FOUR CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF A NARRATOR: FOCALIZATION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN *UNDER THE VOLCANO*

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> Have we heard right? Is human life in its most human dimension a work of fiction? Is man a sort of novelist of himself who conceives the fanciful figure of a personage with its unreal occupations and then, for the sake of converting it into reality, does all the things he does—and becomes an engineer?[1]

Ortega's idea that life resembles a work of fiction poses two seeming paradoxes. How is it that life can imitate art? And, if one pursues the fiction metaphor, how is it that a person can act as both author and protagonist in the unfolding narrative of his or her life? Malcolm Lowry was fascinated by Ortega's suggestion and, as I propose to show, elaborate techniques for representing consciousness in his novel *Under the Volcano* present ways in which one can be a "novelist of oneself." Previous commentators, such as D.B. Jewison (Grace 136-45) and Sue Vice (Grace 123-35), have investigated the interface between "fiction" and "life" in Lowry's oeuvre in terms of intertextuality or narrativity. To date none has employed the tools of narratology, which endeavours to define limits distinguishing author, narrator, and character in fiction. Lowry's use of focalization and thought representation in *Under the Volcano* challenges received conceptions of these respective "roles," troubling any simplistic distinction between "writing" and "being written," "narrating" and "being narrated."

I

"Too much stream-of-consciousness stuff":[2] Internal Focalization and Free Indirect Discourse.

In his consideration of Lowry's oeuvre Matthew Corrigan notes a peculiar collapsing of first and third person and regards it as a failed attempt, on Lowry's part, to keep insanity at bay:

> Lowry feared consciousness, though he could not escape from it. In his own way he was striking out against this fear by trying to objectify it: to deal with it at a distance, in the third person. In fact he never manages this effectively; his best writing always breaks the distance he is trying to establish between himself and the protagonist. (416; see also 417)

Corrigan cites no examples to corroborate his impression of Lowry's work. In my view the basis for his response, at least in *Under the Volcano,* lies precisely in Lowry's use of focalization and narration. This section sets out three influential and divergent conceptions of the discourse boundaries between narrator and character, before turning for examples to chapter one of *Under the Volcano.*

The term "focalization" was first proposed by Gérard Genette to describe the phenomenon more generally known as "point of view" in fiction. Genette bases his theory on a clearcut distinction between "mood" and "voice." The former term addresses the question, "who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?" ("who sees?"), while the latter asks, "who is the narrator?" ("who speaks?") (186). In *Under the Volcano* the narrator is heterodiegetic, that is, absent from the story told. This narrator is depersonalized—lacking definable personality and opinions—and thus can be closely identified with the author in practice, despite remaining distinct from him in principle. Although focalization may vary within a text, we can provisionally classify *Under the Volcano* as Genette's second type, "internal focalization," in which "the narrator says only what a given character knows" (189). The focalizations in *Under the Volcano* are variable: the depersonalized narrator "sees" through the minds of Laruelle (chapter one), Yvonne (chapters two, nine, eleven), Hugh (chapters four, six, eight), and the Consul (chapters three, five, seven, ten, twelve). Multiple focalization, through which the same event may be evoked more than once from the perspective of different characters, also oc-

curs: for example, the Consul's placement of the postcard under Laruelle's pillow (59, 245), or Hugh's return to the Consul's house (138, 302).

Genette, following Roland Barthes, notes that as a rule of thumb, a text has internal focalization if it can be rewritten in the first person, changing only the grammatical pronouns (193).[3] This test suggests a particular proximity between narrator and focalizing character and indeed, internal focalization appears, initially, to rest uneasily on the border between two consciousnesses. Franz Stanzel's "typological circle," which represents focalization as a continuum rather than a series of discrete categories, makes this point clear in diagrammatic form. He places a "figural" third-person text, such as *Under the Volcano*, near the "person boundary" with the first-person interior monologue form (see Genette 1988: 102-108).[4] Of the narratologists refining Genette's ground-breaking study, Mieke Bal offers the most rigorous revision, contending that Genette conflates two qualitatively different operations, "focalization on" (external focalization) and "focalization through" (internal focalization). In Bal's typology every segment of text contains both a focalizer, and a focalized object, which may be perceptible (physical phenomena, actions) or non-perceptible (mental processes, emotions, perceptions).[5] The following table sets out Bal's typology:

— focalized object —

focalizer	non-perceptible (np)	perceptible (p)
character (CF) (focalizer within fictional word)	1. [free direct discourse (interior monologue)][6]	2. [character as witness]
external (EF) (focalizer external to fictional world)	4. [omniscient]	3. [camera eye]

Bal's initial four-part typology resembles that proposed by Brooks and Warren, which Genette specifically rejects on the basis that there is "no real difference in point of view between 1 and 4 . . . and between 2 and 3" (1980: 186-87). To cover the field of Genette's

"internal focalization" Bal introduces the further category of "double focalization," in which

> the external EF ... *watch[es] along with* a person, without leaving focalization entirely to a CF. This happens when an object (which a character can perceive) is focalized, but nothing clearly indicates whether it is actually perceived. (1985: 113)

Thus, an external focalizer at the first level of focalization "looks over the shoulder" of a character focalizer at a second level (EF1 + CF2). Bal notes that double focalization is "comparable to free indirect speech, in which the narrating party approximates as closely as possible the character's own words without letting it [sic] speak directly" (113). This attempt to articulate the interrelationship between focalization, subjectivity, and forms of discourse representation further muddies the narratological waters. Presumably, where free indirect discourse occurs, internal focalization also must occur, for in adopting words within a character's linguistic range, a narrator inevitably "sees" through that character's eyes.[7] Bal does not address the opposite possibility, that all cases of double focalization amount to free indirect discourse, very broadly defined.

Free indirect discourse itself is a narratological outlaw which resists precise description. Brian McHale's 1978 paper, "Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts" remains the best summary of approaches in this field prior to the publication of Ann Banfield's *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982). McHale points out the strengths and inadequacies of numerous formulations without finding one that fully accounts for the peculiar characteristics of free indirect discourse. Its grammatical markers are well documented: the absence of an initial reporting verb of saying/thinking; back-shift of tenses; shift in personal and possessive pronouns; conversion of deictic elements; the use of words such as "seemed" and "appeared,"[8] and indications of expressiveness such as exclamations or questions. Yet formal categories by no means exhaust the possible incidences of free indirect discourse, for readers are able to detect the presence of a character's consciousness in narration through signals of tone, context, and register (McHale 264).[9] As a broad preliminary definition, free indirect discourse consists of the mediation of the fictional world through the consciousness of a focalizing character. In cases of free indirect thought and speech, a character's language impinges upon the narratorial voice, and thus

both narrator and character "speak," eroding trenchant divisions between "who sees" and "who speaks." This "dual voice" approach, to which Bal and Genette (1980: 174) implicitly subscribe, views free indirect discourse as a co-operative venture between narrator and character. It would map free indirect discourse halfway on the continuum between mimesis (in the sense of minimum narratorial mediacy) and diegesis (in the sense of maximum narratorial mediacy).[10]

Ann Banfield rigorously argues against the "dual voice" position. Focusing upon expressions of subjectivity in language, she contrasts direct speech and indirect speech with represented speech and thought (Banfield's term for free indirect discourse). The following outline, greatly simplified, reproduces some key concepts in Banfield's detailed thesis:

> (i) Direct speech expresses the first-person subjectivity of the quoted speaker. It is both communicative and expressive.
> (ii) Indirect speech expresses the first-person subjectivity of the quoting speaker.[11] The embedded sentence is neither expressive nor communicative.
> (iii) Free indirect discourse expresses subjectivity attributed to a third-person pronoun. The form is expressive (it has a third-person SELF), but not communicative (it suppresses the SPEAKER).

Banfield announces the "surprising results for literary theory":

> Since no first person may appear in represented speech and thought . . . represented Es [expressions] cannot be simultaneously attributed to a covert or 'effaced' narrator. Rather than being narrated, consciousness in this style is represented unmediated by any judging point of view. No one speaks in represented Es, although in them speech may be represented. (1982: 97)

Banfield's controversial reformulation would supersede the preliminary definition of free indirect discourse which I set out above. Far from consisting of a dual voice, free indirect discourse expresses a single subjectivity, that of the SELF or character, the single "filter" for the fictional world.

I turn now to examples drawn from chapter one of Under the Volcano, extending Banfield's "narratorless" formulation from free indirect discourse as formally (linguistically) defined, to free indirect discourse in its broadest sense as the mediation of the fictional world through the consciousness (comprising speech,

thought, *and* perception) of a focalizing character. In the clearest manifestation of free indirect discourse, the narrative employs words which belong to a character's idiolect, such as "God willing" in this example focalized through Jacques Laruelle: "Not that that made it any the less hard to be leaving, even though he would soon, God willing, see Paris again" (55). Euphemism or circumlocution also stem from a character's linguistic repertoire; in chapter one phrases such as "the Consul's plight" (58) and "what had happened just a year ago" (51) suggest Laruelle's reluctance to refer directly to the Consul's death (of course, these fudging phrases also serve to create suspense). The focalizing character may also provide the more elusive criterion of "tone" to a passage, such as the elevated description of the Mexican boys on the lorries, evoking Laruelle's own sense of mixed regret and relief upon leaving the country (57).[12] Obvious absurdity or physical impossibility also show the mediating influence of a character's mind. When the Ferris wheel sinks from sight it does not literally topple to the ground (58);[13] and we attribute the following non-sequitur to Laruelle's thoughts, in accordance with the convention that the narrator is more logical than the characters need be: "He was getting too fat, had already got too fat in Mexico, which suggested another odd reason some people might have for taking up arms" (61).

The ordering of information according to a character's sequential perception of it is frequent in *Under the Volcano:* for example, when Yvonne enters the Bella Vista bar she at first sees no one ("The bar was empty, however") before making out the figure of first the Consul ("or rather it contained one figure") and then the barman (90). Ellipsis may function similarly, imitating a "black-out" of the focalizing character's consciousness. Suspension points indicate Laruelle's elision of consciousness when Sr Bustamente hands the book of Elizabethan plays to him:

> But Sr Bustamente was coming back, carrying, in one uplifted hand above a press of people by the curtain, a book ... M. Laruelle, conscious of shock, was turning the book over and over in his hands. (73)

The verb "was turning" reinforces the black-out effect: the past progressive tense implies continuous movement which started before Laruelle was fully conscious of his action.[14]

Objective description, which gives physical detail of an object rather than naturalizing it with a familiar name, also indicates a character's point of view, as when Laruelle sees a flock of "small, black, ugly birds, yet too long, something like monstrous insects, something like crows, with awkward long tails, and an undulating, bouncing, laboured flight" (59).[15] The use of objective description to describe something normally thought of as familiar creates an alienating effect and may suggest the disturbance of the focalizer's mind. The Consul's horrified contemplation of Laruelle's penis is a textbook example: "that hideously elongated cucumiform bundle of blue nerves and gills below the steaming unselfconscious stomach [which] had sought its pleasure in his wife's body" (250). The Consul's fixation on this body part and the agency of the verb "had sought" separate Laruelle's genitals from the rest of his person. To the Consul, Laruelle has come to signify illicit, perhaps even uncontrolled, sexuality. So powerful is the gravitational pull of the Consul's consciousness throughout the novel, however, that the reader shares the Consul's nagging doubt: the Consul, and together with him the reader, lacks conclusive evidence of an adulterous relationship between Yvonne and Laruelle.

Under the Volcano also contains examples of "mimetic syntax," in which sentence structure reinforces either the state of a character's mind, or the actions which a character is undertaking. For example, the short, simple sentences of the following passage, which contrast with the complex syntax of the Consul's more characteristic idiom, evoke the chilling clarity with which he perceives his own fate:

> Suddenly [the Consul] felt something never felt before with such shocking certainty. It was that he was in hell himself. At the same time he became possessed of a curious calm. The inner ferment within him, the squalls and eddies of nervousness, were held in check. (243)

Awkward syntax can have a similar effect, as in this sentence:

> His love had brought a peace, for all too short a while, that was strangely like the enchantment, the spell, of Chartres itself, long ago, *whose every side-street he had come to love and café where he could gaze* at the Cathedral eternally sailing against the clouds, the spell not even the fact he was scandalously in debt there could break. (58)

The broken syntax of the passage which I have italicized shows a momentary dominance of impression over clarity of expression in Laruelle's reverie. In yet another example, an imbedded form of free indirect discourse combines with internal focalization in the scene where Laruelle encounters Sr Bustamente in the cantina adjacent to the cinema (71-77). Pages 75-77 contain extensive passages of Sr Bustamente's free indirect speech; the fact that his words are conveyed in that form and not in direct speech suggest Laruelle's indifference, that he is half-listening, engaging in the conversation only with asides and interjections.

None of the effects which I have discussed so far go beyond the bounds of existing categories of thought representation. My main object has been to demonstrate how profoundly the consciousness of each focalizing character "infects" the narrative of *Under the Volcano*, and to suggest that the terrain of free indirect discourse, in its broadest sense, is limited only by the reader's ability to detect its effects. Even the epilogue (416) is focalized through the Consul's misreading of the garden sign. The characters, in effect, stage a takeover bid and relegate the narrator to the status, almost, of pure function, nothing more than a means of conveying characters' consciousness via the text to the reader. *Almost* pure function, but not quite, for (without considering the two epigraphs) there are at least two sentences which cannot be internally focalized through any of the four main characters: "the Consul fell asleep with a crash" (137); "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (416).

Even the first four paragraphs of chapter one have an element of ambiguity in their focalization. At first they appear to constitute the classic "enigmatic *introit*" of novelistic opening in which the narrative appears initially from a distant external viewpoint before the narration "zooms in" to a close-up followed by an internal (non- perceptible) perspective. The reference to Laruelle as "the other" (50) reinforces this interpretation; in cases of double focalization the focalizing character is normally referred to by his or her proper name.[16] Yet the plethora of statistics in the opening paragraphs does receive a faint echo in Laruelle's thoughts: he recalls the Consul "wandering around Cholula with its three hundred and six churches and its two barber shops" (57). Given the characters' propensity for mimicking and parodying literary styles, including the tourist

brochure idiom of the first three paragraphs, I do not rule out the possibility that Laruelle's viewpoint mediates this passage. It is even possible, as Lowry suggests in his letter to Jonathan Cape, that Laruelle focalizes all of the remaining chapters, two to twelve, with the final statement of chapter one ("backwards revolved the luminous wheel") referring to Laruelle's memory turning backwards in time (*LJC* 23).

The ambiguity of the opening is not evident until after one has read further into the novel and become aware of the self-conscious and self-ironic posturing of Hugh, the Consul, and, to a lesser extent, Laruelle. This fact exposes one of the limitations of any model of free indirect discourse, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's, which relies on the "interpenetration" of identifiable "voices." Such an approach regards the novel as a spatial structure, rather than as an unfolding reading process: "the reader, far from having *a priori* mastery of the voices in a text, must be gradually 'schooled' by the novel itself to organize its semantic continuum into the appropriate voices, whether these are fictional speakers or non-personified 'interpretative positions' or 'linguistic ideologies'" (McHale 273).

The minimal role of the narrator in *Under the Volcano* shows further limitations of narratological theories which seek to describe free indirect discourse as a "dual voice" or as a dialogue between ideological world-views (Voloshinov/Bakhtin). It is difficult for a character to engage in dialogue—even in Bakhtin's broad sense of the term—with an anonymous narratological function.[17] Indeed, the very word "voice" becomes problematic when the narrator is reduced to the simple grammatical function of transforming the characters' immediate experience of the fictional world into the third person and past tense. Aural metaphors prove inappropriate in accounting for free indirect discourse, an "exclusively literary style" (Banfield 1982: 68) which has "silenced" modern prose (Voloshinov 156).

There is no such thing as a narratorless text. Banfield ostensibly disputes this "common-sense" approach with her thesis that "not every independent sentence . . . contains a SPEAKER, even in deep structure" (1978: 296). Banfield equates the SPEAKER with the narrator in a narrative text. However, it becomes clear that she uses "narrator" in the sense of "personalized narrator," an agent with full subjectivity and the capacity for expressiveness. This point is evident in Banfield's comment that, in free indirect forms, "consciousness is represented unmediated by any *judging* point of

view" (1982: 97, italics added; see also 65-70). She attributes what I call the purely "functional" role of a narrator to the author whose role, "unlike a narrator's, is in no sense equivalent to a speaker's role" (1978: 299). Banfield's "author" denotes, not the real-life figure, but a construct of literary theory (1982: 182-85). Banfield thus does not refute Bal, who regards the narrator as a function rather than an originating subjectivity: "the narrator is not a person, he is an agent—an 'it'" (1983: 243).

In *Under the Volcano* it is the characters who take centre stage, and the ascription of certain words to either the narrator or a particular character becomes an increasingly difficult, and ultimately sterile, endeavour. The novel thus plunges the reader into the state of uncertainty, confusion, and delusion experienced by the focalizing characters. In this respect it is typical of modernist literature, which attempts to replace the mimesis of action (realism) with the mimesis of thought ("psychological" forms).[18] In either case mimesis is conventional, existing by agreement amongst the members of a reading community who partake in a "mimetic language game":

> Mimesis is not, despite the desire that it might be or the illusion that it sometimes is, a representation of things as they are or happened. To say this is to flog a dead horse (which may never have been quite alive), but this does not make it any less true. Literary mimesis does not aim at truth, either as unveiling or as adequation. It is not a philosophical but a rhetorical language game: it aims at conveying an impression, creating an effect, persuading a possible reader that it is the *semblance* of true discourse. (Ron 18)

Even the narration of words, which Genette cites as the only possible true mimesis in fiction (1980: 164ff.), relies upon convention: although direct speech in a text is assumed to represent language most accurately, the written word is still unable to convey the intonation and pacing of the spoken utterance. Genette presumes a ready equivalence between representation of speech and representation of thought,[19] but in fact the latter raises specific problems: a text such as *Under the Volcano* undertakes the mimesis, not just of thought, but of consciousness itself.

II

The Consul and Non-Reflective Consciousness

Readers who play the mimetic language game within a dual-voice conception of narration intuitively follow the rule that descriptions of characters' actions form part of narratorial discourse. It is this rule which Genette announces in distinguishing "rigorous" internal focalization from a looser form:

> We must also note that what we call internal focalization is rarely applied in a totally rigorous way. Indeed, the very principle of this narrative mode implies in all strictness that the focal character never be described or even referred to from the outside, and that his thoughts or perceptions never be analyzed objectively by the narrator. . . . Internal focalization is fully realized only in the narrative of "interior monologue," or in that borderline work, Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie,* where the central character is limited absolutely to—and strictly *inferred* from—his focal position alone. (1980: 192, 193)

Genette is in fact groping towards a distinction between knowing or noticing something, and being aware of it without making it the object of reflection, ideas subsequently developed by Banfield as, respectively, "reflective" and "non-reflective" (or "spontaneous") consciousness. The latter identifies actions which we perform without giving them conscious thought, but which we *could* know if we turned our minds to them. Banfield gives the examples of stepping over a puddle (following Bertrand Russell) and calculating figures (following Jean Paul Sartre). Non-reflective consciousness also includes mental states and physical perceptions. Banfield does not add that this distinction is culturally determined: stepping over a puddle may be virtually instinctive for a resident of Vancouver, B.C., but for someone who has spent a lifetime in an arid climate, it is quite an event. Non-reflective consciousness must be non-linguistic, for to speak of something—including "inner speech" or deliberate thought—always implies reflective consciousness of it (Banfield 1982: 198). Nonetheless, "if the speaking subject cannot *speak* his non-reflective knowledge, this does not mean that language cannot *represent* it" (1982: 199). In narrative, reflective consciousness appears as represented thought (Banfield's term for free indirect thought) while non-reflective consciousness takes the

form of "represented perception."[20] The two share some features, such as the use of tense, deixis, evaluative ad-jectives and kinship terms (1982: 200-203). Other constructions, such as exclamations, direct questions, parentheticals, and noun phrases referring to the self specify reflective consciousness: "a sentence representing consciousness which lacks these constructions may be ambiguous as to the level of consciousness represented, but the addition of these constructions disambiguates it" (1982: 203). The possibility of representing non-reflective consciousness furthers Banfield's program to render redundant the expressive, subjective narrator of "dual voice" narrative theory. Seemingly neutral narration may express a character's (non-reflective) subjectivity, without necessarily drawing upon a character's linguistic repertoire (1982: 212).

Under the Volcano provides evidence that the occurrence of non- reflective consciousness in a text need not imply a personalized narrator. The Consul's acute self-consciousness defies Genette's assumption that, in cases of internal focalization, external description amounts to narratorial intrusion. This passage furnishes one example:

> [1] The Consul looked at the sun. [2] But he had lost the sun: it was not his sun. [3] Like the truth, it was well-nigh impossible to face; he did not want to go anywhere near it, least of all, sit in its light, facing it. [4] 'Yet I shall face it.' [5] How? [6] When he not only lied to himself, but himself believed the lie and lied back again to those lying factions, among whom was not even their own honour. [7] There was not even a consistent basis to his self-deceptions. [8] How should there be then to his attempts at honesty? [9] 'Horror,' he said. [10] 'Yet I will not give in.' [11] But who was I, how find that I, where had 'I' gone? [12] 'Whatever I do, it shall be deliberately.' [13] And deliberately, it was true, the Consul still refrained from touching his drink. [14] 'The will of man is unconquerable.' [15] Eat? I should eat. [16] So the Consul ate half a canapé. [17] And when M. Laruelle returned the Consul was still gazing drinklessly— [18] where was he gazing? He didn't know himself. (248-249)

Upon a Genettian reading, [1] would consist of an external, narratorial description of the Consul's non-reflective action (that is, the words "I look at the sun," or even "he looked at the sun," do not literally pass through the Consul's mind). A reading which would counter Genette starts at [4], which, with its first-person

pronoun and quotation marks, illustrates reflective consciousness in the form of free direct speech (or thought). The conjunction "yet" links [4] back to [2] and [3], indicating that [2] and [3] also form part of the Consul's reflective consciousness. A similar back-derivational logic obtains with the conjunction "but" at [2] connecting with [1], which therefore becomes unambiguously reflective.[21] Under Banfield's model, no transgression has occurred, for a character can bring non-reflective consciousness to the level of reflection. Under Genette's model, however, something seems amiss. [1], apparently a narratorial description of the Consul's action, becomes picked up within the Consul's thought, a "flip" between the extra-diegetic narration and the diegesis or fictional world. [17] and [18] create the same effect, this time within a single sentence. The reference to the self by the proper noun "The Consul" confirms Banfield's description of the characteristics of represented perception (1981: 71; 1982: 206).[22] [12] and [13] demonstrate a "flip" in reverse: [12] is clearly reflective consciousness; [13] could, formally, be non-reflective but the repetition of the word "deliberately" and the phrase "it was true," a concessionary phrase frequent in the Consul's idiom, suggest that we should read [13] as the Consul's reflective thought.

Such apparent "transgressions" between the narrative levels of heterodiegetic narrator and diegetic character occur in fiction more frequently than might be expected, as one of Bal's subtle analyses shows (1983: 253-55). Quoting an extract from Colette's *La Chatte,* Bal deduces two rules of "cross-influence" between primary focalizer (heterodiegetic narrator-focalizer) and second focalizer (Alain, a character).[23] In *Under the Volcano* these phenomenological inversions create the strange impression that the Consul's mind is engaged in a running commentary or self-narrative. Or, to put it another way, even if the Consul lived in Vancouver B.C. he would *know* every time he stepped over a puddle. As a result it becomes difficult to confirm whether the third-person voice of chapters focalized through the Consul derives from the free indirect mode of *Under the Volcano,* or whether the Consul "thinks himself" in the third person, with the distinction between reflective and non-reflective consciousness itself collapsing. The remainder of my paper addresses the resulting dislocations of grammatical person and tense.

A temporal shift usually accompanies the movement from non-reflective to reflective consciousness exemplified by [1] / [2]

and [17] / [18] above, based on the expected time lag between experience and narration. Chatman, for example, argues that narrating "is not an act of perception but of encoding" (195), while Banfield writes that, in the specific case of first person narration "the I is divided by time into a SELF caught always in the NOW of consciousness and a SPEAKER narrating in a moment for which the NOW of consciousness is always past" (1982: 195). In the following sentence focalized through Hugh, for example, reflective and non-reflective actions remain disjunct through the use of the pluperfect, which enables the reflective recall of prior non-reflective consciousness: "unconsciously, he had been watching her, her bare brown neck and arms, the yellow slacks" (142). Compare the following:

(A) Unconsciously he watched her . . . .
(B) Unconsciously he had been watching her . . . .

Under usual (non-Consular) circumstances, (A) makes plain the presence of the narrator, needed to convey material which is "unconscious" and so could not have passed through Hugh's reflective consciousness. (B), by contrast, is more mimetic: it *could* represent the flow of Hugh's thoughts (his realization that he had been watching her unconsciously), and *could* be read as free indirect thought. Similar examples occur in chapters focalized through Yvonne: "without her knowing it they had passed the corner" (108); "she had been almost crouching over Hugh's drink" (367). The anomalous effect of "the Consul was still gazing drinklessly—where was he gazing?," in which the Consul seems simultaneously to apprehend both reflective and non-reflective modes of consciousness, should now be apparent.

Other passages from *Under the Volcano* show more clearly the Consul's phenomenological high jinks. The opening of chapter five presumably conveys the Consul's state of mind as he gradually wakes from his slumber on the porch. The italics imply reverie, a transcendent vision, as on pages 166 and 367 when Hugh and Yvonne, respectively, daydream about a northern paradise. Yet even at this level of dream the Consul seems consciously to control his thought, as his word-play suggests:

> *Yet his thirst still remained unquenched. Perhaps because he was drinking, not water, but lightness, and promise of lightness—how could he be drinking promise of lightness? Perhaps because he was*

> *drinking, not water, but certainty of brightness—how could he be drinking certainty of brightness?*

The effect is paradoxical. How is it possible to be fully cognizant in the midst of a reverie, which by definition takes place when the mind drifts aimlessly? The same conundrum arises with the Consul's calm awareness that he is hallucinating (136), "awareness" and "hallucination" being, at least ostensibly, mutually exclusive. One of the Consul's most disoriented moments occurs at the close of chapter five, when he blacks out in the bathroom:

> . . . Why then should he be sitting in the bathroom? Was he asleep? dead? passed out? Was he in the bathroom now or half an hour ago? Was it night? (185)

The Consul's question "am I asleep?" confounds the Genettian distinction between "who sees?" and "who speaks?" by conflating the speaking narrator with the experiencing character (asleep and thus, we would expect, unable to verbalize the experience). Grammatical tense performs a similar *trompe l'oeil* of consciousness with the question "was he in the bathroom now or half an hour ago?" Once again, the Consul appears consciously to delve into the reaches of non-reflective consciousness. Frederick Asals comments:

> If one can see oneself, by apparent daylight, sitting in a bathroom, how is it meaningful to ask, "Was it night?" unless one conceives oneself as at least potentially detached from one's own experience? And if that is the case, then that experience may have an independent existence, inhabit a realm essentially outside of time altogether, which like a film might be run or rerun before one's eyes at any moment. (Grace 100)

The Consul also alludes to this experience: "it was as if something he could not put his finger on had mysteriously supervened to separate drastically that returning figure from himself sitting in the bathroom" (190). The Consul's experience of himself "at one remove" recalls the quotation from Corrigan quoted above: Lowry's attempt to distance consciousness is mirrored in the fictional world by the Consul's own creation of a third-person self. In a truly Consular irony, the effort succeeds only in drawing the Consul deeper, seemingly into the realms of non-reflective consciousness itself.

The Consul's struggle to control experience, his "battle for the survival of the human consciousness" (261), manifests itself in other

dispersed instances. He tries consciously to control the spontaneous workings of memory, forbidding from his mind "that phrase of Frey Luis de Léon's the Consul did not at this moment allow himself to recall" (239). In this hyper-self-conscious context, even clear references to unconscious action, italicized in the following examples, can give the impression of deliberate intention:

> (i) "'Genius, as I'm so fond of saying,' he added, standing up, adjusting his tie *(he did not think further of the tie)* squaring his shoulder as if to go . . ."(179)
> (ii) "like some poor sorrow, *this time without effort,* Yvonne left his mind again"(380)
> (iii) The Consul gestured towards his briars, and *perhaps unconsciously* also in the direction of the tequila bottle"(176).

Chapters focalized through the Consul, therefore, contain particularly unsettling dislocations of consciousness. A narrated monologue appears to run through his mind as he participates in the fictional world. In this sense he experiences himself at one remove and hence splits into "narrator" and "character," a split which occurs at a radical level and goes beyond the Consul's accomplished and compulsive role-playing as Englishman, orator, and tragedian. Laruelle thus signifies more than he realizes in his belief that the Consul's life had become a "quixotic oral fiction" (79). The Consul does seem to regard himself as a character in a continually-running fiction; in a strange way, he *narrates himself.*

Of course, to create a text that aims both to efface the narrator (as subjective consciousness) as much as possible, and to convey psychological depth, it is necessary to invent highly self-conscious characters who are able to fulfil narratorial functions such as characterization. Laruelle, for example, reflects upon Hugh's character while also seeing himself through Hugh's eyes :

> In half an hour [Laruelle] had dismissed him as an irresponsible bore, a professional indoor Marxman, vain and self-conscious really, but affecting a romantic extroverted air. While Hugh, who for various reasons had certainly not been 'prepared' by the Consul to meet M. Laruelle, doubtless saw him as an even more precious type of bore, the elderly aesthete, a confirmedly promiscuous bachelor, with a rather unctuous possessive manner towards women. (54)

With the exception of Yvonne, the characters are self-ironic: Hugh *knows* that his mental height is six feet two (148); the Consul *knows* that he is deceiving himself (see, for example, the above extract from pages 248-49)—a self-consciousness which places him amongst archetypal tragic heroes such as Faust, Macbeth, and Hamlet, who march towards their doom with open eyes. Yet the Consul's finely-tuned, idiomatic consciousness goes further, challenging the conventions of mimesis. In the sense of "minimal narratorial mediacy" the passages focalized through the Consul are highly mimetic, but in the sense of "verisimilitude," the Consul defies the "real-world" logic which insists that certain operations of the mind function below the threshold of consciousness. Conversely, the Consul is frequently confused about events at the most accessible levels of consciousness, such as his own verbal utterances; often he is unsure of what he said or whether he spoke at all. The Consul's brain seems overcrowded and overburdened, consciously rehearsing those sense impressions ordinarily relegated to the backrooms of non-reflective consciousness. Needless to say, the Consul already *knows* this, too, as is evident in his vision of "his soul as a town":

> Christ, how it heightened the torture (and meantime there had been every reason to suppose the others imagined he was enjoying himself enormously) to be aware of all this, while at the same time conscious of the whole horrible disintegrating mechanism, the light now on, now off, now on too glaringly, now too dimly, with the glow of a fitful dying battery—then at last to know the whole town plunged into darkness, where communication is lost, motion mere obstruction, bombs threaten, ideas stampede—(189).

An important modification to generalizations about self-consciousness in *Under the Volcano* lies in Lowry's presentation of Yvonne, an issue which calls for close attention beyond the scope of this essay. In contrast to the three other major characters, no word-play occurs in the chapters focalized through Yvonne—even with a sentence such as "Yvonne felt her spirit that had flown to meet this man's as if already sticking to the leather" (90), a figure of speech which would provide the Consul with a paronomastic field-day. Compared to chapters focalized through other characters, Yvonne's chapters contain fewer literary or historical allusions and evidence simpler diction and syntax. Future analysis

may combine the forces of narratology and feminism in evaluating Lowry's attempt to capture "feminine" consciousness; feminist narratologists such as Susan Sniader Lanser, Robyn Warhol, and Maryse Rochecouste have already established a body of theory in this developing area of research.

The narratological analysis of *Under the Volcano* in this paper has confirmed Corrigan's contention that "what results [in Lowry's oeuvre] is not fiction in any normal sense; nor is it narrative; both those things being superstructures upon basic consciousness; but consciousness itself, to use his omnipotent word, the drama of consciousness" (426). In *Under the Volcano* the narrator plays a merely functional role, as vehicle for the subjectivity of the characters. The "dual voice" approach, which differentiates a "narrator's" discourse from that of a character, proves inadequate. Although my paper focused on chapter one as an example, the result would be similar for chapters focalized through the Consul and Hugh: passages not "infected" by a character's subjectivity are extremely rare, and none call for the existence of a personalized narrator. Banfield's distinction between reflective and non-reflective consciousness also falters. The Consul's remarkable, hallucinatory mind is "unruly," defying classifications which govern "ordinary world" inferences. In the case of the Consul, the text folds in on itself: the Consul is a character who narrates himself as a character in his ongoing "drama of consciousness." By the end of the novel, Lowry has certainly taken the reader on a voyage to "the final frontier of consciousness" (179).

NOTES

[1] José Ortega y Gasset, quoted from Lowry's letter to Downie Kirk of June 23, 1950 (*Selected Letters* 210).

[2] This phrase derives from a reader's criticism of the *Volcano* manuscript Lowry submitted for publication: "The author has overreached himself and is given to eccentric word-spinning and too much stream-of-consciousness stuff" (*LJC* 10).

[3] Rimmon-Kenan points out that this "rule of thumb" does not specify whether the translation to the first person need only be possible grammatically, or whether there is also a requirement of verisimilitude (75), although Genette adds

that the translation into the first person should occur "without obvious semantic incongruity" (1980: 194).

[4] See also Diengott, who distinguishes between two categories of narratorial typologies. The Mimetic typologies of Franz Stanzel and Dorrit Cohn (see Fehn 258-66) retain the grammatical distinction between first and third person; non-mimetic typologies (Genette, Bal, Rimmon-Kenan) focus on whether or not the narrator participates in the fictional world. Diengott does not consider Banfield's "narratorless" approach discussed below.

[5] Chatman rejects Bal's concept of the heterodiegetic narrator as a "primary focalizer" on the basis that "the narrator can only report events, he/she does not literally 'see' them" (193; see also Genette 1988: 72-78). True to the spirit of "terminological exuberance" (Bal 1983: 251) obtaining in narratology, Chatman proposes an alternative typology of "centre," "filter," "slant" and "interest-focus." Genette himself has added to the terminological fray by suggesting the term *"foyer"* in place of "focalization" (1988: 74, with *"foyer situé"* translated as "situated focus").

[6] Retrospective first-person narration, when focalized through the younger "hero" rather than the older "narrator," also fits within this category (see Edmiston).

[7] A review of the theories addressing the relationship between worldview and language is beyond the scope of this paper. I follow Mikhail Bakhtin in holding that one's personal language (idiolect or "speech zone"), informed by factors including gender, race, class, and historical influences, expresses one's ideological outlook.

[8] "Seemed," "appeared," and other "modalizing locutions" do not conclusively determine focalization (Genette 1980: 192-94, 203). Genette gives an example which disallows internal focalization ("the tinkling of the ice cubes against the glass *seemed* to awaken in Bond a sudden inspiration" 193-94). By contrast, "seemed" always refers to a character's impressions in *Under the Volcano* and hence confirms internal focalization (CF-np). For example, in a sentence such as "what had happened just a year ago seemed already to belong in a different age" (UV 51) the impression clearly "belongs" to Laruelle and not to a heterodiegetic narrator or character-witness.

[9] See also Sternberg, who finds Banfield's linguistic approach overly restrictive, normative, empirically untenable, and inimical to dynamic and context-dependent aspects of language.

[10] See Genette 1980: 169-73, and the more detailed account in McHale, 258-60.

[11] Banfield 1982: 52-58. The following sentence, modified from Banfield 55 n.24, demonstrates her point: "John says that his landlord is a bloody scout master." The attitude towards the scoutmaster indicated by the word "bloody" belongs to the speaker of the sentence rather than to John. Contrast the sentences, "John said, 'My landlord is a bloody scoutmaster'" (category [i]); "His landlord was a bloody scoutmaster" (category [iii]).

[12] The sentence beginning "A car was passing . . ." (57) is carefully structured, building through a series of paratactic noun phrases. The word "dust" is repeated

no fewer than six times, suggesting chaotic movement, sterility, and disintegration; the "rain" which brings final relief from the sentence is not life-giving water, but, ironically, merely another figure describing dust (the whirling dust gives the impression of a distant rain storm). Even Laruelle's thoughts, it seems, have a consciously literary quality.

[13] The effect of the sentence "The Ferris wheel sank from sight" depends upon the reader's co-operation in the "mimetic language game" (see Ron). If *Under the Volcano* belonged to the genre of magic realism the reader might construe such an utterance very differently.

[14] Contrast the more deliberate effect conveyed by the preterite: "M. Laruelle, conscious of shock, turned the book over and over in his hands."

[15] See Leech and Short 180-85 for exposition of the term "objective description." "Objective description" is still "subjective" in the sense that it passes through a character's mind. Compare the phrasing, "urracas came flying out of the south-east."

[16] The reason is clear when applying Barthes's rule of thumb, changing all the personal pronouns in the sentence into the first person: "We had been playing tennis, followed by billiards, and our rackets, rainproofed, screwed in their presses—the doctor's triangular, the other's quadrangular—lay on the parapet before us."

[17] There is no text which escapes ideology. However, in works such as *Under the Volcano* which lack a definable narratorial perspective, the reader must glean information about the author's "ideological orientation" through more dispersed elements of the text. In these cases the issues of narratorial irony and sympathy raised by Bakhtin become redundant (for Bakhtin's discourse typology see: "Discourse in the Novel" 301-31; *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 181-204).

[18] *Under the Volcano* is modern in its disruption of narrative continuity, extensive use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse, and sense of pathos and loss in the face of disintegrating social and psychic orders. As Sue Vice establishes in "The *Volcano* of a Postmodern Lowry," a postmodern reading is also tenable.

[19] See Sternberg. Genette 1992 and 1988: 58-63 defends his original stance on the basis that all narrative must consist of either narrative of events (including consciousness) or narrative of words.

[20] Terminological consistency becomes difficult at this point. The term "free indirect" is inappropriate with regard to perception, which, being non-verbal, cannot be reported indirectly (see Brinton 370). I therefore retain Banfield's term "represented perception."

[21] Verbs such as "look," "see," and "watch" are difficult in considerations of focalization. Bal points out that "seeing" is a non-perceptible action, while "looking" is perceptible; in other words, it is possible externally to observe someone who "looks" but not someone who "sees" (Bal 1985: 111; Brinton: 370). In Banfield's terms "seeing" implies reflective consciousness, "looking" need not.

[22] "Descriptive phrases like 'the grizzled old veteran' . . . cannot refer to the SELF in a sentence of non-reflective consciousness" because "the proper name is the name the SELF knows himself by, as opposed to such descriptive phrases" (Banfield 1982: 209). In

the unusual circumstances of *Under the Volcano*, Geoffrey Firmin "knows himself" by a phrase, "The Consul," which thus functions as a proper noun in Banfield's terms. Banfield's explanation accounts for the incongruity of the sentence set out in n. 16 above, "other" being neither a proper noun nor a personal pronoun by which a focalizing character might know himself or herself.

[23] I here set out the passage in full, together with Bal's most pertinent comments:

> "She's pretty," Alain reasoned, "because not one of her features is ugly, because she's an out-and-out brunette. Those lustrous eyes perfectly match that sleek, glossy, frequently-washed hair that's the colour of a new piano." He was also perfectly aware that she could be as violent and capricious as a mountain stream.

Bal comments: "This passage begins in direct discourse. With the verb 'reasoned,' the narrator yields the floor to the character. He [sic] takes it back in the next sentence: 'He was also perfectly aware . . .'" (253). The word "also" indicates the bond between the focalizations of Alain and the narrator. Bal concludes: "along with the first change in the level of focalizing, the first focalizer influences the focalized at the second level; and along with the second change in the level of focalizing, the second focalizer influences the focalized at the first level" (255).

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