AIKEN AND LOWRY

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IN AN ARTICLE in *Canadian Literature* 44 I suggested that Malcolm Lowry's story "Through the Panama" made use not only of the story of the Ancient Mariner, but also of the voyage of Ulysses as this is interpreted in the neo-Platonic versions of the myth.[1] In addition I suggested that the union of Martin with his Primrose, the threat of their separation, and their love in the dark was an allusion to the story of Cupid and Psyche, in which the union of the lovers represents the harmony of intellect and feelings, and their separation a division in the human soul.

The suggestion relied on an examination of the story itself, and not on the sources from which Lowry might have gained a knowledge of these pervasive myths. In what follows I hope to demonstrate the use of the Psyche myth and of the Ulysses myth in much the same way in Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage*, a work by which Lowry was strongly influenced.[2] I shall show that the Ulysses myth plays an important part in Lowry's *Ultramarine*.[3] I shall also indicate the part that is played in both *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine* by the myth of Narcissus as a representation of the descent of the soul into the sensual world of generation, in accordance with the neo-Platonic interpretation of this myth. I hope that this may be interesting as showing how modern writers may make use of an ancient tradition, and also that this may cast some light both on Lowry's debt to Aiken and on Lowry's originality in the use that he makes of the myths in question.

MALCOLM LOWRY'S indebtedness to Aiken in general, and in particular to *Blue Voyage*, needs no demonstration. Lowry's *Ultramarine* takes its title from the "ultramarine abyss" of Aiken's book, and similarly attempts the use of a voyage as a representation of human life. There is also, apart from the relationships that I shall point to in this article, a general resemblance of style. Both Aiken and Lowry draw on a wide range of reading — on the whole Western tradition — for linguistic and mythical elaboration. Both are lavish in their

quotation from other writers, and both are ingenious in their use of double meanings, and of names that hint at a significance. In *Blue Voyage* Demarest, the hero, says:

> I waste a lot of time in logolatry. I am a verbalist, Cynthia — a tinkling symbolist. I am the founder and leader of a new school of literature — The Emblemists.

This is true not only of Demarest, but also of his creator. The pun in "tinkling symbolist", for example, might easily be missed by a hasty reader (and would not be a very serious loss). At times Aiken calls attention to a verbal parallel; he notes for example that "Agnes Day = Agnus Dei" and tells us that "Faubion = Fleshpot." The whole scheme of names in the book appears to be based on similar ingenuities.

Blue Voyage is the story of William Demarest's journey from New York to London, in search of his Cynthia, whom he has met on a previous eastbound voyage. What he hopes for from this love is a Platonic transcendence of the flesh:

> What I hoped was that at last I had found a love which somehow *transcended the flesh.* Yes — I actually persuaded myself that I had captured the chimaera; and that in Cynthia and poor William the phoenix and the turtle had met.

Cynthia is thought to be in London, at the eastward goal of the journey. However, she is, it soon appears, on the same ship as William, though separated from him because she is in the first class, while he is in the cabin class. (This theme of *separation* is recurrent in the story.) The intellectual nature of the relationship is signified by the playing of chess on the previous voyage, and by many explicit statements. Cynthia "whose face was turned to the east" is, as her name suggests, an unattainable Diana, a chaste moon-goddess. The journey to the east is a journey to the home of Cynthia; her appearance on the voyage, separated from William, and indeed rejecting him, suggests the unattainable nature, in this life, of the striving for a purely intellectual state of being. William finally succeeds in escaping from the passion for Cynthia, dismissing her as a "stained-glass window". However, he finds consolation in the arms of Mrs. Faubion, a "savage" or "fauve" who offers him more accessible joys than those of the pure intellect.

The symbolism of the William-Cynthia-Faubion triangle is obvious enough; and the voyage to the east is presented without disguise as an equivalent to the journey of life. There are however many indications of a more elaborate symbolism, and in particular of deliberate and sustained reference to the neo-Platonic myths.

In particular, three major neo-Platonic myths are introduced. The first is that of the voyage of Ulysses, which is understood as representing the progress of the soul, in its ship of the body, over the dark sea of the material world, towards its true home or paternal port in Ithaca, where it may hope to be re-united with its Penelope, who represents the *sophia* or true wisdom of the soul.[4] The second is the myth of Cupid and Psyche, in which Cupid represents man's intelligence, and Psyche his affective or emotional nature.[5] Their separation in the story — brought about by Psyche's desire to *know* too much — represents the unhappy separation of mind and feeling in man's experience. Their union, and their love in the dark, represents a happy and harmonious balancing of mind and feelings. The third of these myths, introduced only at the end of the novel, and touched on only briefly, is that of Narcissus whose love of his own image, seen by reflection in a mirror, is understood by the neo-Platonists as a symbol of the soul, in love with its own generated image, and in consequence of this infatuation falling into the sensuality of a lower order of existence.[6]

The Ulysses theme is sounded early in the novel, when Frank Smith, an ageing music-salesman from New Orleans, returning to his "home" in England, is compared with Ulysses:

> "You're like Ulysses, setting out at last to find the rim of the world, the Pillars of Hercules."
>
> "Not much! No exploring for me. I want to get back, that's all."

In other words, the comparison made is the wrong one; this is not a Ulysses on his final voyage of intellectual exploration, but a Ulysses who wants only to "get back" to his home. (This is represented in the novel as a death-wish, as a final refusal of the westward journey of exploration.) Demarest in jest pretends that Smith is his father, so that he himself becomes, on the voyage, a Telemachus, or younger version of Ulysses, seeking the east, not out of weariness, but out of a longing for fulfilment. (Smith is also jestingly represented as "a kleptomaniac", and thus as akin to the thieving Ulysses.)

The significance of the voyage to the east is not deeply hidden, but it is made explicit only in the later chapters of the book:

> . . . Here he stands, on the deck of a dark ship, which is moving eastward at fifteen knots an hour. The steersman shifts the wheel, his eyes on the binnacle . . . Who is this little, this pathetic Demarest? We laugh at him, and also we weep for him; for he is humanity, he is God. . . . he struggles — why? to avoid the making of mistakes, to escape the tyrant solipsism, and to know himself; like us, he endeavours to return to God.

(Here it may be noted that the aim of the neo-Platonic wisdom is to return to God through self-knowledge. It should also be noted that the name Demarest may be resolved into *De - mar - est*, or "of the sea, eastward".) The opening chapter of the novel, however, offers other evidence of the neo-Platonic system, though this is not likely to be obvious to the casual reader. Thus the wharf from which the ship sails is described as "an enormous, depressing place, cavernous" — a reference to the Platonic view of this life as a cavern. The notion of imprisonment, and of birth as an entry into a cave, a spider's web, a cage, in which the soul is utterly alienated and alone, is here advanced:

> What disgusting animals ships were; always fouling their sides with garbage.... He crawled up the next gangway, steep as a funicular, and stepped on the resilient deck. O Thalassa! Thalassa! Unmerciful sea. He was already fairly launched into the infinite, the immense solitude which seemed (to the steward who took his bag) to mean so little. Yes: alone. Alone with the sea for eight days: alone in a cage with a world of tigers roaring outside.
> "Am I alone in this cabin?" he asked.

(This may be compared with Lowry's use of the cabin in "Through the Panama": "The cramped cabin our obvious place on earth.") The image of the web (as the web of Persephone, and also as the spider's web of Arachne, with which the soul is entangled in the world of nature) is used by Aiken in the longing of Demarest to escape:

> ... Ah, that incurable longing for escape, for a spider's cable by which he might swing himself abruptly into space or oblivion! But this time, was it an escape or a return?

In the general pattern of significance, even the buying of seasick pills, described in the first words of the novel, has its place, since the soul, in the neo-Platonic account, is drugged into forgetfulness of its origins before it begins its journey into the world of the senses:

> It had suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten his seasick pills — the little pink and green box was indispensable — oh, absolutely! A charm against sea-serpents.

So Demarest stops at a drug-store to replenish his supply. Here his musings, as he stands waiting, are about the coming voyage; they are filled with incipient nausea at the prospect it offers:

> O God, what a prospect! And the ship — what was the ship? A congregation of gigantic mushroom-like ventilators, red-throated, all belching a smell of hot oil

> and degenerate soup, with sounds of faint submarine clankings. Among them, a few pale stewards, faces like cauliflowers, carrying gladstone bags and hot-water bottles . . . He suddenly felt queasy.

This, echoing Hamlet's view of this world as a "pestilent congregation of vapours", establishes the ship as an image of the life of the senses, and man's condition in this life as an inescapable nausea and alienation. Demarest, like all men, still hopes for a happy voyage, with "blue sky, sunny decks, and a beautiful, mysterious young lady to talk to." There are indeed young ladies to talk to on the ship, but there is no gracious Lady of Generation to guarantee anything like a happy voyage.

The young ladies Demarest meets on the voyage include not only his inaccessible Cynthia, but also a Welsh girl, an Irish girl who is identified with Psyche, and a Daisy Dacey, who may be Aiken's side-glance at the Daisy of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which was published two years before *Blue Voyage*. The Welsh girl is described as a "*lamia*", and as a vampire; she is studiously avoided by Demarest, and plays no important role in his own story:

> A vampire, a serpent, a lamia, a carrion-flower, — yes, a mouth like a carrion-flower, and giving out poisonous juices; for, as she laughed, Demarest noticed that her lower lip, which was undershot, was wet with saliva.

However, the ship's pianist falls into her toils, so that the suggestion conveyed is that the artist is the natural prey of this *fleur de mal*:

> She drew back a little, narrowed her eyes at the pianist's thick spectacles, then directed suddenly at Demarest a serpentine smile, at the same time giving him a gleaming wink quick as the eye of a kodak.

The Baudelairean evil is no great threat to Demarest himself, nor is the ideal represented by Daisy Dacey, who is weak and silly, and reminds Demarest of Ophelia:

> There's rosemary — that's for remembrance. Wan, and oh so wistful. Weak, and oh so helpless. But no pansies — ah not: for never a thought had she. Straying with little white feet among the lilies. Oh, pity me, a shop-worn Ophelia.

The three women to whom Demarest is attracted are Cynthia, who torments him with her unattainability; the Irish girl, who seems to proffer warmth and joy, but from whom he is separated by their mutual shyness; and finally Faubion, who gaily makes her own advances, and into whose arms he falls in the last pages of the novel. Each of these women represents a different life-choice — Cynthia

of a transformation of experience through the intellect, the Irish girl of a kindling of the emotional life, and Faubion of a joyful celebration of the life of the senses, of Nature itself. They are in other words his Penelope, his Psyche, and his Circe. Enough has already been shown of the role of Cynthia; it remains to show how the Irish girl is associated with Psyche, and Faubion with Circe.

The Irish girl, who has "innocent grey eyes and a mouth just amiably weak", appears early in the story talking to "two solid prelates". She is in general shown as inviting Demarest's approaches, but as too shy to give him the encouragement without which he is afraid to make the first move:

> ... She eyed him with a sort of tentative candour, a smile withheld ... He felt shy and turned stiffly away ...

The opportunity lost is more than a shipboard flirtation; in his restless reveries Demarest identifies the Irish girl with Psyche, who loved Cupid in the dark, but yielded to temptation and brought a lamp to the bedside in order to see the god:

> *Zring* went the Irish girl's bed-curtains again and *tschunk* went the electric switch on the wall, leaving dark the reticulated grill over the upper berth; and then the bunk creaked, and creaked seasawingly, as the Irish girl got into it, and creaked as she corkscrewed her Irish body down the ship-folded bed-clothes; and an elbow thumped the matchboard partition close to Demarest's ear, and then grazingly bruised it again, and then a padded round knee bumped, and the elbow again more softly knocked....
>
> . . . .
>
> Is it you, darling?? In the dark? where? ... Don't pause to knock, but approach swiftly through the night of sound and water, step serenely from thrum to thrum of the ship's engines, from heartbeat to heartbeat of the terraqueous god. Is it you, with the candle in your hand, you in a nightgown? Ah Psyche from the regions which! You with a pocket flashlight? ...

Here the "thrum" of the ship's engines is the "heart-beat of the terraqueous god". The ship itself, as in the neo-Platonic version of the voyage of Ulysses, represents the generated self, and in particular the body, terraqueous because immersed in the natural elements. (In the same way, Martin Trumbaugh, in "Through the Panama" asserts: "I am a ship".) Within the structure of this myth, Demarest represents the human mind, Cynthia his strivings to pure intellectuality, and Psyche, his affective nature. The separation, and the longing for union with Psyche, is one aspect of man's condition in the realm of nature — the disconnection between thought and feeling. The Irish girl however cannot replace

Demarest's longing for his Cynthia, and even as he lies so near to his Psyche his thoughts turn to his intellectual ideal, of whom he says later:

> This miraculous communion between us, Cynthia — was this perhaps an earnest of what was to come? I do not mean simply for us, for you and me, but for all mankind! Was it possible to guess, from this beautiful experience, that ultimately man would know and love his brother; that the barriers of idiosyncracy and solipsism, the dull walls of sense, would go down before the wand of Prospero?

The union with Psyche is less attractive as an ideal because it offers only individual happiness; while the love of Cynthia is a part of the transformation of all experience by the intellect, and opens the door, or so it may be hoped, to a general love of mankind.

Pauline Faubion, on the other hand, is far from inaccessible. She is a girl from the West — a point that is emphasized in contradistinction to Cynthia's belonging to the East. In the neo-Platonic scheme, the East is the abode of gods, the West of demons, and indeed there is something demonic about Faubion:

> She was handsome, saturnine, though her features were not particularly good. There was something dark and brooding about her which, combined with her extreme youth and brilliant vulgarity, intrigued him enormously. She was extraordinarily alive.

Faubion has "a burning simplicity and candour"; there is nothing remote or cold in her manner. She is a creature of this world, "sea-blown, wild, impetuous." She early provokes in both Smith-Ulysses and Demarest-Ulysses emotions that combine sexuality with cannibalism. In what follows, the porpoises, like the dolphins in Yeats's poetry, are the symbol of the life of immersion in the sea of existence:

> Porpoises. Flying fish. Icebergs. Cobalt and snow. . . . A slice of porpoise, Mr. Smith? A little off the breast, please, Mr. Demarest. . . . Faubion gazed at him, morose and sombre, reserved but yielding, implacable but affectionate. Poising the bread knife, with waved edge damascene, he prepared to make Faubion an Amazon. One breasted. Tell me when it hurts, Faubion. . . . This was the moment — this was always the moment; that delicious moment of utter anguished surrender . . .

Faubion is for the ageing Smith, and later for Demarest, when he has shaken off the spell of his moon-goddess, the very principle of life:

> Are you warm enough, Mr. Smith? . . . Quite warm enough, thank you, Mr. Demarest! . . . And what is the flavour of Faubion, Mr. Smith? . . . Flamingo,

> hibiscus, and guava, Mr. Demarest! . . . Take them — eat, drink, live . . . and lo! Smith lived . . .

Faubion at the same time represents the Circean sensuality that in the neo-Platonic account of the story turns men to swine by charming them into acceptance of the world of nature, the dark sea of material things:

> "The fleshpots of Egypt," said Demarest swiftly. Why? Faubion = Fleshpot. . . . For we, alas, the Fleshpots love . . . Man cannot live by bread alone.

Obsessed with his anguished love of his Cynthia-Penelope-Sophia, Demarest yields to her opposite, the Circean Faubion, only when he has lost Cynthia and, in a long struggle, has accepted this loss. With this acceptance it is possible for him to turn instead to Faubion, to the active principle of life, impure though it may be. The last pages of the novel deal with his liberation into the world of the senses, and the transforming of that world. In order to enter this new life he must accept his own animal nature. He need no longer make himself unhappy for any female, and since both Cynthia and Psyche — both intellect and emotions — are "asleep", he may at least hope that the passionate life of the senses is awake — as indeed she is! Demarest, who has been described as "Narcissus with a handglass", looks in his cabin mirror and sees his own animal nature, which he has not been able to acknowledge while under the sway of Cynthia and the Irish girl:

> Nymphs that smell of ambergris; and the wholesome dew called ambergris. He looked again, once again, with a profound amused wonderment, with blank black pupils, into his mirrored eyes. What an extraordinary-looking object he was, with pink ears, animal hairs in his nose, and a blue mole on his cheek!

The transformation into a swine is paradoxically the liberation into a new life.

It is thus Faubion-Circe who triumphs; and in accepting the love of Faubion Demarest recognizes the impossibility of a transformation of life through intellectual love, and chooses instead a surrender to physical reality. Just as Yeats in his later poetry inverts the symbolism of the neo-Platonic journey of the soul to assert that "things out of perfection sail / And all their swelling canvas wear", so Aiken makes Demarest, instead of fleeing his Circe and remaining faithful to his Penelope, fall willingly into the toils of the enchantress:

> Eagerly, softly, he withdrew himself from the shipfolded bed-clothes. And as his feet touched the coarse carpet, the knock was repeated, the turning knob gave a little creak, and the door began softly to open. Faubion.

These are the last words of the novel, and they are subtly contrived to suggest an

emergence from the mummy-wrappings of a life of sleep, the making of a new contact with "coarse" reality, and the opening of the door to a new existence. The Platonic philosophy is inverted, and Circe appears as the life-giving goddess.

The ending comes as something of a surprise, as Aiken no doubt intended. It is however prepared for throughout the novel, by incidents some of which gain their full significance only on a second reading. The chess-match between Demarest and Hay-Lawrence, early in the story, is one such incident. This game ends with the defeat of Hay-Lawrence, indeed with his being "done to death", at least symbolically. As the game proceeds, thoughts of Faubion "coming out of the West" and of Cynthia "sleeping in the East" fill the mind of Demarest. They are identified in his mind with the black and white queens respectively — "Queen Faubion, the black queen; Queen Cynthia, — white as the moon". Hay-Lawrence is playing black, and Demarest white, so that the game is a contest for Cynthia against the black Queen Faubion and the sinister Hay-Lawrence. Hay-Lawrence is a Mephistophelean character:

> I ask you, was there ever a more perfect example of the gentleman ruffian? Monocle and all. Raffles isn't in it, nor Dracula, nor Heliogabalus. That bored Oxford manner, the *hauteur* . . .

The game opens with a further suggestion of the diabolical in Hay-Lawrence:

> Hay-Lawrence frowned his monacle into his left eye-socket, stretching the left corner of his refined cruel mouth.

Demarest finally wins the game, in a move that is described as a *murdering* of Hay-Lawrence:

> Hay-Lawrence stared, immobile, an expression of stupor, or perhaps terror, in the fixed unseeing eyes: loss of psychic distance. One could hear the blood hammering at his temples — gush, throb, thrum, pound, pulse, boom. *Blood — blood — blood* sang the furies. Hay-Lawrence is being done to death. Demarest is murdering him . . .

The suggestion of blindness ("fixed, unseeing eyes") and of blood-agony and stupor, taken with the insistence on the monacle screwed into "the left eye-socket", and the presence throughout the game of a one-eyed poker-player, indicate that the Mephistophelean Hay-Lawrence is also an Odyssean devil — a Polyphemus, whose blinding by Ulysses has a particular significance in the neo-Platonic myth. Aiken has attempted to prepare for this by associating Hay-Lawrence with a tent-pole, and by making the move that destroys him a knight's move — and therefore a thrust with a spear:

Hay-Lawrence with a tent-pole, walked sedately, haughtily.

The putting out of the one eye of the Cyclops with his own huge staff is represented by the neo-Platonists as the blinding by Ulysses of his natal demon, the "outward eye" of the senses, and as a liberating of the "inward eye" of the spirit. That the murdering of Hay-Lawrence is a triumph for Cynthia and the "white" cause is plain; after the game Faubion accuses Demarest of an unnamed offence:

'Oh, I know what you've done. And *you* know *too*.'
"Cross my heart and hope I die . . . Not guilty. I appeal."
She cut her meat savagely.

Demarest does indeed know what he has done, since he has played the chess game as a battle for his White Queen against the Black Queen Faubion. And he has murdered the Cyclops who threatened to eat his white "men" one by one, and in so doing has defeated the forces of darkness and of this world.

However, even in this chess game it enters Demarest's mind that there is perhaps no great difference between Hay-Lawrence and Cynthia, between the theology of damnation and the theology of salvation. Both Cynthia and Hay-Lawrence, he thinks, though she is "of a world utterly remote" from his, "belonged, somehow, to the same constellation." In this way the ground is prepared for the reversal at the end of the book, when Cynthia is seen as representing a kind of damnation, and Faubion as a door opening into life. The choice of Faubion is a choice of the natural world, and an escape from the endless warfare of good and evil.

Finally it may be interesting to note that the first of the two epigraphs to the book is a quotation from Juvenal: "E coelo descendit *gnothi seautòn*" (From the heaven comes down: "Know thyself"), and that the second, from Coleridge's "Self-knowledge", is a question about what man can know of himself. The voyage to the East, like Martin Trumbaugh's voyage to the East, is a quest for self-knowledge.

IN *Ultramarine* the influence of Aiken's novel may be clearly seen, but Lowry draws on many writers, some of whom, like Melville and Conrad, themselves contributed to the patterns of mythic significance employed by Aiken. Lowry's knowledge of *Blue Voyage*, and his familiarity with its author, may have been the starting-point of his interest in these myths, but it is clear that he recognized them elsewhere. To identify all these influences would require a

major work, and I shall confine myself here to a brief account of the myths that are common to *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine*, without suggesting that where such similarities exist they are an indication of a simple dependence of one author on the other. Where two writers share a common tradition, similarities need not imply any such dependence. The identifying of the tradition may however greatly help our understanding.

The central theme of *Ultramarine*, as of *Blue Voyage*, is the hero's search for his true self, for the source of his being and his identity. He is a "toff", and his full name is *Eugene* (well-born) Dana Hilliot; since his parentage seems to isolate him from his common humanity, he must learn to discover this in his shipmates. He sees his ideal, and his own true self, at times in Norman, the all too "moral" and "heroic" galley boy, and at times in Andy the cook, who appears to be weak and degenerate, but who is later revealed as a hero of three torpedoings, and as a man who can take sexual experience in his stride, without becoming its victim. The weak chin indicates not cowardice, but courage and endurance, since Andy has "lost his chin in the war". Andy is related to Dana as Smith-Ulysses is related to Demarest in *Blue Voyage*: "Andy is more a part of me than the rest"; and Dana is told by the fortune-teller: " . . . He is your father too". Dana, Norman and Andy are all Norwegians who have settled in Liverpool, in Port Sunlight or in Great Homer Street — they are Norse and Homeric heroes in whom the innocence of the snowy north and the brightness of the Homeric world have been dimmed but not extinguished. Dana is nineteen, Norman is twenty-nine, and Andy is thirty-nine, so that each represents a stage on the journey of life. Andy is in this sense Dana's future self, as well as his father, and the theme of the book is Dana's reconciliation with his own nature and its development. Dana's resentment of Andy — who treats him with contempt, and appropriates the bar-girl Olga just when Dana has summoned up the courage to sleep with her — leads him to dream of murdering Andy. The discovery that Andy is a war-hero makes possible a new respect for him, and an acceptance of the process by which a hero may come to terms with life, appear outwardly shabby and defeated, and yet retain his integrity. At the end Dana, in a letter to Janet claims not only to identify himself with Andy ("I have identification with Andy. I am Andy") but also to have transcended Andy through his abiding love for Janet, which gives him an "all-embracing love for mankind." This has obvious similarities with Demarest's relationship with Cynthia, and like Demarest, Dana does not actually send to his lady-love the letter in which this claim is made.

Aiken's hero describes himself as a "tinkling symbolist", and in his turn Dana

Hilliot recalls that he has been described as a "tinkling sciolist". The significance attached to names is part of the "tinkling symbolism" that Lowry shares with Aiken. The name of Lowry's hero, Eugene Dana Hilliot, is misspelt in a crew list as "Heliot". This indicates that he is related to the sun (*helios*), and his home address indeed is "Sea Road, Port Sunlight". He is *Dana* because he serves "before the mast", and *Eugene* because he is preoccupied with his genetic history. He is obsessed by the idea that his father is insane, that his mother is going blind, and that he has inherited syphilis. This Ibsenesque view of Dana's past is in sharp contrast with the symbolism of Norway as a place of light, of whiteness, of Vikings — of innocence and heroism. This symbolism accumulates slowly throughout the story, but some of it may be seen in one short passage:

> Norman and Andy — Norsemen (were they?). And once more his thoughts turned tenderly towards Janet. She it was he apprehended in their voices, she and no other. And he thought of that time when their families, for ten years neighbours in Port Sunlight, had met in Christiania when he was a boy, and how their love for each other had never changed. That winter they had seen an elk in the street, driven down from the mountains by starvation — everyone was on skis — all was white.

Dana is at once a child of light, and blighted by his birth. The journey of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a further advance into the darkness of existence, into the Hades or Hell of the life of the senses. The ship is "outward bound for hell", and there are many hints that the "whole damned business" of the voyage is a descent into a lower order of existence. In this fallen state, Dana's love of Janet, to whom he remains faithful in spirit, as Demarest does not remain faithful to his Cynthia, provides the strongest reminder of the original innocence of the soul and the transforming power of love. The symbolism of a journey to the East, so prominent a part of *Blue Voyage*, is of minor interest in *Ultramarine*; instead, Lowry uses the traditional symbolism of the north as heavenly and the south as leading to the fallen and hellish world of nature. This is combined with the idea of the ship as representing human existence, and the idea of an ultimate return to the Penelope who represents the true wisdom of the soul, as Janet represents Dana's highest moral ideals. Dana's shipmates, like those of Ulysses in the traditional interpretation of the story, are different aspects of the human personality, "other selves" to Dana. Of the ship Dana reflects:

> When you come to think of it — an ideal match. Both of us born of Viking blood, both robbed of our countries and left to make out as best we can; both, finally,

with the same wandering, harbourless, dispossessed characteristics. Her very history is enough to fill me with a narcissistic compassion!

As has been shown, the myth of Narcissus and the mirror, combined with the Ulysses-Circe myth, plays an important part in the resolution of the conflict in *Blue Voyage*. In *Ultramarine* this myth, touched on in the passage just quoted, is more strongly suggested in later passages. In Dana's conversation with the German wireless operator the reflection of Narcissus in the beer-glass is associated, as in the neo-Platonic interpretation of the myth, with the descent from the heavens, and with the involvement of the soul with the corruptions of the physical world:

> One bubble makes a grain of sand. Sixty stars to each man. I put my glass down noisily then picked it up again, and gazed mournfully at my reflection. Narcissus. Bollocky Bill the Sailor. Bollocky Bill, aspiring writer, drawn magically from the groves of the Muses by Poseidon. But had it been so much Poseidon? I looked more deeply into the glass. Christ, was this me? What was there? Misery! Self-disgust! Terror! No getting away from the unfortunate Hilliot, this strong creature with a head of filthy, infected hair, and a maggoty brain and infected consciousness, who dreams of archetypal images; this sad dish, Eugene Dana Hilliot! Thy hand, great Anarch, evil ghost who must follow me wherever I go! Hear, chaos! Hear me, stinking cod fulfilled of donge and of corrupcion! . . .

Later, contemplating his rendezvous with Olga the bar-girl, the Circe of *Ultramarine*, Hilliot hears the siren's call "Hoo-ah-hooooo, wailed a siren from the river". This is followed by an acceptance of the unavoidable descent into sensuality:

> Do this thing. Laugh about it, because it is funny; cry, because it is beautiful; smile, because it is inevitable. . . . Well, it was for Janet, wasn't it? But if I could only be purged before doing it, were I only cleaner, more beautiful, how much more lovely it would be! How appealing the simple sadness of the scene could only the soiled Narcissus that was Hilliot be washed by rain from Heaven. . . . Hearts that should be white turned red . . . And all the sorrow of her labouring hips. North wind blow south over my vineyards, north wind brings the snow; I do not think that this is the north wind. . . .

The significance given to Narcissus here is not that of self-love, but of the self-disgust of the soul that has descended into the sensual abyss of existence. This is as distinctly a neo-Platonic Narcissus as is Demarest when he sees his own animal shape in the mirror before his Circe arrives.

The story of Oedipus is evidently important in a novel in which the hero

voyages in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and dreams of killing his "father" in a fog. Lowry however combines the Oedipus theme with that of Ulysses. A snatch of Greek poetry that goes through Dana's mind early in the story suggests that he may be at once an Oedipus who is hostile to his father and a Telemachus who seeks for and loves his father. The fragment of Homeric verse may be translated: "There are many ships in sea-girt Ithaca." This is part of the speech in which Athene, goddess of wisdom, urges Telemachus to set sail in search of his father Ulysses. The words occur to Dana as he remembers his humiliation at being excluded from the school swimming team, and there follows a memory of the occasion when, at Kowloon, Dana has shown himself to be the best swimmer on the ship, while Norman swims badly and Andy not at all. In this respect at least Dana is more like Ulysses than his shipmates, so that he is encouraged in his hopes of achieving manhood and of finding his true self. There follows his ignominious failure to rescue the pigeon from the mast-head. This first failure, as in *Lord Jim*, leads to a second defeat, when Dana fails to rescue the pigeon from the sea, in spite of his prowess as a swimmer. The pigeon is rescued originally by Norman, who allows it to fly attached to a cord; this provides a link with the contest of the heroes in the funeral games in the *Iliad*, where the target in the archery contest is a pigeon flying at the end of a cord from the mast of one of the ships. That Lowry has the funeral games in Homer in mind is shown by his twice quoting a line from the *Iliad* describing the collecting of wood for the funeral pyre of Patroclus. A further link with Homer and with the story of Ulysses is the quoting of a line from Book IX of the *Odyssey*, where Ulysses observes the futile struggle of Sisyphus with the stone. The recollection of the funeral games and of Ulysses' visit to the dead comes as Dana, who is about to return to Olga the prostitute, remembers and mourns the cold purity of the snow and of his early love of Janet. Just as Demarest, in *Blue Voyage*, betrays his Cynthia-Penelope by falling into the arms of Faubion-Circe, Dana is preparing to betray his Janet-Penelope by returning to carry his relationship with Olga to its consummation. Dana is however only an apprentice Ulysses, wet behind the ears, and when he returns to the bar he finds that Andy has appropriated Olga. Like Ulysses, Andy knows how to sleep with his Circe without succumbing to her magic; and the only way in which Dana can hope to supplant the true Ulysses (who is also his "father") is to dream of murdering him by pushing him overboard. Death by drowning is an appropriate fate for Ulysses, whose death at sea is predicted by Tiresias in the *Odyssey*, and is recorded by Dante.

The sustained metaphor of the ship as an image of human existence, and of

the hero's shipmates as aspects of his own being, is the chief common feature of *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine*. This metaphor, fully developed in the *De Ulixis Erroribus*, is the dominant feature of the Ulysses myth as it is interpreted in the neo-Platonic version.[7] The Ulysses story itself is strongly implied in both novels, and with it the symbolism of Circe and the turning of men to swine. In both novels the Narcissus myth is used as an image of the descent of the soul into the inferior realm of the sensual.

Lowry however adds an original twist to the Circe myth. Where Aiken shows only a descent by his Demarest into animal sensuality, Lowry reminds us that Circe turns men not only into swine, but also into "mountain wolves and lions". Dana's loss of Olga to Andy makes him contemplate murder, so that he must come to terms not only with the sensual or swinish part of his nature, but also with what is tigerish and cruel in his heart. The ship on its homeward journey takes on a cargo of elephants, tigers, and leopards; and Dana, in an exchange of yarns with his fellow-sailors, invents a fantasy in which the animals escape, take over the ship, and eat the crew. This vision of the tiger in man requires Dana to find some outlet for demonic energy, and this he achieves by finally becoming a *fireman*, working in the "little hell" of the stoke-hold, and taking up the task he has earlier seen performed by Nikolai the Russian fireman:

> Cloom-cloom — cloom-cloom. Looking down he could see through the bulkhead doors where the red and gold of the furnaces mottled the reeking deck, and the tremulous roar of the cages' fires dominated a sibilant, continual splutter of steam. The *Oedipus Tyrannus*' firemen, among whom he once again recognized Nikolai, half naked, gritty and black with coal, and pasty with ashes, came and went in the blazing light, and in the gloom, flaming nightmares, firelit demons.

Nikolai the fireman, and not Norman or Andy, represents Dana's true destiny, which is not to hope for a return to sunlight, snow, and innocence, but to work in the stoke-hold and sustain the fiery energies. The imagery of fire, of the furnace, dominates the last part of the novel; Dana is a child of the sun, from Port Sunlight, but in the actual world the sun is manifested as heat, not as light, and the journey into existence leads to the burning heat of the tropics and finally to the polar cold. After observing Nikolai, Dana affirms his faith in life: "He loved the ship. He loved life". He then drinks whisky with his fellow-sailors, gulping down its "throat-smarting fire", and symbolically celebrating the heroism of Nikolai.

The theme of the voyage of life as a journey into fire, into the special destiny

of the artist as he nourishes life at its centre, is elaborated in Dana's meditation of the future:

> There is, as it were, a storm flood within, as my heart beats with the beating of the engine, as I go out with the ship towards the eternal summers. A storm is thundering out there, there is the glow of tropical fire! Bad or good, as it happens to be, that it is what it is to exist! . . . It is as though I have been silent and fuddled with sleep all my life.

Demarest's awakening is to the life of the senses; Dana's is to the necessity of accepting the task as a *fireman*, the condition of the *poète maudit*, of a Baudelaire or an Ancient Mariner:

> In spite of all, I know now that at least it is better to go always towards the summer, towards those burning seas of light; to sit at night in the forecastle lost in an unfamiliar dream, when the spirit becomes filled with stars, instead of wounds, and good and compassionate and tender. To sail into an unknown spring, to receive one's baptism on storm's promontory, where the solitary albatross heels over in the gale, and to come at last to land.

The hope of a return to the sunlit innocence of the north, to Port Sunlight and Norway, is replaced by an acceptance of the need to voyage continually into the south, into the "noonday fire", and after each return to human 'normality', to home, to set out again until finally the last voyage takes the sailor into the unknown:

> Then at last again to be outward bound, always outward, always onward, to be fighting always for the dreamt-of harbour, when the sea thunders on board in a cataract, and the ship rolls and wallows in the track of the frozen sea's storm.

Dana accepts his job as a fireman, and is urged by Nikolai to learn the meaning of the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit". The novel ends with the passing in the night of the Norwegian ship *Oxenstjerna*, symbol of Dana's youthful dreams, and representing, as does the *Sylvia Lee* in *Blue Voyage*, the journey that is not taken. The loss of the simple heroic ideal is painful: "But oh, Janet, no sorrow is so bad as that which quite goes by." In these last words of the novel the whole story is summed up; Dana has found his true nature in the acceptance of the "little hell" of an existence in which his manhood is attained through painful and humble service to the human energies which it is the artist's task to nourish.

What may seem at a first reading to be a loosely organized novel appears on more careful reading to be carefully constructed, with every detail, however much it may at first appear to be merely casual or anecdotal, taking its place in

an elaborate pattern of significance. The sailor's yarn about the hippopotamus Huberta, which wanders four thousand miles to find a tragic fate from the guns of farmers is itself an animal Odyssey. The attempt Dana makes to explain his life to Popplereuter (the sound of morse combined with the name of a news agency) suggests the isolation of each existence, since the wireless operator of the German ship speaks in bad English, while Dana tries to speak to him in bad German. To identify all these significances would be tedious, but I hope enough has been shown of one part of the rich symbolism of the book to indicate the intelligence and the care that Lowry put into it. *Ultramarine* owes much to Aiken, but it owes more to Lowry's own genius.

NOTES

1 Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama", in *Hear us, O Lord, from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, Philadelphia and New York, 1969.

2 Conrad Aiken, *Blue Voyage*, New York, 1927.

3 Malcolm Lowry, *Ultramarine*, New York, 1962.

4 See Thomas Taylor, *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus*, II vols., London, 1792, II, pp. 294-309, in a lengthy note giving the views of Porphyry.

5 Thomas Taylor, *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche*, London, 1795.

6 Thomas Taylor, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, (Amsterdam?), n.d. pp. 147-8.

7 *De Ulixis Erroribus*, tr. Johannes Columbus, Stockholm, 1678.

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