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The Tyranny of Words
Malcolm Lowry's *Tender Is the Night*

When in 1949, in Dollarton, British Columbia, Malcolm Lowry turned from the novels and short stories he had in progress to work with his wife Margerie on a filmscript, the massive project that suddenly inspired him became central to his career as a writer and essential in his struggle for personal spiritual redemption.[1] What began as a brief treatment grew by the spring of 1950 into a 455-page typescript adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*.[2] "We have become possessed by *Tender Is the Night*," Lowry wrote in a September 1949 letter to his contact in Hollywood, Frank Taylor, ". . . I myself have never felt so creatively exhilarated since writing the better parts of the *Volcano*" (*Cinema* 19). Though the Lowry filmscript retains many of the characters and some of the situations of Fitzgerald's story, it nonetheless differs markedly from it. Among numerous re-writings, there are lengthy, completely original sections dealing with Dick Diver in New York and on a mercantile ship to Europe, a dramatically revised ending, and an overall Expressionist filmic aesthetic that aligns the script much more with Lowry's other writings than with Fitzgerald's novel. Lowry's manuscript was the only major piece of writing that he completed after *Under the Volcano* (1947); yet until its recent publication it remained a relatively obscure, eccentric document.[3] Even a recent reviewer of the published script, though generally praising the screenplay, nevertheless suggests that Lowry undertook the task of adapting Fitzgerald's novel as a way of avoiding his own writing (Binns 37). And for more explicit corroboration of this kind of indictment, we have biographer Douglas Day's comment that it

was the later opinion of Frank Taylor—an opinion which Day does not contest—that Lowry "had taken on the scriptwriting chore as an excuse not to do his own work" (Day 422).[4]

The scarcity of critical writing and support surrounding the filmscript is indicative of the way in which response to a text, what Gerard Genette has called the *horizon d'attente* of the reader, is to a significant extent determined by an assessment of its generic classification. To suggest that Lowry was unable to do both *Tender Is the Night* and his "own work" is to distance the filmscript from Lowry's other fiction and imply a hierarchy within Lowry's body of writing in which the script is accorded secondary status. In fact, Lowry's *Tender Is the Night* is a serious and significant literary work, and any insistence on first labelling it "simply" a filmscript and then categorizing that genre as implicitly inferior denies the text both its multi-generic status and its important connections to Lowry's concerns as a writer. By limiting the script within generic boundaries, it becomes possible to emphasize its conventional shortcomings.[5] Such criticism, however, posits an actual film produced out of, but separate from, the physical writing contained within the text. A different and more productive study of the script must first examine the writing that such a film would displace, a writing that in this case is highly self-reflexive and passionately involved with the conditions of words themselves. The fact that Lowry had Fitzgerald's ready-made material in front of him undoubtedly functioned as practical impetus for Lowry's sudden obsession with the project at this time. The realization, however, that he was faced with having to transform someone else's words into his own vehicle for self-representation also exacerbated Lowry's anxieties about language and self-authorization. For in the script Lowry most clearly gives expression to his ambivalent and troubled relationship with the written word and looks to the different medium of film as the means by which he might successfully overcome the predicaments and exigencies of linguistic representation. The filmscript is thus essential to an understanding of the fiction of Malcolm Lowry, accentuating concerns with which Lowry continually struggled, in particular foregrounding and illuminating his central obsession as a writer: the individual's arduous encounter with language in his desire to represent himself.

Brian O'Kill has called attention to what he terms a "strangulated hyperarticulacy" in the writings of Malcolm Lowry: "We witness an intense struggle with language: a man not knowing which language to use, not even

confident that he speaks any language, feeling himself to be in a small curious linguistic recess, having great difficulty in writing at all, sometimes wishing that he were free from 'the tyranny of prose'" (180). One way in which Lowry attempts to overcome this tyranny is to embrace language fully in all its excesses. Lowry loved words, and he took pleasure in pushing them to their limits. But while Lowry embraced language, he also feared it. He was made anxious by its contradictions, its ambivalences and vicissitudes, its inescapable, uncontrollable interpretations. For all his obvious enchantment with words, Lowry also saw them as a threat.

This struggle is often explicitly dramatized within Lowry's stories. In *Under the Volcano*, for example, the sign in the garden—LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN QUE ES SUYO? EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN!—both in its literal meaning and in the Consul's "misreading" of it,[6] functions as a graphic linguistic reminder of the threat under which the Consul lives, a threat here manifest at least in part by the very strangeness (to English eyes) of the words on the sign. (Significantly, these are the final words of the novel.) In a related context, it is the Babel of voices in the bar Farolito during the novel's final scenes, with seemingly disembodied words appearing to literally fly at the Consul from all sides, that prefigures the Consul's demise. Similarly, in both *October Ferry to Gabriola* and "The Forest Path to the Spring," signs threaten to control, or at least significantly affect, the protagonists' lives.

Such dramatic manifestations of the threat of words are evident throughout Lowry's work, but this anxiety more significantly haunts Lowry at a broader level of writing. In a June 1950 letter to his Vancouver friend Downie Kirk, Lowry expressed his fascination with Ortega y Gasset's notion of man as "novelist of himself" (*Selected Letters* 210).[7] And in a 1953 letter to his editor, Albert Erskine, he spoke in detail of "Ortega's fellow, making up his life as he goes along, and trying to find his vocation" (*Letters* 331). Lowry hoped that his belief in this notion of "man as novelist of himself," in "Ortega's fellow," would allow him to escape becoming a character in someone else's novel. But he also understood all too well the inescapable, inexorable fact that these fictions or constructions of the self, however protean, however much they might purport finally to be the product of an autonomous, authoritative subjectivity, existed nowhere but in language and were thus vulnerable to appropriation by other voices, subject to other discourses of authority. In a suggestive reading of Lowry's association of writing with

self-entrapment and death, Patrick McCarthy has recently shown how the Consul in *Under the Volcano* fears the completion of writing because it will signify his loss of control over the self-identity that is constructed within it (45).[8] This certainly accounts for the Consul's refusal to rest on any one of the series of provisionally held rhetorical postures within which he lives. Undoubtedly, Lowry himself dreaded the same loss of control. But if on the one hand he celebrated language's open-endedness, even its indeterminacy, as a way of avoiding closure and thus subjection, on the other hand Lowry, who sought to write himself in and through his writings, simultaneously feared the destabilizing, the loss of grounding, of self that such indeterminacy would inevitably effect.[9] Though words were Lowry's necessary tools in the process of his self-making, those same words would nonetheless threaten the self's control and authority as the author became subjected by and to language. Thus, while Lowry at times celebrated the open-endedness of language, he also feared for the self caught in language and defined along with everything else as a component in the discursive field. In 1949, in his and Margerie's shack at Dollarton, mired in the composition of *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid*, a kind of gloss on the writing of *Under the Volcano* and a text which would come to illustrate the inherent difficulties in the notion of "man as novelist of himself," Lowry turned to the filmscript of *Tender Is the Night*.

Among his examples of methods available to writers in their search for voice, O'Kill cites what he calls a "style of transcription." This he defines as "using language which is, or professes to be, objective. . . . [The writer] can do this by putting into his work apparent transcriptions of external reality—the language of public notices, signposts, menus, advertisement hoardings" (181).[10] By the time Lowry began working on *Tender Is the Night*, he had already made use of signs, posters and advertisements in his writing, most notably in *Under the Volcano*, and would do so again in *October Ferry to Gabriola*.[11] In the filmscript, he contextualizes and justifies the use of such graphics and insists on their effectiveness on numerous levels. "Cinematically speaking we might indeed here be right back in the phantasmagoric world of Murnau," Lowry writes of his use of signs. In the filmscript, as in Lowry's other work, these graphics include words themselves. But because the envisioned final product in this case is a film, these words take on a peculiarly significant status.

According to Lowry's view of his own work, no part of the project was inessential to its intricately planned structure. It is possible to make a distinction, though, between writing which appears intended as background (though still significant) material, perhaps to remain unnoticed by the majority of viewers, and writing which is clearly foregrounded. Many of the references in the script to film titles, to names of plays on theatre marquees, to road signs, etc., fall into the former category. At times, however, Lowry positions words on the screen so that it is impossible to miss their physical presence. There are numerous instances throughout the script of such use of the written word. When, for example, we first see, through Dick's memory, Dr. Dohmler's sanatorium in Zurich where Nicole has been brought by her sister Baby, the script dramatizes Nicole's condition through the use of words on a written report:

> The camera starts forward to focus on the report, and we see what is written, small, but coming closer and larger as we move in. First we see it as over Dohmler's shoulder, written in Gothic German handwriting. Before we have grasped this it has turned to French as we move up towards it:
>
> Diagnostic: Schizophrénie. Phase aiguë en décroissance.
>
> Before we have read even this much it has changed into English so that by the time we have come up to it we can read it clearly:
>
> Diagnosis: Divided Personality. Acute and downhill phase of the illness. The fear . . .
>
> The other words are blurred and while we are reading, the words Divided Personality have changed into the one word Schizophrenia, their anglo-Greek and more terrifying counterpart. The other words all drop away, and on the screen, surcharged with horror and menace, accentuated by music, and coming straight out of the screen at us, the one word:
>
> SCHIZOPHRENIA (*Cinema* 93; UBC 144)

Clearly here the words themselves are meant to overwhelm the viewer's consciousness.

Similarly, in the script's long New York sequence, the electric headlines that rotate round the top of the Times Building provide Lowry with countless opportunities to emphasize the materiality of words. The screen becomes engulfed by contemporary headlines which, as Dick watches, inevitably begin to act strangely:

> IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES MAY . . . (the news can't make up its mind, adds incongruously) OSWEGO NEW BRUNSWICK . . . OUTBREAKS OF . . . It is standing like this when Dick looks up from his newspaper; everything suddenly blacks out save the ID of ideological at the very beginning and the EGO of Oswego; then, for a few seconds, either the Times Building goes mad or Dick has a delusion:

while the EGO stays where it is, the ID swoops up to it in a trice to try and get past: another ID comes swooping round the other side of the Times Building in the reverse direction—and at this moment it ceases to behave like the news at all, and behaves in the flashing dancing manner of a frenetic frenzied illuminated advertisement in perpetual metamorphosis, and for a moment the EGO is caught between the two IDS but still holding its ground: not merely that, but coming up on the left the sentence about the senator from Idaho has repeated itself in a flash, then blacked out leaving only the ID of Idaho and SUPERCARGO, which instantly changes to SUPEREGO; simultaneously yet another ego has been coming round from the right so that the EGO is caught between the SUPEREGO as well, so that the hammering lightning dispersal of the words is something like:

ID - SUPEREGO - EGO - SUPEREGO- ID

Yet the EGO still holds. (*Cinema* 168; UBC 297-98)

Though, in the best Lowry tradition, this may be overdone, there is no denying the impact that the sheer size and physicality of the words themselves would have in a movie theatre.

My final example is drawn from an earlier scene in Paris after one of Nicole's breakdowns but before the impending crisis that forces her back into the sanatorium. In their Paris hotel room, Dick receives telegrams from both Baby Warren and his old colleague, Franz Gregorovious, urging him to invest in a Switzerland clinic. Here, in a typically Lowryan nod to silent film, the words take the form of subtitles, commenting on the action on the screen. Soon, however, the words once more begin to acquire a life of their own:

Meantime, on the screen, almost before we have finished with the word "Warren," all the words save the word "agrees" vanish, against which word other single words continually changing and approaching in the same manner, keep sliding up as if trying to get past, while "agrees" refuses to move, so that the effect, though it is horizontal and not vertical, is as below, the word "reason" having been taken from Baby's uncondensed telegram:

BANKER AGREES
GREGOROVIOUS AGREES
REASON AGREES
LIFE AGREES (to which is added now)
FOR NICOLE'S POSSIBLE BENEFIT

On the screen now a DIS suddenly inserts itself between the AGREES and LIFE and the POSSIBLE disappears so that it reads:

LIFE DISAGREES FOR NICOLE'S BENEFIT then, the first two words disappearing:
FOR NICOLE'S BENEFIT then, the last word disappearing:
FOR NICOLE which is replaced by, suddenly:
CHANCE YOU HAVE AWAITED ALL YOUR LIFE to which is added:
FOLLOWS condensed to:
LIFE FOLLOWS
Dick: (on the phone as this last is appearing below, though he has not

> stopped talking more than a necessary moment or two here) Absolutely final . . . We'll be glad to see you. No, I said glad. G for Grand Guignol, L for Lanier, A for abracadabra, D for damnation. Glad. (Dick hangs up, throwing away the last words in the act.) (*Cinema* 127-28; UBC 230-31)

On one level, of course, the words in these scenes are intended as graphic expressions of Dick's consciousness, what Lowry sees as the consciousness of humanity. The words atop the Times Building enact a herculean, universal psychological struggle while simultaneously dramatizing Dick's particular predicament. Similarly, the words from the telegrams convey Dick's crisis in which (as yet unaware that the two are inseparable) he must choose between personal freedom and responsibility, with key words—LIFE, TIGHT, FREE, STOP—apparently shifting their allegiance at will. Insofar as these words operate in this manner, their function is largely thematic, determined to serve the purpose of the narrative.

Yet these words on screen acquire additional significance which has little to do with the actual narrative, though much to say about Lowry's relationship with words themselves. In his introduction to his recent study of writing in film, Tom Conley argues that writing can induce "a linear reading of an image, but its own nondiscursive traits can jostle or complicate its meaning enough to make of its signs a tabular, pictural, even tactile ensemble of letters" (xi). Its own form, in other words, can alienate the viewer/reader to the extent that the word itself can be analyzed graphically. This view of the written word is in fact suggested by Dick's own breaking down of the word "Glad" into each of its components: "G for Grand Guignol, L for Lanier, A for abracadabra, D for damnation. Glad" (*Cinema* 128; UBC 231). By laying bare its composition, Lowry encourages us to confront the word as a constructed object, an entity unto itself, which can be broken apart and played with: "G for Grand Guignol, L for Lanier," etc. Apart from any of their other possible meanings, then, words become concrete objects on the screen and enter into relationships with human individuals, relationships in which they not only function as expressions of those individuals but also at times as their masters. The word on screen in the Lowrys' script, then, often represents what we may call the tyranny of the object.

Though the idea of the malevolence of objects and their power over the individual can be traced back to nineteenth-century reaction to the mechanization of everyday life, this obsession with objects also has its antecedents in silent film.[12] As John Barlow has pointed out, where early American films

(Chaplin's, for example) found comedy in the struggle of individuals with objects, the German films of the 1920s, particularly the Expressionist films which Lowry so loved and which so clearly influenced his script, used objects to "express the tragic hopelessness of the human predicament."[13] "Individuals," Barlow argues, "fight with the objects that challenge them in the American movies, and we laugh; they are overcome by them in the German movies, and we shudder" (135).

This ambivalence surrounding the relationship between object and individual is central in the *Tender Is the Night* filmscript. Though it may not make us laugh, for example, there is certainly comedy of a different sort in the portrayal of one of the most significant objects in the script, the Divers' Isotta. Intended to replace the incest motif of Fitzgerald's novel, Nicole's car accident (in which her father is killed) is meant to convey, superficially at least, the origins of Nicole's illness. Later, the car takes on further ominous overtones when Nicole, during one of her breakdowns, is responsible for a serious accident during the family's return to Switzerland. Yet the car also allows Lowry to explore the possibility of freedom and hope. While the Isotta represents illness, doom, and menace at the story's beginning, it finally stands as the sign of Nicole's freedom when she drives, alone, from the beach to the Villa Diana near the end. The car becomes that which marks the transformation from damnation to redemption.

In the case of the word, though, the relationship between object and individual is more ambiguous and uncertain. Certainly, Lowry's camera often appears obsessed with words, specifically with words as objects. Barlow has pointed out that in Expressionist film, "[t]he camera tends to dwell on certain objects . . . and the actors hover about them, handle them, even seem to submit to them, as if the force that moved the action and determined the characters' destinies were contained in these things" (137). At the level of plot, it is Baby Warren's letter to Dick in Glion (*Cinema* 113; UBC 20-01), asking him to escort Nicole back to Zurich (after Dick has apparently completed a successful emotional break from Nicole), that initiates Dick's fate and precipitates much of what follows. But it is the pervasive presence of words on screen and their seemingly overbearing effect on both characters and viewers that in the Lowrys' script best exemplifies the attempt to represent the tyranny of objects. For although these words are often intended as graphic articulations of internal consciousness or struggle, just as frequently they appear to exert control over the individual, in effect subjecting him or her.

Seen as a pictural surface, as Conley has argued, "the letters of a title can be broken apart, splayed and recombined," and he detects in such activity the freedom of the viewer "to see writing as a compositional design that has everything—as well as nothing—to do with what is meant" (xi-xii). But though he might at times encourage such playfulness, Lowry never allows us to forget the tyranny of the object itself. He finally forces us to confront the words on the screen as objects ("visual weapons" he calls them in his notes (30)), objects over which no one seems to exert any control, as is suggested by Lowry's practice of pairing them in the script directions with active rather than passive verbs: "words . . . keep sliding up"; "'agrees' refuses to move"; "DIS suddenly inserts itself"; "POSSIBLE disappears"; "the ID swoops"; "the EGO still holds"; "the news can't make up its mind." The self's subjection to language is here represented to the extent that words reveal their own independence and superimpose themselves upon the individual. Once given expression, language appears to take on an autonomy that at times threatens to dictate the individual's fate and authority.

Dramatized here is a struggle between self and language in which the latter threatens to subject the former, a struggle that in Lowry's case translates into an anxious fear of losing control over his own life-writing. He had come to literally dread *Under the Volcano*'s power over him, its threat to in effect rewrite him as the Consul.[14] With the filmscript of *Tender Is the Night* he hoped to refashion himself as the heroic and redemptive figure of Dick Diver.[15] Yet he seemed now to doubt that he could accomplish this within the medium of words. The difficulty lay for Lowry in the heterogeneity and elusiveness of the written word, with its formidable challenge to the authority of the coherent, individual author. Never hesitant to take advantage of the possibilities offered by his modern technological world, Lowry quickly seized upon the film camera as the most appropriate vehicle through which he believed he could successfully put the object back in its place, thereby guaranteeing the self's coherence. The written word would not stand between him and his self-making.

In his portrayal in the filmscript of the relationship between the word/object and the individual, Lowry finally embraced a paradox. As we have already seen, he attempted to present a kind of allegory of the struggle between the writer and his words, dramatizing the latter's ability to subject the author, thus breaking down the traditional stable relationship between self and language. At the same time, by turning to the medium of film, as I

will now try to show, Lowry articulated a desire to affirm and celebrate the authenticity of the object (including the word as object) on the screen. In so doing, he hoped to correspondingly posit the authenticity of the self and attempt to re-establish its stability.

In the filmscript Lowry reveals his desire to embrace film as the medium which would allow him to transcend the play of language by apparently solidifying the boundaries of the written word and reaffirming the primacy of his own authority. Not surprisingly, Lowry stands precariously balanced between two opposing views of cinematic articulation, and he expresses a wilfully self-contradictory attitude toward filmic representation. Though, as one would expect given his predilection for Expressionist representational strategies, he argues that film manipulates, amplifies, transforms whatever stands before the camera, Lowry nonetheless repeatedly insists on film's capacity to mechanically record the fullness and plenitude of the profilmic event, to provide an objective rendering of the material world. In this he resembles those who like Siegfried Kracauer claimed that through cinema viewers could recover the "crude and unnegotiated presence of natural objects" (164), or who like André Bazin insisted on the "essentially objective character" of the photographic image (13).[16] As Kaja Silverman has argued, such faith in the "indexical relation of the camera to the profilmic event"(9) signals a desire to compensate for the loss inherent in the cinematic process—that is, the loss of the physical presence of the object itself. It was precisely this apparently lost stable object, with its necessarily corresponding lost coherent subject, that Lowry wished to recuperate.

Muriel Bradbrook has suggested that Lowry "learnt from the cinema the art of suggestion, of collocation without comment, and transposed it into his own medium" (67). The assumption that film can "collocate without comment" seems questionable, for it denies the role of selection, apparatus and so on, in the filmic process. Yet Lowry often perceived film as functioning in precisely this innocent, disinterested way, revealing a desire for immediacy and lack of mediation perfectly in keeping with his insistence that film images could be uniquely profound because "fully realised—ten pages of condensed naturalistic technique at a blow each time they appear" (*Notes* 15). As Paul Tiessen has noted, Lowry's "faith in the film image's ability to move man seemed to surpass his faith in the ability of the literary image to do the same" ("Statements" 123). And this ability to move seemed for Lowry

to exist first and foremost in what he perceived as film's capacity to fully present to the audience the object already there, whole and complete. Lowry insisted on an existential bond linking the cinematic image to the phenomenal world. Like Kracauer, he believed that the power of the camera lay in its ability to seem as if it had "just now extricated [natural objects] from the womb of physical existence and as if the umbilical cord between image and actuality had not yet been severed" (Kracauer 164).

This is made explicit in Lowry's other attempt at an adaptation for film, the 27-page screenplay for his short story, "The Bravest Boat."[17] The script begins:

> In long shot we see the rip-teeth of the winter-white mountains across the bay; closer in, the combers riding in toward shore; and close-up, what was there all along: the single flare of a rain-drenched blossom on a flowering tree (1)

The script directions here emphasize the role of the camera in recording what was already there, "what was there all along." The blossom, in other words, is presented as possessing an autonomous (and poetically romantic) existence outside of the camera's perspective. The camera has no need to "create" the flower; it simply records its presence. Immediately following, during a description of a squirrel, the script directions insist that "He is neither afraid nor curious; above all, he is not cute; he is merely a squirrel" (1). Again here the camera functions as objective observer and recorder; it remains non-judgmental, non-creative. Elsewhere, "the camera" is depicted as noting "without comment" (6) and as capturing suddenly also "another sound which we haven't been aware of although it has been going on" (2).

Such statements of belief in the camera's intrinsic objectivity have their precedent in the filmscript of *Tender Is the Night* and its accompanying notes. In the latter, Lowry expresses his trust in the ability of the camera to capture the "superior power of the outer world," the "objectively real" (*Notes* 43). The very first scene in the script, calling for a panoramic shot reminiscent of the opening passage of *Under the Volcano*, begins with "a tremendous shot of the night sky, the stars blazing" (47), and moves gradually down to the words on a sign in a field, establishing the camera's capacity to capture the "objectively real" in all its fullness. Soon after, in one of the script's early scenes, Lowry writes that "the feeling should be . . . of such intensive realism that we feel ourselves actually to be on the beach" (52).

Lowry was searching for a grounding of meaning and thus of self that he believed the camera's function as a mechanical recorder of the material world could provide. Though he saw the concreteness of the cinematic

image as the basis upon which he could build a more subjective vision, the focus on the materiality of the film image remains throughout. Though he believed that "the camera's evocative power is much greater than that of words, for it can say several things at once" (60), he also believed that such evocation could somehow be controlled in a film in a way that would be impossible to emulate on the written page.

The medium of film afforded Lowry the opportunity to ground his process of self-making in the "objectively real." And it allowed him, in a way that he felt the written word never would, to enact a process of shared human experience in the apprehension of the filmic depiction of the material world. Whatever room for the individual imagination the camera allowed, Lowry believed that film had the unique capacity to involve a community of viewers in a shared reality. Furthermore, he insisted that there was an "inevitability" in the movement of film (Tiessen "Statements" 132). In his notes, he spoke of the audience as being "at the mercy of the momentum of the film itself" (*Notes* 9), and in *October Ferry to Gabriola*, his protagonist, Ethan, responds thus to the inexorable progression of the film: "And against such a predetermined doom, as against one's fate in the nightmare, finally you rebel! How? when the film will always end in the same way anyhow?" (133). Implicit here is a desire to equate the inevitability of the film's movement and images with the inevitability of the viewer's interpretation of those images, an interpretation which in effect would be formed for the viewer by Lowry himself. Lowry believed in film's inherent capacity to capture and convey a specific reality that can—indeed must—be shared by all viewers, in a way that the written word cannot hope to emulate. Thus his insistence that film concern itself (as the script of *Tender Is the Night* did) with the "ennoblement of man." If film had a unique ability to move an audience and to unite them in the process of their apprehension of the film image, then the film of *Tender Is the Night* would take full advantage of that ability and move that audience upwards, taking Dick Diver and Lowry with them.[18]

Much has been written about the "cinematic" qualities of Lowry's writing, but most of this commentary too easily elides the significant distinction in Lowry's mind between the written word and the film image. Lowry's movement from page to screen reveals a desire for autonomy and authority, for a more strict interpretation of "reality," based on an insistence (however naive or emotional) that the film image denotes the "real" more immediately and effectively than the written word. If Lowry was to be successful in his literary

self-making, he needed to arrest the meaning of the literary work. Yet by the simple though complicating fact that he undertook this task in language, such a project was impossible. This led him into a paradoxical engagement with the idea of the object. While he sought in the filmscript to represent the word as object and dramatize its threat to the self, by turning to the medium of film he simultaneously placed his faith in what he saw as the film camera's unique capacity to ground meaning in the object through its depiction of the profilmic event.

Thus, though the object on the page (as word) represented that against which Lowry struggled in his self-making, the object on the screen became the means by which he sought to stabilize and ground meaning and, by extension, the self. Whereas words—his own words—would always remain elusive and thus threatening, film would offer a chance for personal redemption arising out of the shared experience of author, character, and audience. In place of a solipsistic, weary Consul literally battered by words, Lowry foresaw the figure of Dick Diver sacrificing himself heroically amidst a community of viewers who would be transported by the simple force of the medium itself. The fact remains, of course, that the film of *Tender Is the Night* exists nowhere but in words, thus obviously complicating Lowry's hopes for such redemption. Yet though Lowry's camera thus never achieves more than the status of metaphor, Lowry's filmscript nonetheless remains as his most ardent, even desperate, expression of an inevitably unfulfilled desire to overcome "the tyranny of prose."

NOTES

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1 Though the figure of Margerie Bonner Lowry (as editor and collaborator) problematizes all that has been published under Malcolm Lowry's name, in this case the issue of authorship is particularly relevant. The title page of the filmscript includes both their names, and in an April 1952 letter to Albert Erskine at Random House in which he expressed hopes of using the script to meet the publisher's demands for a book, Lowry voiced concern about the "joint authorship" (*Selected Letters* 308). Although in this paper my interest lies in what I take to be Malcolm Lowry's personal stake in the project, I want to acknowledge here that Margerie Lowry's involvement in the writing of the filmscript challenges the attribution of the work to Malcolm Lowry alone. Consequently, when I refer to Malcolm Lowry, I do so keeping in mind that this construct is here constituted by the relationship between two people.

2 Lowry's filmscript was never filmed. It has recently been published in edited form in *The Cinema of Malcolm Lowry*. The original typescript is housed in the Malcolm Lowry Collection at the University of British Columbia Library, Box 23, Folders 15-17.

References in the text are to page numbers in both the edited script (as *Cinema* pg.) and the original manuscript (as UBC pg.). The script was circulated in Hollywood by Lowry's contact in the industry, his former editor Frank Taylor. Among others Taylor tried to interest MGM and David Selznick, whose own interest in Fitzgerald's novel led to the eventual production of *Tender Is the Night* by Twentieth Century-Fox in 1962. Taylor has recently indicated that he sent Lowry's script to Selznick and scriptwriter Ivan Moffat after Selznick, who had earlier sold the screen rights to the novel to MGM, repurchased the rights. However, they did not, according to Taylor, read the script.

3 For good, though rare, early critical assessments, see Perlmutter and Tiessen, "Statements." Lowry's own extensive notes to the script (hereafter cited in the text as *Notes*) were published separately as *Notes on a Screenplay for F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night.* The volume features not Lowry, but a prominent photograph of Fitzgerald on its cover.

4 Though Gordon Bowker, Lowry's most recent biographer, briefly discusses the script, he nevertheless refers to it as a "disruption" (Bowker 461). In the book's index, *Tender Is the Night* appears under Fitzgerald's name but not Lowry's.

5 Binns is justified in criticizing Lowry's *Tender Is the Night* as filmscript. As a screenplay, it in no way measures up to the "professional" Hollywood work of writers such as Faulkner or Fitzgerald (nor, for that matter, of countless "lesser" Hollywood hacks). Yet to judge it only or principally on those terms (as Binns himself pointedly does not) would be to do Lowry's work a disservice. When Faulkner wrote *The Road to Glory* (1936) or Fitzgerald *Three Comrades* (1938), they were composing, first and foremost, professional Hollywood screenplays and they were doing so from within a specific community that structured the conventions within which they could work. Lowry's *Tender Is the Night,* though ostensibly a filmscript, recklessly breaks generic boundaries (though it must be granted that such adventurousness is often the result of ignorance of both the craft and the practical demands of the Hollywood production machinery). In his afterword to *The Road to Glory,* George Garrett cautions us not to overlook "the essence of the creative process in movie making—that it is corporate, that it is political, also, in the sense that the final product is a choice arrived at through constant negotiation and compromise," and he adds that "all this was obviously understood by William Faulkner" (164). Whether it would have been understood also by Malcolm Lowry had the filmscript raised more interest in Hollywood is impossible to say. He referred to the work as a "blueprint" and repeatedly assured Frank Taylor that he understood that the script might need further work. But unlike Faulkner or Fitzgerald, Lowry was far from the world of Hollywood exigencies (he had unsuccessfully tried to get work in the industry in 1936), and his writing reveals little awareness of studio politics. Rather than a "professional" screenplay, then, Lowry's *Tender Is the Night* may best be described as a celebration of a cinematic imagination enacted within a literary context that never hesitates to break generic conventions.

6 Literally, the sign translates as "Do you like this garden that is yours? Prevent your children from destroying it!" The Consul portentously misreads it as "You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" (*Under the Volcano,* 128).

7 Lowry is alluding to the "History as a System" section of Ortega y Gasset's *History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History.* On Lowry and Ortega, see Grace "Consciousness" and Virgili.

8 On the relationship between writing and death from which McCarthy partly draws his argument, see Foucault, "Language to Infinity" and "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice.*

9 In "Language to Infinity," Foucault speaks of the inescapable excessiveness of language:

"Excessive because language can no longer avoid multiplying itself—as if struck from within by a disease of proliferation" (65). But he also questions whether such excess does not lead to a loss of "ontological weight." Language's excess makes it "fated to extend itself to infinity without ever acquiring the weight that might immobilize it" (65).

10 In the context of Lowry's writing as autobiography, Sue Vice reminds us of the "realist paradox that more words bring greater verbal opacity," "minutely detailed description moves steadily *away* from its object" (124). One way in which Lowry attempted to solve this problem, Vice argues, was to allow the story to be told at times by "an assemblage of autonomous words" (125), such as those on signs, posters, etc.

11 For discussions of the typographical qualities of *Under the Volcano*, see Costa, Tiessen "Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema" and Grace *Regression*. Both Tiessen and Grace note the influence of film in this context.

12 "Things, inanimate objects," John Barlow has argued, "played an important role in the silent cinema" (135). This is particularly true in German films of the period. "The Germans," Lotte Eisner writes, "used as they are to savage legends, have an eerie gift for animating objects. . . . Animate objects always seem to haunt German narcissism" (23).

13 For lucid, insightful discussions of Lowry and Expressionism, see Grace "Malcolm Lowry" and *Regression*.

14 See Jewison: "*Under the Volcano* both validates the concept of world as text and shows how, if the will is destroyed, the library destroys life. The author/narrator is writing, but the protagonist, because of a lack of will, has succumbed to the fate that Sigbjørn Wilderness will later experience in 'Through the Panama'; he has allowed himself to be written. He has become product instead of process" (144). Lowry feared becoming product himself; he feared being written, in effect, by and through the Consul. But he also was made deeply anxious, I argue, by the possibility of losing self-coherence and stability through process.

15 Lowry's Diver differs significantly from Fitzgerald's. While in the novel, Dick is left to a vague, somewhat dingy end, moving from one small American town to another, in the Lowrys' script he exits in a blaze of glory, going down valiantly and heroically in a sinking ship after having enacted the ultimate sacrifice for Nicole. Fitzgerald critics familiar with the Lowrys' filmscript have not been generous toward the choice of ending. Phillips writes: "One must say in favor of the Lowry script that at least it did not reduce the plot line of the novel to superficial melodrama, as Fitzgerald's own scenario tended to do. On the other hand, the ending which Lowry supplied for his film version of the book is not any more acceptable than the one that Fitzgerald himself had devised for his own adaptation of the novel" (139). (Fitzgerald had himself collaborated with Charles Warren in 1934 on a film treatment of *Tender Is the Night*.) Dunlap adds that Dick's "obscurely drawn-out purgatory in the American hinterlands is a far more terrible and appropriate" kind of ending than that constructed by Lowry (285). Dunlap fails to notice that a "terrible" end is not what Lowry has in mind for his Dick Diver, and neither critic considers Lowry's own significant emotional and psychological investment in the revised ending.

16 "For the first time," Bazin adds, "between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. . . . In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced" (13).

17 Composition date for the screenplay is unknown. Day writes that Lowry completed the short story by November 1, 1951 (426). It was accepted for publication by the *Partisan Review* in 1954, and it is likely that the script was written after this. As late as 1956, in a

letter to David Markson in which he alludes to the story, of which he is "very fond" (*Letters* 385), Lowry makes no mention of the script. The screenplay is at UBC 7-18. References are to page numbers within the script.

18 See Falk: "Lowry's plans for a 'drunken Divine Comedy' rested on a schematically simple pattern of self-transcendence, a ceaseless striving upward" (54). In a "preface" to the filmscript, Lowry asks: "Is there any valid reason for literature and the movies to portray man as ignoble and mean? How have we got that way? . . . Surely one place for this to be corrected is the film" (8). "Man *wants* to be drawn upwards. (Even should the protagonist go downwards)," Lowry argues (10), projecting onto the audience his own desire for redemption. The manuscript of the Lowrys' preface (UBC 23-14) consists of about twenty-eight pages, mostly typed but also hand-written in parts. There is no conclusive evidence as to whether a final typed draft was ever composed and sent to Taylor. The preface, introduced and edited by Paul Tiessen, has been published as "A few items culled from what started out to be a sort of preface to a film-script."

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