

# LOWRY'S ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

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**H**ALF-WAY THROUGH *Ultramarine* (1933) the novel's adolescent hero confesses that

the desire to write is a disease like any other disease; and what one writes, if one is to be any good, must be rooted firmly on some sort of autochthony. And there I abdicate. I can no more create than fly. What I could achieve would be that usual self-conscious first novel, to be reviewed in the mortuary of *The Times Literary Supplement*, a "crude and unpleasant work," something of that nature, of which the principal character would be no more and no less, whether in liquor or in love, than the abominable author himself.<sup>1</sup>

The voice speaking here seems to be less Dana Hilliot's than Malcolm Lowry's, signalling with defensive irony the autobiographical quality of this first novel and its author's acute self-consciousness of the literary weaknesses that can follow on from such transparently-personal inspiration. If the confession was meant to neutralize or provoke the critical response from that particular organ of the English literary establishment it failed, and the paper's reviewer merely noted that "*Ultramarine* reads less as a novel than as the first expansion of shorthand notes taken with a view to making a novel out of a new experience," finding much of the dialogue boring and concluding that "If the art of writing is imitation the author has mastered it; if reconstruction enters into it he has yet some way to go, for he has not attempted to fuse the objective and subjective elements of his narrative into a whole."<sup>2</sup>

From this angle it might seem that *Ultramarine* can only engage our interest as a document of youthful autobiographical jottings, an immature outpouring from the hand that later wrote *Under the Volcano*. Lowry's widow disagrees: "The most important thing about this book, to me, is not its partially autobiographical content, but the fact that at this early period Malcolm was already so completely the self-conscious artist, in control of his material and style."<sup>3</sup> Examining this first novel in the light of Lowry's later career allows us to under-

stand both points of view and to recognize that what rewards the work yields lie precisely within these dual areas of interest.

Clearly Lowry's three early sea-voyages provided an initial resource for his romantic self-mythology, and *Ultramarine* furnishes us with the first full-length expression of this deeply-felt experience, already partially drawn on in four short stories and later to be re-deployed within *Under the Volcano* and "Elephant and Colosseum."<sup>4</sup> Against this context of biographical reference, however, stand the distancing techniques of Lowry's style. His baroque foregrounding, verbal wit, encyclopaedism and densely-literary allusiveness removes the novel from the realm of purely biographical interest and helps to place it within the context of its time. In this sense I would disagree with Mrs. Lowry's opinion that *Ultramarine* is "highly original and, for its time, experimental,"<sup>5</sup> since on the contrary it seems to stand very much within the tradition of the psychological novel as it developed in the work of Joyce and Virginia Woolf and could be sensibly grouped with similar second and third generation modernist novels deriving from this tradition such as Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1931), Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) and Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945).<sup>6</sup>

When reading *Ultramarine* it is also worth bearing in mind two other traditions which Lowry distinctively draws on: firstly, that of the romantic *Bildungsroman* (ranging from *The Prelude* to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), which characteristically deals with the self's development into maturity, and secondly a diverse collection of largely autobiographical sea-voyage literature, including R. H. Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, the novels of Melville and Conrad, Eugene O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape*, and two novels with the largest claims as influences on Lowry's novel, Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage* and Nordahl Grieg's *The Ship Sails On*.<sup>7</sup> It would be easy enough to single out other literary perspectives against which to interpret the action of *Ultramarine* since it is a characteristic of encyclopaedism to promote a sense of equality between differing expositions of meaning; I would suggest, however, that the larger meanings of the novel are contained in the three areas of the psychological, the romantic, and the autobiographical to which I have pointed.<sup>8</sup> The stream of fragmentary parodies of T. S. Eliot's poetry which run through *Ultramarine* (never more wryly grotesque than in Hilliot's drunken mutation of the last line from "The Waste Land" into "she shantih" (sea-shanty)) serves to emphasize the radically disrespectful and comic nature of Lowry's relationship to tradition.<sup>9</sup> Although the novel takes us into the familiar territory of the Waste Land ("Women squatted

on the steps of the houses, and, as we passed, hoisted up their skirts, as if mechanically. A gramophone was going somewhere, playing 'My Sweet Hortense.'") there is no sense of a cultural heritage providing a yardstick against which to measure the fallen modern world. For Lowry a gramophone record is sufficient to register the irony of the situation, whereas in Eliot's poem the incongruity in the act of the typist who "smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" relies for its irony on the hidden literary allusion to *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Lowry is not, of course, averse to using Eliot's poetic strategy when it suits him, but there isn't the simple one-way process going on in Lowry's novel as there is in "The Waste Land". The total effect of literary allusion in *Ultramarine* is to contaminate rather than revere and preserve "the tradition". Lowry's use of romantic poetry provides a case in point; in his loneliness and misery Hilliot quotes from Keats, identifying with the narrator of the "Ode to a Nightingale", and yet a short time later he burlesques an equally melancholy lyric of Shelley's to describe the workings of the ship's engine ("The desire of the link for the pivot; of the lever weight for the fulcrum . . ."). What is tonally appropriate in the first instance is, by the very nature of the transformation from lyric fragility ("The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow, / The devotion to something afar / From the sphere of our sorrow") into a mechanical context, entirely incongruous in the second. Consequently one allusion cancels out the effect produced by another. The way in which we interpret Hilliot's voyage is affected by an enlargement of this technique. Clusters of literary allusion allow us to convert Hilliot's journey either upwards into terms of mythic grandeur or downwards into a context of low-life realism, and only by recognizing the contradictory implications of the encyclopaedic array of reference can we realize that the meaning of the voyage falls somewhere in between the two extremes. Although the past matters in *Ultramarine* it is not finally the literary past which provides the index to Hilliot's actions but, more simply, the impulses of feeling which stem from his personal past.

**B**EFORE GOING ON to consider what type of feeling is wrought on Hilliot's consciousness by the effect of the past it is worth taking note of a different kind of literary self-consciousness which differentiates *Ultramarine* from a work like *Two Years Before the Mast*. Lowry's novel is something more than simply thinly-veiled autobiography in the way that it self-consciously draws attention to the process by which private experience is rendered into art. Through-

out Chapter Four one of the sailors sets up a chorus of references to a "Yankee fellow":

"This bird was a journalist or something of that on a paper in Australia. He's travelling round the world for it and singing songs at the piano. He says if you talk to me —"

"Lor lumme days. *Talk* to him. Do you mean he stood you that feed just for talking to him?"

"*Certainly* he did. He kept saying, now say that again. And all the while he was writing in a little black notebook."

The anonymous figure of the expatriate musician writer provides a counterpoint to Hilliot, himself a musician, an exile and a writer registering the bleak working-class experience of life aboard the *Nawab* for eventual literary ends. The documentary realist side of *Ultramarine* is made clear by Hilliot's smattering of allusions to the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

"— a selection of the real language of men —" "— the language of these men —" "— I propose myself to imitate and as far as possible to adopt the very language of these men —" "— but between the language of prose and that of metrical composition there neither is nor can be any essential difference —"

The novel divides up fairly evenly between blocks of dialogue and passages of interior monologue, a structural ordering which serves to realize the monotony and imaginative poverty of a sailor's life and the contrasting richness and depths of Hilliot's consciousness, saturated as it is by an eclectic reading in an immense variety of literature. One of the crew tells Hilliot how much he enjoys reading George Bernard Shaw:

"I don't mean from a literature point of view. I mean from a reading point of view. I dunno how to explain — like. You see, he's always got a message for the proletariat — like. You see us working men ain't the sort of bastards that the moneyed class think us, lying in all morning smoking cigarettes and then telling the tale to the Labour Exchange in the afternoon."

Nowadays we are most likely to read *Ultramarine* "from a literature point of view," recognizing its embryonic anticipations of the themes and techniques of *Under the Volcano*. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Lowry's first novel uniquely blends the two very different contemporary genres of the modernist psychological novel and the proletarian realist novel.<sup>10</sup> Lowry escapes the limitations of much committed Thirties' literature by qualifying any tendency towards an easy class-identification, observing many of the petty rivalries which inhere in the *Nawab's* own hierarchial system of rank and finally subsuming Hilliot's

quest for brotherhood within a larger metaphysical integration. Lowry's realism is, however, more than just a gesture towards fashion and a good instance of its functional relationship to the psychological theme is provided by the way in which the humanizing of Andy, the ship's cook, from his original role of caricatured bully, emphasizes the meaningful change which experience works on Hilliot's perceptions of the world.

Lowry is not averse to subordinating his low-style realism to ironic fictional ends, however, as an apparently chance reference to "Three white leopards" makes clear. In the context of the babble of conversation which composes Chapter Four the remark seems to be associated with the ship's recent intake of zoo animals. At the same time these words duplicate part of a well-known line in Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," and Lowry's contextual placing of the allusion amidst bawdy and brutal dialogue ironically transforms the pre-Raphaelite delicacy of the original source with sardonically grotesque effect. The most radical instance of the falsification involved in the process of mediating experience into fiction is revealed in Hilliot's admission that the figures which have haunted his imagination throughout the novel are conjured from a banal reality:

As for my father we shall exhume him from his imaginary madhouse, reinstating him to his normal position of tutor, to his liver trouble, his pipe, his dog and his games of chess; my mother may return fearlessly to her eye-bath and her Sanatogen — she may even learn to be proud of her wandering son and I foolish to deny my love for her; my guardian becomes miraculously what he has always been — the family chauffeur . . .

*Ultramarine*, then, generates a self-scepticism which warns us not to take the novel too directly as confession and which consequently points us towards a consideration of the techniques involved in such distancing.

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N LITERATURE the sea has often functioned as a place of purgatorial suffering where, through separation and apparent loss, the individual moves toward redemption and reconciliation, and Dana Hilliot's voyage proves no exception to this traditional perspective.<sup>11</sup> Although he frequently denies a motive for abandoning the comfort of his wealthy home background to join the harsh conditions of life aboard the *Nawab*, his voluntary ordeal quickly shapes itself into a romantic quest for authenticity through suffering. The voyage becomes a prolonged initiation ceremony with Dana, taunted by the Furies ("singing over their victim, sending him mad. Janet, enjoying it in a white sweater, gloating in

a thin, ululating treble.”), seeking and eventually discovering an identity with his social and metaphysical environment.

The epigraph from Chaucer amplifies the meaning of Hilliot's rejection of his home life: in a sense “wrecchedness” is where he belongs, and suffering becomes the only road to freedom. He recognizes this when, in the inferno of the stokehold, he perceives that the firemen “seemed to get more fun out of life than the seamen, and seemed somehow to be better, in some queer way to be nearer God —.” This central paradox underlies the novel and finds enlargement in the warring tension between innocence and experience in Dana's consciousness. Although he is contemptuous of his background and of “those who carried the whole horizon of their lives in his pocket” he finds himself unable to relinquish the pressures of the past, obsessively returning to a mental picture of his virginal girlfriend, Janet, and the promise she has extracted from him to remain *virgo intacta*. He experiences the pain of the social outcast, enduring the bullying of the crew and their mockery at his sexual timidity. His one attempt to pick up a whore in one of the Asian ports ends in failure and drunkenness, and he retreats into narcissistic fantasy, alcohol (“I *could* drink, anyway; there were no complications about that”) and, the crew bluntly suggest, masturbation. Hilliot's feelings of sexual neurosis and guilt are further compounded by an irrational terror of syphilis, the unwelcome attentions of a homosexual quartermaster, and the bragging of the crew about their brothel exploits. He longs to heal his fractured perceptions within a vision of order and simplicity, and the ship's engine becomes a central symbol of his metaphysical goal,

in the engine of the *Nawab*, with whose disunion, as perceived by him, he felt his sympathy to be perfect, existed also that revolution from complex [*sic*] he so desired: and it was precisely this order, more particularly regarding Janet, but also in regard to Andy and Norman — and the quartermaster! — that his consciousness lacked — was it lacking in intensity too? — and would, so far as he could see, always lack. Order, do you hear? Listening, Janet?

Hilliot's self-questioning about the intensity of his consciousness is purely rhetorical, since there is no denying the deeply-felt dramatic power of his imagination, however much we may deprecate his tendency to wallow in self-pity. His desire for “revolution from [the?] complex” calls to mind Lowry's own wish, expressed in a letter to Conrad Aiken around the time *Ultramarine* was being finally completed, “for escaping from the subtle and sophisticated.”<sup>12</sup> In describing *Ultramarine* as an anatomy of melancholy I do not, however, want to indulge in biographical speculation and make a simple equation between Hilliot and

Lowry but instead propose a single focus of attention which enables us to distinguish the central characteristic of Hilliot's cerebral journey from confusion to equilibrium.

The origins of Dana Hilliot's name are overtly literary. "Dana" clearly derives from the name of the author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, while "Hilliot" carries a distorted echo of "Hamlet." On occasion he also refers to himself as "Eugene Dana Hilliot," a name drawn obviously enough from the author of *The Hairy Ape*. The relationship between Hilliot and Hamlet is, however, more than semantic, since Hilliot's behaviour on board the *Nawab* seems closely equivalent to that malady known to Renaissance England as melancholy, a malady of which the two outstanding studies were *Hamlet* and Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Melancholy was regarded as a psychopathological condition stemming from an excess of one of the four humours and characterized by morbidity, passivity, wretchedness, grotesque hallucinations and a longing for death. All of these symptoms are displayed by Dana Hilliot up to the time when he breaks out of his brooding Hamlet-like inactivity to verbally confront his main persecutor, Andy, in a scene which provides the prelude to his release from isolation and mental torment. The analysis of Hilliot as a sufferer from melancholy proves equally viable in modern psychological terms, since according to Freud's definition in "Mourning and Melancholia,"

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.<sup>13</sup>

As a modernist psychological novel, then, *Ultramarine* provides a dramatic analysis of melancholy, exhaustively dissecting Hilliot's nightmarish interior world and using a variety of encyclopaedic techniques to body out its wide-ranging exploration of an abnormal state of mind. By encyclopaedism I mean not only the use of a vast array of literary allusions and echoes but also the narrative technique of listing contingent materials like notices, names and numbers, that particular quality of stylized exaggeration which for example makes Hilliot typically bemoan not simply the distance that lies between him and his beloved, but "The Yellow Sea, the Black Sea, the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, and all the seventy-seven seas, and more than seas, that lie between us."

It is symptomatic of melancholy that it seems to lack any external causation, and Hilliot confesses that his tormented condition is congenital:

When I was fourteen I was under the delusion for a year I was Thomas Chatterton . . . mad? No . . . not even that. But a kind of semi-madman, pernicious and irritating and apathetic in the extreme, for whom in madness, as in death to the impotent, exists the only dignified escape.

He reveals that his father is in a mental hospital and demonstrates an obsession with the idea of heredity, brooding on his dead relatives in Oslo cemetery and claiming himself as the only survivor of the family taint of madness. Later he denies an etiology in heredity, admits that his father is in fact only in a nursing home with a kidney ailment, and confesses that

The apparent facts are largely imaginary. I assume the guilt of a mother, or of a father, or of a heredity, imagine it completely, to be able on the one hand to give an adequate explanation of my more inexplicable actions, and on the other in order to be clothed in a dark, blood-stained dignity. Some of these points are raised, and you may have read for yourself, in my much maligned and certainly dangerous and misleading work, *Hamlet*.

The heredity theme recurs when Popplereuter, Norman and Dana visit the anatomical museum on their evening ashore, a museum containing grotesque exhibits and bible-thumping polemic about depravity and heredity. The museum guide provides an ironic miniature of the novel itself in the way it arranges encyclopaedic perspectives around a simple theme, piling up medical rhetoric to assert "the awful effects of MAN leading a DEPRAVED life visiting the iniquity of the FATHERS upon the CHILDREN." Although the accretive method of the guide points up the structural techniques of the novel there is of course the crucial difference that its naive didacticism ("if any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, WHICH TEMPLE YOU ARE. . .") lacks any self-consciousness whatsoever and is hence authoritarian, whereas *Ultramarine* persistently invites the reader to re-adjust his point of view by undermining its mythic and romantic dimensions with parody.

Like Joyce and Beckett, Lowry reveals a fascination with arcane medical rhetoric, and he inserts odd medical terms into the narrative which make up a ramifying network of associations coming together under the theme of melancholy. Hilliot, we remember, sees the urge to write as a *disease* and asserts that he would never make a novelist because he isn't creative and because "what one writes . . . must be rooted firmly on some sort of autochthony." The oblique joke here is the transparency of the distinction that he is making (so far as *Ultramarine* is concerned), since to be autochthon is to be a native of the land you inhabit, and the term lives on in the vocabulary of medicine as the *Oxford English*



*Dictionary* observes: "An autochthonous or primitive thrombus is one which remains confined in the part in which it first arose, especially in the heart." Likewise Lowry's fiction remained largely confined to autobiographical material. Paradoxically the two sides of the novel are brought together here in the way that we are shown both the confinement of the fiction to themes close to the heart of the writer, while at the same time we are reminded that in expressing his subjective inspiration the writer is forced to use the public medium of language. If a biography of Lowry illuminates our understanding of *Ultramarine* a comprehensive dictionary proves equally necessary.

The heredity theme which runs through *Ultramarine* connects the medical vocabulary with Hilliot's sexual obsessions. Reference to "the metacarpi of Eugene Dana Hilliot" draws attention to his sense of guilt about his hands, relating both to the motif of masturbation and to his inability in school geometry lessons to draw a regular hexagon because of the clumsy bigness of his hands. The metaphysical quest for order symbolized by the geometry motif runs parallel with Hilliot's dark broodings on sex and inheritance; at one point he imagines that

The centre of the Charing Cross, ABCD, the Cambridge Circle, the Cambridge Circus, is Hilliot . . . shafts of wit, laced with blood, AB, CD are the diameters.

Now with his navel as centre and half CD as radius, describe a vicious circle! An order imperiously given! Hear me, Janet, maker of all these thoughts and words, these finite stupidities and speculations, an incantation for yourself, our unborn son, and me.

As has been pointed out, Hilliot is the first of the Lowry heroes, discovering himself to be the centre of the world and having to find an identity between his imagination and his environment.<sup>14</sup> His obsession with heredity, order and metaphysical speculation coheres within a fantasy sequence which enlarges on the possibiliities of parenthood with the Janet he "abwhores":

Between the Tarot and the cabbage, the systole and the diastole, between the pleuritic friction, the intercostal spaces and the wild west; between the paroxysm and dyspnoea our child, Janet — this has occurred to me; to what extent may it not be subject to the pre-natal influences? Supposing we ever had one. Heredity. Tee-hee! Or perhaps the humour of the *thing* escapes you. That in the original unity of the first thing lies the secondary cause of all things with the germ of their inevitable annihilation?

The immediate parody of Eliot's "The Hollow Men" quickly slides into surreal visionary speculation staged in medical terms and moving at a breathtaking pace

with an oblique wit which suggests Hilliot's almost incoherent distaste for his prudish and anaemic girlfriend. The tone is one of levelling irony and the idea of parenthood is converted into something altogether grotesque, with the pun on "humour" pointing both to the metaphysical possibilities which Hilliot alone discerns and to his tragic insight into the decay and ultimate obliteration which conditions existence. The "humour" is both comic — expressed in the incongruous juxtaposition of superstition and informed medical knowledge — and bitterly fatalistic; the history of the world since the Fall is reduced to a strip-cartoon with Eve (plucked from "the intercostal spaces") at one end and the wild west at the other. This duality of tone is maintained in the subsequent parody of bourgeois domesticity which follows, though the underlying sense of doom is finally realized by Hilliot's mournful vision of his child as the fated syphilitic victim of his father's vice:

a twisted, witless mask, grinning sightlessly at us, two holes in the bridgeless nose, the sightless eyes like leaden bullets sunk into the face. . . . Myself, also, the man without a soul. It died, suddenly, at the age of eight.

Unable to account for his melancholic disposition Hilliot takes a morbid delight in fabricating nightmarish intimations of a tragic life and imminent mortality. In one notable fantasy he sees himself broken by syphilis and wandering through Liverpool while a chorus of newsboys shouts the news that the *Oxenstjerna* has gone aground and is polluting the river Mersey. This ship, which keeps coincidentally returning throughout *Ultramarine* to cross Hilliot's path, serves as a visible reminder of the past, evoking memories of the times when he and Janet had watched it sailing past and symbolizing the "iron bond" of his love for her. The metaphor suggests that this love is imprisoning, something to be escaped from, and the imagery of pollution and death which attends the imaginary shipwreck makes the actual final appearance of the *Oxenstjerna* at the close of the novel suggestively ambiguous in its meaning for him.

THE CENTRAL INCIDENT in the novel which proves the turning point of Hilliot's search for acceptance and order is the drowning of the galley-boy's pet pigeon. Much to Hilliot's chagrin he had earlier been rudely restrained from saving the bird when it was originally discovered resting from exhaustion at the top of the mainmast, and instead Norman had shinned up and gained the glory of capturing it. Mid-way on the voyage, however, the bird — which has

had its wings clipped and been caged — escapes to quench its thirst, flops into the sea and begins to drown. While the crew gather helplessly, certain that the sea is dangerous to swim in,

a little white motor boat was skidding along the water coquettishly and then turning almost in its own length and retracing its course looking more foolish than ever. The crowd yelled at it, all hooting and trumpeting at once, but its engine was making too much noise, and its only occupant divided his attention between the wheel and the spurting exhaust, which he seemed to be admiring from time to time by looking over the side at it.

The bird drowns, and the tragic futility of the incident is underlined by the arrival of the agent who announces that the harbour is perfectly safe for swimming.

The scene expresses more than simply a naturalistic situation. There is a clear association between the Chaucer epigraph and the pigeon's fate, focussed by Hilliot's earlier perception that "The pigeon might be the very messenger of love itself" and by the symbolic role of the little white motor boat. Throughout *Ultra-marine* the colour white is overtly linked with Janet, and the implications of the coquettish, narcissistic activities of the boat accompanying the pigeon's death seem inescapable.<sup>15</sup> "Drowned" in memories and immersed in the dark world of experience Hilliot can no longer be attracted by the sugary platonic love that Janet has to offer. At last he has found an equilibrium in suffering and his willingness to risk his own life to save the pigeon sets the seal on the initiation process. Hilliot and Andy become staunch friends, the ship turns round for the homeward journey, the "indifferent point" of Hilliot's voyage is reached simultaneously in geometrical and metaphysical terms and the ship's engine-room no longer signifies muddle and confusion:

The tragedy of the afternoon, the horrors of the voyage were forgotten; all at once he had a perfectly clear vision of himself, as if a red leaf should fall on a white torrent. Instantly there was no lack of order in his life, no factors wrongly co-ordinated, no loose tangled ends.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly Lowry the novelist fashions an order out of the complex confusions of Hilliot's consciousness, and the final chapter provides a complete resolution of the various strands of the novel. The letter that Hilliot receives from Janet shows her to be every bit as girlishly immature as the impression we have previously received from his memories. Her remarks tend to be as incongruously ironic as those on the card which he gets from the weighing machine after his riotous

night ashore when he learns that he is “of a simple disposition, quiet and home-loving”:

I loved our talk last Sunday evening before you went home, because you were so manly, and you put things so simply and without making excuses for them, and I understood and felt proud of you. Please always tell me things in that way. I shall always understand if you do! Oh, Dana, the sun is shining ever so brightly and the grass in the cricket field looks wonderfully fresh after the rain — will you tell me that you love me always?

The break in communication is comically complete, and Hilliot begins to compose a reply that he knows he will never send. As he sardonically points out, highlighting the difference between her simple brisk cheerfulness and his own complex self-conscious melancholia, “If you were one with Charcot and Bernheim — I would try to tell you — if I could only tell you — if it would be worth your while to understand.” Charcot and Bernheim were the major influences on Freud’s early investigations into hysteria, and there is a passage in Freud’s memoir of Charcot which seems to ironically reflect on Hilliot’s obsession with heredity and syphilis:

As for the aetiological theories which Charcot defended in his doctrine of the ‘*famille neuropathique*’ and made the cornerstone of his whole conception of nervous diseases, they too will probably soon need to be probed into and corrected. So greatly did Charcot over-estimate heredity as a cause that no loophole was left by which nervous disease could be acquired; to syphilis he allotted only a modest place amongst the ‘*agents provocateurs*’ . . . <sup>17</sup>

In the end Hilliot’s “perfectly clear vision” of himself enables him to dismiss his obsessions and become one with the crew and the ship. He frames his explanations in explicitly psychoanalytical terms, telling Janet that although she has acted “as an inhibiting factor” she is now, at the same time, “a sublimatory factor”:

Although Andy beat me out in port, it ceases to bother me because first, there is yourself; secondly, being in love with you I have the universal experience of sublimated all-embracing love for mankind. There is no need to invent a venereal lineage for myself; it is no longer amusing; my innocent aunts, and their equally innocent parents may rest in peace in Oslo cemetery. Put a flower on their graves for me — rose instead of lobelia syphilitica.

*Ultramarine* closes with a note of affirmation and hope; Hilliot plans to discover “something to change for the better, to transform from wasting into growth” and he turns his back on narcissistic fantasy: “Dreaming, when reading psychology, of climbing the Jungfrau. Getting lost in tunnels, tube stations, caves . . .

Never again." In Jungian terms Hilliot has achieved individuation, and he makes social use of his brilliant imagination by delighting the crew with an hilarious and lurid fantasy — which he spuriously passes off as a genuine dream — about the escape of the animals in the *Nawab*. In other words it is a *fiction* which, after the confrontation with Andy and the subsequent incident of the drowning pigeon, provides the final proof of Hilliot's acceptance by the crew and of his own coming to terms with the harsh realities of adult experience. Implicitly it is *Ultramarine* itself which is, as Dana Hilliot's autobiography, the final evidence in this process of self-recognition.

Hilliot vows "to be outward bound, always outward bound, always onward, to be fighting always for the dreamed-of harbour" and at that exact moment Nikolai, the fireman, comes to tell him that he is to be a replacement coaltrimmer, "a proper *limper*." Initiation is complete, and the immediate coincidence of the re-appearing *Oxenstjerna* provokes not fantasy and self-pity but the cool admission that he's seen the ship before "once or twice." The elegaic last sentence ("But oh, Janet, no sorrow is so bad as that which quite goes by") expresses Hilliot's wistful leavetaking of his past, which no longer possesses its power to inflict pain and neurosis.

*Ultramarine* is rather more tightly constructed than critics have on the whole been prepared to concede, and the novel resolves its patterns of theme and image with a complex aesthetic completeness. The ending contains some ambiguity, however, since the nature of Hilliot's future relationship with Janet seems poised on a fine balance. Although she provides a sublimating medium for his exuberant affirmations of social fraternity, the enormous distance in communication between her vapid sentimentality and his sharp sense of irony makes Hilliot's assertions of love seem equivocal, and this impression is magnified by his radical admission: "My writing? You or any woman can do that for me." In this sense *Ultramarine* anticipates the structural pattern of both *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* and *October Ferry to Gabriola*, where the open-ended plots similarly have the effect of converting the closing rhetorical expressions of optimism and affirmation into tentative gestures rather than securely-grounded certainties. Whatever we may feel about the substantiality of a future relationship between Dana Hilliot and Janet there is no doubt that he himself provides one of the rarer examples in Lowry's fiction of the finally integrated personality, saved rather than destroyed by suffering.<sup>18</sup>

Encyclopaedic writers tend to channel their creative energy into one major book (Rabelais, Burton, Sterne) and Lowry — not altogether intentionally —

proves no exception, *Under the Volcano* itself providing sufficient motive for further reading into the brilliant ruins of the epic scheme which he planned around the masterpiece. Of all Lowry's novels *Ultramarine* stands the furthest outside this scheme, elliptically sounding-out some of the later creative themes. In its awareness of literary process *Ultramarine* evidences a conceptual interest which remained in suspension during Lowry's career until reinvigorated by his reading of Ortega y Gasset two decades later to become the major theme of the *Hear Us O Lord* . . . volume. It is nevertheless *Under the Volcano* which, finally, provides the closest link with *Ultramarine*, owing less to schematic or thematic considerations than to structural ones; the anatomy is more important than the melancholy. Both novels originated in short-story form, and the example of Joyce (who of course conceived *Ulysses* as a short story) provides an index to the reasoning and the techniques involved in an encyclopaedic enlargement of unpromising short stories into epic portraits of sensibility. *Ultramarine* is Lowry's apprentice-work and though perhaps at times flawed by self-pity and an intoxication with words we can quickly discern the young author feeling his way towards the technical mastery of the major novel. Although the themes change in the later fiction as the quest for integration and completeness becomes increasingly elusive, Lowry's heroes never quite lose the sense of melancholy which drenches Dana Hilliot's consciousness. *Ultramarine* encapsulates the embryo of an entire creative career and therefore deserves greater recognition that it has hitherto received.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Ultramarine* are taken from the first edition (London, 1933). Mrs. Lowry's "Introductory Note" to the Revised Edition (London, 1963) should be consulted for the valuable background information it provides concerning the original publication of the novel and Lowry's later decision to locate it as the first volume in the projected epic novel sequence *The Voyage That Never Ends*. A comparison of the two versions suggests that Lowry's intentions were never realized, and the connections with *Under the Volcano* remain tenuous. Evidently sporadic revisions include the addition of apparently casual marginal annotations (for example, in the Revised Edition the conversation between Popplereuter and Hilliot in Chapter Three is abruptly interrupted by the remark, "I forgot to mention there was a war on about half a mashie shot away, it being June, 1927, but that has no part in the story."). Other revisions include the addition of the second epigraph from Richardson and the removal of the original dedication to Elizabeth Cheyne and Thomas Forman. In the case of this particular extract the Revised Edition changes — presumably corrects — "on" to "in" in the first sentence.
- <sup>2</sup> Anon., *Times Literary Supplement*, July 13th, 1933, p. 481. Three decades later the paper took note of Lowry's allusion and reviewed the Revised Edition in

considerably more enthusiastic tones as "an astonishing *tour de force* . . . A novel which can be placed confidently on the shelf next to Melville himself." (Anon., *Times Literary Supplement*, March 22nd, 1963, p. 197.)

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> The four short stories are "Port Swettenham," (February 1930), "Goya the Obscure" (June 1930), "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre" (Winter 1930-31?) and "On Board the *West Hardaway*" (October 1933). For places of publication see J. Howard Woolmer, *A Malcolm Lowry Catalogue* (New York, 1968). The third of these stories became Chapter Four of *Ultramarine* whereas the others were substantially rewritten before inclusion in the novel.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> See Leon Edel, *The Psychological Novel 1900-1950* (London, 1961) and Melvin Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven, 1955). Two useful essays which help in placing *Ultramarine* against the background of modernism are Richard Hauer Costa, "Ulysses, Lowry's *Volcano* and the *Voyage* Between: A Study of an Unacknowledged Literary Kinship," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXVI, pp. 335-52, and "Malcolm Lowry as Modernist" in Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (London/Oxford/New York, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> For the influence of Aiken see Costa, Op. Cit. For the influence of Grieg see the letter by W. G. Simpson in the *Times Literary Supplement*, April 12, 1963, p. 249. Lowry also confessed in a letter to Grieg written in 1938 that "Much of *Ultramarine* is paraphrase, plagiarism, or pastiche from you." (Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Eds.), *The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry* (London, 1967), p. 16). Lowry also worked on a play version of Grieg's novel, and his short story "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre" refers in the last three words of the title to Grieg's book, published by Knopf in translation as *The Ship Sails On* in 1927.

<sup>8</sup> For a relevant analysis of the perplexing effects of encyclopaedism on critical interpretation of Joyce see Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox* (London, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> The joke is excised in the Revised Edition. For a student at Cambridge to make fun of T. S. Eliot at this time was a very subversive thing to do. According to James Reeves the new undergraduate was handed *Poems 1909-1925* and *The Sacred Wood* with the same air of hushed reverence as "the stranger who enters an Anglican Church at service time is handed two books, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and *The Book of Common Prayer*." Quoted by R. C. Townsend in "Cambridge English: The Idea of an English School," *Critical Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Winter 1967). In his letter to James Stern of May 7th, 1940 Lowry refers to Reeves as having "loathed me at Cambridge for three years." For further information about Lowry's unhappy years at Cambridge see Conrad Knickerbocker, "Swinging the Paradise Street Blues: Malcolm Lowry in England," *Paris Review*, 38 (Summer 1966) and Gerald Noxon, "Malcolm Lowry: 1930," *Prairie Schooner*, XXXVII, No. 4 (Winter 1963-64).

<sup>10</sup> An interesting comparison in this respect is the fiction of Edward Upward, six years older than Lowry and also educated at Cambridge. His novella *Journey to the Border* (1938) — reprinted in *The Railway Accident and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth, 1972) — brilliantly blends psychological obsession with political gesture.

