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SOME RENAISSANCE ELEMENTS
IN MALCOLM LOWRY'S
UNDER THE VOLCANO

Malcolm Lowry's imagination is vitally in touch with that of many other authors and artists, notably with English Renaissance writers. The most important of these is obviously Marlowe, whose Faustus has a marked and explicit resemblance to the Consul, as for example on p. 40 of the Penguin edition of *Under the Volcano* (I quote from the "Modern Classics" reprint of 1968), where M. Laruelle is looking at the Consul's book of "Elizabethan plays," thinking of "Marlowe's Faustus" and confronted with "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight . . . etc." The Consul's "hellish fall" is no doubt a warning to the "Shaken" M. Laruelle, and Lowry's tendency to use *Doctor Faustus* for moral purposes is a central one in his book, as in the persistent dialogue between the good angel and the bad angel in the Consul's mind. The average educated reader of English will have little difficulty recognizing the Marlovian influence and the way Lowry uses Marlowe's masterpiece.

Other Renaissance influence is not so easy to detect, yet not without interest and importance. Not every reader will be aware that "The Case is Altered" on p. 27, which is used as (in M. Laruelle's view) a "queer name" for a pub, is also the title of a rather obscure play by Ben Jonson. The fact seems to serve little purpose as far as any possible resemblance between Jonson's play and Lowry's novel is concerned; what is typical, it seems, is the way Lowry has remembered what

must have been to him an arresting phrase, and appropriate after the Consul's youthful initiation into the sexual life in "the Hell Bunker," which is followed by the excursion to "The Case is Altered." We may find the symbolism a little heavy-handed in both phrases, but a network of associations, both temporal and spacial, was clearly highly significant to Lowry in terms of both his artistic procedure and what implicitly he wished to say. "The Case is Altered," as a Renaissance phrase, is to be connected with "the Hell Bunker" and thus, again, with Faustus, to understand that, in the Consul's case as in Faustus's, one sin is followed by another.

But more crucial and successful is Lowry's allusion to Marvell's "Clorinda and Damon," and by implication to other Marvell poems, in the phrase *Might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its drought?* which the Consul remembers verbatim on pp. 78 and 84.

Lowry may have known the poem in, for example, H.M. Margoliouth's edition, *The Poems & Letters of Andrew Marvell*, which was first published by the Clarendon Press in 1927. Nothing in that edition would have particularly directed his attention to the poem; nor would such a critical work as M.C. Bradbrook's and M.G. Lloyd Thomas's *Andrew Marvell*, which was first printed by Cambridge University Press in 1940, and which it seems the more relevant to consider when it is remembered that Lowry had been a student at Cambridge and that *Under the Volcano* was first published by Jonathan Cape in 1947. It may be assumed, therefore, that the singling out of the poem is as likely

to have been a matter purely of Lowry's initiative as anyone else's. What would have attracted him to it?

Marvell is, amongst other things, a pastoral poet, and this poem typically evokes memories of the Garden of Eden, with Clorinda tempting a reluctant Damon towards "Loves Shrine." We must see a parallel with the Consul's garden, about which his wife Yvonne ("Eve-onne") says, also on p. 78, "Geoffrey this place is a wreck!" – the irony being that it is the Consul who destroys his Paradise rather than Yvonne. The sentence *Might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its drought?* also assumes an ironic meaning in Lowry. In the Marvell poem, Clorinda states that near "Loves Shrine" there is "a Fountains liquid Bell" which "Tinkles within the concave Shell." It is in response to this that Damon asks his question. In the Consul's case, the memory of the Marvell poem is within the context of his obsession with liquor, in which he appears to be more interested than either his soul or Yvonne, although no doubt he has those, too, in mind when the fact that "The swimming-pool ticked on" reminds him of Marvell's fountain and a situation that does bear *some* resemblance to his.

The fountain occurs in yet another way, as an image, on p. 84. On p. 82 the Consul, having sneaked out of the house once he hears Yvonne in the bathroom, finds himself "face downward on the deserted street." He is reminded of Cambridge when an "English 'King's Parade' voice" calls out to him and he sees "the English striped tie, mnemonic of a fountain in a great court." This fountain is no doubt that of Trinity College Cam-

bridge, to which the tie – as the Consul and the Englishman agree on p. 85 – also belongs. It is, in Lowry's world, not at all accidental that Trinity is the Cambridge College to which Andrew Marvell went in 1633. And even before we or the Consul are fully conscious of all these facts, the "fountain in a great court" which the Consul "distinctly" sees has brought to his mind once again the question *Might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its drought?* By this time, that question has more implications than can here be discussed fully, or need to be. At the least, a reader who remembers the Marvell poem will be aware that the irony is the graver because the Consul's fall, in a more than literal sense, is to be measured against what is probably partly his – and certainly Damon's – craving for such a slaking of drought as only "great *Pan*" can provide.

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Queries

Jokes, Transmission of – There are, of course, all sorts of channels for transmission of jokes and tales. It has been said that the old-time Western Union and Postal Telegraph operators would tap out jokes and stories to each other to amuse themselves during hours when there was little business. Is there any literary or other docu-