

M. A. T H E S I S

MALCOLM LOWRY'S UNDER THE VOLCANO: A STUDY OF MYTH AND SYMBOL

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras.

Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A Study of Myth and Symbol

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras.

Cristina Maria Teixeira - Setembro / 1979.

Esta Tese foi julgada adequada para a obtenção do título de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Especialidade Língua Inglesa e Literatura Correspondente e
aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação

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Aos meus pais.

Para Newtinho, Helinho, Lauana, Gustavo e Tuísa.

A G R A D E C I M E N T O S

Apesar destas palavras estarem no início do presente trabalho, são as últimas que escrevo. Apesar do intenso cansaço físico e mental que atualmente sinto e que me torna difícil encontrar as palavras adequadas, gostaria de expressar aqui a minha gratidão intensa às instituições que oportunizaram a minha participação no curso ora concluído e a todos os amigos, companheiros de trabalho, professores, às pessoas que por amizade, coleguismo, espírito profissional e colaborador e de fraternidade humana, procuraram ajudar-me emprestando seu apoio valioso, conhecimentos e habilidades. Na impossibilidade de citar a todos, destaco:

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A B S T R A C T

The mythological content of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano is the object of study in the present dissertation. I analyse the way Lowry uses mythology in relation to existing mythic patterns and conventions, in order to learn about the author's creativity in dealing with this traditional subject, and to judge how personal or impersonal is his use of myth.

It would be too reductive if we tried to find a definite explanation for Under the Volcano as either a personal or impersonal work, and for Lowry as either a subjective or objective writer. He is a curious blend of the two and Under the Volcano can be characterized as a book that has clear signs of Lowry's subjectivity, along with its undeniable universal significance. Sometimes we feel Geoffrey Firmin and Malcolm Lowry as a single character having archetypal dimensions but at the same time we also feel that the author keeps himself apart from his main protagonist and presents us a critical, ironic view of this character's role as a mythological figure.

Analysing not only the parallels but also the inversions Lowry makes of existing mythic patterns, it is my purpose to show Lowry mainly as one of these writers who presents a 'secondary elaboration of myth', i.e., one who subjects the 'spontaneous' dream elements of the book to irony and re-arrangement.

R E S U M O

O conteúdo mitológico do livro Sob o Vulcão, de Malcolm Lowry, é objeto de estudo da presente dissertação. Eu analiso a maneira como Lowry usa mitologia, com relação aos padrões e convenções mitológicas existentes, a fim de sentir a criatividade do autor em lidar com este assunto tradicional, julgando também quão pessoal ou impessoal é o seu uso do mito.

Seria bastante redutivo se tentássemos encontrar uma explicação definitiva para Sob o Vulcão, caracterizando-o como um trabalho pessoal ou impessoal, e Lowry como um escritor subjetivo ou objetivo. Ele é uma mistura curiosa destes dois aspectos e Sob o Vulcão pode ser caracterizado como um livro que tem sinais evidentes da subjetividade de Lowry, juntamente com sua inegável significação universal. Às vezes sentimos Geoffrey Firmin e Malcolm Lowry como um só personagem que tem dimensões arquetípicas mas ao mesmo tempo também sentimos que o autor se mantém distante de seu protagonista principal e nos apresenta uma visão crítica e irônica do papel deste personagem como figura mitológica.

Analisando não apenas os paralelos mas também as inversões que Lowry faz dos padrões mitológicos existentes, é meu objetivo mostrar Lowry principalmente como um destes escritores que apresentam uma 'segunda elaboração do mito', ou seja, alguém que submete os 'espontâneos' elementos de sonho do livro à ironia e re-elaboração.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this work is to analyse Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano at the mythological level. Having in mind that there are perhaps as many approaches to a literary work as there are critics who examine it, it is my intention to make an open minded analysis of the book, not adopting the method of archetypal criticism only, but also acknowledging the usefulness and validity of other approaches, even when sometimes apparently contradictory. This could not be

avoided because I intend to identify not only mythic parallels but also the ironic inversions Lowry consciously makes of existing mythic patterns.

The novel is crammed with mythic analogies but at the same time we can also find mythic parodies. Lest we be too reductive, we should keep in mind what D. H. Lawrence once said of the novel in general: "If you try to nail anything down in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail."¹

Another point which I would like to emphasize here is the relation between the personal, biographic character of the novel, and its impersonal qualities. In this respect,

the critics' opinions vary quite a lot. While some of Lowry's critics stress the personal, autobiographic qualities of the book, others find very convincing arguments to show us its impersonal, mythological values. In the review-of-criticism part, which is included in this chapter, we shall present these opinions in more detail. The main problem I will try to analyse in the present work is whether Lowry is a subjective, personal writer who could never write about anything but himself, or whether he is the opposite, a "mythic" or impersonal artist, an inspired Jungian conductor who achieves archetypal levels of detachment. Here it is worth noting that what deserves our close attention, is Lowry's very special use of mythic values, the burlesque inversions he makes of mythic patterns; this is another way, a very interesting way of understanding Under the Volcano and it makes us see Lowry as a writer who is much more than just a conductor of archetypal impulses. This aspect of Lowry's novel will also be emphasized in the present dissertation.

Since I am going to deal basically, although not exclusively, with the archetypal criticism, it is worth saying that myth critics aim at discovering patterns of imagery and symbolism, especially those of regeneration and rebirth, that occur frequently and regularly in the literatures all over the world. They search for the so-called mythic core, which

they think lies hidden in the web of artistic structure. Jung explained that the recurrence of such mythic patterns is due to what he calls "archetypes" or "collective unconscious" which is "a sublimated racial memory that each generation passes on to the next."² Jung, with Freud, suggests that dreams transmit unconscious reactions and spontaneous impulses to consciousness. In dreams, Jung could detect some frequent elements which could not be derived from the dreamer's individual experience since their presence could not be explained by anything in the individual's own life; quoting Richard H. Costa:

They seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind. Jung calls them "archetypes" or "primordial images", which are "a tendency to form ... representations of a motif - representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern."³

One of Lowry's old Cambridge friends describes him as such an archetypal figure:

I think Malcolm does emerge as the man qui tollit peccata mundi, who had assumed the role of Cain, which becomes at last the redemptive role through his own descent into hell, his own acceptance of the sins of the world . . . he has taken on the role of the guilty in order to atone for all kinds of private and social sins.⁴

But there is another way to read Lowry and his artistry, which stresses his peculiar good humour, the humour of a man

who never takes things quite seriously, as Aiken points out: "While he knew that life was an infernal machine tearing him apart, the tragic was only one of Lowry's disguises"; the fact that people saw Lowry as a maker of sad myths was for Aiken "a great joke" because he saw Lowry as "the merriest of men."⁵

This dichotomy of views and feelings is a recurrent characteristic in the critic's view of Lowry and his work. The author himself is aware of the multiplicity (undoubtedly intentional) of meaning Under the Volcano contains, for he says: "the idea I cherished in my heart was to create a pioneer work in its own class, and to write at last an authentic drunkard's story."⁶ Also, "the book was so designed, counterdesigned and interwelded that it could be read an indefinite number of times and still not have yielded all its drama, or its poetry: and it is upon this fact that I base my hope in it."⁷ There is no doubt that the book has many and complex layers, working at several levels and with different combinations of emphasis, depending on the reader.

Lowry's biographer, Douglas Day, adopts a "Gestalt" approach (although it can be considered a Gestalt approach only in a loose sense) to the novel and analyses it from five different levels he discerns in the book. First is the chthonic or earth bound level: the sinister landscape itself,

represented mainly by the volcano and the abyss, among many other things. Second is the human level, which centers around four chief characters: Geoffrey, Hugh, Laruelle and Yvonne, these four being parts of a larger personality, according to Lowry. The third level is the political, which presents Mexican political problems as well as the problems of Europe and of the whole world during the war. The following two are, respectively, the magical and religious levels; these two will be objects of a more detailed study in this work, although in a way different from Day's.

Day sees as a mistake the insistence with which critics try to identify in Under the Volcano traces of Aiken, Joyce, Mythology, etc. On the contrary, he thinks we should concentrate on the work itself, considering it as an autonomous object with recognizable structural characteristics, a self-contained entity. This attitude towards Under the Volcano is perfectly acceptable and reinforces the extraordinary value of the book, which is so receptive to the most varying interpretations. However, we cannot avoid seeing that mythology is present in the novel in a peculiar and ubiquitous way. Thus, while concentrating my analysis on the mythological angle, I will also try to keep sight of these other possible levels of reading.

Review of Criticism

It has already been said that we can find quite different approaches to Lowry's Under the Volcano. In regard to the mythic dimension of Under the Volcano, it is interesting to see that the critics not only differ among themselves, but sometimes the same critic takes two opposed views of the book. This is not difficult to accept and understand because we know that Lowry's book can be read at many levels without losing its richness of meaning. And it is very significant that the author writes, concerning his own work:

. . . one of my intentions was to write a book . . . I wanted to make of it a jam session, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce. It is superficial, profound, entertaining, boring, according to one's taste. It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a crazy film, an absurdity, a writing on the wall. It can be thought of as a kind of machine; it works, you may be sure, for I have discovered that to my own expense. And in case you should think that I have made of it everything except a novel, I shall answer that in the last resort it is a real novel that I have intended to write, and even a damnably serious novel.⁸

In this review, I will try to summarize the critics' opinions concerning Lowry and his use of myth in his major work. I want to emphasize chiefly the contrasting views they have of the novel as a "personal" or "impersonal" work, since this is relevant to my own thesis.

David Markson, who has specifically studied the novel's symbolism, states that Lowry's method, like Joyce's, is based

on "that constitutional insistence upon reference and allusion which calls forth archetypal equations" and he recognizes the inherently "spatial" nature of the work, which is characteristic of a mythic novel. But he also emphasizes that, although Lowry, in a highly and masterly calculated analogy, equates the characters in Under the Volcano with various mythic figures such as Christ, Adam, Faust, Oedipus, Prometheus, Dante, etc.,

such allusions and/or equations hardly comprise the sum of the novel. Indeed, it is a paradoxical tribute to Lowry's achievement that the book has been so often praised by readers with virtually no perceptions of these undercurrents at all. For all its indivisibility of surface and symbol, however, this use of myth does remain intrinsic to Lowry's creative strategy.

So he characterizes Lowry as being both a personal and impersonal writer, although in his book he emphasizes the analogies and parallels Lowry makes of mythological figures.

Another author who has paradoxical attitudes towards Lowry's work, is the critic Richard H. Costa, who gives us convincing arguments for his varying interpretations. He says that "In life Lowry underwent the kind of Molochian ordeal in 1936/38 that enabled him to become the Consul. . . . Living by total immersion the early plot of Under the Volcano . . . Lowry was elevated—or, in terms of his career's crack-up, reduced to being his own character"¹⁰; and he goes on: "of such intensity was that twenty-month interlude [in Mexico]

that its felt life literally burned into being the outline and most of the crucial motifs of Under the Volcano."¹¹

However, later on Costa sees the "civilized, sensitive, still idealistic figure of Geoffrey [as] the archetypal Great Man invaded by addiction and a doleful period of history."¹² For him, the Consul's impotence is an outward and visible sign of a much larger spiritual impotence, that is man's inhumanity, his incapacity to feel love. And he pushes this argument forward, comparing the image of the Consul's death with the whole world's "itself shaking with its own demonic orchestras apparently intent on plunging to its own catastrophe."¹³

In a single sentence Costa makes a fusion of the personal and impersonal explanations he poses concerning the novel, when he states that "the Consul, although endowed with some of the qualities of heroes in Greek and Christian mythology, is above all a man in his own right, a product of our own period and his dilemma, while undoubtedly allegorical, is also immediate."¹⁴ He actually recognizes "Lowry's ability to cast Firmin as a Promethean figure [who] . . . is not merely a theatrical drunkard flinging himself at destruction; he rises from the page as a tragic, real, rounded man of mind and emotion, sharply etched from the inside,"¹⁵ thus characterizing Lowry's protagonist as a modern tragic hero.

In one chapter of his book, Costa deals with the mystic-messianic aspects of the book, viewing Lowry as a "Jungian Conductor." Lowry once wrote to Markson: "it never occurred to me that consciousness itself could be of any aid, quite the contrary, and let alone a goal," and he saw "the good ship Solipsism as a wreck."¹⁶ However, Costa hardly sees Lowry and Geoffrey as ironic figures. He cannot avoid seeing the Consul, among many other things, as a symbol of mankind, and Lowry as "the spiritual archivist who was forever receiving and storing up mystical correspondences out of thin air . . . a conductor of what a reviewer called 'mescalusions' but which come close to being in Jung's terms 'archetypal fragments. . .'"¹⁷ Based on Jung's notion of the archetype, Costa states:

I do not believe it an oversimplification to say that Lowry's life was itself an archetype. And because all of his fiction . . . duplicated his life, the fiction too is archetypal, in the Jungian sense: representational of a motif.¹⁸

After presenting explanations of Lowry's use of fire and water, which he classifies as Lowry's major archetypal motifs, Costa ends his argument with a view of Lowry as an impersonal writer, a conductor of mystical impulses, by saying that:

Lowry, who lived a kind of megalomaniacal mythology did not casually apply to his aspired-to paradise the name Eridanus . . . the River of Life and also the

Styx, [which] is connected with the legend of Phaeton. . . . The legend, with its suggestion of death and rebirth, must have appealed to Lowry whose fondest hope was that he, like Orpheus, would soar from--transcend--the ashes of his fiery life. Life as a wheel continuously turning forward and backward on itself--life as a river that contains at once the beauty of flow and the murk of stagnation: these are the major motifs in Lowry's working in life and art of an archetype to which now can be applied this name: the Pilgrim's Everlasting Return. Or--better--the Everlasting Voyager.^{19*}

Costa suggests another Jungian concept, the leader-function a writer has in effecting a compensatory adjustment required by men, when experiencing the psychic ailments common to every period in the history of mankind. The poet-leader allows himself to be guided by the unexpressed desires of his time and shows the way to attain that which men in general unconsciously expect. Sometimes this attainment can produce good effects but it can also represent the destruction of an epoch. This role Costa assigns to Lowry, reinforcing the impersonal values of Lowry's art. He shows that Under the Volcano, written during the interwar years, "made the Mexican Day of the Dead an archetypal holiday standing for humanity's dying."²⁰ He also considers the Consul's

* We know that it was Lowry's purpose concerning his work to write some books in a trilogy form which he had "christened" "The Voyage that Never Ends". This trilogy would have consisted basically of Under the Volcano, which would have been the Inferno part, Lunar Caustic, which would have functioned as the Purgatory phase, and the final stage would have been the Paradiso, with the novel In Ballast to the White Sea.

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alcoholism as a symbolic representation of the sickness which afflicts mankind: a strong sense of guilt (not of sin) and the inability to feel selfless, rather than selfish love.

Costa quotes Jung's cogent argument about the failure of a work of art when it only echoes neuroses without transcending them:

the personal idiosyncracies that creep into a work of art are not essential. . . . What is essential in a work of art is that it should rise far above the realm of personal life and speak from the spirit and heart of mankind. The personal aspect is a limitation--and even a sin--in the realm of art. When a form of art is primarily personal it deserves to be treated as if it were a neurosis.²¹

Commenting on this passage, Costa makes the following remarks, with which I personally do not agree:

So one hand of the master, in a sense, strikes down what the other has built. In life, Lowry enacted daily Jung's concepts of the Unconscious. In art, Lowry's attempt to metamorphose Junglike impulses failed and eventually overwhelmed him.²²

I would rather conclude my account of Costa's view of Under the Volcano using another of his comments:

Under the Volcano is the story of a possessed man that could only have been written by a possessed man. Yet the always lucid evocation of the Consul's madness is the product of an artist who was in control of his Jungian labyrinth.²³

In Douglas Day's biography of Lowry, we can find a great many facts which are common to both Geoffrey and Lowry, as we are going to see in the third chapter of this dissertation.

These facts lead us to characterize Lowry as a personal writer. Day considers this personal aspect of Lowry's art as being an essentially narcissistic attitude, which was not simply a product of vanity but a symptom of Lowry's extreme self-absorption which, in its turn, was a visible sign of regressive, infantile state that the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan called Protaxis: "he could scarcely distinguish himself from the universe. . . . Lowry, seeking to understand the outside world, knew only to look at himself."²⁴

However, Day is also ambivalent in his interpretation of Lowry and his novel, for, after presenting the above opinion about the author, Day affirms that Under the Volcano is "a deeply moral work" and that Geoffrey is "in a way, Lowry's representative of the human spirit, of all mankind: and his peril is our peril, his death our death."²⁵ He follows this argument till the end of his book, when he (following Jung's explanations of a work of art) affirms:

A work of art is successful, then, in the degree to which it becomes autonomous, freed from the self that is writing. Only once in his life was Lowry able to accomplish this: in Under the Volcano.²⁶

He sees the Consul as a mythological character with archetypal significance, as we can conclude from the following statement Day makes about Geoffrey:

This failed Consul, this erratic and faintly ludicrous drunk, is nothing less than a modern-day type of the Faustian-Promethean rebel, a man who turns his back on grace, and who seeks by doing so to acquire diabolical wisdom and power. He knows, like Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and the rest of the poètes maudits, that the way down and the way up are one and the same; and he, like them, prefers the way down.²⁷

Day also explains that Jung sees two different modes of artistic creation: the psychological and the visionary; this terminology can be associated with the personal and impersonal concepts we have been using here. The psychological artist is "the artist of consciousness, whose values are order, discipline, and clarity, and whose materials are crucial experiences, powerful emotions, suffering, passion, the stuff of human fate in general--as understood by the conscious, reason-oriented mind."²⁸ Of the visionary artist Jung speaks in a very eloquent way:

Here everything is reversed. The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is something strange that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding and to which in his weakness he may easily succumb. The very enormity of the experience gives it its value and its shattering impact. Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from timeless depths; glamorous, demonic, and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos. . . . On the other hand, it can be a revelation whose heights and depths are beyond our fathoming, or a vision of beauty which we can never put into words.²⁹

Or, to put it in simpler words, as Day does:

The visionary artist is the artist of the irrational, the obscure, the monstrous: his values lie not in order and discipline, but in inspiration, whether sublime or perverse. His subject matter is not the everyday world, but the ancient and dangerous archetypes which lie hidden in the deepest regions of the unconscious.³⁰

An artist cannot remain at one or the other pole. Ideally, the creative process functions as a kind of journey from the visionary realm of the unconscious to the rational world of consciousness: "The artist is a genius who has dared to expose himself to the full impact of the vision, and still been able to return to the world of consciousness in order to lend the most satisfying shape to that vision."³¹

Finally, with these concepts in mind, Day makes a synthesis of the two opposite views he has of Lowry, by seeing Under the Volcano as "a stunning and final evocation of hell on earth, a magnificently controlled vision of a world which none of us know, but which all of us recognize."³² For him, Lowry got with his book, "a supremely successful fusion of both modes of artistic creation. The vision is there, and so is the evidence of intelligent and sensitive shaping."³³

Another critic, M. C. Bradbrook, shares these two contradictory views of Lowry's art but, like most of the other critics do, she emphasizes the impersonal values of Under the Volcano, over the personal ones. She writes:

The relation of his works to his biography poses problems of more than personal significance. The importance of his early life in shaping his work cannot be gauged without considering both the conventions of his art and the facts, in so far as they can be established. . . . The judgement that all his books are disguised autobiography ignores the shaping power that appeared constructive and free in his books while his life became ruinous and self-destructive. At the end, when fantasies played an increasing part in ordinary life, the truth emerged symbolically in fiction, especially in uncovered symbols of his earliest years.³⁴

She sees Lowry as a poet who, in many ways, "anticipated the interests of our own time." This argument is closely related to Jung's notion of the poet-leader function, a function exerted only by the impersonal writer. For Bradbrook, Lowry was a very good illustration of Eliot's dictum "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (cf Jung's notion about this, in Costa's section), but she immediately remarks: "It is precisely because of the autobiographical element in his work that the artist in Lowry must be remembered; if in life he indulged in fantasies, in his art he could be ruthless in his own self-depiction."³⁵

Bradbrook reaches a balance between these two opposite views when she states that Lowry "succeeded in building a life of allegory," thus justifying "the obvious relevance of his history to his artifacts."³⁶ She recognized that Lowry's mythology "derived from many books but likewise from

his own personal experience."³⁷ These comments remind me of Costa's view of Lowry as an archetypal figure.

Like the other critics presented here, Stephen Spender has a two-dimensional view of Under the Volcano; first, he characterizes the novel as a work "about the breakdown of values in the twentieth century,"³⁸ reflecting not only the tragic despair of Mexico but the hopeless situation of Europe as well. According to him, Geoffrey "is a modern hero--or anti-hero--reflecting an extreme external situation within his own extremity. His neurosis becomes diagnosis, not just of himself but of a phase of history."³⁹ But he also acknowledges the autobiographical, personal characteristics of Lowry's approach to the book, which Spender says, is utterly different from the works produced within the same context and with the same purpose such as Ulysses and The Waste Land, which use myth to structure the chaos of modern experience. He writes: "the hero of Under the Volcano is the autobiographic consciousness of the Consul, who is a mask for Malcolm Lowry."⁴⁰

Spender agrees that Under the Volcano contains a great deal of symbolic myth, but he stresses the fact that, different from Ulysses, in which myth absorbs the characters "into a kind of cosmic consciousness," myth in Under the Volcano is used "in order to create the interior world of

the Consul [who] with all his defects, is the cosmos--and he is also Malcolm Lowry."⁴¹ Having an individualistic view of life, Lowry put in his work many situations which he had himself experienced. While Joyce's characters are instruments through which a collective, historic consciousness speaks, Lowry's characters reflect the author's personality. But Spender does not see as a flaw the autobiographical characteristics of the novel. On the contrary, he finds a meaningful reason for this:

What I mean by calling him an autobiographer is that in his writing he constructs a picture of the world by piecing together situations which are self-identifications. Under the Volcano is his best book because it seems to contain the whole sum of these identifications. The agonies he endured in Mexico provided a catalyst which enabled him to express his deepest feelings about his life, his vision of 'the times'.⁴²

Different from Markson, who stresses the mythic parallels in Under the Volcano, Spender emphasizes Lowry's very special use of mythic patterns, claiming that he took these conventional patterns of mythology and adapted them to his own special aims: "Lowry has borrowed from Joyce, turned his symbolic devices upside down [*italics mine*] and used them for his own purposes either with audacious intelligence, or else from a kind of inspired misunderstanding." Thus, myth, which was a mysterious, sacred expression of "a tradition which lies outside this time" was transformed by Lowry's exceptionally creative

capacity into an expression of "what the Consul knows and is
 --a frustrated great [*italics mine*] man."⁴³

Statement of Purpose

This work will be thus organized: a background chapter, where I will gather some information about mythology in general, with summary of the main ideas existing in this area of knowledge. In another chapter I will characterize Lowry as a personal, autobiographic writer, and try to discover some traces of identity and influence of his life on his major works (Ultramarine, Lunar Caustic, Under the Volcano, Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid and October Ferry to Gabriola) in a superficial way, analysing with a little more detail the similarities between Lowry and Geoffrey Firmin, the major character of Under the Volcano. The next chapter will consist of an analysis of Lowry's use of mythological figures, the very special comparisons he makes between Geoffrey and such figures as Christ, Adam, Oedipus, etc. In the fifth chapter I will make a catalogue of the novel's recurring symbols and I will also analyse their meaning and the way Lowry uses them for ironic or mythological, archetypal purposes, how he deals with such motifs as fire, water and other elements of the animal, vegetal and mineral worlds. The final chapter will contain a study

of Lowry's peculiar way of dealing with mythological patterns (ascent/descent, the journey theme, rebirth, etc.) in relation to the ones presented in the background chapter.

I will try to show that Lowry is a combination of the personal and the impersonal writer who is able to transcend the level of facts through his artistry, especially in Under the Volcano, his best novel. I will also try to show that, even being considered an impersonal, mythological work, the novel's mythic content is interestingly ambiguous; Under the Volcano contains both the historical and the eternal notions, the comic and serious treatment of myth and, therefore, the immediate and deep levels of the novel have an internal coherence that enables the reader to interpret it from both perspectives.

While studying the novel's mythological content, I will keep in mind the idea that we cannot limit the analysis and values of a book with such a remarkable richness of meaning to an archetypal approach, or to a Jungian explanation of a work of art, which are only two, among several other possible ways of understanding Under the Volcano. Besides this, we can feel throughout the novel, a strong tendency to see mythic patterns from a critical angle, due to the author's consistent inversions of mythic truths. Lowry, as a good modern writer, is recreating myth for modern readers, because

he does not write about myth in a conventional way. The modern world is so chaotic that there cannot be any straightforward vision such as myth used to provide. And there is still the possibility that, by misleading almost all the mythic parallels he uses, Lowry is adopting an ironic view of myth to express his ironic feelings towards man in general; it seems that he feels that the modern world is "bankrupt" and man has lost his unity of being. Although the paradox or apparent contradiction between these approaches can never be resolved, they do not deprive the book of its remarkable value; on the contrary, I think it would be a little reductive if we tried to find fixed, static explanations for such a rich, complex novel.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTHOLOGY: ITS MAIN PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

Although recognizing John Vickery's exaggeration, when he states that "myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically. [and] as a result, literary plots, characters, themes and images are basically complications and displacements of similar elements in myths and folktales,"¹ we cannot deny the importance that mythology has for literature, mainly in its symbolically illustrated moral truths, universal values and concepts which are relevant material for the poet. In his article Literature and Myth, Northrop Frye characterizes literature as "a developed mythology," and he goes on, explaining that

One important social function of a mythology is to give a society an imaginative sense of its contract, of its abiding relations with the gods, with the order of nature, and within itself. When a mythology becomes a literature, its social function of providing a society with an imaginative vision of the human situation directly descends from its mythological parent. In this development the typical forms of myth become the conventions and genres of literature and it is only when convention and genre are recognized to be essential aspects of literary form that the connection of literature with myth becomes evident.²

Having found important mythic features in Lowry's Under the Volcano and also being aware of his personal, individual dynamic and craftsmanship giving a peculiar shape to these features, it is my purpose to present in this chapter some of

the relevant mythological ideas that will enable me to interpret (in other chapters) Lowry's use of mythology. Thus, I will summarize the content of important studies about mythic principles and conventions, archetypal and recurring images and afterward I will analyse the way Lowry deals with them.

Bidney

Bidney traces what we could call the history of mythological theory, in which he tries to summarize the main ideas existing about myth, from the time of Plato and the Sophists until it has reached its modern status. While he traces the theories about myth, he also questions the kind of interpretation we should apply to it.

The Sophists of the Greek Enlightenment viewed the traditional myths "as allegories revealing naturalistic and moral truths."³ The Christian theologians, however, only interpreted allegorically and literally the narratives of the Old Testament but did not accept this explanation of the pagan myths, which they considered "purely poetic or artistic representations of human emotions and aspirations."⁴

These concepts suffered radical transformations, especially during the European Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, when the rationalistic philosophers such as Voltaire, in search for a religion of reason, regarded the classic myths as "irrational superstitions or deliberate fictions

foisted upon the multitude by the crafty priests."⁵ Against this notion it is worth emphasizing the idea of Giovanni Battista Vico, who acknowledged the value of myth as "containing significant historic records of the cyclic evolution of human thought and social institutions."⁶

The Romantic movement of the eighteenth/nineteenth century--mainly the figure of Schelling--added new ideas to the subject, which acquired philosophical dimensions with Schelling's affirmation that mythical figures were "autonomous configurations of the human spirit," being, rather than something freely created, "a necessary mode of feeling and belief which appears in the course of history and seizes upon human consciousness."⁷ These ideas reached modern times, where we find E. Cassirer's ideas about myth extremely significant. He tries to integrate the philosophy of myth to the philosophy of culture, taking into consideration that myth can be explained through "the unity of a specific structural form of the spirit."⁸ Thus, "mythical thinking is a unitary form of consciousness with its specific and characteristic features."⁹ Cassirer also found that in myth there cannot be unity of object but only unity of function, which is a result of a unique mode of experience, that is the direction human consciousness took while constructing spiritual reality.

Differing from old philosophers--such as Sallustius--who regarded myths as divine truths and mysteries which could not be easily understood, Cassirer sees myth as a self-contained form of interpreting reality, a subjective and psychological truth without mystery. Besides this psychological aspect of myth, it has a pragmatic function in promoting "a feeling of unity and harmony between the members of a society as well as a sense of harmony with the whole of nature or life."¹⁰

Having thus exposed the several theories about myth, Bidney concludes by presenting his own theory, which establishes the great symbolic or allegorical value of mythology, "not because myth necessarily and intrinsically has such latent, esoteric wisdom, but because the plot or theme suggests to us universal patterns of motivation and conduct."¹¹

Wheelwright

This author's concept of the cyclic character of nature and its relation to ritual and myth, comes close to Frye's and Campbell's idea on the subject, as we are going to see later. According to him, there is an analogy between man's transition from state to state and the evolutionary periods of the physical world. Thus, rites which celebrate the coming of the full moon because it marks the arrival of a new month, can be related to the vegetation ceremonies which,

frequently oriented towards astronomical phenomena, praise the passage from season to season. As primitive rites of man's passage were also closely related to the ones of cosmic transition, it is hard to identify if the actual reason for celebration applies to a change in human state or a change in nature.

The author cites Van Gennep, who considers these ceremonies of transition or rites of passage to be formed by three distinct stages of development: "The rites of separation, those of 'the margin' when the celebrant finds himself in the darkness and anonymity of 'between two worlds' and those of attainment."¹² These three phases correspond to Gaster's four categories: Mortification, Purification, Reinvigoration and Jubilation. In both authors we notice the idea of cyclic repetition and rebirth, what reminds us of Campbell's idea that "wherever the mythological mood prevails, tragedy is impossible."¹³

Northrop Frye

To introduce the notion of archetypes, Frye stresses first the fact that "every poet has his private mythology, his own spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols, of much of which he is quite unconscious."¹⁴ He then makes it clear that many artists of different cultures make use of the same images, and transform them into archetypal symbols of

literature. The author considers the action of archetypes as a unifying category of literary criticism which should be a part of the total form of criticism in literature that is literary history.

Concerning ritual, it is Frye's idea that "all the important sequences in nature, the day, the phases of the moon, the seasons and solstices of the year, the crises of existence from birth to death, have rituals attached to them, and most of the higher religions are equipped with a definitive total body of rituals suggestive, if we may put it so, of the entire range of potentially significant actions in human life." And since "the myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle [then] the myth is the archetype."¹⁵

He also identifies the single pattern of significance that exists in the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year and the organic cycle of man's life. This meaningful pattern, which will be now described, constitutes the base from which myth creates a central narrative with figures representing, at the same time, the sun, vegetative fertility and the hero god, i.e., the archetypal human being:

1. The dawn, spring and birth phase--we have the themes of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death in this stage; the hero is born, resurrected and new things are

created. As subordinate characters we have the father and mother.

2. The zenith, summer, marriage or triumph phase--in this phase are included the myths of apotheosis, of sacred marriage and of coming into the wonder zone. The companion and the bride personify the subordinate characters.

3. The sunset, autumn and death phase--here we have myths representing the fall, isolation of the hero, the dying god and images of sacrifice. The subordinate characters are the traitors and the sire.

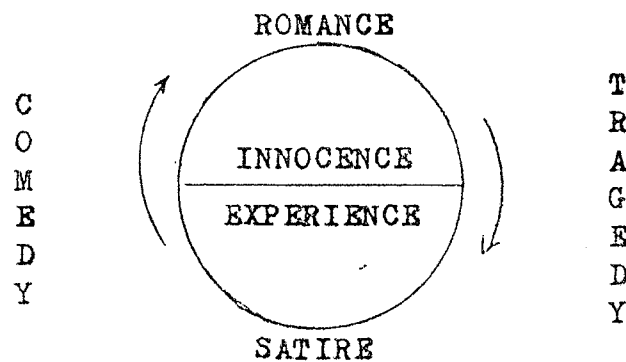
4. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase--stage in which we see the triumph of the dark powers which defeat the hero and cause the return of chaos. The ogre and the witch represent the subordinate characters.

Another interesting notion the author points out is that of the quest-myth constituting the central myth of literature. To make clear the meaning of this pattern, which originates in our subconscious, Frye explains that

the human cycle of waking and dreaming corresponds closely to the natural cycle of light and darkness, and it is perhaps in this correspondence that all imaginative life begins. The correspondence is largely an antithesis; it is in daylight that man is really in the power of darkness, a prey to frustration and weakness; it is in the darkness of nature that the "libido" or conquering

heroic self awakes. Hence art, which Plato called a dream for awakened minds, seems to have as its final cause the resolution of the antithesis, the mingling of the sun and the hero, the realizing of a world in which the inner desire and the outward circumstance coincide.¹⁶

This concept can be well summarized in the following diagram, which also categorizes the four different forms of literary expression. Following this pattern, Frye says that the best literary works are the transitional ones:



To conclude this discussion of his work, the author presents a central pattern to establish the distinction between the comic and the tragic vision, although emphasizing the over-simplification of this model:

	<u>COMIC</u>	<u>TRAGIC</u>
human world	{ communion, love, order and friendship	{ tyranny or anarchy, isolated man, leader with the back to his followers, deserted/betrayed hero
animal world	{ domesticated animals, birds, lamb	{ beasts and birds of prey, wolves, serpents, vultures

	<u>COMIC</u>	<u>TRAGIC</u>
vegetable world	{ garden, grove, park, tree of life, rose	{ sinister forest, wilder- ness, heath, tree of death
mineral world	{ city, temple, glowing precious stones	{ deserts, rocks and ruins, sinister geometric images like the cross

This model is really oversimplified since, for example, though comedy ends in a renewed society, it can take place in a forest or chaotic world that is potentially tragic. We know that "tone" is more important than "matter", as a way of distinguishing comedy from tragedy.

Campbell

One of the points that Campbell stresses is the similarity of function that myth has, instead of an identity of content. To prove this he presents the arguments of other scholars such as Adolf Bastian, who recognized the constancy of man's "Elementary Ideas" and identified the influence of geographic and historic factors over these universally common features, producing in this way the different "Folk Ideas." Franz Boas, in his book The Mind of Primitive Man, affirmed that "in the main, the mental characteristics of man are the same all over the world" and "certain patterns of associated ideas may be recognized in all types of culture."¹⁷

In regards to mythology it is amazing to see the similarity of some fundamental patterns that keep occurring in

several kinds of culture which have almost nothing in common. This uniformity of mythological patterns makes then clear the uniformity of mankind and "it may be really true that, as Jeremias said, the various cultures of mankind are no more than the dialects of one and the same spiritual language."¹⁸

In his book The Hero With a Thousand Faces, Campbell shows what could be called a theory of the monomyth, in which we can see the patterns that are represented in all kinds of culture, no matter how different from one another they are. These patterns represent the hero's stages of development and can be described in general terms as Departure, Initiation and Return. Each of these stages can be subdivided into other phases, such as

- | | | |
|------------|---|---|
| Departure | { | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the call to adventure 2. refusal of the call 3. supernatural aid 4. the crossing of the first threshold 5. the belly of the whale |
| Initiation | { | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. the road of trials 7. the meeting with the goddess 8. woman as temptress 9. atonement with the father 10. apotheosis 11. the ultimate boon |
| Return | { | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. refusal of the return 13. the magic flight 14. rescue from without 15. the crossing of the return threshold 16. master of the two worlds 17. freedom to live |

These phases can thus be explained:

1. The announcement of the adventure is usually represented

by a figure judged evil by the world, but it brings an atmosphere of wonder and marks a new stage in the life of the hero.

2. If the hero does not accept being led to the adventure it is changed into its negative. Turning himself to other interests, the hero becomes a victim to be showed from a more or less complete disintegration of consciousness.

3. The hero meets at this point a protective figure who represents the favorable power of destiny and gives him help against the dangerous force the hero is going to face. We have examples of this guardian power in the figures of Beatrice and Virgil in Dante's Divine Comedy. This supernatural guiding principle unites in itself the ambiguities of the unconscious and it is an indication that the unconscious is the support of the conscious personality which will perish to follow this mysterious guide.

4. Following his adventure, the hero comes to the entrance to the region of splendid power. Different from the common people who remain within the world bounds, the hero steps into unexplored zones where the hero, released from the ego, finds free region for the projection of unconscious content.

5. The worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale is an indication of the rebirth the adventurer experiences. Being swallowed inward, the hero gives us the idea that the

crossing of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation, from which he is born again, having undergone a metamorphosis.

6. After crossing the threshold, the hero finds himself in a curious dream landscape full of symbolical figures which are trials he must survive. The same happens to anyone who decides to journey downward "into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth"¹⁹ in a "long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination."²⁰

7. The hero's ultimate adventure is usually represented as his mystical marriage with the Queen Goddess of the World. In mythology, the woman represents "the totality of what can be known [while] the hero is the one who comes to know" and if he "can match her import, the two, the knower and the known will be released from every limitation."²¹

8. Since the woman represents the living power, having married the Queen Goddess of the World, the hero reaches a total mastery of life.

9. The father's "ogre" aspect is a symbol reflecting the victim's own ego. Thus, atonement is no more than "abandonment of that self-generated double-monster--the dragon thought to be God (superego) and the dragon thought to be sin (repressed Id)."²² To do this, however, one must be detached from the ego itself. One must feel the father's mercy and when one believes in this mercifulness, feared ogres will

disappear. When the hero encounters his father, he opens his soul in a way that makes him ready to understand that the tragedies of the universe are validated in the "majesty of Being." Thus, "the hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the force of the father, understands--and the two are atoned."²³

10. At this point, the hero attains a divine state, releasing the potentialities he has within himself; "when the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he becomes free of all fear, beyond the reach of change."²⁴

11. The hero, now as a superior man, is the image of indestructability.

12. To follow the full cycle of the monomyth, the hero, having acquired his ultimate boon, must return to the common world to transmit his wisdom for the benefit of mankind. However, the hero sometimes shows unwillingness to accept this task because he finds accomplishment difficult to communicate. Instead, he may prefer to remain "forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being."²⁵

13. In his return to the world, the hero is helped by his supernatural guide only if the former, after receiving the blessing of the gods, is clearly told to do so. If the hero's desire to return is not well accepted by the gods or

demons, the adventurer will find this stage full of obstacles to make his pursuit more complicated.

14. In his return voyage, the hero may be helped by the outside world, which come in order to help him because "so far as one is alive, life will call. Society is jealous of those who remain away from it and will come knocking at the door."²⁶ As explained in the previous stage, the hero may be assisted by his supernatural guiding force through the whole course of his journey, since the ego has succumbed. The unconscious establishes its own equilibrium and the hero is born again to the land of common day.

15. The divine and the human worlds, although depicted as two different realms, as distinct as life and death, are actually one--and here lies the key to the understanding of myth and symbol. The divine world is a forgotten sphere of the world we know and it is the hero's duty to explore this wonder zone. At the end of his wondrous excursion, the hero must re-enter the long-forgotten atmosphere of society, bringing with him the wisdom to be transmitted to mankind. This task, however, has always been extremely difficult for the hero, due to the existing inconsistency between the truth revealed to him from the deep world and the values commonly accepted by ordinary men. And the problem is "how to represent on a two-dimensional surface a three-dimensional form,

or in a three-dimensional image a multi-dimensional meaning?
 . . . How communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void."²⁷ Sometimes the hero fails in his ultimate difficult task and frequently he questions the validity of attempting to make known his experience of transcendental bliss, to men and women interested only in the degenerated superficial values of human existence. Then, the hero longs for his soul-satisfying world but to complete his adventure, he must return and survive the impact of the common world. To make the impact less strong, the hero takes some precaution to prevent him from touching the ground directly, yet permit him to live among common people. As examples of this, we have images of the isolating horse or kings being carried on the shoulders of noblemen. Sir James George Frazer explains the reason for this procedure: "Since the virtue of holiness is, so to say, a powerful explosive which the smallest touch may detonate, it is necessary in the interest of general safety to keep it within narrow bounds, lest breaking out it should blast, blight and destroy whatever it comes into contact with."²⁸

16. At this phase, the hero has the power to move freely back and forth from the divine to the common world, "from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back--not contaminating the principles of the one

with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other."²⁹

17. The results of the hero's miraculous journey and return are appropriately described in the passage that follows:

Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new. ... This self cannot be cut nor burnt nor wetted nor withered. Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever. ³⁰

As Campbell states, "the hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become because he IS." He realizes the great difference between things that apparently don't change in time and the permanence of Being. In the same way, he does not fear that the next changing moment is going to destroy the permanent, because

nothing retains its own form; but Nature, the greater renewer, ever makes up forms from forms. Be sure there is nothing that perishes in the whole universe; it does but vary and renew its form.

The Universal Round

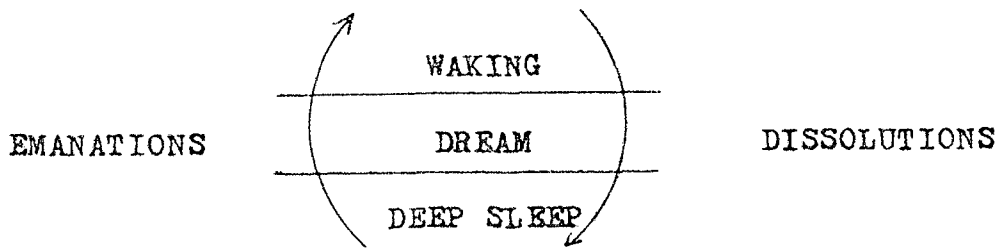
The continuous flow of vital forces which come from the unconscious dark to the zone of waking consciousness, thus, maintaining man's physical and mental health, is represented in myth as the cosmogonic cycle, where "the universe is

precipitated out of, and reposes upon, a timelessness back into which it again dissolves."³² The gods control this cyclic flow of power from the source which reminds us of the basic principle of mythology that in the end lies the beginning.

As an example of this we have the ever-revolving, twelve-spoke wheel the Jains used in order to symbolize time which they considered an endless round. This wheel was divided in two parts, the first part representing the descending series while the other one represented the ascending phase.

The cosmogonic cycle, shown in the diagram that follows, thus symbolizes the

circulation of consciousness through the three planes of being. The first plane is that of waking experience: cognitive of the hard, gross facts of an outer universe illuminated by the light of the sun, and common to all. The second plane is that of dream experience: cognitive of the fluid, subtle forms of a private interior world, self-luminous and of one substance with the dreamer. The third plane is that of deep sleep: dreamless, profoundly blissful. In the first are encountered the instructive experiences of life; in the second these are digested, assimilated to the inner forces of the dreamer; while in the third all is enjoyed and known unconsciously, in the 'space within the heart', the room of the inner controller, the source and end of all. 33



The Hero Today

In our contemporary world, we observe a collapse of the traditional universe of symbols. About this, Campbell writes:

The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night. ³⁴

The power of religion, which in ancient times was the support of the social unit, was replaced by the power of economic and political organizations. In the modern world, man's problems have taken a quite opposite direction:

where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there now is darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the coordinated soul. ³⁵

To succeed in his mission, however, "it is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero but precisely the reverse".³⁶ And here it is worth emphasizing Campbell's idea that "art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are

instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization."³⁷

Mythology has a psychological, rather than a historical or ethnological origin and, for Campbell, the science of myth would thus be psychology, where Freud and Jung established the basis of a scientific approach to myth. Freud began to study magic and theological phenomena under a psychological point of view, identifying the relationship of myth to dream, this aspect of the subject being also recognized by Jung, who stressed the notion of the conductive power of images.

Mythology is, like dream, a spontaneous product of the psyche, revealing its deep contents and consequently the whole nature of man, his desires, fears, aspirations and his destiny. Thus, "dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche. But in the dream the forms are quirked by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer, whereas in myth the problems and solutions shown are directly valid for all mankind."³⁸ One distinction however, must be made between dream and myth, since the former is a spontaneous product of the unconscious whereas myth has patterns consciously produced to serve as a powerful image for communication of the traditional wisdom and universal spiritual principles. These principles teach us that "all the visible structures of the

world--all things and beings--are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise, which supports and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve."³⁹ This power is what the scientists call energy; it is the power of God for Christian religion while for the psychoanalysts it is the libido. It is the function of myth and ritual to make possible the apprehension of this source.

Campbell still raises another interesting point in relation to the function of mythology, the reasons for its sameness and necessity. First, he present Róheim's concept that

the outstanding difference between man and his animal brethren consists in the infantile character of human beings, in the prolongation of infancy. The prolonged infancy explains the traumatic character of sexual experiences which do not produce the like effect in our simian brethren. ... Finally, the defence mechanisms themselves owe their existence to the fact that our Soma (Ego) is even more retarded than the Germa (Id) and hence the immature Ego evolves defence mechanisms as a protection against libidinal quantities which it is not prepared to deal with. 40

Then he quotes Adolf Portmann's statement about man who is "the incomplete creature whose style of life is the historical process determined by a tradition."⁴¹ Quoting Róheim,

Campbell stresses the idea that

civilization originates in delayed infancy and its function is security. It is a huge network of more or less successful attempts to protect mankind against the danger of object-loss, the colossal efforts made by a baby who is afraid of being left alone in the dark.

Pushing these statements a little further, Campbell concludes that "society, as a fostering organ is thus a kind of exterior 'second womb', wherein the postnatal stages of man's long gestation are supported and defended"⁴² and "rites then, together with the mythologies that support them, constitute the second womb, the matrix of the postnatal gestation of the placental homo sapiens."⁴³

Rank

Before giving his psychological explanation for the mythical analogies, Rank presents some existing theories on the subject:

1. Adolf Bastian's theory of "Idea of the People," admits the existence of elemental ideas (see Campbell's section), according to which the fundamental similarities in mythology were due to the uniform composition and arrangement of the human mind in its basic aspects, despite the modifying influence of time and place.

2. The Original Community is a theory which was first

adapted by Theodor Benfey to folklore and fairy tales and was afterwards applied to myth analogies by Rudolf Schubert. They assume that these tales were born in India, then accepted by the primarily related (the Indo-Germanic) people and were finally spread over the world, still keeping their basic patterns.

3. The theory of Migration or Borrowing is very similar to the theory of Original Community and it explains that myths originated from definite people, especially the Babylonians and were transmitted to other people through oral tradition and literary influences.

Noteworthy here is Wundt's idea that "the appropriation of mythological contents always represents at the same time an independent mythological construction; because only that can be retained permanently which corresponds to the borrower's stage of mythological ideation."⁴⁴

All these theories, although they propose very good explanations for the interdependence of mythological patterns, do not answer the basic problem, i.e., the origin of mythology because, as Schubert says, "all these manifold sagas date back to a single very ancient prototype. But [one] is unable to tell us anything of the origin of this prototype."⁴⁵ From the investigation of the origin of myths, the actual theory appeared with its naturalistic explanation for the birth of

hero myth: all myths were an allegory of the sun, reflecting its rising, setting and supernatural influence. Thus, "the newborn hero is the young sun rising from the waters, first confronted by lowering clouds but finally triumphing over all obstacles."⁴⁶ In opposition to this school, another one appeared claiming that myths were lunar in origin, i.e., referring allegorically to the moon. However, both approaches have declined since they don't give a very convincing explanation to the motives of myth formation.

The author then comes to a psychological theory for the uniformity of mythological content, explaining that the constituents are similar because they all originated from a common human source; the dream, or rather, the human imagination: "it is to this imaginative faculty--of humanity at large rather than of the individual--that the modern myth theory is obliged to concede a high rank, perhaps the first, as the ultimate source of all myths."⁴⁷

From the uniformity of several mythological stories that the author collects, he draws a kind of "standard saga" which he outlines as follows:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening

danger to the father (or his representative). As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by a humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other. Finally he achieves rank and honors."⁴⁸

Rank gives us the psychological interpretation to these patterns found in mythology: we observe the detachment of the child hero from his parents but this is necessary for the normal growth of the individual, as the old saying—"A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country and in his father's house"⁴⁹—explains. The young child considers his or her parents as unique source of faith and authority. As he/she progressively develops, he/she comes to know more people, including the ones who belong to the category "parents". These newer acquaintances make the child question herself about her parents' incomparability. Intense emotions of sexual rivalry are also experienced by the child in the relationship with his/her parents and he/she often feels neglected to the point of believing that he/she is an adopted child. What follows from this alienation on the part of the child is what can be designated a "family romance," when the child despises her/his actual parents and replaces them by others of higher rank. The second stage of the family romance takes place when the child acquires the knowledge about sexual matters: she begins to

imagine erotic situations, in which the mother or the object of the greatest sexual curiosity is placed in a position of secret unfaithfulness and clandestine love affairs. It must be explained here that, under this disguise of ingratitude, the child's feelings of love for his/her parents are still kept; the fact that the child substitutes his/her parents for superior ones is an indication of the child's desire to go back to her early happy time, when she considered her parents wonderfully incomparable.

By making a comparison of these features with the mythological outline stated previously, we can say that the ego of the child, which represents a collective ego, corresponds to the hero of the myth. In myth, the hero's separation from his parents corresponds to the child's denial of her parents, which is a basis for her personal development and independence. The two parent-couples (the humble and the noble) of the myth also find the correspondence in the real life of the child. The exposure of the hero myth is a parallel for the child's feelings of repudiation by the parents. The exposure in water is a symbolic expression of birth, the basket or box symbolizing the womb. These elements--the water and the basket--are used to "asexualize the birth process, as it were, in a childlike fashion."⁵⁰ The representation of the birth by its opposite (dangerous exposure in water) is an indication

of the parents' hostility towards the hero, while in actual life we have the child's hostility toward his parents. The refusal to let the son be born is also represented by an opposite feeling--the wish to have the child, the hostility being projected to another figure, to an oracular verdict, for example. In real life we can observe a certain feeling of hostility or competition in the relations between father and son or between brothers. This hostility gradually disappears and the father, previously represented by the king, the tyrannical persecutor, is identified with a lowly man, a figure entirely separated from the royal persecutor. The attitude of the child towards the mother figure is represented in myth by lowering of the mother into animal forms, which are "especially appropriate substitutes, because the sexual processes are here plainly evident also to the child, while the concealment of these processes is presumably the root of the childish revolt against the parents."⁵¹

Just as the hero's revolt against the father comes to an end, the conflict between father and son is finished when the latter, now a grown boy, becomes himself a father.

These myths are a product of the adults who transfer to the hero a part of their own infantile history when their ego was itself a hero through its first heroic act of revolting against the parents. In other words, myths are "created by adults by means

of retrograde fantasies."⁵² From what has been said, the author affirms that myths have "sprung from two opposite motives, both of which are subordinate to the motive of vindication of the individual through the hero: on the one hand the motive of affection and gratitude toward the parents; and on the other hand, the motive of revolt against the father."⁵³

Carl Jung

Campbell's theory of the monomyth, in which he represents a basic structure of the cycle of action that underlies all hero stories, has its psychological basis in Jung's notion of the archetype, which can be generally defined as "the common inherited patterns of emotional and mental behavior."⁵⁴ The archetypal behavior has its origin in what Jung calls the collective unconscious, that "part of the psyche that retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind."⁵⁵

According to Jung, the human mind has innate, inherited collective thought patterns which spring from a deep source, not controlled by consciousness. When we dream, we are receiving these spontaneous impulses and reactions from the unconscious to our consciousness. Some of these elements are not derived from the dreamer's personal experience; they are our "primordial images," the "universals in man," or the

"archetypes." When the human being makes a conscious representation of these psychological, archetypal images, then he is creating mythical, religious and philosophical concepts which vary a great deal on the surface, without losing their basic pattern. And the underlying sameness of mythological stories as an evidence of their psychic, archetypal source.

Jung emphasizes the importance for men of the universal hero myths, when he says that "the need for hero symbols arises when the ego needs strengthening--when the conscious mind needs assistance in some tasks that it cannot accomplish unaided without drawing on the sources of strength that lie in the unconscious mind."⁵⁶ He also explains that

the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness - his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses - in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him. ... The image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality.⁵⁷

Thus, the psychic process of initiation that is experienced by all human beings in their psychological development and which, according to Jung, "begins with a rite of submission, followed by a period of containment and then by a further rite of liberation,"⁵⁸ finds its symbolic representation in many mythological stories, whose general, allegorical patterns we have already presented in this chapter.

Having thus summarized some of the main ideas about mythology and the theories of myth criticism, I would like to explain once more that I am not going to adopt, specifically, this method of criticism because I do not want to restrict the analysis of Under the Volcano to a single point of view. Besides this, we cannot accept the archetypal approach as a dogma because, as a method of analysis of a literary work, it also has limitations, together with its undeniable importance, as one scholar has wisely defined it: ". . . a committed point of view and so cantankerous, obstreperous, irritating, wrong on details, and dictatorial, but it is passionate and alive and has something to say."⁵⁹

It also seems to me a little difficult to know whether mythic analysis, while recognizing the universal values of a work of art, is compatible with "realistic" psychology of individualized characters who have an existential situation in a particular here-and-now, or whether myth (and therefore, myth criticism) is compatible with humor and irony. Also, we cannot know if the author is a "conductor" of his archetypal impulses or if he consciously is controlling them for some specific end that may go beyond mythic consciousness. However, a study of the general concepts of the myth criticism provides important background material to compare/contrast with Lowry's manipulation of these ideas, since he does use

a great deal of mythological content, although he works with these collective truths of myths in a very special individualized way that makes his novel a sui generis work.

CHAPTER THREE

LOWRY, THE PERSONAL WRITER

I tell you this: that only a person whose whole existence is his work, who has dominated and disciplined the volcano within him, at what cost of suffering I do not wholly understand, could have written such a book. (Excerpt, letter from Margerie Lowry to Harold Matson)¹

As the title indicates, the purpose of this chapter is to characterize Lowry as a personal, autobiographical writer. As we have seen in the first chapter, there are two opposed views of Lowry's behavior as a writer: some critics see Lowry as an extremely personal writer, while others find in him clearly defined traces of impersonal, mythological behavior. Recognizing the existence of both characteristics in Lowry's work, and having for the present dissertation the purpose of analyzing the author's use of mythology, I will examine in this chapter the personal aspects of his writing so as to judge afterwards just how impersonal or personal is his use of myth. Here we will try to identify the influence his life exerted on his work, tracing also some parallels between facts of his own life and their representation in his main books. I will analyse some psychological traits that carry over from Lowry's life to his work, but I will work at the level of facts too, trying to show how particular events of his life repeat themselves through his characters. Biographical facts are thus

very useful to us, especially in this concern, because it supplies a measure of the transformation that these facts underwent in Lowry's art and reveals their decisive influence upon it. As Costa accurately states, what happened to Lowry was a kind of "metamorphosis of autobiography into art."²

It is not necessary to be specially schooled in Freudian analytical theory to understand how important are the early years of one's life. In Lowry's case, this is particularly true, as we are going to see briefly now. Most of the themes common to all Lowry's books, have their origin in his life.

Conrad Aiken once told Richard Costa that "Malc really wished for the unconscious--the womb, if you will, and nothing any of us could do for him changed that."³ To this statement we could add Knickerbocker's remarks: "I finally decided what it was about Malcolm. It was simply that he hadn't wanted to be born at all. . . ."⁴ For purposes of illustrating this point, we must remember now that during his undergraduate days "a student magazine depicted him curled up inside the body of a ukelele, as if in a womb," as Bradbook notes.⁵ This incident appears in Under the Volcano, when Hugh recalls his early experiences with the guitar:

Like Philoctete's bow or Oedipus's daughter it was my guide and prop. I played it without bashfulness wherever I went. Nor did it strike me as any less than an unexpected and useful compliment that Phillipson, the artist,

should have troubled to represent me, in a rival paper, as an immense guitar, inside which an oddly familiar infant was hiding, curled up, as in a womb.⁶

Lowry's characters are markedly introspective, always worried about going deeper and deeper into the hidden regions of the unconscious (or the womb). We will not go into a more detailed analysis of this characteristic of Lowry's books because it will be studied in chapter five of the present work, but now it is worth trying to find out its source in Lowry's life.

Although his brothers state the opposite, it seems that Lowry, "the last and probably least wanted of four children,"⁷ did not have a very happy childhood. Arthur O. Lowry represented for his son, a "harsh, threatening superego."⁸ Malcolm never escaped from his father's domination and his feelings toward his father were a mixture of love and terror. We see that in Under the Volcano Geoffrey both idealizes his father (as a religious quester) and kills him off. Arthur, a Methodist with a strong religious sense, discouraged drinking, smoking, parties and jazz in his home. He was a successful businessman whose only hobby was sport. As early as he could, Lowry started drinking, which was obviously a way of defying his puritannical, abstemious father. And his characters were drunkards too.

At the age of five, Lowry was introduced to the destructive effects of venereal disease, when his eldest brother Stuart took him to the Anatomical Museum in Paradise Street, Liverpool. This provoked in the young Lowry a deep-seated fear that in the future produced in him a "syphilophobia," the venereal disease itself being transformed into a leit-motif in his book. It seems that Lowry was also exposed to terrible sexual insults at the hands of his sadistic nannies. With respect to these incidents, Lowry's Vancouver friend, William McConnell recalls:

Many of the incidents of his childhood remained in his mind vivid as current events. He told us on several occasions, for example, of a nurse his wealthy father employed when he was very young. She had loved his older brother and to his horror hated him. Once she had wheeled his cart along the cliff-edge, high above the rolling sea. He described with quiet exactitude her features as she leaned over with a blanket to smother him, how he screamed (the exact key), and then the saving running footsteps of his favoured older brother which interrupted the scene."⁹

Although we cannot feel sure about how much truth there is in these stories (he recalls one nurse having whipped him on his genitals), these experiences, together with feelings of guilt over sexual impulses caused by his parents' severe sense of sin, had bred in Lowry a sexual insecurity that is manifested in some of his characters' impotence and fear of sex. One of Lowry's friends, James Stern, once declared that Lowry's fear of sex could be due to "a basic fear of authority

--specifically, of Arthur O. Lowry."¹⁰ And this fear of authority Lowry also transfers to his characters, mainly to Geoffrey Firmin, Sigbjorn Wilderness and Ethan Llewelyn. Lowry's sexual problem can also have been the cause of his drinking, since alcohol could serve as a sexual substitute, necessary because of lack of confidence.

Lowry's mother was not a very healthy woman, and because of her illness, she had frequently to be absent from home. Lowry, being the youngest of the family, was the most heavily exposed to psychological distress by this separation from his mother. All his life he spent looking for substitute mothers; Margerie fulfilled this role, as well as Yvonne in Under the Volcano, as we are going to point out in chapter four, when we analyse the Oedipus complex. Douglas Day (basing himself on Freud's explanation of the oral stage of character formation) characterizes Lowry as an oral type, thus clarifying Lowry's striking elements of infantilism and his inability to distinguish the self and the world. He quotes Holland:

Because the oral phase occupies the earliest period when self and object are still not clearly differentiated, this first phase is important for establishing our ability to trust external realities, especially other people. It is important too, for establishing what we might call our abilities to do nothing, to be passive, to wait. These traits can become too overdone in the adult personality; typically, the malingerer, the addict, the alcoholic, have been disturbed in this first phase of orality. . . . The kinds of images in a literary work that would make you expect you are dealing with an oral situation are, naturally enough, almost anything to do

with the mouth or with "taking in": biting, sucking, smoking, inhaling, talking, and the like; or their correlatives, food, liquor, tobacco, and especially words, particularly curses, threats, and vows, words which "bite," constituting a kind of action in themselves.¹¹

To Holland's comments, Day then adds:

If the orally-fixated person becomes a writer, one can predict with some confidence not only the subjects he will choose to write about, but even the way in which he will write about them. Alcoholics, addicts--losers of one kind or another--will be his protagonists. What they do not swallow, will attempt to swallow them: the sea will drown them . . . sea voyages will abound, as will journeys into labyrinths. The element of fantasy will be strong . . . the death wish, present in us also, is perhaps stronger in the oral type, who, having never really separated himself from the all-encompassing maternal element, is in gravest danger of subsiding back into it . . . the writing of the oral type is likely to be marked by a high degree of energy and apparent lack of discipline.¹²

Although there is no doubt that Lowry wanted to construct a dismal image of his childhood, and used his creative mind for this purpose, he really had dark memories of events of his life as a child. One of these facts was a relatively bad attack of corneal ulceration he suffered, which, he believed, had been a result of neglect on the part of his parents. Almost all of Lowry's protagonists, from Ultramarine to October Ferry to Gabriola are made to suffer from an eye problem, which, in its turn, suggests Oedipus, guilt and castration, in Lowry's complicated network of correspondences. Lowry seldom in his books writes about his characters' infant life and when he does, we notice that their childhood

often resembles Lowry's own. Also, in his works, parents and brothers appear in displaced and often hostile forms. In October Ferry, we have Ethan, during his engagement, telling Jacqueline of his childhood miseries, which give us an enlarged picture of Lowry's own memories.

Lowry's first voyage was his initial severance from his family and he then began searching out substitute family groups. When, in 1929, he came to know Conrad Aiken, who acted as his father for the next three years, Lowry "found the father-figure for whom he had so obviously been searching."¹³ Also, the Taskersons of Under the Volcano could represent, as Day explains, "the sort of family he would have preferred his own to have been: instead of the abstemious and philistine A.O. Lowry, there would be the wordsworthian Abraham Taskerson; and instead of the three muscular Christian Lowry brothers, he would have the boisterous and boozy Taskerson boys."¹⁴ Several other voyages followed this first one and Lowry's long exile began--Spain, Paris, New York, Mexico, Canada, etc.--as one of his fragments of verse confessed in Under the Volcano:

Some years ago he started to escape
 . . . has been . . . escaping ever since . . .
 Some tell
 Strange hellish tales of this poor founder'd soul
 Who once fled north . . .¹⁵

However, it is an irony that all through this "escape" Lowry

is dependent on his father's money and awkwardly very submissive to the old man.

As almost all Lowry's main characters are drunkards, or a reflection of their creator's own condition, Day tries to summarize the possible factors that can produce drinking problems:

. . . orally fixated types are prone to excessive drinking. Sons of austere and autocratic fathers are apt to express their rebellion against that parent by drinking. Guilt and fear, of sexual origin, are likely to express themselves in drinking. Reaction against a rigidly authoritarian religious upbringing may manifest itself in drinking. [So] Lowry drank not so much because he chose but because he had to: from one source or another, he had acquired, by the age of eighteen, enough guilt--sexual and otherwise--and resentment and insecurity to have made it almost impossible for him to be anything but an alcoholic.¹⁶

And Day goes on in his psychological depiction of Lowry, which, in a way, is a picture of almost all the protagonists Lowry creates:

Lowry possessed a free-floating anxiety neurosis . . . [he] was able to be afraid of almost anything. Fear of life, fear of sex, fear of failure, fear of authority--fear of literally dozens of things; guilt, self-loathing; possible latent homosexuality; love of death, desire for oblivion.¹⁷

We cannot resist the impulse to trace fire as Lowry's archetypal symbol, both in his life and in his novel, where it is used with an amazing insistence and variety of meanings. We know that in the summer of 1944, the Lowrys' shack (in his paradisaical Dollarton) burned down, consuming nearly everything

they owned and, most important of all, the manuscript of Lowry's novel in progress, In Ballast to the White Sea (which was based on Lowry's voyage to meet Nordahl Grieg). Besides his fiction, his letters are also full of references to the fires that dogged him all his life. He once wrote to Aiken:

Actually the business of fire seemed to drive us both slightly cuckoo. Its traumatic effect alone was shattering. We had to live through the bloody fire all over again every night. I would wake to find Margie screaming or she would wake to find me yelling and gnashing my teeth.¹⁸

This fire incident became the source of a very important theme in Under the Volcano, as we are going to see in chapter five. It also appears in October Ferry, where it is used in all its strength, in an incredible variety of allusions. Like the Lowry's shack at Dollarton, the Llewelyns' house at Niagara-on-the-Lake was destroyed by fire, which made Ethan's anguish reach a pitch of desolation that was beyond avail. When the the Lowry's shack burned down, Lowry thought that because he had begun playing about with the occult (his interest in the Cabbala) he had provoked the anger of demonic forces and so it was his fate to be pursued by fire. These feelings he transfers to Ethan Llewelyn, who also thinks that the fire means that "some alien intelligence is after him personally, toying with him before striking him down."¹⁹ Here once more an obvious example of Lowry's paranoiac feelings of being followed. This time, however, he imagines for himself a

cosmic persecution (remember that the Consul once thinks that all natural elements are against him), to satisfy his unconscious megalomaniac sense that if supernatural powers/beings are after him, then he must be pretty important.

Turning our attention to Lowry's novels, we will see that they give us the general shape of Lowry's life. In his works, Lowry has depicted as central figures, a young seaman (Dana Hilliot in Ultramarine), a drunkard and committed mental patient in a hospital (Bill Plantagenet in Lunar Caustic), an alcoholic (the Consul in Under the Volcano), an anxiety-ridden writer (Sigbjorn Wilderness in Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid), and a man extremely attached to the land, afraid of being evicted from it (Ethan Llewelyn in October Ferry to Gabriola). Keeping this in mind, I will try to find the interrelation between the facts of Lowry's life and his fiction.

Lowry's first novel, Ultramarine, traces his first voyage. Before entering Christ's College at Cambridge, Lowry got from his father permission to spend a year at sea, since he (influenced by O'Neill's sea plays and Jack London's The Sea Wolf) "could see no way to becoming a man but by shipping out."²⁰ So, Lowry, aged eighteen, found himself in the course of a romantic voyage as bosun's boy aboard a freighter, the S.S. Pyrrhus. Because the young sailor arrived at the dock

on the day of departure in the family Rolls, reporters quoted him (in an article entitled "Rich Boy as Deck Hand"): "No silk-cushion youth for me. I want to see the world and rub shoulders with its oddities and get some experience of life before I go back to Cambridge University."²¹ Because of his youth, inexperience and his privileged social condition in relation to the ship's crew, he could not feel comfortable among them who, in turn, hated him. All these details Lowry transfers to his book and similar events also happen to the young Dana Hilliot. The "nauseous overrated expanse of the sea"²² was not a very good experience for Lowry, but undoubtedly it had a strong effect on him; his writings, Day remarks, "are very nearly always water-borne"²³ and this is especially true of his first novel, which is clearly an autobiographical account of Lowry's sea life, as described above. This novel's theme is mainly that of conflict between home and exile, and this is indeed closely related to the author's life. The book is crammed with as much Lowry's experience as he could gather. Hilliot's Cambridge career is adapted from Lowry's own. The sailor's talk had been caught by Lowry's impeccable ear. Lowry says about his life at sea:

I do not regret my action, but I do not intend to go to sea again . . . where my hardest job was chipping paint off winches, and what you cannot chip off you get off with your nails or your teeth. Another job I did was to paint the inside of a coal bunker with black paint.

As a rule I worked from 5:30 in the morning until 7 at night, scrubbing decks, polishing brasswork, and carrying the meals to the seamen. I took my ukelele with me and tried to compose some fox-trots. I hope to go to a university and compose some more fox-trots and write fiction.²⁴

When we read Ultramarine, we feel that this is exactly what happens to Dana Hilliot. Lowry's alcoholism and sexual problems are also Hilliot's. At sea, "Lowry gave himself up to only two iniquities: going ashore and getting drunk, or remaining aboard and getting drunk. He seems to have observed a good deal of fornication . . . but to have taken part in none."²⁵ In Ultramarine we find some of Hilliot's shipmates talking to him: "You've been oiled in every port all the way up the bloody coast . . ."²⁶ "You're one of the most regular booze artists I ever struck . . . you drink enough to put out the bloody fire of the ship. It's not natural at your age-- that's what we all says."²⁷ Dana's vow of chastity to his dear Janet is only an excuse he finds for his fear of sex, which is a consequence of his terrible fear of venereal disease. (It is also probable that fear of venereal disease is a result or a disguise for his fear of sex.) Here, Lowry's early visit to the Anatomical Museum repeats itself through Dana Hilliot:

THIRTY-SEVEN models in EIGHT glass cases portraying secondary symptoms all taken from LIFE. Some of these diseases have been greatly aggravated by the use of MERCURY and also wrong treatment. . . . The HEAD and

NECK showing the awful and DEGRADED state in which MEN come when they DISOBEY the laws of GOD; the wages of sin is DEATH.²⁸

We can now repeat Day's words about Lowry's first book:

"if concentrating on the inner life of Dana Hilliot (who is Malcolm Lowry . . .) enabled him to transcend the rather shop-worn conventions of the youthful sea voyage seen as rite de passage, it also placed him in the position of having to understand more about himself at twenty than he could do."²⁹

Lunar Caustic, another of Lowry's novels, was grounded on his own experience as a committed mental patient in Bellevue Hospital, New York, 1935. Lowry himself insists that he went there on a voluntary, "deliberate pilgrimage" to get material to write another novel. Repeating Day's words, "if we are to gain any information about Lowry at Bellevue, it is to this Lunar Caustic complex that we must go." The hero of the novel, like its author, is a seaman, a drunkard, a failure as a husband and a jazz musician who, continuing Lowry's career in the profession of music, led a group called "Bill Plantagenet and his Seven Hot Cantabs," but who later on loses everything, as he tells Dr. Claggart: "In a way, I lost my contract, I lost my band, I lost Ruth."³⁰ In fact, Lowry had also behind him a broken marriage; his wife, Jan, betrayed him, "rubbing her emotional life in Lowry's nose, taunting him for his drunkenness and lack of sexual prowess."³¹

When Plantagenet tells Dr. Claggart, one of the hospital's resident physicians: "Hullo, father, return to the presexual revives the necessity for nutrition,"³² he gives the doctor evidence that his psychological illness is close to infantilism; and also it shows that both Plantagenet and Lowry are aware of this possibility. Now, compare Lowry's characterization as an oral type, one who, when still an infant at the breast, became arrested at this phase.

Plantagenet attributes his failure as a musician to his small hands, as he tells Dr. Claggart: "I can't stretch them over an octave on a piano."³³ Lowry was also frustrated because "his hands were impossibly small, and his fingers so short and clumsy that he could never stretch over an octave on the piano, and had to 'fake it' constantly on the ukelele."³⁴ Parodying Plantagenet's sentence, Dr. Claggart tells him what he thinks about Plantagenet's failed marriage: "Perhaps it was your heart you couldn't make stretch an octave," thus referring to Plantagenet's inability to love, his impotence caused by heavy drinking, which is indeed a reflection of Lowry's own situation. Thus, the doctor is no fool, but a kind of prototype of the Vigil of Under the Volcano.

One of the novel's main themes, the protagonist's inner voyage, a journey downward, will not be analysed in detail here since we are going to deal with this motif in chapter

six. However, it is worth presenting here the novel's last lines because they lead us back to Lowry's insistent return-to-the-womb image: sitting at a solitary place and "feeling he [Plantagenet] was being watched even there, he moved later, drink in hand, to the very obscurest corner of the bar, where, curled up like an embryo, he could not be seen at all."³⁶ In this single passage, besides the womb image, we find also references to Plantagenet's (Lowry's, indeed) drinking, his paranoiac feeling of being persecuted and his (perhaps consequent) desire for oblivion and isolation. One of Day's comments about the novel's pessimistic tone, shows us once more the close relationship between Lowry's life and the life of his fiction. He says:

in 1936, Lowry was in near despair over what he had just gone through at Bellevue. It would have been unlike him to write an optimistic fable about so negative a reality. ... We feel that Lowry is hiding behind Plantagenet.³⁷

Lowry and his wife Jan arrived in Mexico (Lowry's most terrible journey of all) on November 2, 1936, on the Day of the Dead. There he tasted his first mescal; there the Consul was created. They settled in Cuernavaca in a house at Calle de Humbolt, with a beautiful view of the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. It had a garden which was in very bad condition and a tiny swimming pool. Through the back yard ran

one of the town's many barrancas, where the body of the Consul would be thrown. On the hill northeast of Lowry's house, was situated the Hotel Casino de la Selva, where one could swim and play tennis.

In Mexico, Lowry was in poor condition. His alcoholism was worse, his marriage was not getting on and Jan still betrayed him. When Jan had met Lowry for the first time, she had known a man who was completely different from the one with whom she had married. At that time, Lowry became (temporarily) sober, bathed daily and wore clean clothes. And she did not notice Lowry's lack of interest in sex, despite an incident that happened to them, as Day recalls: "On their first evening walk together . . . they had stumbled while in the gardens of the Generalife, and Lowry had landed on top of her. She had expected to be seduced, and was rather surprised when, instead, Lowry took this opportunity to recount for her the plot of Ultramarine."³⁸ As he came to realize that Aiken also wanted Jan for himself, Lowry decided to take her away (Oedipus-like) from his father-rival figure. It seems that he even threatened to kill Aiken, who, in his autobiographical book Ushant, repeats Hambo's (Lowry's) words:

You as much as admitted that now it was my turn--my turn to kill you. First, by taking Nita [Jan]. Yes. For of course we both knew that both of us were

powerfully drawn to that open wound. ---You first, but with your own obligations to Lorelei Two [Clarissa Lorenz], and therefore guiltily offering her up to me, but in effect proposing to share her. Not so? Yes-- in the shadow of Hundred Fountains, at the Alhambra, you proposed to share her, as foul a sort of voyeur's incest as any second-rate god could imagine.³⁹

When they got married, Jan became disappointed with Lowry's continual drunkenness and his sexual impotence (although he did love her), the latter being the cause of Jan's various liaisons, as she explained once. She also said that, sometimes, he even flung her at other men (perhaps because he was conscious that he was not performing his "duties" as a husband or because he wanted to avoid total responsibility in their failed marriage, by making her also be guilty of this). Here we can fairly connect Jan's own situation with that of Yvonne in Under the Volcano. Sexual problems would persecute Lowry throughout his life and he would let his protagonists undergo these very experiences.

One night, staggering drunk home, Lowry fell into a stinking sewage ditch, in a "real-life introduction to this small-scale but nonetheless equally cloacal sort of baranca." In Mexico, Lowry kept taking notes and pondering the fate of Geoffrey Firmin. As a conclusion for Lowry's drama of Mexico, Jan left him alone and ran away with their neighbor, probably the British consul in Cuernavaca (according to Aiken's memory) or a French consul, according to the

Calder Marshalls. And it is with a Frenchman that Lowry makes Yvonne betray her husband in Under the Volcano.

Before the Christmas of 1937, Lowry left for Oaxaca, which he was to call "his own City of Dreadful Night," where "my [Lowry's] only friend is the Virgin for those who have nobody with."⁴¹ In Oaxaca he began having hallucinations to the point of seeing a vulture perched on his washbasin and feeling that he was being spied on by a man in dark sun-glasses. That year, he spent Christmas in prison. As he was drinking mescal steadily by this time, these symptoms of paranoia can be associated with his drinking. With respect to his paranoia, Day writes:

. . . He seems to have been perfectly serious about being followed. Indeed, this classical symptom of paranoia became more and more conspicuous in him as the years went on, until in Mexico he was convinced that he was being trailed by secret police and informers; and during the Canada years it was obvious to him that the Authorities were tracking him down, or waiting for him at the Border. Most typically, these attacks of paranoia were set in motion by conflicts, real or imagined, between Lowry and his father, or between Lowry and one of his several father-surrogates. Some obscure guilt, of course, lay behind it all, amorphous and probably without basis in fact. A truly punitive superego like Lowry's did not need the commission of real, palpable sins; imaginary sins would do quite as well.⁴²

These paranoiac feelings of being followed, Lowry also transferred to the Consul in Under the Volcano, who saw everywhere men in dark glasses spying on him. The Consul himself, on the other hand, is identified with a spy or "spider" by the

fascist police, who tell him: "you are no a de wrider, you are the espider and we shoota de espiders in Mejico."⁴³ Here we have an interesting point to discuss; the Consul (or Lowry himself), at the same time, is spied on and is a spy. So he cannot distinguish between something that is outside himself and something that is within him. The explanation for this, we find when we think of Lowry as an orally fixated person (besides a paranoiac), one who is unable to make "self-object differentiation," because his ego cannot separate off the external world from itself.

On the positive side of his experience in Mexico, Lowry came to know a mysterious Zapotecan man named Juan Fernando Marquez, who became one of Lowry's major friends and was to appear as a character in both Under the Volcano and Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid. From his twenty-month stay in Mexico, Lowry received deep scars:

I have known a city of dreadful night . . .
 In the dungeon shivers the alcoholic child,
 Comforted by the murderer, since compassion is here too;
 The noises of the night are cries for help
 From the town and from the garden which evicts those
 who destroy!⁴⁴

But when Lowry left, "he could take away with him his vision of the terrible beauty of Mexico, of misery in settings of natural majesty, of real gentleness side-by-side with explosive cruelty, of the barranca at the base of the volcano.

. . . And he was taking with him out of Mexico the embryonic form of Under the Volcano--which made all the anguish seem worthwhile."⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, the novel was adapted from the facts of Lowry's stay in Mexico. The details of his actual Mexican experience, as described in the paragraphs above, are all present in Under the Volcano. Besides these main facts, there are others also relating closely to Lowry's life and his characters', which are for this reason worth presenting here. The young Lowry was a brilliant golf-player and he also played tennis very well. The landscape of home remained within Lowry's memory and it reappears in Under the Volcano in its lighthouse (the Farolito, a cantina that really existed and was located in Oaxaca), in its tennis and golfing scenes. We know that Lowry was born in a villa at Warren Crest, North Drive, from where one could see fifteen golf courses, four lighthouses and the sand-dunes of the Wirral Peninsula. A golf course appears in Laruelle's recollections of his and Geoffrey's childhood. At Laruelle's house, Geoffrey, gazing out toward a golf course, thinks about this sport, which had been his "forte" -- once, like Young Lowry himself. Then, in a "zoom in" across time, space and reality versus imagination, the ravine downward Laruelle's house, turns into the "Golgotha Bunker":

It was as if they were standing on a lofty golf tee somewhere. What a beautiful hole this would make, from here to a green out into those trees on the other side of the barranca, that natural hazard which some hundred and fifty yards away could be carried by a good full spoon shot, soaring . . . Plock. The Golgotha Hole. High up, an eagle drove downwind into one [sexual act?]. It had shown lack of imagination to build the local course back up there, remote from the barranca. Golf [hole, womb] = gouffre [Geoffrey, one might say] = gulf [womb, also]. Prometheus would retrieve lost balls. And on that other side what strange fairways could be contrived, crossed by lone railway lines, humming with telegraph poles, glistening with crazy lies on embankments, over the hills and far away, like youth, like life itself, the course plotted all over these plains, extending far beyond Tomalin; through the jungle to the Farolito, the nineteenth hole . . . The Case is Altered.⁴⁶ (Italics mine.)

The Farolito is associated with a tavern called "The Case is Altered." In the Farolito, the Consul tries to find compensation for his sexual problems, in the same way that young Geoffrey went into the tavern to forget a traumatic sexual experience he had suffered at the time when he, together with his friend Laruelle had got the habit of "picking up girls." The incident is recalled by Laruelle in the first chapter of Under the Volcano:

He [Laruelle] had happened with his girl, who bored him, to be crossing the eighth fairway towards Leasowe Drive when both were startled by voices coming from the bunker. Then the moonlight disclosed the bizarre scene from which neither he nor the girl could turn their eyes. Laruelle would have hurried away but neither of them--neither quite aware of the sensible impact of what was occurring in the Hell Bunker--could control their laughter. Curiously, M. Laruelle had never remembered what anyone said, only the expression on Geoffrey's face in the moonlight and the awkward grotesque way the girl

had scrambled to her feet, then, that both Geoffrey and he behaved with remarkable aplomb. They all went to a tavern with some queer name, as "The Case is Altered." It was patently the first time the Consul had ever been into a bar on his own initiative.⁴⁷

It seems that this event had extremely bad effects on young Geoffrey, whose sexual activity probably was "altered" from that time on, to the point of making it difficult for him to retrieve his sexual power, his "lost balls." Laruelle goes on in his recollections of his past life with Geoffrey. He even remembers the little Wibberlie, Wobberlie song they used to sing, about which Lowry says, tracing its origin from his own life: the song was "the traditional song of all our family that all the Lowry brothers sang at a certain ordeal for new boys at school . . . I am not at all sure that the composer was not my eldest brother himself."⁴⁸

Hugh Firmin, Geoffrey's half-brother, shares with Lowry features of his own career: Hugh is also a Cambridge student, an enthusiast for jazz, and a guitar player, a boy who had not served in the Army but who had already gone to sea. Hugh's recollections about his voyage aboard the S.S. Philoctetes are similar to what Lowry's must have been, as well as Dana's experiences, already seen in this chapter:

Meantime it is scarcely an overstatement to say (Jesus, Cock, did you see the bloody paper? We've got a bastard duke on board or something of that) that he was on a false footing with his shipmates, not that their attitude was at all what might have been expected! Many of

them at first seemed kind to him, but it turned out their motives were not entirely altruistic. They suspected, rightly, that he had influence at the office. Some had sexual motives, of obscure origin. Many on the other hand seemed unbelievably spiteful and malignant, though in a petty way never before associated with the sea, and never since with the proletariat. They read his diary behind his back. They stole his money. They even stole his dungarees and made him buy them back again, on credit, since they had already virtually deprived themselves of his purchasing power. They hid chipping hammers in his bunk and in his sea-bag. Then, all at once, when he was cleaning out, say, the petty officer's bathroom, some very young seaman might grow mysteriously obsequious and say something like: "Do you realize, mate, you're working for us, when we should be working for you?"⁴⁹

As one might expect, Hugh dwells on sexual problems and the always present persecution theme.

By analysing facts related to Jan's and Margerie's life and comparing them to Yvonne, we come to the conclusion that the latter bears very much resemblance to the first two. Yvonne lived with Geoffrey in Mexico and left him at the time, as occurred with Lowry and Jan. Jan's/Yvonne's betrayal may have been provoked by Lowry's deep sense of sexual inadequacy, which is also a characteristic of the Consul. Yvonne's good side is drawn from Lowry's love for his second wife, Margerie, who, among other things, had studied astronomy, as Yvonne did. Margerie had been an "adolescent horsewoman" working in westerns and other films produced by Paramount, MGM, etc., in order to support her family. At age eighteen, she got married to Jerome Chaffee. Two years after this marriage she was

divorced and returned to her work in films. In 1939 when she met Lowry, she was working as a sort of "factotum" for an actress, and writing mystery stories, although without being able to get them published. She was "pretty, tiny, youthful, . . . curiously like Jan in appearance if not manner."⁵⁰ We can compare now Margerie's life to Yvonne's, as the latter recalls her own, at the time she had not met Geoffrey yet:

She had, starting when she was only thirteen, supported her father for five years as an actress in "serials" and "westerns" . . . afterwards she met the millionaire playboy, Cliff Wright . . . It is easy to see how he was able to persuade her, beneath the Hawaiian moon, that she loved him, and that she should leave college and marry him. . . . The inevitable divorce . . . followed. . . . And now she's back in Hollywood and people who know her best say she has no time in her life now for love, she thinks of nothing but her work . . . so Yvonne Constable, at twenty-four, is well on the way for the second time to becoming a star.⁵¹

But she came to know Geoffrey, with whom she got married. Like the Lowry's, the Firmin's sexual life was extremely problematic, but Margerie did not have the same attitude to this problem as Jan did. As we have already said, Yvonne's reaction to Geoffrey's lack of sexual interest was drawn from Jan's betrayal of her husband. From Margerie Lowry took Yvonne's strong desire and effort to reconstruct her life with Geoffrey in a lovely, pastoral scenery. Here, the Lowry's earthly paradise, Canada, also enters the novel as the Firmin's dreamt-of Eden, a possible land of salvation for the Consul, to which Yvonne tries to persuade Geoffrey to go with her.

With all these similarities in mind, then, we are not surprised by the description Day gives us of Clarisse Francillon's reaction, when she came to know Malcolm Lowry:

She really got a look at Lowry, as we stood by the fireplace with a glass of whiskey clutched in his small, plump hand, in his eyes a look that was at once attentive and distant. There was something, she saw, quite strange about him. A little later, when he had left the room, the two ladies explained to her that, yes, he was the Consul, and, yes, the story of Under the Volcano was partly his story.⁵²

Lowry's/the Consul's story reappears again in the mouth of the protagonist of Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid, who draws a precis of chapter eight of Under the Volcano:

One day about nine years ago, it was the end of 1936 [when Lowry went to Mexico] . . . I took a bus to Chapultepec. . . . There were several people with me, a person extremely dear to me . . . Señora X my first wife . . . and two Americans, one of whom was dressed up in cowboy costume. . . . We were going to a bullthrowing. . . . About halfway there we stopped beside an Indian who seemed to be dying by the roadside. We all wanted to help but were prevented from doing so . . . because we were told it was against the law. All that happened was that in the end we left him where he was, and, meanwhile, a drunk [a pelado] on the bus had stolen his money out of his hat, which was lying beside him, on the road. He paid his fare with it, the stolen money, and we went to the bullthrowing.⁵³

Sigbjorn Wilderness is an unpublished alcoholic novelist, author of a book similar to Under the Volcano--The Valley of the Shadows of Death. Like his creator, Sigbjorn has returned to Mexico with his second wife (Primrose) in an attempt to visit the scene of his novel and to exorcise the memory of terrifying experiences of a decade before:

Was it that he wanted to return there, as if to gloat over the conquest of these things, as he might have looked down from the mountains upon the valley, upon the narrow-gauge railway line . . . that had carried him on his first, his second, his third, last and disastrous trip to Oaxaca, with a feeling of pride, thinking that all this had been transcended? How much better I am now! . . . Had he really transcended it? Was he coming here with a pride of accomplishment with [Margerie], and a gesture of defiance, to fling his gage in the face of fate and say . . . Look, I have succeeded, I have transformed, single-handed, my life-in-death into life, nay what is more I am going to make that life-in-death pay for the future, in hard cash. I have come back to show you that not an hour, not a moment of my drunkenness, my continual death was not worth it: there is no dram of even the worst of those hours, not a drop of mescal that I have not turned into pure gold, not a drink that I have not made sing.⁵⁴

Almost all the material for Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid Lowry got from his and Margerie's journey to Mexico, between November 1945 and March 1946. In Cuernavaca the Lowrys wanted to see its barrancas; in Oaxaca they wanted to visit the Farolito, and most important, Lowry wanted to meet his "good angel," his friend Juan Fernando Marquez (Dr. Vigil and Juan Cerillo in Under the Volcano). With a shock he came to know that his friend had died in Villaermosa in December 1939, when, drunk, he was shot to death with a pistol. Fernando appears under his proper name in Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid, and suffers the same tragic end as his prototype.

Even their flight to Mexico appears in the book, where it is described in detail. Faithful to the original experience

Lowry's characteristic fears and anxieties are also experienced by Sigbjorn Wilderness. Amazed by the striking coincidences between the Consul's life and his own life in Mexico, Lowry began to realize that he was living the book he had written:

It seemed to him that he was in grave danger of being taken over by his own fiction, of becoming a character in his own novel. The idea was fascinating, but terrifying. What, he began to wonder . . . if he were coming back to Mexico, not to assert his rejuvenation, but to seek the death that had eluded him there eight years earlier? What if he had invented that death in the final chapter of Under the Volcano, and now had returned to claim it as his own?⁵⁵

Or again,

It was very easy for Lowry to imagine that he was not so much writing, as being written about, possibly by some capricious and not necessarily talented daemon.⁵⁶

And Lowry makes Sigbjorn undergo these very feelings.

Here once more we see clear signs of Lowry's paranoia/megalomania.* Richard Costa once said about Lowry: "he simply made no distinction between the ordeals of living and of writing.

Life would write him and he would record what his life wrote."⁵⁷ So, the death Lowry creates for the Consul is a foreshadowing of the one life would give him; or, in other words, he was actually written by his own character: he does go the same way as Geoffrey, in the sense that he destroys himself and chooses the "Farolito" (the pub at Ripe) over his wife.

* Cf. page 60.

Sigbjorn experiences the same fear Lowry once had felt, when thinking, at the time he wrote Ultramarine, that he was a plagiarist. He had borrowed heavily and directly from Grieg and Aiken. Once he wrote to Grieg: "much of Ultramarine is paraphrase, plagiarism, or pastiche from you."⁵⁸ It is in this way that Sigbjorn sees the relation of his book to Drunkard's Rigadoon; he also betrayed some anxiety about the possible accusation of plagiarism. Definitely, this is another example of his paranoiac feeling of persecution.

When Lowry says about Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid: "it has some theme, being no less than the identification of a creator with his creation,"⁵⁹ we can read this statement from two different levels: the relation between Sigbjorn Wilderness and his Valley of the Shadows of Death and also between Malcolm Lowry and Under the Volcano, because the novel gives us enough evidence to reach both conclusions; it is a perfect example of the close correspondence between Lowry's art and his life.

October Ferry to Gabriola, a book published after Lowry's death, is also rooted in his own life at Dollarton. In October 1946, the Lowry's heard about the possible eviction of the Dollarton squatters by the Harbour Control Board, which planned to transform the whole area into a public park. So they began looking for another place to live. As Lowry did

not like cities, he decided to buy an island to inhabit. In Ethan Llewelyn, Lowry's attachment to the land is clearly reflected. The Lowrys took a ferry from Vancouver to Victoria and then went by bus to the town of Nanaimo, and there they took another ferry to the island of Gabriola, where Lowry intended to buy a piece of land. As Day writes, "the daydream slowly began formulating itself in his mind as material for fiction, too; and within a few weeks he had conceived the idea of writing a story called October Ferry to Gabriola."⁶⁰

Lowry's route, as described above, is taken by the Llewelyns too for the very same reasons. Like his author, Ethan is threatened with being dispossessed of his "Thoreauvian" retreat and this arouses a strong fear of eviction. So, it is not without reason that Day states: "the protagonist of October Ferry to Gabriola is finally yet another projection of the author's personality, well-intentioned, vulnerable, fumbling, tormented by the crassness and venality of the world, and wanting only to be left alone in sylvan solitude."⁶¹ As for Jacqueline, Ethan's wife, "she is still for the most part Margerie Lowry as seen by her husband: nervous, vivacious, moody, strong."⁶²

Ethan cannot forget one of his classmates' suicide at college because he feels guilty and responsible for this death, he is devoured by remorse. Here we are facing one more fact.

taken from Lowry's actual life: the ambiguous "Wensleydale" incident, which seemed to haunt Lowry. During his Cambridge years, Lowry had been relentless pursued by a handsome, rich boy (also undergraduate), who told him one night he would commit suicide if Lowry would not respond to his sexual advances. Lowry did not answer him and instead went to a nearby pub. That evening, the boy did kill himself, making Lowry feel remorse for his indifference from that time on. Lowry often spoke and wrote about this incident, but there seems no way of confirming if it actually took place. But even as a conjecture it is important because, in order to understand Lowry, one has to pay attention not only to real facts of his life but also to the fantasies he creates in abundance.

Ethan's multiple, neurotic fears are characteristically Lowrian:

. . . and out of the fears grew wild hatreds, great unreasoning esemplastic hatreds: hatred of people who looked at him so strangely in the street [his "spies"]; long-forgotten hatreds of schoolmates who'd persecuted him about his eyes at school; hatred of the day that ever gave him birth [womb-wish] to be the suffering creature that he was; hatred of a world where your house burned down with no reason; hatred of himself, and out of all this hatred did not grow sleep.⁶³

Day, commenting on this passage, appropriately writes:

Such vehemence hardly suits the timid Ethan Llewelyn: it comes obviously as a cri de coeur from the author himself, and tells us more about him than almost any other autobiographical statement he ever made.⁶⁴

Other minor works from Lowry are also reflective pieces, more or less autobiographical in nature, as for example, the stories of Hear us O Lord from Heaven thy Dwelling Place, in which "the common theme is the one which preoccupied Lowry during his entire career: it has to do with the struggle of man and woman who, having been expelled from the garden, hope first to survive, and then, with luck, to return." All these personal characteristics, inherently present in Lowry's fiction, are acceptable and understandable, because, as Day explains, "what else could he do, as a writer whose only material was himself?"⁶⁵ Lowry himself, diagnosing his books and his life, says that his experience has been "youth, plus booze, plus hysterical identification [*italics mine*, to stress his writing phase as he sees it] plus self deception, plus no work, plus more booze."⁶⁶

Lowry's first biographer, Conrad Knickerbocker, once declared that Lowry "could not perform the vital surgery of separating himself from his characters, save in the one book [Under the Volcano] where he achieved a triumph of consciousness, expressed with the utmost lucidity."⁶⁷ Although he has crammed his books with real facts of his own life, he has also been able to transcend them, especially in Under the Volcano and he succeeds in "constructing a picture of the world by piecing together situations which are self-identifications,"⁶⁸

as Spender remarks. For me, this means that Lowry, in what Jung would call a visionary experience, had been conscious that his life itself was archetypal. Thus, by speaking about himself, he was talking about the human being. It is not then, simply a matter of self-identification, because we feel that it is through its transcendence that he is able to give a profound vision of men's life. And it is when we recognize this vision that we cannot deny Lowry's genius.

CHAPTER FOUR

GEOFFREY AS CHRIST, ADAM, OEDIPUS, PROMETHEUS,
FAUST, AND DANTE

In this chapter, I am dealing not merely with "motifs," but mainly with character-parallels of an extended nature. For this purpose, I selected the above mythological characters to compare/contrast with Geoffrey Firmin, since the present thesis' aim is a study of the novel's mythological content.

Since Under the Volcano has no single predominating analogy but rather a "multimythic" richness, and presents an incredible wealth of allusion in cross-reference, it will not be easy for me to separate its archetypal figures. Sometimes, a single passage has several different meanings, each one applying to a different mythic analogy/parody. But we will try to analyze, as far as possible, each archetypal figure separately, emphasizing not only its analogies and direct associations but also the subtle inversions Lowry makes of the traditional images. It is also necessary to make it clear that the last character (Dante) is not a mythological figure, strictly speaking. However, as he does have archetypal significance, I found it worth including him here for comparative analysis also.

CHRIST

" . . . And I crucified between two continents."
 Lowry, In the Oaxaca Jail¹

The image of Christ can be directly associated with love, which will be one of the central themes to the novel's various levels of meaning. According to Richard H. Costa, Geoffrey's inability to love "defines what love is."² When Geoffrey reflects that "love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth,"³ he is repeating Christ's message to mankind, and the inscription "no se puede vivir sin amar," underlies all failures in the novel. This inscription, ill-painted on the façade of Laruelle's house, had its letters "merged together most confusingly."⁴ Such is the meaning of religion: confused or hidden to modern man. This very phrase, "that phrase of Frey Luis de Leon's the Consul did not at this moment allow himself to recall,"⁵ becomes the thematic declaration of the novel. It has a broad meaning, implying lack of brotherhood, charity and faith and it is not only Geoffrey's fault but also Yvonne's, Hugh's and Laruelle's, who can be said to represent one single person: the Consul. How can Christ forget love since it is his main concern on earth?

Hugh, with whom Geoffrey shares his identity, thinks about himself: "in less than four years . . . one would be thirty-three."⁶ Hugh's age indicates Christ's at Calvary. We could say that in the near future (which has already begun)

Hugh (Geoffrey/Christ) will be suffering on his earthly mission. He actually reflects: ". . . after all I am willing to give my life for humanity."⁷ But Hugh does not act, he only thinks. Hugh is also compared to Judas; he feels guilty over his involvement with Yvonne:

Christ, how marvellous this was, or rather Christ, how he wanted to be deceived about it, as must have Judas, he thought . . . how joyous all this could be, riding on like this under the dazzling sky of Jerusalem--and forgetting for an instant, so that it really was joyous--how splendid it all might be had I only not betrayed that man last night . . . if only it happened though, if only it were not so absolutely necessary to go out and hang oneself.⁸

He is also indirectly responsible for the Consul's death, for Lowry makes him "betray" Geoffrey, although unwillingly: the telegram found by the fascist police in the Consul's pockets, had been put there by Hugh and it is this telegram that reveals Hugh's (Geoffrey's) identity: "it say here: Firmin. It say you are Juden,"⁹ Juden here referring both to Hugh (Judas) and the Consul (Jew, Christ). This telegram incites the police's anger and they accuse Geoffrey of being an anarquista, or an "antichrist", as significantly mispronounced by the Chief of Rostrums.

Throughout the book, Lowry uses sentences which echo Christ's words. For example:

--The Consul's letter (the one Laruelle finds under his pillow) does become distinctly Biblical at one point, when its

handwriting reminds us of the crucifixion motif, with its "t's like lonely wayside crosses save where they crucified the entire word."¹⁰ This motif will reappear at one of the crucial scenes in the novel, from which point onward its tragic progression becomes irreversible: Yvonne, looking for Geoffrey, had to choose between two different paths, "but the two alternatives, the two paths, stretched out before her on either side like the arms--the oddly dislocated thought struck her--of a man being crucified."¹¹

--Christ's words: "Verily I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice," are recalled in chapter twelve, where we have the three denials when somebody answers NO to the question "Quiere usted la salvacion de Mexico? . . . Quiere usted que Cristo sea nuestro Rey?"; which is repeated three times. And "suddenly, the Consul thought he saw an enormous rooster flapping before him, crowing and crowing. He raised his hands and it merded in his face."¹² We can say that this negative answer is being spoken by Geoffrey, who is denying his own salvation but we can also interpret it as the Mexican people's denial of this Christ (Geoffrey) because he is an antichrist.

--The Consul's following words can be said to be borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount ("blessed are the poor of spirit . . ."); "Only the poor, only through God, only the people

you wipe your feet on, the poor in spirit . . ."; but "the Consul didn't know what he was saying."¹³

--On a foreshadowing of his tragic end, Geoffrey declaims to a pariah dog: "Yet this day, pichicho, shalt thou be with me in--"¹⁴ (note the ambiguity: heaven or hell?), thus repeating Christ's words. At this moment, the dog flees at Geoffrey's words but it cannot escape in the end and is flung, dead, after Geoffrey's body.

One very important theme in connection with Christ, is that of the Samaritan. According to the narrative in Luke:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. . . . But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds . . . and took care of him.¹⁵

Lowry uses this motif for the first time in the incident of the ship, ironically named S.S. Samaritan, in which Geoffrey had been an officer; this ship, a "camouflaged" gunboat, captured a German submarine and its German officers were "kidnapped by the Samaritan's stokers and burned alive in the furnaces."¹⁶ It seems that Geoffrey was responsible for this act, which was quite unsamaritan-like behaviour. The theme of the Samaritan reappears in chapter three when the Consul, having collapsed in an empty street, is offered assistance

by a passing man. This incident does not have a very important meaning but it is related to the Samaritan motif, which has its climax in chapter eight, when we have a failure of reciprocal Samaritanism on the Consul's part (and on the other character's too). Here, the Samaritan is characterized by his absence, reflecting once more the incapacity of the characters to love. Since "no se puede vivir sin amar," they are going to die and their death will occur through symbolic involvement with the same wounded man lying in the road, whom they refuse to help: the man's horse will appear later on as a destructive agent, causing (although indirectly) Geoffrey's and Yvonne's death. Hugh wants to help the dying Indian but the Consul, definitely then an antichrist, does not allow him to do so because "you can't touch him--it's the law, Actually it's a sensible law. Otherwise you might become an accessory after the fact."¹⁷ Here Geoffrey has a rather Pilate-like attitude, which would remind us of the guilty "las manos de Orlac," a ubiquitous sign. According to Hugh's feelings, "the most potent and final obstacle to doing anything about the Indian was this discovery that it wasn't one's own business but someone else's."¹⁸ Having in mind one of the Ten Commandments, according to which you must love your brother as you love yourself, we see that Geoffrey, instead of obeying the divine law, follows the Mexican one. Near his death,

Geoffrey realizes that "no one would help him even if they could. Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt. . . . 'No se puede vivir sin amar' they would say, which would explain everything."¹⁹ He had not undertaken his task on earth since it was Christ's role to come to the common world in order to save mankind through love, by dying for humanity and then resurrecting. Geoffrey also dies but because he does not die for love, he will not be reborn.

Geoffrey's incapacity to feel love is also stressed by one minor character, Mr. Quincey, who is literally referred to as "God" (Christ's father, then) and who severely greets Geoffrey, calling him "Dr. Livingstone," i.e. living stone. And Geoffrey calls himself Blackstone (black stone): stones do not love.

Geoffrey is conscious that love "is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth," and he really is not a bad person; he only feels lost, without knowing how to choose between love and selfish isolation in drinking. His wife tries by all means to save him, to show him the right way and the Consul, for a moment, decides to follow her, for he says, "Let's for Jesus Christ's [his own] sweet sake get away [to their Canadian paradise, to love]. A thousand, a million miles away. . . . Away from all this. Christ, from

this."²¹ But he immediately changes his mind, because of his own lostness. Some time before, on the telephone, when asked by an operator what he wants, Geoffrey shouts in despair: "God" into the receiver. He wants his father's help because he has forgotten his mission on earth and now he does not know how to act. But he is significantly holding the receiver "the wrong way up"²² all the time. So, Geoffrey fails in his attempt at communication with the upper world. The telephone, which was symbolically a direct line to God, is, however, used by the Consul's accusers later on and "the curious thing about this telephone was that it seemed to be working properly."²³ It seems that these men are emissaries sent by God to punish his son for not having performed his duty on earth. Here it is worth noting that the man who speaks to the fascists about it is called Diosdado, i.e., God given. Another member of the fascist police is the Chief of Gardens (God), who comes himself to punish his son. Looking at him, the Consul realizes that "the Chief of Gardens might have been the image of himself, when, lean, bronzed, serious, beardless, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assumed the Vice Consulship in Granada."²⁴ So we have the father and son united in a single person, representing two figures of the Holy Trinity; as for the third figure, we have the "palombas."²⁵

Lowry makes other purposefully ironic analogies to this archetypal figure: first, we have a clear image of the Consul as Christ, who is "standing inside the place with his back to the wall, and his blanket still over his head, talking to the beggars, the early workers, the dirty prostitutes, the pimps, the debris and detritus of the streets and the bottom of the earth,"²⁶ but the words that follow this visual picture of Christ tell us that these poor people "were yet so much higher than he [Geoffrey/Christ], drinking just as he had done here in the Farolito."²⁷ It is interesting to see that Geoffrey had been previously compared to what we can call a "drunk, drunkard's" Christ: "the beggars, hacked by war and covered with sores, one of whom one night after four drinks from the Consul had taken him for the Christ . . . falling down on his knees before him."²⁸ When Lowry writes in chapter eight: "There appeared now, standing alone in a sort of rubbish heap . . . opposite the detour, a stone [italics mine] wayside cross,"²⁹ we immediately conclude that here perhaps it was Lowry's purpose to depict Christ's modern estate.

At his "last supper," Geoffrey is forced to think of "the supper at Emmaus" and he begins a bawdy interpretation of the menu, which includes references to the Consul's impotence, physical and spiritual, his incapacity to feel love. Now he too is near the end. Running to the Farolito, Geoffrey

reflects about his own fate: "God is it possible to suffer more than this, out of this suffering something must be born, and what would be born was his own death, for ah, how alike are the groans of love to those of the dying."³⁰ But the resurrection would not follow to Geoffrey's death. Still under the influence of mescal, the Consul discovers the face of a beggar "slowly changing to Senora Gregorio and now in turn to his mother's face, upon which appeared an expression of infinite pity and supplication."³¹ This presence will suggest Mary's at Calvary. The Consul's last moments have really come and he talks to himself: "Christ, this is a dingy way to die."³²

At the beginning of chapter five, we see Geoffrey's spirit ascending upward into the Himalayas, when he (together with a dog) wishes to find his father (God) "with heaven aspiring hearts."³³ Now, at his death, Geoffrey imagines "he had reached the summit" but "nor was this summit a summit exactly: it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling too, whatever it was, collapsing, while he was falling, falling into the volcano,"³⁴ into the abyssal, hellish barranca, with a dead dog thrown after him. NO SE PUEDE VIVIR SIN AMAR.

Thus, to summarize, he has both the aspect of a real and a false Christ, and his death is ambiguous too---he is killed for his virtues and for his failure at the same time. And at

his death he is identified as both a "compañero" and a "pe-
lado."

ADAM

"The novel's allegory is that of the garden of Eden, the garden representing this world from which we are now even a little more under the threat of ejection than at the moment when I wrote this book."

(Lowry, Preface to a Novel, pg. 28)

Related to this archetypal figure is a keep-off-the-grass sign--"Le gusta este jardin que es suyo? Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!"--which Geoffrey mistranslates into "Do you like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" These words, "simple and terrible words, words which one took to the very bottom of one's being,"³⁵ become one of the novel's major talismen of doom, the key to the novel's Eden-and- eviction theme, which characterizes Geoffrey as a forlorn Adam.

We have the first identification between Adam and Geoffrey in the book when Laruelle, passing by Geoffrey's house a year after his death, did not want to see the light in the window of Geoffrey's house, "for long after Adam had left the garden, the light in Adam's house burned on."³⁶ At the beginning of chapter three, Yvonne arrives at Geoffrey's house and comments on his garden: "Geoffrey, this place is a wreck!"³⁷ Later on, she says: "My God, this used to be a beautiful

garden. It was like Paradise."³⁸ Actually, Geoffrey's ruined garden shows us nature at her lowest, its horticultural misery suggesting an abandoned paradise, or lost Eden:

. . . the tall exotic plants, . . . perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst, staggering, it almost appeared, against one another, yet struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency, or of a collective desolate fecundity. . . . "Touch this tree, once your friend. . . . Consider the agony of the roses. . . . Regard: the plantains with their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death."³⁹

This garden, in anticipation of its owner's end, also declines towards the hellish abyss, as Hugh sees it: "the long garden below descending steeply, parallel with which on different levels obliquely climbing the hill, all the other gardens of the contiguous residences . . . also descended steeply towards the barranca."⁴⁰ To Hugh, the conditions of the garden are not so bad: ". . . it looks quite beautiful to me, considering that Geoffrey hasn't had a gardener for so long."⁴¹ This lack suggests Geoffrey's (Adam's) separation from God.

In chapter five, Lowry parodies what might have passed between Adam and God after the Fall: Mr. Quincey is watering his perfect, symmetrical garden, when Geoffrey walks through his own, looking for a bottle of tequila (his forbidden fruit, since in this novel drink is regarded as a means of achieving self-knowledge) he had hidden there. Mr. Quincey looks at him

"as if to say: I have seen all this going on; I know all about it because I am God."⁴² But the Consul tells Mr. Quincey:

Do you know, Quincey, I've often wondered whether there isn't more in the old legend of the Garden of Eden, and so on, than meets the eye. What if Adam wasn't really banished from the place at all? That is, in the sense we used to understand it. . . . What if his punishment really consisted . . . in his having to go on living there, alone, of course--suffering, unseen, cut off from God . . . Or perhaps . . . Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cardenas, in fact--tee hee!--Kicked him out . . . for it's obvious to everyone these days . . . that the original sin was to be an owner of property.⁴³

We have here a Dantean Adam who sees that innocence and grace without a previous knowledge of sin is a false state of being which does not make a man content. This passage deals also (besides its political implications, which will not be analyzed here) with Yvonne's betrayal, which here is not considered sinful, for, as Geoffrey says, according to God's will it is Geoffrey's obligation to share his property, that is, Yvonne. The eviction theme is here rather desired than feared, as Geoffrey reads in El Universal (the universe, the world): "Kink [read King, i.e. Adam, Geoffrey] unhappy in exile."⁴⁴ And one member of the police who evict the Consul from this "earthly paradise" is significantly called Chief of Gardens.

Lowry repeats the warning at the end of the book, whose last lines, as David Markson interprets them, "stand as his [Lowry's] exhortation to mankind--a mankind which as embodied

so triumphantly in the Consul, he has also shown to be worth the saving."⁴⁵

OEDIPUS

In Under the Volcano we are going to find references to this mythological figure also associated with Jean Cocteau's play, La Machine Infernale, which is a dramatic version of this myth. According to the play, Oedipus is enmeshed in the diabolical machinery of the gods, in the same way that the Consul is briefly caught up in a loop-the-loop, a literal sort of demoniacal machine. However, one point of divergence between Oedipus and Geoffrey must be emphasized here; that the former is impotent to alter the plans of the gods who themselves build up his fate, while the latter has free will to decide his own life, even if these impulses lead him to his destruction. Geoffrey's fatalism, if we can call it so, may only be an excuse he finds to justify his drunkenness and unwillingness to act.

In chapter seven, the drunken Consul is gazing dreamily at the Ferris Wheel, the wheel of fortune, the infernal machine, "the wheel of law rolling through the emerald pathos of the trees."⁴⁶ As he approaches a huge loop-the-loop machine, called La Machine Infernale, he remembers having just glanced at Cocteau's play in a book. Walking outside Laruelle's house, Geoffrey also sees some children "swinging

round and round a telegraph pole on an improvised whirligig, a little parody of the Great Carrousel up the hill in the square."⁴⁷ As we see, children also have their infernal machine. He now sees the loop-the-loop, this "huge evil spirit, screaming in its lonely hell, its limbs writhing, smiting the air like flails of paddlewheels."⁴⁸ He boards it and will find himself "hung for a moment upside down at the top"⁴⁹ and he realized that "he was being emptied out, returned empty, his stick, his passport [but] no one could stop the machine."⁵⁰ This incident could lead us to think of Geoffrey as a powerless figure against the great force of the gods, who make him lose his identity, this loss causing his death later on. But we know that this is just one way, and a very limited one, of looking at the complex development of the action in Under the Volcano. Besides this, it is the Consul who consciously decides to go to hell, to the Farolito, where he will die. An image which follows the loop-the-loop incident will fit better the Consul's figure, that is, a man building his own destiny:

A madman passed, wearing, in the manner of a lifebelt, an old bicycle tyre, With a nervous movement he continually shifted the injured tread around his neck. He muttered to the Consul, but waiting neither for reply nor reward, took off the tyre and flung it far ahead of him towards a booth, then followed unsteadily, stuffing something in his mouth from a tin bait jar. Picking up the tyre he flung it far ahead again, repeating this

process, to the irreducible logic of which he appeared eternally committed, until out of sight.⁵¹

Besides the mythological content of the Oedipus figure, we find in Under the Volcano allusions to the Freudian Oedipus complex, presented to us in a very peculiar way: the name of the ship Hugh signed on board when younger, is called Oedipus Tyrannus, a name purposefully chosen. Hugh loves Yvonne and because of this he is jealous of Geoffrey, whom Hugh calls "papa"; Yvonne is then, his "mama" so that we have Hugh (who is also Geoffrey) as Oedipus, Geoffrey as Laius and Yvonne as Jocasta. Yvonne's dead son is called Geoffrey, so in a way, she is wedded to her own son. Considering Hugh's adultery with Yvonne, Lowry, in a conglomerate mythic arrangement, transforms Geoffrey both into usurper son and murdered parent. Geoffrey thinks: "mind you [Hugh] I have perhaps acted as a father: but you were only an infant then."⁵² Concerned with Hugh's infidelity, Geoffrey exclaims, Oedipus-like: "what you did impulsively and have tried to forget in the cruel abstraction of youth will begin to strike you in a new and darker light" but immediately after, he acts as a different Laius, one who is able to forgive: "how shall the murdered man convince his assassin he will not haunt him?"⁵³

At a certain moment in the bullthrowing, Yvonne sees Geoffrey "leaning his damp head against her hair like a child,"⁵⁴ in a clearly suggested Oedipus analogy (remember

also that Yvonne's son's name was Geoffrey). Geoffrey sees motherly figures everywhere; he runs desperately toward Señora Gregorio, the owner of the cantina El Bosque, as if he were looking for his mother's help. And she does appear to him as his mother, giving him good advice and offering herself to protect him. We also have that old lady with the dice who seems to preside over his fate and who tries to help him as a mother would do. Yvonne sees her as a "bad omen," perhaps feeling that they were "rivals" in their love for the Oedipus-like Geoffrey. His sexual fear and impotence also fit into the idea that, as a victim of the Oedipus complex, he always feels guilty over sexual relations. However, having married, and loved Geoffrey, who is the image of her father, Yvonne becomes the obverse of the Freudian coin in Lowry's Oedipus symbolism, not only Jocasta but now, also Elektra. When Geoffrey is to make love with the prostitute, he sees her "for a moment curiously like Yvonne. . . . Her body was Yvonne's too."⁵⁵ Geoffrey thus makes love with his own daughter/mother and afterwards, he thinks: "Ah, Yvonne, if only as a daughter, who would understand and comfort him, could only be at his side now!"⁵⁶

To stress the Oedipus analogy, Geoffrey, who habitually avoids light, is literally without sight for a moment near his death, when a "cock flapped before his eyes, blinding

him."⁵⁷ With all this multiple identification, we see Geoffrey's death foreshadowed by the radio which announces that "es inevitable la muerte del Papa." At the immediate level, this means the Pope's death but we can see it from the mythological angle, implying that Laius' (Geoffrey's) death is pre-ordained. Thus, Geoffrey is father and son in one but, above all, his personality fits in with that of Oedipus, the self-punishing son who kills himself.

PROMETHEUS

The identity between Geoffrey and Prometheus lies in both characters' search for knowledge, which causes them to endure unending torment. Before the Consul enters the Infernal Machine, a quotation appears: "Je crois que le vautour est douse à Prométhée et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers."⁵⁸ Then, the Consul boards it, merged in actuality with the tormented figures of Prometheus and Ixion: "The Consul, like that poor fellow who was bringing light to the world, was hung upside down over it, with only a scrap of woven wire between himself and death."⁵⁹

There is an interesting passage connected with this archetypal figure, that is worth analyzing in detail. In chapter five, Geoffrey thinks about the barranca: "It was, perhaps, not so frightening here: one might even climb down

[italics mine], if one wished, by easy stages of course, and taking the occasional swig of tequila on the way, to visit the cloacal Prometheus who doubtless inhabited it."⁶⁰ In order to reach the bottom of this abyssal barranca, one has to go downward, but since it is here characterized as the place where the unfortunate Prometheus lived in, i.e., a mountain, we have the idea of climbing contained in this passage. And to go there, one has to be helped by drink, which in this novel acquires mystical, religious dimensions. Finally, it is at this same barranca that Geoffrey will be thrown at his death and he too will inhabit it for a moment. In this passage he is fore shadowing his own death, identifying himself with this mythological character, an equation which implies mutual suffering. It is worth remembering here that a bad liver is both Prometheus' complaint and the alcoholic's problem. Another point: Laruelle classifies the barranca as a "dormitory for vultures," thus stressing that as it is now Prometheus' dwelling, it will be for a moment also Geoffrey's since these birds, specifically named "infernal birds of Prometheus," will persecute Geoffrey throughout his last day, waiting "only for the ratification of [presumably Geoffrey's] death."⁶¹ And there are always vultures circling about him; they even appear in his washbasin!

Prometheus is a kind of Christ figure too, an "angel" who (like Lucifer) was cast out of heaven into the underworld. The romantics saw him as their main hero--the human rebel against a tyrannical god. Hugh's rebellious desire for action and struggle against tyranny seems to represent a particularly Promethean phase of the Consul. As a "professional indoor marxman," Hugh does not act but his older brother, at his very end, decides to behave still as a Promethean figure, revolting against the fascist police. And the tragic result is the same for Geoffrey, as it had been for the mythological character he symbolized.

The Promethean myth is related to the fire motif; we know that Prometheus was punished for having stolen the fire that meant knowledge. In Under the Volcano, the fire is associated with Dr. Vigil, a cultivated, intellectual man who, as a keeper of the flame, represents enlightenment: "Dr Vigil conjured a flaring lighter out of his pocket so swiftly it seemed it must have been already ignited there, that he had drawn a flame out of himself."⁶² But Geoffrey refuses Vigil's advice and guidance, which would imply that he, unlike Prometheus, is running away from fire. However, Geoffrey's drink is once referred to as "aguardiente" (fire water) and it is through it that he hopes to achieve enlightenment. Although his death is also related

to images of fire, we cannot feel sure that he has gotten to know "the" truth.

FAUST

"This novel . . . has for its subject the forces that dwell within man and lead him to look upon himself with terror. Its subject is also the fall of man, his remorse, his incessant struggle towards the light under the weight of the past, which is his destiny. . . . I hold to the number twelve . . . as if I heard a clock sounding midnight for Faust."

(Malcolm Lowry, Preface to a Novel, pg. 28)

With two masterfully chosen epigraphs Lowry introduces to us another important theme in the novel. The first one is taken from John Bunyan's Grace Abounding for the Chief of Sinners and it has pessimistic connotations:

Now I blessed the condition of the dog and toad, yea, gladly would I have been in the condition of the dog or horse, for I knew they had no soul to perish under the everlasting weight of Hell or Sin, as mine was like to do. Nay, and though I saw this, felt this, and was broken to pieces with it, yet that which added to my sorrow was, that I could not find with all my soul that I did desire deliverance.⁶³

The dog, one of the novel's ubiquitous symbols, will be directly associated with Geoffrey at his death. The other passage is taken from Goethe's Faust: "Whosoever unceasingly strives upward . . . him we can save."⁶⁴ These lines, containing the optimistic key to Faust's salvation, are to be profoundly ironic in terms of the Consul, who emerges as a character whose sufferings bespeak a sense of damnation and an inability to achieve grace. When the Consul exclaims "I

love hell," he is deliberately refusing salvation. Later on, we will see Juan Cerillo's advice (he is a kind of Dr. Vigil), which appears as a paraphrase of Goethe's words:

every man ... even as Mexico, must ceaselessly struggle upward. ... What was life but a warfare and a stranger's sojourn? Revolution rages too in the tierra caliente of each human soul. No peace but that must pay full toll to hell.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, this advice is not addressed to Geoffrey. Although Lowry makes use of Goethe's version of the legend, Marlowe's

Faust echoes more vividly. The two versions are quite different because Goethe's Faust saves himself by his own efforts while Marlowe's is hauled off to hell and ends passively waiting for a doom it is too late to avoid. We can see clearly that Geoffrey's fate is similar to the latter Faust.

In the first chapter (which, as we have already said, has its importance in establishing the themes of the book), we will find some important allusions to the Faustian myth. We see that it was Laruelle's intention to make "in France, a modern film version of the Faustus story, with . . . Trotsky for its protagonist."⁶⁶ Opening Geoffrey's book of Elizabethan plays, Laruelle misreads a line of Marlowe's: "Then will I headlong fly [*italics mine*] into the earth. Earth, gape! it will not harbour me!" and also: "Cut is the branch

that might have grown full straight . . . Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall."⁶⁷ On the night of Geoffrey's death, because of his beard, someone calls him Trotsky, i.e., the protagonist of Laruelle's proposed Faust film. Unrecognized by Laruelle, Geoffrey's life has been this very story. Exactly a year ago, the Consul's body had been flung into the ravine, thus literally flying into earth, in a hellish fall.

Geoffrey's unposted letter to Yvonne is essentially

Faustian:

Night: and once again, the nightly grapple with death, the room shaking with daemonic orchestras, the snatches of fearful sleep, the voices outside the window, my name being continually repeated with scorn by imaginary parties arriving, the dark's spinnets. As if there were not enough real noises in these nights the colour of grey hair. Not like the rending tumult of American cities, the noise of the unbandaging of great giants in agony. But the howling pariah dogs, the cocks that herald dawn all night . . .⁶⁸

These feelings will repeat themselves, some moments before Geoffrey's death, when

Closing his eyes again, standing there, glass in hand, he thought for a minute with a freezing detached almost amused calm of the dreadful night inevitably awaiting him whether he drank much more or not, his room shaking with daemonic orchestras, the snatches of fearful tumultuous sleep, interrupted by voices which were really dogs barking, or by his own name being continually repeated by imaginary parties arriving, the vicious shouting, the strumming, the slamming, the pounding, the battling with insolent archfiends, the avalanche breaking down the door, the proddings from under the bed, and always, outside, the cries, the wailing, the terrible music, the dark's spinnets.⁶⁹

Geoffrey's inner voices remind us of Marlowe's Faust: "Look up at that niche in the wall over there on the house where Christ is still suffering, who would help you if you asked him: you cannot ask him."⁷⁰ Geoffrey cannot reach salvation as Goethe's Faustus did, because (as it occurs to Hugh), "he might be, finally, helpless, in the grip of something against which all his remarkable defences could avail him little . . . this man of abnormal strength and constitution and obscure ambition . . . could never deliver nor make agreement to God."⁷¹ Geoffrey, like Marlowe's Faust, loved knowledge and power more than he did Christ. For him, "the will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it."⁷²

Goethe's Faust does not reach a tragic ending because of his love for Margareta who brings him salvation. Yvonne, Geoffrey's potential saviour, dreams of a new start with her husband in a Paradisal Canada but she is not able to save her lover because, instead of loving her, he loves hell, so intensely that when he felt that "he was in hell himself. . . . he became possessed of a curious calm."⁷³

Yvonne, like Margareta, is a kind of "eternal feminine" who "inspires" Geoffrey--but at the same time he betrays her, lets her perish. Thus, instead of rising to Heaven after her, he falls to Hell (like the drunkards of the picture Los Borrachones).

Even Laruelle tries to help him and speaks of

... the things so important to us despised sober people, on which the balance of any human situation depends. It's precisely your inability to see them Geoffrey, that turns them into the instruments of the disaster you have created yourself. Your Ben Jonson, for instance, or perhaps it was Christopher Marlowe, your Faust man.⁷⁴

But Geoffrey is not interested in absorbing superficial realities and conventional truths. He aims at something far deeper, and to Laruelle's words, he ironically replies with the words: "have a devilled [*italics mine*] scorpion,"⁷⁵ offering him a plate of "camarones"; a scorpion, like himself, is an instrument of its own destruction. In chapter twelve, seeing a dead scorpion, Geoffrey reflects about it (or about himself): "but maybe the scorpion, not wanting to be saved, had stung itself to death."⁷⁶

The dogs which appear throughout the novel, are Faustian too. We know that Goethe's Devil appears in the form of a black "poodle" and in Under the Volcano, a pariah dog follows Geoffrey in his last day's journey, which ends in the hellish "barranca". Besides this, another interesting point: Geoffrey's "pact" with the Devil, seems to center around his drinking, an attempt perhaps like Baudelaire's to achieve intensity of vision by artificial means, by shortening the extent of his life.

Throughout the book we find a pair of Faustian familiars who struggle to direct Geoffrey's conscience; in naming them "guardian angels," Lowry is obviously alluding to Faustus' Good and Evil Angels. At the end, the good angels are defeated by the bad ones, for Geoffrey hears "his voices again, hissing and shrieking and yammering at him: 'Now you've done it, now you've really done it, Geoffrey Firmin! Even we can help you no longer.'" ⁷⁷

Foreshadowing his own death, the Consul declaims: "Dies Faustus," while walking through the fair. He looks at his watch, realizing that "it was still only five to two. It was already the longest day in his entire experience, a lifetime."⁷⁸ Lowry insists upon the hour; chapter twelve begins with "a clock pointing to six," i.e., one hour to seven o'clock, when the Consul will die. This reference to the hour leads us to Marlowe's Faust: "Ah Faustus/Now hast thou but one bare hour to live/and then thou must be damned perpetually!" Through an almost fatalistic determinism, Geoffrey's death approaches also inevitably. However, Geoffrey refuses any kind of help; completely different from Faustus' frantic longing for life, is Geoffrey's apathetic acceptance of his tragic fate: "No thought of escape now touched the Consul's mind. Both his will, and time . . . were paralysed." Here lies the inversion Lowry makes of this archetypal figure. And

Kilgallin properly writes: "Employing the Faust archetype, Lowry has achieved a sense of ironic dissimilarity and yet of profound human continuity between the modern protagonist and his long dead exemplars."⁷⁹

As another example of the Faust-like black magician we have the CABBALISTIC ADEPT, also an archetypal figure that fits in with Geoffrey's "esoteric" personality:

. . . that deep layer of the novel--or the poem--which derives from myth is linked at this point with the Jewish Cabbala. . . . The Cabbala is used for poetic ends because it represents man's spiritual aspirations. . . . The spiritual domain of the Consul is probably Qliphoth, the world of husks and demons, represented by the Tree of Life turned upside down. . . . I mentioned it in passing so as to give the feeling . . . "that depths exist." In the Jewish Cabbala the abuse of magic powers is compared to drunkenness or the abuse of wine and . . . William James, if not Freud, might be in agreement with me when I affirm that the agonies of the drunkard find a very close parallel in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers.

(Malcolm Lowry, Preface to a Novel, pg. 27-8)

Mrs. Lowry once declared that Lowry "jolted up from his work one day to declare that his hero was a black magician."⁸⁰ Hugh, while walking with Yvonne, asks her "how much does he [Geoffrey] really know about all this alchemy and cabbala business? How much does it mean to him?" As Yvonne does not know how to answer him, Hugh immediately adds: "Maybe he's a black magician!"⁸¹ Later on, Hugh will see many cabbalistic books on Geoffrey's bookshelves. Geoffrey even tells Yvonne

once that he had given up learning the philosophical section of War and Peace in order to "dodge about in the rigging of the Cabbala like a St. Jago's monkey."⁸² We cannot fail to see that the Consul's drunkenness, with its hallucinatory quality, means more than ordinary addiction; it is closely associated with the visionary aspects of occultism. The Consul is then a black magician who has abused his mystic powers, because of his excessive alcoholism.

An important evidence of the novel's cabbalistic content is the author's insistent use of the numbers seven and twelve, which have cabbalistic implications. There are seven major schools of Jewish Cabbala; among these, there is Abulafia's contemplative school, which postulated "seven stages of contemplation and seven methods of scriptural interpretation."⁸³ The Merkabah mysticism, which showed the earliest traces of Jewish Cabbala, symbolized the various ascending stages of mystical experience as a journey through seven heavenly palaces; this journey was completed in twelve days, during which the initiate remained in a trance state (like Geoffrey's drunken peregrination through the novel's twelve chapters).

Perle Epstein writes about the importance of these two numbers:

Numerology, with special emphasis on the numbers 12, 7, and 3, plays a definitive part in the Cabbalistic

cosmology. Twelve are the signs of the zodiac, the months of the year, and the human activities of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, copulating, dealing, walking, thinking, becoming angry, laughing and sleeping. When broken down into components of three, three serve love, three serve hate, three engender life, and three engender death. . . . God rules all-- that is, One (god) over three (heaven, sea, land), three over seven (planets, days), seven over twelve (signs of the zodiac, tribes of Israel).⁸⁴

Lowry himself comments on his deliberate use of these cabbalistic numbers:

. . . my novel consists of twelve chapters, and the main part of the narrative is contained within a single day of twelve hours. In the same way, there are twelve months in the year, and the whole book is enclosed within the limits of a year, while that deeper layer of the novel--or the poem--which derives from myth is linked at this point with the Jewish Cabbala, where the number twelve is of the greatest importance.⁸⁵

I have noticed that the number seven occurs more than forty times , applying to the most different images. We have not only the number seven itself but also its variations, such as seventeen (Hugh's age when he lost his innocence), twenty-seven (Yvonne's age when she married Geoffrey) , and seventy-seven (the number of years Hugh proposes himself to stay in prison in the Andaman Islands) . The first chapter finishes at a little past seven and the novel's main action takes place between seven o'clock a.m. and seven o'clock p.m., when Yvonne is killed by that mysterious, "ubiquitous" horse which had the number seven branded on its rump.

Douglas Day makes a good summary of the basic ideas of the Cabbala, which is worth quoting here. He writes:

According to the Zohar, the sacred book of the Cabbala, God has manifested His existence in Creation by ten Sephiroth, or emanations. . . . These emanations, arranged hierarchically from spiritual down to physical states in an intricate structure known as the Sephirothic Tree, form for the adept a means of achieving salvation. Before the Fall, man had been able to reach the Top of this Tree, which is a triad of Sephiroth: Kether, the Crown; Chochma, Wisdom; and Binah, Understanding. But now, corrupted, he can go no higher (unless he possesses the Cabbalistic secrets) than the second triad: Chesed, Mercy; Geburah, Power; and Tipheret, Worldly Glory. For most men, however, only the lower branches of the Tree--those which belong wholly in the material world of appetites and passions--are accessible. So long as the adept is chaste and abstemious, the Tree remains upright and he can aspire to salvation; but as soon as he violates the Law, the Tree inverts itself (like the Máquina Infernal) and the sinner's climb toward heaven becomes a slide into Qliphoth, the realm of husks and demons.⁸⁶ (cf Lowry's statement, at the beginning of this section.)

This is what happens to Geoffrey, who, aware of his own situation, writes in his letter to Yvonne:

Meantime do you see me as still working on the book, still trying to answer such questions as: Is there any ultimate reality, external, conscious and ever-present etc. etc. that can be realised by any such means that may be acceptable to all creeds and religions and suitable to all climes and countries? Or do you find one between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah (but still at Chesed)--my equilibrium, and equilibrium is all, precarious--balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgable void, the all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God? As if I ever were in Chesed! More like the Qliphoth.⁸⁷

The problem of equilibrium will reappear at Yvonne's death, when she loses her balance and slips from a very real, yet still

cabbalistic broken ladder at the fallen tree (the cabbalistic tree of life) she is climbing. The equilibrium referred to here is not only related to Yvonne (who is Geoffrey too) but to the Consul himself because he is not able to reach the equalization, the balance between the opposite forces that pull him in different ways. From Perle Epstein's The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry, which analyses Lowry's use of the Cabbala in Under the Volcano, we learn that:

Evil is ... distinguished by means of good, and good is distinguished by means of evil. An ever-functioning system of opposites, mediated by harmony, rules over the mental and physical universe, whose new creations emerge from their fusion. Balance and harmony through creation are perpetuated by means of sex. Equilibrium is thereby equated with love, and love is personified in the female form of the Shekinah. . . . Love is the bridge between above and below.⁸⁸

The key point here is to understand that Geoffrey's inability to reach a balance is manifest in his sexual impotence, in his inability to love and because of this he is not allowed to receive Yvonne's help. When he declares that he loves hell, he finally loses his equilibrium beyond any possibility of restoring it. His journey then follows the way to the farthest recess of Kelipah, the abyss at the center of the earth. Here lies a peculiarly Lowrian irony: when Geoffrey feels all the natural elements against him (because the negative powers set loose begin to take effect), when he decides that he is anxious to reach hell, Lowry's wise hand

writes that "the queer thing was, he [Geoffrey] wasn't quite serious."⁸⁹

In her book, Perle Epstein gives us the difference between black and white magicians: "the successful redeemer of mankind descends into the world of the shells in order to rise to selflessness⁴ while the black magician is only drawn into profounder depths of chaos and egotism."⁹⁰ Geoffrey, not having allowed himself to love (which state, according to the Cabbalists, is the only feeling as strong as death), has built his tragic end, from which he cannot escape. Here, once more, is the theme of love as something essential to life: NO SE PUEDE VIVIR SIN AMAR. So he dies, precisely at 7 o'clock. Since the number seven is a cabbalistic number of release, we are facing again one more twist Lowry subtly makes with the traditional myth. He gives us a hint that enables us to see that the Consul's tragedy is not actually tragic, from one special perspective. And Geoffrey himself sees that "It was a tremendous, an awful way down to the bottom. But it struck him he was not afraid to fall either."⁹¹

⁴This is very similar to the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell, presented in chapter two of this work.

DANTE*

The book was first of all conceived rather pretentiously as the first leaf in the triptych of a kind of drunken Divine Comedy. Purgatory and Paradise were to follow, with the protagonist . . . becoming at each stage slightly better or worse, according to one's point of view.

(Malcolm Lowry, Preface to a Novel, pg. 25)

The first chapter of the book gives us some introductory keys that lead us to draw close parallels between Under the Volcano and Dante's Divine Comedy, and to see the Consul as a peculiarly characterized Dante. The opening scene of the novel takes place in a hotel called Casino de la Selva (selva means wood), where Laruelle is talking to Dr. Vigil about their dead friend Geoffrey. Leaving Dr. Vigil, Laruelle takes a solitary walk and he approaches the abyssal barranca, the deep ravine. When he reads in Geoffrey's letter that "the name of this land is hell," the resemblance to Dante's hell is made clear when he goes on to say that "right through hell there is a path . . . and though I may not take it, sometimes lately in dreams I have been able to see it . . . I seem to see now, between mescals, this path and beyond it strange vistas, like visions of a new life together we might

* Dante is not a mythological character, but his narrator-surrogate goes on a mythological, archetypal "journey", a "descent" à la Vergil.

somewhere lead."⁹² All these themes will reappear several times throughout the book, and we are going to see them in more detail. To close this chapter, "Suddenly from outside, a bell spoke out, then ceased abruptly: dolente . . . dolore!" (cf the inscription Dante places above the gate of Hell--"Per me si va nella cita dolente/Per me si va nell' eterno dolore . . .").

One of these themes is the wood, where Dante finds himself at the start of the Divine Comedy. In Under the Volcano, one of the cantinas is called El Bosque: "The Terminal Cantina El Bosque, however, seemed so dark that even with his glasses off he had to stop dead . . . Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura--or selva? No matter. The Cantina was well named, 'The Boskage.'"⁹³ In chapter six, the middle chapter of the book, Hugh (Geoffrey, in a way) thinks: "Nel mezzo del 'bloody' cammin di nostra vita me ritrovai in . . .," to which we immediately add: a dark wood. These words are taken from a poem in the Divine Comedy, to which Lowry interpolates the appropriate word bloody. At the end of her life, it is Yvonne who comes to be in a really dark wood, where she is going to find her death.

Concerning the journey theme, we can say that the route the Consul follows is derived largely from Dante; both travel downward to hell but on arriving there, they can find a path

where hell meets heaven, because, to Dante, man must achieve an understanding of suffering before the way to freedom and happiness can be made clear. Dante goes on his upward journey helped by Beatrice, but we cannot be sure that Geoffrey will be able to find the right path, as he himself writes (see quotation in the first paragraph of this section). In this context of analogies, Popocatepetl becomes a counterpart to Dante's Mountain of Purgatory, at the top of which Eden is situated; so, to climb Popo would imply a spiritual climb, an affirmation of the soul: "the notion of climbing the volcano had somehow struck them as having the significance of a lifetime together?"⁹⁴ But the Consul thinks that it is "all a pathetic joke, of course, still, this plan [Hugh's] to climb Popo."⁹⁵

In chapter three we have Geoffrey's attempt at climbing, when he finds himself "guiltily climbing the Calle Nicaragua" but he collapses in the empty street, as he will collapse at the time of his death, amid imagery of ascent. And the man who assists Geoffrey will drive away "up the hill,"⁹⁶ continuing his journey, but the Consul is unable to do so because he always goes down. Once more the idea of climbing occurs but now it happens only within Geoffrey's mind; he imagines that "with souls well-disciplined they [Geoffrey and a dog] reached the northern region and beheld, with heaven aspiring hearts,

the mighty mountain Himavat" but he immediately realizes that "nor was he after all in the mountains."⁹⁷ Geoffrey does not know any other way but the way down. At his death, he is in the hellish cantina El Farolito, which is situated directly beneath Popocatepetl, i.e., "under the volcano." Dead, he is thrown to the infernal barranca, once significantly referred to as "the Malebolge", Dante's name for the eighth circle of hell.

The leading roles in the Divine Comedy are played by the poet Virgil and Beatrice, Dante's sublime love on earth, who leads him through Paradise. In Under the Volcano it will be symbolised in an inverted way, by Yvonne and Dr. Vigil, whose name lacks only the "r" to form the name of the poet who leads Dante through the mists. Dr. Vigil is a Mexican physician, but his concern for the Consul's soul is an interest assuredly beyond his role as a doctor. However, we have a distorted comparison with Dante's guide when Geoffrey thinks that "Vigil's visit had somehow been timed to coincide with his own probable visit to the tequila* . . . with the object, naturally, of spying upon him."⁹⁸ In the Divine

*We know that drink in Under the Volcano is associated with a rite of passage, exerting a leading role in Geoffrey's journey to the deep regions of the unconscious.

Comedy, Virgil leads Dante through Hell and Purgatory. In Under the Volcano we have an inversion of this role; Dr. Vigil does not want to lead Geoffrey through hell. He invites Geoffrey on a visit to Guanajuato, instead of their planned journey to Parian, where the Consul will be thrown into a hellish abyss. But Geoffrey refuses and invites him to come to Parian, to the Farolito, to which Dr. Vigil replies, "whee, es un infierno."

With Yvonne, we also witness a reversal of Beatrice's role, since Yvonne tries to lead Geoffrey but she does not succeed. On the contrary, she is lead by him towards death. When Yvonne wants to buy an armadillo, which appeared to her "astonishingly soft and helpless," Hugh tells her not to do so because "if you let the thing loose in your garden it'll merely tunnel down into the ground and never come back. . . . It'll not only never come back, Yvonne, but if you try to stop it it will do its damndest to pull you down the hole too."⁹⁹ We cannot miss the identity between Geoffrey and this little animal, at the same time that we realize the inversion Lowry makes of Beatrice's guiding role; instead of guiding him through Paradise, Yvonne will follow Geoffrey in his journey to hell.

At the end of chapter ten, Geoffrey accuses Yvonne of denying "the only natural and good function you have. Though

on second thoughts it might be better if women had no functions at all!"¹⁰⁰ On a deep level this would imply that Yvonne is unable to be Geoffrey's anima, to exert her guiding role. Actually, she writes him:

Darling, we can't go on like this, it's too awful. ... I'm leaving. ... What's a lost soul? [Geoffrey's] It's one that has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness. ... You are walking on the edge of an abyss where I may not follow. 101

Since she fails to lead him to Paradise, Geoffrey decides to go to hell and he runs "toward the forest which was growing darker and darker,"¹⁰² to Parian, to the Farolito.

However, at her death, Yvonne goes upward (both a "Goethean" and a "Dantean" motif at once) as, simultaneously, Geoffrey goes downward in his death. As one of Jung's concepts reminds us that the extremes meet at the end, we can infer the truth about Señora Gregorio's previsions: "I think I see you with your esposa again soon. I see you laughing [an appropriate pun on "living"] together in some Kernice place where you laugh . . . far away,"¹⁰³ perhaps in their dreamt-of Dantean Paradise, Canada.

We can see that many of the mythic personae that Geoffrey is living out are relevant to the type of Poete Maudit, or the romantic rebel (Faust, Prometheus, Lucifer, etc.) who rebels against the tyrannical and repressive forces of

traditional morality in the name of a higher, individual morality with quite different values. We notice that even in Dante we have to descend to hell before we can climb to heaven. However, we can also analyse the Consul's identification with such cosmic rebels from another point of view, thus considering this association as a form of delusion which, like Geoffrey's alcoholism, may also lead him to lose individuality rather than gain it.

Another general point worth emphasizing here is that all myths are used ambiguously and may therefore receive an ironic reading. It is very difficult for us to identify the reasons that lead to Lowry's deliberate, ironic inversions of mythological figures. Geoffrey both is and is not Faust, Christ, Prometheus, etc., in the same way that we suddenly have a peculiarly drawn Christ, Oedipus, etc., to fit Geoffrey's extremely complex personality. As I have already pointed out, he may be using these pedantic parallels to rationalize his own failure and to dignify his passive sordid descent into alcoholism and solipsism, as Perle Epstein appropriately writes: "He [Lowry] had determined that the Consul's destruction should have the universal significance of the sacrificed godman, or scapegoat."¹⁰⁴

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SYMBOLS IN UNDER THE VOLCANO

The Consul's awareness encompasses an astonishing range of image and symbol, from the Greeks and Elizabethans to the cabala and jazz . . . Lowry wove these references not to bewilder his audience, but because he was always haunted by what he took to be the occult correspondences among events and ideas.¹

Conrad Knickerbocker (Perle, 42)

An evidence of the extreme complexity of Under the Volcano and the consequent difficulty one has in understanding it, is the letter Lowry felt it necessary to write to his publisher in order to explain his "Baudelairean forest of symbols."² Cape's reader, without perceiving the remarkable consistency of the novel's symbolism, concluded that "the book is much too long and over-elaborate for its content, and could have been more effective if only half or two-thirds its present length . . . the author has over-reached himself, and is given to eccentric word-spinning and too much stream-of-consciousness stuff."³ Fortunately, however, after Lowry's long explanatory letter, the book was accepted and published as it was, with all its difficult arrangement, its very well chosen themes interrelated by a complicated web of symbolic references. And it could not be otherwise because, as Day says of Lowry:

He had in him that which prohibited him from stopping

at the thing in itself; the thing had to mean, had to relate to another thing, and so on until order and symmetry were lost in a maze of arcane correspondences and brilliant conceits. One must begin to speculate that perhaps Lowry might have used alcohol as, among other things, a mental anesthetic: a means of stopping or at least slowing down this beautiful but ruinous construction of labyrinths.⁴

In this chapter I will make a catalogue of the symbols in Under the Volcano and then I will try to analyse the main symbols I have gathered, taking into consideration that the complex metaphorical structure of the novel appears in a spatial form (we must keep in mind that the spatial reading technique also fits the myth critics' analysis), which stresses the connection between simultaneous elements. It seems that there are some organizing principles/themes in the novel, around/to which the specific symbols converge. About this characteristic of the book, Doyen states in his article "Elements Toward a Spatial Reading of Under the Volcano": "images, names, printed notices and fragments of conversation often return in an apparently haphazard way, yet with additional details in each new context; different elements are felt to be related though not explicitly linked, and deeper levels of symbolic meaning are gradually revealed." So, in order to fully understand the novel, one has to be "continually fitting fragments together and keeping allusions in mind until, by reflexive reference, he can link them to their complement."⁵

Given the great importance of the symbol in Under the Volcano, it is worth quoting here a passage which had originally belonged to Under the Volcano but which Lowry (no one knows why) removed in the final draft. This passage, in which Geoffrey analyses the nature of real life and of symbolic life, represents also Lowry's "intellectual malaise" as Day remarks:

Life was a forest of symbols, was it, Baudelaire had said? But, it occurred to him, even before the forest, if there were such a thing as "before", were there not still the symbols? Yes, before! Before you knew anything about life, you had the symbols. It was with symbols that you started. From them you progressed to something else. Life was indeed what you made of the symbols and, the less you made of life the more symbols you got. And the more you tried to comprehend them, confusing what life was, with the necessity for this comprehension, the more they multiplied. And the more they multiplied, that is, disintegrated into still more and more symbols which in the first place never had the slightest intention of meaning anything, let alone of being understood, just like human beings in short, the more they liked it, until, in the end, life itself . . . fluttered away abruptly, leaving an abstraction behind.⁶

Before going to the symbols themselves, I would like to quote Perle Epstein, for she gives an intelligent, general explanation of them; she says that Lowry uses "the external world of nature as a representation of inner states of consciousness; the Consul's alcoholic bliss is denoted by his idyllic descriptions of the cantinas; his anguish is symbolized by the vultures, dogs, and overgrown gardens."⁷

In the interests of clarity, I have tried to arrange the symbols

into more comprehensive categories, i.e., the animal, vegetable, mineral and the human worlds. While making this categorization of the novel's symbolism, Northrop Frye's theory of archetypal meaning and imagery came to my mind, in which he classifies the elements found in a work of art as belonging either to tragedy (demonic images) or comedy (apocalyptic images) (see chapter 2). If we apply Frye's categorization to analyse the symbols of Under the Volcano, we will come to the conclusion that Lowry wrote a great piece of tragedy, since all the elements in the book are distinctly part of the demonic imagery, as Frye puts it. However, we must also keep in mind the novel's inherent idea of rebirth in the transitional movement which characterizes it. Thus, although the novel presents Geoffrey's voyage downward, it also implies that the next phase will be the movement upward and this denies the tragic nature of the work.

Still concerning its imagery, Day states that, in Under the Volcano,

the chthonic imagery is, clearly, archetypally demonic in nature: that is, it employs apocalyptic images of the Mount of Perfection, the fertile valley, the cleansing stream or fountain and the blossoming garden, but it employs them in an inverted, ironic form. What had indicated fruition, now indicates sterility; what had represented cleansing, now represents corruption and what had symbolized the soul's striving upward toward salvation,

now symbolizes the descent into damnation. It is of a world turned upside down that Lowry writes.⁸

However, I will not apply any reductive classification to Under the Volcano: I will rather explore it under the most varying possibilities, trying to get from it as much profit as possible. Using Frye's framework (see pages 28/29) we can classify the symbols in the following way:

- ANIMAL WORLD: birds, vulture, eagle, pigeon, cock, chicken, horse, dog, bull, scorpion, snake, cat, goat, armadillo, rabbit, stag, oxen, insects, lizard, butterfly.
- VEGETABLE WORLD: wood/tree (forest, Casino de la Selva, El Bosque, cross, the Sephirotic tree), garden (Quincy's, Geoffrey's, Maximilian and Carlotta's, the public gardens).
- MINERAL WORLD: water: sea, rain, fountain, swimming pool
earth: mountain, volcano, rocks, abyss, mines, barranca
air: dust
fire: aguardiente, burning images, candle, matches.
- HUMAN WORLD: background figures (noseless peons, legless beggars, madmen, old crones, prostitutes, brutal policemen, dwarfs, gnomes, a pelado, Indian, peasants, old women)
secondary characters (Señora Gregorio, Dr. Vigil)
main figures (Geoffrey, Yvonne, Hugh, Laruelle)
man-made elements (posters, advertisements, signs, telephone, letters/postcards, telegraph messages, cantinas, churches, castles.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that these are only the main symbols I have tried to select since it would be

impossible to make an exhaustive catalogue and discussion in just one chapter; this job would necessarily require a whole thesis and symbols are not the specific aim of the present work.

ANIMAL WORLD

We can now begin with the animal world, since animals abound in the novel and almost all of them are of a peculiar sort: instead of sheep, doves, and other domesticated animals, we have insects, vultures, snakes, scorpions, pariah dogs (a white dog appears only on one occasion), etc. According to Jung,

the animal motif is usually symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature. Even civilized men must realize the violence of their instinctual drives and their powerlessness in face of the autonomous emotions erupting from the unconscious ... the acceptance of the animal soul is the condition for wholeness and a fully lived life. ⁹

I do not deny that Jung's explanation applies to the study of the animal world in Under the Volcano, but I believe that Lowry's purpose was to present much broader implications than the one Jung gives us, as we are going to conclude from a detailed analysis of this particular symbol.

Horses, which "often symbolize the uncontrollable instinctive drives that can erupt from the unconscious and that

many people try to repress,"¹⁰ stand as a very important symbol in the novel. The horse appears for the first time in Laruelle's mind when, looking upward to the clouds, he thinks that they are "dark swift horses surging up the sky."¹¹ Amid his recollections, Laruelle sees a drunkard riding a horse, and he thinks that "this maniacal vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled, somehow almost admirable, this too, obscurely, was the Consul."¹² Here the horse is under the control of its rider, in contrast to what happens in chapter twelve, when the horse will be the cause, although in an indirect way, of Geoffrey's death and also the direct instrument of Yvonne's death, because "the Consul, shaking himself free, tore frantically at the horse's bridle . . . [and] released, the horse reared; tossing its head, it wheeled round and plunged neighing into the forest,"¹³ where it trampled Yvonne to death. Here it is really understood as a symbol of men's instinctual forces which sometimes become instruments of destruction.

Yvonne had been an adolescent cowgirl movie star. She recalls having once seen a film in which "a shadowy horse, gigantic, filling the whole screen, seemed leaping out of it at her."¹⁴ Without knowing that the film was foreshadowing her death, she thought that it was "the best film you have ever seen in your life; so extraordinarily complete in its

realism, that what the story is all about, who the protagonist may be, seems of small account beside the explosion of the particular moment, beside the immediate threat, the identification with the one hunted, the one haunted, in this case Yvonne Griffaton . . ."³⁵ At her death, as a lightning flashback: "the horse--great God, the horse--and would this scene repeat itself endlessly and for ever?--the horse, rearing, poised over her, petrified in mid-air, a statue, somebody was sitting on the statue, it was Yvonne Griffaton, no, it was the statue of Huerta, the drunkard, the murderer, it was the Consul, or it was a mechanical horse on the merry-go-round the carrousel, but the carrousel had stopped and she was in a ravine down which a million horses were thundering towards her."¹⁶

During their morning walk, in which they ride together, Hugh and Yvonne met an Indian with his horse, "the number seven branded on its rump"¹⁷ near a cantina meaningfully called La Sepultura. Later on, this same horse will be seen by Geoffrey, who, while walking with Laruelle, sees

a man on horseback pass, a fine-featured Indian of the poorer class, dressed in soiled white loose clothes. The man was [ironically] singing gaily to himself. But he nodded to them courteously as if to thank them [for the help he will ask Geoffrey in vain]. He seemed about to speak, reining in his little horse. . . . But the man, riding slightly

in front, did not speak and at the top he suddenly waved his hand and galloped away, singing.

And, later on, he will meet his death. This scene brings good thoughts to Geoffrey's mind: "ah, to have a horse, and gallop away, singing, away to someone you loved perhaps, into the heart of all the simplicity and peace in the world; was not that like the opportunity afforded man by life itself?"¹⁹ This is a kind of vision of what had just occurred to Yvonne and Hugh. And the image that immediately follows is that of Goethe's vision of the horse, one which "weary of liberty he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains"²⁰ (italics mine). This is to be profoundly ironic when we realize that, instead of being tamed, the Indian's horse is set free, thus causing Yvonne's death.

Considering that Geoffrey, more than once, is associated with a horse (it is worth noting here the "self-reflexive" character of the novel's symbols, i.e., they all eventually refer to the Consul)--he once sees himself "still strong as a horse, so to speak, strong as a horse!"²¹ for Yvonne, "after all, Geoff's as strong as a horse"²² and a mailman delivers Yvonne's postcard to Geoffrey, exclaiming: "a message por el señor, for your horse"²³--we can conclude that the horse he releases symbolizes himself, his unconscious impulses that kill Yvonne, who wanted to change (or tame) him.

The dog is also used with an insistence that calls for our attention. In one of the novel's epigraphs, taken from John Bunyan's Grace Abounding for the Chief of Sinners, we feel man's wish to be in the "blessed" condition of a dog or horse, as a way of avoiding deep awareness of his poor condition as a human being. At the end of the book, Geoffrey dies almost like a dog and, ironically, "somebody threw a dead dog [his "companero"] after him down the ravine."²⁴

In this novel, the dog sometimes seems to keep its characteristic of loyalty; we know that in many mythologies, dogs appear as spiritual guides to the land of the dead:

The Astec Indians always included a dog with the corpse of the sacrificed god so that the spirit could swim on the dog's back over the water of the dead: 'The departed was to take a little dog with him ... and, after four years of passage, he arrived with it before the god, to whom he presented his papers. ... Whereupon he was admitted together with his faithful companion to the Ninth Abyss.'²⁵

However, in Under the Volcano, the dog which was supposed to guide Geoffrey is dead. Also, dogs follow him instead of leading him. Another mythological example is that of Cerberus, the dog of Pluto, which stands at the entrance of Hades (the kingdom of the infernal regions) in order to prevent the living from entering it and the dead from escaping. In Under the Volcano, a dog

keeps watching Geoffrey all the time (we can see here that Geoffrey--or the author himself--in his paranoia, has even the animal world persecuting him), but as it does not succeed in its mission of stopping Geoffrey's desire to enter the hellish world, it dies with him and they both go straight forward to their "all-but-unretraceable path."

A direct antithesis of the "howling pariah dogs,"²⁶ the "hideous pariah dog"²⁷ that followed Geoffrey and Yvonne all day, is "an affectionate scrubbed woolly white dog"²⁸ that accompanies both Hugh and Yvonne in their walk, "guarding all of them."²⁹ When they are crossing the river, "the dog swam ahead, fatuously important."³⁰ It seems that it had been sent to protect Hugh and Yvonne from evil, for it "ran ahead of the foals though he never failed to dodge back periodically to see all was well. He was sniffing for snakes among the metals."³¹

When Geoffrey is dreaming, he sees that "behind them walked the only living thing that shared their pilgrimage, the dog. And by degrees they reached the briny sea. Then, with souls well disciplined, they reached the northern region, and beheld, with heaven aspiring hearts, the mighty mountain Himavat."³² But unfortunately, reality goes in the reverse direction, and Geoffrey's "disturbingly familiar" pariah dog, now dead, follows his downward pilgrimage. In a very

important passage related to the leitmotif of the dog, we identify a foreshadowing of both the dog's and Geoffrey's fate; Geoffrey is at the Cantina El Bosque, where "a starving pariah dog . . . looked up at the Consul with beady, gentle eyes . . . these people without ideas . . . [and Geoffrey tells it that] 'God sees how timid and beautiful you really are, and the thoughts of hope that go with you like little white birds . . . Yet this day pichicho, shalt thou be with me in'---"³³ (the sentence is incomplete, but the missing term seems to be "Hell"). In addition to this, we have more dreadful omens: Hugh, during the bus trip to Tomalin, sees "a dead dog right at the bottom, nuzzling the refuse; white bones showed through the carcass"³⁴ and, afterwards, Yvonne remembers "the dog that was dying on the street in Honolulu, rivulets of blood streaked the deserted pavement."³⁵

Although there are several kinds of birds in the book, the most important member of the class is the vulture. We have a first direct reference to birds in chapter three, when the Consul discusses with Yvonne the nature of a bird that has appeared in a nearby tree, and characterizes it as "a solitary fellow . . . I think, the ambiguous bird,"³⁶ thus associating the bird with his own state of isolation and ambivalence. Jung has said that the bird is "the most fitting symbol of spiritual transcendence; it represents the peculiar nature of

intuition working through a 'medium' i.e., an individual who is capable of obtaining knowledge of distant events or facts of which he consciously knows nothing."³⁷ In Under the Volcano we have two passages in which birds keep this omen-like characteristic; amid his recollections, Hugh sees "reflections of vultures a mile deep [which] wheeled upside down and were gone. A bird, quite close really, seemed to be moving in a series of jerks across the glittering summit of Popocatepetl"³⁸ and while the Indian is dying (chapter eight), "a single bird [his soul] flew high."³⁹ These images can be associated with the Consul's death, as well as Yvonne's, which will be characterized by images of ascent/descent. In ironic contrast with the second reference to "palombas" in the book (when they will appear at the time the Consul is to be killed), we have them also like "little secret ambassadors of peace, of love, two beautiful white tame pigeons"⁴⁰; this passage will only serve to stress the fragile nature of love and peace in the novel.

The 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, above the summit of the Andes,"⁴¹ keep flying throughout the novel, waiting as bad omen, waiting "only for the ratification of [mainly Geoffrey's] death."⁴² We saw in the preceding chapter that vultures

torment both Prometheus and Geoffrey. And they wait for his death in the right place; Laruelle, seeing the barranca, exclaims: "dormitory for vultures"⁴³--we know that it is there that the Consul will be thrown, dead, to serve as food for these disgusting creatures. When Geoffrey thinks that vultures are "more graceful than eagles,"⁴⁴ we cannot fail to identify these two different kinds of bird with, respectively, Geoffrey and Yvonne. This association will be strengthened in chapter eleven, when Yvonne sees an eagle (her ego, her soul) in a cage:

There the bird was still, a long-winged dark furious shape, a little world of fierce despairs and dreams, and memories of floating high above Popocatepetl, mile on mile, to drop through the wilderness and alight, watching, in the timberline ghosts of ravaged mountain trees. With hurried quivering hands Yvonne began to unfasten the cage. The bird fluttered out of it and alighted at her feet, hesitated, took flight to the roof of El Petate, then abruptly flew off through the dusk, not to the nearest tree, as might have been supposed, but up--she was right, it knew it was free--up soaring, with a sudden cleaving of pinions into the deep dark blue pure sky above, in which at that moment appeared one star. No compunction touched Yvonne. She felt only an inexplicable secret triumph and relief: no one would ever know she had done this; and then, stealing over her, the sense of utter heartbreak and loss.⁴⁵

This is a beautifully constructed, metaphorical image of what is going to happen a little afterward, at Yvonne's death, at the moment of her finally attained freedom, though maybe the eagle could symbolize Geoffrey's soul instead of hers and by freeing the eagle, she is consenting to his death, perhaps

realizing (as his guide, his "anima") that it was the best choice for him.

In opposition to the birds, or the creatures from "above," we have lots of representatives of the underworld: the snake, scorpion, armadillo, etc. Hugh, once is referred to as "you old snake in the grass"⁴⁶ and he does once represent temptation and sin, when he makes Yvonne betray her husband by sleeping with him, with all the bad consequences that actually followed. However, at a certain moment, he not only resists the temptation, but is also able to dominate it and surmount its bad influence:

and here indeed it was again, the temptation, the cowardly, the future-corruptive serpent: trample on it, stupid fool. Be Mexico. Have you not passed through the river? In the name of God be dead. And Hugh actually did ride over a dead garter snake, embossed on the path like a belt to a pair of bathing trunks.⁴⁷

Thus, Hugh symbolically overcomes his (phallic) attraction to Yvonne. This same passage can also be interpreted as it were a parallel image of the biblical, Christian battle between St. George and the dragon. As for Geoffrey, we have a similar image:

on the path before him a little snake he had thought a twig was rustling off into the bushes and he watched it a moment through his dark glasses to protect himself against its terrible influence, fascinated. It was a real snake all right. Not that he was much bothered by anything so simple as snakes, he reflected with a degree of pride.⁴⁸

However, we feel that Geoffrey is unable to control the temptation of the incredible hallucinations his drinking affords him. Thus, when he dies, he is tragically flung toward the "serpentine barranca."

Another symbol which fits Geoffrey's suicidal impulses is the scorpion, which, like Geoffrey "not wanting to be saved, had stung itself to death."⁴⁹ Also related to the scorpion imagery, is the notion that the novel's action takes place in November, thus under Scorpio in the Zodiac and this adds a touch of fatalism to the novel. Keeping in mind that the scorpion is an emblem of Geoffrey himself, the following quotation, which actually has astrological implications, is a clear depiction of both Geoffrey's and Yvonne's death: "As Scorpio sets in the south-west, the Pleiades are rising in the north-east."⁵⁰ In fact, Geoffrey (a scorpion, Scorpio) goes downward at his death, at the same time that Yvonne, dying, is "borne towards the stars, through eddies of stars scattering aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water, among which now appeared, like a flock of diamond birds flying softly and steadily towards Orion, the Pleiades . . ."⁵¹

Concerning the insect world, I will just concentrate on a passage which describes one of Geoffrey's hallucinatory visions, here an evident symptom of his paranoiac state:

The Consul sat helplessly in the bathroom, watching the

insects which lay at different angles from one another on the wall, like ships out in the roadstead. A caterpillar started to wriggle toward him, peering this way and that, with interrogatory antennae. A large cricket, with polished fuselage, clung to the curtain, swaying on it slightly and cleaning its face like a cat, its eyes on stalks appearing to revolve in its head. He turned, expecting the caterpillar to be much nearer, but it too had turned, just slightly shifting its moorings. Now a scorpion was moving slowly across toward him. Suddenly the Consul rose, trembling in every limb. But it wasn't the scorpion he cared about. It was that, all at once, the thin shadows of isolated nails, the stains of murdered mosquitoes, the very scars and cracks of the wall, had begun to swarm, so that, wherever he looked, another insect was born, wriggling instantly toward his heart. It was as if, and this was what was most appalling, the whole insect world had somehow moved nearer and now was closing, rushing in upon him.⁵²

Still related to the animal world, we have a very interesting passage in the novel, when Hugh wrestles with a bull, in the bull-throwing at Tomalin. This image is similar to the mythological battle between the hero and the dragon, which, Jung explains, symbolizes the "archetypal theme of the ego's triumph over regressive trends."⁵³ This explanation also applies to the bull incident in Under the Volcano, about which Lowry himself writes: "Hugh here conquers the animal forces of nature which the Consul later lets loose"⁵⁴ in the figure of the horse, which, as we have already said, becomes a destructive agent. This fight has a specific mythological connotation when it is considered as a parallel of Theseus' fight with the Minotaur, with the basic difference that in Hugh's case, the reward does not come. It is interesting to see

that Lowry gives the bull an almost human personality: "the poor old creature seemed now indeed like someone being drawn, lured, into events of which he has no real comprehension, by people with whom he wishes to be friendly, even to play, who entice him by encouraging that wish and by whom, because they really despise and desire to humiliate him, he is finally entangled"⁵⁵; here again, the symbol seems to mirror back specifically Geoffrey. The bullfight spectacle also relates to another important theme in the book, that of the character's inaction. Jung has said that attending a theatre could also indicate a popular way of evading an active part in life's drama. Throughout the book Yvonne tries to persuade Geoffrey to work/act their salvation but, unfortunately, he does nothing at all. So, it is profoundly ironic that, instead of Geoffrey, it is Hugh who suddenly decides to fight with the bull, due to "that absurd necessity he not his brother felt for action."⁵⁶

VEGETABLE WORLD

A noteworthy symbol in the novel which belongs to this group is the forest, the dark wood in which the main characters seem to find themselves, although sometimes just in a symbolic way. At the beginning, Laruelle and Dr. Vigil are in a hotel called Casino de la Selva (selva means wood). It

is also important to keep in mind the relationship (already stated in chapter four) between Under the Volcano and Dante's Divine Comedy. And it is in a dark wood--the Inferno--that Dante finds himself at the beginning of the Divine Comedy. In chapter six, Hugh, although literally finding himself "down on the porch daybed," thinks that "Nel mezzo del bloody cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai in . . ." ⁵⁷ --a dark wood, one could immediately add, not only because of Dante's Divine Comedy (from which these words were taken), but also because the forest can have many connotations, including that of being the land of the unknown; and Hugh seems to be completely at a loss.

For Jung, the forest means "the realm of the soul itself, which the soul may choose to know to seek therein its most intimate adventure [for] . . . all that is dark and tempting in the world is to be found again in the enchanted forest, where it springs from our deeper wishes and the soul's most ancient dreams." ⁵⁸ Geoffrey, attracted as he was for the inner regions of his unconscious, goes to a cantina significantly called "El Bosque," where it

seemed so dark that even with his glasses off he had to stop dead . . . Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura - or selva ? No matter. The Cantina was well named, 'The Boskage' . This darkness, though, was associated in his mind with velvet curtains, and there they were . . . too dirty and full of dust to be black , partially screening the

entrance to the back room, which one could never be sure was private.⁵⁹

We are going to see that Yvonne (in chapter eleven), while looking for the Consul, finds herself in a dark wood--now truly a wood and not its symbolic representations--where she is going to meet her death, falling from a very special kind of tree, the Cabbalistic Sephirotic Tree of Life (already referred to in chapter four).

The garden symbol plays also a very important role in the novel, because it is related to one of the most important themes in Under the Volcano, that is Adam's expulsion from Paradise (see chapter four). The Consul's garden clearly reflects his inner aridity, his sexual problem and inability to love: "the tall exotic plants . . . perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst, staggering, it almost appeared, against one another, yet struggling like dying voluptuaries in vision to maintain some final attitude of potency, or of a collective desolate fecundity . . . the plantains with their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death."⁶⁰ Directly reflecting Geoffrey's state, we can also see the garden as a mythological symbol (the Garden of Eden) which is here inverted and parodied. This garden does not seem to look friendly to his owner: as a typical paranoiac he notices "a sunflower looking in through the bedroom window. It . . . stares. Fiercely. All day.

Like God!" He even tells Dr. Vigil about this: "A sunflower. I know it watches me and I know it hates me."⁶¹ To reinforce the sterility theme, Lowry gives the name of Concepta (one who conceives) to Geoffrey's maid; he also makes references to the Cosmic Egg, a mythological symbol of fertility: "And flood; the drains of Quauhnhuac visited us and left us with something that smelt like the Cosmic Egg till recently."⁶² And yet, Yvonne sees, while walking home with Geoffrey, that "the grass . . . wasn't as green as it should be at the end of the rains: there must have been a dry spell."⁶³

The Consul likes his garden even with snakes in it; perhaps he is also satisfied with his own condition:

oddly enough, it did not strike him as being nearly so 'ruined' as it had earlier appeared. Such chaos as might exist even lent an added charm. He liked the exuberance of the unclipped growth at hand . . . [that] positively made a little vision of order.

On the other hand (perhaps as a subtle indication of the relativity of moral values), Geoffrey sees his neighbor's symmetrical, carefully kept garden, but in which "there existed at the moment certain evidence of work left uncompleted."⁶⁴ It is worth remembering here that, as we have seen in the previous chapter (in the Adam section), it was Geoffrey's idea that the real punishment might be to be forced to stay in paradise forever. If we have in mind the association

we saw in chapter four, between Mr. Quincey (Geoffrey's neighbor, the owner of the garden) and God, the uncompleted work means also that God (Quincey) has not expelled Adam (Geoffrey) from Paradise (the garden, earth), as He should have already done.

Yvonne had hopes of a new start with Geoffrey in a paradisaal farm. She takes care of the garden as she tries to save her husband from the terrible and fatal isolation he lives in: "Yvonne, or something woven from the filaments of the past that looked like her, was working in the garden, and at a little distance appeared clothed entirely in sunlight."⁶⁵ Here, she is associated with the sun and she does in fact try to illuminate Geoffrey's mind, but she is not able to take him out of his dreadful darkness. So, her efforts, her dreams, die with her: "the walls with their millwheel reflections of sunlight on water were burning, the flowers in the garden were blackened and burning . . . the garden was burning."⁶⁶

MINERAL WORLD

As a first representative of this group we have the water, which in Under the Volcano appears in the form of rain/storm, swimming pool, fountain, river and the sea. Sometimes it has archetypal significance, to which a peculiar Lowrian meaning is added.

The presence of rains both at the epilogic beginning and at the end of the novel, stresses the idea of renewal after death; however, it is interesting to notice that perhaps men do not want the purifying rain but they would rather live with their own sins: "outside the storm seemed over but the Cervecería XX meantime had filled with peasants, evidently refugees from it."⁶² In the first chapter, Laruelle sees that "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"⁶⁸ (*italics mine*). Now, it is his turn to receive the cleansing effects of the water but he thinks it is not necessary any more because it is too late. Also: "Rain, M. Laruelle thought. But his desire to get wet had deserted him."⁶⁹

In Under the Volcano the sea—"these seas, these pastures of experience"⁷⁰ also has the connotation of providing man's initiation into life. Both Hugh and Geoffrey had experienced "the limitless purification of the sea,"⁷¹ but Geoffrey had hellish experiences at sea which persecuted him throughout his life, while Hugh "did genuinely love the sea, and the nauseous overrated expanse was his only love, the only woman of whom his future wife need be jealous."⁷² However, as Hugh's sea life seems not to have been as effective

a means to maturity as Geoffrey's, at the end he decides to go to sea again and we begin to wonder if he is going to suffer the same process that his half-brother did when he reached manhood.

A very important symbol which belongs to the water motif is the fountain/swimming pool. Quauhnahuac possesses "no fewer than four hundred swimming pools, public and private, filled with the water that ceaselessly pours down from the mountains."⁷³ Among these, there is Maximilian and Carlotta's "covered with green scum, its steps torn away and hanging by one rotting clamp"⁷⁴ and Geoffrey's "small chuckling swimming pool . . . in which the water appeared a deep turquoise."⁷⁵ The author "intrudes" himself (or is it Geoffrey himself, thinking?) and associates the swimming pool image with its inherent possibility of salvation and rebirth: "might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its drought?"⁷⁶ If the Consul had decided to dive in this sort of "paradisaal river" of baptism, he probably would be able to slake his spiritual thirst, but, instead, his unbearable thirst leads him not to the purifying bath but to another kind of water, the aguardiente (firewater), from which he receives an illusory form of grace. The sentence appears again but with a new meaning and a new construction, when Lowry makes a pun on the word drought: "Might a soul bathe there or quench its draught?".

This indicates also Geoffrey's dilemma between "to drink or not to drink," that is, to be saved and purified or to continue his drunkenness, trying to quench his dreadful "thirst." Geoffrey's hallucinatory vision of an "object shaped like a dead man and which seemed to be lying flat on its back by his swimming pool"⁷⁷ is a foreshadowing of the Indian's death in chapter eight, as well of Geoffrey's punitive death.

Geoffrey, feeling an "inconceivable anguish of horripilating hungover thunderclapping about his skull," undergoes dream-like experiences, in which he sees that

the lake was lapping ... the waterfalls were playing ... but he was still thirsty. ... Then the lake was blowing ... the waterfalls were blowing ... he was blowing away himself, whirled by a storm of blossoms into the mountains, where now the rain was falling. But this rain that fell only on the mountains, did not assuage his thirst. ... Yet his thirst still remained unquenched. Perhaps because he was drinking, not water, but lightness, and promise of lightness. ⁷⁸

Here, the inherent illusory quality of the drinking is evident; he will never be satisfied, because it is not the soul-cleansing, renewing water he looks for, but the one that gives him a mirage-like pleasure.

During their morning walk, Yvonne and Hugh pass a "dried-up fountain below some broken steps, its basin filled with

twigs and leaves,"⁷⁹ a sign of its meaninglessness in such a disastrous world. However, it seems that there is still hope for those who persevere ; Hugh and Yvonne, who early in the morning had crossed a river, are to bathe themselves in a pool at the Salon Ofelia (while Geoffrey bathes his soul in mescal):

A natural waterfall clashing down into a sort of reservoir built on two levels . . . the lower level made a pool where Hugh and Yvonne were still not yet swimming. The water on the turbulent upper level raced over an artificial falls beyond which, becoming a swift stream, it wound through thick jungle to spill down a much larger natural cascada out of sight. . . . The Cascada Sagrada. . . . To where the rainbow ends."⁸⁰

Due to its artificiality, we cannot be sure if this water will provide Hugh's and Yvonne's purification and consequent salvation. It seems that Yvonne has reached her own and is going to a heavenly life but this is not true for Hugh.

As opposed to the water motif, we have the fire symbol which, in its duality, implies both the idea of purification, together with that of destruction. Walking home, Geoffrey and Yvonne see "a photographic enlargement, purporting to show the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre, of a great rock split by forest fires." Gazing at the picture, Yvonne thinks:

the violence of the fire which split the rock apart had also incited the destruction of

each separate rock, cancelling the power that might have held them unities. . . . She longed to heal the cleft rock. She was one of the rocks and she yearned to save the other, that both might be saved. . . . The other rock stood unmoved. 'That's all very well' it said, 'but it happens to be your fault, and as for myself, I propose to disintegrate as I please !' 81

For this purpose, the "rock" uses the fire water quite a lot and what occurs in the picture is going to happen to these two unfortunate characters: they are "split" because of the fire (drinking) and despite Yvonne's efforts, she cannot avoid Geoffrey's tragic, deliberate ending, his total "disintegration."

However, with Yvonne we have fire as a symbol of transformation, rebirth, warmth and love. Near her death, she is identified with the Phoenix, a mythological bird which arose fresh from its own ashes. Having taken mescal, Yvonne feels that "something within her was smouldering, was on fire. . . . But no, it was not herself that was on fire. It was the house of her spirit."⁸² Dying, she has burning visions, in which all her dreams, her plans for the future were "burning, burning, burning, whirling up from the fire they were scattered, burning."⁸³

The Consul is more than once referred to as "diablo," while walking in the Calle Tierra del Fuego (the Street of

the Land of Fire) and he once had actually acted as a "diablo," when, as an officer at the S.S. Samaritan ship, ordered that some kidnapped German officers were "burned alive in the furnaces."⁸⁴ However, the purifying fire has its effect upon him; Laruelle, with Geoffrey's letter in his hands,

half absently, yet on a sudden impulse, he held it into the candle flame. The flare lit up the whole cantina with a burst of brilliance. . . . M. Laruelle set the writhing mass in an ashtray, where beautifully conforming it folded upon itself, a burning castle, collapsed, subsiding to a ticking hive through which sparks like tiny red worms crawled and flew, above a few grey wisps of ashes floated in the thin smoke, a dead book now, faintly crepitant. . . . Suddenly from outside, a bell spoke out, then ceased abruptly: dolente . . . dolore! ⁸⁵

Definitely, this constitutes a kind of exorcism of the dead Consul's evil spirits, a ritualistic release of his soul, whose introductory ceremony seems to have taken place a little before, since "everywhere people were flashing torches or striking matches . . . [and] the cantina, known as the Cervceria XX [where the ritual would be effected] was lit by candles stuck in bottles on the bar and on a few tables along the walls."⁸⁶ And they chose the right day for doing this: the Day of the Dead.

Dealing with the earth motif, we are now going to analyse two important symbols which stand in a significant polarity--the mountain and the abyss--which are related to one of the main themes in the novel, the ascent/descent motif (this theme will be seen in the next chapter). At the end of chapter six, the Consul receives a postcard that had been sent by Yvonne a year ago; the postcard showed "a picture of the leonine Signal Peak on El Paso [a mountain, symbol of Yvonne's hope] with Carlsbad Cavern [*mine*] Highway leading over a white fenced bridge between desert and desert [Geoffrey's aridity] towards the Cavern, another very real abyss."⁸⁷

In the same way that his father went upward to the Himalayas, Geoffrey intends to climb Popocatepetl, perhaps in an effort to achieve self-mastery, or the affirmation of his (later to be lost) soul. It is interesting to note here that the volcano is a paradoxical symbol because it is both high and the entrance to the underworld. But this only happens within his mind--he also once imagines himself climbing the mountain Himavat "with heaven aspiring hearts"⁸⁸ but this is only part of one of his several dreams--since the novel is characterized by total absence of action toward salvation; it only occurs to emphasize Geoffrey's self-destruction (his deliberate drinking, his going to the Farolito, the release

of the horse, etc). The theme of inaction is also enlarged upon with the volcanoes, which are already extinct. We only see Popocatepetl in eruption when it appears painted in an artificial scenery which served as background for photographs.

The volcanoes also function as an external representation of the character's inner states; talking to Dr. Vigil, the Consul lifted "his face towards the volcanoes and feeling his desolation go out to those heights where even now at mid-morning the howling snow would whip the face, and the ground beneath the feet was dead lava, a soulless petrified residue of extinct plasm in which even the wildest and loneliest trees would never take root."⁸⁹ Undoubtedly, this is a metaphorical picture of Geoffrey's physical and spiritual impotence. As Geoffrey's opposite, we have Yvonne metaphorically represented as a volcano too, but now a very active one: ". . . she felt, crazily, as if something within her were smouldering, had taken fire, as if her whole being at any moment were going to explode."⁹⁰

The anthropomorphism of the two volcanoes shows them in a harmony that ironically contrasts with Geoffrey and Yvonne's: "Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, that image of perfect marriage."⁹¹ They sometimes rise "clear and magnificent" and "beautiful beyond belief"⁹² but they also seem "terrifying in the wild sunset"⁹³ as some of the novel's characters. In the

following passage we can see that the metaphorical image appears as a reverse of the reality it represents: ". . . in the tragic Indian legend Popocatepetl himself was strangely the dreamer: the fires of his warrior's love, never extinct in the poet's heart, burned eternally for Ixtaccihuatl, whom he had no sooner found than lost, and whom he guarded in her endless sleep . . ." ⁹⁴ (italics mine).

At the end of the novel, the polarity mountain/barranca appears again: Geoffrey realizes that he is "under the volcano" because he is in the Farolito from whence "Popocatepetl towered through the window, its immense flanks partly hidden by rolling thunderheads; its peak blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead, the barranca, the Farolito, directly beneath it." ⁹⁵ When he dies, he thinks that both Yvonne and Hugh had already reached salvation, for he suspects that "they had not only climbed Popocatepetl but were by now far beyond it" ⁹⁶ and he tries to reach his own heights but it is "too late" to do it:

And now he reached the summit. . . . Opening his eyes, he looked down, expecting to see, below him, . . . the heights . . . like these peaks of his life conquered one after another before this greatest ascent of all had been successfully, if unconventionally, completed. But there was nothing there: no peaks, no life, no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly: it

had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling too, whatever it was, collapsing, while he was falling, falling into the volcano ... yet no, it wasn't the volcano.⁹⁷

It was its reverse counterpart, the abysmal barranca.

Besides standing in opposition to the volcano, the barranca still has an important role in the story, as Lowry says: it is also "the ravine, that cursed abyss which in our age every man presents to himself, and also, more simply, if the reader prefers it, the sewer."⁹⁸ But things are not so simple as he says; if we associate the barranca with the womb image (as we are going to see in the following chapter) and with the Hell Bunker incident (and the connection does exist; both Laruelle and Geoffrey recall the Hell Bunker incident when they look at the barranca, as we saw in the third chapter), then I would say that, by transforming the barranca into a sewer, Lowry is (perhaps unconsciously) transferring to the novel his distorted view of sex, i.e., something dirty and fearful.

The Barranca has hellish characteristics; it is more than once referred to as the Malebolge, Dante's eighth circle in Hell. It is also called the "serpentine barranca."⁹⁹ So it is not without reason that Geoffrey's dead body is thrown there, thus arriving at the final point of his fatal voyage downward (to hell). Geoffrey himself foreshadows his tragic

end when, looking at the barranca, he ponders over it:

. . . the day offered too many immediate--pitfalls! It was the exact word . . . He had almost fallen into the barranca. . . 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 chops. One was, come to that, always stumbling upon the damned thing, this immense intricate donga cutting right through the town, right, indeed, through the country, in places a two-hundred-foot sheer drop into what pretended to be a churlish river during the rainy season, but which, even now, though one couldn't see the bottom, was probably beginning to resume its normal role of general Tartarus and gigantic jakes.¹⁰⁰

It is worth noting here that Tartarus, according to mythology, is a region of the infernal Hades, where the most impious and guilty men (like the Consul) were sent in order to be punished.

Turning our attention to the fourth element from the mineral world--the air--we can see that in Under the Volcano it is marked by the constant presence of dust, which, we could say, announces the dissolution of the world as it announces Geoffrey's own disintegration. It is also used to disguise man's shameful behaviour, as in the Samaritan incident in chapter eight, when "dust obliterated the scene . . ." ¹⁰¹ and also "dust, dust, dust--it filtered in through the windows, a soft invasion of dissolution, filling the vehicle."¹⁰²

In the first chapter, we have in a single sentence, a "lone section of dust"¹⁰³ in which it appears seven times. Sometimes the main characters appear in the dust, as at the

end of the eighth chapter when they arrive at Tomalin: "the three of them stood again in the dust, dazzled by the whiteness, the blaze of the afternoon,"¹⁰⁴ not only themselves but also "their shadows [which] crawled before them in the dust."¹⁰⁵ Besides the main characters, that old lame Indian also finds himself "shuffling through the grey white dust in his poor sandals,"¹⁰⁶ and even two little pigs, which disappeared into the dust at a gallop."¹⁰⁷ The dust, besides its foreshadowing role, also shows us the characters' inner, desperate state of mind, their imminent collapse. It is a symbol of infertility--the opposite of rain, which stands for Geoffrey's aridity, his physical and spiritual impotence. However, as the culmination of the character's tragedy approaches "there was no more dust"¹⁰⁸ because it had already made known to us what was going to happen and now that its function of foreshadowing the plot is accomplished, it disappears to be substituted by the character's own "dissolution."

HUMAN WORLD

We have subdivided this part into two others: in one part are included the human beings, the novel's characters who, in their turn, can either be main characters or secondary ones. In the other part we have the man-made elements. About the main characters there is not too much to say since

a whole chapter in this work analyses Geoffrey under the most varying perspectives, and we know that Yvonne, Laruelle and Hugh, who can also be classified as main characters, are only different aspects of Geoffrey's personality. Yvonne's role is that of "the eternal feminine, mother, mate, sister, and daughter, all things to all men."¹⁰⁹ She is associated with Jung's idea of anima, that feminine side existing within all men, that can lead them to either destruction or salvation. Here, I think, lies the hidden unity of these four characters: all of them love Yvonne and desperately need her because she is their "anima," or, to put it better, she functions as the anima for that larger human personality that is represented by these three different characters.

It has already been said that Geoffrey is an archetypal figure who embodies the theme of isolation and guilt as a consequence of an inability to love, or, as Day has it: he is "a good man self-destroyed by his inability to overcome whatever it is that prohibits him from loving."¹¹⁰ His personality can be well summarized by a passage taken from William James' Varieties of Religious Experience, which states the following:

In delusional insanity, paranoia, as they sometimes call it, we may have a diabolical mysticism, a sort of religious mysticism turned upside down. The same sense of ineffable importance in the smallest events, the same texts and words coming with new meanings, the same

voices and visions and leadings and missions, the same controlling by extraneous powers; only this time the emotion is pessimistic: instead of consolations we have desolations; the meanings are dreadful; and the powers are enemies to life.¹¹¹

Here, again, the effect is mock-heroic or that of inverting the order of myth or epic for special purposes.

The background figures are not so much characters as they are part of the setting. Almost totally deprived of human characterization, they function as symbolic representations of the world's tragic "status" or man's distorted state of mind; so, we have a gnome-like maid, an "incredibly filthy"¹¹² pimp, a young prostitute, a cantina proprietor who happened to be a murderer of his wife, a "swashbuckling"¹¹³ policeman, a "patriarchal toothless old" potter¹¹⁴ and also a "pelado," one "who did not have to be rich to prey on the really poor."¹¹⁵ We have old women with "completely expressionless"¹¹⁶ strong faces; among these, there is that "old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o'clock in the morning . . . whose stick, made of steel with some animal's claw for a handle, hung like something alive . . . and who also had a little chicken on a cord which she kept under her dress over her heart."¹¹⁷ Although this woman chilled Yvonne's heart because she thought that vision "was like an evil omen,"¹¹⁸ she is one who tries to take Geoffrey away from the Farolito and advises him of the dangerous situation in which he was to be

a little old woman. ... Her hair seemed to have been recently hennaed, or dyed red, and though it hung untidily in front it was twisted up at the back into a Psyche Knot. Her face ... evinced the most extraordinary waxen pallor; she looked care worn, wasted with suffering...¹¹⁹

But when she saw the Consul, "her tired eyes gleamed, kindling her whole expression to one of wry amusement in which there appeared also both a determination and a certain weary expectancy."¹²⁰ This friendly widow always gives Geoffrey good advice, such as the following: "Life changes you know, you can never drink of it"¹²¹; she mispronounces the word think for drink but the pun wisely fits here because drinking in this novel seems to have extraordinary overtones, including that of "illuminating" Geoffrey's conscience and enlightening his spirit. When Geoffrey is to go away from her cantina, significantly named El Bosque, she humbly tells him: "I have no house only a shadow. But whenever you are in need of a shadow, my shadow is yours,"¹²² thus proposing to share her greatness of heart with him, to help him in his spiritual hunger.

We also have beggars "hacked by war and covered with sores"¹²³ who are nevertheless capable of experiencing feelings of love and companionship, as we can feel from the

following passage:

Two beggars had arrived and were taking up their posts outside the bar, under the tempestuous sky. One, legless, was dragging himself through the dust like a poor seal. But the other beggar, who boasted one leg, stood up stiffly, proudly, against the cantina wall as if waiting to be shot. Then this beggar with one leg leaned forward: he dropped a coin into the legless man's outstretched hand. There were tears in the first beggar's eyes.¹²⁴

When children appear in the book, they are sometimes "small dark sickly looking"¹²⁵ children (i.e., Geoffrey himself); there are also dead children (Yvonne's son and the corpse that will be transported by express) and beggars; but these "wretched children,"¹²⁶ as Geoffrey calls them, bring back to him everything that had fallen from his pockets when he was in the loop-the-loop machine.

At the end of chapter nine, when Hugh, Yvonne and Geoffrey are to enter the tavern Todos Contentos y yo Tambien, they observe a weird scene:

Bent double, groaning with the weight, an old lame Indian was carrying on his back . . . another poor Indian, yet older and more decrepit than himself. He carried the older man and his crutches, trembling in every limb under this weight of the past, he carried both their burdens.¹²⁷

This weight of the past very well expresses Hugh's, Yvonne's and Geoffrey's weight of the past sins, which they carry on up to the present but with extreme difficulty. The author himself associates this image with that of "man eternally carrying the psychological burden of his father."¹²⁸

This explanation leads us to see the relation the image has with the Oedipus myth and also its Freudian interpretation. This passage, as all the others related to the lesser people presented here, also stands in opposition to the novel's main theme, the lack of love in the human being.

And there are many other characters, as for example, Dr. Vigil (a well-intentioned Virgil to match Geoffrey's Dantesque personality) who behaves like an "apostle" sometimes, and Fructuoso Sanabria, the Chief of Gardens, "who looked pure-bred Castilian,"¹²⁹ in whom the Consul saw "the image of himself when, lean, bronzed, serious, beardless, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assumed the Vice-Consulship in Granada."¹³⁰ The Chief of Gardens, a symbolic image of the angel Michael who expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise (though he is also a fascist, and therefore, a devil), decides the fate of the Consul, sending him away from earth (to hell).

Besides the human beings, we have also the things they create. From the novel's very beginning, we come to know that Quaunhahuac possessed "eighteen churches and fifty-seven cantinas."¹³¹ There is a church for the bereaved and lonely, "those who have nobody them with,"¹³² like Geoffrey himself. We also have ruined churches, "full of pumpkins, windows bearded with grass. Burned, perhaps, in the revolution, its

exterior was blackened with fire, and it had an air of being damned,"¹³³ an external representation of Geoffrey's desolate state. Not only the church appears in ruins but also a castle, "a grotesque remnant of love's mansion,"¹³⁴ which is an image of Geoffrey and Yvonne's relationship and a visible sign of what is going to happen to Yvonne's dream-like plans for the future:

the broken pillars, in the half-light,
might have been waiting to fall down.
... The shattered evil-smelling chapel,
overgrown with weeds, the crumbling walls,
splashed with urine on which scorpions
lurked ... this place, where love had
once brooded, seemed part of a nightmare.¹³⁵

A French chateau is turned into a brewery, in the same way that a monastery gave place to the infernal Farolito.

All the other cantinas have very suggestive names; some of them indicate the existing possibilities of salvation and rebirth, like the one called El Puerto del Sol in Independencia, in which "the doomed men would be already crowding into the warmth of the sun, waiting for the shutters to roll up with a crash of trumpets . . ." ¹³⁶; another one is called Amor de los Amores and also Señora Gregorio's El Bosque, which was Geoffrey's "sanctuario." However, we also have the ominous La Sepultura. The cantina Todos Contentes y yo También (despite the tragedy that happens all over the world) stresses the theme of alienation, also present in the novel. Most important of all is the Farolito, "The Lighthouse, the

lighthouse that invites the storm, and lights it,"¹³⁷ the paradise of Geoffrey's despair, i.e., an upside down paradise, in which he is going to find a "solution" for his tragic anxieties. This turns to be very ironic when we remember that Christ is associated with a lighthouse in Christian symbolism.

The several instruments of communication referred to in the novel, serve mainly to stress the theme of isolation; we have Geoffrey's unposted letter to Yvonne, in which we feel that his pleas for salvation--written in a literary, metaphorically sophisticated way that does not fit a sincere appeal for help--are less directed to his potential savior than to his own self. Besides this, we have the postcard Yvonne sent to Geoffrey but which unfortunately came "too late" because it, curiously, "had wandered far afield."¹³⁸

A little before his death, Geoffrey receives a package containing Yvonne's letters, which she wrote "till her heart broke"¹³⁹ but which, strangely, had also arrived too late for Geoffrey to withdraw; now he is so completely detached from the outside, real world that he does not understand the things he reads:

"Do you remember tomorrow?" he read. No, he thought; the words sank like stones in his mind.--It was a fact that he was losing touch with his situation . . . He was dissociated from himself, and at the same time he saw this plainly, the shock of receiving the letters

having in a sense waked him, if only, so to say, from one somnambulism into another; he was drunk, he was sober, he had a hangover, all at once."¹⁴⁰

His cynical response to Yvonne's desperate appeals of love and forgiveness is another evidence of misunderstanding between men and failure to trust each other. However, he is conscious of the terrifying situation in which he finds himself:

The Consul read this sentence over and over again, the same sentence, the same letter, all of the letters vain as those arriving on shipboard in port for one lost at sea, because he found some difficulty in focusing, the words kept blurring and dissembling, his own name starting out at him: but the mescal had brought him in touch with his situation again to the extent that he did not now need to comprehend any meaning in the words beyond their abject confirmation of his own lostness, his own fruitless selfish ruin, now perhaps finally self-imposed.¹⁴¹

The final words of the telegram sent to Hugh--"stop Firmin"--appear without any kind of punctuation and this enables us to interpret these two words as a serious warning (originally it means that a full stop is to be put there), not to Hugh but to his half-brother. However, Geoffrey does not see it and therefore, this very telegram does stop his senseless voyage, for it will become an important instrument in Geoffrey's death. It is not only the breakdown in human communication that we observe, but also the communication with the above world; wanting to seek a doctor, Geoffrey goes to the telephone and shouts for God in an earnest call for

help but he held the receiver the wrong way around. Thus, he is caught in a solipsistic circle, in which he can talk only to himself. As the telephone does not serve for Geoffrey's needs, he does not use it any more and let it ring, "the tintinnabulation beating around the empty rooms like a trapped bird."¹⁴² Later on, however, the telephone works properly for those whom it should not work for: for the men who are going to kill Geoffrey, perhaps after receiving telephone orders from above.

We also have an important form of communication provided by several posters, advertisements and signs, which appear throughout the novel with the most varying messages. A. C. Nyland said that Lowry uses advertisements

as links with the background. Sometimes ... advertisements serve as anchors by which the character is moored to reality; sometimes they are bridges by which the characters make the transition from thought to thought, or from present time to past time. ... From his consciousness of the need to identify a scene by the use of specific details grew the ability to use what the advertisements were saying as a means of emphasis, or to form a link in the development of complicated thought.¹⁴³

I would add that they also serve the purpose of illuminating the character's inner states. The most important of these symbols is the inscription in Laruelle's house—no se

puede vivir sin amar--which, we could say, is the novel in miniature, since it gives us the sense of spiritual and physical starvation that underlies all the failures in the novel. Also closely related to this theme is the sign that appears in the novel's several gardens--Le gusta este jardin que es suyo? Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan! Both signs function as serious advice which, not receiving the necessary attention, turn themselves into omens of the character's fate.

There are several posters announcing 4 Emocionantes Peleas: Box; Arena Tomalin. El Balon vs. El Redondillo.

This can imply Geoffrey's, Hugh's and Laruelle's "fight" for Yvonne's love, an irony since the novel is characterized by total lack of action. It can also symbolize the conflict between the Consul and his wife, that unfortunately will not be solved in a satisfactory way and both will be defeated. It is still a symbol of men's conflict in general, not only a conflict among enemies, or in a particular war, but mainly the struggle each man has with himself throughout his life.

The poster that immediately follows the one above is an advertisement for a murder film--Las Manos de Orlac, about which Hugh tells Yvonne: "it's a lousy picture . . . about a pianist who has a sense of guilt because he thinks his hands are a murderer's or something and keeps washing the blood off them. Perhaps they really are a murderer's, but I forget."¹⁴⁴

Hugh is trying to forget his feelings of guilt for having betrayed his brother. All the main characters in the novel are guilty of something and the poster is always present to remind them of that. Passing by the advertisement, Laruelle begins to wonder:

Yet what a complicated endless tale it seemed to tell, of tyranny and sanctuary, that poster looming above him now, showing the murderer Orlac! 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?¹⁴⁵

Here the poster stands not only for Laruelle's deep sense of guilt but also for the universal guilt of contemporary men, of the murderous tragedy of war. In the dying Indian incident, Orlac's murderer's hands are concretely realized in the Pelado, who triumphantly and cynically stole the Indian's money: "the pelado's smeared conquistador's hands, that had clutched the melon, now clutched a sad bloodstained pile of silver pesos and centavos."¹⁴⁶ And this incident is foreshadowed by the poster itself; in chapter four, when Hugh and Yvonne see this same Indian resting near La Sepultura, they also see the advertisement stuck on a tree to which the Indian's horse was tethered. And at the beginning of chapter eight (when the incident occurs), while Yvonne, Hugh and Geoffrey are in the bus, "they passed tall hexagonal stands

pasted with advertisements for Yvonne's cinema: Las Manos de Orlac. Elsewhere posters for the same film showed a murderer's hands laced with blood."¹⁴⁷ The Consul also has strong reasons for experiencing feelings of guilt: he does not love people as he loves his drinking and in his isolation he goes on destroying himself and the people who love him and could thus save him. More than once, chances for salvation appear: Geoffrey once passed by an advertisement at the foot of the fountain: "Peter Lorre en Las Manos de Orlac, a las 6.30 p.m."¹⁴⁸ Here the Consul could wash off his guilt and be clean and able to love again, as Leruelle is telling him: "What about the damage you've done to her life . . . After all your howling . . . If you've got her back!--If you've got this chance."¹⁴⁹ But he rather prefers his love for mescal and embraces all its tragic results.

There are many other examples of mental problems and feelings externally depicted in the novel through posters and advertisements; there is one in Dr. Vigil's windows: "Dr. Arturo Diaz Vigil, Médico Cirujano Y Partero, . . . En enfermedades de niños, Indisposiciones nerviosas,"¹⁵⁰ which differs from the one which appears at the end: "Clinica Dr. Vigil, Enfermedades Secretas de Ambos Sexos, Vias Urinarias, Trastornos Sexuales, Debilidad Sexual, Derrames Nocturnos, Emisiones Prematuras, Espermatarrea Impotencia,"¹⁵¹ but they

both indicate Geoffrey's big problems and the need he has for medical care. Also, the chances for salvation appear in the form of a calendar which Geoffrey sees (and here lies the irony of the situation) in Maria's bedroom, the prostitute with whom he will take one more step toward his destruction:

The Consul's eyes focused a calendar behind the bed. He had reached his crisis at last, a crisis without possession, almost without pleasure finally, and what he saw might have been, no, he was sure it was, a picture of Canada. Under a brilliant full moon a stag stood by a river down which a man and a woman were paddling a birch-bark canoe. This calendar was set to the future . . .¹⁵²

Lowry's mind, as Day says, "worked centrifugally"¹⁵³; we sometimes have a single image, from which several meanings emerge, in the same way that, around a single meaning, several images appear. Also, at certain moments (as the dying Indian incident in chapter eight and Geoffrey's death in chapter twelve), the novel's several lines of development seem to converge to a specific image, with all its strands (religious, political, supernatural, etc.), gathered together in that image. So, we must pay attention to Markson, when he tells us that the novel "demands to be read as we look at a mural: where individual stanzas or even lines may bear no immediate relationship to those nearest them, they hold their decisive, reflexive place in the whole when viewed spatially."¹⁵⁴

Markson insists on the novel's "spatially mythic construction"

and the way Lowry uses symbols makes evident this characteristic of the work. Here we can conclude that, from the analysis of the symbols we have just done, we can see that some of them have archetypal significance and others are based also on mythological patterns, but these are manipulated in a wisely twisted way, to fit his peculiar thematic purposes, i.e., specifically, parody, irony, mock-heroic effects which undercut the Consul's pretensions even as they seem to affirm them.

Lowry's use of leitmotif also gives us the idea of cyclic repetition, inherently present in the book. He stresses this characteristic of the novel by choosing for it a circular structure; we do not have to stop reading it at the end of the twelfth chapter, as he tells us:

No, the book should be seen as essentially trochal, I repeat, the form of it as a wheel so that, when you get to the end, if you have read carefully, you should want to turn back to the beginning again, where it is not impossible, too, that your eye might alight once more upon Sophocles' Wonders are many and none is more wonderful than man--just to cheer you up.¹⁵⁵

And Day adds:

The whole work is, as he says, a wheel, and a wheel in constant motion. Under the Volcano is a highly dynamic work, and one must keep the idea of kinesis always in his mind as he journeys through it. The dynamics are cinematic, dramatic and most probably have their origins in the play by Jean Cocteau that Lowry saw twice in Paris, May, 34: La Machine Infernale.¹⁵⁶

By using symbols in such a repetitive, cyclic way, Lowry perhaps also wanted to show us that history itself is cyclic, that is, the facts that appear throughout time are only different representations of previous events, as well as man's individual existence, which is also marked by this recurrence of experiences from past through present up to the future. However, we must be aware of the particular effects of Lowry's use of mythological patterns, together with the ironic inversions he makes of these patterns. It seems that, by having it both ways, the author wants to show us the Consul as a character tied to linear history as well as a compound of archetypal echoes.

Let me finish this chapter with Margerie's comments about what she thinks is a fault in her husband's writing since it is closely related with the subject just presented. However, I personally disagree with her opinion because I think that Lowry's complicated style once more confirms the great quality of his work:

I am not blind to Malcolm's faults as a writer. His astonishing awareness of the thickness of life, of the layers, the depths, the abysses, interlocking and inter-related, causes him to write a symphony where anyone else would have written a sonata or at most a concerto, and this makes his work sometimes appear dispersed, whereas actually the form and context have arisen so inextricably one from the other that they cannot be dissociated. Then too he is cramped, for instance to some extent as a novelist by the subjective equipment of a poet, so that I doubt if he could ever be a great novelist of "character."

CHAPTER SIX
ARCHETYPAL MOTIFS AND THEIR INVERSIONS
IN UNDER THE VOLCANO

This chapter will consist basically of an analysis of three important themes in the novel--the idea of rebirth, the principle of opposites and the journey theme--which are closely related to mythological features and thus have a strong archetypal significance. These themes sometimes overlap, but for purposes of presentation I will analyse each of them separately, trying to see how they contribute to make Geoffrey an archetypal character and the novel a universal, impersonal, mythological work. At the same time, I will analyse the inversions Lowry makes of these mythological patterns.

We know that, although Lowry knows Jung's theories, (or perhaps because of it) he retains control over his characterization of the Consul because, as an artist, he is much more than simply a "conductor" of archetypal motifs. The novel undoubtedly has a lot of mythological content but Geoffrey, who can be characterized as a very learned and pompous man, may be using mythology in order to rationalize his degeneracy, his cowardice, and unwillingness to act. We could, therefore, say that, concerning myth, the novel is ambiguous in the creative sense, i.e.,

asserts both the mythic theme which sees Geoffrey as a timeless hero and the "mock heroic" idea that he is using myth to disguise and defend his aberrations.

THE IDEA OF REBIRTH

New lines are wreathed on old lines half erased,
 And these on older still; and so forever.
 The old shines through the new and colors it.
 What's new? What's old? All things have double meanings.

Conrad Aiken, Palimpsest¹

The idea of rebirth is connected in meaning with that of the "cyclic" notion, "the 'timeless paradox' of death and rebirth in cyclical repetition"² which is also present in the book. An important symbol that frequently recurs in the novel is the Ferris Wheel, about which Lowry himself writes:

This wheel is of course the Ferris wheel in the square, but it is, if you like, many other things: it is Buddha's wheel of the law . . . it is eternity, it is the instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return, and it is the form of the book; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards . . .³

In fact, this wheel, revolving ceaselessly, leads us backward once again into the past and brings us back to the present, i.e., November, 1939, back to events that had happened exactly a year ago, on the Day of the Dead, November, 1938: "over the town, in the dark, tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel."⁴ These are the words

that appear at the end of the first chapter, which, in its turn, also strengthens the idea that in the end is the beginning, because this chapter, although preceding the story in sequence, actually follows it in time. Thus, by placing an epilogue in the place of a prologue, the author builds for his novel a circular structure that stresses the "paradoxical" motif of continuance of death and rebirth, afforded by the wheel image.

We can feel the concept of death and resurrection implicitly underlying all statements in the novel and it is not without reason that Lowry causes the novel's main action to occur on the Day of the Dead, a day of mourning but also a day of celebration because it is on this day that the dead come to life:

As the processions winding from the cemetery down the hillside behind the hotel came closer the plangent sounds of their chanting were borne to the two men; they turned to watch the mourners, a little later to be visible only as the melancholy lights of their candles, circling among the distant trussed cornstalks. . . . Only if one listened intently, as M. Laruelle was doing now, could one distinguish a remote confused sound--distinct yet somehow inseparable from the minute murmuring, the tintinnabulation of the mourners--as if singing, rising and falling, and a steady trampling--the bangs and cries of the fiesta that had been going on all day.⁵

And it is on this day that Laruelle, thinking about his friend Geoffrey who had died a year ago, sees a drunkard riding a horse and he associates this image with his dead

friend, thus actually bringing him to life:

he imagined the rider . . . galloping recklessly around the corner into the Calle Tierra del Fuego and on, his eyes wild as those soon to look on death perhaps an indication that the events of the past year are going to be repeated once more through the town--and this too, he thought suddenly, this maniacal vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled, somehow almost admirable, this too, obscurely, was the Consul . . .⁶

The idea of cyclical repetition is also emphasized by some subtle details such as the rain, which appears both at the end and at the beginning of the novel, reminding us of its cleansing, purifying effects that provide resurrection and salvation of lost souls. The Orlac film, which had been playing a year before, is going to be shown at the cinema this year again, and it makes Laruelle think: "hadn't he seen the Orlac picture here before and if so had he revived it as a hit."⁷

Besides implying its inherent idea of rebirth, the circle motif (which, according to M. L. Von Franz, is the "symbol of the self" and "expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects"⁸), is closely related to Jung's idea of the mandala, the magic circle that is the "symbolic representation of the nuclear atom of the human psyche."⁹ Throughout the book we find allusions that directly relate to this circle image, which is a symbol of cosmos but also of chaos; in chapter eleven, we have birds that "scattered

aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water" and the storm, which "must have been travelling in a circle."¹⁰ The Consul's shakes are described as "wheels within wheels,"¹¹ and his illusions as "a whirling cerebral chaos, out of which, at last, at long last, at this very instant, emerged, rounded and complete, order."¹² But these are only slight references that precede a very important one, which defines life in terms of this circular structure, where we can feel the universe as a macrocosmic representation of human life:

Scorpio, setting . . . Sagittarius, Capricornus; ah, there, here they were, after all, in their right places. . . . And tonight as five thousand years ago they would rise and set. . . . As Scorpio sets in the south-west, the Pleiades are rising in the north-east. . . . Tonight, as ages hence, people would say this. . . . And the earth itself still turning on its axis and revolving around that sun, the sun revolving around the luminous wheel of this galaxy, the countless unmeasured jewelled wheels of countless unmeasured galaxies turning, turning, majestically, into infinity, into eternity, through all of which all life ran on--all this, long after she herself was dead, men would still be reading in the night sky, and as the earth turned through those distant seasons, and they watched the constellations still rising, culminating, setting, to rise again--Aries, Taurus, Gemini, the Crab, Leo, Virgo, the Scales and the Scorpion, Capricorn the Sea-goat and Aquarius the Water Bearer, Pisces, and once more, triumphantly, Aries!--would they not, too, still be asking the hopeless eternal question: to what end? What force drives this sublime celestial machinery?¹³

This "celestial machinery" will keep itself turning endlessly; it is the wheel of life, mythologically symbolized by the wheel of fortune, that will never disappear because, as

a biological, physical principle, new forms of life develop from death.

However, the "machinery" has also a negative connotation implied in the symbolism of the infernal machine of fate we saw in chapter four, in the Oedipus section. Like Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, we have the "slowly revolving Ferris wheel" in the square of Quauhahuac that keeps in frightening motion in its fatal business of destroying human lives. It is the doom of poor Geoffrey, when he is inexorably drawn into boarding a very special kind of Maquina Infernal, the loop-the-loop in the fair:

He was alone, irrevocably and ridiculously alone, in a little confession box. After a while, with violent bewildering convulsions, the thing started to go. . . . But he did not like it. This was not amusing. . . . And it was scarcely a dignified position for an ex-representative of His Majesty's government to find himself in, though it was symbolic, of what he could not conceive, but it was undoubtedly symbolic. Jesus. All at once, terribly, the confession boxes had begun to go in reverse: Oh, the Consul said, oh; for the sensation of falling was now as if terribly behind him, unlike anything, beyond experience.¹⁴

And it is in this diabolical machinery that he loses his passport but keeps Hugh's telegram that will afterwards cause his death.

It is worth remembering here that even the cycle of the day, or the cyclic character of nature with its transitional movements from season to season, the phases of the moon, etc., follows this circular movement in time, which, in its turn,

can be compared to the organic cycle of man's life and his psychological development, as Jung wisely puts it: "the descent into the night of the unconscious, following the sun's circuit, which is followed by an ascent to the bright zenith of consciousness."¹⁵ These notions directly apply to Under the Volcano, whose action takes place between 7 o'clock a.m. and 7 o'clock p.m., the whole novel taking exactly one year. And it is in this period of one morning to night that Geoffrey tries to reach his maturity.

The menu Yvonne sees in the restaurant El Popo brings closely together these two paradoxical ideas of death and rebirth; she sees in it "a design like a small wheel round the inside of which was written 'Loteria Nacional Para La Beneficencia Pública' making another circular frame, within which appeared a sort of trade or hallmark representing a happy mother caressing her child." Immediately after noting this symbolic representation of life, Yvonne notices on the left side of the menu, a picture that foreshadows her own death:

a full-length lithographic portrait of a smiling young woman . . . with one hand she was beckoning roguishly, while with the other she held up a block of ten lottery tickets, on each of which a cowgirl was riding a bucking horse and (as if these ten minute figures were Yvonne's reduplicated and half-forgotten selves waving good-bye to herself) waving her hand.¹⁶

But it is for the benefit of the whole of mankind, or all the living creatures in the world, this natural, circular

flux where new things are being born while others are dying.

Even the bullfight in this novel stresses the theme of rebirth:

Yes, it struck her now that this whole business of the bull was like a life; the important birth, the fair chance, the tentative, then assured, then half-despairing circulations of the ring, an obstacle negotiated--a feat improperly recognized--boredom, resignation, collapse: then another, more conclusive birth, a new start; the circumspect endeavors to obtain one's bearings in a world now frankly hostile, the apparent but deceptive encouragement of one's judges, half of whom were asleep, the swervings into the beginnings of disaster because of that same negligible obstacle one had surely taken before at a stride, the final enmeshment in the tails of enemies one was never quite certain weren't friends more clumsy than actively ill-disposed, followed by disaster, capitulation, disintegration-- and . . . death, or a sort of death, just as it so often was in life; and now, once more, resurrection.¹⁷

Taking all these arguments into consideration, we could consider the Consul's death wish, his anxious desire to "sink lower still" as a desire to return to the womb, from where he could be reborn; and when he dies, he is actually thrown in a womb-like abyss. However, we can find an argument that opposes this idea, in Day's statement that

the Consul is terrified of life as was his creator, terrified of human responsibility, terrified of what he sees in himself. . . . All his magical posturing is only a way of hiding first from the world in which he has so signally failed, but chiefly from God, who, Geoffrey Firmin is sure, must hate him.¹⁸

If we deprive the novel of its mythological, universal meaning, we are going to characterize the Consul as a failure, a man who pretends to be doomed so that he can indulge his weakness. Thus, by avoiding involvement with the world he lives in, Geoffrey will have no choice but that of being expelled from the world he had been trying to deny, without any possibility of salvation, as we can conclude from Laruelle's thoughts when he takes the book he had borrowed from Geoffrey: "the book will by then have become an emblem of what even now [on this day of "vision and miracles" when the dead are reborn] it is impossible to return."¹⁹ Now that his friend is dead, nothing more can be done to help him. Here the "machine" image can be recalled again with pessimistic implications that now, its work has finally been successfully completed.

We can never be sure about Lowry's intentions when he wrote Under the Volcano because we can find in the novel enough evidence to lead us to quite different interpretations but, as my personal response to the book was also the recognition of its archetypal values, I would include here Markson's statement that "nothing does pass; it is only reshaped into art"²⁰ as an idea in which Lowry himself believed and wanted to communicate to us.

THE PRINCIPLE OF OPPOSITES

From Jung's psychological theory we learn that the experiences the psyche receives from the world always come in the form of contrasts and opposites:

All forms of life may be understood as a struggle of contending forces, a moving dynamic tension, a continual running counter to. . . . Everything depends on a condition of inner antithesis. . . . Energy depends necessarily on a pre-existing antithesis, without which there could be no energy. There must always be present height and depth, heat and cold, etc., in order that the process of equalization--which is energy--can take place. . . . All life is energy and therefore depends on forces held in opposition. . . . The amount of energy generated and set loose varies directly with the depth and intensity of the internal conflict. . . . After the oscillations at the beginning, the contradictions balance each other and gradually a new attitude develops, the final stability of which is the greater in proportion to the magnitude of the initial differences.²¹

We can say that the Consul's problem is the difficulty (or impossibility) he feels in integrating disparate parts of his personality, his struggle toward light and darkness, love and self-destruction, his soul and body, his inner and outer desires, etc. This can be considered the main conflict of contemporary man who Geoffrey represents and it can result in destruction, when man cannot reach a balance of these opposing forces.

The cabbalists say that "evil is synonymous with imbalance"; Perle Epstein pushes this notion a little further, explaining Böhme's theory that considered "all life to be

double, each state of nature implying its opposite--for example, there is no light without darkness . . . suffering is the condition of joy. In one supreme moment (presumably during illumination), they merge."²² On the other hand, Jung sees the dissociation of the personality as the cause of neurosis, man's "inner cleavage", the state in which man is in constant war with himself, thus being unable to let the harmonious flow of his psychic energies.

Throughout the novel, we see the characters teetering between despair and hope, their destructive, guilty past and their creative, paradisaical thoughts for the future. Unfortunately, Geoffrey does not reach the equalization process; on the contrary, he decidedly chooses "hell", his "Dantean" way towards heaven; he is a good example of the romantic idea that for the poete maudit (Baudelaire, Byron, Blake, etc.), hell is the only possible way one must take if he wants to reach salvation. His name--Geoffrey Firmin = infirm--very well defines his inner state of polarity that will never reach a balance. The barranca, "the frightful cleft, the eternal horror of opposites,"²³ is also an important image that fits Geoffrey's split personality and we can find many other passages in the book that reflect his disintegration.

As good examples of this principle of opposites we have the voices that appear several times throughout the novel, giving good and bad advice to Geoffrey, who is unable to decide which one he must follow; they form an interesting pattern of complementary polarities that can be associated with Geoffrey's id and ego (or superego), respectively. At the end, the unifying principle is defeated by his desperate, unconscious urges that are never in tune with his conscious reasoning, and the "good angel" realizes that nothing more can be done to avoid Geoffrey's destruction: "Now you've done it, now you've really done it, Geoffrey Firmin! Even we can help you no longer. . . ." ²⁴

While walking home, Geoffrey and Yvonne pass by a printer's shop in which they see some "brave wedding invitations . . . the same touched up prints of extravagantly floriferous brides," together with a picture of a split rock, showing "the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre"; this picture deeply impressed Yvonne because she feels that these images are external representations of their inner conflict. They are divorced and this separation has produced extremely bad effects in her husband who is now completely lost in his spiritual/physical paradoxes that will inevitably lead him to destruction. She desperately tries to save him and for this reason she has come back to him:

Wasn't there some way of saving the poor rock whose immutability so short a time ago no one would have dreamed of doubting! Ah, who would have thought of it then as other than a single integrated rock? But granted it had been split, was there no way before total disintegration should set in of at least saving the severed halves? There was no way.²⁵

No way because Geoffrey insists on his own destruction: "as for myself, I propose to disintegrate as I please!"²⁶ And this is exactly what happens at the end, when Geoffrey feels himself "shattered by the very forces of the universe."²⁷ His (and Yvonne's) coming death is foreshadowed by a grotesque picture Geoffrey sees in Laruelle's house, called Los Borrachones, in which he notices that

Down, headlong into hades, selfish and florid-faced into a tumult of fire-spangled fiends, Medusae, and belching monstrosities, with swallow-dives or awkwardly, with dread backward leaps, shrieking among falling bottles and emblems of broken hopes, plunged the drunkards; up, up flying palely, selflessly into the light towards heaven, soaring sublimely in pairs, male sheltering female, shielded themselves by angels with abnegating wings, shot the sober.²⁸

When Geoffrey makes up his "melodramatic little mind" and decides to go to hell, we have a definite break of the polar balance that, if attained, would bring salvation to both Yvonne and himself. But what happens is precisely the opposite: with their death, each one takes a different direction.

Looking for her husband, Yvonne reaches a point "where the path divided in two . . . [and] the two alternatives,

the two paths, stretched out before her on either side like arms--the oddly dislocated thought struck her--of a man being crucified."²⁹ This is a symbolic representation of the novel's structure, whose unity bifurcates from this point on; the action of the last two chapters occurs simultaneously but are separated to emphasize the broken unity of the main characters and their consequent tragic end. We could analyse Yvonne and Geoffrey as symbolic representations of, respectively, soul and body, the spiritual/mental and the physical values necessary for man to achieve the completeness without which he cannot survive. Yvonne also symbolized light, hope and salvation while Geoffrey's destructive, dark impulses represented her antithesis which could come to a synthesis through love. As Geoffrey is unable to love, he prefers the duality inherent in his mystical drinking (which is a means of enlightenment as well as a powerful instrument of destruction) and therefore the synthesis of the opposing forces does not occur, as their deaths clearly shows us: when Yvonne dies, she goes upwards, "borne towards the stars," as Geoffrey, dying at the same time, falls downward into the barranca.

THE JOURNEY THEME

Lowry's "drunken Divine Comedy" was, he said, to be constructed on a dynamic of "withdrawal and return"; like

Rimbaud's seer, his various personae were to plunge themselves, to extinguish their outer identities, usually with the aid of alcohol; and then to emerge from their own inner hells regenerated, now with their perilously gained vision able to join mankind, and to serve it.³⁰

It is striking to observe how consistently Lowry uses this motif in his works; almost all Lowry's main characters are going somewhere and these journeys are never only geographical but they are symbolic of each character's own pilgrimage, their inner voyage into the hidden regions of the unconscious. It seems that Lowry himself was deeply impressed by the downward voyage of self-discovery, which, he thought, was extremely necessary for man, and especially for the artist, so that this dominant pattern in Lowry's novels can be considered an expression of his own life, an incessant search, a long journey toward self-mastery and fulfilment.

Costa writes:

Lowry learned to convert the surfaces of life into mythologized megalomania. He . . . sought to penetrate depth beyond depth into consciousness, finding there his own darkness, his personal sense of failure, of honesty, integrity, kindness; and facing them, sought to transcend them in his art.³¹

We saw in chapter two (more particularly in Wheelwright, Frye and Campbell's sections) that there are important mythological features which symbolically represent the journey motif; as it can be traced to a psychological origin, we will try to describe this theme in Under the Volcano from the

mythological and psychological points of view, analysing also the peculiar way in which Lowry sometimes twists these universal concepts.

When Geoffrey identifies himself with William Blackstone, who had been a pioneer of an untracked continent, we can say that he, like the latter, is also an explorer venturing into unknown lands. He actually feels as if he were "a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell."³² Mythically speaking, it is necessary for man to sin before he can know the way to redemption; and this is also a "black romantic" idea:

Evil is not to be shunned . . . because it provides secret knowledge unavailable to the plodding healthy man. He must know it and subdue it employing equilibrium as his most powerful weapon. . . . This archetypal journey into the world of the shells becomes an example for men. They too must taste of sin in order to absorb the holiness locked inside until, at last, sin itself has disappeared forever and sanctity is all that remains.³³

The "Dantesque" nature of the landscape functions as an external representation of this inward journey. The whole book can be described in terms of an "occult ordeal" which follows two different patterns, that of the pilgrimage of ascent, evident in the symbolism of the volcano and Yvonne's offer of a new, paradisaical life of love and happiness, together

with the dominant image of the barranca, Geoffrey's descent into the abyss, metaphorically representing his downward voyage for self-discovery, his breaking out of containment in order to reach liberation and transcendence, or, as Jung puts it, to achieve the "individuation" process. However, the barranca can also be interpreted as a symbolic image of the tragic consequences of Geoffrey's irresponsible behaviour. By allowing himself to be dominated by alcohol, despising the possibility of salvation afforded by people who loved him, Geoffrey will have no choice: dead, he will be thrown at the hellish abyss which, ironically, is also a sewer, instead of being the wonder zone to where mythic heroes go in order to be reborn.

It is interesting to notice that, even the time during which the novel's main action takes place (or the "journey" occurs) can be described in terms of mythical features; the main action develops from morning to night, or from the darkness of the innocence; the superficiality of superego truths, to the profound illumination provided by an awakening of experience coming from the id domain. Yet this movement in time can be analysed from a quite opposite point of view, implying that, as time develops from morning to night, we observe Geoffrey's greater and greater remoteness from social and moral obligations, his deliberate, cowardly steps towards destruction which finally comes at night.

Following Campbell's scheme, we see that the first step for this mystical "ordeal" is what he calls the call to adventure; in Under the Volcano, this role is assigned to drinking, which is a powerful means of achieving spiritual enlightenment and wisdom. This image of alcohol as providing man's "rite de passage," clearly reflects the author's personal feelings about it; according to Day, "for him, intellectually at least, alcoholism was not necessarily a weakness, or disease: it could also be a source of spiritual strength, even of mystical insights--a positive force, one of which any man might be proud."³⁴ Lowry himself acknowledges the initiatory properties inherent in drink, represented in Under the Volcano by mescal:

But mescal is also a drug, taken in the form of buttons, and the transcending of its effects is one of the well-known ordeals that occultists have to go through. It would appear that the Consul has fuddledly come to confuse the two, and he is perhaps not far wrong.³⁵

Despite Yvonne's efforts to talk her husband out of his perilous journey, Geoffrey cannot resist the temptation afforded by "the necessary, the therapeutic drink,"³⁶ which he drinks as if he "were taking an eternal sacrament"³⁷ that acquires really religious dimensions:

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 of the Farolito that rolls up with a crash, as the unpadlocked jostling

jealousies which admit those whose souls tremble with the drink they carry unsteadily to their lips. All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster, is here, beyond those swinging doors.³⁸

This is all very well, but we must also keep in mind that, seen from a different angle, we can consider that Geoffrey may be using these fancy ideas only to rationalize his own doom. Thus, Lowry is also parodying the myth hero by making his drunk protagonist's degeneracy acquire such universal dimensions. The self-destruction drinking provokes is also evident; together with mescal, Geoffrey drinks strychnine from a "sinister-looking bottle," which, we know, is poisonous, as Geoffrey's good voice tells him: "all your love is the cantinas now: the feeble survival of a love of life now turned to poison, which only is not wholly poison, and poison has become your daily food, when in the tavern--"³⁹

Although Laruelle admits that Geoffrey sees "more clearly" when he drinks, he does not understand Geoffrey's "journey" through the dark kingdoms of the soul in search of self-knowledge, during which he must lose his mind before he can find it. Thus, Laruelle advises Geoffrey that, although he acquires a type of clairvoyance, he is blind to common life:

I admit the efficacy of your tequila--but do you realize that while you're battling against death, or whatever you imagine you're doing, while what is mystical in you is being released, or whatever it is you imagine is being released, while you're enjoying all this, do you realize what extraordinary allowances are being made

for you by the world which has to cope with you, yes, are even now being made by me?⁴⁰

Read at the immediate level, this passage clearly shows Laruelle's attempts at making Geoffrey understand the extent of his irresponsible drinking and its effect on the social world, from which Geoffrey is cravenly trying to run away.

Although we cannot be sure if the Consul accepts or rejects the call to adventure because the facts in the novel happen in a very contradictory and complex way, we feel that he goes forward in his inward journey, receiving from mescal the supernatural aid he needed to undergo a "rite de passage" to his maturity--or to his regressive downfall, his tragic self-destruction:

And the Consul was talking about the Indo-Aryans, the Iranians and the sacred fire [aguardiente], Agni, called down from heaven, with his firesticks, by the priest. He was talking of soma, Amrita, the nectar of immortality, praised in one whole book of the Rig Veda--bhang, which was, perhaps, much the same thing as mescal itself. . . . In any event the Consul, once more, was talking about the sacred fire, the sacrificial fire, of the stone soma press, the sacrifice of cakes and oxen and horses, the priest chanting from the Veda, how the drinking rites, simple at first, became more and more complicated as time went on, the ritual having to be carried out with meticulous care, since one slip--tee hee!--would render the sacrifice invalid. Soma bhang, mescal, ah yes, mescal, he was back upon that subject again, and now from it, had departed almost as cunningly as before.⁴¹

Here we may analyse a peculiar inversion of mythological patterns; in general, this supernatural aid is given by a woman who symbolises man's "anima," whose vital role is

to "put the man's mind in tune with the right inner values and thereby opening the way into more profound inner depths."⁴²

In Under the Volcano the Consul has to abandon his guide, his "anima" (Yvonne), in order to proceed on his journey. Yvonne tries to convince Geoffrey that he is on a wrong path that will lead him towards destruction: "oh, Geoffrey, why can't you turn back? Must you go on and on forever into this stupid darkness, seeking it, even now, where I cannot reach you, ever on into the darkness of the sundering, of the severance! --Oh Geoffrey, why do you do it!"⁴³ However, instead of her being able to guide him through a different path, it is Geoffrey who leads Yvonne to death. She arrives in Quauhnahuac "in the seven o'clock morning sunlight"⁴⁴ by plane (from heaven) in a journey which was "neither thoughtless nor precipitate"⁴⁵ to bring the love Geoffrey needed to illuminate his life and save him. But her husband is not interested in earthly values and happiness, for it is something more profound he is looking for. Yvonne does not understand that Geoffrey's values are completely different from hers and she thinks that his soul is lost (and perhaps she is right and sees his rationalizations) because it "has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness."⁴⁶ She tries to guide him out of this:

You are walking on the edge of an abyss where I may not follow. I wake to a darkness in which I must

follow myself endlessly, hating the I who so eternally pursues and confronts me. If we could rise from our misery, seek each other once more, and find again the solace of each other's lips and eyes, who is to stand between? Who can prevent?⁴⁷

It is the powerful mescal that does not allow her to exert her guiding role, that prevents him from following her, guiding him instead through different, dangerous paths, about which Geoffrey thinks with wonder:

he was not sober. No, he was not, not at this very moment he wasn't. But what had that to do with a minute before, or half an hour ago? . . . And even if he were not sober now, by what fabulous stages, comparable indeed only to the paths and spheres of the Holy Cabbala itself, had he reached this stage again . . . this stage at which alone he could, as she put it, "cope", this precarious precious stage, so arduous to maintain, of being drunk in which alone he was sober! . . . Ah, a woman could not know the perils, the complications, yes, the importance of a drunkard's life!⁴⁸

Here, the irony clearly goes against Geoffrey, who is unconsciously mocking himself in his attempt at giving mysterious, pompous connotations to his drunken state.

The apostle-like Vigil (as we characterized him in chapter four, in the Dante section) also qualifies as a guide who wants to stop Geoffrey's downward journey. Vigil, with "his practiced eye had detected approaching insanity . . . as some who have watched wind and weather all their lives, can prophesy under a fair sky, the approaching storm, the darkness that will come galloping out of nowhere across the fields of the mind," and he tells Geoffrey about his deep

problem:

I think mi amigo, sickness is not only in body but in that part used to be call: soul. . . . The nerves are a mesh, like, how do you say it, an eclectic system. . . . But after much tequila the eclectic system is perhaps un poco descompuesto, comprenez, as sometimes in the cine: claro? A sort of eclampsia, as it were.⁵⁰

But he does not succeed in his mission of "saving" his friend. Nor does the good voice that asks Geoffrey to "Stop! Look! Listen!" because it has something important to tell him: "Raise your head, Geoffrey Firmin, breathe your prayer of thankfulness, act before it is too late."⁵¹ Geoffrey sometimes feels really tempted to succumb to this hope of salvation:

The Consul wanted to raise his head, and shout for joy, like the horseman: she is here! Wake up, she has come back again! Sweetheart, darling, I love you! A desire to find her immediately and take her home . . . to put a stop to this senseless trip, to be, above all, alone with her, seized him, and a desire, too, to lead immediately again a normal happy life with her, a life, for instance, in which such innocent happiness as all these good people around him were enjoying, was possible. But had they ever led a normal happy life? Had such a thing as a normal happy life ever been possible for them? . . . Nevertheless the desire remained--like an echo of Yvonne's own--to find her, to find her now, to reverse their doom, it was a desire amounting almost to a resolution . . .⁵²

But the desire passed because "the weight of a great hand [the responsibility of his messianic, heroic mission or, perhaps, the weight of his physical and emotional impotence, together with his powerlessness to stop his alcoholism]

seemed to be pressing his head down" ⁵² and now he feels that he needs a drink. He misses his wife once more, as it had happened previously when, looking for her in the "Via Dolorosa," he wandered around, thinking about what he could do to prevent her from going away. However, he could not find her because, as he was looking for her, he kept drinking all the time and this led him away from love, to a different, solitary path, since he could not be faithful to both Yvonne and mescal at the same time.

When Geoffrey is about to leave the cantina El Bosque, the proprietress, wanting to thank him, says "sank you" and he does obey her, going still deeper in his desperate attempts at self-discovery, because he has already decided to perform his archetypal mission to "drink to the bottom of the bowl." He realizes that "it was a tremendous, an awful way down to the bottom. But it struck him he was not afraid to fall either. He traced mentally the barranca's circuitous abysmal path back through the country, through shattered mines, to his own garden . . ." ⁵³

Geoffrey goes on sinking faster and faster, despite his good voices' advice:

Geoffrey Firmin, this is what it is like to die, just this and no more, an awakening from a dream in a dark place, in which, as you see, are present the means of escape from yet another nightmare. But the choice is up to you. You are not invited to use those means of

escape; it is left up to your judgement; to obtain them it is necessary only to--⁵⁴

We could add to this sentence the words "love" and "stop drinking," which are words Geoffrey does not allow his conscience to pronounce because he has already chosen to take the opposite direction, leading his "anima" also towards destruction. The metaphorical incident of the armadillo clearly foreshadows their fate, when Hugh tells Yvonne about it:

if you let the thing loose in your garden it'll merely tunnel down into the ground and never come back. . . . It'll not only never come back, Yvonne, but if you try to stop it it will do its damndest to pull you down the hole too.⁵⁵

In fact, instead of exerting her guiding role, Yvonne follows her husband, drinks mescal and enters his enchanted, hallucinatory world, dying afterwards with him, when she is drawn upwards to the stars, back to her home in heaven.

When Geoffrey reaches the Farolito, mythically speaking he is crossing the threshold and entering a region of splendid power; his "sanctuario," which is constructed not like a light house but a labyrinth, is a path into the "Underworld" :

it was really composed of numerous little rooms, each smaller and darker than the last, opening one into another, the last and darkest of all being no larger than a cell. These rooms struck him as spots where diabolical plots must be hatched, atrocious murders planned as his own death which was going to take place there, soon afterwards ; here, as when Saturn was in Capricorn, life reached bottom. But here also great wheeling thoughts hovered in the brain.⁵⁶

This image can also be a symbolic representation of the belly of the whale, the womb from which the hero is reborn, after having undergone a metamorphosis. However, the irony is again evident; he is using the mythic view in order to justify self-destruction.

Even as the journey develops we can feel the chaotic nature of Geoffrey's search, because he is not so sure about what he wants; he reflects:

Christ, o pharos of the world, how, and with what blind faith, could one find one's way back, now, through the tumultuous horror of five thousand shattering awakenings, each more frightful than the last, from a place where even love could not penetrate, and save in the thickest flames there was no courage?⁵⁷

Sometimes he strongly desires to escape from his "dreadful tyranny of self": "Oh my God, this city---the noise! the chaos! If I could only get out! If I only knew where you could get to!"⁵⁸ However, he realizes that, if he wants to attain self-knowledge, he must endure these agonies of spirit:

I have sunk low. Let me sink lower still, that I may know the truth. Teach me to love again, to love life. That wouldn't do either. . . . Let me truly suffer. Give me back my purity, the knowledge of the mysteries that I have betrayed and lost.--Let me be truly lonely, that I may honestly pray.⁵⁹

Since he is inside the belly of the whale (the Farolito) and having already experienced a process of self-annihilation in which he is released from the ego (remember that when he

gets out of the "infernal machine," that Cocteauvian loop-the-loop in the fair, he notices that he is without his passport, an evidence that he has lost his identity), Geoffrey now has to go through what Campbell calls the road of trials, where he is going to find symbolical figures which are trials he must survive. It seems that he does not succeed at this stage; that old woman with a chicken and dominoes of fate is an image that appears in front of him several times. She actually wants to help him, but he does not realize this. As a consequence, instead of the mythic meeting with the goddess that would follow, Geoffrey meets a prostitute with whom he makes love, as a confirmation of his lostness:

--and the silent final trembling approach, respectable, his steps sinking into calamity (and it was this calamity he now, with Maria, penetrated, the only thing alive in him now this burning boiling crucified evil organ--God is it possible to suffer more than this, out of this suffering something must be born, and what would be born was his own death), for ah, how ⁶⁰ alike are the groans of love to those of the dying.

The next stage would be (according to Campbell) the atonement with the father, an oddly buried theme in Under the Volcano, for we know very little about Geoffrey's parents. Geoffrey's father went up into the Himalayas and Geoffrey wants to follow him upward but he actually goes the downward way. In his descent, Geoffrey finds a substitute for his father figure, the fascist police who also represented authority and are responsible for the Consul's death, a

definite form of punishment for a hero who has not performed his duty according to the established conventions.

Before returning to the common world, the hero must reach the apotheosis stage, after which he receives the ultimate boon that will give him indestructibility and superiority. Now, compare the Consul's inner state:

The Consul dropped his eyes at last. How many bottles since then? In how many glasses, how many bottles had he hidden himself, since then alone? Suddenly he saw them, the bottles of aguardiente, of anís, of jerez, of Highland Queen, the glasses, a babel of glasses. . . . His conscience sounded muffled with the roar of water. It whacked and whined round the wooden frame-house with the spasmodic breeze, massed, with the thunderclouds over the trees, seen through the windows, its factions. How indeed could he hope to find himself to begin again when, somewhere, perhaps, in one of those lost or broken bottles, in one of those glasses, lay, for ever, the solitary clue to his identity? How could he go back and look now, scrabble among the broken glass, under the eternal bars, under the oceans?⁶¹

When the classic hero acquires the wisdom he was looking for, it is his task to transmit this knowledge to ordinary man but sometimes he does not want to return to the common world. It seems that Geoffrey has reached this stage:

He laughed once more, feeling a strange release, almost a sense of attainment. His mind was clear. Physically he seemed better too. It was as if, out of an ultimate contamination, he had derived strength. He felt free to devour what remained of his life in peace.⁶²

However, he has not acquired yet his "ultimate boon" and it is necessary for him to go a step further. For this reason, he goes from the Parolito downward into the womb-like

barranca, from which he will be born again, resurrecting in the first chapter on the Day of the Dead, the day in which the dead come to life. But this "resurrection" is a bit anticlimactic and dubious and therefore does not fit in with a hero with archetypal dimensions. Thus, if we understand Under the Volcano only in terms of its universal meaning, we will be disappointed at the end. On the other hand, if we feel the subtle irony that underlies the mythic values in the novel, we will recognize Lowry's creative genius in his very special way of dealing with common themes. Under the Volcano gives us enough elements that enable us to trace the symbolic journey in which the messianic, archetypal figure of Geoffrey assumes the conglomerate guilt of mankind and decides to atone for all men, suffering this long day's dying to be redeemed and to gain deep knowledge of himself. However, we cannot avoid seeing this mystical, tormented ordeal of the spirit, this "battle for the survival of human consciousness" has also become an instrument of Geoffrey's destruction. As he has not sufficient power to restore order to the world, his attempt to overcome universal chaos turns him into a pathetic, mock hero. Besides this, we still have Day's accurate explanation of Geoffrey's mystical descent:

The hallucinations that he sees are only functions of delirium tremens. The Consul may (as he thinks to

himself, sitting on the toilet at the Sal6n Ofelia) feel himself "being shattered by the very forces of the universe," but it is simply his own poor madness, with its attendant fears and frustrations, that is destroying him. He is a major adept only in what he calls the Great Brotherhood of Alcohol. And alcohol does not offer "a perverse way to spiritual enlightenment," or even diabolical wisdom and power. It, and the cantinas in which the Consul drinks, offer only oblivion, forgetfulness, avoidance of human or spiritual commitment.⁶³

The fact that myth functions both seriously and ironically cannot be considered a weakness but rather a strength of the novel. Sometimes the Consul acquires really archetypal dimensions but his supernatural inner power can also often be characterized simply as a drunkard's rationalizing toward self-destruction caused by a strong fear of social responsibility. Being at the same time connotative and ambiguous about myth, Lowry makes it difficult for us to decide which one prevails,

Although the book is open to multiple interpretations, these quite different ways of understanding it do not deprive the novel of its remarkable value because it is not the theme itself that makes it an excellent work of art but the way this theme is expressed.

C O N C L U S I O N

"The reporter asked the ritual question: 'Why do you write?' Lowry responded, 'Out of despair. I am always despairing, then I always try to write. I write always except when I am too despairing.'

(Douglas Day, p. 400)

As we have stated previously, the present work has aimed at analysing the subjective and the universal, objective characteristics of Lowry's art and to judge how impersonal or personal is his use of myth, mainly in his best novel, Under the Volcano. As far as the personal characteristics of Lowry's books are concerned, we verified that there was a fundamental change in his writing between all of his previous novels and Under the Volcano. It is not to be doubted that Lowry used a lot of biographical material in his books but in Under the Volcano these actual facts are transcended and it turns out to be a book that has a great deal of impersonal, archetypal content.

In regard to the novel's mythological content, I would like to emphasize here a very important point: it is the fact that the universality of Under the Volcano should not be primarily understood as an unconscious expression of the author's archetypal impulses. Lowry does not belong to that category of writers who are characterized as "mysteriously" inspired conductors of such universal meanings. On the contrary, Lowry retains control over these archetypal patterns and manipulates them for his own specific purposes in such an original way that we feel he is

recreating myth, or creating his own mythology to adapt it to his very special intentions. Much more than Jung's "visionary" artist who uses myth seriously, Lowry is rational, critical, comic and satirical about it.

Here, it is worth pointing out that myth is not the only way of being objective or achieving "artistic distance". Indeed if myth is misused it can be a justification for very personal assumptions and prejudices. There are some passages in the book in which we feel that Geoffrey's characterization as an archetypal figure is simply a reflection of Lowry's megalomania and paranoia, as, for instance, when Geoffrey is depicted as a Christ figure who is being persecuted/punished by God for not performing well his role on earth. On the other hand, irony and the historical, existential sense of the protagonists' freedom of choice can produce an objectivity too - which help Lowry to rise above the folly of his character and enable him to separate himself from Geoffrey. We also know that, among several possible ways of understanding Under the Volcano, we have the "reading at the immediate level" in contrast to the symbolic or mythic reading at a "deep" level. Both have their relevance and importance and they lead us to quite different interpretations of the novel.

It is extremely difficult for us to find exact terms to define the figure of Geoffrey Firmin. Although sometimes he seems to reflect the author's complex personality, his social

displacement and emotional unbalance, the Consul is undoubtedly much more than simply Lowry's self-portrait. He can be seen as the archetypal hero who undertakes that dangerous, mythological journey downward into the wonder zone, into the hidden regions of the unconscious. But he can also be seen as a "clown", a man who ridicules everybody, or is ridiculed by the other characters, or even by the reader. In this case, Geoffrey's archetypal voyage could be analysed mock-heroically, this mythic vision being only a justification for his solipsistic alcoholism.

The controversy over Lowry turns around the question of whether he is a personal writer who presents his protagonist in a historical context, or an impersonal writer who presents archetypal, timeless verities. In this sense, I found it more correct to adopt a mixed view of Lowry's art - that to a certain extent, he is an inspired conductor but beyond that he is a modern, self-conscious artist who uses myth for his own ends. And, I think, it could not have turned out in a different way because, for me, the remarkable value of the book lies in this incoherent coherence. It is this inherent ambiguity of the novel that makes it unique.

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