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## Malcolm Lowry's "Under the Volcano" and the Romantic Tradition

The article deals with the relation of Lowry's *Under the Volcano* to Romanticism. In the complex web of literary allusions of this novel the specific analogies with the themes and the structural devices of Romanticism are established. Special attention is paid to Lowry's use of landscape which owes a debt to Romantic nature poetry. The parodic inversion of some Romantic themes and motives is analysed as an important part of Lowry's narrative strategy. The article concludes that the many echoes of the Romantic tradition immensely enrich the polysemantics of this late modernist novel.

Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, staging a powerful drama of the disintegration of the self, represents a polyvalent modernist text. The texture of the novel is an intricate web of literary allusions, parallels, reminiscences and echoes. Many critics who have commented on Lowry's novel have worked out parallels with the Bible, Dante, the Elizabethans, Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud etc. In the immensely rich texture which portrays a painfully personal drama but refracts so much of the European literary heritage there is one more literary affiliation to be discerned and that is to English Romanticism.

The main protagonist of Lowry's novel, the Consul Geoffrey Firmin, can be directly linked to the Romantic iconography of Cain, Faust and Prometheus. He can be just as well accommodated within the broad lines of the tradition of the "heroic rebel" as within that of a "homeless wanderer". In the dialectic of the struggle of good and evil which is staged within this novel, the traditional concepts of "heaven" and "hell", "salvation" and "damnation", are represented as the states of his own soul, as in Blake and Wordsworth and Coleridge. In spite of all the complex ironies, attending his modern plight, Geoffrey Firmin, like his Romantic ancestry, strives for the "moments of vision" which would allow him to "see into the heart of things". In spite of the ignominies of professional and private plight, his drunkenness, his pathetic inadequacies, his involvements in grotesque and debasing situations, Geoffrey Firmin is, in an essential sense, related to Romantic prototypes. His projected book on "Secret Knowledge", his attempt to attain to a kind of all-embracing vision of cosmic secrets is much more than an intellectual pose.

Through mescal and through extreme states of mind and soul he is desperately striving at reconstituting the ultimate vision which his fragmented self cannot any more attain. Plunging through pain and chaos in the self, courting disaster, he strives to reach a visionary insight and "to cleanse the doors of perception". In striving to expand his consciousness even at the price of unleashing destructive forces within himself he is a remote descendant of Romantic prototypes.

Some specific analogies with both the themes and the structural devices of romanticism can be established. Like Wordsworth's *The Prelude* Lowry's novel is a spiritual crisis-autobiography, telling of the struggle with the forces of inertia, dejection and the self-destructive tendencies of the inner self. In exploring his soul Lowry's hero is, like the protagonist in Wordsworth's great poem, involved in constant confrontation with the surrounding landscape so that the main structural points of the overall design are his communings with the landscape.<sup>1</sup> As is common in Romantic nature poetry through this dialogue between the subjective consciousness and the landscape multiple and subtle meanings are constantly read into the landscape until it is fully spiritually and emotionally charged. Like Wordsworth's poem, Lowry's novel deals with the complex texture of everyday life in which contingencies are given their due but crucial to the central design are certain configurations of events, certain dominant thematic clusters which weave a close pattern of the whole. Like Wordsworth's poem, Lowry's novel centres on memory and explores its mysterious workings. As in *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey* the writer's awareness of the double time scheme brings in complexities of treatment, whereby time present, time past as well as the intermediary stages interweave – similar to each other and yet subtly differing from each other – creating a complex fusion of different time segments which organically coalesce. Finally, both Wordsworth's poem and Lowry's novel possess a circular form. They are shaped in such a way that the end leads into the beginning and that they speak, in fact, about their own genesis. About Wordsworth's poem M. H. Abrams says the following: "*The Prelude* then is an involuted poem which is about its own genesis – a prelude to itself. Its structural end is its own beginning, and its temporal beginning is Wordsworth's entrance upon the stage of his life at which it ends. The conclusion goes on to specify the circular shape of the whole."<sup>2</sup> In Lowry's novel, the long first chapter is at the same time a prologue and an epilogue. Its final words, "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, *backwards revolved the luminous wheel*"<sup>3</sup> introduce us to the rest of the novel whose substance may be viewed as a reinterpretation of the past, that is to say, of the last day of the Consul's life, by his friend Laruelle, the imaginative artist.

Within the intricate structure of Lowry's novel microcosm reflects macrocosm and is thus in full consonance with the basic Romantic premise about the fusion of the self

1. Of *The Prelude* M. H. Abrams says: "... an individual confronts a natural scene and makes it abide his question, and the interchange between his mind and nature constitutes the entire poem, which usually poses and resolves a spiritual crisis. *The Prelude*, too, begins with the poet alone in an open prospect, responding in spirit to the attributes and alterations of the landscape, and it proceeds by recurrent passages in which the mind is made aware of a new stage in its growth by coming to a new accounting with the natural scene." *Natural Supernaturalism*, W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1971, p. 79.

2. *op. cit.*, p. 92.

3. Page references are to Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1963.

and the world, the subjective and the objective. The external setting, Mexican history, Mexican landscape, possesses a solid reality of its own but is at the same time correlated at every point with the Consul's soul and its crisis. The Mexican past, full of violence, betrayal and destruction, chimes in with the basic leitmotifs of the Consul's interior life; the Mexican present with the emerging conflict between the forces of order and the wild irrational forces of chaos is correlated with the destructive forces gaining ground in the Consul's soul. The physical properties of the landscape coexist with the interior dimensions of the Consul's spirituality and thus the very configurations of the Mexican landscape mirror his split self. The fearful *barranca* which meanders through the landscape, opening a chasm under everything, the mountains (a double symbol of destruction, associated with the volcanoes, and, simultaneously, of peace and fulfilment, associated with Geoffrey's dream of climbing the sacred mountain), the garden of the Consul's house and, by extension of meaning, the whole Mexican land which once suggested paradise but has been, through centuries of violence and destruction, converted into a nightmarish place of disunity and discord, are crucial components of the total picture. Physical things carry a spiritual and moral charge and thus the novel builds a dense universe of correlated meanings wherein things physical and things spiritual are intermeshed.<sup>4</sup>

The crucial supporting points of the structure are the Consul's great interior monologues which are, in essence, communings with the landscape. By an alchemy of transposed meaning, a description of a physical place exteriorizes complex spiritual processes. The landscape, which has the function of mirroring the subjective consciousness, grows into a variant of the interior monologue. Its genesis may be traced to Romantic nature poetry of which W. K. Wimsatt says:

"Both tenor and vehicle, furthermore, are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of the metaphors by which reminiscence is described. A poem of this structure is a signal instance of that kind of fallacy (strategy) by which death in poetry occurs so often in winter or at night, and sweethearts meet in the spring countryside. The tenor of such a similitude is likely to be subjective – reminiscence or sorrow or beguilement – not an object distinct from the vehicle, as lovers or their souls are distinct from twin compasses. Hence the emphasis of Bowles, Coleridge, and all other romantics on spontaneous feelings and sincerity. Hence the recurrent themes of One Being and Eolian influences and Wordsworth's "ennobling interchange of action from within and from without". In such a structure again the element of tension in disparity is not so important as for metaphysical wit. The interest

4. Many critics stress the importance of the role of the landscape in *Under the Volcano*. Cf. Octavio Paz: "The landscape does not function as the background or the physical setting of the narrative; it is something that is alive, something that takes on a thousand different forms; it is a symbol and something more than a symbol; a voice entering into the dialogue, and in the end the principal character in the story. A landscape is not the more or less accurate description of what our eye sees, but rather the revelation of what is behind the visible appearances. A landscape never refers to itself; it always points to something else, to something beyond itself. It is a metaphysic, a religion, an idea of man and the cosmos." *Landscape and the novel in Mexico*, *Alternating Current*, The Viking Press, New York, 1973, p. 15.

Cf. Douglas Day: "Far from being simply "Mexican colour heaped on in shovelfuls" the nature and man-made setting for the novel is quite possibly the most vital element in it, and expressive of the "meaning" of *Under the Volcano* as any of its other thematic levels. It is this chthonic level that gives the work its extraordinary textural density, its oppressiveness which is sometimes almost unbearable. Everything in nature is rendered alive and febrile, as in a woodcut by Munch or an oil by Ryder. Such vitality is initially exhilarating but – like a fever – ultimately exhausting." *Malcolm Lowry, a Biography*, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 332.

derives not from our being aware of disparity where likeness is firmly insisted on, but in an opposite activity of discerning the design which is latent in the multiform sensuous picture."<sup>5</sup>

The Romantics played constant variations on the interaction between the "outer motion" and "inner emotion", of which the poetic mind was the chief mediator. Coleridge spoke characteristically of the "sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world", and again of the need that the "poet's heart and intellect should be combined, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature, and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them".<sup>6</sup>

Lowry's novel establishes a world of total correspondences between the outer and the inner, between material and spiritual reality. Lowry claimed to be indebted to the Cabbala for this system of correspondence but it suffices to glance at English Romantic poetry to find a parallel which strikes more closely home.<sup>7</sup> In Lowry's narrative strategy the description of the landscape, which mirrors the subjective consciousness, turns into a variant of the interior monologue. There are four major consciousnesses through which events are filtered, Geoffrey's, Hugh's, Yvonne's, and Laruelle's, but by far the most important one is the Consul's.

At the beginning of Chapter Three there occurs a description of the Consul's ruined garden which imperceptibly slides into an interior monologue through the Consul's strong subjective reaction to it. Thus the description of the landscape powerfully projects an inner state of mind owing to the linguistic density of the texture.

"The tragedy, proclaimed, as they made their way up the crescent of the drive, no less by the gaping potholes in it than by the tall exotic plants, livid and crepuscular through his dark glasses, 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, the Consul thought distantly, seemed to be reviewed and interpreted by a person walking at his side suffering for him and saying: "Regard: see how strange, how sad, familiar things may be. Touch this tree, once your friend: alas, that that which you have known in the blood should ever seem so strange! 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. Consider the agony of the roses. See, on the lawn Concepta's coffee beans, you used to say they were Maria's, drying in the sun. Do you know their sweet aroma any more? Regard: the plantains with their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of evil phallic death. You do not know how to love these things any longer. 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 -"

"Hias Pedro gone then too?" Yvonne was holding his arm tightly but her voice was almost natural he felt.

"Yes, thank God!"

"How about the cats?"

"Perro!" the Consul, removing his glasses, said amiably to the pariah dog that had appeared familiarly at heel. But the animal cowered back the drive. "Though the garden's a rajah mess, I'm afraid. We've been virtually without a gardener at all for months. Hugh pulled up a few weeds. He cleaned out the swimming-pool too... I hear it? It ought to be full today." (70-71)

5. "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery" in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. by M. H. Abrams, Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 30.

6. Quoted in W. K. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery", p. 28.

7. Cf. Malcolm Bradbury: "Malcolm Lowry as Modernist", in *Possibilities*, Oxford University Press, 1973, and Jonathan Arrac, "The form of Carnival in *Under the Volcano*", *PMLA*, Vol. 92, No. 3, May 1977.

A "person walking by his side", interpreting to him his own tragedy, shadows his split self, which appears in many other guises: his inner voices, his good and bad angels talking to him as in a medieval morality play, the personages of Hugh, Yvonne, Laruelle, Dr Vigil and others, who embody facets of his own personality etc. The whole universe of signs speaks to him eloquently in an emblematic language which he reads all too well but chooses to ignore. The garden with its growth of plants, "dying of unnecessary thirst", speaks powerfully of the Consul's inner state, of the chaos prevailing in his mind and, with its connotations of thwarted sexuality, of the emotional and sexual impasse he has reached in the relationship with his estranged wife. "The agony of the roses", by a direct transposition of meaning, is the Consul's own. The thirst that the Consul feels is both physical and spiritual: physical because it makes him consume inordinate quantities of tequila and mescal which ruin his health but also spiritual as the Consul in thirsting for some indefinable spiritual satisfaction which no earthly fulfilment can satisfy, for the revelation of ultimate truths.<sup>8</sup> The theme of estrangement, of alienation from one's own nature, is subtly woven throughout the description. The Consul's state of soul brings to mind Coleridge's great *Ode to Dejection* as well as Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. The frozen state of the soul whereby the senses, perception and reason function perfectly but the capacity to feel and joyously to respond to the outer universe is irreparably damaged, leading to an overwhelming feeling of loss, frustration and despair, calls to mind the *Ode to Dejection*. ("Regard: see how strange, how sad, familiar things may be.") The tree which reminds the Consul of how different the universe looks now when he does not feel the impact of external things on his emotion ("known in the blood") might have come from Wordsworth's *Ode to Immortality* ("But there is a Tree, of many, one, / A single Field which I have looked upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone: / The Pansy at my feet / Doth the same tale repeat: / Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?") / . Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, the Consul feels alienated from the whole universe and unable to connect, unable to bring himself into some kind of *rapport* with the surrounding Nature, being severed from its vital rhythms. The incapacity to ask the suffering Christ for forgiveness recalls the similar plight of the Ancient Mariner when the dry lips of the Coleridgean hero in his state of dejection and utter loneliness were unable to phrase the words of a prayer. As in *Christabel* the evil is projected through the guise of sexual evil. The tall exotic plants in the Consul's garden, perishing on every hand of unnecessary thirst, staggering against one another, yet struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency, are symbolic of an "evil, phallic death". They mirror both the Consul's relationship towards his wife, and his final sexual disaster in the demonic *cantina* Farolito, where his choice of evil and destruction takes the form of utmost sexual degradation. The description of the landscape correlates with the present, with the Consul's state of soul, his general situation, his relationship with his wife, and

8. "He was lying face downward drinking from a lake that reflected the white-capped ranges, the clouds piled five miles high behind the mighty mountain Himavat: the purple chenars and a village nestling among the mulberries. Yet his thirst still remained unquenched. Perhaps because he was drinking, not water, but lightness, and promise of lightness – how could he be drinking promise of lightness? *Perhaps because he was drinking, not water, but certainty of brightness – how could he be drinking certainty of brightness? Certainty of brightness, promise of lightness, of light, light, light, and again, of light, light, light, light, light!*" p. 129.

anticipates the future (the events in Farolito). In fact, it contains within itself the whole configuration of the plot of the novel. As in Coleridge's *Christabel* there occurs a subtle inversion of the moral meaning through the use of the demonic double. In Lowry's description of the Consul's garden the plantains with their queer familiar blooms were once emblematic of life but now of "evil, phallic death". The good is transformed into evil in the same way as in *Christabel* purity is perverted into corruption. As the innocent *Christabel* was changed under the poisonous influence of Geraldine into an evil being (a mysterious transformation, never fully explained), so the Consul's love of life has been transformed, through a mysterious and not fully explicable process of spiritual transformation into a poisonous love of the *cantinas*, of physical and spiritual destruction. The powerful description of the landscape, which is emblematic of the Consul's life and death (the "evil, phallic death" is more than an opposite phrase with regard to the structuring of the action) incorporates a palimpsest of literary associations. The central literary source is Biblical, and the Consul's garden is likened to a garden of Eden which has been converted into a nightmare of history. At the same time many echoes of English Romantic poetry witness to the fact that this remained for Lowry a powerful source to be tapped unconsciously ever so often.

Some powerful effects in Lowry's novel are achieved by giving the landscape a hallucinatory slant, subtly distorting the real in consonance with the pressures of the subjective vision and its traumas and obsessions. Here is a good example:

"All these thoughts were passing through his mind — which, so to say, nodding gravely, accepted them with the most complete seriousness — while he gazed back up his garden. Oddly enough, it did not strike him as being nearly so "ruined" as it had earlier appeared. Such chaos as might exist event lent an added charm. He liked the exuberance of the unclipped growth at hand. Whereas farther away, the superb plantains flowering so finally and obscenely, the splendid trumpet vines, brave and stubborn pear trees, the papayas planted around the swimming-pool and beyond, the low white bungalow itself covered by bougainvillea, its long porch like the bridge of a ship, positively made a little vision of order, a vision, however, which inadvertently blended as this moment, as he turned by accident, into a strangely subaqueous view of the plains and the volcanoes, with a huge indigo sun multitudinously blazing south-south-east. Or was it north-north-west? He noted it all without sorrow, even with a certain ecstasy, lighting a cigarette, an Alas (though he repeated the word "Alas" aloud mechanically), then, the alcohol sweat pouring off his brows like water, he began to walk down the path towards the fence separating his garden from the little new public one beyond that truncated his property.

In this garden, which he hadn't looked at since the day Hugh arrived, when he'd hidden the bottle, and which seemed carefully and lovingly kept, there existed at the moment certain evidence of work left uncompleted: tools, unusual tools, a murderous machette, an oddly shaped fork, somehow nakedly impaling the mind, with its twisted tines glittering in the sunlight, were leaning against the fence, as also was something else, a sign uprooted or new, whose oblong pallid face stared through the wire at him. *Le gusta este jardín?* it asked...

*¿Le gusta este jardín?*

*¿Que es suyo?*

*¡Evíte que sus hijos lo destruyan!*

The Consul stared back at the black words on the sign without moving. You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy! Simple words, simple and terrible words, words which one took to the very bottom of one's being, words which, perhaps, a final judgement on one, were nevertheless unproductive of any emotion whatsoever, unless a kind of colourless cold, a white agony, an agony chill as that iced mescal drunk in the Hotel Canada on the morning of Yvonne's departure." (131–132)

Geoffrey's state "as he crashed on through the metamorphoses of dying and reborn hallucinations" conditions his responses to the landscape which is represented entirely

as he sees it. His double awareness colours all his reactions and splits them down the middle. A certain numbness and the impossibility of reacting sharply to his desperate situation where everything is staked on his crucial decision to leave drink and save himself and his marriage or go to his physical and spiritual ruin is mirrored in his reaction to the landscape. The garden appears not to be so "ruined" as he thought before. The sight of his house for a moment is lent the appearance of "a little vision of order" perhaps through its similarity to a ship ("its long porch like the bridge of a ship"). Complete disorientation, a state induced through the frightful quantity of alcohol he has drunk ("with a huge indigo sun multitudinously blazing south-south-east? Or was it north-north-west?") is accepted by him with equanimity ("He noted it all without sorrow."). The terrible words he reads on an imaginary plaque confronting him ("¿Le gusta este jardín? ¿Que es suyo? ¡Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!") at the perfunctory level of his consciousness do not produce much emotion ("words which, perhaps a final judgment on one, were nevertheless unproductive of any emotion whatsoever"), do not appear to touch him very closely. Yet, as the text makes unmistakable, beneath the superficial numbness the hallucinating Consul experiences things with frightful intensity and is, on a deeper level, more than fully aware of the decisive moment in his life that he is facing and of the need to act. This very fact makes the conflict within his mind take on an almost unbearable intensity. The illusion of calm and order is deceptive. He knows this with the other half of his drunken mind. The garden is ruined as the exuberant growth witnesses and as the plantains "flowering so finally and obscenely" demoniacally proclaim. The association with the bridge of the ship to which his bungalow is likened undermines the "little vision of order". (It was on the ship which he commanded in the First World War that a crime against humanity was committed and German prisoners were burnt in the ship's furnaces.) The word "Alas" with its double meaning /English and Spanish/ is spoken mechanically but is indicative of his having taken note of the situation at a deeper level. And, above everything else, the garden adjoining his own, takes on a profoundly threatening aspect, accusing him finally and irrevocably. The hallucinatory element has imperceptibly crept into the description until it fully takes over the scene. It is introduced with the "strange subaqueous view of the plains and the volcanoes" and the threatening gigantic sun "multitudinously blazing" as if it were going to consume the world, and the hallucination culminates with the imaginary plaque with its condemning words staring at him like a pallid oblong face and pronouncing its stern verdict. The fact that the Consul mistranslates the Spanish words and that the words in his mistranslation acquire a new and terrible meaning, condemning him irrevocably, gives an additional twist to the general hallucinatory slant of the description. Things constantly metamorphose and turn into their opposites (as they are wont to do in the Consul's mind) so that the initial numbness of feeling is converted into a final agony pictured insistently as the agony of a "chilled mescal" drunk on the morning of Yvonne's definite departure from him. The "vision of order" proves as deceptive as everything else in this fabric of self-deceptions and falsehoods with which his consciousness plays half-heartedly, delaying the moment of the final rendering of accounts with his own conscience. An almost ecstatically accepted loss of orientation is finally turned into a dull pain of loss as on the morning of Yvonne's departure. Through this complicated mesh of subtle self-deceptions induced by a drunk and hallucinatory mind, there persevere feelings of grief, loss and despair and a fear of some overwhelming moral

judgment that is going to descend on him. The hallucinatory slant of the Consul's mind, intermeshed with the description of the landscape, gives Lowry an opportunity to wrap up nuances of meaning in linguistic complexities which defy analysis. The hallucinatory element more and more distorts the landscape that surrounds the Consul, from the plains and the volcanoes – changed out of all recognition – through the apocalyptic sun, to a culmination in the description of the gardening tools, hysterically experienced as instruments of torture ("nakedly impaling the mind"). Such hallucinatory elements in Lowry's description are remote but legitimate descendants of Romantic poetry. We can cite, for instance, the boat episode from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* with its strange anthropomorphic metamorphosis of the mountain peak which appears throughout in the subjective projection of the boy's imagination and becomes a dramatic agent in its own right.

"..... lustily  
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
Went heaving through the water like a swan.  
When from behind the craggy steep till then  
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,  
As if with voluntary power instinct  
Upreared its head.  
I struck and struck again  
And growing still in stature the grim shape  
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me."<sup>9</sup>

The powerful effect of a sudden alienation from nature, of being wrenched from the comforting unity with it, is obtained by Wordsworth through insisting on the hallucinatory subjective consciousness. The "shadowy presences" which are so powerfully evoked by Romantic poetry in general have their equivalents in Lowry as do more specifically the sudden hallucinatory transformations of Nature into something alien, threatening and hostile, that occur in Wordsworth, especially in his descriptions of the "sublime landscape".

The landscape in Lowry has other extended functions. As in Coleridge, it may stage the drama of the soul in a phantasmagoric, fantastic setting, or, as in Blake, it may embody metaphysical meanings. Here is one of the most powerful examples of phantasmagorical landscapes in *Under the Volcano*:

"Mescal", the Consul said, almost absent-mindedly. What has he said? Never mind. Nothing less than mescal would do. But it mustn't be a serious mescal, he persuaded himself. "*No, Señor Cervantes*", he whispered, "*mescal, poquito.*"

Nevertheless, the Consul thought, it was not merely that he shouldn't have, not merely that, no, it was more as if he had lost or missed something, or rather, not precisely lost, not necessarily missed. – It was as if, more, he were waiting for something, and then again, not waiting – It was as if, almost, he stood (instead of upon the threshold of Salón Ofélia, gazing at the calm pool where Yvonne and Hugh were about to swim) once more upon that black open station platform, with the cornflowers

9. *The Prelude*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 56 (Book First, lines 401–412).

and meadowsweet growing on the far side, where after drinking all night he had gone to meet Lee Maitland returning from Virginia at 7.40 in the morning, gone, light-headed, light-footed, and in that state of being where Baudelaire's angel indeed wakes, desiring to meet trains perhaps, but to meet no trains that stop, for in the angel's mind are no trains that stop, and from such trains none descends, not even another angel, not even a fair-headed one, like Lee Maitland. - Was the train late? Why was he pacing the platform? Was it the second or third train from Suspension Bridge - *Suspension!* - the Station Master had said would be her train? What had the porter said? Could she be on this train? Who was she? It was impossible that Lee Maitland could be on any such train. And besides, all these trains were expresses. The railway lines went into the far distance uphill. A lone bird flapped across the lines far away. To the right of the level-crossing, at a little distance, stood a tree like a green exploding sea-mine, frozen. The dehydrated onion factory by the sidings awoke, then the coal companies. *It is a black business but we use you white: Daemon's Coal....* A delicious smell of onion soup in side-streets of Vavin impregnated the early morning. Grimed sweeps at hand trundled barrows, or were screening coal. Rows of dead lamps like erect snakes posed to strike along the platform. On the other side were cornflowers, dandelions, a garbage-can like a brazier blazing furiously all by itself among meadowsweet. The morning grew hot. And now, one after one, the terrible trains appeared on top of the raised horizon, shimmering now, in mirage: first the distant wail, then, the frightful spouting and spindling of black smoke, a sourceless towering pillar, motionless, then a round hull, as if not on the lines, as if going the other way, or as if stopping, as if not stopping, or as if slipping away over the fields, as if stopping; oh God, not stopping; downhill: *clipperty-one clipperty-one: clipperty-two clipperty-two: clipperty-three clipperty-three: clipperty four clipperty-four:* alas, thank God, not stopping and the lines shaking, the station flying, the coal dust, black bituminous: *lickety-cut lickety-cut lickety-cut:* and then another train, *clipperty-one clipperty-one,* coming in the other direction, swaying, whizzing, two feet above the lines, flying, *clipperty-two,* with one light burning against the morning, *clipperty-three clipperty-three,* a single useless strange eye, red-gold: trains, trains, trains, each driven by a banshee playing a shrieking nose-organ in D minor; *lickety-cut lickety-cut lickety-cut.* But not his train: and not her train. Still, the train would come doubtless - had the Station Master said the third or fourth train from which way? Which was north, west? And anyhow, whose north, whose west? ... And he must pick flowers to greet the angel, the fair Virginian descending from the train. But the embankment flowers would not pick, spurring sap, sticky, the flowers were on the wrong side of the stalks, (and on the wrong side of the tracks), he nearly fell into the brazier, the cornflowers grew in the middle of their stalks, the stalks of meadowsweet - or was it queen's lace? - were too long, his bouquet was a failure. And how to get back across the tracks - here was a train now coming in the wrong direction again, *clipperty-one, clipperty-one,* the lines unreal, not there, walking on air; or rails that did lead somewhere, to unreal life, or, perhaps, Hamilton, Ontario. - Fool, he was trying to walk along the single line, like a boy on the kerb: *clipperty-two clipperty-two: clipperty-three clipperty-three: clipperty-four clipperty-four: clipperty-five clipperty-five: clipperty-six clipperty-six: clipperty-seven clipperty-seven* - trains, trains, trains, trains, converging upon him from all sides of the horizon, each wailing for its demon lover. Life had no time to waste. Why, then, would it waste so much of everything else?" /283-285/

The hallucinatory element is even more prominent here than in the previous passage. The constituents of the previous passage are repeated with a heightened intensity: disorientation in a strange landscape, undefined fear of punishment, of retribution for some unspecified wrong done in the past, mysterious shapes which constantly metamorphose into new configurations, all vaguely threatening. The structure of meanings permeating this strange hallucinatory landscape is incomparably more complex. Beneath the surface representing the disorientation of a drunkard there lie meanings which refer to the central experiential complex that the Consul's thought probes here and elsewhere. There is a sense of the universe as chaos, which is accompanied by a profound existential anguish. Among the many literary reminiscences that interweave in the complex linguistic web of this passage, much beneath the Baudelairean or Coleridgean associations ("a woman wailing for her demon lover"), and the reminiscences of Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, the profoundest substratum of

meaning is organized by a savagely inverted biblical reference to Ezekiel's vision of God's wheels leading simultaneously to all the four points of the compass, symbolizing a well-ordered, morally coherent universe. Lowry's passage is a darkly inverted parody of Ezekiel's vision. It is a vision of a disjointed, disrupted cosmos, which has lost purpose and meaning, in which phenomena incongruously coexist side by side without any coherence, without being subordinated to any principle. The demonic trains are a deep-seated symbol of a disrupted cosmos, in which an individual cannot but experience terror and existential anguish. This cosmos, full of incoherent motion, defies reason and logic, balks any effort at definition. The demonic trains move simultaneously in all directions disrupting space into a shapeless mass of incoherent unrelated phenomena, while the four points of the compass, wrenched out of their place, make orientation impossible. A disoriented man stumbles through a shapeless incoherent space, his consciousness dissolving under the burden of existence. The only certainty is the threat of death, the threat of annihilation. It is embodied by these demonic trains which finally malignantly converge on one point in the shapeless space – the Consul's consciousness. These trains are a grotesquely inverted, grotesquely transposed version of Ezekiel's vision of wheels within wheels, bespeaking a coherent, well-ordered universe which is permeated by God's purpose. Like the Ferris wheel in the plaza on which the drunk Consul in a heart-stopping moment hangs upside-down, the demonic trains belong to the deepest symbolic substratum of Lowry's novel whose polysemantics, referring to the Consul's existential vertigo, is of an especially intense order.

In this context it is interesting to recall the Blakean reinterpretation of Ezekiel's vision both in writing and painting. In his article "Wheels Within Wheels" Edward J. Rose states that in *Jerusalem Blake* "creates a demonic parody of Ezekiel's wheels, which modulate into the "Satanic wheels", the "Wheels of Enitharmon", the "Iron Wheels of War", the "Starry Wheels" of Fallen Albion's sons, and the "Wheel of Fire" or "Wheel of Hand". The author further says that "In the first part of *Jerusalem*, Blake introduces the demonic starry wheels ... and the apocalyptic wheels of Ezekiel .... associated with the four Zoas and the fourfold vision:

And the four Points are thus beheld in Great Eternity  
West, the Circumference: South, the Zenith: North  
The Nadir: East, the Center, unapproachable for ever.  
These are the four Faces towards the Four Worlds of Humanity  
In every Man. Ezekiel saw them by Chebars flood.  
And the Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East.  
And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North."

In his article Edward Rose works out the relation between the wheels and the four Zoas. He says: "The four Zoas who in the Apocalypse at the end of *Jerusalem* are united in the Fourfold Man, are divided and opposed in fallen man. As wheels they are no longer synchronized, and this failure to synchronize is, on one hand, a parody of the wheels Ezekiel beheld, and, on the other hand, a description of fragmented vision. Instead of being wheels within wheels, the Zoas have become wheels without wheels. They destroy the very spirit and unity which they are representative of in man, in the vision of the prophet, and in the poem. Their "vehicular" character is perverted .... When Albion walks in the "Four Complexions", the synchronization of the wheels is restored ....

Blake's painting, "Ezekiel's Vision of the Eyed Wheels" portrays these "Living Creatures" in action, and the starry eyed wheels should be contrasted with the cog wheels portrayed in *Jerusalem*.

Once the wheels are re-synchronized, no longer "in opposition deadly", no longer "poisonous", they go where the spirit goes, for now "the spirit of the living creatures" is "in the wheels also". The wheels are seen in "Visions of Imagination", not in the abstract "Harmonies of Concords and Discords", which are ratios geared to the Rational Morality."<sup>10</sup>

A parody of Ezekiel's wheels, as we see, occurs both in Blake and Lowry. In Blake it is correlated with fragmented vision, in Lowry it is correlated with existential anguish.

## II

The Coleridgean associations are an integral part of the texture of *Under the Volcano*. A fascination with extreme states of soul, with sin and evil as opposed to sanity and normality, is something both authors share. Coleridge's portrayal of a frozen state of soul, of an inability to function as an integral personality, of the pain of the loss of the creative imagination, has its analogy in Lowry whose novel may be envisaged as a complex transposition of the *Ode to Dejection*. The lamentation over the loss of the creative imagination has a strong autobiographical element in both Coleridge and Lowry. In the course of the working-out of this theme both writers experience a great flare of the creative impulse which inherently contradicts the theme of spiritual aridity which is at the centre of both the poem and the novel. As in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, the principle of self-division goes right through the landscape of *Under the Volcano* and a chasm opens under everything. But while Coleridge reconciles the disharmonies and the disparities of the tumultuous nether landscape and the harmonious upper landscape in the ultimate harmony of the great dome ("The shadow of the dome of pleasure / Floated midway on the waves; / Where was heard the double measure / From the fountain and the caves. / It was a miracle of rare device, / A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!"), there is no such reconciliation in Lowry's novel. The tragic split goes right through the bone of everything and is ultimately unhealable. Like *The Ancient Mariner Under the Volcano* depicts the frozen soul which has been alienated from the outer world through sin and suffering. Although one of the major quotations flashing through the Consul's mind comes from Andrew Marvell's "Clorinda and Damon" ("Might a soul bathe there and be clean, / Or slake its Drought?"), the Consul's plight more strongly recalls that of the Ancient Mariner: "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide sea! / And never a saint took pity on / My soul in agony. / ... I closed my lids, and kept them close, / And the balls like pulses beat; / For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky / Lay like a load on my weary eye, / And the dead were at my feet."<sup>11</sup> The vicious circle

10. *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Winter 1972, pp. 36, 38-39, 44.

11. In his story "Through the Panama" Lowry evokes a gloss from *The Ancient Mariner*: "... And later, the stars: but now Martin saw the fixity of the closed order of their system: death in short." Coleridge's gloss runs as follows: "In his loneliness and fixedness the Ancient Mariner yearneth towards the journeying Moon,

of sin and suffering, loneliness and despair, in which the Ancient Mariner lives until his final redemption, is shared by Lowry's Consul. Only for Lowry's hero there is no reconciliation with God and the world, no redemption and absolution from sin. For him there is no returning to the homeland, no kirk on the hill and no saintly hermit who will shrive him. The final phase of reconciliation with God and men is missed out in Lowry whose hero's death is engulfed in a vision of general apocalyptic destruction.

Finally, *Under the Volcano* exhibits an analogy with the world of Coleridge's *Christabel*, a major document of Romantic sensibility. The theme of *Christabel*, as of Lowry's novel, is the theme of the split self. The self is disintegrating because of an internal division which it is unable to transcend. In both the poem and the novel this self-division is symbolized by the theme of the dark *Doppelgänger*. The Romantic theme of the double, in the context of the multiple and shifting relations between the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, is subtly worked out throughout the novel but it attains unprecedented complexity in the final scenes in the demonic *cantina* Farolito. The hallucinatory slant of the Consul's consciousness which has been responsible for many complex interrelations between the subjective and the objective throughout the novel is given a new twist in the *tempo furioso* of the ending.

"He saw again in his mind's eye that extraordinary picture on Laruelle's wall, *Los Borachones*, only now it took on a somewhat different aspect. Might it have another meaning, that picture, unintentional as its humour, beyond the symbolically obvious? He saw those people like spirits appearing to grow more free, more separate, their distinctive noble faces more distinctive, more noble, the higher they ascended into the light; those florid people resembling the huddled fiends, becoming more like each other, more joined together, more as one fiend, the farther down they hurled into the darkness. Perhaps all this wasn't so ludicrous. When he had striven upwards, as at the beginning with Yvonne, had not the "features" of life seemed to grow more clear, more animated, friends and enemies more identifiable, special problems, scenes, and with them the sense of his own reality, more separate from himself? And had it not turned out that the farther down he sank, the more those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle, if struggle there were still? Yes, but had he desired, willed it, the very material world, illusory though that was, might have been a confederate, pointing the wise way. Here would have been no devolving through failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that become more and more like one voice to a death more dead than death itself, but an infinite widening, an infinite evolving and extension of boundaries, in which the spirit was an entity, perfect and whole; ah, who knows, why man, however beset his chance by lies, has been offered love? Yet, it had to be faced, down, down, he had gone, down till — it was not the bottom even now, he realized. It was not the end quite yet. It was as if his fall had been broken by a narrow ledge, a ledge from which he could neither climb up nor down, on which he lay bloody and half-stunned, while far below him the abyss yawned, waiting. *And on it as he lay he was surrounded in delirium by these phantoms of himself, the policemen, Fructuoso Sanabria, that other man who looked like a poet, the luminous skeletons, even the rabbit in the corner and the ash and sputum on the filthy floor — did not each correspond, in a way he could not understand yet obscurely recognized, to some fraction of his being?* And he saw dimly too how Yvonne's arrival, the snake in the garden, his quarrel with Laruelle and later with Hugh and Yvonne, the infernal machine, the encounter with Señora Gregorio, the finding of the letters, and much beside, how all the events of the day indeed had been as indifferent

and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest and their native country and their own natural home, which they enter unannounced, as guests that are certainly expected, and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival." Quoted in Geoffrey Durant, "Death in Life: Neo-Platonic Elements in 'Through the Panama'", in *Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work*, ed. by George Woodcock, *Canadian Literature Series*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1971, p. 43.

tufts of grass he had half-heartedly clutched at or stones loosed on his downward flight, which were still showering on him from above. The Consul produced his blue package of cigarettes with the wings on them: Alas! He raised his head again; no, he was where he was, there was nowhere to fly to. And it was as if a black dog had settled on his back, pressing him to his seat." /361–362/

In the Consul's final accounting with his conscience the crucial metaphor of rising and falling is used. The whole action of the novel can be subsumed under this metaphor.<sup>12</sup> The stress falls on the vital freedom of choice which has always been open to him and which makes his guilt even more poignant. The relation between the subjective and the objective assumes a special prominence in this chapter where every outer thing assumes a double meaning in the hallucinatory mode which is masterfully used by Lowry. With the scenes in Farolito Lowry creates a Kafka-like world of nightmare turned reality. The political reality (Farolito is a favourite haunt of the pro-Fascist, para-military organization *Union Militar*, the members of which will irresponsibly murder the Consul) takes on the features of a nightmare while the subjective consciousness (the Consul's) is only dimly aware of it. The hallucinatory element, stemming from the Consul's consciousness, is intertwined with other elements of description, creating internal complexities of tone and meaning. The scene dynamically moves backward and forward between the subjective and the objective poles of meaning, with the special stress being laid on the grotesquely incongruous confusion of levels. The political reality is beyond the subjective codes of meaning (the Fascists are indulging in a sinister play with their future victim), but in this stylistic *tour de force* external reality assumes for the Consul the form of his own soul. The private hallucinations are superbly intertwined with the objective presentation of the total scene. For the Consul, the scene is shaped according to his predominant subjectivity, his sense of guilt, his sense of having failed morally for which he must be severely punished. For the Consul, every detail of the external reality is a reflected fragment of his own being; all the human figures that surround him, including his future murderers, appear to him in the feverish activity of his senses and imagination as fragments of his own personality, his dark *Doppelgänger*s. But this time the hallucination, in spite of the intensity of the subjective feeling, is only a grotesque inversion of objective reality. Both levels are masterfully fused by Lowry. Although the hallucinatory element of the Consul's imagination multiplies the complexities of meaning, the reader distinguishes clearly between what belongs to objective reality and what belongs to the subjective hallucinatory mode. The motive of the *Doppelgänger* is orchestrated in the context of the theme of guilt, linked with the Consul from the very beginning, featuring prominently in all of his interior monologues. Yet, the reader sees clearly where and how the Consul goes wrong in his estimate of the situation and can clearly discriminate between the details belonging to the grim and terrifying external reality enmeshing the Consul and the subjective hallucinatory play of his imagination. The Consul's mind centres on the feeling of guilt, and fixes itself on the figures of his tormentors, the Fascist thugs, as the potential bearers of retribution but he dimly recognizes that in his drunken state the situation somehow eludes him. The intensely felt psychological reality is distinct from political reality within the framework of which the Consul is an innocent victim of the Fascists rising in power on the eve of the Second World War. The demonic *cantina* fuses

12. Cf. Jonathan Arrac, *op. cit.*

in his perception with the memory of many such places he once visited in moments of agony and despair. Paradoxically described as "the paradise of his despair" it is pictured as a mythical place of evil, where life reaches the bottom, where the diabolical plots are hatched and murders planned, yet where, perhaps because of all these attributes, "great thoughts wheel in the brain". It is thus valued as providing extreme experiences which maximally activate the mind. The Consul, whose "soul was locked with its essence", as has been said earlier, identifies with the place. In a fundamental sense, the place is the man and the man is the place. In all kinds of subtle ways Farolito explains the disintegrative processes in the Consul's soul. As in many other instances in the novel, the intimations of paradise ("the paradise of his despair") turns by a demonic inversion into the hell of direct experience which has psychological, moral, historical and metaphysical connotations. Through the description of a particular place there emerges a structure of complex meanings. The outer is transformed into an inner reality, picturing the agony of the Consul's mental state which causes him to give in to impulses of evil disintegration while yearning for some paradisaic state transcending this conflict and pain. The description of a place, the description of external phenomena in general, stages a drama of the soul. This gives it its dynamism, its multiple charge of meaning. As in *Christabel* the drama taking place within the self is represented by the motive of the *Doppelgänger*. To the Consul's delirious consciousness everything in his surroundings seems to be a reflection of his dissociated self. Not only do all the human figures around him seem to be parts of himself but all things surrounding him, animate and inanimate, seem to partake of his personality. The ghostly doubles underline the theme of the split self. Evil is, as in Coleridge's *Christabel*, projected as sexual evil, though not so exclusively. The Consul's final choice of death, destruction and damnation is, as in *Christabel*, represented through degraded sexuality. (The prostitute María who infects him with syphilis is a demonic substitute for his wife Yvonne, a demonic counterpart of the Virgin Mary to whom the Consul prays earlier in the novel.) The *cantina* Farolito is a mythical place of pure, undiluted evil. It is fully consonant with the processes of final disintegration in the Consul's soul of which his choice of sexual evil is emblematic - evil is the demonic inversion of good. In the historical context it represents the unleashing of irrational forces. On the metaphysical level, it implies the Consul's final choice of absolute evil ("I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost back there already.") and acquires the rhetorical echoes of the Last Judgement. In the *tempo furioso* of the final chapter where all the intertwined themes of the novel reach their culmination, the slowly moving plot of the novel explodes in the violent last act of the drama. While the outer frame of action is elaborately presented (the political reality), the subjective processes in the Consul's consciousness are rendered with great intensity in the final superb interior monologue. The Consul recognizes with inexorable lucidity that hell is a state of mind, a *status* and not a *locus*, and that his own soul constantly recreates it. The dislocation of meaning, the grotesque interfusion of levels whereby the Fascist killers are mistaken by the Consul for the agents of divine retribution,<sup>13</sup> the deliberately incongruous mixture of planes which should normally be kept separate, is

13. Their leader, Fructuoso Sanabria, is disguised as the Chief of Gardeners, and is supposedly responsible for the sign which greatly perturbed the Consul earlier: *¿Le gusta este jardín? ¿Que es suyo? ¡Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!*

a stroke of supreme aesthetic judgment by Lowry. The grotesque interfusion of planes presents the political murderers as incarnation of the inner Furies persecuting the Consul for some private and intensely felt guilt. Owing to the intentional mixture of levels on the part of the author the themes of self-betrayal and self-destruction are precipitated on another plane, grotesquely fused with the political nightmare. The physical action is accompanied by the Consul's self-communings, his subtle rendering of accounts with his own conscience. On the subjective level, the theme of self-betrayal, guilt and expectation of punishment predominate; on the objective level, the same individual, namely the Consul, is seen as an anonymous victim of political violence, his death an accidental murder. The Consul's basic situation in the novel is a situation *in extremis* and the final scenes in Farolito raise it to an almost unbearable intensity. The historical nightmare catches up and fuses with the private nightmare. On the level of literary reminiscence, the Consul's death calls to mind the inevitability of the inner destruction of E. A. Poe's Roderick Usher but the situation in which his death takes place evokes the nightmarish world that surrounds Kafka's lonely heroes. The grotesquely, incongruously mixed levels of reality in the final chapter reflect the disjointed world, the "madly revolving" world, the novel has so powerfully portrayed through the individual psyche and through the historical context. And yet, there is a deeper logic in the fact that the Consul mistakes the Fascists for the Eumenides and sees ghostly doubles, however mistakenly, in the local thugs. The novel implies a subterranean affinity between the forces of self-destruction wreaking havoc in the Consul's self and the irrational forces unleashed in historical reality.

### III

In his novel Lowry is echoing many motives and themes of the Romantic tradition but he treats them with a savage irony as befits the late date and time. The Consul has all throughout been projected in a double perspective, one of which made for self-aggrandizement while the other insisted on self-depreciation. As scathing self-irony shadowed his thoughts of self-aggrandizement, so his gesturing in the poses of a Romantic "heroic rebel", was always accompanied by self-mockery. His romantic wish for a "return to Nature", his wish to live a life of a "natural man" who will escape from the vices of civilization into some pastoral idyll is mocked on the one hand by the Consul's inner disintegrative processes and on the other by the political reality of his Mexican "paradise". The concept of the Romantic poet-prophet, announcer of the new era of the general redemption and the resurrection of the spirit is savagely mocked in the apocalyptic imagining which the delirious Consul indulges in at one point in the development of the action:

"The Consul wouldn't have needed a practised eye to detect on this wall, or any other, a mene-Tekel-Peres for the world, compared to which mere insanity was a drop in the bucket. Yet who would even have believed that some obscure man, sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts, was authoring their doom, that, even while he was thinking, it was as if behind the scenes certain strings were being pulled, and whole continents burst into flame and calamity moved nearer - just as now, at this moment perhaps, with a sudden jolt or grind, calamity had moved nearer, and, without the Consul's knowing it, outside the sky had darkened. Or perhaps it was not a man at all, but a child, a little child, innocent as that other Geoffrey had been, who sat up

in an organ loft somewhere playing, pulling out all the stops at random, and kingdoms divided and fell, and abominations dropped from the sky - a child innocent as that infant sleeping in the coffin which had slanted past them down the Calle Tierra del Fuego ...." /149-150/

In the delirious Consul's consciousness many disparate things coalesce into clusters of interfused meanings. The echoes of St. John's *Apocalypse* undergo a demonic inversion. The central image of the artist who directly influences the orderings of history and the vital affairs of men, with its reminiscences from European Romanticism, is savagely ironized through the image of the artist who helps bring about the general Apocalypse. In the savage inversion of the Romantic pattern, his soul is not in full consonance with the Spiritus Mundi, "the universal spirit of harmony", but acts in unison with the dark powers of the universe ushering in the apocalyptic destruction of the world. The splintering of the Consul's consciousness into the double awareness of an adult man and of the innocent child the Consul had once been fuses with the image of Yvonne's dead son who was also called Geoffrey, and both intermingle with the parodic inversion of the Blakean reminiscence from the *Introduction to Songs of Innocence* when the poet receives sanction from the divine child on the cloud, the Redeemer of the world, to sing his happy songs of things in their pristine loveliness and of universal harmony.

In the description of the Consul's death, when he is thrown into the fearful *barranca*, echoes of the biblical *Apocalypse* are richly woven into the text. Yet here where time and history topple as in Blake's *Vision of the Last Judgment*, the Consul is presented not with the grandiose gesture of a Romantic Titan, challenging the forces of the universe, but as a petty *pelado*, stealing the ideas of other people and thus trying to aggrandize himself in his futile existence. In contrast to the Romantic poets who modelled their writings on the biblical *apocalypse* but who wrote not only about the destruction of the known world but about the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, Lowry's *Apocalypse*, unleashed at the end of the novel with the Consul's death and the outbreak of the Second World War features only the general destruction. The end of the novel projects neither the poet-prophet annunciating the general resurrection of the spirit like Shelley in the *Ode to the West Wind*, nor the evangelist of the liberated imagination like Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, nor the Blakean Los confronting eternity through his imagination, but a willfully self-destroyed man whose grand projects of the expansion of consciousness have come to nothing ("the cloacal Prometheus").<sup>14</sup> The Consul is engulfed by the destructive forces of history but yet preserves until the very end in the profoundest depths of his soul some wild imperishable yearning for the supreme good and truth and beauty as well as a remnant of faith in the creative strength of the human spirit.

Finally, the genre of the subjectivist, lyrical novel to which *Under the Volcano* belongs may be traced to European Romanticism as Ralph Freedman makes clear in his study *The Lyrical Novel*. He says that, for instance, in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* "the hero's time-bound adventures are transformed into a sequence of image-scenes that mirror the nature of the protagonist's quest and represent it symbolically. The progression required by the narrative genre is converted into a lyrical

14. "You are interfering with my great battle", the Consul said, gazing past M. Laruelle at an advertisement at the foot of the fountain: *Peter Lorre en Las Manos de Orlac*, a las 6.30 p.m... "My battle for the survival of the human consciousness." Op. cit., pp. 220-221.

progression produced by the elaboration of pictures and scenes. This adaptation of the episodic structure to poetry has produced incisive types of lyrical novels, variously intermingled with ingredients of the novel of adventure, from the German symbolic novel of the romantic age to *Moby Dick* and *The Heart of Darkness*". Like his great predecessors in the genre of the lyrical novel, Lowry's *Under the Volcano* "seems to combine men and world in a strangely inward, yet aesthetically objective form" and in it "the direct portrayal of awareness becomes the outer frontier where novel and poem meet."<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion we can say that in a dense web of literary polysemantics in *Under the Volcano* the many echoes, overt and covert, direct and oblique, of the Romantic tradition immensely enrich this late modernist novel.

#### POD VULKANOM I TRADICIJA ROMANTIZMA

Članak problematizira vezu Lowrijeva romana *Pod vulkanom* s romantičnom tradicijom. Iz složenog tkiva literarnih aluzija izdvajaju se i naglašavaju specifične analogije sa tematikom i strukturalnim obilježjima pjesništva romantizma. Parodične inverzije nekih tema i motiva romantizma dio su Lowrijeve narativne strategije. Zaključak je članka da mnogobrojni odjeci romantičke tradicije uvelike obogaćuju polisemantičko tkivo ovog romana kasnog modernizma.

15. *The Lyrical Novel*, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 15.