiritual deficiencies³. Yet Hugh, touched by madness, is also an Appollonian figure. For him value is created by "action". The authentic life is aggressive, masculine, active: The will and the intellect play an important part in this lifestyle. He will give up his correspondent's role and become an active fighter for the Loyalist cause.

However, much of Hugh's struggle is unnecessary and immature, and it is also pathological. Hugh wants to win the war almost singlehandedly, a desire exacerbated by a deep sense of guilt. The guilt lies in the past: "the past remained a tortured shape, dark, and palpable, and accusing." (159) Hugh must get in touch with his true self not out of shame and

3 Epstein, p. 165.

humiliation but through active virtue.

Hugh uses his reason to distinguish true emotion from false emotionalism, and faith from fanaticism. And because of that struggle one cannot accuse him of Sartrean "bad faith" which plagues the Consul.

Hugh first appears as a definite intruder in the renewed relationship between Yvonne and the Consul. His presence injects energy and suspense into the narrative.

When Hugh first sees Yvonne "his heart and the world stopped too; the horse half over the huddle, the diver, the guillotine..."

(98) And the picture of Yvonne, "clothed entirely in sunlight," adds a truly visionary quality to the scene, potentially both creative and destructive. Significantly, Hugh is paralyzed momentarily and reluctant to meet the past, however not to the same degree the Consul was and remains throughout.

Hugh's ambivalent nature is reflected in his appearance. Carrying a second-hand copy of Jack London's Valley of the Moon Hugh is reminiscent of one of London's tough and hellish creations. At the other extreme is Yvonne's embarrassing remark about the "drug-store cowboy". Despite this hybrid caricature Hugh "is, secretly enormously proud of his whole outfit," (100) and with his darkened skin and his gun consciously radiates masculinity. The passion and the tension of the scene however is sublimated into superficial pleasantries and finally discharged through humour. Hugh's natural nonchalant story telling succeeds in awakening a deep level response from Yvonne: "Hugh, how like you!" (101) and once more Hugh is suddenly attracted to her -

"Hugh felt the pain in his heart and looked away." (101) Hugh becomes aware of the bitterness of love's memories. But the process of illusion is working in Hugh once more. Yvonne is almost unresponsive but desirable and perhaps obtainable, and Mexico, with its prisons and revolutions, is horrible but now appears paradisaical. Perhaps this ambivalence about reality symbolically accounts for Hugh's madcap antics. Hugh gives nonsense replies to Yvonne's questions about himself. Perhaps the cause lies further back in "the faint giddiness" he felt at first seeing Yvonne. (99) Hugh becomes "mentally intoxicated" (parallel to the Consul's intoxication) as Yvonne presses against him to avoid the charge of the billy goat (a symbol of licentiousness). Hugh continues to play the goat to avoid the approaching crises of his love and the past but there was "something nervous mutually dependent still about their mirth." (104) Underneath all is the consciousness of a false relationship and significantly the barranca suddenly appears. A ravine or gorge sometimes signifies a crack in the conscious life through which the inner pattern of the individual psyche or of the world soul may be glimpsed. It also signifies danger, and the danger is there in Hugh's desperate humour, which now is separating them and in the terrific sound of the "target practice" in the distance. The conversation turns to the war in Spain. Hugh's attempts at humour, as if to scan Yvonne's feelings about the war, pick up again but soon collapse: "He was lamely silent" (105) when Yvonne asks him if he plans on going back to Spain. Hugh becomes

extremely cynical. However this is a defensive mask. Hugh's ship is headed for Spain. He dreams about the voyage "the exhilaration the limitless purification of the sea." (108)

His desire is also rooted in guilt which must be purified. Not to act would be to collapse the tension between life and death and sink in suicidal despair, despair, as Camus puts it, in the absurdity of the world, which absurdity is manifested in Hugh's half serious joking about the war.

Hugh and Yvonne decide to go riding and the scene is implicitly sexual ("We've never ridden together before, have we?"). (109) The idyllic ride with Yvonne is agonizingly simultaneously heaven and hell for Hugh. The duality is suggested as a kind of visionary experience - "this day of visions and miracles... No peace I shall ever find but will be poisoned as these moments are poisoned -" (111) Hugh, idealistically, does not despair. His thoughts turn toward the larger conflict in the arena of Mexico itself: "A country of model farms: of hope? - It was a country of slavery." (112) And finally the conflict is universal: "Revolution rages too in the tierra caliente of each human soul. No peace but that must pay full toll to hell -". There is no romance here; Hugh is willing to pay the price. (112)

Paradoxically, in the midst of enjoying the ride Hugh's sense of guilt overwhelms him. Like Judas he has betrayed his master, knowing perfectly well what he was doing. He struggles with his inherent desire to hide from the truth: - "how marvellous this was, or rather Christ, how he wanted to be deceived about

it as must have Judas, he thought... if only it were not so absolutely necessary to go out and hang oneself." (115)

Thus Hugh suddenly asks Yvonne whether or not she has divorced the Consul. When she answers that she has gone back to the Consul it is hell for Hugh. He suggests that he go to Oaxaca, another parallel to the Consul, another sundering and heartbreak. Yvonne asks Hugh if he thinks she can help the Consul in some way. But Hugh maintains a detached attitude telling Yvonne that there is nothing really wrong with the Consul except his will power, and that he is simply not his brother's keeper. It is easy to see that he places his ruined relationship with Yvonne on a higher level. Yvonne is hurt and angry at his tolerance, indifference and even fatalism. Hugh adds: "What's the good? Just sobering him up for a day or two's not going to help. Good God if our civilization were to sober up for a few days, it'd die of remorse on the third." (121) In stating this absurd and terrible truth, Hugh had displaced his aggression against Yvonne and the Consul to the world itself.

High on beer, amused, Hugh sounds at best incredulous, at worst insensitively mocking towards Yvonne's dream of having a farm in Canada. Alcohol brings out in him an uninhibited and belligerent euphoria but underneath this is a feeling of oneness with Yvonne and the Consul. The possibilities of their future paradise set his imagination afire. Galloping through the fields, experiencing a keen pleasure, he feels he has atoned for his selfishness. Hugh, gazing out over the wild

strength of the landscape reveals his deeply idealistic and romantic nature, yet recognizing the danger of being so nearly always hypocritical in the affirmation of one's soul. His longing is identified with the main symbol in his heart - the sea.

We next encounter Hugh in Chapter 6 lying down, watching the clouds speeding across the Mexican sky feeling the intolerable impact of the knowledge that has come to him perhaps too late, that one could not be young forever. Hugh's consciousness, like the Consul's is split: "I am not young. On the other hand: I am a prodigy. I am young." (154)

"In the middle of the bloody road of our life..." The feeling of uncertainty is anguish; the depth of the anguish increases as the threatening changes strike at more central regions of the self. What is necessary is faith in the undiscovered self, found by searching up in the past. But this involves anxiety. A voice says to him "No: I am much afraid that there is little enough in your past which will come to your aid against the future." (155)

Hugh proceeds to turn inward for an extended self-analysis of his ailing ego, "settling himself back on his daybed." (155) It is soon evident that Hugh's acute, almost morbid self awareness while extremely necessary for self consciousness is a hindrance to his natural flow of thought and feeling. It is particularly relevant to Hugh's self inflation, illusion and disillusionment cycle. He mocks his own dreams of glory and sees his past triumphs in terms of

self-dramatizations. It leads to the most bitter self accusations as if the more black his past the whiter his present or future will be after his atonement: "And yet it is nothing I am beginning to atone for my past so largely negative, selfish, absurd, and dishonest." (156)

What is wrong with Hugh? Firstly he looks to other people for an appraisal which indicates his insecurity: "Nothing to ye that pass by?" (156) Secondly, equivocation: "I have no responsibilities." (157) However this is balanced by his ironic sense of humour and his poetic nostalgia which skates on the edge of sentimentality. As a youth going to sea for the first time, Hugh was a foolish young dreamer and a hypocrite. Thus inevitably Hugh had only travelled in a circle of unpleasant reality. He had not succeeded in escaping the soft life, the bourgeois phoniness. He longed for a typhoon! Hugh had to pretend to himself that "there was something romantic in what he had done. As was there not!" (166) Ironically he was totally unaware of the magnificence and history of his surroundings, lost in a dream world of adventure: "and far above was perhaps another sea where the soul ploughed its high invisible wake." (167) ("Ploughed" suggests a connection with Yvonne's dream of a farm.) The irony becomes double-edged as Hugh longs to return home to England, dreaming of her "as a lover of his mistress," (168) and the banalities of tea and tennis. He fantasizes about the fame his songs will bring him which he convinced himself he had earned for "having gone through hell." (168) Hugh is very mixed up at this point and the novel's

central theme - "No peace but that must pay full toll to hell," is humorously turned upside down.

But by chance Hugh does in the end go through fire aboard the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He comes to realize that to the sailor life at sea was no senseless publicity stunt. It was crashing dullness and exposure to peril. "That, and a secret longing to be buried in it. And an enormous unquenchable pride," (171) (with a suggestion of the alcoholic motif once more). There is also a dualistic suggestion of the Freudian death wish and its tension with eros. On the second ship he "had been neither abused nor toadied to. He had been treated as a comrade." (172) Yet the absurdity of his position was never more real: "his shipmates insisted on packing his bag for him. As it turned out with stale bread." (172)

Hugh learns that his songs have not sold, but "in spite of himself felt flattered at being initiated into the mysteries of the song writing business." (173) There is a constant battle in Hugh between the adolescent and the mature man, between a desire for instant fame and a true initiation into manhood. But as part of his disillusionment the first step into manhood had already been made albeit unwillingly: "Hugh became aware of the world." (174)

He finds a job pasting cuttings in a scrap book. He writes some stories. At bottom he now wanted not trial by hardship but the familiar catchwords - "honesty and art." Even more absurdly he plotted revenge against Bolowski in an orgy of anti-semitism and takes his revenge by seducing Bolowski's

wife. Bolowski files for divorce naming Hugh as co-respondent and accuses him of plagiarizing two songs: "Had he been living in a world of illusion so absolute... that involvedly, even his disillusionment... was false?" (176) Like the Consul he is troubled by demons: "His poor songs pursued him in a minor key now macabre." (176) Disgraced Hugh sentimentally thinks, full of self pity: "It seemed, finally, almost a comfort that his mother and father were dead." (176). Then an inexplicable miracle occurred - Bolowski dropped the charges and forgave him. Perhaps this is meant to be symbolic of the insubstantial quality of the whole of Hugh's world.

Hugh goes to university: "the godsent opportunity - the most appalling of nightmares." (180) But Hugh was not only a victim of affectation. He too had his prejudices. Hugh, once anti-semitic, now idealizes the Jews and becomes a Zionist. He reverts back to his guitar seducing women with it and making a lot of money as a band leader. However Hugh's songs insulate him from life composing essentially a childish regression of which Hugh is unaware. However after his rise to fame he stops playing. Finally he faces the partial truth that "one had always been singing oneself." (183) As Perle Epstein says of Hugh's guitar: "Like the magic liquor the magic lyre is also a double edged sword functioning for good or evil in accordance with its master's predisposition⁴." As Hugh remembers, thoughts of the Battle of the Ebro keep intruding symbolically interwoven with his guilt, responsibility, and fate. Hugh's semi-rationalization

4 Epstein, p. 120.

continues. He had become "increasingly conscious of loneliness isolation." (184) He attributes this to the missing part of his identity - his guitar, ("It strung me to life"). (184)

Yet Hugh ludicrously wishes that he could just walk off the stage of his life, just as the actor in the Passion play can get off his cross and go home to his hotel for a Pilsener: "Yet in life ascending or descending you were perpetually involved with the mists, the cold and the overhangs, the treacherous rope and the slippery belay; only, while the rope slipped there was sometimes time to laugh. None the less, I am afraid..." (185) ("overhangs"=hangovers, perhaps). He still cannot detach himself or laugh at his defeats at the hands of "harsh reality." (185) Significantly he asks: "can it be that I am returning to it with my dreams intact, nay, with dreams that, being without viciousness, are more child-like than before. I love the sea, the pure Norwegian sea. My disillusionment once more is a pose." (186) His disillusionment is a subtle way of avoiding the struggle. He needs another "counter-pose" or counterpoise, and finally he asks the fundamental question "What am I trying to prove by all this?" And the answer lies somewhere in the regions of the undiscovered self. As Perle Epstein says, his trials are the training ground for the soul, a preparation for his last true voyage⁵. He must accept the contradictions in himself. And through accepting himself he comes to accept others particularly the Consul - "this man of

5 Epstein, p. 121.

abnormal strength and constitution and obscure ambition, whom Hugh would never know, could never deliver nor make agreement to God for, but in his way loved and desired to help." (187) For the first time unselfishly he feels deep sympathy for Yvonne, "yet it struck Hugh that she walked by herself. Poor darling Yvonne." (190) He feels ready to face "the euhred stupid bloody terrific guitar-playing future." (190)

It begins innocently enough. During the bus ride to Tomalin, in Chapter 8 "Like a child Hugh wanted everyone to be happy on a trip. Even had they been going to the cemetery he would have wanted them to be happy." (238) Yet he also senses the unreality and imminent catastrophe, "the naked realities of the situation, like the spokes of a wheel, were blurred in motion towards high unreal events." (238) The two things of greatest importance to Hugh are blended together: "The more even sounds of the bus wove into Hugh's brain an idiotic syllogism: "I am losing the Battle of the Ebro, I am also losing Yvonne, therefore Yvonne is...." (240) But, on the other hand, we may recall Hugh's thoughts on American women: "They do not care who is losing the Battle of the Ebro...." (191)

The scene of the dying Indian is Hugh's personal hell. Only he finally attempts to save him. There is an almost unconscious bond of understanding and sympathy between Hugh, who is seized with an uncontrollable desire to see the Indian's face again (perhaps it will reflect his), and the Indian with

his dying groan of "Campanero." Hugh is hauled away by the police. He hallucinates visions of terrifying atrocities of war and feels guilty. Yet he does not accuse the other passengers, understanding their fear and reluctance to become involved. But the horrible truth as Hugh sensitively realizes still lies deeper in the nature of the world and fate: "And perhaps it was one of those occasions when nothing would have done any good. Which only made it worse than ever." (252) And also, repellingly - the pelado had stolen the dying Indian's money. Hugh sensitively realizes the significance of this: "It was a recognized thing like Abyssinia." (254) At the end of the ride everyone is happy, "including those Hugh thought who effortlessly, beautifully, in the blue sky above them, floated, the vultures-xopilotes, who wait for the ratification of death." (255) Hugh is deeply in touch with the sadness and terror of the world. His awareness informs his idealism giving it depth and weight but also adds to his isolation.

The "stupid bloody terrific" day continues to unwind. During the course of the bullfight a rider is called for and Hugh jumps into the arena. Gradually one begins to feel the courage, strength, and wildness of Hugh, yet controlled, expert, as opposed to Hugh the dreamy young man of the morning. "One felt, even, half ironically that this was the kind of thing Hugh might be best fitted to do...." (277) True. Hugh's lifestyle is violently absurd and absurdly violent.

In Chapter 11 Hugh buys a guitar during the confused search for the Consul. He intends to expose the hypocrisy of

the world through his singing yet with not a thought of his own. Perhaps he is joking. In any case, Yvonne rightly points out that he is dramatizing himself. Hugh's songs tell of idealism, revolution and martyrdom: "Hugh was singing ironically." (334) Thus while Hugh may be on the way to achieving a new harmony and spontaneity, the picture of him singing blithely in the thunder and darkness is not without an element of satiric regression. This is perhaps symbolic of the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the man and part of the general ambivalence which like the barranca cuts right through the heart of the novel.

What are we to conclude about Hugh? We must remember Freud's great discovery that the great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of knowledge of oneself, of one's destiny. This fear is very often isomorphic with and parallel with fear of the outside world. The avoidance of knowledge is sometimes the avoidance of responsibility. Thus Hugh's looking into himself and his past uncovering hopes and fears is in one sense a model of courage.

Thus as a youth Hugh would willingly seek out and accept the pain of life as part of his romantic philosophy of existence. He has not yet learned that true growth comes through pain and conflict in being true to one's intrinsic conscience or inner nature. The true discovery of identity and the loss of illusions, though painful at first, can be ultimately exhilarating and strengthening. This we can observe if we take an over-all view of Hugh's progress - a halting development toward the ultimate

ideal of self realization and integration, becoming fully human and accepting the contradictory feelings in oneself as a prelude to change.

Hugh has a long way to come along this path. As for his commitment, as Kierkegaard says, the sole proof that a man has a conviction is that his life actually expresses it; is it not doublemindedness to live without conviction or more rightly to live in the constantly changing fantasy that one has and one has not a conviction⁶? Hugh's search for identity is a search for guiding values. He recognizes in his self-awareness, sometimes superficial, sometimes extremely lucid (a cause of pain in itself) the absurdity of his life and tries to accept it with all its absurdity - that he is a man striving for romantic ideals plagued with self-doubts whose efforts often end in farce and melodrama, largely because they are egocentric. He strives to accept the good and the evil, the false and the real, the essential duality of existence. Perhaps in his character the only solution is to go with the flow of life in a kind of release and freedom which also perhaps means death. And, finally, his imminent death in the war contains an element of suicide which resolves the chords of disillusionment and idealism in his existence. It is an act which may not contribute positive good in the long run to the war effort and thus not realistic; and Hugh's fears and doubts reflect its partial equivocal (neither defeat nor victory) character: "And on that lonely platform tonight he himself would stand with his

6 Kierkegaard, p. 111.

pilgrim's bundle." (238). (dynamite, possibly) And thus Hugh, forced to choose for a lifetime, experiences his own existence as something beyond the mirror of thought, encounters the self that he is in the involvement and pathos of choice, as something sacred.

In a false society, as Raymond Williams points out in Modern Tragedy⁷, which the individual is powerless to change, the impulse to self fulfillment becomes tragic; the self that wills and desires destroys the self that lives. Yet the rejection of will and desire is also tragedy, a corroding insignificance of the self. This is the pathos of Hugh, the reverse of his egoism. On a deeper level, as Williams points out, desire and guilt are inextricable. The false society is part of one's own desires. This truth must be confirmed, forgiven, and lived with in our own separate and isolated suffering. Reality, painfully, lies in the intersection of Light and Dark.

⁷ Williams, p. 105.

Yvonne

It is stated in the Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad: "It is not for the love of a husband that a husband is dear but for the love of the Soul in the husband that a husband is dear." The finite longs for the Infinite and we feel the sorrow of things that pass away but beyond the fears of mankind there is the rainbow of joy. We can love the Infinite in all and thus we can find joy in all¹.

Yvonne's love, while intensely spiritual is also daimonic: it is both giving and demanding, gentle and cruel. In trying to find the Consul she finds herself. In losing him or hating him she does the same to herself. Yvonne enters the Consul's private hell groping for a meaning, a way out amidst the loving and the hating. Yet because of the nature of life and suffering she ultimately fails. "Do I sound mad?" she asks. (365) Against all experience she declares her love to the Consul and his truth. "You are born to walk in the light," she says in her letters. (365) Against all logic Yvonne's terrible love will not concede defeat. The conjunction of hope and despair is the tragic cause of her suffering, lifting her up and then hurling her down. Her love borders on masochism. But as one Oriental philosopher points out: such is the duty of the human mind that it should try to maintain a sane balance in an everlasting sea of conflicting impulses, feelings and desires. And such is truth in human affairs that that is true

¹ Juan Mascaro, Introduction The Bhagavad Gita (Penguin Books, 1962).

which we will to make so. The unanswerable argument can always be answered with some compassion, and validity itself invalidated by love. In human affairs it is often the illogical course of conduct that is the most convincing².

Chapter 2 opens with the scene of Yvonne's return. Yvonne's feelings are ambivalent - "nostalgia and anxiety" (48) as she confronts the past. There is also the feeling of being "ashamed" - guilt for leaving and guilt, perhaps, for returning.

Yvonne is still sailing through a hurricane of immense and gorgeous butterflies. The butterfly among the ancients was an emblem of the soul and of unconscious attraction toward the light. In psychoanalysis it sometimes symbolizes rebirth³.

The "beautiful beautiful volcanoes" (49) evoke the image of the love of Yvonne and the Consul which transcends space and time "as if it was November 1936 and not November 1938." (49) She thinks of the dawn and "the gold scrolled back to reveal a river of lapis." (49) Lapis is short for lapis lazuli but also refers to 'lapis philosophicus' the philosopher's stone of the alchemists. Yet Yvonne arrives on the plane which is compared to a "minute red demon, winged emissary of Lucifer." (49) As Lowry states in his letters Yvonne is eternal woman, both angel and destroyer.

As Yvonne enters the bar there is a sudden shift of perspective and consciousness. The goddess of air, of freedom, feels the "exhilaration and longing" leaving her. Of necessity,

2. Lin Yutang, The Importance of Living (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1937), p. 424.

3. Cirlot, pp. 33-34.

since she is in the Consul's hell, she is identified with the picture "of a woman wearing a scarlet brassiere lying on a scrolled divan, behind the upper row of tequila anejo bottles." (51) She felt "her spirit that had flown to meet this man's already sticking to the leather," (her divan). (50)

The Consul, his hands shaking, offers Yvonne a drink. Alcohol is a subtle and profound personal symbol of the hell that they have created and are afraid to face. It is a barrier, but when lowered, also a bond. Thus Yvonne feels deeply alienated, "repellent", when she refuses the drink. Thus searchingly pathetically she reveals the anguish of separation to the Consul: "What have you done? I wrote you and wrote you. I wrote till my heart broke. What have you done with your -" (53) Her emotions are brought to a climax by the need to show in some way that she is trustworthy, dependable in some deep sense. This is symbolized by the word "Oaxaca". The memory of former happiness combines love and despair in a deathlike vision which becomes so terrible that their existence and actions and feelings seem "unreal", a kind of madness.

Love and fear are combined as Yvonne is afraid that the glare of the Consul should turn upon her. Yvonne feels that he is giving her the ultimate denial. She cannot understand the Consul's self destructiveness. But the answer she seems to get from him reveals a profound empathy for his desperate love of the cantina and the profound "hopeless joy" of his life. Yet she also senses the closeness of death - the old woman with

the dominoes.

They begin to walk, and the scene with its combination of strangeness and familiarity produces a division in Yvonne's consciousness - "the severance of thought and body, mode of being, became almost intolerable for a moment." (58) She manages to joke almost aggressively about the Consul's not answering her letters. During this time Yvonne is responding deeply, heartbrokenly, to the Consul's sentimental recollections. She holds back her tears at the bitter conjunction of pain and pleasure, determined not to break down. Looking in the mirror of the shop window Yvonne sees herself as beautiful, beyond human grief. Yet she thinks "the sun turned grief to poison and a glowing body only mocked a sick heart" (59) - expressing an essential duality of appearance and reality. Her dismissal by the Consul is again suggested by the curiously sad picture of the split rock "La Despedida." "She longed to heal the cleft rock." (60) She longs for a miracle, magic (humorously, "some fanciful geologic thaumaturgy") one of the principle ways transcendence is attempted in the novel. Alcohol furnishes another means; and the thought passes through Yvonne's mind: "Geoffrey, let's be reckless this once and get tight together before breakfast." (60) The recklessness of the tragedy is closely allied to madness. If she cannot have him she will at least join him in disintegration. She is aware that Geoffrey blames her for their separation and having a drink with him might also be a way to placate him, please him.

Yvonne thinks: "The Street of the Land of Fire." (60)

Fiery pleasure is desire and love but it is also destructive, (the violence of fire had split the rock) and now there is a suggestion that Yvonne is in hell, in the abyss; "The whole little thoroughfare... was banked sharply down to the right as though it had once side-slipped in an earthquake." (60)

While waiting for the Consul Yvonne has a desire to play upon the Consul's guilt, and significantly, "a mood of martyrdom stole upon her," (the way Yvonne sees herself - as a victim). (61) But looking into the past ("the way they had come"), and exhilarated by being unbelievably in Mexico again, she soon forgets the martyr role, and directs her attention to the future, and the hope of a new life. Yet the past swarms in upon her, as they talk of Hugh and Laruelle. As Perle Epstein says: "When she is reminded of her infidelity by Geoffrey's insinuating comments, Yvonne (now viewed as Eve, the source of sin, or the female in her negative aspect) assumes part of her husband's guilt over the failure of their marriage and sees Geoffrey as 'living in the midst of her blame⁴.'" And "After a while Yvonne said weakly, scarcely hearing herself speak: 'Well, we may have a little time together, mayn't we?'" (66) She is pathetically hopeful that the intimacy of sex will restore love and tenderness.

Yvonne attempts to put away her fears by seeing the situation in relative terms, and she remembers how desperate things had seemed when she left Mexico. Yet when she had been away "she'd tried to keep Quauhnhuac itself, as a sort of safe

4 Epstein, p. 83.

footway where his phantom could endlessly pace, accompanied only by her own consoling unwanted shadow, above the rising waters of possible catastrophe." (68) Ironically, locked away in safe protective memory is a ghostly, sorrowful unreality and futility. Now she thinks of "Geoffrey here alone, but now in the flesh, redeemable wanting her help." (68) She is lifted for a moment but again she plunges into despair: Geoffrey does not want or need her help, but is curiously sustained by her blame. This thought throws Yvonne into a state of "lightheadedness" and she grips her bag tightly - delirium (sans alcohol) in response to the Consul's duplicity. She experiences a profound joy upon entering their home, but at the same time she feels it is false, a lie. In spite of everything Yvonne has a deep desire for happiness which wells up in momentary illusions of fulfillment.

With a surprising and unusual lack of empathy and understanding arising out of anger and frustration perhaps, Yvonne expects the Consul to sober up in a day or two. There may also be the genuine pathos of innocent unawareness here too. But finally the Consul strikes a deep chord of shared emotion and they embrace. When the Consul fails to make love to her she cries to herself, yet the greater tragedy of the Consul seems to have overshadowed any self pity. Again the deepest love is fraught with the greatest pain.

When Hugh arrives on the scene Yvonne acts pleasantly toward him. But her soul is in Geoffrey's world, symbolically the ruined garden, which she is preoccupied in trying to fix

up. She conveys an essential ambivalence to Hugh: "her eyes seemed hurt and unhappy, but vaguely amused: her expression as she went on paring blossoms managed to be both speculative and indifferent." (100) Hugh's presence seems to be good medicine for Yvonne but it soon turns to poison. Hugh asks suddenly if she has gone back to the Consul. She is momentarily upset and uncertain, symbolically reflecting the greater ambivalence that lies inside. Seeming not to realize Hugh's disappointment, or careless of it, or perhaps feeling that the terrible plight of the Consul is more important, she appeals to Hugh for help with Geoffrey. She confides in Hugh her secret dream of owning a farm somewhere. She begins to feel happy, laughing, yet, "her dark eyes that had been shining were opaque and withdrawn." (123) The motif of insanity (Carlotta) and ruin appears again when they reach Maximilian's Palace.

Hugh thinks of Yvonne in Chapter 7: passing her one would not have suspected agony. Is she inside really an All-American bitch, as Hugh thinks, both angel and succubus? But in the next few moments she is a happy, cheerful, imaginative little girl carried away by small things like the postman's humorous antics.

Yvonne, at Jacque's house, pitiously pleads with the Consul asking if he has any love left for her at all. She is upset by the Consul's drinking but ironically, inconsistently, she promises to let him drink his fill if only he would take her away. The Consul turns his hostility toward her and she is

crushed, promising never to exhort him again. The most terrible thing in the world for Yvonne is the Consul's anger. She is in a trap watching him disintegrate and unable to help him lest he rise up against her.

The opening scene of Chapter 9 as mirrored in Yvonne's mind is meant to convey the impression of a happiness that will soon be terminated as the euphoric effects of the drinks wear off. Thus in anticipation are suggestions and touches of a fundamental ambivalence, of the dark as well as the light.

Yvonne clutches at straws - Geoffrey had met her at the bus terminal. She felt a happy sense "illogically" of sorrow that would be overcome. The bull knew "it wasn't going to be killed, merely to play." (257) The "borrachos" trying prematurely to ride the bull "were escorted off tottering, weak-kneed, protesting yet always gay." (257) Thus through the alcoholic haze cheerful gaiety predominates and playing the game is the central notion of fairness. The effect of the alcohol soon wears off. Soon she is overwhelmed by anxiety.

She reflects on the duplicity of the world as manifested in the spectacle of the bull. She is full of sympathy for the poor old creature whom she begins to identify with her father and his childlike, promising dreams and failures in a hostile world. Here again is a ruined paradise, alcoholism and fatuous singing. Yvonne identifies the Consul with her father: "Consul to Iquique!... or Quauhnahuac!" (260) Heroic destiny once again has undergone the ironic transmogrification into absurd, awful reality.

Incongruity is the keynote as Yvonne's mind travels back to her childhood and her father. There is the incongruity of Chile's geography and of the name of the revolutionary leader, "Bernardo O'Higgins." The final stroke of absurd nonsense is her father's invention of an insanely complicated pipe. All this obscure brooding and its results is stupendously incredible. But Lowry insists on the humour and horror of life, which like the business of the bull for Yvonne, is full of irony and disaster. Her father's collapse had a terrifying effect on Yvonne's young mind. Yet her sufferings were kept behind the scenes or rather the sets of the westerns she acted in. Geoffrey had been bored, perhaps ashamed by this history. Significantly, this is the very response of the reader. Could this be the background of the beautiful sophisticated woman we are reading about? Again there is the deliberate terrific incongruity: "the false real excitement, or the false flat bright enchantment of the studies, or the childish adult pride, as harsh as it was pathetic, and justifiable, in having, somehow, at that age, earned a living." (262) Yvonne had become aware of the world long before Hugh. In some ways she is the strongest of the four main characters.

Yvonne's mind shifts from the pathetic absurdity of her father's life to the "marvellous" absurdity of her own adolescence. Its absurdity is evinced and symbolized by the stupid, superficial, melodramatic Hollywood gossip-column version or vision in terms of which it is all brought back to

her. Yvonne is caricatured as the "Honolulu Hellion" decidedly devilish and rebellious, but also faintly suggestive of torment lurking beneath the vitality of youth. The torment comes from a vain fantasy of stardom (like Hugh's) becoming all too real and ending all too swiftly. This immaturity led to the disaster of her first marriage. Looking back she now identifies with the "screamingly funny" meaningless tragedy or half tragedy of her father's family, in which they had been caught up in or invited. Yvonne's "marvellous" absurd vision now shifts back to its opposite tragic pole. She has undergone a radical alienation and thus welcomes the same idiotic ruin of her relatives.

Yvonne's mind travels back to her early life stretched between the two poles of art and life. Their conjunction intensifies the struggle as she is ironically aware of herself playing a part on the stage of life itself. Unfortunately the greatness of her performance is connected to the degree of her anguish.

The duality of Yvonne's sufferings is stressed: "a failure yet rich yet beautiful." In a hell without meaning "everyone save herself, it seemed to her, however hypocritically however churlish, lonely, cripple, hopeless, was capable, if only in a mechanical crane, a cigarette butt plucked from the street, if only in a bar, if only in accosting Yvonne herself, of finding some faith." (267) This exhibits, I think, a strong death wish. Significantly Yvonne "had never found a faith merely in 'life' sufficient? If that were all!" (270) Is

Yvonne overreaching herself in ascent towards her true purpose as Lowry says of the Consul? Here I think Lowry is indicating that the search is meaningful yet ultimately futile and hopeless. Certainly the gap between reality and fulfillment is responsible for unhappiness. In this respect Yvonne's fate is again parallel to Hugh's.

Yvonne soon retreats from the cruel bullfight into her fantasy of a woodland paradise and a new life with Geoffrey, and the juxtaposition of scenes effectively portrays the duality of life. Yvonne possesses a gifted lyrical poetic imagination rooted deep in her heart, if not in reality. She insists to herself: "It was possible!" (271) She wishes that she were alone with Geoffrey so that she could tell him about her vision, as if then, by magic, it would come true. Meanwhile, in the arena, there is a powerful strange silence. The silence seems to contain a mystical element allowing Yvonne to retreat through the door of despair, of consciousness, into her dreamland of hope and intense melancholic beauty.

In the arena, "the scene itself possessed a remote strange beauty: the white trousers and bright serapes of the men enticing the bull shining against the dark trees and lowering sky, the horses, transformed instantly into clouds of dust by their riders with their scorpion-tailed whips, who leaned far out of their bucket saddles to throw wildly, ropes anywhere, everywhere." (278) There is the conjunction of light and dark containing the mystery, magic, impossibility, and

madness of the scene, yet the essential element is aesthetic "beauty". This, I think, is significant of the guiding philosophy and art of the book itself.

Yvonne suddenly turns to the suffering Consul and they decide to go away. But in the next instant they are compared to prisoners in Yvonne's mind. This resembles a scene out of the Theatre of the Absurd as in Becket's "Waiting for Godot" where the two main characters say to each other "Let's go" and neither of them moves.

There is a deeply moving tender exchange between Yvonne and the Consul, a real step towards final love and reconciliation. She has stepped into his private world so completely that she has lost all desire to judge or evaluate it, and without trampling on meanings which are precious to him:

'Yvonne?'

'Yes, darling?'

'I've fallen down, you know... Somewhat'

'Never mind, darling' (279)

But this cannot last:

'Geoffrey -' Yvonne began hurriedly, 'I don't expect you to - I mean - I know it's going to be -'
But the Consul was finishing the habanero. (280)

Yvonne retreats into her woodland paradise once more but amidst her vision of happiness "-Why was it though, that right in the centre of her brain, there should be a figure of a woman having hysterics, jerking like a puppet and banging her fists upon the ground?" (281) Yvonne in exploring Geoffrey's dark mad world has been led into her own. "Their shadows," projections of their darker selves, "crawled before them in

the dust." (281)

Chapter 11 is also told from Yvonne's point of view. Two central motifs, fire and water, are present. Both are symbols of transformation and regeneration, destruction and purification, the forces which are symbolically almost simultaneously operating in Yvonne's soul. Fire implies the desire to annihilate time and to bring all things to their end⁵. On the cosmic level the equivalent of immersion (the bathers) is the flood (the rising of the Pleiades) which causes all forms to dissolve and return to a fluid state thus liberating the elements which will later be recombined in new cosmic patterns⁶.

The dualism of the life and death struggle is expressed by the vultures' flight - "vultures that on earth so jealously contend with one another, defiling themselves with blood and filth but who were yet capable of rising, like this, above the storms, to heights shared only by the condor." (318)

In their search for the Consul, Hugh and Yvonne reach a cross-roads which reminds her of a crucifixion. The general significance of the cross is that of the conjunction of opposites, the positive with the negative, life with death. The basic idea is that of experiencing the essence of antagonism, an idea which lies at the root of existence. Yvonne's emotions again suffer confusion and torment when she frees the caged eagle: "No compunction touched Yvonne. She felt only an inexplicable secret triumph and relief; no one would ever know

5 Cirlot, p. 101.

6 Ibid., p. 365.

she had done this; and then, stealing over her, the sense of utter heartbreak and loss." (321) She is symbolically freeing the Consul's soul, yet she too yearns for freedom and happiness but knows that it is impossible to achieve. Yvonne's soul unites with the pure Being and beauty of the stars - "touching all within that in memory was sweet or noble or courageous or proud." (323) Yvonne is again momentarily lifted out of her misery. She is a true "child of the Universe."

Soon they come to the El Popo and the noise and accelerated chaos of the world. Yvonne hallucinates, seeing the Consul everywhere, another stroke of incipient madness. There is the surreal quality of the flowers shining with "unnatural vividness" in the artificial light. Yvonne blocks her ears as the cockatoo screeches and the thunder starts again. Inside the cantina Yvonne suddenly orders a mescal: "The air was so full of electricity it trembled." (326) Human madness is compared to the tension of cosmic forces.

Yvonne's grim humour masks her wish for self destruction. Yet perhaps, by a kind of primitive sympathetic magic her soul will merge with the Consul's if she drinks the mescal. It releases into consciousness the suppressed rage, the mad "fire" that has been burning in Yvonne throughout. The fire continues to burn out of control consuming her dream - the farm. "But where was the fire?" Yvonne asks, "Crazy thoughts," (327) she imagines, but important really if one must consider the threat to be external or internal. The

second mescal drowns her soul. In a desperate wave of love for the Consul - the magic has worked. She has visions of her woodland paradise, dark and deep, yet, bright, clear, and clean, suggesting the mysterious fusion and transcendence of light and dark to be found in nature, which Yvonne seeks so desperately.

Hugh wants to do something about the Consul but Yvonne would rather get tight. This is the height of her revenge against the Consul, caused by the unhealed wounds of her suffering. The lottery advertisement on the menu suggests duplicity: Yvonne is gambling with the Consul's life, betraying him.

The scene assumes a wild menacing quality for Yvonne. The undergrowth, the trees, and Hugh are drunk. Through drinking Yvonne is once again in hell, and she becomes almost hysterical with a strained sentimental love for the Consul. During a brief lull in the storm Yvonne wishing, hoping, associates the present scene with the romance of this morning's ride with Hugh; "some night essence of their shared morning thoughts, with a wild sea-yearning of youth and love and sorrow." (333) (Significantly, sorrow is inseparable from youth and love.)

Yvonne's death takes place during the thunderstorm - "a shattering insanity in heaven" (339) which is related to Yvonne's madness encircling it, cocentric. In her death vision Yvonne finds herself at the centre of a whirling circle of planets or constellations now symbolic not of madness but

of the symmetry and beauty of Yvonne's brave soul. This effect is heightened by the vision of myriads of beautiful butterflies - scene of her happy return to Mexico. (Return home is symbolic of death as a reintegration of the spirit into the Spirit⁷.) She sees the horse once more. It was the Consul finally destroying her. Her vision is then filled with the mad fire of her first mescal. Everything is burning. This is the fire of hell, destructive but ultimately purifying. It is the final blaze, the fiery death struggle of her love which must burn itself out in order for Yvonne to be free. She must either be driven mad or led to her death in order to be so. Her death opens up the heavens and she is born upwards towards the stars. Yvonne thus finds a kind of release and fulfilment in death - the outcome of her terrible love which will not concede defeat. Every ending is also a beginning: the words and images of the final paragraph resemble those of the first paragraph in the chapter.

The end may be seen in terms of Manichaean philosophy. Yvonne, emissary of celestial love or of the power of Light, disengages herself from the struggle with Darkness and returns to her home in the heavens. There is peace, but not a final solution.

The Consul

...what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning? Your volcanoes outside? Your stars-Ras Algethi? Antares raging south south-east? Forgive me, no. Not so much the beauty of this one necessarily, which, a regression on my part, is not perhaps properly a cantina, but think of all the other terrible ones where people go mad that will soon be taking down their shutters, for not even the gates of heaven, opening wide to receive me, could fill me with such celestial complicated and hopeless joy as the iron screen that rolls up with a crash, as the unpadlocked jostling jealousies which admit those whose souls tremble with the drinks they carry unsteadily to their lips. All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster, is here, beyond those swinging doors. (55)

This is Lowry's vision: half-mad, sentimental, perhaps, but nevertheless somehow more real, more tragic, and more meaningful.

In Chapter 3 we have the vision of the intersection of tragedy and comedy. The comedy is a response to the alcoholic's "hopeless joy". However it furnishes escape only: to be transcendent it would have to burst the bonds of sanity.

The tragedy centres around the issue of the Consul's impotence - symbolic of his failure to love with commitment. Take the love out of life, and the tragedy is corruptly sexual - as symbolized by the exotic plants in the Consul's garden dying an "evil phallic death." The plants are perishing of unnecessary thirst - neglect of human care. From this point of view alcoholism is an unnatural replacement for love. "It is the feeble survival of love of life now turned to poison

which only is not wholly poison." (70)

The humour is grotesquely cosmic in scale: the overflowing drains left something that smelled like the Cosmic Egg. The egg is usually, ironically, symbolic of immortality, the seed of generation and the mystery of life. Now it is merely repellent.

The Consul's "familiar", his demon, "a specialist in casuistry", tells him that he must have 500 drinks in order to cope with the situation of Yvonne's return. The Consul mocks himself: "I have resisted temptation for two and a half minutes at least: my redemption is sure." (74) He disregards the threats of his conscience. It is surely part of Lowry's genius that he could thus portray a man's ruin, masterfully balancing this tension between comedy and tragedy, and never losing sight of either one. The Consul thinks of tapering off "poco a poco". (The road to hell is paved with good intentions).

Even as they embrace there is a touch of slapstick: The Consul had almost fallen backwards on to his broken rocking chair. But the moment of love is stillborn. The explanation is simply that unconsciously, and perhaps consciously too, the Consul does not want to change. His defenses are locked in tight.

With some self pity he feels that Yvonne is no longer his. There is no real basis for this sentimentality for Yvonne still loves him deeply, a fact which he cannot or will not face and respond to accordingly.

Again, regaining his sense of humour, the Consul it is suggested is making a game out of the proceedings: "The Consul found his dark glasses and put them on almost playfully." (77) He says, ironically, of the swimming pool: "might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its draught?" (78)

The "horror of an intolerable unreality" descends upon him as he realizes the full impact of his wife's return. He is lost in the darkness of sin and guilt. "The sunlight could not share his burden of conscience, of sourceless sorrow." (80)

There follows the comic episode with the mindless stereotyped Englishman. Liquor and laughter mix very well with Lowry. A fundamental feature of this humour is the amazing fluency and ironic self awareness of the Consul at these moments - even innocence - "the Consul innocent as a man who had committed a murder while dummy at bridge entered Yvonne's room." (86) This is the "dignity" of comedy perhaps, as opposed to the dignity of tragedy which pervades the novel.

The Consul knowing that the moment of his salvation has arrived begins to joke and put on a show but soon is "trembling with the emotion of the poor actor." Perhaps in one of his most sober moments he asks, "What's the use of escaping... from ourselves?"

The tragi-comedy of the struggle between the bottle and love is brilliantly dramatized in the following scene.

The Consul can only cope in the periods when he is drunk yet sober - something like the magic of breathing under water. He makes plans to reform his drinking by going on beer,

"full of vitamins." Yet "Nothing in the world was more horrible than an empty bottle! Unless it was an empty glass." (91) He fantasizes about the great success of the book he will write, but things get lost and blurred in this drunk-sober monologue - "from alcohol to alkahest" - everything he sees is dissolved in an alcoholic vision.

The Consul becomes tender and sentimental. They embrace - "a solution for one shared instant beautiful as trumpets out of a clear sky." (94) Yet in his imagination he sees the "cantina when in dead silence and peace it first opens in the morning." (94) It is a kind of death wish, but also an epiphany - the beauty amidst the filth, the sunlight flooding the darkness - a restoration of hope. The vision takes on a religious significance but leaves him impotent in reality, with Yvonne. He drinks fiercely to assuage his anger and grief. Then in a lighter mood he begins his sad facetious rationalization of his behaviour and his neglect of Yvonne. He begins to have delusions of grandeur and madly, joyously, the clouds say to him: "Drink all morning... drink all day. This is life!" (97)

Yet his soul finally tires of the humour of playing the horrible game with life, love and sanity: "The shadow of an immense weariness stole over him... The Consul fell asleep with a crash." (97)

"Ah, the frightful cleft, the eternal horror of opposites! Thou mighty gulf, insatiate cormorant, deride me not, though I seem petulant to fall into thy crops." (134)

The Consul exclaims thus with a mixture of horror and bathos. The ravine is a privy - "general Tartarus and gigantic jakes." The Consul is later to awake in the bathroom sitting "like a grotesque parody of an old attitude in meditation." (149) These scenes constitute the blend of scatology and eschatology found in Chapter 5.

Eschatology is present in the Garden of Eden theme. The Consul misreads the sign in the public garden (a kind of hallucination). The implication of his interpretation is that the Consul is both destroyer and outcast.

In his conversation with his neighbour Quincy "the retired walnut grower" (a nut) who represents the narrowminded and conservative outside world, or perhaps the skeptical reader, the Consul gives us yet another interpretation of the myth: Adam really loathed the Garden, and that the Old Man found this out. His punishment was to remain there suffering cut off from God. The paradise, the Consul imagines, was full of "abominations" - a dualistic Manichaeian conception of reality.

This material - spiritual opposition is further explored. Quincy gazed at the Consul with "the cold sardonic eye of the material world" (136) and the Consul mockingly jests that "the original sin was to be an owner of property." (137) Idealists and intellectuals receive the same castigation: "Ah these people with ideas... old William didn't like them." (139)

Then the Consul pompously tells Quincy that his genius is "the final frontier of consciousness" (139) a curious mixture of foolishness and truth.

The spiritual world is the alcoholic one. The bottle is both "Sanctuary" and "Horror". (131) This world is full of the madness of fantasy and vision. Visions both large and small, terrible and ridiculous are at the main core of the Chapter, the meeting ground of alcohol and the unconscious.

The unconscious makes its appearance in the Consul's dream - the search for the eternal drink and promise of light. Nature possesses a mythical, elemental, pristine beauty in the dream. The scene dissolves surrealistically into whirling blowing chaos, then illogically back to peacefulness. The Consul awakes and desperately needs a drink - to sustain his vision and even life itself.

Running towards the hidden bottle of tequila he thinks of his tragedy as a visioned escape into the unknown but is stopped "by what was for him an unscalable wire fence." (130) The Consul's mysticism is bathetically satirized. The Consul running, "crashed one through the metamorphoses of dying and reborn hallucinations, like a man who does not know he has been shot from behind," (130) symbolizing the treacherous nature of reality for those who turn their backs on it. After his drink the Consul significantly "felt himself in a position to entertain for a moment the illusion that all was really normal." (131)

However his paranoia and guilt become acute at the approach of Dr. Vigil. He remembers the macabre "pictures of ancient Spanish surgeons, their goat faces rising queerly from ruffs resembling ectoplasm, roaring with laughter as they

performed inquisitorial operations." (141) Vigil's ridiculous pantomime of "progression a ratos" with its mock horror almost contains the same elements of mad humour and torture. The figure of Vigil is partially satirical - the medieval idea of the doctor who cannot cure himself.

The Consul imagines the day stretching out before him like a vast desert with tequila cases and is "drawn on beautifully by the dissolving mirages past the skeletons like frozen wire and the wandering dreaming lions towards ineluctable personal disaster." (143) He is in the exotic magical world of Rousseau again and thus the disaster is pictured as containing an element of triumph.

Lowry uses the technique of suddenly jumping ahead in time, looking at the present as past. Thus we are able to see the events in a kind of vision again, through an alcoholic filter of confusion, dread, and guilt.

The Consul sees the figures of the past in a kind of mad acceleration: "moving quickly and jerkily now like those of an old silent film, their words mute explosions in the brain." (145) He is in a hell of menacing "minutiae". Even the outside world of nature is "infernal beauty", (148) its thousand aspects torturing him like jealous women (perhaps a hint at his impotence here too). There is another reference to life as the cine - "un poco descompuesto", a "sort of eclampsia" returning to the motif of convulsions as in the jerking silent films. (148)

Similar imagery is found in the theme once again of

the horror of opposites. The Consul speaks of the pain of awareness of life disintegrating - "the light now on, now off, now on too glaringly, now too dimly, with the glow of a fitful dying battery - then at last to know the whole town plunged into darkness." (149) He feels the world sinking beneath his feet like "Atlantis" - another reference to a lost utopian paradise.

The final vision is the Consul's terrifying hallucination of the insect world closing in upon him, a symptom of his delirium tremens. He hears voices calling to him - Vigil, Abraham Taskerson, his familiars, his mother, and his wife. This ties together all the various threads of emotions that have been building up. The effect is sad and tearing, the simultaneous presence of opposites. There is no escape from this madness. Everyone with a vision is not immortal but damned and doomed.

Chapter 7 again deals with the Consul. It lies at the heart of the story. It depicts the Consul's mostly unsuccessful attempt to free himself from "the drunken madly revolving world" and his inevitable fate.

Jacque's "madhouse" with its military character seems "a bad idea" to the Consul. Only a few weeks ago he had sworn never to enter the place again. This is symbolic of the Consul's retreat from insanity, abandoning the defenses and battlements of his war against imaginary opponents, (Laruelle, as well).

The Consul is trying to free himself from the orbit of

a vicious circle: "The clubs of flying machines waved silently over the roofs their motions like gesticulations of pain." (200) The movement of his love follows a circular path - "it might be either approaching or receding". (200) Yvonne has come back but the Consul can only feel "the unreality". His mind travels in circles: "And yet he was thinking all over again and all over again as for the first time how he had suffered...." (201) He feels the urgent desire to hurt Yvonne. The circle of abandonment and return is connected to the vicious circle of alcoholism. The alcoholic suffers at the same time from the wish to destroy his love objects and the fear that he will lose them¹. Drinking has an unconsciously aggressive function². And it satisfies at the same time the need for self destruction because of guilt feelings which arise³. Something of the same satisfying self destructive nature of alcoholism is portrayed in the poster "Los Borrachones". Upon seeing it the Consul "laughed a trifle shakily". (203) The ridiculous yet simple and awful attraction of evil half appeals to and half frightens and repels him. Yet the Consul longs to drink in the Farolito. The cantina attracts his soul with "its certainty of sorrow and evil." (204) Paradoxically he finds "peace" here too. The Consul significantly can make a heaven out of hell. And he can make a hell out of heaven - their love had been too good to last.

The circle motif reappears - how could one begin all over

1 Menninger, p. 170.

2 Ibid., p. 177.

3 Ibid., p. 181.

again, "fight one's way back through the tumultuous horrors of five thousand shattering awakenings...."(205)

Even in its most innocent ramblings the Consul's mind makes its way to the cantina - the Farolito ("the nineteenth hole"). However the Consul's abundant natural wit can clear away the pollution of mixed and troubled emotions and relationships. But as for himself his humour succeeds almost but not quite in resolving the tensions in his mind, leading only to near insanity or absurdity.

Perhaps reality is too painful to bear without alcohol. Seeing Laruelle in the shower and reminded of his adultery with Yvonne, the Consul exclaims: "How loathsome, how incredibly loathsome was reality." (210). And outside the distant firing - "the erections of guns disseminating death."

Sensing an imminent breakdown the Consul frantically tries to call Dr. Guzman. This fails, and the Consul drinks down everything in sight to control his frenzied emotions. He picks up a book, Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale: "sortes Shakespeareanae, 'The gods exist, they are the devil,' Baudelaire informed him." (212) This would account for the Consul's madness, the forces of transcendent evil which are operating upon him. It is also the most important statement of the dualistic paradox of the novel - daimonic power, and its potential for good and evil. Gods become devils.

The Consul longs for the simple happiness of the Indian he sees singing and galloping away on his horse. But this

happiness is not possible, he thinks. Perhaps the Consul is right and Lowry is saying that life is too full of Faustian ambitions, too insanely complicated and complex to fit into this simple vision. Yet, on the other hand, there is no trace of sentimentality here and as Douglas Day⁴ points out, "the simple loving of the real and fragile world" would have sufficed to save the Consul. The Consul thinks of Goethe's remark about the horse: "Weary of liberty he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled and was ridden to death for his pains." (216) The irony points to the need for freedom without compromise for all men. It is part of the central motif of freedom of the chapter and the novel itself: Stop the world, I want to get off.

The circle motif is again present in the huge carousel at the fair. Exciting and fun for the children, its pictures on the panel running around the inner wheel also possess a certain attraction for the Consul. They have a strange magical quality about them (perhaps something like tattoos) suggesting the fantastical queeress of the unconscious. One of the pictures showing two lovers - "Though childish and crude it had about it a somnambulist quality and something too of truth, of the pathos of love." (217) The picture awakens in the Consul a tremendous desire to find Yvonne and begin a new life - "But the weight of a great hand seemed to be pressing his head down." (218) (This may be a reference to *Los Manos d'Orlac* and the powerful unconscious). Then everything about the

4. Douglas Day, Malcom Lowry (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 326.

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carrousel "had suddenly become transcendently awful and tragic, distant, transmuted, as it were some final impression on the senses of what the earth was like, carried over into an obscure region of death." (218) This too I think suggests the terrifying unconscious mind at work. The poor Consul, like a child, had been carried round and round the carrousel, up and down on his little steed of destiny (the horse motif again) in unconscious pursuit of his dream.

Laruelle says of the Consul's "battle" - it is not for "the things so important to us despised sober people, on which the balance of any human situation depends." (221) "Balance" is the key word, the very same equilibrium and perspective that the others, Laruelle included, have found impossible to attain. Thus his reproach while just, is partially unfair and hypocritical. (Perhaps something is wrong with society if it cannot accomodate and learn from the mystic). Meanwhile the Consul has been gazing dreamily at the ferris wheel - "the wheel of the law, rolling" he thinks. Here is symbolized the perfect balance, justice, and order of the world, but we must not forget that it is a ferris wheel "a child's structure in Meccano," and "what a hullabaloo there would be later" at the carnival. (221) Thus part of what is "being released" in the Consul, as Laruelle puts it, is merely the desire for fun, reckless escapist fun in the face of inevitable disaster. But on a deeper level, as Laruelle recognizes, is the childlike wish for omniscience for which the Consul is willing to embrace his

own damnation. For this he has gotten on to the Wheel and now part of him wishes to jump off and part of him wishes to stay on.

In the next scene the Consul has been driven by the children into the "Maquina Infernal". This ride is symbolic of the vicious circle of the Consul's drunken life now speeded up many rotations. His initial response is sickness and anxiety but soon, being "emptied out", losing his possessions, his identity, he finds a fierce delight in "letting go". Thus experiencing hell, he does not pray or confess, but wishes for the release into oblivion.

There is also some inversion symbolism present with regard to the upside down consciousness - a transcendental change of direction is sought at the focal point. Thus the children who had formerly besieged him now return to him his possessions and his money. Inversion in most mythologies requires a sacrifice and the sacrifice here is the Consul himself: "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa." (233)

The madman who appears flinging a bicycle tire ahead of him represents, as one critic has observed, the hell of Sisyphus' absurd suffering and its relation to the Consul's⁵

In the Cantina El Bosque a voice tells the Consul of death - a series of nightmares with only alcohol as a means of escape if one chooses. By this definition the Consul is long since dead and buried.

The Consul and Senora Gregorio share a very amusing

5 Jim Barnes, "The Myth of Sisyphus in Under the Volcano," Prairie Schooner, XLII, no. 4 (Winter 1968-69), pp. 341-348.

sympathetic friendship based on their common loss of a loved one and its solace in tequila. The wronged deserted lover role is part of the Consul's identity and he does not wish to abandon it because of the sympathy he craves and also because of his self image. Thus he does not tell the Senora that his wife has come back. Significantly, when the kind humorous woman leaves, "the overflowing cup suddenly within reach had lost all meaning." (231) He seems to need the senora as a mother. The Consul is a child needing care and protection. Senora Gregorio seems to recognize this, and she says, in what must be one of the most tender, beautiful dark passages in the novel and also an expression of the dualistic motif: "'I have no house only a shadow. But whenever you are in need of a shadow, my shadow is yours.'" (233) But as for a father, a protector, something revered to be believed in - "Es inevitable la muerte del Papa" - there is no one or anything.

Chapter 10 deals with what the Consul would call "the ingress" of the human world, "the people with ideas." Fundamentally it deals with the ethics of love and care, the loss and discovery of the human and, in turn, the self. During the earlier part of the day the Consul needed alcohol as a medicine. Now, on the run from the others and himself, he begins his serious drinking, his spiritual quest, and orders a mescal - the beginning of the end. He embarks on a visionary recollection of the time he had gone to meet Lee Maitland's train. The significance of this memory is that it recreates his long agonizing wait for Yvonne's return - "Oaxaca

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or Oakvill what difference?" As Lowry states in his letters, the opening train theme is related to Freudian death dreams⁶. The train symbolizes the approach of death but carries the promise of love - the fair haired angel. In this paradox lies the daimonic element. The signs on the coal companies seem to read: "It's a black business but we use you white: Daemon's Coal." The trains are "converging upon him from all sides each wailing for its demon lover." "They are beautiful and terrifying these shadows of cars."

Everything seems to take on a human aspect and significance. A natural waterfall is for the Consul "some organized ultimate sweat." (286) Parian is a great "mystery" cut off from the human. Nobody seemed to come back from there. The mescal causes the drifting mists to become "a phantom dance of souls... seeking permanence" - human form or being, perhaps. Cervantes' cock reminds the Consul of cock fighting, "vicious little man-made battles."

Without mescal the Consul imagined he had forgotten eternity. But significantly eternity consists of visions of lost heaven, absurd madness, the empty events of the day or simply illusion itself - "whatever it would shortly be after the next mescal." (289) The point here is that eternity is in the mind of the beholder. The vision can only reflect the state of consciousness (in this case chaotic and suffering) of the adherent. "What is man but a little soul holding up a corpse?" (289) the Consul asks, perhaps referring to his own morbid state. And

⁶ Letters, p. 82.

the Consul feels that the soul has within it the seeds of its own destruction and betrayal - a dark and terrible vision of the human spirit which is Lowry's principle theme. But the soul also possesses imprisoned, a melancholic childlike inmost essence - "sitting within her innermost citadel in chains drinking chocolate, her pale Moctezuma." (289)

The Consul's prayer to the Virgin provides the key to his suffering. Since Yvonne has returned - "Nothing is altered and in spite of God's mercy I am still alone." (290) This contains the Consul's fundamental isolation. Yet at the end he cries in his heart "Destroy the world." It is an alienation of his own making. The prayer has turned from a humble supplication to a hostile plea.

The Consul remembers Andalusia and the scene of his first love with Yvonne. But "in how many bottles had he had himself, since then alone." (294) But though he has lost himself the Consul had loved every minute of it - "the bottles, the bottles, the beautiful bottles of tequila, and the gourds, gourds, gourds, the millions of gourds, of beautiful mescal." (294) And even now in the present - "there was something in fact almost beautiful in the frightful extremity of that condition the Consul now found himself in," and, "it was not so much necessary to sober up again as to wake..." (295) For the second time that day the Consul wakes up in a bathroom. The toilet was a "tomb" and "It is what I deserve... It is what I am, thought the Consul." (295): The matter of his fate is not all that farcical: "Perhaps this was the eternity he had been making so much fuss about... a stone monastic

cell," again pointing to his fundamental isolation from the human world in his quasi-religious quest.

The Consul begins to read the tourist folder (his toilet tissue), while in the background the conversation between Hugh and Yvonne is concerned with the dead Indian on the roadside. The discussion is of identity, responsibility, politics and ethics. It implies a kind of evil in the paradisaical state of Tlaxcala. The Tlaxcalans were Mexico's traitors, and this evil too underlies the beautiful churches and historic sites. The conversation also foreshadows the Consul's own death at the hands of the Fascist police. The constant shouting for Cervantes and the mention of a windmill, (297) humourously evokes the preposterous image of the Consul as a latter day Don Quixote. The Consul sipping mescal begins to hallucinate voices heard earlier in the day accusing him, mocking, and pleading with him. The travel folder has planted seeds of a paradisaical vision in the Consul's mind. He is in Tlaxcala. It is white and pure. Significantly, aside from Yvonne who is drunk also, there is nobody to interfere with the splendid happiness of his drinking.

As he assesses the present drink situation - he had drunk the mescal but had not drunk it as far as the others were concerned, it becomes apparent that his reality consists in what he can hide from others.

The Consul suspects Hugh of luring Yvonne away from him. The Consul attacks Hugh where he is most vulnerable - his cherished idealism about Communism - and the personal battle becomes political.

Suddenly the Consul launches into a wild digression listing all the natural elements which oppose him. This connects to the Consul's role as a dark magician. His battle is with the cosmos but ultimately of course, the science of the cosmos, the macrocosm, corresponds to that of the microcosm - the soul.

The Consul's argument in support of determinism is logically sound but it ignores natural human feelings. His argument on the psychological level may be seen in terms of a clever evasion of responsibility. His argument that there is nothing constructive or sincere in revolutionary battles is of course only a half truth. His bitter pessimism about the fate of the world strikes home however. The issue finally comes down to the complex question of whether man is inherently good (Rousseau) or evil. The universal question is reflected in the personal struggle. The Consul vents his anger in a moment of sudden cruelty and vulgarity but in a kind of "detached" state of mind. This detachment is important. It signifies the unconscious split in every man when confronted with violent emotion. As for his own evasion of responsibility the Consul resolves it once and for all: "For all you know it is only the knowledge that it most certainly is too late that keeps me alive at all." (314) Paradoxically the half mad Consul is sustained by a kind of death wish. On the other hand, it may be the true statement that his fate has long since been decided and he is living on the dreadful courage of despair. But his anger does surface in a kind of mad hatred - his accusation of Hugh and Yvonne "playing bobbies and titties... under cover of saving me." (315) He cannot bear the fact of others enjoying a bit

of happiness when he is suffering. This weakness is natural and understandable but it becomes part of his own undoing.

The Consul becomes confused. He wants to be in Tlaxcala. Suddenly there is a return to the opening train vision. The Consul is caught between heaven and hell: "Was it the second or third train from Suspension Bridge - Suspension! - 'Tlax' - the Consul repeated; 'I choose - '" (316) Having looked into the abyss he shouts to the others - "'I love hell.'" (316) This may be seen as the attention getting behaviour of a suicidal person. Also hell can be the place of the final mad release of warring emotions, for importantly, human feelings remain hell to the Consul and this is the theme that emerges from the ethical and political discussion. Douglas Day comments that the Consul is a Faustian figure with a sickness of soul because of which he "comes to embrace his depravity, and consciously to seek his destruction, a perverse way to spiritual enlightenment⁷." But we must not forget the other truth contained in the novel - that one must know hell before one can find heaven. Herein lies the essential dualism of the novel. The Consul is moved by the wish to suffer truly, to descend into his personal hell, to find the truth in his own soul, that will restore his faith and allow him to love. This movement is in opposition to and undercuts the driving power of the Faustian half of his personality.

Chapter 12 is the eleventh hour for the Consul but there is no cry of contrition or repentance. Instead he feels safe in

⁷ Day, p. 345.

the Farolito, "the paradise of his despair." (339) The lighthouse invites the storm and lights it, as the Consul previously philosophized. The tragic beauty, the suffering⁸ and the meaning it has is the light itself - the insight into hell. This insight is mirrored in the picture of Los Borrachones which the Consul sees in his mind's eye once more. As in Dante's purgatory, God's love is directed to confirm each individual in its own identity, so that the nearer it draws to him the more it becomes the unique and personal self⁸. But instead of this evolving the Consul is aware of his existence and identity as one of "ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self." (362) He feels that the horrible creatures around him "correspond in a way he couldn't understand yet obscurely recognized to some fraction of his being." (362) Thus they may be regarded as part of the projected vision of punishment arising out of his own guilt feelings, and the satiric absurdities of his own bad conscience. Indeed the only reality seems to be an inner one: "From a mirror behind the bar, that also reflected the door open to the square, his face silently glared at him, with stern, familiar foreboding." (338) The mirror also reflects madness: "And encountering his accusing eyes in another mirror, within the little room, the Consul had the queer passing feeling he'd risen in bed to do this, that he had sprung up and must gibber... something really senseless...." (345) Similarly it amuses the Consul to play roles; "It lugubriously diverted him to imagine, for A Few Fleas' benefit, though half aware the

8 Dorothy L. Sayers, trans., The Divine Comedy, Purgatory, Dante Alighieri (Penguin Books, 1966), intro. p. 37.

preoccupied boy was not watching him at all, he had assumed the blue expression peculiar to a certain type of drunkard... Abandoned by his friends, as they by him, he knows that nothing but the crushing look of a creditor lives round that corner." (341.) (God or conscience, perhaps). Also of course, careless of his safety there is the Consul's half serious joke that he is really William Blackstone. The two beggars who enter the Farolito, one able to stand, the other helpless, symbolize the two halves of the Consul's identity. The first beggar's generosity toward the second signifies an inner harmony, a charity toward oneself. The lack of this is the Consul's spiritual poverty. In a kind of momentary hallucination, the face of the reclining beggar changes to that of Senora Gregorio and then to his mother's with a look of pity and supplication. And the sadness of the scene is infinitely multiplied by passages from Yvonne's letters movingly superimposed on the mad, obscene surrounding conversation. The hopes of the letters arouse the Consul's guilt. But the battle has already been fought and lost. Ironically the Consul's prayer has been answered. He has sunk lower and though, as Kierkegaard⁹ says, it is a gain to win an inner intensity of heart through a deeper and deeper sorrowing over guilt, the Consul has committed the sin of proclaiming that all is lost.

Thus the Consul encounters the dark side of his being but cannot find the love and strength to conquer it. He almost without regret forfeits the battle to the pride of his own dark egoism: "maybe the scorpion not wanting to be saved had stung

9/ Kierkegaard, p. 45.

itself to death." (339) . Like the cleft rock outside the cantina, "it struck him that he was not afraid to fall either." (340) He thinks "with a freezing detached almost amused calm of the dreadful night inevitably awaiting him whether he drank much more or not." (343) The Consul will not reach out for help - a result of the deep loss of human connection. As he remembers La Despedida he thinks - "How long ago how strange, how sad, remote as the memory of first love, even of his mother's death, it seemed; like some poor sorrow, this time without effort, Yvonne left his mind again." (340) Ironically, when he does reach out, it is for Maria the prostitute.

This may be seen as the craven effort to forget defeat in the arms of pleasure. But uppermost in his mind is Yvonne: "Miserably he wanted Yvonne and did not want her." (348) He wants at the same time to love and to hurt her and thus unconsciously himself as well. However, illusory it might seem Maria is still Yvonne. The former repression of guilty desire cannot last and comes back with a fierce vengeance.

Here sex is a proof of potency against death as well. It is used as a tool to prove prowess and identity. Most importantly, as Rollo May points out, sex is the handiest drug to blot out the anxiety-creating aspects of eros¹⁰. We fly to the sensation of sex in order to avoid the passion of eros. The end toward which sex points is gratification and relaxation whereas eros is a desiring, a longing, a forever reaching out, seeking to expand¹¹. Thus ironically the Consul penetrates in intercourse

10 May, p. 65.

11 Ibid., p. 73.

the inescapable essence of his own life - the anxiety and pain of eros. Maria's body became "a fiendish apparatus for calamitous sickening sensation; it was disaster, it was the horror of waking up in the morning in Oaxaca...." (349) Thus acute spiritual and emotional pain is encountered in the highest sensual pleasure. The Consul is agonizingly reenacting the perversity of the Fall: "Then it struck him that some reckless murderous power was drawing him on, forcing him, while he yet remained passionately aware of the all too possible consequences and somehow as innocently unconscious, to do without precaution or conscience what he would never be able to undo or gainsay, leading him irresistibly out into the garden." (348) Afterwards because he is now in hell: "It was as if, out of an ultimate contamination, he had derived strength... 'Alas', a voice seemed to be saying also in his ear, 'my poor little child, you do not feel any of these things really, only lost, only homeless.'" (354) There is always a glimpse, a glimmer of heaven in hell. We recognize in the lost child the father of the sinful man.

The events and people become increasingly stupid, obscene and ridiculous. The evil is subtly personified in the figure of the Chief of Gardens (God himself perhaps?). The Consul sends him a mute appeal for help: "he was answered by an implacable, an almost final look." (360) The haranguing and the insults the idiocy and madness is turned up a screw. It is a kind of Kafkaesque world. He is aware that the police are murderers but the same force which prevented him from accepting

and loving Yvonne is now preventing him from saving his own life. This lack of spirit places him in hell. He identifies with the inhabitants of hell, "the accursed," but also with the victims of a cruel unjust world: "The Consul didn't know what he was saying: 'Only the poor, only through God, only the people you wipe your feet on, the poor in spirit, old men carrying their fathers and philosophers weeping in the dust. America perhaps, Don Quixote -'" (372) The Consul is confused because dawning in him now is a kind of spiritual rebirth, the realization of responsibility before man and God. The previously cynically denied fight for freedom, values, and human dignity is now seen as of the utmost necessity. Now he begins to angrily resist in earnest. He is shot attempting to ride away on the horse branded with the number seven. Now he is seen as a tragic victim like the poor Indian lying by the roadside. The Consul's identification with the dead Indian is stressed again when the old fiddler calls him "Companero". But the Consul is not simply a victim: "he had become the pelado, the thief - yes, the pilferer of meaningless muddled ideas out of which his rejection of life had grown." (374) This rejection of life had no firm basis in reality. The central motif - the climbing of the volcano, symbolic of spiritual ascent, is at first treated somewhat ironically and humorously: "with pockets full of dried prunes and raisins and nuts, with a jar of rice protruding from one coat pocket, and the Hotel Fausto's information from

the other, he is utterly weighed down." (375) Then he is being rescued, carried in an ambulance toward the summit. The key to this apparent salvation is "no se puedo vivir sin amar"... which would explain everything." (375) However the evil is still thought of as outer, not inner as well: "How could he have thought so evil of the world when succour was at hand all the time." (375) He reaches the summit and there is the final dreadful dropping of the veil: "But there was nothing there: no peaks no life no climb." The self deceptive emptiness, uselessness, destruction and folly of his life is finally ultimately realized. He falls back into the volcano - hell. Yet the eruption is the world itself bursting into the flames of war. Nations, men like the Consul, are destroying the world in their selfish battles.

The Sign in the Garden which appears on the final page is a fitting epitaph addressed to mankind. Man is ultimately responsible for the love he instills in his children and thus for the fate of the world. The children are an undying hope for the future. Thus the final warning is also an epigraph as well, a statement of purpose.

The Consul's death is born out of suffering. It is nihilistic and horrifying but it is also a blessed escape from terror. There is also a suggestion that it is a return to the womb, for Geoffrey throughout the novel is compared to a lost child. His death ties together all the various threads of emotion and meaning in the novel - degeneracy, absurdity,

dignity, and tragedy - in a final resolution. As Birney¹² states, death was central to Lowry: Preoccupation with death, its omnipresence, his own fear of it and passion for it and the illusory escape from that unsupportable duality into the substitute death of drunkenness which in turn hastens the approach of real death.

The greatness of the Consul's suffering corresponds to his greatness of soul. It is a betrayal of something in him which had a real existence and could never die. His hatred is directed outward to deflect hatred towards himself; and alienation from self is the grounds of alienation from other men. But apathy, not hatred, is the opposite of love and herein lies the real tragedy.

But it may also be said that while the Consul desired to master nature he also possessed a reverence for its beauties. And through his "magic" he manages to steal away the hearts of the other characters as well as the understanding reader. The heightened consciousness of his drunkenness was in some ways necessary to life and to vision. Nietzsche would have praised the Consul's Promethean virtue, conferring dignity on sacrilege. The Consul's exaltation is a religious feeling, the complement of Christian humility without which the latter is cant.

Man lives on the threshold of the mystical. The Consul's demons just might be real! Lowry was almost obsessed

12 Earle Birney, "Against the Spell of Death," Prairie Schooner XXXVII, no. 4 (Winter 1963-64), p. 330.

with occult correspondences and signs. This is the other side of his controlled metaphorical symbolic search for meaning and form. The Consul's search for eternity only became, perhaps, a search for oblivion and death when its hopelessness was realized. The Consul's ordeal is finally a picture of what it is to be human - the weakness and the strength of it, heaven and hell: "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man."

CONCLUSION

Thus men of all ages have striven to seek a synthesis between matter and spirit, causation and free will, human justice and divine providence, time and eternity, and man and God. The dual pattern runs through all existence. Lowry's vision in these terms is a half-tragic, half-absurd stalemate or perpetual conflict. He has given us four major characters in whom the central opposition is worked out. One goes insane (the Consul), one dies (Yvonne), one throws away his life in a futile sacrifice (Hugh), and one simply retreats (Laruelle). The underlying unity is clear. As Lowry states in his letters the four main characters are meant to be aspects of the same man or of the human spirit¹.

Dr. Vigil remarks at one point that the Consul's nervous system is an "eclectic" (electric) mesh. The novel itself is eclectic in that it borrows from many sources to enhance the power of its presentation. Dante, the Cabbala, and Baudelaire are three important ones. A brief discussion of these provides a useful summary of the main themes of the novel.

The Consul's agony and delusions mirror mankind's in terms of Dante's vision. In hell the spirit is eternally fixed in that which it has chosen² (the Consul's alcoholism). Hell is not a punishment as such. It is the condition to

1 Letters, p. 60.

2 Dorothy L. Sayers, trans., The Divine Comedy, Hell, Dante Alighieri (Penguin Books, 1966), notes, p. 120.

which the soul reduces itself by a stubborn determination to evil and in which it suffers the torment of its own perversions. Hell is the image of the deepening possibilities of evil within the soul³. The punishment for sin is simply the sin itself experienced without illusion⁴. In hell God's power is experienced as judgement, alien, and terrible⁵ (the sunflower that the Consul fears staring at him all day fiercely like God. (183)). As Douglas Day points out the Consul would rather face hell than divine retribution⁶.

According to the Cabbala, for man evil is synonymous with imbalance⁷. Equilibrium is equated with love. Love is the bridge between above and below; when a man crosses that bridge he has arrived at a condition of oneness with all things⁸. Evil must not be conquered but brought into cosmic harmony. The secret of the Cabbala is to transmute the darkness⁹.

As Perle Epstein points out one of the pivotal questions of the novel thus becomes: can Geoffrey assume the guilt of the world on his shoulders, is he equipped to perform the Messianic descent¹⁰? The Consul has discovered many divine secrets. He is intoxicated with them but he is

3 Sayers, "The Divine Comedy, Hell", p. 68.

4 Ibid., p. 102

5 Ibid., p. 127.

6 Day, p. 349.

7 Epstein, p. 27.

8 Ibid., p. 26.

9 Ibid., p. 41.

10 Ibid., p. 116.

not a saviour. He is not destined to restore the order but is instead the scion of Adam and Noah, one of the epic failures whose pathetic-heroic attempt to overcome the chaos results in his own destruction¹¹.

But the Consul's vision is deeply meaningful. Boehme, whom Lowry was familiar with, considered all life to be double, each state of nature implying its opposite. What may appear one way to the senses is actually the opposite in the world of the spirit. In this manner, he concludes that suffering is the condition of joy, and in one supreme moment presumably during illumination they merge¹². This gives us a new insight into the dualistic theme. The Consul's "hopeless joy" reaches out toward this illumination, but unity is never fully achieved. The Cabbalistic theory of the duality inherent in the mystical wine signifies the fractured theme of Geoffrey's life, the conflict between love and death, and creative and destructive power which he is unable to overcome¹³.

The Consul is mad in some ways. He is torturing himself and enjoying it: "Je crois que le vautour est doux a Prométhée et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers." (222) These are the last two lines from an obscure and striking sonnet by Jean Ogier de Gombauld, which begins: "Que les grandes beautés causent de grandes paines"¹⁴. The sonnet is

11 Epstein, p. 44.

12 Ibid., p. 34.

13 Ibid., p. 74.

14 Jean Ogier de Gombauld, sonnet quoted in Aldous Huxley, Texts and Pretexts (1932; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), pp. 87-88.

quoted in Aldous Huxley's Texts and Pretexts which Lowry must have used, and there is a likelihood that he used this excellent anthology for other allusions, particularly Baudelaire's poems¹⁵.

Commenting on Baudelaire's poem "Obsession", Huxley states: "He wanted to have the 'all feeling' to 'share the immortal lot' of the spirit of things... But he always remained narrowly, hopelessly, mortally himself... The world was part of his tortured spirit and sick body; never even for a moment could they become part of the impersonal world¹⁶." This is quite similar to the Consul's plight.

In the novel Lowry refers to Baudelaire's angel in the Consul's mesal vision: "...he had gone to meet Lee Maitland returning from Virginia at 7.40 in the morning, gone, light-headed, light-footed, and in that state of being where Baudelaire's angel indeed wakes, desiring to meet trains perhaps, but to meet no trains that stop, for in the angel's mind are no trains that stop, and from such trains none descends, not even another angel, not even a fair-haired one, like Lee Maitland." (283) The allusion is to Baudelaire's poem entitled, significantly, "Reversibilite". The third stanza concerns old age and approaching death.

15 I am indebted to Professor Matthew Hodgart for this fortunate discovery.

16 Huxley, Texts and Pretexts, p. 42.



Ange plein de beauté, connaissez-vous les rides,
Et la peur de vieillir, et ce hideux tourment
De lire la secrète horreur du devouement
Dans des yeux ou longtemps burent nos yeux avides?
Ange plein de beauté, connaissez-vous les rides?... 17.

As Huxley comments: "It is not the angel who
menaces man, it is man who menaces the angel - the angel
who believes his youth to be everlasting, but who is in
fact mortal and doomed. We are all in our youth that angel.
Strong in the illusion of our eternity we could laugh at
the words of the man growing conscious of his mortality¹⁸."
Huxley adds that the poem contains "a harsh pain made more
agonizing by the beauty (for beauty has a penetrative force),
by the grave perfection (for perfection is barbed and having
pierced, remains in the wound) of its poetical rendering¹⁹."

Lowry's "poem" (as he refers to it) was also intended
philosophically and aesthetically to present a conflict. As
Lowry says in his letters: "That which seems inorganic in
itself might prove right in terms of the whole churrigue-
resque structure I conceived and which I hope may soon begin
to loom out of the fog for you like Borda's horrible-beautiful
cathedral in Taxco²⁰."

Lowry has masterfully portrayed the tormenting duality
of life and death, angels and devils. He has shown us the
means of transcendence - negatively, alcohol, sex and daimonic
knowledge, and positively, revolt, love, the inward journey,

17 Quoted in Huxley, p. 146.

18 Huxley, p. 148.

19 Ibid., p. 149.

20 Letters, p. 61.

union with nature and humour. As Erich Fromm importantly points out: "Creation and destruction, love and hate are not two instincts which exist independently. They are both answers to the same need for transcendence, and the will to destroy must arise when the will to create cannot be satisfied²¹."

In the novel the mystery of existence is echoed in the Consul's eternal question: "ah, who knows why man, however beset his chance by lies, has been offered love?" (362). Yet we may discern in the Consul's words a trace of one of the main themes of Kierkegaard's philosophy: Man longs for the good but has become terribly embittered against the very longing²².

Finally the achievement of the novel lies in the fact that it transcends man's predicaments not by eliminating them but by transmuting them. The pain remains; it is the quality (significance, import) of the pain that has been affected. This transcendence effects its results through insight and brings a certain joy.

As Lowry says in his letters the final effect should be "katharsis not depression." (I think he is using the word in the Aristotelian sense of purgation. Lowry studied Aristotle at Cambridge.)

Under the Volcano will always remain a profound vision of life's "celestial, complicated and hopeless joy".

21 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (Greenwich Conn. Fawcett, 1955), p. 42.

22 Kierkegaard, p. 64.

Appendix A

An important literary relationship exists between Under the Volcano and D.H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent. Lowry never mentions its influence on his work (perhaps due to his plagiarism phobia) but the two novels are remarkably similar in theme and imagery.

Both novels are set in Mexico and both see Mexico as superficially beautiful. Underneath, however, the "place was cruel, down-dragging destructive" (51). Lawrence's Mexico also has a quality of hopeless joy: "The country gave her a strange feeling of hopelessness and of dauntlessness. Unbroken, eternally resistant, it was a people that lived without hope, and without care. Gay even, and laughing with indifferent carelessness." (82)

The central theme in Lawrence's novel is the return of the cult of Quetzalcoatl: "We must take up the old broken impulse that will connect us with the mystery of the cosmos again." (150) Quetzalcoatl is "lord of both ways, star between day and dark," (251) similar to Lowry's fusion of heaven and hell. Moreover the ecstatic blood religion is analogous to drunkenness: The people craved for Quetzalcoatl's hymns, "as men craved for alcohol, as a relief from the weariness and ennui of mankind's man-made world." (285) As in Under the Volcano alcohol releases the activity of the subconscious mind. The

1 D.H. Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent (New York: Vintage Books, 1959).

daimonic comes into conflict with the white consciousness. In Lawrence's novel this is depicted symbolically in a civil war in the country and also in the division in the mind of Kate Forrester, the main character. She struggles with her "demon lover" Cipriano. (342) There is the same reaching out and holding back in this relationship as in that of the Consul and Yvonne: The dark power causes Kate to be "spellbound but not entirely acquiescent. In one corner of her soul was revulsion and a touch of nausea." (423) Yet Kate is also aware, as Don Ramon tells her, that "it takes a man and a woman together to make a soul." (425) This is similar to Lowry's images of "La Despedida."

However there is one essential difference between the two novels. As William York Tindall points out in his introduction to Lawrence's novel:

Nothing approaching charity or compassion is apparent in the great design. Indeed, Don Ramon particularly condemns them. "You must hate people and humanity," he observes, and in order to escape horror of mankind, you must go beyond it to the "greater life." Lawrence's saviors are opposite to Jesus, and Lawrence himself seems to have regarded human beings with dislike, impatience, or missionary zeal.

In both novels the characters must submerge their individuality in something greater to achieve transcendence. The Consul's tragedy is that he fails to love; Kate cannot fully surrender to the new religion of Quetzalcoatl. Both novels thus deal with the powers of Darkness and Light and are deeply spiritual and sensual:

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