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Lou Bermingham
San Jose State University

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existential analysis**

Bermingham, Lou, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1992

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RUSHING TOWARDS ABSURDITY IN UNDER THE VOLCANO:
AN EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Lou Bermingham
December, 1992

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Marian Robinson

Dr. Marian Robinson

EW Matt Dillon

Dr. Matt Dillon

Nils Peterson

Mr. Nils Peterson

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

M. Lou Luvendowski

ABSTRACT

RUSHING TOWARDS ABSURDITY: AN EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

by Lou Bermingham

This thesis explores the underlying existential aesthetic in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano. It examines Lowry's use of the existential themes of despair, alienation, and rejection within the text. Albert Camus' absurdist works, The Rebel and The Myth of Sisyphus, are used as the basis upon which to examine Lowry's work in an existential context.

The research on this novel reveals that Lowry's use of two characters to represent one personality is contradictory; therefore, this becomes an absurd work. Furthermore, the opposing nature of these two inextricably linked characters creates an absurd situation. Using both Camus' philosophy and David Falk's Jungian based research, a clear connection is shown between Malcolm Lowry and existentialist thought.

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To my parents, Arnold J. and Maryse Bermingham.
This project could not have been accomplished without
your generous support and encouragement. A million thanks.

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At all events I am progressing, slowly but surely
. . . But here I am. I am not escaping. And what's
more I intend to have a hell of a sight better
time staying.

(Lowry 92)

Just suppose, cher maitre, that we should be taken
literally? We'd have to go through with it.
Brr . . .! The water's so cold! But let's not
worry! It's too late now. It will always be too
late. Fortunately!

(Camus, The Fall 147)

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Introduction

Under the Volcano (UTV) chronicles within the frame of a single day (November 1, 1938, the Mexican Day of the Dead,) a one year period of time which climaxes with the death of two of the main characters. The story centers around Geoffrey Firmin, a retired minor British consul, Yvonne, his former wife, Geoffrey's half-brother, Hugh, and Jacques Laruelle, Geoffrey's boyhood friend. Though the action of the novel takes place within a twelve hour period, the work spans many years through the use of flashbacks, interior monologues, and conversations. The setting is the small town of Quauhnahuac, Mexico. Quauhnahuac is the Indian name for the actual town of Cuernavaca, situated southwest of Mexico City, where Malcolm Lowry lived for a time.

Critic and author David Markson, particularly noted for his understanding of the many references and myths used by Lowry in UTV, states that, "it is the 'mythic' artist, more profoundly than any archaeologist or anthropologist, who will project [a] timeless 'shared' continuity of human experience" (4). Malcolm Lowry is one of these "mythic" artists. UTV uses numerous references such as the tragedy of Oedipus, The Inferno, the Faustus legend, and Jean Cocteau's The Infernal Machine to explore the tragic lives of the

characters.

The ten years Lowry spent on Under the Volcano represent an effort to incorporate a type of Dantean Divine Comedy into an essentially existentialist twentieth century setting. Critic and biographer Douglas Day makes this clear when he quotes a Lowry letter to Albert Erskine, Lowry's editor for UTV at Reynal and Hitchcock. Lowry says in the letter that

Under the Volcano was originally planned as the inferno part of a Dantesque trilogy to be called The Voyage that Never Ends. Lunar Caustic was the purgatorial part, but was to be much expanded. . . . The Paradiso part was called In Ballast to the White Sea, was a good deal longer than the Volcano and was completely destroyed in the fire here which took our house and all our books. (Day 123)

Utilizing literary references such as Dante's Divine Comedy and Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, Lowry explores his various tragic themes. Extended over the formal structure of this symbolic world is the dilemma of the absurdity of the characters' lives. The Consul's infernal, personal hell is part of this horror.

Geoffrey Firmin, the Consul, is a deeply troubled man: an alcoholic, a failed husband and author, a debased practitioner of the Caballah, and a useless retired diplomat. He rebels against life, and he does not want the help offered to him by Hugh or Yvonne. Life has no meaning

for him any longer: "he did not now need to comprehend any meaning in . . . words beyond their abject confirmation of his own lostness, his own fruitless selfish ruin, now perhaps finally self-imposed . . . " (Lowry 345). It is in this sense of negation that Geoffrey Firmin shows himself a rebel in an absurd world. Firmin says that, "'The will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it.' . . . Drink all morning . . . drink all day. This is life!" (Lowry 93).

It is this dilemma, the individual's burden of living in an absurd world, that Lowry explores in UTV. In discussing the complexities of the novel, Markson says that "even in essentially traditional terms Lowry presents difficulties" because he "maintain[s] a redemptive sense of the absurd throughout . . . a tragedy in which his subjectivity serves to create a drama of the consciousness rather than any mere representation of its workings" (Markson 7). Throughout the story a series of strange and irrational actions will eventually lead to the Consul's death. Critic David Falk sees these as a series of failures:

as son, as brother, as lover, as war hero, as diplomat, as poet and mystic Yet he [Geoffrey] knows these failures form an ineluctable pattern, and, in fact, he has come to believe that his own value, his specialness, derives from both the awfulness and the inescapability of life. (Falk 209)

Geoffrey's death will have a liberating influence on the positive aspect of the self as represented by Hugh Firmin. With the physical death of the Consul, the possibility of a spiritual rebirth, of a transcendence for Hugh, becomes a reality:

To cure the sickness of the soul, Hugh, as the ego, must achieve a transcendent rebirth, enter a new reality from which the shadow is barred and thereby consigned to an 'irrevocable past' . . . to death. . . . Thus Hugh's spiritual aspirations do not merely conflict with his brother's embracing of disaster, but by the laws the novel 'creates as it goes along,' they necessitate the consul's death. (Falk 214)

The Consul's death and Hugh's re-emerging sense of idealism constitute an important transition within the novel. This transition between the two characters fits into the pattern of existential logic that Lowry develops through the use of Jungian imagery.

The majority of critical work on Malcolm Lowry's novel UTV does not address its powerful existential component but focuses primarily on the work's symbolic and psychological aspects. These analyses do not explore what I consider is an important existential aspect of UTV: the importance of the absurd throughout the novel. By using Camus' existential philosophy as defined in The Rebel, I will show a well defined pattern of absurd reasoning in Malcolm Lowry's UTV. Furthermore, using other critics' discoveries I will

substantiate my point of view by building on their previous research.

Malcolm Lowry's protagonist, Geoffrey Firmin, the Consul, is the quintessence of the "absurd man" of Albert Camus. Therefore, Camus' existential philosophy will provide a structure upon which an analysis of Under the Volcano's absurd theme can be examined. A question that has to be asked then is what defines an "absurd man" according to Camus. Is he a rebel? And if so, what is that man or woman rebelling against and why? Camus asks: "What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation" (Camus, The Rebel 13). And Geoffrey does say no--to treatment for alcoholism, to renewed love, to life--but he does not renounce that which drives him downward into the inferno: mescal, tequila, alcohol, drink. Using Camus' definition of the absurd we can see that Lowry's characters represent the absurd in their actions:

[t]he moment that we claim to remain firmly in the absurdist position and ignore the real nature of the absurd . . . is an experience to be lived through, a point of departure, the equivalent, in existence, of Descartes methodical doubt. The absurd is, in itself, a contradiction. . . . The absurd considered as a rule of life is therefore contradictory.
(Camus, The Rebel 8-9)

It is contradictory, and therefore absurd, that through the character of the Consul, a nihilistic, self-destructive

character, Lowry should also include within the novel the Consul's antithesis, his half brother, Hugh. Hugh is full of life but equally impotent; he is morally powerless. Geoffrey's brother is a failure as a musician and, later, as a newspaperman and writer. And more importantly, Hugh fails to join his friends battling Franco during the Spanish Civil War because he cannot bring himself to fight. The opposing nature of these two characters who are inextricably linked creates an absurd situation. Falk supports the premise that Lowry fully intended this rapport to be seen between the two brothers.

Falk posits a valid and detailed argument based on a Jungian viewpoint that the two brothers, Geoffrey and Hugh, represent the two aspects of a divided psyche: the shadow and the positive self, respectively. Accordingly, Geoffrey is the "unregenerate self" (Falk 210) and Hugh is the "nearest representative in Under the Volcano of [Lowry's] sense of what his normal self and its possibilities [are]" (Falk 212). David Markson agrees with Falk's argument. Markson states that "[e]ventually it will be understood that the two [Geoffrey and Hugh] are to be read as halves of the same representation, or alter egos in a polar balance between characterizations" (Markson 44).

Lowry's use of two characters as different aspects of one self is a commitment to absurdist reasoning. As an

artist, as a creator of literary vision, Lowry's use of two characters as aspects of one self can be seen in the absurd sense thus:

Just as all thought . . . signifies something, so there is no art that has no signification. Man can allow himself to denounce the total injustice of the world and then demand a total justice that he alone will create. But he cannot affirm the total hideousness of the world. To create beauty, he must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality but does not hide from it.

(Camus, The Rebel 258)

Therefore, Lowry's use of Geoffrey and Hugh as two symbiotic characters represents a rejection of reality to "exalt certain of its aspects" (Camus, The Rebel 258). These aspects are both the beauty of the world and the horror of it. By looking at the shifting levels of reality in the novel, one can further explore its different themes and symbols.

By doing an explication of the text, I hope to bring to light the underlying absurdist aesthetic in UTV and to analyze how it supports the novel's symbolic content. Lowry's work cannot be disassociated from its mythic context because it is within the mythic context that the work must be understood. UTV is a symbolic world where every page, paragraph, and phrase pulses with life and references to other great works of literature, such as Melville's Moby

Dick, Goethe's Faust, Dante's Divine Comedy, as well as Hindu myths, Biblical allusions, and films. Since I believe the influence of the absurd working within the mythic context of the novel is an important element within Lowry's text, an exploration of this area will be of critical interest. An explication of this text will uncover the absurd existential framework of the novel which supports its symbolic and mythic elements. And this will therefore show that a clear relationship exists between the absurd elements in Malcolm Lowry's UTV and the absurd reasoning of Camus' The Rebel.

Chapter 1

Malcolm Lowry, creator of absurd and tragic works, loved humor and good times above all--even though, ultimately, drinking cost him his life. The writer Conrad Aiken, friend and mentor, notes that "'his [Lowry's] whole life was a joke; never was there a gayer Shakespearean jester. A fact that I think we must remember when everyone is saying What Gloom, What Despair, What Riddles! Nonsense. He was the merriest of men" (Day 98). And yet Lowry's disease was certainly apparent and was "undeniable evidence that he was an alcoholic of Gargantuan proportions, an occasionally dangerous manic-depressive, and a suicide" (Day 98). It is important that Aiken refers to Lowry as a "jester." Is not the role of the jester to illuminate the darkness of ignorance with the light of truth?

This search for truth in the face of overwhelming odds was a life-long quest for Malcolm Lowry. Part of this quest was of an utterly Rimbaudian nature as Lowry spent many seasons in hell seeking the truth to the purity of his artistic vision. And, in fact for Lowry, seeking for truth was a search for his inner being, his soul: "soul . . . meant something: for [Lowry], to speak of salvation or damnation was not to speak metaphysically, but to speak of

realities. Like his hero, Rimbaud, he felt that . . .
 'Theology is serious, hell is certainly down below,--and
 heaven on high¹" (Day 326).

This "journey" into the depths of hell Malcolm Lowry translated into the literary reality that became his opus, Under the Volcano. This quest started at an early age and prior to attending Cambridge, Lowry convinced his father to let him sail away as a crew member on board the Pyrrhus, a liner bound for the Far East. To his horror, Malcolm was driven to the docks in the family Rolls Royce with a pack of reporters waiting for him to board. Malcolm found that the so-called "freedom" he was looking for did not exist in class-conscious England, whether on land or sea. So began Malcolm Lowry's odyssey into discovering a literary landscape where he could express his sense of alienation, dissatisfaction, and anger with the external reality of a merciless world. This six month experience on the sea matches Hugh Firmin's feelings of his time on board ship in UTV:

Hugh had described the Philoctetes
 [the fictional equivalent of the
Pyrrhus] . . . as a tramp. Tramp or no,
 the whole ship rolled and weltered in
 bourgeois prejudices and taboos the like
 of which Hugh had not known even
 existed. . . . Still, he had to pretend
 to himself . . . there was something
 romantic in what he had done. As was
 there not!

(162-63)

When Lowry came back to England from his disastrous sea journey, he entered Cambridge. During his university years

Lowry drank . . . partly because the sailor home from the sea was expected to be something of a boozier; but he drank not so much because he chose to as 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.
(Day 97-98)

All of this figures into Lowry's self-analysis and, naturally, into his characters in UTV, particularly Geoffrey Firmin, a former British Consul. Lowry felt he was onto a similar quest as Rimbaud, and for this, he had to go beyond reality; Lowry believed it necessary to transcend his earthly consciousness: "Lowry seems really to have thought of his life in these Rimbaudian terms; and it is striking to observe how consistently throughout his works he was to point toward the symbolists' demented inner voyage as being necessary for the artist. . . ." (Day 203). In this quest, Lowry is a revolutionary, a seeker within the confines of an absurd universe and a kindred soul to Arthur Rimbaud. In Camus' dialectic, Rimbaud is the forerunner, the pioneer, in the art of absurd creation because of "his [Rimbaud's] conception of a life beyond the confines of his agony, his conception of a life beyond the confines of this world, the yearning for the unattainable and reality brutally

determined on restraint, [and] the rejection of morality. . . ." (The Rebel 88-89). Lowry too was uncomfortable with the conventions of his time; the societal codes of his day led him to leave England and live in the United States, Mexico, and finally Canada.

In 1936, two years after marrying Jan Gabriel, his first wife, Malcolm and she went to Mexico. First they went to Oaxaca and then Cuernavaca. They stayed in Cuernavaca and he began work on what would become UTV. Douglas Day describes them as "living in a one-storey, three-room house: No. 15, Calle de Humboldt, complete with tiny swimming pool, a soon-to-be-ruined garden, and a spectacular view of the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl" (215). Lowry's backyard had a barranca, one of the town's numerous deep ravines, running through it. This actual scenery is used to create the incredible setting for UTV; this setting would contain the "ruined palace on the surface of the earth; the magic mountains in the distance, rising like the Mount of Purgatory to heaven; and at one's feet, apparently bottomless and certainly feculent, was the abyss" (Day 215).

In Mexico Lowry found a land which could support his cast of characters: "He had what was important: his self-tormented symbol-seeking man of surrendered authority, his drunken witty Consul; and he had his volcano, his exotic and dangerous land, and his barranca" (Day 219). Into UTV Lowry

would pour, over a decade, his idealism, his sense of loss, tragedy, and existential despair. And, he would show his creativity and humor as well, because Lowry was the ultimate jokester:" he was perfectly capable of breaking out into his foxy grin, throwing his arm over your shoulders, and telling you a long, intricate, and hilarious joke--of which he was usually the butt"(Day 98).

Beyond the joking, the wit and humor, Lowry's problem, his addiction to alcohol, was severe. In Mexico

Conrad Aiken, survivor of the small company who watched Lowry dying by the glass in Cuernavaca . . . has publicly called Volcano 'inspired melodrama' . . . and . . . a 'literary accident.' . . . The book is both. In being melodrama and a kind of masterpiece-by-accident, the book, two decades after its original publication, sheds a distinctive shadow (Costa 170)

Lowry's life is incredible for its tumultuous events, both humorous and tragic. Malcolm Lowry represents the sort of individual who wrote because of necessity; he wrote continuously and compulsively; he wrote to find out who he was, to create a world he could understand. In doing so, he created a literary reality in UTV that is at once imaginary and realistic. The use of 'familiar,' or inner voices, that talk to the Consul are of a hallucinatory nature, as are the corpses he visualizes prior to seeing them in the flesh. Yet, the descriptions of the Consul's alcoholic fits are

realistic, as are Lowry's descriptions of the Mexican setting. Therefore, Lowry is utilizing a literary setting to both contradict the reality of the outside world and condemn its problems while, at the same time, investigating the interior textual absurd universe of UTV. In this fashion Lowry discovers and creates an absurd world in which "[e]xcept for vivid moments of fulfillment, all reality for them [humans] is incomplete" (Camus, The Rebel 260).

Lowry's despair with everyday banal reality is similar to one of his literary heroes: "Balzac once terminated a long conversation about politics and the fate of the world by saying: 'And now let us get back to serious matters,' meaning that he wanted to talk about his novels" (Camus, The Rebel 260). Malcolm Lowry strove to create a novel that would endure the ravages of time and changing perceptions of reality. In creating an absurd work of literature, of art, Lowry attempts to go past the barriers of conventional story-telling to seize the heart of his existential pain and despair:

By the treatment that the artist imposes on reality, he declares the intensity of his rejection. But what he retains of reality in the universe that he creates reveals the degree of consent that he gives to at least one part of reality--which he draws from the shadows of evolution to bring it to the light of creation. (Camus, The Rebel 268)

This search for another level of reality through the

written word is an attempt to denounce the injustices of the world, and, at the same moment, reaffirm the possibility of hope in a seemingly terrible and fragmented world. To be able to achieve a work of art based on absurd principles Lowry carefully straddles the line between absolute negation and absolute affirmation; in this he follows Camus' thoughts on negation and absurd creation:

Just as all thought, and primarily that of non-signification, signifies something, so there is no art that has no signification. . . . To create beauty, he [the artist] must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it.
(The Rebel 258)

Malcolm Lowry never felt he had true "freedom"; he was always tied to his father's allowance; his first wife, Jan, was unfaithful and eventually left him; Margerie, his second wife, adored him and endured the incredible strain his alcoholism cost both his professional and personal life. Furthermore, Lowry was in a paradoxical situation: he burned with desire to create a masterpiece of literature, a true work of art, yet he felt constricted and strained in attempting this task. In a word he felt incapable of producing what he eventually created: a masterpiece of modern literature. Eventually this masterful writer decided--subconsciously or consciously--to die by his own hand. And one must ask the question: did Lowry chose to die as a

conscious act? Was he making a decision based on Albert Camus' theses in The Myth of Sisyphus and The Rebel that the only two acts of freedom, of free will, now left a human being are suicide and murder?

If, as Camus says, we consider two subjects, murder and suicide, respectively, as the only choices left to a person to make as his or her own inalienable decision, then the rest of one's life is embroiled in situations so unclear as to leave the concept of "free will" unobtainable. Malcolm Lowry's mirror images, the brothers Geoffrey and Hugh Firmin, deal with the absurdity of the human condition--the choice of free will--in UTV. Geoffrey, the Consul, has two choices: the first is to commit suicide. He does this slowly through his addiction to alcohol; for what is heavy, serious drinking but an escape into the abyss, the void? And his second choice is allowing himself to be murdered--which he does. Therefore, in both choices he deals with Camus' basic theses in The Rebel and The Myth of Sisyphus. Geoffrey Firmin's murder by the Mexican Fascists in the bar and brothel, the Farolito, comes about by an intentional disregard for his own safety; in effect, Firmin will be acting as both the murderee and the murderer of his own death. Geoffrey Firmin therefore fulfills the condition expressed by Camus' Monsieur Meursault whose "heart becomes . . . an abyss threatening to swallow up society" (Camus, The

Stranger 101). Society cannot tolerate a disregard for a knowing repudiation of conventional moral values. Both Geoffrey Firmin and Monsieur Meursault knowingly are "guilty" of breaking moral conventions. What therefore does absurdist reasoning mean in relation to murder?

From the moment that life is recognized as good, it becomes good for all men. Murder cannot be made coherent when suicide is not considered coherent. A mind imbued with the idea of the absurd will undoubtedly accept fatalistic murder; but it would never accept calculated murder. In terms of the encounter between human inquiry and silence of the universe, murder and suicide are one and the same thing, and must be accepted or rejected together. (Camus, The Rebel 6)

In looking at UTV, we see that it espouses absurdist reasoning and logic, and most importantly, metaphysical rebellion. As the Consul goes slowly towards "hell" and eventually ends in the abyss, literally being thrown into the barranca, the great ravine splitting the Mexican landscape, he represents the metaphysical rebel firmly trapped in a position of inactivity. Throughout the novel, he will passively accept the downward spiral of events that kill him in the end. When the Consul rebels against society he "identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself, and from this point of view human solidarity is metaphysical" (Camus, The Rebel 17).

If, as I've pointed out, we look at Geoffrey Firmin as

symbolizing the negative pole of the personality and Hugh Firmin as the positive pole, we can see how Lowry constructs a symbiotic relationship between the two characters so that they play both sides of the absurdist moral equation: to accept death passively, like Geoffrey Firmin does, is to renounce one's choice of constructing a reality based on the concept of free will--the metaphysical rebel's main dialectic. But through Hugh, Lowry shows that choosing life allows the self to rise above tragic circumstances, to become a man of free will--even if only briefly. Therefore, Lowry is seeking to show through his characters that

the reasons for rebellion cannot be explained except in terms of an inquiry into its attitudes, pretensions, and conquests. The problem is to know . . . whether all rebellion must end in the justification of universal murder, or whether, on the contrary, without laying claim to an innocence that is impossible, it can discover the principle of reasonable culpability.

(Camus, The Rebel 11)

UTV proves this point: though Geoffrey and Yvonne die, Hugh, the positive self of the Geoffrey/Hugh union lives on to repudiate this murderous link. Hugh goes onwards to Spain to aid the Republican army; it may be a lost cause, but he willfully moves toward moral absolution away from his earlier cynicism and despair: "For Hugh, at twenty-nine, still dreamed, even then, of changing the world . . . through his actions . . ." (Lowry 9).

Malcolm Lowry's own life parallels the metaphysical rebellion of his main characters, Geoffrey and Hugh Firmin, through his incredibly confused existence, his two tumultuous marriages, his journeys, and his alcoholism. Therefore, in this sense both Lowry and the Firmins are Camus' metaphysical rebels: the writer creates himself as one being embodied within two distinct characters in the literary terrain of an absurd microcosm.

Lowry is an iconoclast, an original who synthesized from many diverse influences; yet he does not hide his debt to the geniuses of literary tradition. In his writing, Lowry is most influenced by nineteenth century writers, particularly Melville and Flaubert. Similarly, Camus' analysis of metaphysical rebellion has its origins with the nineteenth century writers. Gerald Noxon, critic, writer, and friend of Lowry's says:

Basically Malcolm was unwilling to repudiate the legacy which he had found awaiting him in the works of nineteenth-century novelists. While discarding the aridity of a purely realistic style, he was unwilling to adopt the kind of personal stenography which made the works of writers like Joyce and Faulkner superficially difficult. . . . For Malcolm it was necessary that his writing should have a perfectly wrought surface meaning, in the sense of the term established by Flaubert. A competent and thoroughly understandable narrative technique, however complex it might be in form was a necessity. . . . Malcolm insisted that his writing must

be capable of carrying meaning at many different depths, on the many different levels of intellectual and emotional communication. . . .

(Noxon 317-18)

For this reason, we can see that Lowry fashions an absurd work utilizing both imaginary and realistic techniques for the purpose of creating UTV. In this way he succeeds in writing a narrative with a surface story--the life and despair of the alcoholic Consul--and a subtextual account of the inner lives and realities of the different characters. This dualistic aspect of the novel gives it an absurd quality: one reads various accounts of the same story but told from differing points of view; the accounts oscillate in rhythm with one another creating a multilayered, existential novel. Therefore, Lowry fashions his novel in this sense from the absurdist viewpoint:

Literary art . . . can neither totally consent to reality nor turn aside from it completely. The purely imaginary does not exist. . . . Real literary creation, on the other hand, uses reality and only reality with all its warmth and its blood, its passion and its outcries. It simply adds something that transfigures reality.

(Camus, The Rebel 269)

When Camus discusses metaphysical rebellion, he could well be describing Lowry's own personal, chaotic existence. Lowry lived in a constant whirlwind of frenetic activity followed by passive somnambulistic bouts of alcoholic

depression. Lowry is the embodiment of the two extremes of Camus' rebellious man:

If metaphysical rebellion refuses to assent and restricts itself to absolute negation, it condemns itself to passive acceptance. If it prostrates itself in adoration of what exists and renounces its right to dispute any part of reality, [italics mine] it is sooner or later compelled to act . . . Rebel poetry, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, constantly oscillated between these two extremes: between literature and the will to power, between the irrational and the rational, the desperate dream and the ruthless action. (The Rebel 81)

Lowry always saw himself as a poet, though he was realistic enough--when sober--to realize his talent lay in prose. Day makes this clear:

Though Lowry thought of himself as a poet primarily, and always claimed that he intended eventually to cease writing prose, and to spend his declining years at his true vocation as a poet, it is all too obvious to the reader of The Lighthouse Invites the Storm [a collection of poems published posthumously] that, though Lowry's prose could be majestically poetic, his poetry is prosaic in the extreme: leaden, in fact, when it turns from doggerel to high seriousness. (282-83)

But, in a sense, Malcolm Lowry, the writer, can be considered a sort of troubadour using language in a poetic form. And it is in this sense that Lowry is a 'metaphysical rebel' as discussed by Camus. Lowry writes to rebel: against

his father, against the wealthy society he knew as a child, against the hostility and pain of an absurd world. Furthermore, he writes as a way of changing his own inner self; he is in search of an inner reality, and he accesses this new and different reality through the written word. So that Lowry, in essence, is creating his own reality through writing which Camus believes is a method that allows someone to "act." Throughout his life, Lowry "acts" out the different parts that go into UTV making it the unique work it is: fictional and real at the same time that it is multilayered, hallucinatory, and incendiary. Lowry is at once Geoffrey Firmin, the rejected alcoholic Consul who is the court jester, knowing what truth is, but unable to follow its course; and, on the other hand, Lowry is Hugh as well, striving for the light of truth knowing it may be a futile attempt--but trying regardless. Therefore, within UTV, Lowry strives to create a new literary landscape that sustains its own sense of reality and existential chaos. And contained within Under the Volcano is the simultaneous search of Geoffrey and Hugh Firmin for hope and affirmation within an absurd cosmos.

Chapter 2

Geoffrey and Yvonne have been dead for exactly one year as the novel opens. The use of flashbacks enables us to know them, but it also presents difficulties in understanding the chronological sequence of events. Critic David Markson explains the work's structure:

Like the Aeneid . . . or like Paradise Lost, the novel is comprised of twelve sections. Its central action occurs in twelve hours, these in turn enclosed in the twelve months. . . . (70)

These twelve months are enclosed within the twelve hour span of the story. UTV is the story of one man's tragic destiny: a tragic descent into alcoholism, despair, and murder. Within the setting of UTV, an atmosphere is generated through the use of continuous time shifts and changing points of view that creates a near hallucinogenic effect simulating the tension between the characters. In addition, the volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, and the ruined garden of the Consul are important symbolic motifs within the existential imagery created throughout the novel.

The novel centers around Geoffrey Firmin, a former British Consul to Mexico, his ex-wife Yvonne, Geoffrey's half-brother Hugh, and Geoffrey's boyhood friend Jacques Laruelle. Laruelle in chapter 1, recalls what transpired one year before on the Day of the Dead. In a twelve hour period,

Yvonne returns to Geoffrey whom she had divorced and left, and Hugh, who has been in Spain with the International Brigades, arrives from the U.S. just before Yvonne does. The interaction between these four characters creates the basic tension in the work.

Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne decide to go to the small town of Tomalin to a rodeo. On the bus ride to Tomalin they witness a dying Indian--fatally stabbed--by the side of the road. The bus stops, but no one assists the Indian. Another Mexican riding on the bus, a fascist sympathizer who reappears at the end of the story, steals the Indian's money. After Tomalin, Geoffrey, the Consul, disappears and Yvonne and Hugh search for him in every cantina in Tomalin finally moving on to the worst one--the Farolito, in the neighboring village of Parian. The Farolito is also a bordello and headquarters for the Almazan, the Mexican fascist party.

Geoffrey goes to the Farolito, has intercourse with a prostitute, and finally is murdered outside it. The gunshots that kill him scare the horse he is looking at--stolen from the murdered Indian. This horse rushes downhill into the jungle leading to the Farolito. Yvonne and Hugh are coming up that hill at the same time: Yvonne is killed by the horse. Hugh leaves for Veracruz shortly thereafter with the aid of Jacques Laruelle. He leaves with guns and munitions

for the beleaguered Republican army in Spain.

Thus Mexico acts as the site for the characters' existential journeys and symbolizes on a larger scale, the entire world's problems and the absurdity of the human condition. Mexico acts in the same fashion that Algeria does for Camus: both countries' histories differ from the main characters' personal origins: Firmin is an Englishman living in Mexico; Meursault in The Stranger, though born in Algeria, is of French, not Arab descent. Thus the strangeness of this habitation affects both characters with its different heat, soil, and climate. Mexico, for Lowry, mirrors the passion, deception, sorrow, joy and warmth his characters perceive in their lives. For both Lowry and Camus these two countries offer reflection and insight into the chaos and ruin occurring in Europe at that time. For Camus the:

glory of the African sun and sea and mountains needs allows no explanation. They provide no reason for living, but they make it possible for one to want to go on living. . . . Camus is willing to listen unashamedly to the cry of the heart even when reason is most convincing. (Barnes 370-71)

For Lowry

[t]he setting of Under the Volcano is a town in Mexico called Quauhnahuac, . . . where 'a fine American-style highway leads in from the north but is lost in its narrow streets and comes out a goat track.' This from Malcolm Lowry's

opening page, a directional signpost for the age: civilization one way, dissolution the other. In the shadow of Lowry's symbolic volcano, the balance is critical. But 'place' in Under the Volcano is more than contemporary microcosm; simultaneously, 'the name of this land is hell.'" (Markson 11)

The multilevel work that Malcolm Lowry created in UTV carries literary symbols and cinematic imagery throughout its text; it has literary and cinematic allusions, time shifts, and numerous tangential observations made by the characters. These observations, both by an omniscient narrator and the characters themselves, contain the angst, despair, and existential questioning that is the basis of the characters' individual quests within the novel.

Lowry's use of cinematic techniques and flashbacks combined with stream of consciousness writing guide--or lure--the reader's thoughts into a pattern which follows the characters' lives into the downward spiral of their existences. Critic Richard Costa says the significance of

Lowry's lark with time . . . is in the tradition of the finest elegiac writing, a memorializing of the past as a means of returning the dead to life. Calendar time exists as a reminder to us . . . that a world was dying in November, 1939, even as the Mexican dead were being honored. (Costa 67)

In this sense time acts as part of the absurd elements within the novel; Lowry uses time as part of the structure of UTV as a device upon which the absurd can be seen to

connect with the four main characters, Geoffrey, Hugh, Yvonne, and Jacques Laruelle. There is within the characters a realization that time is moving beyond them, that they are living in a world grinding on into oblivion: "Or the absurd may coincide with that 'revolt of the flesh' with which a man suddenly feels himself situated in time. A person may one day reflect on the fact that he is thirty years old. He places himself in time" (Barnes 165).

For Hugh this becomes particularly clear: he finds himself in Mexico trying to cure his brother of the advanced stages of alcoholism; he has just quit his job as a correspondent for The Globe; he has left his comrades fighting fascism in Spain and feels he has no ideals left. Like all the characters in UTV, Hugh is searching for a sense of idealism long lost, but unlike his brother Geoffrey, he slowly finds the path towards living again:

At twenty-nine a man was in his
thirtieth year. And he was twenty-nine.
And now at last, though the feeling had
perhaps been growing on him all morning,
he knew what it felt like, the
intolerable impact of this knowledge
. . . this knowledge, hitherto
associated only with people tottering on
the brink of the grave . . . that one
could not be young forever--that indeed,
in the twinkling of an eye, one was not
young any longer. (150)

And, furthermore, Hugh has time to start realizing that he has acted in a cowardly fashion: he has been running from

his responsibilities, and he is now too old to continue ignoring them--though he continues to debate this within himself:

I have no excuse any longer to behave in this irresponsible fashion. . . . I am young. I am a dashing fellow. Am I not? You are a liar, said the trees tossing in the garden. You are a traitor, rattled the plantain leaves. And a coward too . . . And they are losing the Battle of Ebro. Because of you, said the wind. A traitor even to your journalist friends you like to run down and who are really courageous men, admit it--Ahhh!
(150-151)

As difficult as UTV is to understand regarding chronological events, it could not be otherwise:

Any drastic rearrangement of the material would not only compromise its effectiveness, he [Lowry] rightly contended, but would also 'buckle the very form of the book, . . . a wheel with twelve spokes, the motion of which is something like that . . . of time itself.' (Cross 27)

The shifting point of view in UTV is an existential tool with which to capture the absurdity of the characters' lives. By shifting from a narrative omniscient view to a limited omniscient view through a character's awareness, Lowry creates a powerful and cinematic reading of his work. One is forced to question the point of view: Is it valid? Is it false? For example, in chapter 3, the Consul, Geoffrey Firmin, hears familiars: "'--She might have said yes for once,' a voice said in the Consul's ear . . ." (UTV 68). Do

these voices exist outside of his delirium tremens? Do they exist as separate entities or as part of his subconscious?

Geoffrey Firmin hears these voices as the

first of many appearances of Geoffrey's 'voices' or 'familiar' which, like the good and evil angels in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, do battle for his soul. The challenge they make to the Consul's sense of moral duty is unequivocal: is he the man to drink at this critical and longed-for-hour of Yvonne's return, thereby evading his responsibility, or will he be able to resist the temptation? (Ackerley and Clipper 108)

Lowry forces us to consider whose point of view is valid or real and guides us into looking at the novel through the perspective of an absurd and chaotic world with its own internal workings and logic. As a writer, Lowry is trying to "creat[e] destiny to suit any eventuality. In this way it [the novel] competes with creation, and provisionally, conquers death" (Camus, The Rebel 264).

To this end, the use of cinematic techniques within the text, propels the reader forward into UTV's existential mystery and sorrow. At the end of chapter 8, for example, the Consul, Yvonne, and Hugh witness the pelado steal the dying Indian's money and brazenly act as if nothing has happened. The moment that the Consul and Hugh decide not to help the Indian because of the possible political and legal implications causes Hugh to think

it was not time that stood still. Rather was it time was moving at different speeds [much like a film camera can speed up or slow down a particular visual], the speed at which the man seemed dying contrasting oddly with the speed at which everybody was finding it impossible to make up their minds.
(246)

Lowry's use of time in UTV is paralleled by the setting as a function of the symbolic landscape. This landscape will reflect the characters' existential ordeals as the novel shifts back and forth chronologically to the final dreadful death scene. As Costa explains it, "In the world of Lowry's imagination, the dispossessed Consul is the prisoner of a malaise whose interior geography is the main business of the book" (67). In the introduction of chapter 1, the narrator

offer[s] a matter-of-fact account of the situation and topography of Quauhnahuac, together with information about roads, hotels, places of worship, and recreational facilities These details prefigure the labyrinthine story about to unfold, the tragedy or 'goat song' of a cuckold, a cabron. . . ." (Cross 27).

And one of the most important motifs in this topography are the volcanoes towering over the valley town of Quauhnahuac.

Overlooking the town of Quauhnahuac are the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. These two volcanoes create a powerful motif within the setting. Looking at the symbolism of the volcanoes and their relationship to the characters' lives will show their existential significance to the work.

The historical background for these volcanoes, which actually exist, is based on the Indian legends for Mount Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl:

The father of Ixtaccihuatl forbade the marriage [between Popocatepetl and her], but seeing his daughter's grief he relented Ixtaccihuatl died, but holding in his heart the hope that she might come back to life, the prince took her body up into the hills, where he built a fire at sunset and knelt beside her to watch for signs of life. At last Quetzalcoatl took pity on them and changed them into volcanoes, the princess sleeping but the prince glowing as he maintains eternal vigilance over his beloved. (Ackerley and Clipper 395)

The volcanic imagery appears at various times, through different locations, as the characters' individual destinies unfold.

In chapter 11, Yvonne and Hugh are searching for the Consul who has deliberately left the Salon Ofelia to flee to his place of final "refuge," the Farolito. Yvonne and Hugh are tracing his steps by visiting every cantina towards Parian. As Hugh and Yvonne continue following the trail to Parian, the "jungle close[s] over them and the volcanoes [are] blotted out" (317). As Geoffrey "escapes" from the beneficial company of his brother and ex-wife, he in actuality moves forward to confront the absurd--though he does not recognize this until after his death.

However, Geoffrey is not meant to learn something from

his encounter with the absurd; in essence, his death must occur for the liberation of the ego as represented by Hugh. Therefore, Geoffrey faces his ordeal without the comprehension Hugh eventually gains:

The problem [whether life is or is not worth the trouble of being lived] becomes acute at that moment when one confronts the absurd. Such confrontation is like an awakening; and unless one deliberately closes one's eyes again, something of importance is bound to result. One goes on inevitably to suicide or to recovery. (Barnes 165)

In UTV Geoffrey does choose suicide--through alcohol--and ignores the consequences of his actions which cause his death in the Farolito. Hugh, on the other hand, rejects "death" and goes on to "recovery" by regaining his lost idealism and convictions.

As they follow Geoffrey's trail, the jungle encloses Hugh and Yvonne as they progress to the final climactic movement: the deaths of Yvonne and Geoffrey. The jungle significantly blots out the volcanoes because this parallels the lives of these two characters. Death comes swiftly for both in the final stages of the work. When Hugh and Yvonne reach a clearing in the jungle, they momentarily see the two volcanoes again, with black--deathlike--clouds floating upwards. Instead of eagles they spot vultures: "[b]irds were sailing up there, ascending higher and higher. Infernal bird of Prometheus!" (317). And Yvonne thinks of a poem the

Consul liked about the legend of Popocatepetl: "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 [*italics mine*] . . ." (318). Lowry controls the destiny of these two individuals by having Geoffrey's ex-wife come back to reunite or "find" him for a twelve hour period during which time she literally loses him. This time Geoffrey flees from Yvonne, "losing" or reversing what had happened the year past when she had left him.

The active volcano Popocatepetl acts as a metaphor in the setting for the "volcano" or intense emotional activity within each individual--Yvonne smolders with passion, Hugh barely restrains himself sexually with her--previously they had been lovers--and the Consul has a passion for alcohol. In relation to Hugh, the volcanoes signify his unrestrained sexual appetite. As a young man he had been an aspiring musician and had published some songs--in the process seducing his publisher's wife: "Just as he had long since forgotten to do his good turn every day Hugh only remembered to be prepared. So Hugh seduced Bolowski's wife" (172). This had become a scandal, but it was abruptly forgotten as the publisher withdrew all legal charges against Hugh. Later on Hugh seduces Yvonne--his brother's

wife. He has felt guilty over it ever since. And Geoffrey has not forgiven him.

In chapter 4, Hugh meets Yvonne again for the first time since she has left Quauhnhuac. He surprises her in the garden. Since Geoffrey is asleep--drunk--Hugh and Yvonne go for a walk into town. Quite spontaneously they decide to rent some horses from a local stable. As they ride they slowly "plo[d] downhill toward a river"(109). The symbolic meaning is clear: they are both going towards something, but it leads them downwards; in Lowryean terms this downward movement is towards moral damnation. Hugh is idly thinking "What was life but a warfare and a stranger's sojourn? Revolution rages too in the tierra caliente of each human soul" (108). Here Lowry is making a subtle comparison between the active volcano, Popocatepetl and Hugh, and Ixtaccihuatl, a dead volcano, and Yvonne. This proves to be true of Yvonne: the love between she and Geoffrey is dead. When Lowry compares this "tierra caliente" he uses it as an equivalent term to the feelings or passions which flow within each of these three characters--just like the hot lava flows within an active volcano:

Everywhere . . . were attestations to Popocatepetl's presence and antiquity. And here the damned thing was again! Why were there volcanic eruptions? People pretended not to know . . . [T]he lava flooded out, the gases escaped, and there was your eruption. --But not your

explanation. No, the whole thing was a complete mystery still. (238-239)

The absurdity of the situation is that all four characters, Geoffrey, Hugh, Yvonne, and Jacques Laruelle, are both "dead" and "alive." Jacques, a failed French movie director, has come to Quauhnahuac where he becomes like Geoffrey: lost, alienated, and alcoholic. Each character mirrors the symbolism of both volcanoes. And only Hugh escapes this cycle of death to become fully alive by the end of the novel.

In contrast, Geoffrey firmly embraces this existential downward movement throughout UTV. He is caught between life and death--and the need to rush absurdly into the pit, the abyss, the barranca. Just before Hugh returns and meets Yvonne in chapter 3, Geoffrey, lounging in a chair on his veranda mildly drunk, complains that "I am too sober" (92). He sees "Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, that image of the perfect marriage" while overhead are "vultures waiting, more graceful than eagles" (93). Lowry links two distinct and opposing images: one of the perfect union between two lovers, and the other of scavengers waiting for carrion. These two images create a tension which works as Lowry intended: to demonstrate the condition of each individual characters' heart and consciousness in relation to the volcanoes' imagery of a pure, unified love. As Geoffrey

contemplates this beatific scene of the volcanoes he speaks out loud: "The will of man is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it"(93). This phrase is a recognition of his encounter with the absurd:

If we remember that the absurd springs from the encounter between human demand and the unresponsive universe, we can see that a man . . . may simply suppress the demand, in which case he will commit suicide, which means consenting to the irrational. . . . (Barnes 168)

And we know that Geoffrey is determined to embrace the irrational. . . . Furthermore, this quote is also an allusion to Milton's lines from Paradise Lost I. 105-108:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost--th'unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.
Satan's words undercut the Consul's
[words] by his viewing the
volcanoes as an 'image of the perfect
marriage'; by his seeing the waiting
vultures as 'more graceful than eagles';
and by his falling asleep with a crash.
(Ackerley and Clipper 141)

David Markson finds that the symbolic imagery of the ancient volcanoes working in opposition to one another creates the necessary tension to support Lowry's artistic vision:

"Repeated oppositions . . . as in the dialectic of the Tao, will eventually be understood to form a pattern of complementary polarities, or 'opposing motions' as Lowry calls them . . ." (Markson 42). Thus, the volcanoes overlooking the town of Quauhnahuac allow for the creation

of two movements. And like the Mount of Purgatory in Dante's Divine Comedy, both volcanoes oversee the characters' actions. The repeated references to the volcanoes causes both a downward movement and an upward motion thus creating two distinct messages of tragedy and redemption. After Geoffrey is murdered, Yvonne is killed by the horse Geoffrey had been looking at--the murdered Indian's stolen horse--which rushes downhill because of the gunshots which kill Geoffrey. Popocatepetl, within the context of the setting is a symbolic link to the Consul's fall from grace:

Popo is the novel's dominating symbol, its snowy peak and burning heart epitomizing both man's aspiring and destructive capacities. At the moment of his death, the Consul imagines himself to be climbing towards its snows only to be tipped into the fiery furnace.

(Ackerley and Clipper 11)

Hugh, who renounces "death," lives and regains his sense of idealism by transporting TNT to the--already lost--cause of the Republican army in Spain. In this case, Hugh has a change in consciousness: "he [Hugh] will be like the condemned man, the extreme opposite of the suicide [Geoffrey], who asserts his right to live even as sentence is passed. He maintains an awareness of death and yet rejects it" (Barnes 168).

Another important element of the setting is contained within the backyard of Geoffrey's house: a once well

maintained garden has become feculent and wild. It is the Garden of Eden after the Fall. The imagery of this garden, gone to seed, allows Lowry to manipulate the Consul's moral choices. The garden serves as a fertile area to allude to Geoffrey's passiveness, his inabilities, and his willful misuse of his creative powers; the garden symbolizes the free will that is found in the original Biblical Eden. And Geoffrey represents the first man with free will who falls from God's graces: Adam.

This overgrown "livid and crepuscular" (UTV 65) garden in Geoffrey's house on the Calle Nicaragua acts symbolically to show the decay in his life. The garden also serves as a symbol for Mexican political instability and corruption as Mexico itself acts as a microcosm for Western Civilization. Jedynak points out that the

Consul's garden is evidently an existential garden. In it takes place the 'agonic struggle' - the Consul shares a 'burden of conscience, of sourcelsss [sic] sorrow'; his utter neglect of the garden, his letting it run riot, portrays man's inability to accept the responsibility for cultivating the garden of the world. The Consul, indeed, questions the significance of the Garden of Eden concept, thinking that perhaps here again is another spurious illusion of world order, that perhaps God deliberately kept Adam in the Garden of Eden as fitting punishment for one who 'secretly loathed the place.'

(Jedynak 26)

This, naturally, evokes the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. David Markson says that "as has been indicated, Eden in Under the Volcano is untenanted--expulsion has come to pass" (25).

This tragic link with expulsion is further developed in the Consul's garden when Geoffrey and Yvonne return together for the first time since her arrival. The beginning of chapter 3 starts with an image of the cultivated plants and flowers dying, being overtaken by weeds:

The tragedy, proclaimed, as they made
their way up the crescent of the drive
. . . exotic plants . . . perishing on
every hand of unnecessary thirst . . .
yet struggling like dying voluptuaries
. . . to maintain some final attitude of
potency, or of a collective desolate
fecundity. . . . (65)

This imagery serves as potent symbol for "the anguish and disaster of the coming sexual problems of infidelity and impotence which will form the emotional core of the chapter" (Ackerley and Clipper 102).

In chapter 5 the imagery of loss and ruin is bluntly stated when the Consul, about to wander in his garden in search of a hidden bottle, notices a

sign uprooted or new, whose oblong
pallid face stared . . . at him. Le
gusta este jardin? it asked . . .
LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?
QUE ES SUYO?
EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN! (128)

The Consul understands this sign to say: "You like this

garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" This warning, which the Consul ignores, is repeated again in chapter 8 when the Consul, Hugh, and Yvonne are on the ill-fated busride to Tomalin to the bullfights. As the bus crosses through a small town, the Consul sees in "the garden under the trees . . . Le gusta este jardín, que es suyo? Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan! Do you like this garden, the notice said, that is yours? See to it that your children do not destroy it!"(232). This sign is first mistranslated by the Consul in chapter 5. It is not until he sees it written again in the public garden from the bus that he understands it correctly:

'[T]he real translation can be in a certain sense even more horrifying.' Lowry was concerned not only that the reader should be aware of the correct version of the sign, but also that he should have some hint of the occult implications of eviction. . . . The novel, Lowry claimed, is concerned primarily with the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself (Ackerley and Clipper 189)

Costa explains that: "[T]he misreading [of the sign] is the talisman, the key, to the novel's Eden-and-eviction theme. The Consul is a forlorn Adam; his own garden, once beautiful, has become a jungle where he hides liquor bottles. . ."(76-77). Thus, the imagery of the garden frames the Consul within its symbolic borders: he is at once a willful and unrepentant Adam who stands at the brink of

moral disaster and desolation. The Consul embraces the absurd: "The absurd arises when man confronts the irrational with all of his nostalgic longing for happiness and reasonable unity" (Barnes 167). Therefore, although the Consul longs for reunion with Yvonne, he has chosen to ignore her return and promise of renewed happiness. Instead of love and redemption, the Consul hurls himself forward into the void of existence, the abyss, with its allure and promise of damnation.

Chapter 3

The dynamic tension between the characters in Under the Volcano creates a sense of movement within the novel that spirals upwards and downwards. This symbolic movement allows Malcolm Lowry to create situations for his characters that deal with commitment, responsibility, decision, despair, faith, and death. With these various issues Lowry explores the fate of his characters utilizing the work's trochal chronological arrangement. In a letter to Jonathan Cape, his publisher, Lowry explains that the "whole work is . . . a wheel, and a wheel in constant motion" (Day 323). This chapter will discuss the downward spiral of the novel created by its time-shifts and setting. Furthermore I will analyze the characters' attitudes towards free choice, damnation, and destiny. The upward movement will be discussed in chapter 7 because that movement helps to create the transcendent quality of the work.

In discussing the downward motion of the novel we must also look at how Lowry conceives of the passage of time in an absurd universe. The movement of time through a character's life is symbolized by the Infernal Machine: this Infernal Machine is time itself unwinding within a person's lifespan:

The dynamics [of UTV] are cinematic, dramatic, and most probably have their origins in the play by Jean Cocteau that Lowry saw twice in Paris in May 1934: La Machine Infernale. This was Cocteau's version of the Oedipus tragedy . . . This infernal machine is the universe itself: an ingeniously contrived clock-like mechanism in which every part, every minute, has its function in the machine's diabolical purpose--'the mathematical destruction of a human life.' (Day 322-23).

At the end of chapter 1, as Jacques Laruelle walks home for the last time before leaving Quauhnahuac, he notices "the slowly revolving Ferris wheel . . . " in the town square (10). As Laruelle moves down the street the Ferris wheel will seem to sink from his sight. This preliminary phase allows Lowry to create the novel's atmosphere. Thus the setting with the two volcanoes, the Ferris wheel, and the barranca appears to "rise" and "sink" through the use of cinematically described imagery as the work progresses. At the end of chapter 1 Laruelle will see the wheel again as over "the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel.-----" (42). These different views of the Ferris wheel, set up for the Carnival on the Day of the Dead, will support both the physical and psychological movements of the characters in the novel. Lowry explains that the wheel-like image 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 . . . as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before . . . and in this sense, . . . we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation. (Ackerley and Clipper 75)

Thus this image of a rotating wheel in space will integrate the movement of the various parts of the setting into a whole which operates like a movie set: while we initially concentrate on the action of the characters, the setting allows for the characters to interact with one another and to interact with the setting both in a physical and a symbolic sense. Therefore the novel's thematic concerns are given a regenerating quality as the novel itself revolves like a wheel due to its trochal structure.

Every character in UTV is driven in some fashion by the relentless energy of the Infernal Machine. Because of each character's unfulfilled responsibilities, or sense of dread and despair, this symbol of a time devouring machine will compel each character to make absurd decisions at crucial junctures in the novel. For example, in chapter 9, the trio of Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh arrive in Tomalin, a small town outside Quauhnahuac on the way to Parian, to see a bull throwing event at the local arena. There Hugh feels the necessity to prove himself:

It was Hugh. . . . he had jumped from the scaffolding into the arena and was

now running in the direction of the bull
 . . . 'God damn the stupid ass!' . . .
 'It's all right, Geoff. Hugh knows what
 he's doing.' 'The bloody fool . . .'
 'The pimp . . . the poxbox.' (275)

Therefore, on a physical level Hugh is seeking a temporary numbing of his feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Activity lets him stop analysis: he rides the bull. It will not be until the end of the novel, following Geoffrey's death, that Hugh will make the transformation to real courage, moral courage--by his departure back to Spain.

The Consul feels resentment; he is aghast at the physical prowess of his younger half-brother. The bull symbolically represents masculine virility and therefore so does Hugh. In opposition to Hugh's physical performance is Geoffrey's physical inability to please Yvonne sexually. Because Geoffrey is so thoroughly alcoholic and inebriated throughout most of his waking hours he is unable to make love to his ex-wife. Consequently Hugh's riding act aggravates the poisonous feelings of ill will Geoffrey already has for him: "'I don't think he means to show off,' Yvonne smiled. No, he was simply submitting to that absurd necessity he felt for action, so wildly exacerbated by the dawdling inhuman day" (275). Hugh's bull riding will contribute to Geoffrey's increased frustration and will prod Geoffrey to leave Hugh and Yvonne for the Farolito.

Whereas Geoffrey is seemingly paralyzed at moments to

do anything positive for himself or others, indeed even finds it necessary to do nothing, Hugh, his polar opposite, finds he must keep "busy": sending a cable, riding into town with Yvonne, riding the bull, and carrying TNT to the Spanish Loyalists. Because of this, Geoffrey and Hugh are in a state of constant emotional tension: they love each other, they despise each other. In this way, Lowry allows each one to function as a part of the other: this allows one self--Hugh--to ascend, to make decisions, to combat despair--while Geoffrey becomes further locked in a downward spin of dread, anguish, and alcoholism. This conquering of death, as Camus puts it, is what Lowry had in mind "that Geoffrey and Hugh are 'the same person, but within a book that obeys not the laws of other books, but those it creates as it goes along'" (Falk 214).

Just as the Infernal Machine is relentless, so too is the barranca an irresistible force for the characters. This series of ravines, ranging from shallow, filthy drainage ditches to deep, dangerous chasms, is mentioned throughout the entire novel. Therefore, as important as time is for Lowry, so too is the setting, containing the barranca which compels the Consul ever downwards. Just as the volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, act as upward striving symbols, so the barranca acts in opposition to the heavenly aspiring volcanoes. Instead the barranca signifies a

downward movement into damnation. This deep ravine, this barranca, splitting through the outskirts of Quauhnhuac and traversing through the landscape to Parian, symbolizes the Maleboge of Dante's Inferno; it also symbolizes the existentialist's void, the terrifying abyss into nothing. Its Christian connotation is the symbolic representation of hell.

Furthermore, the barranca acts symbolically to represent the tremendously deep wound in Geoffrey's and Yvonne's relationship. This abyss, or rupture, in Geoffrey's and Yvonne's love can be understood through the Confessions of St. Augustine which Lowry alludes to: "St. Augustine explicitly likens the 'tenebrae super abbyssum' ('the darkness over the abyss') to the human heart which lacks the light of God" (Ackerley and Clipper 35). This reference to a gulf or a separation, an abyss of an emotional nature, is reiterated again in chapter 2. At the beginning of the chapter, Yvonne enters the Bella Vista bar looking for her former husband whom she has come back to after a year's separation. Geoffrey does not realize she has come back. Yvonne is at a decisive moment and thinks back to before her return to Quauhnhuac:

Surely this cannot be us," she cried in her heart suddenly. "This cannot be us-- say that it is not, somebody, this cannot be us here!"--Divorce. What did the word really mean? She'd looked it up

in the dictionary on the ship: to
sunder, to sever. And divorced meant:
sundered, severed. (49)

After leaving the Bella Vista, Geoffrey and Yvonne see a photographic enlargement in a printer's shop window. It is called La Despedida, the Parting. The scene in the photo is of "the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre, of a great rock split by forest fires" (UTV 54). As they move on past this curious photograph, Yvonne thinks

After the damp and detritus had done
their work both severed halves of that
blasted rock would crumble to earth. It
was inevitable. . . Was it really?
Wasn't there some way of saving the poor
rock whose immutability . . . no one
would have dreamed of doubting! Ah. Who
could have thought of it then as other
than a single integrated rock? . . . 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. (55)

This disintegration of the rock is symbolic of Geoffrey's and Yvonne's marriage; although they are now divorced, they still cling together but in some unknown way--their energies are as the rock's: split in half with each half neutralizing the other's love. It is this negation of their love that steers both of them symbolically downward. Jedynak states that Geoffrey "turns away from the normal world of order and sanity, he rejects family, human love and religion . . . and chooses to lose his self in the chaos of the void in order

to grapple with ultimate reality" (Jedynak 27). But since Yvonne and Geoffrey are, in a sense, tied, however tenuously, Yvonne is also ultimately dragged down by Geoffrey's ever deeper attempts in exploring the darkness of his own psyche. Thus, as inevitably as the rock, La Despedida, will break apart, so too will their marriage fall into the depths of the earth; this split in the earth is physically symbolized in the barranca. The barranca "is the existentialist view of life; the barranca is a symbol of cleavage--'the eternal horror of opposites' is always present" (Jedynak 26).

While continuing this downward movement for the Consul and Yvonne, Lowry allows for Yvonne to hope, though this hope is doomed, that perhaps she can save Geoffrey:

she'd [Yvonne] tried to keep Quauhnahuac itself, as a sort of safe footway where his phantom [Geoffrey's] could endlessly pace, accompanied only by her own consoling unwanted shadow, above the rising waters of possible catastrophe.

(63)

The Consul's unwillingness, his stubbornness to realize the love Yvonne is showing him by coming back, negates her positive thoughts. As she and the Consul approach their home coming back from the Bella Vista, she has a realization that pulls her in a downward direction:

And deliberately as a climber on a high unguarded place looks up at the pine tree above on the precipice and comforts

himself by saying: 'Never mind about the drop below me, how very much worse if I were on top of one of those pines up there!' she forced herself out of the moment: she stopped thinking. . . . (62)

Because of Geoffrey's inaction, his inability to receive the love Yvonne offers him on her return to Quauhnhuac, he negates any promise of happiness between them. But Malcolm Lowry feels it is essential the Consul be unfulfilled; it is part of his destiny to reject and be rejected: he must be damned. Richard Costa agrees that

Lowry poses the tortured relationship of the Consul and Yvonne, and, within that greater agony, lesser ones in the abortive liaisons between Yvonne and Jacques and between Yvonne and the Consul's doppelganger, his half-brother, Hugh: all symbolic of the modern malaise. As Dale Edmonds notes, it is not that love has ceased to exist in our world; it is that selfish rather than selfless love is the characteristic form . . . 'Ah,' sighs the Consul--it is one of his last coherent reflections--'who knows why man, however beset his chance by lies, has been offered love?' (73)

The various characters search for love: their inability to receive and hold love, once it is found, is one of the book's primary moral and psychological explorations. Through the Consul, Lowry probes the issues concerning free will. Is an inability to accept love cause for damnation? Is the Consul's search for love as ineffective as Camus' Meursault's inability to defend his conduct (and thus prevent his execution)? Geoffrey's reluctance to act when he

needs to take responsibility for an action--showing love to Yvonne, forgiving Hugh, absolving Jacques--is consistent with the philosophy set out in The Rebel. Inactivity can result in a decision as much as active participation can result in a decision; the only difference is using one's free will to make the decision. But as we can see in Geoffrey Firmin's consciousness, he believes, like the Marquis de Sade, that

[t]he point . . . is . . . the maximum of enjoyment coincides with the maximum of destruction. To possess what one is going to kill, to copulate with suffering--those are the moments of freedom" (Camus, The Rebel 43)

If an entity's interest in making a decision, in acting or not acting, ceases to exist, society will decide for that individual. For an alcoholic like the Consul, making decisions about his relationship with Yvonne becomes an impossibility: he allows himself to be damned; his decisions go only in one direction: toward the depths of depravity, murder, and suicide. And denying the existence of love, of accepting love, is Geoffrey's greatest downfall: "when the emptiness of a man's heart becomes . . . an abyss threatening to swallow up society" (Camus, The Stranger 101). This man, this former Consul, cannot function as an element of society: he becomes an outcast, an absurd figure. Similarly, Costa discusses the

galvanic negative capability which causes Melville's Bartleby to choose not to and Camus's Meursault to remain impassive at his mother's funeral. Not since Hemingway brought Jake Barnes and his entourage to the good fishing and bull fights at Pamplona has a group of fictional characters so moved us by their very inability to move. (72)

Destiny plays a strong role in Lowry's concept of "free" choice, "right" action, and movement in the work. The Oedipus legend, in conjunction with the Infernal Machine, operates in UTV as an engine powering one's fate. This sense of predetermined fate running through the work causes Hugh in chapter 4 to misplace a cable received from a Mexican labor union about fascist activities in Mexico. Hugh is talking to Yvonne; he explains to her the significance of the cable:

'The C.T.M.,' Hugh glanced over her shoulder at his cable, 'the Confederation of Mexican Workers, have sent a petition. They object to certain Teutonic huggermugger in this state. As I see it, they are right to object.' . . . Yvonne handed back the cable and Hugh slipped it into the pocket of the jacket [Geoffrey's]. (96)

This simple action, putting the telegram inside the pocket of the borrowed coat, will cost Geoffrey his life; no action, or inaction is without its consequences in UTV. Lowry's description of the cable being slipped into the vest is brief; this small action will precipitate a larger one: a man's death.

In another circumstance where decisions seem to affect one's destiny, in chapter 6, Yvonne meets Jacques Laruelle in a small sidestreet much to Geoffrey's displeasure. Upon Yvonne's return the Consul wants to avoid meeting Jacques Laruelle whom he had become friends with again since Yvonne's departure. During the year Yvonne was gone, a mutual bonding had reunited the two men as in years past-- enough for the Consul to forgive Jacques' affair with Yvonne. But when she comes back, those "benevolent" feelings towards his old friend, Jacques, change for Geoffrey.

But the inevitable meeting happens because the Infernal Machine demands it. It is through Hugh's eyes that we first notice that Jacques has stepped out to greet Geoffrey and Yvonne:

Hugh suddenly noticed that a tall man
 . . . doubtless in some state of exile,
 was confronting them" with "the essence
 of some guilty secret perhaps that he
 kept . . . but which was now momentarily
 exposed, fluttering and embarrassed.

(190)

This "guilty secret," is of course, the affair Jacques has had with Yvonne. As the four of them now continue walking towards Jacques' house for drinks, Geoffrey says, "'It was a great coincidence our meeting here,' [regarding Jacques' arrival in Quauhnhuac the year before] the Consul told Hugh in a changed even tone. 'But I really think you two ought to get together, you have something in common" (191). And by

this Geoffrey is alluding to Hugh's infidelity with Yvonne.

Critics Ackerley and Clipper explain that

Yvonne is anxious to avoid Laruelle's house, just as Jacques is himself, . . . but by a 'favourite trick of the gods,' her very efforts to avoid him contribute to their meeting. The infernal machine is relentless (269)

Later on in the following section, chapter 7, the Consul and Laruelle leave Laruelle's house together; they have some time left before meeting Yvonne and Hugh to board the bus for Tomalin; Laruelle had tried to convince them to go to Guanajuato instead, but to no avail. This would have taken them in another direction--away from Parian and the Farolito. As they leave Laruelle's house, Geoffrey is lost in hallucinatory thoughts about his relationship with Yvonne:

Had such a thing as a normal happy life ever been possible for them? It had the desire remained--like an echo of Yvonne's own--to find her . . . to reverse their doom, it was a desire amounting almost to a resolution . . . But the weight of a great hand seemed to be pressing his head down. The desire passed. (214-215)

As they continue their walk together in town, the carnival around them, at one point Geoffrey imagines Jacques confronting him about his treatment of Yvonne. In Geoffrey's inebriated state he hears Jacques telling him:

'You fool, you stupid fool . . . You've even been insulated from the responsi-

bility of genuine suffering . . . Even the suffering you do endure is largely unnecessary. Actually spurious. It lacks the very basis you require of it for its tragic nature. You deceive yourself. For instance that you're drowning your sorrows . . . Because of Yvonne and me. But Yvonne knows. And so do I. And so do you . . . The same thing is bound to happen again you fool it will happen again if you don't pull yourself together.' (219)

This voice will actually be Geoffrey's inner consciousness. He will awaken with a start from his drunken state and realize he has left another bar, The Paris, and somehow lost Jacques Laruelle. He continues to stumble about until he rejoins Hugh and Yvonne at the bus terminal and they continue their existential journey towards Parian.

Therefore, in their wanderings the three characters symbolize Lowry's search for truth in UTV: Lowry poses questions through his characters: does one have true freedom of choice? Are decisions, and therefore one's fate, predetermined? In terms of metaphysical rebellion what Lowry is doing is creating a dialectic between potential choice--free will--or inescapable destiny--the Oedipus story, the Infernal Machine of the gods. The concept of the Machine is then actually created with the preface of the novel's epigraphs from Sophocles, Bunyan, and Goethe. Douglas Day explains these epigraphs:

The novel is about damnation. The three epigraphs with which Lowry begins--one

from Sophocles, one from Bunyan, and one from Goethe--tell us, in effect, that man is magnificent . . . ; that he must actively desire his salvation if he is to achieve it; and that one's own effort can bring about that salvation. . . . Or, put more negatively: man is marvelous. If he wants salvation, he can be saved. But sometimes he may not want it. This much, the epigraphs say; it is the function of the rest of the novel to show one marvelous man turning his back on salvation, not wanting it, not only refusing to strive upward but rushing instead headlong into hell, into the arms of the infernal gods. (325)

So when one considers Geoffrey Firmin, the Consul, as one who rebels against salvation, he defines the metaphysical rebel: "The metaphysical rebel is therefore not definitely an atheist, as one might think him, but he is inevitably a blasphemer. Quite simply, he blasphemes primarily in the name of order, denouncing God as the father of death and as the supreme outrage" (Camus, The Rebel 24).

In the last chapter of the novel, the Consul will finalize his position on the absurdity of trying to change one's destiny; he wants damnation and not salvation: he will receive it. Geoffrey arrives at the Farolito: "He was safe here; this was the place he loved--sanctuary, the paradise of his despair" (338). As Geoffrey orders another glass of mescal, he notices a scorpion, dead, on the barroom wall in front of him. He thinks: "maybe the scorpion, not wanting to be saved, had stung itself to death" (338). And with this

symbolic thought he is as much referring to the scorpion as to himself and his own death.

Chapter 4

In this chapter I will look at the recurring issues that affect the various characters' lives: alcoholism, alienation, and unfulfilled love. Lowry's characters are searching for a sense of a higher power, or God.

Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus see human existence transcending into the nothing. There is no God. So man is entirely abandoned to fixing his own norms and determining his values and what he will become. (Macquarrie 72)

But if "there is no God," as stated above, these characters need to at least determine for themselves a set of values. Their alienation comes from a feeling of disconnectedness: Geoffrey's and Yvonne's lost love, Hugh's search for truth, and Jacques Laruelle's search for identity. This sense of disconnection from reality is further aggravated in Geoffrey and Jacques by alcohol.

Geoffrey refuses to give up drinking even though Yvonne has come back to him; thus, he refutes a symbolic upward movement towards enlightenment. Instead he mirrors Faust's descent "living among the cohabitations [Lowry's spelling] of Faust himself" (Lowry 86). In contrast, though he is cynical, Hugh wants desperately to believe there is justice and love in the world and that he can redeem himself for his

failures as a man: in a word, atonement.

Hugh seeks expiation for past misdeeds. He is guilty of having seduced Bolowski's wife. Bolowski was his musical publisher when Hugh worked as an aspiring musician. And Hugh is also guilty of seducing his brother's wife, Yvonne. Furthermore, Hugh feels guilt at leaving his friends in the International Brigade fighting Franco in Spain. By seeking expiation for his past acts, Hugh makes a conscious attempt to change his old patterns: he does not succumb to Yvonne's charms again when she comes back to Quauhnahuac; he tries to cure Geoffrey of his alcoholism, and Hugh comes to a decision to return to Spain to fight fascism. Thus, Hugh moves on and upwards: he is the only character to do so.

Even though Hugh has an opportunity to make love to Yvonne again because the initial attraction still exists between them, he does not follow through. Geoffrey is passed out drunk after an abortive attempt at lovemaking with Yvonne and is therefore conveniently asleep--both literally and symbolically. But Hugh lets go of the thought of pursuing Yvonne again because a change has occurred for him, and he senses a transition in his search for truth:

While crossing a river riding horses
with Yvonne in chapter 4, Hugh will find
that 'there derived a certain sensation
of lightness, as if the mare were
swimming, or floating through the air'
. . . and if the concept of 'upward
struggle' must now be read as involving

redemption in the highest sense, Hugh's own thoughts will henceforth be very literally connected with 'atonement.'
(Markson 61)

Hugh evolves towards a new reality based on a search for truth to atone for his past actions. In contrast, because Geoffrey's life is based on destructive principles of deceit, drink, and moral dishonesty he spirals downward; he is inevitably drawn to his own destruction. These moral choices are argued by Camus:

[P]rinciples do not allow him [man] to accept things as they are; and, things not being what they should be, his principles are therefore fixed, silent, and alone. To abandon oneself to principles is really to die--and to die for an impossible love which is the contrary of love. (The Rebel 129-30)

Geoffrey Firmin does exactly this: he dies for fixed, silent principles based on false values. He never regains the lost love he is seeking, even though Yvonne does come back to him. Instead, he loses himself, and therefore his moral nature, in his destructive drive downwards into the bottle, into the abyss. Furthermore, this "flight from light" is exemplified in Geoffrey Firmin's constant searching for the "safety" of the dark, poorly lit cantinas at all hours of the day and night. His feelings of alienation and unfulfilled love are the conditions he feels within himself and his own heart; these feelings are current with Hugh as well and constitute one of the moral dilemmas facing both

characters:

One of Lowry's central concerns . . . is . . . 'the nature of love in a fragmented society.' . . . Meursault, the anti-hero of Albert Camus's The Stranger, announces in the first sentence of the novel that 'mother died today.' He opts out of--and is martyred by--a world that seeks to catalogue the responses of love in a neat series of equations. (Costa 172)

Geoffrey fixes a course of action--or nonaction--tightly bound to destructive principles; the result is predictable: "When principles fail, men have only one way to save them and to preserve their faith, which is to die for them" (Camus, The Rebel 129). Malcolm Lowry is thus reiterating through Geoffrey the existential dilemma facing all the characters in UTV: when one becomes fixed on broken principles, then this becomes the absurd and therefore "the contrary of love." The Consul, in fact, seeks love but cannot have it; this is the rule of an absurd world.

The Consul, as the shadow self, of the Geoffrey/Hugh personality within the absurd universe of Malcolm Lowry, denies a belief in faith; he denies redemption: he becomes god-less man. And, in fact, in the last chapter of the novel, he will succumb completely to 'godless' action: He will be able to sustain an erection with Maria, the prostitute, and complete his moral degeneration into the abyss--prior to his actual physical fall down the barranca.

Lowry intends for the Consul to be lost, unsaved; the Consul is doomed to his fate precisely because he determines to be damned:

'Quiere Maria,' she volunteered again
 . . . [drawing] him down to the bed. Her
 body was Yvonne's too, her legs, her
 breasts, her pounding passionate heart
 . . . it was sinking into a sea . . .
 and the silent final trembling approach,
 . . . (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 alike are the groans of love
 to those of the dying. . . . (348-349)

Furthermore, the Consul finds that Maria becomes a memory for Yvonne, but unlike the real Yvonne, she cannot redeem him. Geoffrey is able to have sex--as opposed to making love--with a prostitute precisely because it condemns him to death. His attempt to make love to Yvonne in chapter 3, marks a possible turning point for him: a salvation. He rejects it:

Yvonne had sunk back in bed patiently.
 But now she stretched forward and
 stabbed out her cigarette in the tray of
 a tall grey tinwork ashstand shaped like
 an abstract representation of a swan²
 . . . 'All right, Geoffrey: suppose we
 forget it until you're feeling better
 (84)

The Consul's sexual inability with his former wife is as much a spiritual--or emotional--problem as an actual

physical disability:

Those readers who prefer to attribute the Consul's impotence to excessive drinking rather than psychical conflict will have a hard time accounting for his effective performance with Maria in the Farolito . . . In one sense . . . the failure does stem from his dipsomania; the cantinas have become a perverse substitute for both marital felicity and mystical union. (Cross 39)

In this way then, the Consul damns himself with an absurd choice: he chooses to fail as a lover with Yvonne, and he succeeds in having sex with Maria. This effectively seals his fate in UTV; Geoffrey will go down to the depths of depravity, and, ultimately, death; Hugh will move away from the negative influences of his alter-ego, older brother, and realize his own true nature: he leaves Mexico to help his friends fighting fascism in Spain.

The ability to make intelligent decisions, to make decisions, is denied Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Jacques. Because of this they lack the strength to take responsibility for their actions: this existential quandary creates a climate within the novel of doubt, bewilderment, and frustration. Geoffrey's seeming inaction represents a fixed course of action: he resolves to do nothing; therefore, this is in itself a decision--albeit one that is damning. Geoffrey hears the voices of madness of his alcoholic "familiar" in the darkness of an absurd world. These voices abet him in

his fixed course of inaction.

The absurdity of his situation is a refusal to take appropriate action; he ignores warnings from within himself: his familiars speak both truth and falsehood. So even his rush towards absurdity, hell, is stymied briefly because he will not listen to reason--his conscience, or insanity--his "familiars." In fact, in chapter 5, where the Consul runs amok in his ruined, formerly orderly garden, while Yvonne naps having just returned, the Consul seizes the moment to drink: he has hidden a bottle in the weeds of his garden, further symbolism of the destruction of his own private "Eden." He comes in contact with his own private absurd alcoholic demons:

The Consul, an inconceivable anguish of horripilating hangover thunderclapping about his skull, and accompanied by a protective screen of demons gnattering in his ears . . . was almost running. . . 'We warned you, we told you so, but now that in spite of all our pleas you have got yourself into this deplorable--' He recognized the tone of one of his familiars, faint among the other voices as he crashed on through the metamorphoses of dying and reborn hallucinations. . . . (126)

His desire for drink is an addictive poison; it draws him further down the pit of hell. Richard Cross indicates that the "voice of one of Geoffrey's familiar spirits speaking on behalf of Yvonne and his own repressed longings, declares: 'All your love is in the cantinas now: the feeble survival

of a love of life now turned to poison, . . . and poison has become your daily food' " (Cross 39).

This then, is the predicament of Camus' metaphysical rebel. The characters in UTV struggle against the absurdity of their lives but without any clear intentions. It is their unconscious urge towards rebellion that convinces the reader of their existential terrors: with a clear plan in sight, we might feel that at least one of them has a chance to overcome the obstacles of a capricious universe. In actuality, the only individual in the story who does that is Hugh. In his metaphysical rebellion against indecision, cowardice, and inertia he rises beyond his absurd circumstances.

The fact that the other three main characters Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Jacques are unable to rise beyond their own lost and negated worlds is a recurring theme that threads throughout the novel. Their rejection of love, their inability to accept redemption, and consequently hope, causes the creative tension between Hugh, symbolizing hope, and Geoffrey, symbolizing despair. Malcolm Lowry creates a work of profound angst that resonates with the existential theme of lost love, alienation, and despair.

In Jacques Laruelle we find a man who has no idea what to do with his life anymore: he is in essence, a man without a future: he is caught between action and inaction. He

cannot rise beyond the absurdity of his own existential lostness. Laruelle questions what he has done in his years in Mexico: "Yet in the Earthly Paradise what had he done?" (10). Apparently, he has done almost nothing--except to have an affair with Yvonne, his best friend's wife. Thus it seems that Jacques Laruelle will never produce art--films--again. Instead he does nothing. There is a consuming void in this character's life; the absurdity of his condition is the irony in what he does--has done--for work: "the Consul's childhood friend deals in false emotions, false loves, celluloid tragedies. It is he who takes on to himself the motto 'No se puede vivir sin amar' and makes a mockery of it" (Jedynak 28). This phrase in Spanish means

'One cannot live without loving.' . . .
It is implied that the Consul, having discovered Yvonne's affair with Laruelle, painted these words in gold leaf and large letters on the wall of Laruelle's house The words constantly remind Laruelle of his complicity in the Consul's death, but also epitomize Geoffrey Firmin's tragic inability to accept the love and salvation apparently offered by Yvonne.
(Ackerley and Clipper 12)

Therefore, this motto is significant in explaining Laruelle's inabilities to deal with real life, real emotions, as opposed to cinematic verity. And this sign on Laruelle's house applies equally to Geoffrey Firmin's inability to return Yvonne's love; thus the phrase becomes

even more ironic. And because of this attitude Laruelle is at a loss: both Geoffrey and Yvonne are dead, Hugh is gone, there is nothing left for Jacques in Mexico. And, in fact, he is preparing to leave the next day this former idyllic, 'Edenic garden.'

Thinking back on his adolescent years with Geoffrey Firmin, Laruelle remembers a scene which actually foreshadows the barranca as the abyss, as well as a foreshadowing of Geoffrey's later sexual problems. The first reference to a personal abyss or "hell" is the "Hell Bunker." The "bunker" is actually a dreaded hazard on the golf course next door to the Taskerson house where Geoffrey was raised with his cousins after the death of his parents. The golf course was the local "lover's lane" during the evenings. Geoffrey and Jacques "fell into the habit of picking up girls on the promenade, walking to the golf course, separating there, and meeting later" (21). This part of the green is described as an "abyss [that] yawned in such a position as to engulf the third shot of a golfer like Geoffrey . . ." (20-21).

As Jacques is walking across the green with "his" girl one early evening they both see in the moonlight

[a] bizarre scene from which neither he nor the girl could turn their eyes . . . 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 . . . and the awkward grotesque way the girl had scrambled to her feet . . . They all went to a tavern with some queer name, as 'The Case is Altered.' (21)

This, then, is an early reference to Geoffrey's awkward liaisons with women and an indication of his predilection for heavy drinking. This first early reference to an embarrassing sexual episode in Geoffrey's life will link back to the sense of loss both he and his wife experience in their failed marriage because of his incapacity to make love to her and her consequent affairs with Jacques Laruelle and Hugh.

Later on in the novel, in chapter 7, Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh are invited for drinks at Jacques Laruelle's. Preceding this invitation is Hugh's first encounter with Laruelle. Hugh realizes that Jacques Laruelle is a mirror image of himself in a few more years. Jacques is a man whose lost hopes place him in a state of artistic exile. All Jacques is capable of now is mere existence: "He had acquired a Mexican mistress with whom he quarrelled, and numerous beautiful Mayan idols he would be unable to take out of the country . . ." (10). But other than this, Jacques does nothing. He exists in an existential void bereft of artistic decisions.

Therefore, is this not similar to Hugh? Hugh likewise,

until the end of UTV, ventures into a number of activities but accomplishes nothing, yet his dissatisfaction with a world devoid of meaning chafes at him. But whereas Hugh is seeking change, and therefore gains redemption later in the novel, Jacques has become complacent, a man of non-action. It is this that Hugh unconsciously senses upon meeting him:

Hugh . . . had certainly not been
'prepared' by the Consul to meet M.
Laruelle, doubtless saw him as an even
more precious type of bore, the elderly
aesthete, a confirmedly promiscuous
bachelor, with a rather unctuous
possessive manner toward women. (UTV 8)

The point of view in chapter 7 then shifts and becomes Geoffrey's. His feelings of guilt over his callous treatment of Yvonne since her return are further exacerbated because he realizes--subconsciously--that he is throwing away his soul for his "love" of alcohol over Yvonne. Costa finds that the "main tension of Under the Volcano is between the necessity of love and the terrible difficulty of love; between the Consul's aspiration to love and his forfeiture of that aspiration" (172-173). Jacques Laruelle, in a moment of lucidity towards his old friend, exclaims: "'Have you gone mad?' M. Laruelle exclaimed at last. 'Am I to understand that your wife has come back to you. . . . And that you treat her indifferently as this, and still continue to care where the next drink's coming from?'" (205). Geoffrey feels further frustration because he realizes the

truth of Laruelle's words. The ironic absurdity of this situation is that Laruelle's words are truthful, but his actions have hardly been honest towards the Consul in the past. Laruelle's calm demeanor in delivering this statement as he steps into the shower causes Geoffrey further agony:

The Consul, [sat] down . . . while the other [Jacques Laruelle] prepared to enter a shower. . . . [T]he abominable impact on his whole being at this moment of the fact that that hideously elongated cucumiform bundle of blue nerves and gills below the steaming unselfconscious stomach had sought its pleasure in his wife's body brought him trembling to his feet. How loathsome, how incredibly loathsome was reality.
(206-207)

This loathing of reality is what Geoffrey seeks to escape by his descent into his personal alcoholic tomb. This, in itself, is a decision based upon the negation of possibilities. Geoffrey concludes it is better not to act than to act.

Lowry's characters and their actions parallel Camus' thoughts on life and rebellion. Camus explicates the absurdity of the human condition through an examination of one's actions as related to life and happiness and death; and, in this, there is a parallel with the internal, literary 'reality' of Lowry's work. Malcolm Lowry thrusts his characters in UTV--notably Geoffrey--into a precarious balance teetering between the rational and the irrational,

the conscious and unconscious. In his quest for the ultimate truth, for the ultimate reality--or self-inflicted damnation--Geoffrey will drunkenly move through his daily actions, on this Day of the Dead, 1938, until his death. The Consul questions his sense of reality in a letter he writes to Yvonne during her absence:

Meantime do you see me as still working on the book,³ still trying to answer such questions as: Is there any ultimate reality, external, conscious and ever present etc. etc. that can be realized by any such means that may be acceptable to all creeds and religions and suitable to all climes and countries? Or do you find me between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah (but still at Chesed)--my equilibrium is all, precarious--balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God? (39)

Geoffrey Firmin, the Consul, not only questions his sense of reality, but he also questions his innermost feelings: those of happiness and sadness, pain, sorrow, and fulfillment. In UTV Geoffrey is constantly escaping from any measure of happiness. Instead he seeks to deny himself joy and fulfillment. For that would perhaps show that there is indeed happiness possible in the world; Geoffrey does not want to be offered that chance. And yet though the Consul does not seek happiness he is a seeker. Jedynak points out that "for the Consul, in spite of his apparent physical degeneration, is a seeking individual. He is a philosopher

in quest of an answer to the ultimate question of life--what is reality?" (Jedynak 25).

Instead he matches Camus' definition regarding the loss of youthful happiness:

[i]t is difficult to return to the places of one's early happiness. The young girls in the flower of their youth still laugh and chatter on the seashore, but he who watches them gradually loses [the] right to love them, just as those he has loved lose the power to be loved.

(The Rebel 267)

When Geoffrey rereads Yvonne's letter--sent after her departure from Quauhnahuac the previous year--in the Farolito, shortly before his death, she reveals just how desperate she too had become for regaining the love they have lost:

'Do you remember to-morrow? It is our wedding anniversary . . . I have not had one word from you since I left. God, it is this silence that frightens me.' . . . [T]he 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, his brain, before this cruelly disregarded evidence of what heartbreak he had caused her, at an agonized standstill. (345)

Geoffrey's lack of commitment to his love for Yvonne and his inability to accept her return, and with it redemptive love, solidly fix him in his own lost alcoholic ruin. As he continues reading her letter two more passages call

attention to the alienation in their marriage:

'What is a lost soul? It is one that has turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness of remembered ways--'. . . --'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. (346)

So even though Yvonne is calling on Geoffrey to refuse the seduction of the abyss, he denies her plea for redemptive love and moves relentlessly on his downward pursuit. Thus, if we strip away UTV to the barest essence of its nature, we are left with one undeniable fact: no matter how many symbols, subplots, or varied themes are discovered and analyzed in UTV--and there are literally dozens--the one irreducible theme is Geoffrey Firmin's unfulfilled love for Yvonne. Likewise, she is unable to fulfill herself in their relationship. This loss of love, this wrenching apart of two beings, formerly in love, creates a core theme of unfulfilled love and damnation for Geoffrey Firmin. And, in contrast, Geoffrey's murder in the Farolito, will liberate Hugh to evolve in positive way: "The volcanoes--under which lie the consul's Tartarus--become for Hugh a symbol of the Mountain of Purgatory and the ceaseless ascent to grace that he has learned to desire" (Falk 222). The symbiosis will be over, and Hugh will evolve towards the light: Geoffrey chooses the darkness of the cantina and the

barranca: "Thus from absolute despair will spring infinite joy, from blind servitude, unbounded freedom" (Camus, The Rebel 72). This creates a situation in which the "Consul is an existentialist hero, engaged in what Santayana calls the 'agonic struggle' in an attempt to pierce the material world and arrive at a view of reality which is truly all-encompassing" (Jedynak 25). And because of Firmin's overriding obsession with alcohol, at the cost of his relationship with Yvone, and Hugh, and Laruelle, he descends into the abyss.

In chapter 10, prior to Geoffrey's actual "descent" into the barranca, Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne are in the Salon Ofelia, a restaurant in Tomalin. They are there after the bull-throwing. It is from this restaurant that Geoffrey will leave to stagger his way to Parian and the Farolito. This chapter is an incredibly confusing network of shifting time sequences and various states of inebriation from the Consul's point of view. These points of view shift as the level of alcohol in his system adjusts his perceptions. The scene will ramble from his remembrance of the past to the present and back into the past. The Consul thinks he is having a conversation with Hugh. Actually, this conversation takes place internally; only the reader hears it, until Hugh breaks the Consul's thought. At one point the Consul feels

all is an illusion, a whirling cerebral

chaos, out of which, . . . at this very instant, emerged, rounded and complete, order: 'The act of a madman or a drunkard, old bean,' he [the Consul] said, 'or of a man labouring under violent excitement seems less free and more inevitable to the one who knows the mental condition of the man who performed the action, and more free and less inevitable to the one who does not know it.' (308)

Lowry in this previous section echoes Camus when the latter says that "Chaos is also a form of servitude. Freedom exists only in a world where what is possible is defined at the same time as what is not possible" (The Rebel 72). Within this illusion of the world, the Consul senses his own approaching doom; he senses the vast absurdity of the universe in a moment of lucid madness. Instead Geoffrey, the Consul, allows his course of inaction to carry him further downstream to the depths:

The Consul, with Bartleby, with the Underground Man, with Meursault, simply chooses not to--not to act, not to alter his course of love, not save himself. The Consul's opportunities to requite Yvonne's love raises questions of utmost significance to his existence as a free agent, and it is only by willing his own destruction that he can assert his freedom of choice. (Costa 81)

Thus, by not acting, Geoffrey continues his isolation and disconnection from Yvonne and Hugh. He creates for both Yvonne and himself their deaths in the absurdity of his nonaction. Jacques Laruelle continues to merely exist.

Because of Geoffrey's death a physical separation from the symbiosis with Hugh happens. This allows Hugh to move forward with his life both symbolically and metaphysically. Hugh will thus gain in stature what the others do not: he fulfills his existence as a man of action within a world filled with contradicting and absurd forces.

Chapter 5

In this last chapter of my analysis of the existential elements within Under the Volcano, I will concentrate on the final paths of the two brothers, Geoffrey and Hugh Firmin. Geoffrey dies, and Hugh finds freedom and life. For Hugh to become whole as an individual, to be in a sense reborn, to heal the darkness within himself created by self-doubt and self-loathing, he must rid himself of the negative aspects of his psyche. Since Geoffrey corresponds to Hugh's shadow self, "the dangerous aspects of the unrecognized dark half of the personality," Geoffrey dies so Hugh can be 'reborn' and continue with a positive, life-affirming existence (Jung, Two Essays 94). Thus, Lowry sets about to create the conditions whereby Geoffrey dies.

Furthermore, Lowry has the characters looking within themselves; their alienation mirrors their confusion about themselves, as well as the external reality of the world. It is by an understanding of this level of literary reality that Hugh goes beyond his past fears and limitations and becomes 'reborn' and redeemed. Thus, a symbolic resurrection occurs. Hugh sustains a moral purification and gains expiation for past sins. In the course of events that take place within the novel, he will finally find a sense of

self-worth and self-respect at the end of UTV.

Consequently, though UTV is a dark, deeply tragic work, Lowry ends with an affirmation of the human spirit to overcome one's struggles and transcend one's personal limitations:

To work and create 'for nothing,' . . . this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to absurd creator. He must give the void its colors. (Camus, Myth of Sisyphus 113-114)

While acknowledging the absurdity of the world and its terrors, Lowry, through his art, shows that "there is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other" (Camus, The Rebel 258).

The absurdity of man's struggle is alluded to early in UTV. David Falk initially fixes on chapter 4 because it foreshadows Hugh's eventual disassociation from Geoffrey: "The fourth chapter provides an excellent illustration [of this disassociation]. . . . Hugh's desire to be reborn is connected directly to Geoffrey Firmin's murder. . . ." (Falk 214). Therefore, Lowry creates in Geoffrey an inability to comprehend the reality of the world and forces him to be a willing accomplice to his own murder.

To further understand how Lowry creates this absurd

scenario, let us look at the exchange between Geoffrey and his next-door neighbor, Quincey, in chapter 5. This verbal joust shows a lack of understanding on Geoffrey's part into human nature. This is of major significance in the final scene of the novel in which Geoffrey allows himself to be slaughtered. As Geoffrey roots through his riotous underbrush searching for a previously hidden bottle of tequila, the atmosphere of this scene is symbolically set by a contrast between Geoffrey's chaotic jungle and Quincey's neat, orderly garden: "the green lawns of the American [Quincey], at the moment being sprinkled by innumerable small whizzing hoses, swept down parallel with his own [Geoffrey's] briars. Nor could any English turf have appeared smoother or lovelier" (131). After a quick drink of tequila, before talking to Quincey, Geoffrey feels "in a position to entertain, for a minute, the illusion that all really [is] 'normal.' . . . Oddly enough, it [his garden] did not strike him as being nearly so 'ruined' as it had earlier appeared. Such chaos as might exist even lent an added charm" (127-28). This "added charm" is not appreciated by anyone but Geoffrey: only Geoffrey finds in this disordered garden a symbol of positive growth--but this symbol is inverted because it represents Geoffrey's own path to moral degradation, ruin, and death.

The Consul cannot grasp Quincey's current revulsion of

him. Because of this lack of comprehension, the Consul lacks the ability to distinguish, at the end of the novel, the Mexican fascists' intentions as well. Though Quincey does not want to physically dispatch the Consul, he truly has no respect for the drunken former diplomat any longer. Taken to its extreme, this attitude of disrespect towards life allows for the Mexicans to banter with, and eventually, kill the Consul. The connection between chapter 5 and chapter 12 is made apparent when the Consul explains, unconvincingly, to Quincey that he is "on the wagon now." To which Quincey nastily replies, "'[t]he funeral wagon, I'd say, Firmin'" (133). This reference to funeral becomes a reality when the Consul meets the fascist sympathizers of the Farolito in Parian.

Within this group of pro-German Mexicans are several local highly placed government officials: the Chief of Gardens--"Jefe de Jardineros" (358), the Chief of Municipality, and the Chief of Rostrums, all members of the Union Militar, a militaristic right-wing organization. The Chief of Rostrums tells the Consul, "'What the hell you think you do around here? You pelado, eh? It's no good for your health. I shoot de twenty people.' It was half a threat, half confidential" (372). This indifferent attitude towards taking human life demonstrates the absurdity of the events leading up to the Consul's murder: "The man who could

not understand how one could love one's neighbor cannot understand either how one can kill him" (Camus, The Rebel 59). Because Geoffrey does not understand the shifting levels of realities he encounters in the Farolito--from his drunken sex act with Maria, the prostitute, to the numerous drinks he consumes--he does not understand the serious nature of the fascists' accusations against him. He cannot conceive how the fascists view him. For them, he represents either a Jew because of his name, a leftist correspondent because of Hugh's telegram found by the policemen in his coat pocket, or a follower of Trotsky because of his beard. The symbolism of the Consul and his short pointed beard becomes evident as he is asked his name: "'Yes, what's your names," shouted the second policeman. . . . 'Trotsky,' gibed someone from the far end of the counter, and the Consul, beard-conscious flushed" (358).⁴ Finally, Hugh's last telegram to the Globe in London seals Geoffrey's fate as it is found in his coat pocket--where Hugh had absentmindedly slipped it in chapter 4.⁵

When Geoffrey steps outside the bar to momentarily escape the increasingly vicious insults leveled at him by the off-duty policemen, he notices the horse of the murdered Indian of chapter 8. In one last moment of lucidity in the face of his impending execution Geoffrey roars: "'You poxboxes. You coxcoxes. You killed that Indian. You tried to

kill him and make it look like an accident.' . . . 'Then more of you came up and took his horse. . . ." (371-72). This is the end for the Consul as the Chief of Rostroms draws "his pistol. . . . 'I blow you wide open from your knees up, you cabron.' . . . The Chief of Rostroms pushed the Consul back out of the light [*italics mine*], took two steps forward and fired" (373).

This reference to 'light' symbolically indicates Geoffrey's return to the darkness of the shadows, as represented by his character, the negative aspect of the Hugh/Geoffrey personality. Thus his death cuts Hugh free to find the light, the light of personal illumination in the face of overwhelming chaos and absurdity. The situation at the end of the novel is a Kafkaesque nightmare:

'And who were these people, really?
 . . . Chief of what Gardens? Surely this
 silent man in tweeds . . . wasn't the
 one responsible for all those little
 public gardens?' . . . The lines might
 easily be substituted for the Consul's
 own; in actuality they come from the
 arrest in the opening pages of The
 Trial. (Markson 201)⁶

Lowry connects this reference to Kafka with the symbolism of the pariah dog thrown down after Geoffrey's body: "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (375). This is one of the numerous pariah dogs that have followed Geoffrey furtively from the beginning of the novel: As Geoffrey and Yvonne make their way back home on foot from

the Bella Vista bar at the end of chapter 2, one of these scavenger dogs follows them: "now here was their gate, off its hinges and lying just beyond the entrance. . . . A hideous pariah dog followed them in" (64). Hugh notices these "dreadful creatures . . . seemed to shadow his brother everywhere" (106). In chapter 8 as Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh are traveling by bus to Tomalin, before seeing the murdered Indian, Hugh notices "a dead dog right at the bottom [of a barranca], nuzzling the refuse; white bones showed through the carcass" (233). The significance of this type of vicious dog is as "a familiar, or accompanying evil spirit, representing essentially the state of the Consul's soul and corresponding to the black poodle of Goethe's Faust . . ." (Ackerley and Clipper 101). This existential imagery exists for Camus as well:

In The Trial, Joseph K. is accused. But he doesn't know of what. . . . He doesn't understand much. He merely assumes he is condemned, but to what he barely wonders. . . . Some time later two well-dressed and polite gentlemen come to get him and invite him to follow them. Most courteously they lead him into a wretched suburb, put his head on a stone, and slit his throat. Before dying the condemned man says merely: 'Like a dog.' (Myth of Sisyphus 124)

Lowry condemns the Consul to death; in his drunkenness, the Consul barely realizes he is to die. Later, he is dragged out of the bar by two impolite "gentlemen"--the

Chief of Rostrums and another policeman: Lowry's imagery turns Camus' upside down, much like the Consul himself is literally turned over during the horrendous scene with the carnival ride, the Maquina Infernal.⁷ But even during his closing moments on earth, the Consul, dying, is passive: "At first the Consul felt a queer relief. Now he realized he had been shot. . . . 'Christ,' he remarked, puzzled, 'this is a dingy way to die'" (373). Afterwards, this death scene is rendered even more graphic as Kafka's character's words become a literal image: a dead dog thrown into the barranca after Geoffrey Firmin's body.

Furthermore, the sense given to this final grim scene in UTV is one of acute anguish and ironic indifference. These contradictory feelings embody the hallucinatory quality of Geoffrey's last moments in this world. Because Geoffrey lacks insight into the feelings and motivations of the Mexican fascists, he echoes Camus' statement that

[L]ogic cannot be satisfied by an attitude which first demonstrates that murder is possible and then that it is impossible. For after having proved that the act of murder is at least a matter of indifference, absurdist analysis, in its most important deduction, finally condemns murder. (The Rebel 6)

Because of Lowry's absurdist reasoning, Hugh lives and Geoffrey dies as the affirmation of the positive spirit of living: proof that Lowry condemns the senseless murder of

Geoffrey. Thus the occurrence of Geoffrey's murder allows Hugh the freedom necessary to transcend his shadow self-- Geoffrey.

This dichotomy between the real and the unreal is further sustained by an allusion to 'shadow' that the Consul reads in the bar of the Farolito in chapter 12. He reads one of Yvonne's letters, sent during her year long absence, and finds that "--'Without you I am cast out, severed. I am an outcast from myself, a shadow'--" (364). This is a reiteration of Yvonne's realization on board the ship returning to Mexico: "[D]ivorced meant: sundered, severed" (49). As Yvonne feels like a shadow of her former self, this image becomes relevant to the Consul: she is a shadow who follows Geoffrey with love; in counterpoint to this image, the Consul follows Hugh as a shadow without love. Therefore, this is Hugh's terrible necessity: to rid himself of the familiar and painful negative influence of Geoffrey. Hugh must do this to live a free and redemptive life and move from one level of literary reality to the next.

The continual recurrence of Geoffrey's questioning of reality, Hugh's past "inability to find a moral course" (Falk 213), and the hollow lives of Yvonne and Jacques Laruelle cause UTV to be a powerful existential work: "Existentialist writings abound in allusions to decision, choice, commitment, engagement," and "resoluteness

. . . ." (Macquarrie 182). All of these are important issues in UTV.

Thus, chapter 10 acts as a focal point for the rest of the novel dictating the Consul's final choice to separate himself from Hugh. In chapters 9 and 10 Hugh slowly rises past his shadow self as represented by Geoffrey Firmin. The absurdity of the characters' struggles acts as a common binding web between them; if one character does something, this action immediately affects the other characters. This sense of reciprocal actions works with the theme of resurrection for Hugh, of a spiritual 'rebirth.' Therefore, in chapter 9, even before Hugh leaps out to ride the bull at the arena in Tomalin the

bull pulled against the opposing forces
of ropes . . . temporarily defeated
. . . he resembled some fantastic
insect trapped at the centre of a huge
vibrating web . . . Death, or a sort of
death, just as it so often was in life;
and now, once more, resurrection. (268)

Thus even the bull reiterates the rebirth and resurrection possible for Hugh. Defeating the bull symbolically represents "the victory of man's spiritual nature over his animality . . ." (Jung, Man and His Symbols 148). The bull caught in the ropes symbolizes Hugh's need to extricate himself from his past. This is further reinforced when he actually rides the bull with skill and near ease. During the conversation between Yvonne and Geoffrey, Hugh is

"rigid with concentration upon the defeat of the bull"
(276).

While Hugh is riding the bull, Yvonne makes a last attempt to change the Consul's destiny and urges him to leave with her, to start a new life in the north: "'This isn't just escaping. I mean, let's start again really, Geoffrey, really and cleanly somewhere. It could be like a rebirth'" (277). This echoes the theme of rebirth, but not for Geoffrey as the next chapter will prove. As the shadow self of Hugh, he must follow his self-determined path of alienation and self-destruction to its final conclusion and instead goes "to the bitter end . . . [and] want[s] to go beyond death in order to reach the very depths of hell" (Camus, The Rebel 264).

This inquiry into what is "beyond death" and reality is set into textual imagery by the characters' questioning gazes at themselves in various mirrors throughout the novel. This sense of the absurd of "the stranger in a mirror" is what the Consul sees staring into his own bathroom mirror after Hugh has dressed and shaved him in chapter 6: "Finally the Consul was ready. . . . [H]e stood gazing at himself in the mirror" (183). Lowry creates the effect of three different selves watching one another: Geoffrey is looking at his reflection while Hugh looks at both Geoffrey and the reflection in the mirror. Lowry thus has Geoffrey looking

into his own damaged soul--symbolized by his gaze into the mirror; Hugh looks on as an outside observer. What is real becomes confused for both Hugh and Geoffrey: "It occurred to Hugh that the poor old chap [Geoffrey] might be, finally, helpless, in the grip of something against which all his remarkable defenses could avail him little." Geoffrey, meanwhile, is thinking that: "it was as though fate had fixed his age at some unidentifiable moment in the past, when his persistent objective self, perhaps weary of standing askance and watching his downfall, had at last withdrawn from him altogether . . ." (184, 183).

This contemplation of the mirrored image is thus a looking within, an examination of the nature of self and reality. Both Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne are constantly reminded of the absurdity of their problems, their alienation, and their mortality:

This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this 'nausea,' . . . is also the absurd. Like the stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar and yet alarming brother we encounter . . . is also the absurd.

(Camus, Myth of Sisyphus 15)

This "familiar and yet alarming brother" is none other than the distinctive face of Geoffrey, the representation of the shadow self.

Similarly, in chapter 9 at the arena, Yvonne has two

disturbing visions while looking into her compact twice within several minutes: "Yvonne straightened her back . . . and began to powder her nose, peering into the traitorous mirror of the bright enamel compact. . . . [H]owever she moved the mirror she couldn't get poor Ixta [the extinct volcano] in, who, quite eclipsed, fell away sharply into invisibility . . ." (256). And in a few minutes, she looks at herself again in the mirror and finds that for "a second she'd had the awful sensation that, not Popocatepetl, [the other, live volcano] but the old woman with the dominoes that morning, was looking over her shoulder" (256-257). Popocatepetl, representing life, or Hugh, and Ixta, the extinct volcano, representing Yvonne, are seen as reflections of the coming crisis. Yvonne does not survive her climb toward Popocatepetl; she is killed shortly after Geoffrey's actions at the Farolito cause his murder as she and Hugh advance towards the Farolito. This further accents the fact that the Consul, traitor to his own inner nature, does not change his mind; his destiny lies at the foot of the volcanoes--in the depths of hell:

Yvonne's vision of the old woman from Tarasco . . . is an intimation of death, also suggested by the Biblical image of 'through a glass, darkly' (I Corinthians 13:12). Yet Yvonne's spiritual blindness may be suggested in that she fails to see that the old woman is also sympathetic. (Ackerley and Clipper 324)

Yvonne continues blindly to try to save Geoffrey, but no matter how hard she tries, he is in the midst of killing himself.

It is in the midst of Geoffrey's calculated descent into hell that he questions himself and his sense of reality: "Why was he here? He would have been glad of a mirror, to ask himself that question. But there was no mirror. Nothing but stone" (294). The mirror for Lowry acts as a parallel to Camus' argument that "the mirror, with its fixed stare, must be broken and we are, perforce, caught up in the irresistible movement by which the absurd exceeds itself" (Camus, The Rebel 10).

The references to stone are of the tomb-like quality of the lavatory of the Salon Ofelia in chapter 10 where he is seated. At a request from the Consul for toilet paper, the attendant says, "' . . . clean yourself on a stone, senor'" (294). These allusions to stone

are summed up in a manuscript variant
 . . . finally deleted: the Consul
 reflects that there can be no peace 'but
 must pay full toll to hell. For even
 were the stone of my own guilt rolled
 away there would still remain the guilt
 of the human race.'

(Ackerley and Clipper 360)

When Geoffrey enters the main barroom of the Farolito at the beginning of chapter 12 he stares into a face familiar with guilt, his own. He finds the barroom deserted

and takes stock of himself in the mirror behind the bar: "his face silently glar[ing] at him, with stern, familiar foreboding." This premonitory feeling is reinforced by his hearing: "the place was not silent. It was filled by that ticking: the ticking of his watch, his heart, his conscience, a clock somewhere" (337). His conscience pulses as with the ticking of a clock; he has forgotten how to relate to his conscience, and he pays a terrible price in the end for that avoidance. Geoffrey, in his avoidance of reality, is like Dostoievsky's absurd rebel, Ivan Karamazov: both are caught in the contradictions of an absurd world, and the fabric of their own reality within that world:

Caught between unjustifiable virtue and unacceptable crime, consumed with pity and incapable of love, a recluse deprived of the benefits of cynicism, this man of supreme intelligence is killed by contradiction.
(Camus, The Rebel 59)

And shortly after entering the barroom, Geoffrey hears a voice wailing down the mountain, "Borracho, borrachon, borraaaaacho!" (337). This link of the word "borracho" back to the title of a painting, Los Borrachones, seen in Jacques' house shows Geoffrey what he has become: "borracho"--a true drunkard; the Consul has achieved the change he wants: his descent into the abyss is almost complete.

Through Geoffrey's slow descent into hell through

drinking, and finally, his actual murder, Hugh achieves a liberation. Hugh's liberation from this psychic weight allows him to begin a new journey, one of new and positive possibilities. The Consul, unfortunately, is trapped in a vicious cycle, one he will never leave until death:

The consul's life is composed of
recurring cycles of aspiration,
disillusionment, and downfall, and what
reappears on his Day of the Dead are all
the disasters of his past, which he is
compelled to reenact for one last time.
(Falk 210)

Furthermore, Geoffrey's eventual death is caused by his drunken investigation into the horse tied outside the Farolito. He finally realizes this is the murdered Indian's horse in chapter 8 and upon this realization his fate is sealed. Simultaneously Yvonne's death is caused: "by virtue of the symbolic function of the horse the Consul is now 'murdering' Yvonne. . . ." (Markson 179). Thus, the Consul becomes responsible for Yvonne's death: a terrible absurdity since he abdicated his responsibility to her as a husband, yet, in the end, he comes back for her, as her executioner. With Geoffrey dead, Hugh no longer has any connection to him. Only Jacques Laruelle remains: a sad parody of Geoffrey as he disintegrates into the void of an increasingly meaningless and violent world on the eve of WWII.⁸

The final group scenario of Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne is brought to a close when Geoffrey leaves the Salon Ofelia

in chapter 10--never to be seen alive again. This sense of closure is created within chapter 10 because these three characters interact with one another in a distant and dislocated way. In fact, Geoffrey is not physically present for virtually half the conversation at the dinner table. Instead, after having ordered his meal with the others, he goes to the lavatory. There he remains seated in this tiny "tomb" and hears Hugh's and Yvonne's conversation--the lavatory is very close to their table--and a variety of inner conversations of his own.

Geoffrey's consciousness weaves in and out of the actual dinner table conversation between Hugh and Yvonne; half the time, he is in an involved conversation within his own mind. His alcoholism is so severe at this point that reality, as the existential sense of the here-and-now, is barely relevant or valid to him: Lowry's sense of negation creates for Geoffrey a disconnection from the physical world by his alcoholism, which stymies Geoffrey's search for his essence, his being. Lowry's technique, the stopping of Geoffrey's consciousness equals "the act of negating--the negating of the in-itself of being, so that there may come into existence the fragile freedom of the for-itself, which is precisely without being and in search of being" (Macquarrie 178). And in the end, this sense of negation, this absurd contradiction, does not allow Geoffrey to find

his own true 'being'--except through death.

This search for reality gives an urgency to the sense of impending doom permeating the novel. Lowry gives the reader a sense of immediacy with conversations between Hugh and Yvonne, historical information about Tlaxcala, and the Consul's hallucinations interspersed with one another in the text. This stream of consciousness technique allows us to see the Consul's downhill slide towards ruin. Geoffrey has a vision of this slide to oblivion in chapter 7 at Jacques Laruelle's before the bull-throwing event in Tomalin and the Salon Ofelia.

The vision occurs when Geoffrey comes half-way down the flight of stairs and his attention is struck by a painting of terrible force:

Over the chevron-shaped windows . . .
 hung a terrifying picture he hadn't seen
 before. . . . Called 'Los Borrachones'
 . . . it resembled something between a
 primitive and a prohibitionist poster
 Down headlong into hades,
 selfish and florid-faced, into a tumult
 of fire-spangled fiends, Medusae, and
 belching monstrosities . . . shrieking
 among falling bottles and emblems of
 broken hopes, plunged the drunkards⁹
 (198-199)

This symbolizes the Consul's decision to take the headlong plunge into hades represented by Los Borrachones, The Drunkards. As he looks at the painting, Geoffrey realizes that

he was in hell himself. . . . [W]hen they were at the bullthrowing perhaps, he might break away from the others and go there [to the Farolito in Parian] . . . if only for one drink. That prospect filled him with an almost healing love and at this moment, for it was part of the calm, the greatest longing he had ever known. (199-200)

Geoffrey's realization that he is in hell confirms his unwillingness to stop drinking and fixes his destiny downwards:

[O]nly in action does existence attain concreteness and fullness. . . . [A]ction properly so-called is intensely personal and involves the whole man. It includes both thought and passion. Were thought, passion, and inward decision lacking, there would be nothing worthy of the name of action.

(Macquarrie 175-76)

Since Geoffrey lacks the courage for action, he repudiates the true existential search for a higher level of reality and therefore must leave it to Hugh, the higher self, to discover. Instead Geoffrey succumbs to drinking mescal again--the most potent of the Mexican drinks for him. This fateful decision leads him in the beginning of chapter 10 to take a small "poquito" glass of it. Mescal¹⁰ is ultimately the most damaging drink for the Consul as it is associated with the hallucinations he suffers throughout the novel, particularly of the corpses he sees. These corpses symbolize the murdered Indian of chapter 8 that Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne encounter on their way to Tomalin.

His early alcoholic hallucination in chapter 3 of a "dead man with a sombrero over his face lying by the side of his swimming pool" is a clairvoyant glimpse into his future: "As Lowry informed his publisher, the corpse is that of the murdered Indian of chapter 8 who is left to die in the road while onlookers refuse to become involved, insisting it is someone else's responsibility . . ." (Falk 210).

Furthermore, Falk explains that

the juxtaposition of the corpse with the purifying, life-sustaining water indicates that he is beyond redemption The dead man by the pool, then, is the very embodiment of the unregenerate self, and as the scene closes, the consul announces his allegiance to that self. (Falk 210)

Therefore, Lowry's absurd quest within UTV assigns the role of non-participant to Geoffrey and, ultimately, of participant to Hugh. This opposition of characteristics with the two brothers mirrors the struggle of the entire cast of characters: to act appropriately under given circumstances in the face of an absurd and incomprehensible vastness.

Consequently, what the Consul acknowledges

in the hallucination [91] is what Jung calls the shadow, the concatenation of all the negative aspects of his personality. On the deepest psychological plane, Geoffrey Firmin's failure is his inability to integrate these dark aspects into the totality of self and thereby to turn their enormous energy to creative uses. (Falk 211)

The integration of the two characters into the one personality of Hugh and Geoffrey presents two aspects of the self:

The conflict between ego and shadow is above all important in the relationship of the consul to M. Laruelle and, especially, to his half brother, Hugh [W]e miss much of Lowry's vision . . . if we scant Laruelle and Hugh or view them as merely ancillary to the consul. (Falk 211)

In the typescript of Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid¹¹, Geoffrey, as conceived by Lowry, is equated as " 'bad guilty self + imagination' " and Laruelle is " 'self plus imagination.' " Hugh, whose name means "mind" is seen as " 'self plus even less imagination' " (Falk 209, 212).

By succumbing to his desire for mescal, Geoffrey, the shadow self, in opposition to Hugh's "mind," takes another step downward and thus further disconnects himself from Hugh. Geoffrey's decision to drink mescal eventually leads him to take 'sanctuary' in the most dangerous of places, the Farolito in Parian. This place, where he is murdered, is the final resting stop; Geoffrey's visions of corpses have become his reality as he becomes one himself and is flung into the barranca.

The sense of tragedy and the absurd in Geoffrey's background is reinforced throughout the novel by a continual reference to treachery as symbolized by the Tlaxcalans:

"Even today the Tlaxcalans are sometimes considered by other Mexicans as 'traitors' because in 1519 they sided with Cortes . . . to bring about the destruction of . . . Aztec civilization" (Ackerley and Clipper 347). Lowry makes continuous reference in UTV to Parian, one of the old Tlaxcalan capitals: "Parian was an even greater mystery. Originally settled by a scattering of those . . . who had succeeded in making Mexico great even in her betrayal, the traitorous Tlaxcalans. . ." (285).

At the end of chapter 10, Geoffrey makes his last traitorous decision: he leaves the Salon Ofelia for the Farolito: "'I choose--Tlax--. . . . Hell,' he finished absurdly. 'Because--. . . . 'I like it'" (314). And finally, he repeats essentially what he said previously at the end of chapter 3: "'I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost there already'" (314).¹² Geoffrey not only destroys himself in the process of his alcoholic damnation, but he also attempts to drag others down with him: Hugh, Yvonne, and Jacques. Only Hugh rises above the tragic circumstances of Geoffrey's death; Geoffrey succeeds in dragging down Yvonne and leaving Jacques a ruined man. The treachery is nearly complete: only Hugh survives. Therefore, when Geoffrey makes his decision to leave the Salon Ofelia by "choosing hell" he reinforces the Tlaxcalan metaphor: "Tlaxcala throughout the book has been a

metaphor for dishonour, betrayal, and death. At this moment, the Consul, 'suspended' between the choice of Yvonne or the Farolito, life and death, makes his existential decision" (Ackerley and Clipper 393).

While the Consul is away from his dinner table in the Salon Ofelia, he remembers going into a church the evening before and praying to a statue of the Virgin; he questions what has become of his life and his dignity: he says, "'Nothing is altered and in spite of God's mercy I am still alone. Though my suffering seems senseless I am still in agony. There is no explanation of my life'" (289). The Consul wonders, at least briefly, on past potential decisions he has ignored. By ignoring decisions, he has actually chosen them--by inaction, by default. This outlook has determined his final, bitter memories. Thus he determines "what is really chosen is oneself. It is out of its decisions that the self emerges. . . . What is given is a field of possibility, and as the existent projects himself into this possibility rather than that one, he begins to determine who he shall be" (Macquarrie 185) In the realization of his self-determined failures, the Consul wonders at his disregard for those who love him:

Where is love? 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. Let us [Yvonne and the

Consul] be happy again somewhere, if
 it's only together, if it's only out of
 this terrible world. Destroy the world!
 (289)

This last phrase "Destroy the world!" exemplifies this "climate of absurdity. . . . The end is the absurd universe and the attitude of mind which lights the world with its true colors to bring out the privileged and implacable visage which that attitude has discerned in it" (Camus, Myth of Sisyphus 12). The Consul's beatific words about lost love and respect of sacred knowledge are suddenly jarred by the crushing despair and hate he now feels. In this, the Consul resembles another character in literary history: Joseph Conrad's terrible Captain Kurtz:

In . . . Heart of Darkness . . . Kurtz, his mind subject to the powers of evil. . . . begins [a report on 'savage' customs] with an eloquent, beautiful piece of writing . . . then, like a flash of lightning in the serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes.' The Consul's final cry, like that of Kurtz, expresses his wish not to be saved from the abominations he really desires.
 (Ackerley and Clipper 352)

After this scene, before coming back to the dinner table, the Consul furtively downs a mescal at the bar of the Salon Ofelia. The restaurant is small, and he overhears Hugh's and Yvonne's conversation about climbing the volcano Popocatepetl. The Consul thinks:

all a pathetic joke . . . this plan to climb Popo, is just the kind of thing

Hugh would have found out about before arriving, while neglecting so much else: yet could it be that the notion of climbing the volcano had somehow struck them [Hugh and Yvonne] as having the significance of a lifetime together? . . . [I]t rose up before them, with all its hidden dangers, pitfalls, ambiguities, deceptions . . . for the brief self-deceived space of a cigarette was their own destiny. . . . (290)

This description of Hugh and Yvonne contemplating climbing Mt. Popo is a mordantly accurate portrayal of the three characters' ambiguous actions and decisions: "Every decision is a decision against as well as a decision for; and every decision limits the range of possibilities that will be open for future decisions" (Macquarrie 182). The characters' lives are thus caught in the net of their own decisions--for and against. Thus, Lowry points the way for their individual destinies to climb, fall, and rise--but not necessarily together.

With the death of Geoffrey and Yvonne, Hugh rises into a new phase of his life. His spiritual rebirth is acknowledged immediately, and he makes plans to leave Quauhunahuac within hours of his brother's and sister-in-law's deaths with the help of Jacques Laruelle. Hugh goes to Veracruz to leave on a ship carrying badly needed munitions for the hard-pressed Republican army. Although this is a futile gesture--since the Republicans are losing the war against Franco's Nationalists, it nonetheless marks an

important turning point in Hugh's character. Returning to Spain, Hugh confirms his basic positive nature. He has shed his shadow self, Geoffrey, that "invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him. Carefully amputated, it becomes the serpent of healing of the mystery" (Jung, Psychological Reflections 217). And he is bound for a more fruitful existence. Hugh becomes a redeemed Dantesque figure; he has "a vision of salvation for his brother, a vision that will never be realized for the consul but which redeems Hugh himself" (Falk 214).

This sense of newly found freedom for Hugh is still ambiguous:

freedom . . . is involved in a dialectic whereby it can easily pass over into its opposite. . . . Freedom seems to contain in itself the seed of its own destruction, so that the mystery of the origin of freedom runs together with the mystery of the origin of evil.

(Macquarrie 180)

In UTV, the lack of conclusive knowledge of Hugh's ultimate fate creates a work that remains ambiguous; we know Lowry intended for UTV to be the first part of a Dantesque trilogy, but how does Hugh carry forward with his life? This question remains unanswered; the link between good and evil, between Hugh and Geoffrey, is an absurd connection within a powerful and destructive world. This sense of ambiguity leaves us with the profound feeling of the absurdity of the

world; how can one predict another's future? Lowry has created an absurd work: he allows despair, tragedy, and ruin in his novel, but he does not renounce love or hope: "That is why there is no genius, contrary to what we are taught today, in negation and pure despair" (Camus, The Rebel 271). Rather, Lowry establishes a tension of opposing forces in UTV to create his existential statement. For this, he parallels Camus' vision that "art and society, creation and revolution . . . must rediscover the source of rebellion where refusal and acceptance, the unique and the universal, the individual and history balance each other in a condition of acute tension" (The Rebel 273).

Malcolm Lowry's final comment on the absurdity of the human condition is this contradiction: "man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping it. In fact, men cling to the world and by far the majority do not want to abandon it" (Camus, The Rebel 260). Thus, Hugh, Jacques, and Yvonne strain to remain in the world while Geoffrey attempts to rush out of it. Only Geoffrey rejects the world, hope, and love and blindly strives to leave it; Hugh remains, accepting the world, but leaving--escaping--his present situation.

The sense of the absurd created by a joining of two characters as different aspects of one self define UTV as an existentialist work. Lowry's literary vision of damnation

and redemption create the underlying absurdist aesthetic: a world pulled apart by opposing chaotic forces, a world in which the absurd flows. Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano seeks to show through the act of redeeming Hugh that the "final conclusion of absurdist reasoning is, in fact, the repudiation of suicide and the acceptance of the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe" (Camus, The Rebel 6).

Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Translated from the French from "Nuit de L'Enfer," Une Saison en Enfer.

Chapter 4

² The appearance of a swan shaped ashtray is not coincidental. This would obviously refer to the many legends surrounding Zeus' incarnation as a swan and his procreation with mortal women. See "Leda and the Swan" by W.B. Yeats. Yeats too, was very involved in studying about the occult, as was Malcolm Lowry.

³ The Consul supposedly had been working for years on a book, a treatise on black magic, which Yvonne and Hugh have both heard about but not read. But the Consul has never elaborated on it; it appears he has not worked on it since before his marriage to Yvonne. Both Yvonne and Hugh do question what Geoffrey does know about the occult. Douglas Day, Lowry's biographer, explains Lowry's fascination with the occult and the Caballah:

On the magical plane, then, it is not enough to say simply that Geoffrey Firmin is a drunk: he is--or had been--a mystic, an adept in the most esoteric varieties of occultism; and his drunkenness is for him no mere vice, but a depravity of awesome proportions, a sickness of the soul, perhaps even--because he comes to embrace his depravity, and consciously to seek his destruction--a perverse way to spiritual enlightenment. Thus his final, suicidal debauchery is more than just that: it is a frenzied and headlong leap into the abyss, a deliberate and successful attempt at self-damnation. (345)

Chapter 5

⁴ The symbolism of Geoffrey's beard is further explained: "The Consul flushes at the gibe of 'Trotsky,' the exiled Bolshevik revolutionary then living in Mexico City and soon to be assassinated. . . . Trotsky's short goatee beard made him instantly recognizable anywhere in Mexico" (Ackerley and Clipper 434).

⁵ See UTV page 96 for this seemingly innocuous detail which causes the fascist officials to believe Geoffrey is Hugh and therefore a hated leftist sympathizer.

⁶ This refers to pages 358-359 of UTV.

⁷ UTV 221-223.

⁸ In chapter 1 as Jacques sits in the Cervceria XX, the bar adjoining the local cinema in Quauhnahuac, contemplating the Consul's and Yvonne's deaths exactly one year before, he has become like his former best friend: "it was only during the last year he had been drinking so heavily." And following this acknowledgment, Jacques has an existential presentiment of his future: "He felt rather like someone lying in a bath after all the water has run out, witless, almost dead" (29). Jacques becoming a sort of a consular figure is further explained:

this change in his drinking habits is one small indication that Laruelle is being depicted as a miniature Consul figure. . . . This suggestion is here reinforced by Laruelle's vision of himself lying in the bath; the intimation very similar to the Consul's recurrent hallucination, p. 96, of the dead man beside the swimming-pool, the 'other' who is in part himself.

(Ackerley and Clipper 50)

⁹ It is important to note that the "picture is called Los Borrachones rather than Los Borrachos because a borrachon is one who is like[italics mine] a drunk, as opposed to a borracho, a total drunk" (Ackerley and Clipper 276). Thus, the Consul, at this stage of the novel, though alcoholic, has not completely admitted to the overwhelming alienation he feels. But by the end of the novel, he fully embraces this existential feeling.

¹⁰ Mescal: See A Companion notes 58.1, 219.3, and 308.5 for Lowry's mistaken belief that mescal, the drink, caused the same hallucinations as mescaline, the drug.

¹¹ This typescript is located at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. My information concerning the typescript comes from David Falk's article "Brothers in Under the Volcano."

¹² See UTV pages 92-93 regarding the Consul's attitude towards hell.

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