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THE INTERNAL CONFLICT OF AMERICAN WRITERS IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE NOVELS WITH REFERENCE TO UNDER THE VOLCANO

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the Internal Conflict of American Writers in Writing Descriptive Novels with Reference to Under the Volcano .Under the Volcano a garden, with a snake, where Geoffrey keeps talking about Eden he proclaims that ownership of property was obviously the original sin. This is, of course, not the only theme of the complex book, but it is its core, holding together its social, religious, and literary vision. The fundamental problem of property takes many forms. For Geoffrey's brother Hugh, it includes his greedily plagiarizing others' songs as his own, even while stealing his publisher's wife. For Geoffrey's estranged wife Yvonne, it is memories of her lost material success as an actress, dragging her away from Geoffrey. For Geoffrey himself, it is his position as paid defender of British territories in the period when he had some complicity in German soldiers being burned alive. The different forms of guilt that the characters feel are variations of the way coveting or defending property divides people from one another. Lowry's long fascination with the supernatural had brought him under the influence of the occultist Charles Stansfield Jones whom Lowry met in Canada. Based on Jones's synthesis of various kinds of mysticism, including Jewish Kabbala, Lowry associated the divisive power of property with the metaphysical idea that, in the beginning, God's divine energy entered vessels that broke, with the tragic consequence being the multiplicity of the material world where there should have been divine unity. More disturbingly, Laruelle had committed adultery with Yvonne, thereby undermining her marriage. Having lost his idealism, Laruelle, who once dreamed of improving the world through filmmaking, has declined into collecting Mexican "idols," material substitutes for the divine.

Keywords: property; mysticism ; idealism ; illusion and supernaturalism.

INTRODUCTION

Under the Volcano is a novel by English writer Malcolm Lowry (1909–1957) published in 1947. The novel tells the story of Geoffrey Firmin, an alcoholic British consul in the small Mexican town of Quauhnahuac, on the Day of the Dead, 2 November 1938. The book takes its name from the two volcanoes that overshadow Quauhnahuac and the characters, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl. Under the Volcano, Lowry's second and last complete novel, is the basis for his reputation as one of the most important novelists of the twentieth century.The novel was adapted to radio on Studio One in 1947 but had gone out of print by the time Lowry died. Its popularity restored, it was made into a film in 1984. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked Under the Volcano as number 11 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. The first version of the novel was developed while Lowry lived in Mexico, frequently drunk and out of control while his first marriage was breaking up. In 1940, Lowry hired an agent, Harold Matson, to find a publisher for the manuscript but found nothing but rejection—this manuscript is referred to by scholars as the 1940 version, and differs in details of various significance from the published version. Between 1940 and 1944, Lowry revised the novel (with significant editorial assistance from Margerie Bonner), a process which occupied him completely: during those years Lowry, who had been wont to work on many projects at the same time, worked on nothing but the manuscript, a process documented exhaustively by Frederick Asals. One of the most significant changes involved Yvonne's character: in earlier versions she was the Consul's daughter. By 1940, she was his unfaithful wife, and in that version (and a 1941 revision) chapter 11 ended with her and Hugh making love. A drastic rewriting in 1944 changed her ending and that of the novel: Yvonne dies at the end of the chapter, run over by the riderless horse released by the Consul in Parian, an event related in chapter 12. In 1944, the manuscript was nearly lost in a fire at the Lowrys' house in Dollarton, British Columbia. Margerie Bonner rescued the unfinished novel, but all of Lowry's other works in progress were lost in the blaze. The burned manuscript was called In Ballast to the White Sea, and would have been the third book in a trilogy made up of Under the Volcano, an expanded version of Lunar Caustic, and In Ballast. Like Dante's Divine Comedy, these were to be infernal, purgatorial, and paradisal, respectively. Asals notes that the important 1944 revision evidences Lowry and Bonner paying extraordinary attention to references to fire in the novel, especially in Yvonne's dream before her death. The novel was finished in 1945 and immediately sent to different publishers. In late winter, while travelling in Mexico, Lowry learned the novel had been accepted by two publishing companies: Reynal & Hitchcock in the United States and Jonathan Cape in the United Kingdom. Following critical reports from two readers, Cape had reservations about publishing and wrote to Lowry on 29 November 1945 asking him to make drastic revisions, though he added that if Lowry didn't make the revisions "it does not necessarily mean I would say no". Lowry's lengthy reply, dated 2 January 1946, was a

passionate defence of the book in which he sensed he had created a work of lasting greatness: "Whether it sells or not seems to me either way a risk. But there is something about the destiny of the creation of the book that seems to tell me it just might go on selling a very long time." The letter includes a detailed summary of the book's key themes and how the author intended each of the 12 chapters to work; in the end, Cape published the novel without further revision.

DISCUSSION

Lowry's novel Under the Volcano explores the path to self-annihilation of one man, and all of the earth. Inspired heavily by the issues of his time and coupled with his own experiences, Lowry's epic novel employs the symbol of the garden as a means of expressing concern for the welfare of humanity, as a people facing the damming effects of expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Under the Volcano belongs to the Modernist literary genre and utilizes many known techniques from it. Lowry's source of inspiration was to be found in his own life and being, which in turn meant that his writing was overwhelmingly subjective, stemming directly from the innermost convictions of the author. The complexity of the novel stems mainly from the author's desire to create a poetic novel. In Under the Volcano, allusions imply not antithesis but identity, fusing past and present. Some general yet relevant themes in the novel are readily understood by the reader. These include themes of love, friendship, family, betrayal, and war. In addition, the repetitiveness of life and other such existential musings are used to express the sense of futility and violence found in Western History. Damon M. DeCoste argues that "the cataclysm of war comes to figure not as a singular catastrophe, but as the inevitable rehearsal of a cyclical, indeed unredeemable, Western Violence" (767, 768). In fact, most of the novel is under the shadow of violence encountered in the past, present and future of the characters' lives and of historical occurrences. Though violence is featured mainly by the continuous reminders of war and fascism, a more subtle form of violence between individuals is found in the relationships between the principle characters. The connections between the "impoverished existences of his (Lowry's) three main characters" (Espinoza 76) is summarized well by Herberto Espinoza,To Geoffrey's alcoholism and inability to cope with his guilty conscious (for an alleged war crime), Lowry added to his torment the painful memories of Yvonne's promiscuity (affairs with Geoffrey's half-brother Hugh and her former boss and mentor, Jacques Laruelle) … the characters' personal memories, conflicts and desires keep incessantly turning and returning. (76). Historical figures such as Maximilian and Carlotta correspond to Geoffrey and Yvonne. In fact, Laruelle, in the novel's opening chapter, unconsciously identifies these two pairs of lovers: how they must have loved this land, these two lonely empurpled exiles, human beings finally, lovers out of their element their Eden, without either knowing quite why, beginning to turn under their noses into a prison and smell like a brewery, their only majesty at last that of tragedy."It is our destiny to come here, Carlotta. Look at this rolling glorious country, its hills, its valleys, its volcanoes beautiful beyond belief. And to think it is ours! Let us be good and constructive and make ourselves worthy of it!" Or there were ghosts quarreling: "No, you loved yourself; you loved your misery more than I. You did this deliberately to us." And suddenly they were weeping together, passionately, as they stood. But it was the Consul's voice, not Maximilian's. Despite distinctions of social rank, there is none of the tonal disparity evident in Eliot's poem: the voices of Maximilian and Geoffrey are not antiphonal; they are interchangeable. In a common setting their doomed lives reach a common tragic climax. Both are killed in Mexico as representatives of European powers because of local political passions they only partially comprehend, with an admixture of nobility and impetuous folly causing death in both instances. Geoffrey "our ruddy monarch'' and Maximilian with Carlotta, "human beings finally" merge through features of personality and experience that transcend boundaries of rank and time. The first chapter which serves as "an epilogue to his tale" (DeCoste 767), introduces the reader to Jacques Laruelle, one of the two men who, it is insinuated, had an affair with Yvonne. He thinks of the events which happened a year earlier, the day that Yvonne came back to Geoffrey. On this fateful day, Geoffrey, Yvonne and Hugh, take a trip to a the town of Tomalín, a bus ride away from Quauhnahuac. The pace of the novel is relatively slow at the beginning, featuring many inner dialogues and hallucinations in Geoffrey's mind. Towards the end of the novel, after discussions involving themes of fascism and war, which Geoffrey's brother Hugh feels passionately about as he is a communist, Geoffrey disappears from the group and heads off to a dingy bar named El Farolito. At this bar, after several conversations and misunderstandings, Geoffrey is murdered by men who claim to be police. Before he is murdered he frantically tries to release a horse, which he believes the police had stolen from a dying Indian which he, Yvonne and Hugh had passed on the way to Tomalín. This same horse after stampeding its way through the forest tramples Yvonne and kills her. The literary genre to which Under the Volcano belongs is Modernism. As one of the final offerings of the Modernist literary genre, it does not contain all the elements usually found in high modernism, though it does represent the movement nonetheless. In the book The Modernist Novel, Kern places the resistance to "existential plenitude" as an important aspect of modernism (24). He goes on to argue that it is "questioned whether a person can actually be anyone thoroughly" (24). Lowry was influenced by this and several other modernist writing techniques. This particular concept of "existential plenitude" as one of Lowry's techniques is substantiated by Gordon Bowker, who posits Lowry's technique as"reflecting what e(Lowry) called his 'multiple schizophrenia'" (9), and goes on to assess Lowry's writing as "all was appearance, disintegration

and confusion" (9). The various elements explored in this essay are directly affected by this tecSimilarly, a reference to Carlotta's future insanity corresponds to Yvonne's vision of herself as "a woman having hysterics, jerking like a puppet and banging her fists upon the ground". In addition to his own life as inspiration, Lowry picked out things from his surroundings which interested him: "He noted down whatever caught his eye-letters, advertisements, newspaper headlines, graffiti-and wasted little to transform such material into art" (Bowker 7). It is likely therefore that many of the elements picked up and dispersed among the text of physically present items such as posters, signs, brochures and train timetables could have actually been known to Lowry from his own time in Mexico, though, altered in one way or another to better suit his artistic purposes. Frequently in Under the Volcano, we experience the characters preoccupied with life-altering questions. Yet, the answers are never straightforward, as an element of convoluted uncertainty always permeates the text. This is in part due to the enormity of the issues being tackled; they cannot be dealt with simply. In this sense, Lowry creates realistic human experience, which is multifaceted and complex. On this topic Bowker states, "he is experimenting throughout with those patterns of interrelations and correlations subtle structures of recurrent leitmotifs, harmonies, and discords-the riddle of multiple identity, the weight of past sins, the search for equilibrium in an unstable world" (9). Lowry had no intention of creating a straightforward and typical novel, argues Perle Epstein: "what he personally strove to create was a poetic novel, something partaking of Sir Thomas Browne on the one hand and Wagner on the other" (4). By taking this information into account, the reader acquires th. In an act similar to the betrayal of the mysteries by Sisyphus and the Consul, Tantalus stole divine food from the Olympian banquet. both explicate the Consul's dying vision of a mountain collapsing about him. For the Consul there is no affirmation under the volcano. Another inhabitant of Tartarus, Ixion, like Prometheus, Tantalus, and Sisyphus, provides mythological commentary on Geoffrey's character. In Under the Volcano the most obvious parallel to Ixion's crime, the seduction of Hera, is the adultery of Laruelle and Hugh with Yvonne. The alternative life presented by both Geoffrey and Yvonne is one in which the natural sphere is physically balanced, working as a healthy space. It is an embodiment of the symbolic garden as it should be, though not in the ecocritical definition of the word garden. It is a wild space which has been endowed with the attributes of an earthly paradise. Effectively, by blending the culturally organized with the inherently wild, Lowry is extending the responsibility of humans beyond the confines of the garden, to encompass all of the earth. Lowry was, in Bowker's words, "striving for mental tranquility through an affinity with nature" . His vision was one he felt was should be shared by all. "Being a moralist, Lowry portrays his neuroses and mankind's Pinal neuroses, especially the mental instabilities precipitated by material forces uprooting and destroying our natural world" (Bowker 10).Within the text is a voluminous interweaving of references to other authors and their work that reading the text once or twice does not suffice to become aware of them all. MacLeod, in her essay, "The Eclectic Vision: Symbolism in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano," provides a concise overview of the most prominent and relevant ones:"Alignments with figures such as Prometheus, Christ, Noah and T.S. Eliot's 'Fisher King' quotations from . Dante's Inferno, Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale, Marlowe's Faustus, Goethe's Faust, and Sophocles' Oedipus Rex" . These references are used in concert with a variety of symbols, which together create "a world which is viewed narcissistically, a world of which it is demanded that it should mirror the self" (MacLeod 4). Following the argument of one human's reality as a microcosmic representation of the reality of the whole world, is the projection of one person's psychological inner turmoil onto his surrounding environment. The clearest example of this can be found in a comparison between chapter four and the large majority of the other chapters. In one of many hallucinated scenes, Geoffrey experiences nature as being against him, "the stains of murderous mosquitoes, the very scars and cracks of the wall, had begun to swarm the whole insect world had somehow moved nearer and now was closing, rushing in on him" (Lowry 152). As Chris Ackerley notes: In chapter four the continued portrayal of the garden as a wild and dangerous place serves as the embodiment of betrayal. Despite its beauty, the unweeded garden is a wreck: the bougainvillea is an emblem of deceit, the fragrant pink and white flowers of the oleander are highly poisonous; and the flowerbed is strangled by "a coarse green vine"–convolvulus –used consistently as a symbol of something that chokes proper growth. (97.1). Here, depictions of symbolically charged plants, 'deceitful' bougainvillea and 'poisonous' flowers, with other plants that inhibit the growth of organisms, embody the fissure in trust between Yvonne and Geoffrey. Whereas before, "Yvonne comments that her garden was 'like Paradise,' but it is now in all senses a fallen landscape" (Ackerley 97.1). From this we see the way natural elements are used to connote the loss of trust and therefore, the loss of love as well. Geoffrey, separated from the life his consciousness illuminates, childless, masochistically believes that Ixion, the source of light, welcomes his infernal condition: "Je crois que le vautour est doux à Prometheus et que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers."Ixion's wheel, whose solar aspect symbolizes life--the potential affirmation registered structurally by the novel's trochal form-- images as well the doomed and sterile cycle of the Consul's self-punishment in Tartarus. In the novel Ixion merges with other mythological figures of the Greek underworld to give depth and nuance to a major theme: eternal suffering as punishment for a crime. Lowry's syncretic genius is evident when the book's other allusions are considered. Geoffrey experiences his reality as being not on earth, but an earthly hell. This earthly hell however, is not a physical place on earth, but rather a condition of the mind and body. "Horrors portioned to a giant nerve! this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has

discovered some extraordinary land but the name of this land is hell. It is not Mexico of course but in my heart" (Lowry 41, 42). Extending from this sentiment, as well as various other instances in which Geoffrey's physical and mental state is depicted as a living hell, is a resulting reality of Geoffrey experiencing himself as outside of the protected regions of Eden, and thus, as Macleod notes, "Although hell may be very well all around, primarily, the much more insidious hell is the one within" (Macleod 52). This representation of Geoffrey as having fallen from Grace, places him outside of the protected conclave of God, and situates him instead in the wild: "the very earliest of documents of Western Eurasian civilization depict wilderness as a threat . After the ejection from Eden, the wilderness is a place of exile the wilderness is associated with Satan" (Garr ard 61). In Geoffrey's last moments, elements of wilderness close in on him, which in turn shows that the elements of nature are still against him, even at his death. The many ways in which the garden is used come together in the conceptualized and dramatized northern place. This paradise fulfills the demands of all the composite parts of the garden symbol. In it we find a wild place, following the rhythm of nature, which is simultaneously a "Columbian Eden". It embodies the hope for a renewal of the relationship between Geoffrey and Yvonne as well as representing the chance of rebirth for all of humanity. "We finish Under the Volcano feeling that the Consul with all his defects is the cosmos – and that he is also Malcolm Lowry. This is perhaps a way of saying that Malcolm Lowry and his hero are romantics.

CONCLUSION

This novel set in Mexico in 1938, on the verge of the Second World War, and which relates the final twenty-four hours of the life of Geoffrey Firmin, on November 1st, the Day of the Dead. Faced with a reunion with his estranged wife, Yvonne, and half-brother Hugh, Firmin nonetheless, through perpetual inebriation, destroys his chance of happiness and is eventually killed by fascists in the local police force. Based largely on Lowry's own reality and personal truth, the novel employs the symbol of the garden to represent the wilderness present in the human soul. By using ecocritical theory as a means of analyzing the novel, the symbol of the garden expounds the correlations between disparate places as well as condensing personal realities, which in turn become symbolic of larger issues. Following this argument is the analysis of the way one person's inner psychological turmoil is reflected onto the surrounding landscape, and how conversely an idyllic place could quell the suffering within. Lowry's garden is an Eden gone to seed, abandoned by God. Augmenting the presence of mystical elements is the use of the Cabbala in the novel, which posits Geoffrey Firmin as a black magician who has the wrath of natural elements set against him. Finally, because of Geoffrey's incessant inebriation, his physical, mental and emotional being is a broken system in need of a return to purity and rebirth.

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