

MALCOLM LOWRY: "THE TYRANNY OF SELF"

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The article starts from the assumption that Malcolm Lowry is fundamentally a one-book novelist. This is manifest in Lowry's compulsive going-back to his text, in what the authors designates as their obsessive repetitiveness. In the article this quality is illustrated by looking at the specific relation holding between the novels *Under the Volcano* and *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* and by tracing this quality on the level of macrocomposition, characters and animal imagery in *Under the Volcano*. Finally, the author draws attention to the motif of the picture "Los Borrachones" as lending authority to his reading.

"deliver me from this dreadful tyranny of self. I have sunk low. Let me sink lower still, that I may know the truth. Teach me to love again, to love life".¹

Once the reader becomes acquainted with the *oeuvre* of Malcolm Lowry, it is difficult to escape the impression that his is basically a one-book career. Notwithstanding the enthusiasm and anticipatory eagerness with which *aficionados* of Lowry's writings approach anything stamped with his name, the summary assessment that insinuates itself is that whatever Lowry has bequeathed to us seems to be preparatory for or consequential to his novel *Under the Volcano*. In direct or circuitous fashion, all his texts relate to this novel and, having once read it, the Lowry reader will make out its haunting presence wheresoever he might

¹ Malcolm L o w r y, *Under the Volcano*, A Plume Book, New York, 1971, p.289. All further references to this novel will be accompanied by the initials UV and the number of the page.

find himself in Lowry's opus. A biographical critic might say that if a hypothetical function of the artistic endeavour is to resolve and be done with certain inner conflicts the artist is prone to by overcoming them, by externalizing the painful experience through a work of art, what is observable in Lowry's case is the inability to accomplish this distance, a compulsion to repeat, an instance of, if I am allowed to figuratively employ a psychological term, the obsessive-compulsive disorder. Speaking on another level, Lowry was victimized by the inadequacy of his artistic externalizations, and instead of experiencing the palliative effect of writing, he became its martyr. In the posthumously published novel *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* we encounter an image which, in this context, could be thought of as a kind of self-portrait:

There were the usual saints in glass enclosed niches: one who looked like Hamlet, dressed in a bejewelled gold-studded Roman toga complete with laced sandals coming right up his legs, seemed to be - in fact was - stabbing himself in the stomach with a pen.²

The relevance of the passage is that it draws an analogy between the sufferings of the artist and of the sculptured saint: of more pertinence to my discussion is the allusion to the self-questioning, Hamletesque inability to overreach selfhood and the powerful final image representing writing as an activity where these harassing processes come to a head, a space of self-maiming and self-mutilation.

In *Dark as the Grave* Lowry left a touching account of his painful engagement with language which turns out to be a sort of losing battle. Since this passage is not only of relevance to the present discussion but gives an effective description of the plight of the conscientious writer, I have decided to quote it at length:

we must consider what happens each morning when the artist is confronted with his work again. Has it not changed in his absence? Of course it has. Even on paper something has happened to it...Even if he were to throw out by now absolutely incomprehensible stuff about the burning building and look upon his work simply as an effort of a carpenter to realize a blueprint in his mind, every morning he wakes up and goes to look at his house, it is as if during the night invisible workmen had been monkeying with it. (DG,169)

² Malcolm Lowry, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*. Penguin Books, 1979, p.169. In all further citations from this book I will use the initials DG and the page number.

Broadly speaking, the passage alludes to the priority of language in relation to authorial intention. More specifically, it expresses Lowry's exasperation at not being able to satisfactorily embody his experience in words and the need this occasioned to continually reengage his texts.

It is Lowry's inability to put something aside and be done with it, this compulsive going back to older sites of writing, that is perceptible in his work. Would it be too far fetched to advance the claim that this particular kind of textual repetition beckons to a definite kind of reader, one willing to reread, reexperience and repeat the travails that these books essentially amount to? A feeling that Lowry's writings compel the reader to return to them, that there is a tactics at work here inciting to reenactments was the inception of the rereading that I offer in the discussion ahead.³

What I intend to do in this paper is to give an explanation of what I understand by the obsessive repetitiveness of Lowry's writings, to show how the special relation holding between the two novels *Under the Volcano* and *Dark as the Grave* exemplifies this facet of his work and, finally, to offer a reading of particular features of *Under the Volcano* employing this criterion. From the start I want to make clear that my concern is not with the psyche of the author but rather how, what I choose to call, the obsessive-compulsiveness is manifest in the writing, as well as in the reading act that is somehow intrinsic to Lowry's texts. In other words, the data which I propose to lay before the reader is not clinical but literary.⁴

An explanation which has been suggested to account for the repetitive nature of Lowry's books claims that he rarely wrote about anything but himself. Or, as Ronald Brinns writes, Lowry felt that he was writing "in the timeless tradition of the *poète maudit*, where the writer's legend tends to inform our

³ In May 1990 I received an invitation from prof. Svend Erik Larsen at Odense University in Odense, Denmark, to present a paper on Malcolm Lowry. Although the lecture I gave there was specifically focused on the cinematic "use" of *Under the Volcano*, that occasion lead me back to Lowry and started me thinking about the issue I deal with in this paper.

⁴ To a certain extent the issue at hand has to do with what Joseph Tabbi has termed "the compositional self" in his article "The Compositional Self in William Gaddis' *JR*": "The compositional self, the being that undergoes "the real work ... the thought and the rewriting and the crossing out and the attempt to get it right", as Gaddis noted in specific reference to *JR* ... is the essential personality, the first-order phenomenon, what, in fact, the book "is about"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol.35, No4, Winter 1989, p.657.

responses to the actual work".⁵ What is incontestable is that Lowry redid used material, that he was driven back to certain scenes, themes, etc.. Just to document these recurrent elements would give ample credence to what I am postulating here but, I believe, a more convincing argument can be assembled if the issue is pursued on another level.

I would like to begin by drawing attention to four lines from Lowry's poem "Xochitepec":

...while the very last day
As I sat bowed, frozen over mescal,
They dragged two kicking fawns through the hotel
And slit their throats, behind the barroom door.

Coming upon these lines I was not only struck by their emotional intensity but more so by the fact that there was a familiar ring about them. And surely enough, in *Under the Volcano* the author has the Consul drinking mescal with ice

when suddenly a man with the look of an executioner
came from the street dragging two little fawns
shrieking with fright into the kitchen. And later
you heard them screaming, being slaughtered
probably. (UV,88)

This is the most exhaustive account of this particular scene in *Under the Volcano*. However, the same scene makes three more appearances in this novel. In the Consul's unmailed letter to Yvonne there is talk of "the noise of slaughtering below in the kitchen" (UV,36). Rambling through his garden in search of the tequilla bottle, the Consul alludes to the above scene as a point of comparison with his present predicament: "an agony chill as that iced mescal drunk in the Hotel Canada on the morning of Yvonne's departure" (UV,129). Finally, near his end, the Consul thinks of "El Infierno", "that other Farolito" and the "dead silence outside his hotel room, too soon for the terrible sounds of squealing and slaughter in the kitchen below" (UV,349). In *Dark as the Grave* the scene is mentioned twice. On page 91 we read that "a man with a look of an executioner had dragged the shrieking fawns to slit their throats behind the barroom door". A few pages later the scene is referred to again: "And then the mescals and the slaughtered fawns" (DG,106). A scene repeated, albeit with linguistic variations, on at least seven different occasions, is a conspicuous example of the mechanism that I have found at work in Lowry's compositional practice.

⁵ M. Bradbury and D. Palmer (ed), *The Contemporary English Novel*, Edward Arnold, London, 1980, p.103-4.

However, are we to take Lowry at his word when he writes: "he was surprised at the poverty of an imagination that had driven him back upon old and used material" (DG,78). I am of the opinion that the notion that repetition occurs because of an impoverished imagination is misleading. Somehow Lowry's avowal of paucity does not accord with his pronouncement that the above scene repeated itself "over and over again, like a disrupted film repeating itself (and that disrupted film was uncomfortably an image of himself too)" (DG,105-6). Lowry reverts back to used material not because of a dearth of material but because of an "uncomfortable", teeming imagination, a regressive pull to certain clusters of imagery and theme that cannot be satisfactorily objectified and that incessantly compel back to the primal scene. This is, as I hope to show, the very origin of Lowry's posthumously published manuscript *Dark as the Grave*.

How is the status of this novel to be defined? The brief appraisal I offer below will show the legitimacy of this question. Namely, as soon as the reader launches into *Dark as the Grave* it takes little perspicacity to realize that the later book is little more than a reliving, a duplication or a commentary on *Under the Volcano*. What we have in our hands is a ghost novel: the protagonists, settings, the tragedies, the qualms, all of these exist and develop within the shadow of the earlier book. In order to have meaning the later book absolutely requires an acquaintance with its antecedent. Is additional evidence needed to show that Lowry was under the tyranny of *Under the Volcano*? or, to quote his poignant statement: "Moreover the book, upon which he had once based so many hopes, began to appear in the light of an enemy" (DG,195-6). If this sentence is used outside of its immediate context, the incrimination of *Under the Volcano* as something inimical might be understood in the light of the author's inability to disengage himself from the lure - better to say trap - of his earlier text, to transcend what he himself denominates as the *tyranny of self*.

In *Dark as the Grave*, the writer narrator, Sigbjorn Wilderness who has appeared, for instance, in the short story "Through the Panama"⁶ is making a return trip with his second wife to Mexico in order to locate his friend, Fernando Martinez, who is, yes!, the character dr. Vigil in *Under the Volcano*. Sigbjorn thinks of his need to see Fernando as "a nostalgia for delirium. Or oblivion" (DG,21). The underlying theme of the book is the traumatic experience Sigbjorn is going through having had his novel, *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (which is, of course, a thinly disguised *Under the Volcano*) rejected by numerous publishers. (Needless to mention, most of this amounts to an autobiographical account of the troubles Lowry went through with his manuscripts).

⁶ See Malcolm L o w r y, *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, Penguin Books, 1984.

However, the obsession with the earlier text operates on a more complex and interesting level. Basically, what Lowry is doing in *Dark as the Grave* is returning to his earlier novel by once more reliving its “continuous tragedies” or, to put it in another way, he is rereading, with us his readers, the text of *Under the Volcano*. The description of Sigbjorn (re)sighting the volcanoes lends support to this assertion:

If this feeling were indeed to be compared to anything whatever, Sigbjorn thought, it would strongly be to reading a book... On the other hand, and far more powerfully, this book that he was reading was like a book that, paradoxically, had not yet been wholly written, and probably never would be, but that was, in some transcendental manner, written as they went along. (DG,118)

On his return trip to Mexico, Sigbjorn has the feeling of being ushered into a book. As far as the reader is concerned, this process of the displacement of reality is only radicalized a degree further. The second part of the excerpt acknowledges the inconclusive nature of Lowry’s act of writing, the imperative it creates to continuously reengage itself, what one might call its circularity.

At this point, I would like to note that the peculiar status of *Dark as the Grave* brings to a focus two relations that are of pertinence to any consideration of fictionality. The first one concerns the relation of fiction and reality, the duplicity of which will be illustrated by two situations in the novel. Promising his wife Primrose that he will take her to his old haunts, celebrated in the unpublished manuscript, Sigbjorn reflects: “she would see a place familiar so far only on paper take actual form” (DG,46). Of course, the problem with this kind of a statement is that it appears “on paper”, that, as text, *Dark as the Grave* cannot approach any closer to the “actual terms” than these had been previously delineated in the pretext. In another passage, the setting of which is the Cuernavaca Inn, there appears the following sentence: “This is the place where Hugh really used to offer the Consul strychnine” (DG,132). The dubious word, the one that should arouse our suspicion, is of course “really”. Namely, on whose authority is the reader to take this as a truth statement which supposedly exposes the fictionality of the corresponding action in *Under the Volcano*. It should be clear that *Dark as the Grave* is itself fiction and, as such, lacks any privileged access to the representation of reality. What we are dealing with are crossreferences to textual sites and there is no way in which the word “really” can be understood in its literal sense. Reality is cancelled out by the interplay and multiplications of texts.

The second element I deem consequent upon the specific character of Lowry's posthumous novel is reduplication as evident in the recurring metaphor of the cinema. Near the end of the novel, Lowry introduces an account of Sigbjorn on his way to see a film version of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a situation which I propose to read as a kind of analogy of his return trip to Mexico, to the locality of his earlier book:

Then he realized he was not only walking in this unreal landscape, withdrawn into a daydream, but that this daydream was framed as it were in yet another withdrawal, by the cinema, in which again he was watching a shadow show on a screen, not even then an original story, but as the director had it, a transcript of themes from Edgar Allen Poe. (DG,260)

The components of this quotation that I consider relevant to my discussion and to the problem of reduplication are the following: framed, shadow, transcript, withdrawal. I would contend that the given account of the cinematic experience may serve as an apt metacommentary on how *Dark as the Grave* relates to *Under the Volcano*. (It does not escape me that the description can be applied to the way that any interpretation relates to its object). The implications are that with each filming, framing, with each reduplication, the shadows darken, the transcript grows more illegible, the withdrawal greater. Can it be presumed that this inevitable "withdrawal" functions as a kind of negative incentive to Lowry's "obsessive" assays to come to terms with his experience through writing? His inability to achieve this self-transcendence and the "slippage" of reality I drew attention to above contribute to a certain instability and momentum of displacements in Lowry's writing, as well as create amongst his readers the enticement to repeat and reenact the world of his fiction.

It was Lowry's obsessive preoccupation with his, can it be said, one book, his reduplication of it in *Dark as the Grave* that lead to the account I give here. The question I found myself asking was whether there were traces of this obsessional repetitiveness and what its nature in *Under the Volcano* itself. In a certain way I was caught up in Lowry's obsessions because the question made me return to the novel once more.

If the macro-compositional level of *Under the Volcano* is taken into consideration than the way Lowry structures his text corresponds to the relationship that obtains between *Dark as the Grave* and the earlier novel: namely, a case can be made for the view that *Under the Volcano* is structured upon Jacques Laurelle obsessively repeating - reading - the events that occurred during last year's Day of the Dead. A cursory reading discloses that the introductory

chapter outlines the events of that day, but what I wish to stress is that Laurelle, like Lowry, like myself, is compelled to go through them one more time. When he quotes from Marlowe -

Then will I headlong fly into the Earth:
Earth, gape! it will not harbour me! (UV,34)

- I would contend that this is not only a prefiguration of the Consul's death but a metaphor for Laurelle's plunge into time past, a backward coercion which proves to be one of the dominant mechanisms of the novel. If my intuition is valid, the fact that the introductory chapter has no counterpoise in a terminal epilogue tips the balance towards the beginning of the book, backwards, charging it with a pull that lures the reader to rereadings.

This basic drift of the novel has parallels on the level of fictional personages. Most of them are ensnared in an unsuccessful but compulsive endeavour to disentangle themselves from the mesh of their pasts. For example, this weight of the past, its obsessive reenactment, is perceptible on the occasion when the Consul is cruelly accosting Yvonne: "doesn't all that revolving and plunging up there somehow suggest to you the voyaging of unseen planets, the unknown moons hurling backwards" (UV,196). This utterance, coming as it does in Laurelle's house, the place where Yvonne had cuckolded the Consul, is used by him to prevent her from extricating herself from the past and to plunge her backward into the remorse of her infidelities with Hugh and Laurelle. It also attests to the Consul's possessed imagination, a kind of self-serving torture-chamber, and his unwillingness to come out of his hell.

Another interesting feature of characterization is the osmotic process whereby the different characters merge with one another. (The significance of this for my reading will become clear in the light of comments on the prohibitionist painting). Frequently, the individuated personages dissolve, becoming facets of the Consul's demonic personality. A level of symbolic correspondences could easily be established on which the minor figures in this meticulously constructed novel turn out to be manifestations of the Consul's character or, is it better to say, projections of a fevered mind. This is conspicuous regarding the historical figures with whom the Consul is frequently identified: the Pope, Don Quixote, Moctezuma, William Blackstone, etc.. On another plane, the text gives out hints that the Consul is, for instance, Hugh's "ghostly other self" (UV,171). Far from presenting a panoramic sweep of characters and their interrelationships, I see *Under the Volcano* developing the character aspect of its structure on a series of identifications and erasures.

The cause, or perhaps the compositional justification, of this osmosis lies in the Consul's self-absorption which hampers him from registering outer stimuli. This is the crux of Laurelle's remark to him: "It's precisely your inability to see them, Geoffrey, that turns them into the instruments of the disaster you have created yourself" (UV,217). On the following page, Laurelle warns the Consul that his seeming "feeling of omniscience" is based on unjustifiable exclusion (UV,218). The calamity lurking behind the Consul's alcoholic maze - the "glaze turned inward" (UV,49) Yvonne perceived in his eyes - is that he is incapable of apprehending things or people as existing for themselves, but manipulates them, appropriates them as instruments of his self-staged tragedy. I bring this up because I have a feeling that the Consul's self-absorption is paralleled by Lowry's writing strategies, whereby he invalidates the independent status of his descriptive passages and subjugates them to the tyrannical, obsessive drive of his book. However, there is a basic difference. If, as was noticed, the Consul's imagination operates on the principle of exclusion it is logical that Lowry's writing, in order to bring this across, has to rely on its opposite, inclusion. What I mean by this is that Lowry does not subtract from the elements of his fictional world but adds to these entities, charges them with what might be called an obsessional streak. Lowry's text coerces the elements (aspects) of his novel into a specific grid of signification, creating metaphoric identifications that destabilize the "realistic" mode of being of the said elements. As an illustration of this practice I choose to look at a few instances of the usage of animal imagery in *Under the Volcano*.

Throughout the novel, the Consul is constantly followed by pariah dogs. In chapter IV, Hugh and Yvonne are escorted by a watch-dog whose presence sets Hugh thinking: "It was certainly hard to reconcile this dog with the pariahs one saw in town, those dreadful creatures that seemed to shadow his brother everywhere" (UV,106). Let me extrapolate from this statement and establish the following pair of opposites: the watch-dog is to the pariah as the community is to the outcast. Or, to put it more bluntly, the Consul's self-ostracism finds a correlative in the canine race. In the same vein, the bull in the Arena Tomalin is apostrophized as "poor old creature" (UV,258), but a more convincing case for the bull's identification with the Consul can be made using the description of the bull storming his pen: "hurling himself at the gate time after time with an incensed, regressive bitterness" (UV,277). (Lowry does use the word "pen" in the previous sentence; I can only hint at a possible virtuoso interpretation that would take up and play with these identifications: bull=Consul, pen(gate)=pen(writing). That last phrase - regressive bitterness - gives a pithy two-word description of the Consul's psychological throes and, in a derivative way, of the mode of compositional buildup of the novel. Two additional illustrations from the novel will lend support to my argument. Dissuading Yvonne from purchasing an armadillo, Hugh cautions

her: "It'll not only never come back Yvonne, but if you try to stop it it will do its damnest to pull you down the hole too" (UV,113). In chapter VI, the scorpion, which makes a number of appearances throughout the novel, is described in the following manner: "He cares not for priest nor for poor peon. Leave him be. He'll sting himself to death anyway" (UV,188). It should be clear that Lowry in these instances undermines the separate status of the animal imagery precisely because the imagery is encumbered with symbolic weight, placed within a signifying field that is obsessively predicated upon the Consul. The inclusion of a metaphoric identification does away with the separate, distinct status of the animal signifiers and they become emblematic of the self-destructive proclivities characterizing the Consul's behaviour.⁷ The consequence of this is that the competence for descriptive, mimetic representation is circumscribed, lending to the novel a symbolic, obsessive and fated tonality.

The final question to consider is whether there can be found in *Under the Volcano* a vantage point authorizing, or better, inciting the reader towards the kind of reading I am suggesting. The question is of course rhetorical. My opinion is that one of the central motifs in the novel, of importance to the present analysis because it foregrounds the mechanism I have been trying to set forth in this paper, is the picture "Los Borrachones" that the Consul sees in Laurelle's house. The picture is a prohibitionist poster depicting the following scene: drunkards falling "headlong into hades" while the sober folk are climbing, shooting into heaven. The immediate impact of the poster on the Consul is devastating: "Suddenly he felt something never felt before with such shocking certainty. It was that he was in hell himself" (UV,199). Depicting the depravity into which the Consul has sunk, the poster is one in a series of motifs Lowry employs to represent the Consul's predicament. However, the fact that the memory of the picture and the subsequent insight it brings to the Consul reappears at the very end of the text assigns to it an additional significance.⁸

⁷ Of course this identification of "galloping cockroaches", "imaginary scorpions" (UV,174) with the Consul is relevant to his psychological portraiture, especially in that brink situation the Consul calls "the ingress of the animal kingdom" (UV,228). Namely, the animal world is a part of the Consul's psyche because they are spawned by his delirium tremens (of special pertinence is the bathroom scene ending chapter V wherein the Consul is overwhelmed by them). Simply put, between the Consul and the animal imagery there exists a mutual bond since the text makes the imagery instrumental in delineating the Consul, while his own hallucinations are crawling with these creatures.

⁸ As my concluding remarks will make clear nothing prohibits the reader from suspecting the Consul's perception of the picture. If his inability to transcend his inwardness is absolutized than the painting "Los Borrachones" becomes a projection of self. Of course, this could then be extended to the whole novel, in which case *Under the Volcano* would turn out a transcript of a solipsistic hell.

Because of the bearing the passage has on my argument it has to be given an attentive reading. Putting the passage in its context, we recall that a moment earlier the Consul had been thinking of leaving the Farolito but nothing comes of this and we find him "leaning his elbows on the bar, he buried his face in his hands" (UV,361). This posture, whereby he blocks out the outer world and surrenders himself to self-absorption, proves inaugurative of the ensuing sequence. The succeeding paragraph is the passage I want to draw special attention to; it begins with the Consul recalling "in his mind's eyes" the picture "Los Borrachones". The difference from the earlier scene is that the Consul now ponders whether the poster might not have had a meaning "beyond the symbolically obvious" (UV,361). He thinks of the opposing movements (upward/downward) structuring the picture as representing two fundamental modes of approaching, knowing reality. To use Lowry's vocabulary, the upward movement, the sober state of mind, would be the condition where the spirit grows freer, more separate, distinctive. On the other hand, the plunging, descending course, the lot of the drunkards, is a mode of being where everything becomes intermingled, more joined together, where the individuality of people and things is obliterated. The passage that is most relevant to my discussion I quote at some length:

When he had striven upwards, as at the beginning with Yvonne, had not the "features" of life seemed to grow more clear, more animated, friends and enemies more identifiable, special problems, scenes, and with them the sense of his own reality, more *separate* from himself? And had it not turned out that the further down he sank, the more those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle, if struggle there were still. (UV,361)

Let me put my own question: is not this passage a key not only to the Consul's psyche but, in a certain way, to Lowry's opus itself? The notion that the "features of life" - outside reality - can be perceived as separate from the self but also as mere "caricatures" of self gives us no less than two modes of appropriating the world. The first procedure is evidently a form of objective, realistic epistemology whereas the latter stands for a radical, solipsistic subjectivism. The implications of this passage for Lowry's novelistic practice are manifold, but what I want to underline is that it illuminates the peculiar bent of Lowry's writings that has been the subject of my investigation.

The consequence of the Consul's having sunk into the downward movement has been, as Lowry writes, a "devolving through failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that became more and more like one voice" (UV,361). This obsessive univocality manifests itself in *Under the Volcano* on the level of characters and imagery. It seems quite inevitable that since the text as a whole is permeated by a downgoing, a descending movement, it should have been affected by this incessant inscription of one voice, fate, one obsessive and tragic vision. To that extent Lowry's textual practice duplicates the Consul's obsessive self-absorption.

Of course, Lowry's pronouncements on the solipsistic "fabrication" of reality should make wary those undertaking an interpretation of *Under the Volcano*. The question logically arises how contagious is the univocality, the skewed appropriation of reality which, as we saw, influences the mode of representation at work in the text? Namely, to what extent is the interpreter capable of perceiving it as a distinct entity, separate, or is he joining it to himself, making it a projection of self? Of course, these queries are not restricted only to the text under consideration. Is not reading a swooping down (to continue with Lowry's metaphors) movement, a process of imposition. The only hope one can harbour is that one's reading has not been too willful, wayward, that bonds of reciprocity do exist between one's constructions and the targeted text.

Stipe Grgas: MALCOLM LOWRY: "TIRANIJA JASTVA"

S a ž e t a k

Polazište ovog rada jest da je Malcolm Lowry u osnovi romanopisac jedne knjige. Ovo se očituje u Lowryevu kompulsivnom vraćanju vlastitim tekstovima, u onome što autor članka nazivlje njihovim opsesivnim ponavljanjem. U radu se ta osobina prikazuje pomoću osebnog odnosa između romana *Pod vulkanom* i djela *Mračno kao grob u kojemu počiva moj prijatelj* i ukazom na makrokompoziciju, likove i životinjsko slikovlje u *Pod vulkanom*. Naposljetku, autor skreće pozornost na motiv slike "Los Borrachones" koja po njemu pridaje vjerodostojnost izloženom čitanju.