

Eagle tells us that the book was originally conceived as a biography of Shaughnessy, a project that was abandoned because personal sources were found to be inadequate. This is a pity, as the glimpses of Shaughnessy one catches in this corporate narrative indicate that his was a complicated and fascinating personality.

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*The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon, 1940-1952*, edited by Paul Tiessen with Nancy Strobel. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988. Pp. 182; one illus. \$22.95.

*The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon, 1940-1952* starts with a chronology that highlights the various stages of Lowry's and Noxon's lives, as well as their mutual interests. Paul Tiessen's ensuing introduction about the writers, text, and the sources provides a valuable key to the correspondence. The correspondence itself is divided into blocks arranged according to biographical periods. A short introductory paragraph, often quoting related material by Noxon, aids the reader in placing these blocks as well as the single letters. The letters are not, however, annotated, which at times makes it difficult to comprehend references to persons or works of art not generally known. A good index in some measure compensates for this shortcoming.

By far the largest of these blocks is the one covering the period from the summer of 1941 to May 1944. In these twenty-one letters criticism by the Lowrys and Noxon of each other's work is at the centre of interest. The letters on Noxon's poetry and on his novel *Teresina Maria* give testimony to Margerie and Malcolm Lowry's ability to issue creative and productive critiques of their friend's work. Margerie's novel *Horse in the Sky* is in its turn subject to Malcolm's and Noxon's criticism. Unfortunately, Lowry's work, especially *Under the Volcano*, which he rewrote in this period, is not discussed in the letters. There are, however, a few short passages in the correspondence which hint at Noxon's influence in reshaping it. These permit Tiessen to infer the existence of a "small writer's guild" (8) which, he suggests, was of much help to Lowry as he did his work. Indeed, writes Tiessen, "[Lowry's] correspondence with Noxon makes clear how incorrect it is to regard him as having burst in 1940-44 beyond the limited artistic range of the earlier (1936-40) drafts of the novel with the help only from Margerie. Gerald Noxon also was periodically on hand . . ." (3). In my

mind, such a statement minimizes Lowry's own influence on his achievement and opens to unlimited guesswork the question of who exerted the decisive influence on him.

One wonders, too, about the fact that there is no discussion of film and politics. A great passion of the Lowrys was to go to the latest movies as well as the classics of German, French, and Russian film. Noxon, according to the chronology at the beginning of the book, attended the Sorbonne in Paris in order to increase his knowledge of German, French, and Russian film, and was one of the founding members of a film guild in Cambridge. It is therefore astonishing to me that there are no discussions or recommendations of films in the letters.

Politics, also, are let aside, though both Lowry and Noxon seem to have been antifascist. One could infer a profound antifascist attitude from Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, while Noxon quit a job in an Italian film institute in Rome as the result of a dispute over Mussolini's political use of the institute. Yet the letters offer not a trace of a profound, or even superficial, discussion of what was happening in these countries.

A hint as to why these topics did not find their way into this correspondence — and, to my knowledge, any other Lowry correspondence — is perhaps provided by the fact that in Lowry's world there was simply no room for World War II or much else beyond his immediate circumstances. Indeed, his lack of interest in important contemporary events makes it easy to "remythologize" Lowry as the "vile hermit" (5) who is actively concerned only with his own limited world. The letters do reveal some charming everyday aspects of the Lowrys' household at Dollarton. Yet this is hardly the "demythologization" (3) Tiessen hopes this correspondence can achieve. What it achieves, in my opinion, is to throw light on a side of Lowry that thus far has not been sufficiently taken into account.

To conclude, this correspondence is well worth reading by everyone who is interested in Lowry. The letters to Gerald Noxon lead into Lowry's private existence as only the letters to a dear friend can. As Tiessen correctly observes: "These letters are a testimony to Lowry's and Noxon's friendship" (19).