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Mechanized wheel in Malcolm Lowry's "Under the Volcano"

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THE MECHANIZED WHEEL IN MALCOLM LOWRY'S UNDER THE VOLCANO

By

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Malcolm Lowry's wheel-imagery in Under the Volcano was the main object of this essay. The wheel is the single most dominant symbol in the novel. It appears not only in its verbal form, but, in most cases, in conjunction with machines or engines. Thus, in this machinistic-mechanical form, the wheel not only represents the traditional passage of time, but also an essentially mechanical universe. This mechanical universe grinds relentlessly throughout the Volcano. All the characters are at its mercy. They suffer not only from the loss of love and a certain determinist attitude—two apt correlatives of the mechanical universe—but will invariably be crushed by it.

Chapter VII, the hub of the novel, functions as a microcosm of such a universe. In this chapter, the protagonist Geoffrey Firmin is surrounded by a series of machines. These machines have a dual function: each of them represents not only one cogwheel in the universal machinery—symbolized in the total of machines in that chapter—but, on an even more microcosmic scale, the mechanical universe itself. When Firmin is inexplicably drawn to one of these machines, the carnival ride Maquina Infernale, his whole situation is symbolized. By surrendering himself to the mechanical progression to this machine, he also symbolically surrenders control of his own life to the workings of a mechanical universe.

The relentless and mathematical progression of such a machine-like universe is further symbolized by the omnipresence of clocks, the Deistic metaphor for a mechanical universe. However, since all the clocks and watches are man-made, they are only capable of recording human-time. The "objective" ticking of the universe can only be conveyed by non-human time devices with a seemingly "eternal" rhythm, such as music and other noises.

Lowry conceived of his novel as a wheel, as a structural correlative to a mechanical universe. In its ideal form, this structure generates a circular reading process, leading to multiple readings, and thus to a proportionately growing insight into the multi-layered novel. Thus, for Lowry, the wheel has a dual function: (i) It epitomizes the mechanical universe within the novel; (ii) and yet, the wheel-like, mechanical reading process is transposed into a revelatory one by the synthesizing capacity of the reader.
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I Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: An Introduction

"I have never before used the word in a review, and I am aware of the responsibility upon me in using it, but I am of the opinion, carefully considered, that 'Under the Volcano' is a work of genius." These are the words of John Woodburn in his review of Lowry's masterpiece in the Saturday Review of Literature upon its publication in 1947. They reflect the overwhelmingly positive response which the novel has received from the critics, and continues to receive. Alfred Kazin's statement in the New York Times Book Review, for example--"Except for Nabokov's Pale Fire which is a unique invention in the early 20th century 'modern manner,' the last thoroughly successful instance was Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano" (Dec 21, 1969,1)--has to be read as a consolidation of Lowry's literary genius. This is also true of the recent film adaptation of the novel.

Despite this overwhelmingly positive response, however, other critics such as Jacques Barzun laconically asserted that Lowry "succeeded only in writing a rather good imitation of an important novel" (New Yorker 23: 97). This "important novel," of course, is a reference to Joyce's Ulysses--the literary watershed in terms of the modern
novel—with which *Under the Volcano* shares indeed a series of formal characteristics, most visibly the suspension of chronology; the unmediated use of the interior monologue; the absence of an omniscient narrator; the limitation of the narrative within one day; the interpenetration of the narrative and dialogue with newspaper headlines and foreign languages; or, what is particularly startling, the Marlowian demons in Geoffrey's mind, disagreeing for up to half a page on end without punctuation, resembling Molly's stream of consciousness in the Penelope section of *Ulysses*:

...a voice said in the Consul's ear at this moment with incredible rapidity, 'for now of course poor old chap you want horribly to get drunk all over again don't you the whole trouble as we [the two voices] see it that Yvonne's long-dreamed-of coming alas but put away the anguish my boy there's nothing in it...'(61).

To imply that Lowry is essentially derivative, as Barzun does, is to ignore the historical fact. Lowry was very much opposed to the idea of a literary kinship between him and Joyce. In an early pre-*Volcano* letter to his friend and former room-mate James Stern, for example, Lowry suggests that one should try to write a novel "perfect in itself, and without being full of inventories (like Joyce)" (Breit 28); and in a letter to his editor Albert Erskine, he even claims
not to have read *Ulysses* until five years after the publication of the *Volcano*: "Though you won't believe me, I read (your gift) *Ulysses*—essentially—for the first time, when I had a fever recently" (Breit 319).  

With such anti-Joycean statements, however, Lowry does not claim that the impact of *Ulysses* on the literary scene left him completely untouched. He was very much aware, as he put it, that "few modern writers, myself included, can have altogether escaped the influence, direct or indirect, of Joyce..." (Breit 319). However, rather than absorbing Joyce's techniques directly, Lowry most probably received his dose of Joyceanism via an almost imperceptible process of osmosis: through reading the works of his mentor, Conrad Aiken. As Richard Howard Costa in his lucid article, "An Unacknowledged Literary Kinship," demonstrated, Conrad Aiken's novels, most prominently *Blue Voyage* and *Ushant*, are permeated with "the subjective emphasis of Joyce" (337). And Lowry, in turn, devouring the novels of his spiritual father (Day 104), must have assimilated Joycean techniques "after a kind of transfusion given him by Conrad Aiken" (Costa 346).  

What Costa does not touch upon in his article, but what distinguishes both Joyce and Lowry from many of their contemporaries, is the incorporation of a mythical framework into *Ulysses* and *Under the Volcano*. Joyce's novel, as
Stuart Gilbert has shown in his early study, *James Joyce's Ulysses*, is erected upon an underlying structure, which derives from the Homeric matrix of Odysseus' voyages and adventures. Lowry's novel, on the other hand, does not rest on any specific myth, but reads more like an amalgamation of a whole series of myths, reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Lowry himself said that his novel "was planned and still is a kind of Inferno, with Purgatorio and Paradiso to follow" (Breit 67), thus expressing his indebtedness to Dante. A unifying mythical grid, such as underlies *Ulysses*, is not discernible. What holds the *Volcano* together is its circular structure (see chapter VIII) and the dense network of different myths. Apart from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, these myths include: Faust, Lost Eden, Christ, Don Quixote, Oedipus, and many more (Markson 18-31). Contrary to Joyce, who superimposed his own narrative on the Homeric matrix, Lowry seems to have inserted his myths into the novel only after the actual "invention" of the story line. This story line grew out of a short story--essentially chapter VIII of the published novel--which Lowry wrote in Cuernavaca over Christmas 1936. And yet, taken together, these myths are so tightly knit that they endow the novel with its own peculiar mythic coherence.

Despite this disparity in their respective use of myths, both Joyce and Lowry must have ascribed similar functions to
myth. Presumably, one of these functions was to give a certain order to the narrative, whether a priori imposed or a posteriori inserted. According to T.S. Eliot, to achieve such an order with the structural help of myths is a hallmark of the modern (experimental) novel. His pioneering essay, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," in which he discusses Joyce's pioneering novel, is equally applicable to Lowry, despite the opposite approach of the two writers:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him....It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history (177).

In addition, it seems as if both writers employed mythic elements—anthropological constants, so to speak—in an attempt to distance themselves from their writing, and thus to endow it with a certain impersonality. Or, to put it differently, both novelists tried to free themselves from a purely autobiographical approach towards literature (even though Stephen Dedalus and Geoffrey Firmin are, at one level, the alter egos of their creators), and functioned very much like instruments of sensibility, recording not themselves, but their time. Thus, by extension, both writers
worked strictly in accordance with T.S. Eliot's view of the modern artist, as expressed in his famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past.... What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality (40) 3.

Lowry goes much farther than Joyce in his use of myth. A careful reading of Ulysses will reveal that Joyce makes only very rare and obscure references to myth; the Homeric substructure comes hardly to the surface at all. Lowry, by contrast, employs his dense and deeply inter-related network of different myths with such a frequency that it could almost be read as a multi-layered running commentary on the actual plotline. This is the case, for example, with the film Las Manos de Orlac. Announced by a poster, this film could be regarded as a modern form of myth. On a literal level, this poster does indeed announce the film, playing in the only cinema of Quauhnahuac. However, since it always flashes into view at crucial stages in the development of the novel, this poster can also be read as a mute but independent narrative voice, commenting on the events.
Aside from James Joyce's indirect influence, one of the most important catalysts of Lowry's style was probably William Faulkner. And again, as in the case of Joyce, Lowry's spiritual father Conrad Aiken served in the role of a mediator. Visiting with Lowry in Mexico in 1937, Aiken made the first sketches of what was to become one of the seminal essays on Faulkner's style, "The Novel as Form." As a result, it is both likely and plausible that Aiken, as Brian O'Kill puts it, "planted in Lowry's mind certain notions of the potential expressiveness of syntax which were later to blossom in Under the Volcano" (87).

This influence is clearly perceptible in the stylistic alterations of earlier drafts of the Volcano, compared with the published version. Early drafts of the novel seem to be rather simplistic, devoid of a complex syntax and adjectival enlargements. The published novel, by contrast, is riddled with adjectives and characterized by an expansive and seemingly never-ending syntax, "avoiding the closed unit of the periodic sentence in favour of an open form with an almost infinite capacity for addition and reduplication" (O'Kill 78). Laruelle's ruminations on the dead Yvonne at the very beginning of the novel, for example, could serve as a typical (though relatively short) specimen of Lowry's elongated style:
His passion for Yvonne (whether or not she'd ever been much good as an actress was beside the point, he'd told her the truth when he said she would have been more than good in any film he made) had brought back to his heart, in a way he could not have explained, the first time that alone, walking over the meadows from Saint Pres, the sleepy French village of backwaters and locks and grey disused watermills where he was lodging, he had seen, rising slowly and wonderfully and with boundless beauty above the stubble fields blowing with wildflowers, slowly rising into the sunlight, as centuries before the pilgrims straying over those same fields had watched them rise, the twin spires of Chartres Cathedral (13).

In the preface to the French translation of *Under the Volcano*, Lowry himself humorously characterized this style as having "an embarrassing resemblance to that of the German writer Schopenhauer describes, who wished to express six things at the same time instead of discussing them one after the other. 'In those long, rich parenthetical periods, like boxes enclosing boxes, and crammed more full than roast geese stuffed with apples, one's memory above all is put to the task, when understanding and judgement should have been called upon to do their work'" (9). Apparently Lowry, like Schopenhauer's anonymous example, saw the present as the
total accumulation of the past, existing simultaneously in toto; his all-enveloping sentence provided the apt syntactic correlative.

Similarly, William Faulkner was possessed by the idea of rendering the past, the present, and possibly even the future within the confines of the prodigiously convoluted sentence. According to Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner said: "My ambition is to put everything into one sentence—not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second" (112). Consequently, on account of the shared objective and after the mediating role of Conrad Aiken, it is very likely that Lowry, consciously or unconsciously, absorbed Faulkner's style as exhibited in Absalom, Absalom!, the Sutpen novel published in 1936. Aiken's commentary on Faulkner's prose in his essay is, in fact, readily applicable to Lowry's:

Overelaborate they certainly are, baroque and involuted in the extreme, these sentences: trailing clauses, one after another, shadowily in apposition, or perhaps not even with so much connection as that, parenthesis after parenthesis, the parenthesis itself often containing one or more parentheses—they remind one of those brightly colored Chinese eggs on one's childhood, which when opened, disclosed egg after egg, each smaller and subtler than the last (651).
This syntax—liquid, exceedingly windy, apparently never-ending, and oftentimes welded together by interior monologues without punctuation—poses great problems to the reader. Very often, one is left in the dark as to who does the actual talking: is it the Consul himself; or is it his two familiar Marlowian voices disagreeing in his mind, mostly for up to half a page? Problems such as these, in conjunction with the network of mythic allusions and the slap-in-the-face symbolism, make a reading of the novel extremely difficult.

As a result, critics in the last two decades have taken a variety of approaches, commensurate with the author's intention: "...the book was so designed, counterdesigned and interwelded that it could be read an indefinite number of times and still not have yielded all its meanings or its drama or its poetry" (Breit 88). One set of critics, spearheaded by Dale Edmonds, advances the thesis that the Volcano should be read on what he calls the "immediate level" (63), meaning that the novel is essentially a realistic portrayal of the last day of British ex-Consul Geoffrey Firmin in Mexico. During this last day, the Consul is shadowed by a series of persons, most notably the "man wearing dark glasses" (46ff), which leads Edmonds to believe that Firmin operated as an underground agent for the British Empire: "Of the Consul's precise duties as a spy (if he is
one) we never learn, but we may assume that they included keeping his eyes open for, and reporting upon, any suspicious individuals or activities—specifically fascist—he observed" (81). Geoffrey Firmin's death at the hands of the fascist Union Militar in the Farolito bar, the obscure phonecalls he receives, the speculations of Senor Bustamente at the beginning of the novel, and many additional textual details could support such a view.

While Edmonds completely neglects the symbolism and the mythic allusions of the novel, a second school of critics focuses on just that. Using the obvious surface level—the story line, that is—as a basis, these critics argue that Lowry buried a series of deeper meanings in the caldera of the Volcano. As a result, the Consul is seen not simply as a British spy, but also as a black Cabbalist magician (Epstein 10), a representation of the Fall of Man (Day 341), of Sisyphus (Barnes 341), or of Faust (Kilgallin 26), to name just a few.

All of these positions can, to a greater or lesser degree, be buttressed by textual evidence. Support for Epstein's widely known theory of Geoffrey Firmin being a black magician, for example, can be located in several passages of the Volcano, such as in chapter I. In this chapter Laruelle, Geoffrey's former friend, finds Geoffrey's unposted letter to Yvonne, in which he equates himself with
a black magician, descending the planes of knowledge. This descent is couched in Cabbalistic dictions:

Is there any ultimate reality, external, conscious and ever-present etc. etc. that can be realised by any such means that may be acceptable to all creeds and religions and suitable to all climes and countries? Or do you find me between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah (but still as Chesed)—my equilibrium, and equilibrium is all, precarious—balancing teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretractable path of God's lightning back to God? As if I ever were Chesed! More like the Qliphoth (36).

However, to base an interpretation of the whole novel on a very limited number of explicit textual passages; to see every stone and plant in a four-hundred page novel from a Cabbalistic point of view only, and thus to be oblivious to the "rest" of the novel, is to embark on too single-minded an interpretation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Lowry scholars all over the world have dismissed Epstein's approach as too narrow. As Lowry biographer Douglas Day puts it: "Let him [the reader] beware...of her ingenious yet persistently wrong-headed and reductive interpretation of the novel: Lowry may have been interested in the Cabbala, but he was interested in a great many other things, too--and Epstein does not see this" (295)4.
One of these "great many other things" was Lowry's interest in the wheel in both its mythic and mechanical form. As a symbol of the passage of time, the wheel is an integral part of many European and Asiatic myths. Lowry, the Cambridge graduate and hobby mythologist, was certainly familiar with most of them. At the same time, the wheel, with its modern implications, also represents the mechanization of the twentieth century. Being a child of this century and at the same time a man deeply interested in myths, Lowry presumably combined both forms of the wheel to forge it into a crucial symbol. It could be regarded as one of the keys to the understanding of the whole novel; for, at the center of *Under the Volcano*, explaining both its motion and structure, grinds a mechanized version of the traditional Wheel of Time.
II The Origins of the Wheel

To see such a mechanized wheel grinding in the Volcano does at first sight not seem justified. Lowry's rich symbolism, the proliferating network of mythic allusions, the graphic description of detail, as well as his overflowing inventiveness all speak against such a mechanistic approach. However, even a cursory reading of the novel will clearly reveal that the mechanized wheel, in a variety of forms, is the single most frequent symbol in it. Apart from indirect references to it, the wheel is explicitly mentioned more than forty times and thus even towers over the otherwise omnipresent volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.

By far the dominant mechanized form of the wheel is the Ferris Wheel located in Cortez Plaza of Quauhnahuac. At the very beginning of the novel alone, it appears and disappears four times from the view of Jacques Laruelle, the self-exiled film director from France and the narrator of the first chapter. This former friend of Geoffrey's is walking back to town after a tennis match and, once it starts to thunder, seeks refuge in a cantina adjacent to the town's only cinema. There, the proprietor of the cinema, Senor
Bustamente, hands him back a maroon volume of Elizabethan plays, which Laruelle had once borrowed from Geoffrey but forgotten in the cantina. As he thumbs through this volume haphazardly, an unposted letter of Geoffrey addressed to Yvonne flutters out—and it is this letter which prepares the reader for the one-year flashback, comprising chapters II through XII.

Technically, this flashback is effected by the rotating Ferris wheel in the very last lines of chapter I: "Over the town, in the dark tempestuous night, backwards revolved the luminous wheel" (38). This motion of the Ferris wheel bridges the one-year gap between the end of chapter I and the beginning of chapter II. Its rotation backwards suggests that this Ferris wheel, aside from its literal meaning and symbolic overtones, here primarily functions as a backwards-spinning filmreel (of former film-director Laruelle) and so provides a smooth transition from 2 November 1939 to that of 1938. As Lowry himself put it in the famous letter to his publisher, expressing his intentions:

This wheel is of course the Ferris wheel in the square, but it is...also many other things: it is Buddha's wheel of the law...it is the instrument of eternal recurrence; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year
before and Chapter II and in this sense, if we like, we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation (70).

Lowry's use of the medium of film comes as no surprise. He and his wife Margerie were lifelong ardent devotees of the German film industry, then in its heydays of the 1920s and 30s. Even during their life as a hermit couple outside the urban area of Vancouver, they did not miss a single chance of seeing a German movie. Writing to the German translator of the Volcano, Clenens ten Holder, in 1951, Lowry states that his enthusiasm for the German film had never deserted him, "for only recently we [Lowry and his wife Margerie] have trekked through the snow,...just to keep up with the times, to see Murnau's Last Laugh...and other contemporary films and Klangfilms at the local Vancouver Film Society" (in Tiessen 38)\(^5\).

Not surprisingly, Lowry's devotion and permanent exposure to the film, particularly the German film, manifested itself in his own work, and that in various ways. Technically speaking, many of his scenic descriptions are seen through a revolving camera eye, gradually focusing on a single subject, such as in the opening scenes of the novel. There, from paragraph to paragraph, the comprehensive bird's eye view of the "camera" zooms in on Quauhnahuac, before it focuses on The Hotel Casino de la Selva in paragraph three.
Once there, in paragraph four the camera angle is narrowed down even further to capture the two men sitting in it, Dr. Vigil and Laruelle.

In addition, signposts like "Quauhnahuac" in chapter I, or the "SERVICO A LA CARTA" of the El Popo restaurant in chapter XI, to name just a few, are seamlessly interspersed into the narrative, thus equally suggesting a "camera eye." Together with the repetition of Las Manos de Orlac, the leitmotif with manifold implications in the Volcano, these examples are ample evidence of Lowry's harnessing of cinematographic techniques for his purposes as a novelist. As he said in his letter to Clenens ten Holder, assessing the crucial influence of the German cinema on his art: "Nor has anything I have read influenced my own writing personally more than the first twenty minutes of Murnau's Sonnenaufgang or the first and the last shots of Karl Gruene's The Street" (in Tiessen 39).

In view of this evidence, it is fair to assume that the film reel is one of the origins of the omnipresent wheels in Under the Volcano. Its mechanical-circular motion was for Lowry the perfect correlative to an essentially mechanistic universe, destroying its inhabitants with machine-like precision. As Paul Tiessen, expert on the cinematographic influence on Lowry, puts it:
At the close of Chapter One,...a movie reel...seems to transport the reader to a passage of time which has already begun and ended exactly one year before, and of which the ending is known to be death...[and] chapters Two to Twelve, unrolling like a strip of celluloid mechanically fixed with its immutable sequences of images, mercilessly record that death (45).

After the cinema, the second major source for the wheel imagery in *Under the Volcano* seems to have been Lowry's study of the Cabbala, the esoteric teachings of Judaism and Jewish mysticism. Lowry got introduced to the Cabbala by the Canadian census-taker Charles Stansfeld-Jones, who stopped by at Lowry's waterfront shack in Dollarton, British Columbia, in the spring of 1942, to register their votes. Having introduced himself as "Frater Achad" and as an adept of the Cabbala, Lowry became more interested in this man, for he himself had just recently done some research on occult mysticism on his own. Lowry invited him in for tea, the start of a long and intense friendship between the two men. It was during that time that Lowry, under the tutelage of Frater Achad, became fully initiated into Cabbalist secrets (Day 294).

Charles Stansfeld-Jones himself was the founder of a group of Cabbalist initiates based in Chicago. By the time he met Lowry, he had already accumulated a vast collection
of occult books, which proved to be a rich quarry for Lowry's interests. However, in addition to Achad's holdings, Lowry also read several of Achad's private publications, in which his initiator advanced his own theories. Although based on the Cabbala, these theories, according to Perle Epstein, "have to be seen as corruptions of the original Cabbala"; and as a result, Epstein concludes, "since he [Achad] was Lowry's only immediate source of information, Lowry's knowledge of the Cabbala was probably limited to a mongrelized version" (15).

Despite this supposed "mongrelized version," Lowry must have gotten pretty familiar with the basic tenets of the Cabbala. Textual evidence in Under the Volcano, such as the Consul's letter (see chapter I), for example, testifies to Lowry's knowledge. The single most important reference to the Cabbala is made by Geoffrey when he is seized by a fit of shakes. As he is trying to tell Hugh, his half-brother and journalist, about his momentary condition—"No... newspaperman ever had the shakes"—Hugh interprets "shakes" as a technical term used in printing, where it describes a blur on a sheet, resulting from the moving of that sheet while it is being printed. His answer—"You mean the wheels"—is most probably a reference to the flywheels of printing presses (and by implication also to the flywheels of the printing presses which Geoffrey and Yvonne
encountered earlier that day), responsible for the transport of the sheets. Hugh's answer is followed by Geoffrey's reaction, "The wheels within wheels this is" (152).

This remark made by Geoffrey is a direct allusion to the prophet Ezekiel and his vision of God, as recorded in the Old Testament. In this vision, Ezekiel sees the divine Presence sitting on a throne, surrounded by four living creatures in human form and a series of wheels:

...Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl...and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel...And above the firmament...was the likeness of a throne....This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezek 1:1).

This revelation of God, sitting on a "chariot," is the foundation of the Cabbala and is generally referred to as the so-called Merkabah tradition (Merkabah> Hebrew "Throne," "Chariot"). It goes back to the third century B.C. This tradition maintains that the Creation of the universe was an act of God and, via a complicated system--involving the ten numbers of the decimal notation and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet--essentially a mechanical process
(Blumenthal 93). Since this mechanical conception of the Creation is based on vision, it also presupposes a mystical understanding of it. Whether Lowry did indeed have that mystical understanding remains unanswered; but it is certainly not too far-fetched to assume that Lowry adapted the wheel-image of Ezekiel's vision of God, explicitly cited by Geoffrey, for his own purposes. In its secularized form, this vision of the Throne of God on wheels seems the perfect vehicle for the mechanical universe, operating in Under the Volcano. The mechanical character of the wheel in the vision of the Chariot; and, by extension, the fundamentally mechanical-mystical conception of the creation of the universe in the Merkabah tradition both confirm such a view.

Lowry was not the only writer to have employed this wheel-metaphor for his own purposes. In the heavenly battle of Paradise Lost, for example, Milton lets the Son of God embark on "The Chariot of Paternal Deity,/ Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel, undrawn..." (VI 750), on which he expells the Devil and his followers from Heaven. In chapter I of Jerusalem, A Prophecy, William Blake establishes a powerful contrast between the machine age of the Age of Reason and an earlier paradise, using Ezekiel's vision of God's Throne with even more force:

I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities
       of Europe
And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose Woof
    rages dire,
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton; black the cloth
In heavy wreaths folds over every Nation: cruel Works
Of many wheels I view, Wheel without wheel
with cogs tyrannic
Moving by compulsion each other: Not as those
in Eden which,
Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony and peace (I, plate 15, 14-20).

And in *Ulysses*, Lowry's "arch rival" Joyce lets Bloom associate Ezekiel's vision of God with the coincidences in his life. Passing a squad of constables on his way to Burton Restaurant, Bloom is reminded of a demonstration by medical students in which he partook several years ago. During this demonstration, he got to know a medical student by the name of Dixon, who just recently—and very coincidentally—tended his bee sting in the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. Now, roughly three weeks after his bee sting, this medical student is working in the Maternity Hospital in Holles Street, where Bloom's friend Mrs. Purefoy is about to give birth to a child:

I oughn't to have got myself swept along with those medicals. And the Trinity jibs in their mortarboards. Looking for trouble. Still I got to know that young Dixon who dressed that sting for me in the Mater and now he's in Holles street where Mrs. Purefoy. Wheels within Wheels (163).
While Lowry's predecessors use Ezekiel's "wheels within wheels" vision for only one specific image within a big work (with the possible exception of Joyce), Lowry expands upon it. Very likely, the mechanical aspect of this mystical vision, similar to the one used by Blake, underlies the whole conception of Under the Volcano, in which a mechanical cogwheel-like universe grinds away at its inhabitants. This vision, in conjunction with the spinning film reel, is very possibly the major origin of Lowry's wheel-imagery.
III  Chapter VII: The Microcosm of the Mechanized Universe

Geoffrey's "wheels within wheels" reference could be regarded as the unifying metaphor of the whole novel. Things, animals, and man alike all seem to be ticking as small cogwheels within the "celestial machinery" of the universe, as Yvonne puts it (281). To prepare the reader for the machine-like sequence of the events, and to embed the action of the novel in a proper matrix, Lowry employs a vivid and ramified wheel imagery.

Occasionally, one will find the word "wheel" in its verbal form. This is the case, for example, during Yvonne's approaching plane from Acapulco, when the volcanoes suddenly were "wheeling into view from the glowing east" (41); or when Hugh, staring into the swimming pool of the Consul, suddenly espies vultures circling in the air: "Reflections of vultures a mile deep wheeled upside down and were gone" (133); or when Geoffrey goes out on the balcony of Laruelle's tower and sees "cloud shadows wheeling across the plain" (171).

In most cases, however, the wheel is explicitly used as a noun and in conjunction with a machine. This is the case, for example, when Geoffrey dreams in his unposted letter to
Yvonne of "the wash of another unseen ship, like a great wheel, the vast spokes of the wheel whirling across the bay" (35), reminiscent of the towering Ferris wheel in the Plaza; when Laruelle espies the totally wrecked faded blue Ford, one of the many symbols echoing Geoffrey's death: "two bricks had been set under its front wheels against involuntary departure" (14); or when Yvonne sees the photographic enlargement of a great split rock in the printer's shop--encapsulating the state of her relationship with Geoffrey--only to perceive it "set behind and above the already spinning flywheel of the presses" (49).

Even more importantly, some of the wheel-imagery conjures up machines of destruction. Lowry gives us a first subtle hint of this cluster of associations, when Geoffrey tells Yvonne that Hugh is staying in the back room with the "mowing machine" (60). At first sight, this machine does not carry any connotations whatsoever; yet upon second thought, the image of a wheeled scythe comes to mind, an image with a dual function. Not only is it a universal foreshadowing symbol of death, but--being positioned in Hugh's room--it also symbolizes his role as a destroyer of relationships (see chapter V).

In the course of the narrative, this destructive wheel-imagery comes to the fore in more explicit ways. When Hugh and Yvonne go for a horseback ride without Geoffrey, for
example, they come upon a girl with an armadillo on her shoulders:

Each time the armadillo ran off, as if on tiny wheels, the little girl would catch it by its long whip of a tail and turn it over. How astonishingly soft and helpless it appeared then! Now it righted the creature and set it going once more, some engine of destruction perhaps that after millions of years had come to this (99).

On a more immediate level, this armadillo can be seen as a transmogrification of Geoffrey. Its helplessness in the hands of the girl mirrors that of Geoffrey in fighting his addiction to alcohol (Barnes 343); yet, in view of the metaphorical equation of the armadillo with a wheeling machine, this animal, small as it is, could also stand for a vast universe taking its course mechanically, like a machine, similar to a wound-up Tonka toy. But Lowry gives us an even more graphic image of a mechanized universe, grinding away its inhabitants, when Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh are on their way to the Salon Ofelia. Walking in the baking sun, their shadows "were caught violently for a moment in an elliptical shade, the turning wrenched wheel of a boy's bicycle" (244). This image of a turning wheel, entangling the shadows of Geoffrey and his followers, as well as the many preceding images, are all signs of a
mechanistic universe, grinding at the core of *Under the Volcano*. They converge in chapter VII, "the navel of the book" (Cross 44).

Exemplary of such a mechanistic cosmos—the navel, or more aptly the hub—chapter VII is a compilation of a whole series of machines, each of which could again be regarded as a miniature universe, running like an assembly of cogwheels. As soon as Geoffrey and Laruelle reach the foot of Cortez Palace, for example, they see a group of children "swinging round and round a telegraph pole on an improvised whirligig, a little parody of the Great Carrousel up the hill in the square" (185). This Great Carrousel up the hill is a paradigm well-oiled machinery, located in the Plaza:

The huge carrousel...was thronged by peculiar long-nosed wooden horses mounted on whorled pipes, dipping majestically as they revolved with a slow piston-like circulation....while the uncovered machine driving it hammered away like a steam pump....the pictures on the panels [were] running entirely around the inner wheel that was set horizontally and attached to the top of the central revolving pillar (187).

In addition to these two carrousels, what further evokes this already strong atmosphere of omnipresent mechanization is Geoffrey's glance at another mechanical wonder—the Ferris wheel. Sitting with Laruelle in a cafe, he sees it
as "huge, but resembling an enormously magnified child's structure of girders and angle brackets, nuts and bolts, in Meccano" (190). As if this were not enough, Lowry directs the eyes of his Consul to yet another little carrousel. As the Consul's thoughts upon seeing this carrousel clearly show, Geoffrey seems to subscribe to a peculiar determinism -- a determinism that was absent as a child but is in keeping with the mechanism of that chapter. It will become important later (see chapter IV) when Geoffrey refuses any interference either in relation to his alcoholism, or in relation to world events:

His eyes fell on another little carrousel, a dazzle-painted little child's toy, and he saw himself as a child making up his mind to go on it, hesitating, missing the next opportunity, and the next, missing all the opportunities finally, until it was too late.

What opportunities, precisely, did he mean? (191).

Shortly afterwards, Geoffrey goes on by himself, only to espy the Maquina Infernal, "another, utterly desolated, 'safe' roundabout" (193). In Under the Volcano, this machine has its origin in the play by Jean Cocteau, La Machine Infernale, which Lowry saw twice during his stay in Paris in the spring of 1934. At the beginning of this play, which is an adaptation of the myth of Oedipus, a voice addresses the audience. It quickly relates in broad terms what is about to happen and closes with the following lines:
Watch now, spectator. Before you is a fully wound machine. Slowly its spring will unwind the entire span of a human life. It is one of the most perfect machines devised by the infernal gods for the mathematical annihilation of a mortal (6).

This machine devised by the infernal gods is, of course, the universe itself. It is, as Day puts it "an ingeniously contrived clock-like mechanism in which every part, every minute, has its function in the machine's diabolical purpose" (323). This purpose is the mathematical destruction of a human life, in our case Geoffrey Firmin's.

Geoffrey himself got acquainted with Cocteau's play just minutes before he and Laruelle leave for the Plaza. Sitting in Laruelle's downstairs living room, Geoffrey grabs a paperback book lying on the table, which proves to be La Machine Infernale. Opening it, he reads the famous lines of the Sphinx: "Oui, mon enfant, mon petit enfant,...les choses qui paraissent abominable aux humains, si tu savais, de l'endroit ou j'habite, elles ont peu d'importance" (183). How unimportant life is and how it will be mathematically annihilated, is symbolized by the Maquina Infernal, on which the Consul will embark shortly. His ride has instinctively been anticipated by Geoffrey's half-brother Hugh earlier that day: "It occurred to Hugh that the poor old chap [Geoffrey] might be, finally, helpless, in the grip of
something against which all his remarkable defences could avail him little" (161).

Upon seeing the Maquina Infernal, this huge "looping-the-loop-machine" appears to Geoffrey as "some huge evil spirit, screaming in its lonely hell, its limbs writhing, smiting the air like flails of paddlewheels" (193). He has no intention of embarking on it; but once the children, who followed him earlier in search for a couple of centavos, spot him again, Geoffrey's "penalty for avoiding them was to be drawn inexorably, though with as much dignity as possible, into boarding the monster" (193). Once on board, the Consul is completely at the mercy of the mechanical, rotating monster:

The confession boxes, perched at the end of the menacing steel cranks, zoomed upwards and heavily fell. The Consul's own cage hurled up again with a powerful thrusting, hung for a moment upside down at the top ...crashed down, paused a moment at the other extremity, only to be lifted upwards again cruelly to the highest point....Everything was falling out of his pockets, was being wrested from him, torn away, a fresh article at each whirling, sickening, plunging, retreating, unspeakable circuit...(193/94).

This ride on the Maquina Infernal, which the narrative voice describes as ferocious and brutal, symbolizes Geoffrey's
situation. By surrendering himself to the mechanical progression of this machine, Geoffrey also symbolically surrenders control of his own life to the workings of a mechanical, inhuman universe. In *Under the Volcano*, chapter VII functions as a microcosm of such a universe: the series of machines, each of which could be regarded as an assembly of "wheels within and upon wheels," evoke an aura of relentless mechanization devoid of human control. Since Geoffrey boards one of these great wheels involuntarily—since he boards it against his will, but is drawn by an inscrutable magnetic force—the narrative voice indicates that Geoffrey does not have any real power to decide at that particular moment. Rather, he functions as a small cogwheel about to board mechanically a bigger cogwheel; and this bigger cogwheel, the *Maquina Infernal*, is in turn one of the cogwheels on the Plaza, representing a miniature "celestial machinery" (281). Thus, through his ride on the infernal wheel, Geoffrey enacts his role in the machinery of the universe: he is a small wheel within a big wheel. By the end of this day, this small wheel Geoffrey Firmin will have come to a standstill. The machinery of the universe, by contrast, will be ticking on.

That Geoffrey refers to himself as an Ixion just minutes before he actually embarks on the Infernal Wheel testifies to his identification with a wheel. Speaking to Laruelle,
the Consul suddenly hears a voice in the radio playing the song "Samaritana." In the Consul's mind, this song immediately brings back memories of his war-time activities as commander of the S.S. Samaritan, a British interceptor for German U-boats disguised as a trading vessel. During one of its interceptive missions, the crew of one German submarine was taken prisoner, but later arrived in port without the German officers on board. They were burned alive in the Samaritan's furnaces.

Whether the Consul had actually given orders to burn these German officers remains a mystery all the way through the novel. But, being in command of the vessel, the Consul was court-martialed, and acquitted. Yet, as we are told by Laruelle, Geoffrey in his drunken state later "began proclaiming not only his guilt in the matter but that he'd always suffered horribly on account of it" (31). Consequently, Geoffrey's identification with Ixion comes as no surprise. Just as Ixion's punishment was to be bound to a fiery wheel for having tried to seduce Hera, so the Consul's punishment will be to roll towards the underworld, tied to a wheel. Embracing his downward journey and identifying himself with this mythic figure, Geoffrey says: "Je crois...que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfers" (191). The force driving the Consul's personal wheel to its end is, of course, the machinery of the Universe, represented by the Maquina Infernal.
IV The Mechanised Universe and Determinism

This conception of the universe as a machine is reflected in the philosophies of the main characters. The development of these characters, with the possible exception of Geoffrey, is rather superficial. Lowry seems to have conceived of his characters in an Aristotelian sense. They do not have a life independent of the plot. Rather, they are a function of plot. As Lowry himself put it in his letter to Jonathan Cape: "I have not exactly attempted to draw characters in the normal sense—though s'welp me bob it's only Aristotle who thought character counted least....The character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent" (Breit 60). Thus, despite the elaborate flashbacks and a series of revealing dialogues, the reader cannot fathom the dimensions of the characters. Seen from that point of view, Yvonne's return to Geoffrey after almost a year of absence does not shed a considerable light on her personality. Her return could be interpreted as an attempt to renew her relationship with Geoffrey. By implication, this would mean that she is non-deterministic: that is, she acts on the belief that her return can make a difference. Yet, during her search for Geoffrey in the dark woods surrounding Parian—the final realization of Dante's selva
oscura—she thinks of the universe in terms of a clock-like instrument of precision. This instrument, which Yvonne associates with the Ferris wheel on the market place, is an inscrutable force, beyond human understanding. It bears a striking resemblance to the Ptolemaic cosmology, with its spheres and wheels, yet is grounded in Copernicus' heliocentric system:

    Scorpio setting...Sagittarius, Capricornus; ah, there, here they were,...in their right places, their configurations all at once right, recognised, their pure geometry scintillating, flawless....And the earth itself still turning on its axis and revolving around that sun, the sun revolving around the luminous wheel of this galaxy, the countless unmeasured jewelled wheels of countless unmeasured galaxies, turning...all this, long after she herself was dead, men would still be reading in the sky...would they not, too, still be asking the hopeless eternal question: to what end?

    What force drives this sublime celestial machinery? (281)

Yvonne does not attempt to answer that question. Without her realizing it, however, the fact that she poses such an imponderable question provides a possible answer for her sudden reappearance in Quauhnahuac. Contrary to her belief, it is not her personal will, but probably the force of the celestial machinery she observes and knows to be un-
fathomable, which ultimately brings her back that day. Thus, seen in this light, Yvonne seems to function not so much as a character as as a tiny wheel within the gigantic wheels of the mechanical universe in the novel. Despite her seeming act of free will, her return could actually have been predetermined by the inexplicable machinery of the universe. Contrary to Dante's *Paradiso*, in which the mechanism of the universe is kept in motion by love (see chapter V), in the *Volcano* it is an inscrutable force.

Minutes after her observation, Yvonne faces her death. In part, this death is brought about by the horse which Geoffrey releases just seconds before at the Farolito bar. Excited by the thunder and lightning, it runs into the dark forest and tramples Yvonne to death. Her prophecy in her letters to Geoffrey—"You would only free something else to destroy us both" (320)—fullfills itself. At the same time, she equates this trampling horse, if only for a second, with "a mechanical horse on the merry-go-round, the carrousel..." (293). Thus, in the last seconds of her life, she seems to conceive of her own death as an act of mechanical destruction, which indirectly corroborates her intuitive vision of a mechanical universe.

While Yvonne does not seem to be fully aware of the workings of the mechanical universe, Geoffrey certainly is. All the way through his last day, the Consul appears
extremely lethargic, apathetic, and listless. He does not at all rejoice at the return of his former wife, and that despite the year-long craving desire to have her back: "...come back, come back," his letter says, "I will stop drinking, anything. I am dying without you. For Christ Jesus sake Yvonne come back to me, hear me, it is a cry, come back to me, Yvonne, if only for a day...." (37). And come back—if only for a day—she does. However, rather than attempting to rejuvenate their relationship and making an effort to curtail his drinking, Geoffrey completely ignores Yvonne and even accelerates his drinking. He switches from Tequila and beer to mescal, which Geoffrey himself knows to be lethal for him: "Tequila, no, that is healthful....Just like beer. Good for you. But if I ever start to drink mescal again, I'm afraid, yes, that would be the end" (189). Why does he remain so indifferent?

Apparently, the Consul seems to subscribe to a peculiar kind of determinism. This determinism surfaced for the first time when Geoffrey stared at the miniature carrousel, pondering his non-existent "opportunities" (191). They come to the fore again in his political discussion with Hugh. Sitting together in the Salon Ofelia, Geoffrey advances his Spenglerian determinism, according to which, as Jakobsen puts it, "every event is either a necessary recurrence of an earlier event or symbolically identical with it" (51). By
extension, such a view of history, which permeates the *Volcano*, is essentially mechanical, since world events return with the precision of cogwheels running in the universal clockwork:

Can't you see there's a sort of determinism about the fate of nations? They all seem to get what they deserve in the long run....Not long ago it was poor little defenceless Ethiopia. Before that, poor little defenceless Flanders. To say nothing of course of the poor little defenceless Belgian Congo. And to-morrow it will be poor little defenceless Latvia. Or Finland. Or Piddledeedee. Or even Russia. Read history. Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course? (270).

Naturally, Geoffrey's professed mechanistic view of world history also has implications for his own life. Presumably, he considers his life to be as much determined as that of a nation. Geoffrey never actually says that, but one can infer as much from his quarrel with Hugh. During this quarrel, Geoffrey rejects all interference in the course of his life, just as he blocked out Jacques' recommendations earlier: "You are all the same, all of you, Yvonne, Jacques, you, Hugh, trying to interfere with other people's lives, interfering, interfering--" (273).
How consistently Geoffrey really subscribes to such a rigid quasi-deterministic position on a personal level remains unclear in the *Volcano*. However, given the fact that the intelligent and perceptive Geoffrey is aware of the patterns of his own life, it is not surprising that he adopts such a view. The development of his alcoholism is a case in point. From Jacques Laruelle, who is the only eyewitness of both Geoffrey's boyhood and adulthood, one can assemble the necessary details.

As a little orphan, after the death of his mother in Kashmir and the scandalous disappearance of his father in the Himalayas, the religious Geoffrey was taken into the family of famous English poet Abraham Taskerson. This family was notorious for its drinking. Abraham Taskerson himself, who had lost the only one of his sons with poetic talent, drowned his sorrow every night, "brooding in his study with the door open, drinking hour after hour." He was assisted by his wife, who was "cheerfully drinking everyone...under the table" (18). And Taskerson's sons, none of whom was above school age, were even more of a drinking phenomenon. As Laruelle tells us:

In a mere five-mile walk they would stop at as many 'pubs' and drink a pint or two of powerful beer in each. Even the youngest, who had not turned fifteen, would get through his six pints in an afternoon (18).
Invariably, such an alcoholic milieu was to have a formative impact on the still formative Geoffrey—a fragile child who up to that point in his life was still a total teetotaler. At first, Geoffrey sticks to his habit of not drinking at all. However one night, an incident occurred that made him deviate from his dry path.

When Geoffrey and his boyhood friend Jacques Laruelle were together at the seashore in Leasowe, they "fell into the habit of picking up girls on the promenade" (20), as Laruelle puts it. As these evenings progressed, they usually led these girls into the bunkers of the adjacent golf course—Geoffrey picked the so-called "Hell Bunker"—venturing into their first sexual encounters. These had "an air of innocence" (20).

During one of these nightly romantic interludes, Laruelle and his girl happened to play Peeping Tom on Geoffrey. Mesmerized by the "bizarre scene" from which neither he nor the girl could turn their eyes, they finally started laughing, much to the surprise and embarrassment of Geoffrey. Geoffrey, in turn, for the first time in his life went voluntarily in a bar to order alcohol—an order which, then, was refused. As Jacques thoughts tell us:

It was patently the first time the Consul had ever been in a bar on his own initiative; he ordered Johnny Walkers all round loudly, but the waiter, encountering
the proprietor, refused to serve them and they were
turned out as minors (21).

Why does Geoffrey for the first time in his life enter a
bar out of his own volition—a boy, who up to that point
never even thought of ever touching a bottle of alcohol?
Presumably, this sudden urge to drink whisky—an urge so
strong that Geoffrey must order his drink "all round
loudly"—stems from a profound psychological strain Geoffrey
must have felt when observed in his sphere of intimacy. The
text is not clear whether Jacques and his girlfriend
actually spied him in flagrante; but, in an attempt to
smooth over and psychologically free himself from this
humiliation and constraint, Geoffrey resorts—has to resort
—to the daily excercise of the young Taskersons and the
remedy of old Taskerson: alcohol.

Luckily this time, Geoffrey's age and the strictness of
the proprietor of the bar still prevent him from drowning
his psychological problems in alcohol. But this scene, which
left a scar so deep in Geoffrey's memory that he still
recalls it after twenty-five years (177), definitely im-
planted a seed into Geoffrey's psychological profile. This
seed was eventually to develop into a fixed pattern that
determined Geoffrey's dealings with future psychological
problems. Once driven into a corner through, let's say,
personal or marital problems, Geoffrey Firmin would become
psychologically infirm to the point of having to flood his consciousness. Gradually, this consciousness-obliterating consumption of alcohol developed into a habit and might very well have been the major contributing factor to the breakup of his marriage. Thus, fundamentally, Geoffrey's rather liquid way of dealing with psychologically straining situations all have their root in the incident at "Hell Bunker." This incident, in conjunction with the example-setting behavior of his foster family, determined Geoffrey's alcoholism.

How advanced Geoffrey's alcoholism really is unmistakably comes to the fore during his quarrel with Hugh and Yvonne in the Salon Ofelia. Unable to handle the psychological strain of their tense conversation, the Consul seems to make the decision to keep drinking in the Farolito: "I've been beguiled by your offers of a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise.... But now I've made up my melodramatic little mind, what's left of it, just enough to make up... That far from wanting it, thank you very much, on the contrary, I choose..." (274). Geoffrey's seeming decision, however, is only an illusion. After years of continued conditioning, he can only react--not act--like an automaton. Despite his imagined act of free will, he does not have a choice anymore. He has to keep drinking. Incidentally, the bar in which Geoffrey first asked for alcohol was called
"The Case is Altered." Even though his order was refused then, from that point on the case was indeed altered.

Geoffrey's half-brother Hugh was not raised in and by an alcoholic family. Also, he does not seem to share Geoffrey's determinist attitude. On the contrary, the fact that he wants to help ship a load of dynamite to the Spanish Loyalist forces in an attempt to overthrow the Fascist regime is very noble, even though it is tinged with sentimental heroism and self-aggrandizement (see chapter V). Laruelle aptly calls him a "professional indoor Marxman" (9).

Like Yvonne, Hugh seems to act on the belief that his contribution to world affairs can make a difference. However, influenced by Geoffrey's gloomy outlook on world history, even Hugh has moments in which his idealism is undermined by a certain determinism. Thinking of his mission to Spain, he reflects:

And it had to be admitted, one was not altogether averse to this, if it had not prevented the Consul from still hinting uncomfortably close to the truth, that the whole stupid beauty of such a decision made by anyone at the time like this, must lie in that it was so futile, that it was too late, that the Loyalists had already lost... (134).
Thus, Hugh, Geoffrey, and Yvonne all fundamentally share a deterministic outlook on life. Admittedly, the degree to which this determinism comes to the fore varies. Yvonne even remains unaware of it, but it certainly sets the philosophical framework of the novel. It is a framework which could be seen as a philosophical correlative to a mechanistic universe. In the Volcano, the absence of love is a second such characteristic. It will be the subject of chapter V.
V The Mechanized Universe and the Absence of Love

Naturally, such a mechanized universe has reverberating consequences for the relationships between the main characters: They have all lost the ability to love—a loss which is delicately counterpointed by the leitmotif painted in golden letters over the entrance of Laruelle's tower, "No se puede vivir sin amar" (183). It resonates throughout the Volcano. The only figures within the novel who still seem to be endowed with that supreme of all abilities possibly are Dr. Vigil and the children at the fair.

Dr. Vigil, whose name echoes Dante's guide through Hell, is a friend to the Consul and a specialist on childhood illnesses and nervous indispositions. Though he is of only peripheral importance, he seems to be the only character who is seriously interested in the spiritual well-being of the Consul without ulterior motives. Meeting the Consul in his dilapidated Eden, he utters his most succinct diagnosis with the warm Hispano-English syntax and grammar that characterizes his speech: "I think, mi amigo, sickness is not only in body but in that part used to be call: soul" (127). This succinct but perceptive diagnosis goes right to the root of Geoffrey's problem. Vigil realizes what Geoffrey
ultimately lacks in order to regain his spiritual balance: a well-balanced relationship with his former wife Yvonne.

Nor surprisingly, rather than trying to solve Geoffrey's problem solely with conventional medical methods, Vigil resorts to his deeply ingrained and well-meaning Catholicism. Walking Geoffrey home from the Red Cross ball, he leads him into a small church in Quauhnahuac in an effort to enable Geoffrey to pray to the Holy Mary. As he says to the Consul: "She is the Virgin for those who have nobody with" (251), thus expressing not only his diagnosis, but also hinting at the Consul's separation from Yvonne. And additionally, upon the actual return of Yvonne the next day, Dr. Vigil is quick to suggest an extended trip to Guanajuato so as to foster the possibility of a rejuvenation of their relationship; but the Consul declines, even though Vigil calls him later that day, urging him to change his mind (181).

In addition to Dr. Vigil, the children at the fair could be regarded as a second pillar of unconditional and unadulterated love. Even Geoffrey becomes aware of their natural good-heartedness. Stumbling out of the Maquina Infernal, the children who asked Geoffrey for money earlier realize his condition and restore his belongings back to him:
Children, he thought, how charming they were at heart. The very same kids who had besieged [sic] him for money, had now brought him back even the smallest of his small change and then, touched by his embarrassment, had scurried away without waiting for a reward. Now he wished he had given them something (195).

With the exception of these children and Dr. Vigil, however, all of the major characters lead a life which is in keeping with the mechanized universe of the novel—a life characterized by the absence of love. Hugh is a case in point. At first sight, he comes across as an enthusiastic journalist, guitar-toting songwriter, and dyed-in-the-wool idealist, acting in the interests of anybody but himself: He tries to cure his half-brother Geoffrey from his dipsomania by administering a strychnine compound to him; he seems willing to risk his life in an effort to smuggle weapons to the Spanish loyalists fighting the Battle of the Ebro; and he is an opponent of the proliferating antisemitism in Mexico and Europe. However, all his professed idealism is not the result of uncalculating love for his fellow human beings, but deeply rooted in a tremendous sense of guilt, stemming from various sources: not only is he the only one of his Cambridge friends not to participate directly in the Spanish Civil War, but he was at one time a staunch anti-semite and at the same time a destroyer of several marriages.
The first relationship which Hugh destroys, at least temporarily, is that of Lazarus Bolowski, a Jewish publisher in London. This publisher was to print some of Hugh's songs, which he had written as a teenage prodigy. Embarrassed that Bolowski did not make an effort to distribute these songs, however, "a form of private anti-semitism became part of his [Hugh's] life" (150), to the effect that he seduced Bolowski's wife. Bolowski, on his part, was so shocked by this betrayal that he at first filed suit for divorce and named Hugh as co-respondent, but later forgave him and his own wife miraculously.

Had the trial taken place, Hugh would have run the risk of being discharged from Cambridge and thus have jeopardized the career-options of his life. But Bolowski's unexpected act of grace—possibly out of true love for his wife—permitted Hugh to stay in Cambridge and subsequently caused him to radically change his attitude. Casting aside his former resolute position as an anti-semite, and avoiding college functions, he now became a staunch supporter of the Zionist movement. He even founded a band, which consisted largely of Jewish musicians. But rather than respecting the pledge of marriage and leaving married women (especially Jewish) alone, he committed adultery a second time. As Hugh's thoughts tell us, "The beautiful Jewish wife of a visiting American lecturer became my mistress" (155).
Hugh's repeated interference in marriages culminates in his third affair with a married woman: Yvonne, the wife of his half-brother Geoffrey. In the Volcano, this brief affair is never clearly made explicit, but is alluded to many times. When Yvonne and Geoffrey look at their former garden, for example, both fear the moment of Hugh's return from Mexico City, from where he sent a telegram to the London Globe, the newspaper he is working for. As Geoffrey's thoughts tell us: "Yvonne, it was clear to him, dreaded the approaching scene as much as he, and now felt under some compulsion to go on talking about anything until the perfect inappropriate moment arrived..." (66).

This affair between Yvonne and Hugh had a detrimental impact on the marriage of Geoffrey and Yvonne. Their marriage, to be sure, had been crumbling long before Hugh's "intervention," presumably because of Geoffrey's increasing dipsomania. But it almost seems as if Hugh's adultery with Yvonne had brought about the final collapse of their marriage. Geoffrey does not quite say this, but one can infer as much from one of his imaginary, confessional talks to Hugh: "Why do I say this? - It is in part that you should see that I also recognize how close Yvonne and I had already been brought to disaster before your meeting" (69).

Even though Hugh does not really know that Geoffrey and Yvonne are divorced, he realizes the devastating effect of
this affair on Geoffrey. Ever since the breakup of the two, the Consul has become even more of a physical and apparently mental wreck, both a result of his increased drinking problem. And Hugh, justly assuming partial responsibility for Geoffrey's alcoholism, tries to ameliorate his half-brother's situation by administering a strychnine compound, designed slowly but surely to wean his half-brother from the bottle. More importantly, the long-term effects of his affairs also seem to dawn on him. Analyzing his own situation in a rare moment of epiphanic sincerity without self-deception, Hugh arrives at what must for him be a frustrating verdict: "Or myself with the thing destined to be some kind of incurable 'love-object,'... interested only in married women... incapable finally of love altogether... Bloody little man" (157). Thus, realizing his wretched condition, Hugh implicitly concedes that all his "relationships" were not—could not be—powered by genuine love, but purely by sexual desires, usually at the expense of a particular marriage. This destructive impulse culminated in his affair with his half-brother's wife, Yvonne—an affair that amounts to the betrayal of brotherhood. It is so treacherous even to Hugh that he sees himself in the role of Judas (97/107). Geoffrey's repeated biblical insinuation to his half-brother—"Hi there, Hugh, you old snake in the grass" (124)—is a continuous reminder of his destructive role.
Similarly Yvonne, who once was married happily with Geoffrey, seems to have lost the ability to love. At first sight, this may not necessarily appear to be so. Textual evidence, revealing Yvonne's willingness to venture a new start, is ample. The fact that she comes back to Geoffrey out of her own volition after almost a year could be interpreted as a sincere attempt on her part to rejuvenate her marriage with her divorced husband. In addition, her repeated suggestion to Geoffrey to move to Canada, as well as her passionate love letters to him seem to be signs of her willingness: "I have put aside all my pride to beg your forgiveness, to offer you mine... My thighs ache to embrace you. The emptiness of my body is the famished need of you... I am in your hands now" (319). Yet, a closer look at her immediate past and at her behavior during the last day of her life unmistakably question the sincerity of her efforts.

In her immediate past, Yvonne has committed adultery several times, once with Hugh, her husband's half-brother, and once with Jacques Laruelle, the French film director and boyhood acquaintance of Geoffrey. Similar to her affair with Hugh, Yvonne's adultery with Laruelle is left in the dark; but once again one can infer the necessary information. As soon as Geoffrey and Yvonne walk past Laruelle's twin-tower house on their way back from a cantina, for example, Yvonne realizes that this house is still there, despite her psychological repression:
What she could not have explained was that recently in her picture of Quauhnahuac this house hadn't been there at all!...it was as if the house had never existed, just as in the mind of a murderer, it may happen, some prominent landmark in the vicinity of his crime becomes obliterated, so that on returning to the neighborhood, once so familiar, he scarcely knows where to turn (51).

This first inkling of her uneasiness at the site of her second betrayal is further corroborated in chapter VII, when Yvonne, Geoffrey, Hugh, and Laruelle enter Laruelle's house to have a drink. Anxious to leave, Yvonne suggests to Geoffrey to "make some excuse and get away as quickly as possible" (172); but Geoffrey, savoring the torment of his former wife, remains oblivious to her plea. Instead, he walks into another of Laruelle's rooms, leaving Yvonne on the porch, thinking, "Was it here he had been betrayed? This very room, perhaps, had been filled with her cries of love" (174). And the narrative voice, as if to lend a sincere-ironic touch to the scene, describes Laruelle's twin-tower house in clearly phallic terms:

There were two towers....On the battlements of the miradors...two bilious-looking angels carved out of pink stone, knelt facing one another in profile...while behind, upon corresponding merlons...sat solemnly two nameless objects like marzipan cannonballs...(170).
Unlike her adultery with Laruelle, however, Yvonne does not seem to regret the side-step with Hugh. It almost seems as if the passion she formerly felt for Geoffrey's half-brother is about to be rekindled, and that at a time when her former husband needed her true love most. "Even in moments of distress about the Consul," as Edmonds puts it, "she is aware of Hugh's capabilities as a past lover and his possibilities as a present or future lover" (72).

After almost a year of absence from her husband, for example—an apparently tormented absence on both sides—Yvonne agrees to go for a walk with Hugh. This she does immediately after she first sees him, rather than staying in the vicinity of the sleeping Geoffrey. Responding to Hugh's inquiry—"Let's get the hell out of it [the garden] ....Unless you are too tired for a walk" (86)—Yvonne's "conscience" does not seem to be in agreement with her action, but her urges are stronger, as the following passage clearly reveals:

Yvonne glanced hastily around as if fearful Geoff might come catapulting out of the window, bed and all, unless he was on the porch, and hesitated. "Not a bit," she said brightly, warmly. "Let's do..." She started down the path before him. "What are we waiting for? "(86).

Later in the day, after having left Laruelle's tower, Yvonne and Hugh prowl around on the plaza. What Yvonne and
Hugh then do on their own, believing themselves to have temporarily escaped Geoffrey's supervision a second time, never clearly comes to the surface. Yet, when Geoffrey follows the two a short while later, through his eyes one gets the impression that they enjoy one another. Apparently, Yvonne's desire to rescue her broken marriage to Geoffrey grows more and more dim:

He had caught sight of Hugh and Yvonne...at the booth; she was buying a tortilla from an old woman....They were having a splendid time, it was obvious. They ate their tortillas, grinning at each other as the sauce dripped from their fingers; now Hugh had brought out his handkerchief; he was wiping a smear from Yvonne's cheek, while they roared with laughter...(196).

How dim Yvonne's desire to rescue her marriage really is becomes apparent in chapter XI. In this chapter, both she and Hugh make "efforts" to locate the Consul who has run away from the Salon Ofelia. These efforts, as it turns out, are not only half-hearted and largely ineffective, but seem at the same time to be designed only to soothe their "conscience" and their sense of duty. These efforts are not acts of love. Even though Yvonne protests to Hugh that she cannot leave the Consul--"You know perfectly well I won't just run away and abandon him" (276)--her actions prove the contrary. They know that by now the Consul is a man out of
control, oozing alcohol from every pore. Consequently, the proper action to take would be to find him immediately and bring him back to Quauhnahuac, possibly even with force. But rather than putting their energy into quickly finding him, they indulge in what amounts to a leisurely walk through the dark forests of Parian and a tour through several cantinas.

The first cantina they stop by is the El Petate. Instead of quickly inquiring about Geoffrey’s whereabouts and then leaving, however, they take what seems to be a break. Hugh has a drink with the customers and is observed by the adoring Yvonne—"how like a man, oh God!"—who meanwhile releases a small eagle from a cage. When they finally leave, Hugh takes Yvonne’s arm and asks her whether she remembers the armadillo they saw that morning during their morning ride. "I haven't forgotten, anything!" (280) she answers—an answer that carries the baggage of joint memories.

Their second rest-stop is at the Hotel y Restaurant El Popo. From the barman and the assistant manager, they find out immediately that Geoffrey did not pass by there either, and it dawns on Yvonne that Geoffrey most probably "was in the Farolito" (283). But what do they do? They do not leave and rush to the Farolito bar, but instead drink the two beers Hugh has ordered, chatting romantically about their
joint adventure that morning, "the woolly dog and the foals that came with us and the river with those swift birds overhead--" (284). Then, while Yvonne orders mescal, Hugh buys a guitar and has another tequila with the guitar salesmen before they proceed to read a creased menu with Geoffrey's old handwriting on it. Having deciphered the remnants of Geoffrey's poem on that menu, they finally leave for the Farolito.

These "efforts" on the part of Yvonne and Hugh, elaborate as they may be, reflect neither care nor love for the intoxicated Consul. Rather, they constitute attempts to prolong their togetherness. Thus fundamentally, Yvonne's procrastinated search for her former husband is not an act of love but—if anything—an opportunity to indulge in romantic reveries with Hugh. What is true of Hugh is, at bottom, also true of Yvonne. She seems to have lost the ability to love, even though her marriage with Geoffrey had, at one point, "not been without triumph" (176).

This triumph has long been obliterated by Yvonne's adulterous affairs with Laruelle and Hugh. They stick irrevocably in the Consul's mind. Walking in one of Laruelle's upstairs rooms, the Consul painfully reflects on the adultery of Yvonne with Laruelle: "Was it here he had been betrayed? This very room, perhaps, had been filled with her cries of love" (174). Minutes earlier, when
Laruelle joins the group, Geoffrey ironically brings all the adulterers together. Speaking to Hugh, Geoffrey suggests, "But I really think you two ought to get together, you have something in common" (167)—a direct reference to their respective affairs with Yvonne.

This understandable bitterness and jealousy of Geoffrey has been boiling under the surface all day long. It comes to an eruption in the Salon Ofelia after the political altercation between him and Hugh. Discussing in a rather agitated manner, Geoffrey shifts the focus from politics to relationships. Addressing both Yvonne and Hugh, he vents all his jealousy and bitterness, which has been building up as a result of his experience over the years and particularly his observations that day:

Of course, I see the romantic predicament you two are in. But even if Hugh makes the most of it again it won't be long...before he realises he's only one of the hundred or so other ninneyhammers with gills like codfish and veins like racehorses—prime as goats all of them, hot as monkeys, salt as wolves in pride (273).

Despite these accusations, which are aimed indiscriminately at Yvonne, Hugh, and, by extension, Jacques, Geoffrey makes a difference in his treatment of the three. Laruelle seems to be a very good friend of his even to this very day, as Geoffrey's remark to Yvonne testifies: "In fact
we've [Jacques and Geoff] had terrific times together. We've been slap through everything from Bishop Berkeley to the four o'clock mirabilis jalapa" (52).

Similarly, notwithstanding Hugh's affair with his wife, the Consul still seems to love both of them. But, contrary to Hugh, whose brotherly betrayal he can sometimes pardon, he cannot forgive Yvonne. This inability to forgive her appears for the first time in one of his imaginary speeches to Hugh: "Clear that I forgive you, as somehow I have never wholly been able to forgive Yvonne, and that I can still love you as a brother and respect you as a man" (69). Apparently, Yvonne has irreversibly violated the sanctity of marriage—a violation which for Geoffrey is unpardonable.

Geoffrey's radical inability to forgive Yvonne becomes even more clear a second time in Laruelle's house, when Yvonne talks to Geoffrey about the possible rejuvenation of their marriage. Geoffrey, however, treats her with benign neglect, until finally his speech and his hallucinations start to merge: "'I do love you. Only--' 'I can never forgive you deeply enough': was that what was in his mind to add?" Geoffrey, in fact, reverses his supposed love for his former wife immediately after he has professed it: "It was hard to forgive, hard, hard to forgive. Harder still, not to say how hard it was, I hate you" (173). Consequently, even though Geoffrey wants to talk Yvonne into believing that he
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still loves her, at bottom he does not. Seen from that angle, his inability to forgive comes as no surprise. It is a direct emanation of his inability to love.

How fundamentally unable to love and forgive Geoffrey really is is delicately epitomized in his temporary impotence. Trying to make love with Yvonne, he starts a promising foreplay—"He was where he was...never ceasing the one-fingered introduction to the unclassifiable composition that might still just follow"—but is finally unable to penetrate her. As he remarks laconically: "Sorry, it isn't any good I'm afraid" (80). Towards the end of the day, however, Geoffrey's sexual powers seem to be completely intact. Sitting in the Farolito bar, he is approached by a prostitute called Maria, trying to seduce him. When Geoffrey finally surrenders, he penetrates her with his "burning boiled crucified evil organ" (305), as he himself puts it. How can such a difference in "performance" be explained?

Obviously Geoffrey, who had "attended a strict Wesleyan school" (18), attaches a certain symbolic significance to the act of physical union. For him, this act seems to be the outward expression of genuine love between married partners—an act the sanctity of which has been violated by Yvonne repeatedly. For Geoffrey, these violations are so severe that he finds himself unable to love emotionally Yvonne anymore. Therefore, his impotence when trying to
sleep with Yvonne comes as no surprise. Lacking any deeply shared emotional basis, his attempt is doomed to failure.

With the prostitute Maria, the Consul uses a different moral yardstick. Being a man completely soaked with alcohol who now really "has nobody with," he willingly surrenders to the seductive spiel of the prostitute Maria. She is the living inversion of his puritanic ideal—"the Virgin for those who have nobody with"—to which he prayed the day before. Since Maria offers herself, his prayer to the Holy Mary has ironically been heard. Now, Geoffrey "has somebody with." However, rather than seeing sexual intercourse as a physical correlative to a happy marriage, the Consul now uses this act to seal his pact with his inner demonic forces. Contracting syphilis, and thus symbolically giving away his life to these forces, the Consul gains a certain vitality:

His mind was clear. Physically he seemed better too.
It was as if, out of an ultimate contamination he had derived some strength. He felt free to devour what remained of his life in peace (309)\(^8\).

Thus, in violating his own moral standards, the Consul desecrates the act of physical union. It is not an act of love anymore, but a profane act devoid of its emotional correlative. Profaning this act, he profanes himself, thus symbolically conceding his inability to love emotionally.
What is true of Hugh and Yvonne, who violated the sanctity of sexual intercourse earlier, is also true of Geoffrey. Despite his physical closeness to the two, he lives in emotional isolation. This emotional isolation permits communication on a surface level only. What is impossible is the communication of existential feelings. This incommunicability, together with the determinism of the characters, is a second correlative to the mechanical universe.
VI The Mathematical Destruction of The Consul

Under the Volcano is permeated with unbelievable coincidences. These coincidences extend far beyond the actual narrative, although most of them are of direct relevance to the events happening on 2 November, 1938— the Day of the Dead, and the day of the novel. While most of these coincidences are relatively unconnected, two series of coincidences in Under the Volcano converge towards one end: the death of the Consul (and Yvonne). The convergence of these unbelievable series of coincidences and their joint teleology give rise to the assumption that Geoffrey's death is not pure happenstance, but the result of a mechanized universe, this intricate and precise machinery devised by the infernal gods. Symbolically, Geoffrey's "Ausgeliefert-sein" (being delivered to the mercy of) to such a universe has been prefigured in his ride on the Maquina Infernal in chapter VII (see above, III). This Maquina Infernal, a big rotating roundabout, constitutes one of the many cogwheels comprising the mechanistic universe. At the same time, this
Maquina Infernal could also stand for the whole mechanized universe, represented in chapter VII. This mechanical universe will crush Geoffrey.

The arrival of Yvonne's postcard on the Day of the Dead is a perfect example of one of the relatively unconnected coincidences in the novel. Geoffrey requested this postcard from Yvonne in his unposted letter, written after her departure from Quauhnahuac in December 1937. In this letter, Geoffrey complains that he did not receive Yvonne's mail in time, mail which could possibly have salvaged their marriage: "And if you'd only written me right away also, it might have been different—sent me a postcard even....But you waited too long—or so it seems now..." (35).

Yvonne, on her part, had written a postcard to Geoffrey shortly after her departure from Quauhnahuac. In this postcard, she expressed her regrets about their separation and her willingness to rejuvenate their marriage: "Darling, why did I leave? Why did you let me? Expect to arrive in the U.S. to-morrow, California two days later. Hope to find a word from you there waiting. Love. Y" (169). Thus, without ever having received Geoffrey's whimpering letter—a letter that was never posted anyway—Yvonne had indeed written the requested postcard. According to Geoffrey, this postcard, had he received it in time, could have possible reversed their situation. This in itself is a stunning coincidence.
Even more coincidental is the actual arrival of the postcard in Quauhnahuac. It arrives after an almost year-long odyssey through various post-offices all over the world. About a year earlier, Yvonne, probably in ignorance about her then-husband's exact whereabouts, had addressed it to Wells Fargo in Mexico City. Upon receiving this postcard from the cartero on their way down to the plaza, the Consul passes it on to Hugh, whose observations give us an idea about the card's peculiar meanderings through international postal channels:

...originally addressed to Wells Fargo in Mexico City, it had been forwarded by some error abroad, gone badly astray in fact, for it was date-stamped from Paris, Gibraltar, and even Algeciras, in fascist Spain (169).

Ironically, it arrives on the last day of both sender and receiver—on the day when both Geoffrey and Yvonne are together for the first time since their separation. That day, they are heading not towards rejuvenation, but—unknowingly—towards death. Seen in this light, the arrival of Yvonne's postcard, which was intended as a first token of marital rejuvenation, is a haphazard and ironic comment on the actual state of their irrevocably deteriorated relationship.

Jacques Laruelle's presence in Quauhnahuac is an even more striking coincidence. From his ruminations in chapter
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I, we know that Jacques got to know Geoffrey Firmin in Courseulles, Normandy, where he used to spend his summer vacations with his father. In the summer of 1911, this little village on the English Channel was also visited by the family of English poet Abraham Taskerson, who brought along with them the young and fragile Anglo-Indian orphan Geoffrey Firmin. Upon seeing Geoffrey, Jacques, who was about the same age, "had felt oddly attracted to him" (17), as he himself put it; and since the Taskerson boys were of a tougher breed than the little Geoffrey, he was forced to adopt an outsider position, thus preparing the way for frequent meetings between Jacques and Geoffrey.

During this stay in Courseulles, Laruelle's mother developed a great liking for Geoffrey, the exotic playmate of her son, as did Geoffrey's foster mother for the French boy. The upshot of all this exchange of sympathy was that "Jacques was asked to spend September in England with the Taskersons, where Geoffrey would be staying till the commencement of his school term" (17).

September passed, but the budding friendship between Jacques and Geoffrey did not come to fruition. The previously discussed incidents of "Hell Bunker" at the golf course and at the bar "The Case is Altered" blemished the friendship of the two boys. It did not, as Jacques recalls, "for some reason survive these two sad, though doubtless
providential, little frustrations" (21). After the vacation in England and a "dreary melancholy parting at Liverpool," Jacques left for France, thus losing sight of Geoffrey.

This initial meeting of Jacques and Geoffrey in a small village on the English Channel, prolonged for a month in England in the summer of 1911, is in itself sheerly coincidental. More coincidental still is that twenty-five years later, in a different country on a different continent, Jacques was to meet Geoffrey a second time, was to have him as a neighbor, in fact. Reminiscing on the death of Geoffrey exactly a year previously during his walk along the barranca, Jacques himself is baffled by such a coincidence and groping for an answer. As his thoughts show, even Jacques thinks of this coincidence as a well-calculated strategem of the gods:

Had his discovery of the Consul here in Quauhnahuac really been so extraordinary, the discovery that his old English playmate...whom he hadn't seen for nearly a quarter of a century was actually living in his street...? Probably not; probably it was just one of those meaningless correspondences that might be labelled: 'favorite trick of the gods' (16).

During the actual happenings a year earlier, Geoffrey explains Jacques Laruelle's presence differently. Reflecting on his influence on Laruelle's life—an all-pervading
influence despite their brief friendship—the delirious Geoffrey ponders the possibility of having exercised a magnetic attraction on his former friend: "Why had Jacques come to Quauhnahuac in the first place? Was it not much as though he, the Consul, from afar, had willed it, for obscure purposes of his own?" (184). A definite answer to that question is, of course, non-existent.

While the above coincidences were in themselves relatively unconnected, two whole series of coincidences converge in the last chapter of Under the Volcano. In this complex and multi-layered last chapter, Geoffrey after having escaped Yvonne and Hugh, finally finds refuge in the Farolito bar in Parian—the bar after which he has been hankering all day. It is six o'clock at night. Usually, as Geoffrey's thoughts tell us, this bar does "not open till four o'clock in the morning. But today being the holiday of the Dead it would not close" (175). Thus, only the coincidence of it being a holiday today enables Geoffrey to go have a drink in the Farolito, "the lighthouse," at that hour.

Coincidentally, this bar also happens to be the headquarters of the Union Militar, the underground fascist police of Mexico. Several policeman of this Union Militar had robbed a money carrier on horseback earlier that day, the money carrier who they subsequently left dying on the
street and whom Geoffrey had encountered several times previously. Outside the Farolito, tied to a small tree, Geoffrey notices that horse with its peculiar characteristics again:

He could mistake by now neither the number seven branded on the rump nor the leather saddle....It was the Indian's horse, the horse of the man he'd first seen to-day riding it singing into the sunlit world, then abandoned, left dying by the roadside (309).

Scrupulating the horse more closely, Geoffrey suddenly realizes that the money-carrying saddlebags, which had been missing when he had come to the site of the crime, "had been mysteriously restored." And now, those saddlebags were apparently empty, because "just as mysteriously those saddlebags no longer chinked" (310). Patting the cropping animal, it suddenly dawns on the Consul that the robbery of the Indian on horse-back was a carefully planned crime by the Union Militar.

Just at that moment, a sergeant of police approaches the Consul. Having observed how Geoffrey patted the grazing animal, he shoves him back into the bar. Inside the bar, the policeman accuses Geoffrey of not paying for the services he received, such as the "Mexican whisky" and "Mexican girl." And now, in addition to Geoffrey's alleged unwillingness to pay, it even seems to the sergeant as if Geoffrey wants to
steal his horse: "You no have money, hey, and now you steal my horse" (311).

These allegations by the policeman culminate in his extended speculations which, in turn, lead to accusation and finally execution. Since he believes Geoffrey to be a destitute thief, he extends his suspicions, surmising that he might be a Spanish loyalist, fighting for the Communist forces. The kernel of this idea the policeman deduced from a conversation with Diosdado (the barkeeper with the symbolic name, "the Godgiven"). Just a few minutes earlier, this Diosdado had indeed given Geoffrey a gift of the gods, the fat package of Yvonne's old letters. These letters, as will became apparent shortly, are a godsend, not of the heavenly gods, but of the infernal ones who devised the machinery. Presumably, Geoffrey had forgotten these letters in the Farolito during one of his nightly drinking tours. Today, after having thought of them repeatedly (80), they resurface. Coincidence converges again.

Upon receiving these letters, the Consul immediately falls back into reveries. He does not even touch a drink. Instead, he begins "to trace sideways in spilled liquor a little map on the bar" (300), while being observed by the interested Diosdado. This little drawing is a map of Spain and induces the Consul to relate in detail where he and Yvonne met for the first time. In addition, Geoffrey gives
Diosdado a detailed explanation of the geography of Spain, not realizing that the fascist barkeeper of the fascist bar gets more and more suspicious. Hence, it is very circumstantial, yet plausible, that the policeman suspects Geoffrey of being a Spanish rebel: "You make a map of the Spain? You Bolsheviki prick? You member of the Brigade Internationale and stir up trouble?" (312).

Seconds later, another policeman, the Chief of Municipality, joins his colleague, who turns out to be the Chief of Rostrums. They ask Geoffrey for his "names," to which Geoffrey replies, "Blackstone....William Blackstone" (313). This answer comes as no surprise. All through the Volcano, Geoffrey had felt a certain congeniality with this 17th century English recluse, (a puritan settler in Massachusetts who disappeared from his community to live with the Indians). Now, in his completely borracho state, Geoffrey imagines himself to be the incarnation of his idol.

The Consul mixes up his personality even further. Sensing the danger to which the Consul is exposed, or pretending to do so, the dwarfish-dubious pimp declares his supposed allegiance to the Consul and encourages him to declare his Englishness: "My friend of England Man! My for Mexican all! American no good for me no. American no good for Mexican" (321). But Geoffrey, aggravated by the insistence of the little gnome, falsely asserts Americanness: "I happen to be
American, and I'm getting rather bored by your insults" (322). Thus, by giving a wrong name and by adopting a different nationality, Geoffrey obfuscates his identity completely. Consequently, it is not surprising that the fascist police-officers become even more distrustful.

Suddenly, as if to search for a piece of identification, the Chief of Rostrums "plunged his hand into the Consul's pockets" (322). This he does at a nod from his superior, the Chief of Gardens. But he does not find Geoffrey's passport, the document which could have demonstrated his true identity beyond the shadow of a doubt, and thus potentially have defused the already life-threatening situation. Instead, they find evidence of a different sort: the Consul's notecase, Yvonne's letters, and—more importantly—"another paper, and a card he [the Consul] didn't know he possessed" (322). This "paper" is the telegram, which Hugh had sent from Mexico City earlier that day and a political membership card, also belonging to Hugh. Both these pieces of evidence completely discredit the Consul's assertions and simultaneously corroborate the Chiefs' suspicions surrounding him. Hugh's telegram—written in a cryptic journalistic style, and thus difficult to understand for the Mexicanos with their fragmentary knowledge of the English language—has great potential for misinterpretation. Since it was found in the Consul's jacket pocket, they assume that the
telegram was written without a doubt by Geoffrey himself; and its contents unmistakably makes Geoffrey appear to be a germanophobe Jewish journalist with a wrong name. Geoffrey's assertion, "True, vero, I'm a writer, an escritor, only on economic matters" (323), is given no credence:

Daily... Londres Presses. Collect antisemitic campaign mexpress propetition... textile manufacture's unquote ... German behind... interiorwards...news....jews... country belief...power ends conscience... unquote stop Firmin (322).

For the three police officers of the Union Militar, pro-German and anti-semitic fascists themselves, this cable must have been the most perfect confirmation of their initial suspicions. Together with the political membership card--"Federacion Anarquista Iberica. Sr. Hugo Firmin"--and his earlier drawing of a map of Spain, these pieces of evidence do not leave a doubt concerning Geoffrey's function in Mexico, and particularly in the fascist bastion, the Farolito: He is mistaken for a Jewish spy, an "antichrista prik," presumably with connections to the anti-fascist Loyalist Spanish forces. As the Chief of Rostrums puts it, announcing Geoffrey's impending death: "You are no a de wrider, you are de espider, and we shoota de espiders in Mexico....You a Jew chingao." (324).
The fact that the Farolito is open today during the daytime; the reappearance of the horse and Geoffrey's tampering with it; the sudden reappearance of Yvonne's letters; and the little alcohol drawing of Geoffrey's map of Spain, which is misinterpreted by the fascist barkeeper, are all very coincidental. Converging in chapter XII, these coincidences contribute to Geoffrey's mistaken identity. Yet, they are not "real evidence" of Geoffrey's identity and function. They only provide the policemen with material for suspicions and speculations. In themselves, these coincidences are not sufficient justification for mistakenly killing him. They do not seal his doom. What really seals Geoffrey's doom are his failures to produce his passport, the political membership card, and the telegram, both of which are actually in the pocket of his jacket. How this membership card and this telegram got into this pocket, and how Geoffrey's passport got out of this pocket, is the result of an even more striking series of coincidences:

Ever since Yvonne's departure in December of 1937, Geoffrey had been living by himself in Quauhnahuac. Then, almost one whole year later, approximately a week before the actual day of the Dead on 2 November 1938, Hugh suddenly showed up at the Consul's house. His dress, according to Geoffrey, consisted of "a distinctly unpukka outfit, looking like Hoot S. Hart Riders to the Purple Sage" (54).
Apparently, as the Consul further tells Yvonne, Hugh had been to the United States for an unknown reason and had intended to cross the border to Mexico. Once at the border, he had willingly left his clothes behind: "He'd lost his clothes en route, but it wasn't carelessness...only they wanted to make him pay higher duty at the border than they were worth, so quite naturally he left them behind" (54).

Consequently, as Hugh had done many times before, he had to rely on his step-brother's helpfulness to provide him with decent attire (68). On the morning of the day of the Dead, Hugh went to Mexico City by bus, wearing one of Geoffrey's jackets. Once there, he sent a telegram to the newspaper headquarters for which he was working at that time, the London Globe. This telegram, as he tells Yvonne in his cool tone, was about the "Confederation of Mexican Workers [who] have sent a petition. They object to certain Teutonic huggermugger in this state. As I see it, they are right to object" (85).

After having dispatched that telegram, Hugh, as he himself puts it, even "meant to buy some new ones [clothes] in the City but somehow never got around to it" (84). Thus, coming back from Mexico City without an outfit of his own, he still was forced to wear Geoffrey's attire and use other of his belongings. Walking up the driveway of Geoffrey's house, he still had "his brother's jacket balanced on his
shoulder, [and] one arm thrust almost to the elbow through the twin handles of his brother's small gladstone bag..." (83).

Upon walking up Geoffrey's driveway, Hugh re-reads the final telegram dispatch, which he is holding in his hand. As soon as he sees Yvonne, however, he is so stunned that—when trying to play the old cavalier again—he hands her the cable along with a flower pot. After having explained what the telegram is all about, Yvonne hands the cable back to Hugh, who "slipped it into the pocket of the jacket" (84).

Standing in the cool shade, Hugh climbs into the jacket of his brother and goes on to explain that this "is the last cable I send the Globe". The reason for it being his last telegram to his newspaper is that he actually is not on duty as a journalist any more. Still in the United States, he had written to the Globe, telling them of his resignation but, as he him himself says, "they hadn't replied..." (85).

A short while later, Hugh takes the jacket off again and leaves it on the porch of Geoffrey's house. Coming back from his ride with Yvonne, they—Geoffrey, Yvonne, and Hugh—decide to go see a bullthrowing competition in nearby Tomalin, an occasion for which they dress up somewhat. After getting dressed himself, most probably using some of his brother's clothes again, Hugh shaves the shakes-ridden Consul and helps him get his clothes together:
Finally the Consul was ready....Wearing a freshly pressed shirt and a pair of tweed trousers with the jacket to them Hugh had borrowed and now brought in from the porch, he [the Consul] stood gazing at himself in the mirror (161).

In this matching outfit, the Consul will go to the fair and ride on the Maquina Infernal. Hugh's anti-fascist telegram, which he slipped into the pocket of the jacket, is still in this pocket, and so--presumably--is his political membership card, the origins of which are never explained. The reader knows only that Hugh was in Spain, covering the ongoing Civil War (90). Maybe, in order to cover front-line news from the Loyalist-communist side, Hugh joined the Federacion Anarquista Iberica which, as a sort of secret pass to the front, might have required such a card. Hugh's armchair marxist propensity in the novel would endorse such an assumption. It is an item which is part of this convergence of coincidences but whose origin is beyond our certain knowledge.

Had Hugh worn a different jacket of his brother's wardrobe when dispatching the telegram in Mexico City, Geoffrey would not unknowingly be carrying around what amounts to his own death warrant. Had Hugh not been so baffled at the unexpected sight of Yvonne, he probably would not have handed his telegram to her emptytheadedly and, upon
receiving it, not slipped it into the jacket's pocket; or, if so, he might have taken it out when bringing it to Geoffrey from the porch.

Had Hugh managed to have some time in Mexico City to finally buy some clothes of his own, chances are that he—"a man secretly enormously proud of his whole outfit" (84)—would immediately have worn his own clothes. Thus, the possibility of his putting the telegram in his brother's borrowed jacket would have been altogether non-existent. In case his membership card had been in Geoffrey's pocket on his way down to Mexico City, he would most probably have taken it out after the purchase of his own clothes and put it in one of his own pockets.

Had Hugh received a note of acknowledgement of his resignation from the London Globe—a resignation he submitted weeks ago from the United States and the confirmation of which should have arrived within the days following—he would not even have dispatched this his "last cable." But, with all those coincidences coming together, a sign that the mechanized universe is at work, Hugh had to put his telegram and his membership card into Geoffrey's jacket and they were destined both to stay there.

With this telegram and card in his jacket pocket, the Consul embarks on the Maquina Infernal. During this ride on this machine, "everything was falling out of his pockets,
was being wrested from him," and thus presumably also the cable and the card. However, little children restore almost all his personal belongings to him, even his money. Of all the children, it is a little girl, Geoffrey observes, who hands him back not only his notecase, but also Hugh's cable:

The child who had his notecase withdrew it from him playfully...No: she still had something in her other hand, a crumpled paper. The Consul thanked her for it firmly. Some telegram of Hugh's (195).

What is missing is the Consul's favorite pipe and his passport. Presumably, Geoffrey had carried his passport along with him all day, since it constitutes an important document in Mexico, even for an ex-Consul. Geoffrey is never quite certain whether he had really brought it along. Losing his personal items on the Maquina Infernal, he reflects:

...his passport, had that been his passport? He didn't know if he'd brought it with him. Then he remembered he had brought it. Or hadn't brought it. It could be difficult even for a Consul to be without a passport in Mexico. Ex-consul. What did it matter. Let it go (194)

Since Geoffrey does not get back this crucial piece of identification, he surmises for a second that he indeed did not bring it: "...and no passport. Well, definitely he could not have brought it" (195). However, Geoffrey's total drunkenness, further enhanced by the tumbling ride on the
infernal machine, do not make him a trustworthy commentator at that point. Rather, credibility has to be given to his first mental flash during his ride. Realizing himself the urgency of having a passport in Mexico, it is safe to assume that he—an experienced and knowledgeable diplomat—must indeed have brought it.

Thus, coincidentally, of all his important belongings, Geoffrey irrevocably loses his passport—the document of identification with the function of a veritable "life insurance" in the politically unstable Mexico. Simultaneously, and even more coincidentally, Geoffrey also loses but then regains the telegram—the document which might as well be a death warrant. With this death warrant in his pocket, but not with his passport—his life insurance—the now identity-less Consul will meet the members of the Union Militar.

Based on the confluence of several other coincidences: the reappearance of the horse of the raided money-carrier, patted by Geoffrey; the miraculous reappearance of Yvonne's letters, which induces Geoffrey to draw a minitiature map of Spain on the bartable and which is misinterpreted by the barkeeper, these fascist police officers suspect him of being an anti-fascist Jewish spy, possibly even with connections to communist splinter groups in Spain. Their suspicions are corroborated by Geoffrey's failure to produce
his passport, and his unknowing possession of Hugh's membership card and telegram in his jacket pocket—evidence enough to kill him.

This failure on the part of Geoffrey to identify himself as well as his possession of two suspicious-looking documents are, as I hope to have shown, also the result of a series of coincidences. Together with the series of coincidences that lead to the suspicions of the Union Militar, these two series of coincidences give reason enough to assert that Geoffrey's death is not pure happenstance. Rather, his death seems to have been well-calculated by the infernal gods, the inventors of the machinery of the universe, running with mathematical precision. At seven o'clock in the evening, this machine has brought Geoffrey's life, the little wheel within the wheels of the universe, to a standstill.
VII The Ticking Universe

In Under the Volcano, apart from the many machines, references to the mechanical-mathematical precision of clocks as tiny man-made microcosms of the mechanized universe are numerous. Even though only Geoffrey (and Yvonne) will get visibly crushed at the end of the ominous Day of the Dead, all characters in the novel are subject to such a universe. This universe is slowly but steadily ticking on. Geoffrey, through his ride on the Maquina Infernal, is the only one of the characters who is symbolically represented as being in the grip of that invincible machine. The other characters however—most prominently Hugh, Laruelle, and Yvonne—cannot escape the mathematical precision of such a universe either. Lowry enhances their inescapability through a delicate omnipresent clockwork imagery.

Even Hugh—whose fate, with the exception of his going to Vera Cruz to catch a ship, is unknown at the end of the novel—is connected with clocks. Shaving his brother Geoffrey in preparation for their trip to Tomalin, Hugh’s thoughts drift back to his time as a freshman at Cambridge. One summer evening, walking towards the kitchen of St.
John's in his gown, he was approached by a professor walking out of the professor's lodge. This professor, as Hugh's thoughts tell us, turned out to be Albert Einstein:

Yes; the great Jew, who had upset the whole world's notions of time and space, once leaned down over the side of his hammock...to ask me...the time. And smiled again when I pointed out the clock neither of us had noticed (160).

Through this brief encounter with Albert Einstein, Hugh is linked with clocks, and subtly, on two different levels. On one level, Hugh is the one to point to the clock located on the tower of St. John's; but--on a more universal level--he is asked for the time by the man who, as he himself put it, "had upset the whole world's notions of time and space." Thus, the simple request for the time is transposed to a universal level by the person requesting that information.

Like Hugh, so of Laruelle the only fact about his fate we know is his scheduled departure for Vera Cruz: "Like Hugh he was going to Vera Cruz and like Hugh, too, he did not know if his ship would ever reach port..." (10). Whether he really leaves we do not know. Yet, the fact alone that his plans are identical with Hugh's suggests an exact repetition of this portion of his life, characteristic of a machine-like universe.
More strikingly, even Jacques' bodily movements seem to follow clock-like processes. When Yvonne, Hugh, and Geoffrey are on their way to the fair, Jacques suddenly materializes out of a side road. Hesitating for a second, presumably at the unexpected sight of Yvonne, he finally manages to move: he hesitated: then this man...came forward with eyes flashing...--and somehow, also, increasingly grave--came forward as it were impelled by clockwork, hand out, automatically ingratiating (my emphasis,167).

Yvonne dreaded this meeting with Jacques. Having had an adulterous affair with him, and being already in the company of her former husband and her other former lover, this meeting must not have been a pleasurable experience for her. Reflecting on her life, primarily on her time as a mediocre movie actress, her thoughts--invariably--also drift to Jacques, the self-exiled French filmmaker. Coincidentally, despite their common professional background and a party in Hollywood, which both attended, Yvonne never got acquainted with Jacques in the film metropolis. For this acquaintance, which was to become her second adultery, she had to wait until her time with Geoffrey in Quauhnahuac. Yvonne describes this meeting as "a shattering and ominous thing in her life" and attributes it to the coincidences of the unfathomable universe (161). Regretting her side-step, she symbolically stares at a billboard, on which "the great
pendulum on the giant blue clock swung ceaselessly, suggesting not only the passage of time, but also the mathematical precision of the mechanical universe, which brought about these coincidences. Then she realizes that her adulteries are irreversible. As she succinctly puts it: "Too late!" (161).

Thus, all of the characters orbiting around Geoffrey appear connected in one way or another with clocks or clockworks. This clock-imagery symbolizes the passage of time and, on a microcosmic scale, the mechanized universe of Deism. As with the machines, the major portion of this clock-imagery centers around Geoffrey Firmin, whose life is "ticking out" that day.

Geoffrey has a watch of his own. This watch makes its first appearance at eight-thirty in the morning, when he enters his house with Yvonne. While he is debating with her about their dilapidated garden, he is "winding his wrist watch" and finally straps it "firmly on his wrist" (65). This watch he does not consult until several hours later, sitting in his bathroom. There, recovering from a blackout and still completely disoriented, he recalls that he was supposed to get ready to go to Tomalin; checking his timepiece, he thinks: "why, it was still this morning, or barely afternoon, only 12:15 by his watch" (124).
Two hours later, Geoffrey looks at his wrist watch again in the Terminal Cantina El Bosque. This quiet bar, operated by the mother-figure Senora Gregorio, is adjacent to the plaza, where Geoffrey just got off the Maquina Infernal. In an attempt to recover from this infernal ride and to flee from his followers, the Consul quickly downs two large tequilas. Suddenly, Geoffrey perceives a sound which begins to bother him. Mistaking it first for a beetle, he finally realizes that this sound is emanating from his watch:

The cantina's emptiness, and a strange ticking like that of some beetle, within that emptiness, began to go on his nerves; he looked at his watch: only seventeen minutes past two. This was where the tick was coming from (199).

Geoffrey's own timepiece, with its individual time, provides the Consul with a sort of personalized time. This personalized time is complemented by a second set of clocks not in his possession, but surrounding him everywhere. Talking to his neighbor De Quincey over the fence, for example, the Consul suddenly believes he hears the chimes of a distant clock. Contrary to what his own wrist watch says, however, this clock strikes twenty-three times, as if approximately twelve hours in advance:

Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one strokes. By his watch it was a quarter to eleven. But the clock hadn't finished:
it struck twice more, two wry, tragic notes: bing-bong: whirring. The emptiness in the air after filled with whispers: alas, alas (119).

Similarly, when Dr. Vigil tries in vain to persuade the Consul to travel with him and Yvonne to Guanajuato, their conversation is suddenly interrupted by the detonating sound of target practice exercises in the Sierra Madre. This sound over, the Consul perceives three black vultures soaring higher and higher "while somewhere a clock was striking nineteen. Twelve o' clock" (129). Thus, for a second time, the chimes of a clock deviate markedly from Geoffrey's own perception of time. Incidentally, just minutes before, Geoffrey's own watch said 12:15—an indication that even his clock, on which he presumably looked, is incorrect, although much more nearly exact.

An additional temporal discrepancy occurs during Geoffrey's busride to Tomalin together with Yvonne and Hugh. After the bus passes hootingly through some of the narrow streets, it makes a quick stop at the market place to pick up some old Indian women. From there, the bus resumes its voyage, with the clocktower coming into view: "The clock over the market arch, like the one in Rupert Brooke, said ten to three; but it was twenty to" (203). Again, in this third instance, Geoffrey's personal time and the hands of the clock on the market arch do not coincide either.
Even though the discrepancy between the two times in this last case is only ten minutes, rather than twelve or seven hours, neither of the times is necessarily correct. Neither is verifiable. Rather, it seems, both these times are "subjective" in the sense that both time-pieces are man-made, and thus capable only of recording human time in this novel. Universal or "objective time," the mechanical and precise and unimpeded advancement of the universal clockwork machinery--the machinery crushing Geoffrey--evades human time-machines. It cannot be "objectively" recorded. Man-made time-recording devices can only approximate it and capture the sense that time is indeed elapsing. Thus, the "objective ticking" of the universal clockwork can only be conveyed by non-human time devices, symbolizing an "eternal" mechanical rhythm--and there are several of these.

The water trickling permanently into Geoffrey's swimming pool functions as such a non-human time device. Its continued, steady, seemingly eternal dripping suggests a rhythm outside the human conception of time. Even though Geoffrey perceives this dripping as similar to the rhythmic beat of a clock, it is not a clock. Talking to Yvonne on the porch, feeling helpless, the dripping suddenly penetrates his ear: "Tak: tok: help: help: the swimming pool ticked like a clock" (63).
Similarly, the knocking and repetitious noise of machines could be regarded as non-human time devices, generating an ambience of non-human time. The dubious brewery, which could also be a disguised mill—a machine, that is—a powerplant, or a prison, emanates such a noise. At this brewery, Yvonne and Hugh have a beer before they continue their ride. As Hugh asks whether Yvonne would care for another beer, he has to fight the loud noise in the background: "He had to raise his voice above the renewed clamour of the plant: dungeons: dungeons: dungeons: it said" (100).

In addition, the hammering noises of incoming trains provide a third example of such non-human time devices, ticking off the rhythm of the universe. Geoffrey recalls these trains in the Salon Ofelia during his shift from tequila to mescal. Alcohol-befogged, his memory drifts back to the time of his younger years, when he was waiting at a train station for a certain Lee Maitland, probably one of his early flames. Standing at the platform, he envisions the incoming trains as gigantic stampeding monsters, making a steady, rhythmic, clanking noise. Geoffrey's mental fusion of these trains—another example for the omnipresence of machines—with their steadily hammering noises make them the perfect paradigm for a mechanized universe which is outside the temporal conception of mankind:
And now, one after one, the terrible trains appeared
...first the distant wail, then, the frightful spouting
and spindling of black smoke, a sourceless towering
pillar, motionless, then a round hull, as if not on
the lines, as if going...downhill: clipperty-one
clipperty-one: clipperty-two: clipperty-two: clipperty-
three: clipperty-three: clipperty-four: clipperty-
four...and the lines shaking, the station flying, the
coal dust, black bituminous: lickety-cut lickety-cut
lickety-cut: and then another train, clipperty-one,
clipperty-two, coming in the other direction...(246).

These various forms of clockwork-imagery can be found throughout the novel. On a massive scale, they all converge in chapter XII—Geoffrey's death chapter. This twelfth chapter contains no less than twelve such clockwork-related references. Geoffrey, of course, is still in possession of his own watch. Sitting in the Farolito, he perceives a ticking, which presumably is that of his own timepiece. Even though he is not certain about the source of this ticking, it is safe to assume that it comes from his own watch. Since nobody is sitting next to him, and since he is in a completely mescal-drugged state by now, the other imagined sources of the ticking, with the possible exception of his heart, are very probably figments of his imagination:
"...the place was not silent: It was filled by that ticking:
the ticking of his watch, his heart, his conscience, a clock somewhere" (295)⁹.

Further, Geoffrey is again exposed to a clock other than his own. In chapter XII, this clock is the one mounted on the archway of the Union Militar headquarters, which are joint with the Comisario de Policia and the Policia de Seguridad. Geoffrey can see this clock through the open door of the Farolito. It comes into view repeatedly:

The building, which also included the prison, glowered at him with one eye, over an archway set in the forehead of its low facade: a clock pointing to six (297).

As in the previous chapters, the time indicated on this non-Geoffreyian clock and the time on Geoffrey's own wrist watch do not coincide. However, contrary to Geoffrey's behavior in the preceding chapters, he now seems to give more credibility to the clock on the archway. Asking the dwarfish pimp for the proper time, Geoffrey gets an answer in broken English: "No it er ah half past six by the cock" (308)—a subtle, though most probably unconscious pun on Geoffrey's corporeal contamination. Still not convinced and questioning the pimp's answer, Geoffrey casts a quick glance at the clock on the archway of the building of the police, only to correct his own watch:

He'd [the pimp] been right about the time ..... The clock on the Comisaria de Policia, annular,
imperfectly luminous, said, as if it had just moved forward with a jerk, a little after six-thirty, and the Consul corrected his watch, which was slow (309).

This reaction on the part of Geoffrey has been prefigured by the grandfather of a large family, walking into the Farolito. Geoffrey observes how this family walks in and how the grandfather, upon looking at the clock of the police barracks, resets his timepiece: "the grandfather in front, [was] correcting his watch, peering at the dim barracks clock that still said six" (304). Unlike the grandfather, however, for whom this correction of time does not have any implications, for Geoffrey this resetting of his slow watch carries fatal overtones. Analogous to the spring of the infernal machine, which has almost fully unwound the spring of Geoffrey's life, so the spring of Geoffrey's wristwatch—his personal portable mechanized universe, so to speak—has unwound also. As the ticking of his watch will soon come to a complete standstill, so will the ticking of the little wheel Geoffrey Firmin. Therefore, the fact that Geoffrey even advances his slow watch to the new time is a symbolic embrace of his impending death, the wish for which has by now gained maximum momentum. As he said to Yvonne and Hugh earlier, running towards the Farolito: "I love hell. I can't wait to go back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost back there already" (273).
Yet, the last seconds of Geoffrey's life have not yet sounded. Before the infernal machine really crushes him, he has to be ground through the accusations and investigations of the fascist police. Only then, only after this clockwork-like machine makes all the series of coincidences converge, does Geoffrey die. In a final act, symbolizing that Geoffrey's life is now indeed "ticking out," one of the police chiefs deprives him of his watch. Scrutinizing it for a second, he pockets it "with the Consul's other things" (323).

Now that Geoffrey is deprived of his watch, symbolically he has also lost his life and his universe. Thus, after the "clock outside quickly chimed seven times" (325) for a last time, the "objective" ticking of the universe takes over again. Immediately after the fatal shots of the Chief of Rostrums, a bell, another non-human time device, sounds the atemporal rhythmic beat of the universe: "Dolente...Dolore!" (326).

The sound of these bells has also been experienced by Laruelle exactly a year later. At the end of chapter I, looking down at the plaza, he suddenly perceives their sound: "dolente...dolore!" (38). Although this chapter is the last one in the temporal sequence of Under the Volcano, it is the first to appear in the book. Thus, the sound of these bells not only foreshadows the pain felt in the novel,
but simultaneously provides an underlying temporal framework for the "objective" time of the universe, ticking at the bottom of the Volcano. Yvonne's bounding after Geoffrey "at the gait of Goethe's famous church bell" (65) shortly after her arrival, is an echo of this non-human time.

As the last seconds of Geoffrey's life fade away from him, his dissipating consciousness is engulfed by the "objective" time of the universe also. Thinking in flashes of the events of the day, he imagines himself to be accompanied by the universal and eternal rhythm of baroque and classic music:

Mozart was it? Siciliana. Finale of the D-minor quartet by Moses. No, it was something funereal, of Gluck's perhaps, from Alcestis. Yet there was a Bach-like quality to it. Bach? A clavichord, heard from for away, in England of the seventeenth century. England...(327).

Both these forms of music, baroque as well as classic, have a distinct mechanical component to them. Like other means of capturing "objective" time, the rhythm of that music functions as a final level of non-human time, indicating the mathematical-mechanical progression of the universal machinery. Even though the little wheel of Geoffrey has ceased to tick, the machinery of the universe will be ticking on.
VIII Conclusion

In this essay, I intended to show that at the center of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* works a mechanized version of the traditional Wheel of Time. In conjunction with various machines, this wheel is the dominant symbol in the novel. It appears more than forty times, thus towering even over the otherwise omnipresent volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. In its totality, this massive wheel- and machine-imagery symbolizes what Lowry must have perceived to be a mechanistic clockwork-like universe beyond human control.

Chapter VII of Lowry's novel functions as a microcosm of such a mechanistic universe. It consists of a compilation of a whole series of machines, each of which could again be regarded as a miniature universe, running like an assembly of cogwheels. Together, these machines evoke an aura of relentless mechanization apart from any human control, though of course, involving humans.

Geoffrey Firmin, the protagonist of *Under the Volcano*, is drawn to one of these machines as if by an inexplicable magnetic force. This machine is the carnival ride called Maquina Infernal. When Geoffrey goes for a ride on this
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machine, a ride which the narrative voice describes in ferocious and brutal terms, his whole situation is symbolized. I have discussed earlier how it is that in surrendering himself to the mechanical progression of this machine, Geoffrey also symbolically surrenders control of his own life to the workings of a mechanical, inhuman universe.

I have also discussed how Geoffrey—who does not embark on this Maquina out of his own volition, but is mysteriously drawn to it—at that moment seems to function as a small automatic cogwheel about to board mechanically a bigger cogwheel. Through his ride on the infernal wheel, Geoffrey encacts his role in the machinery of the universe: he is a small wheel within a big wheel. By the end of this day, this small wheel Geoffrey Firmin has come to a standstill. The clockwork-machinery of the universe, by contrast, ticks on.

Malcolm Lowry, the alcoholic and writer of Under the Volcano, must have thought of himself at times as Geoffrey Firmin, the alcoholic and writer in Under the Volcano. Always suspecting "that he was himself being written" (Costa 87) rather than writing out of his own creative impulse, it seems that he might have seen his own role as a creative artist to be like the role of Geoffrey Firmin, of a tiny wheel within the "celestial machinery" of the universe. In contrast to writers who seem to exercise complete control
over their material, Lowry does not always seem to be in
total control. The levels of interpretation discernible in
_Under the Volcano_ are simply too many. Most of these levels
were carefully planned, as Lowry himself said in his famous
letter to Jonathan Cape: "...the book is written on numerous
planes with provisions made, it was my fond hope, for almost
every kind of reader..." (Breit 66). Despite Lowry's careful
planning, however, it is hard to believe that he could
consciously have intended all of these levels. Rather, Lowry
seems to be what Robert Heilman calls "a possessed artist,"
an artist who appears to be used by his materials "as an
instrument, finding in him, as it were, a channel to the
objective existence of art, sacrificing a minimum of their
autonomy to his hand, which partly directs and shapes rather
than wholly controls" (18). Thus, Lowry the writer might
then indeed have regarded himself as a tiny wheel within a
bigger wheel beyond his personal control. Indeed even the
most self-conscious and brilliant of writers might also be
so considered. Even though he acts as an authorial _deus ex
machina_, pulling the stops of his own control panel to
impose disaster, the _machina de universa_ partly moves his
bloody hands, another of the many pairs of _Las Manos de
Orlac_. By extension, to have such semi-guided hands also
implies that Lowry the writer can assume only partial
responsibility for the events in the novel.
On the other hand, Lowry's conception of the novel as a wheel—the structural correlative to the mechanized universe—was very conscious. Writing to his publisher, Lowry asserted that "the very form of the book, ... is to be considered like that of a wheel, with 12 spokes, the motion of which is something like that, conceivably, of time itself" (Breit 67). Thus, from an aesthetic point of view, Lowry achieves an almost perfect correspondence between form and content.

In an attempt to avoid major editorial cuts, suggested by Cape's editing reader, Lowry was even willing to sacrifice certain portions of the text, but not the novel's overall structure. This twelve-part wheel-structure of the novel suggests not only the progression of time, but also the "objective" ticking of the universe:

Twelve is a universal unit....there are 12 hours in a day, and the book is concerned with a single day, as, though very incidentally, with time itself: there are 12 months in a year, and the novel is enclosed by a year....I have to have my 12: it is as if I hear a clock striking midnight for Faust; as I think of the slow progression of the chapters, I feel it destined to have 12 chapters and nothing more nor less will satisfy me... (Breit 65).
Additionally, the wheel-structure of *Under the Volcano* also suggests a circular reading process. The novel is constructed in such a way as to allow readings on various levels. Each of these readings emerges from the first chapter and again converges in it. Although chapter I is the first chapter in the spatial sequence of the novel, it is the last one from a temporal point of view. It takes place on 2 November, 1939, exactly one year after the major events of the novel. In order to grasp fully the implications of any reading, one has to go back and reread chapter I. Only then will the reader be able to make important connections, albeit retrospectively. As Lowry himself emphasized it in his previously quoted letter: "The book should be seen as essentially trochal, I repeat, the form of it as a wheel so that, when you get to the end, if you have read carefully, you should want to turn back to the beginning again...(88).

Projected on the interpretive potential of the novel, such a reading process itself becomes essentially mechanical. Having gone full circle once, with a re-reading of chapter I, the wise reader can, just like a wheel, resume his voyage through the book a second time, a third time,... and so on. With each new reading, the reader will possibly detect another layer of meaning, which he will retrospectively connect to his previous interpretations of the novel. Always, the instrument carrying him from chapter I
back to the events of chapter II through XII will be the mechanized Ferris wheel. Thus, just like the machine-like universe in the novel, the conception of the novel itself—among many other things—could be seen as a kind of machine. As Lowry put it in his letter to Cape, hinting at the interpretive potential of his masterpiece:

The novel can be read simply as a story which you can skip if you want. It can be read as a story you will get more out of if you don't skip. It can be regarded as a kind of symphony, or in another way as a kind of opera—or even horse opera. It is hot music, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce, and so forth. It is superficial, profound, entertaining and boring, according to taste. It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall. It can be regarded as a sort of machine: it works too, believe me, as I have found out (Breit 66).

Thus, now that this examination is completed, we see the dual implications of Lowry's use of the wheel- and machine-imagery taking shape: on the one hand, the numerous references to wheels and machines, such as the carrousels in chapter VII and the omnipresent clockworks, were the perfect imagery for Lowry to symbolize the mechanized universe. This mechanized universe grinds at the bottom of the Volcano and
brings about the deaths of Geoffrey and Yvonne. Even Hugh and Laruelle, whose fate we do not know at the end of the novel, cannot escape the mathematical precision of such a universe. They, too, as their respective connections to clocks and clockworks demonstrate, will sooner or later be crushed by it.

On the other hand, Lowry's wheel- and machine-imagery—transposed into the conception of the novel—also has implications that go beyond mere mechanization. While repeated readings of the novel, each time ending with a re-reading of chapter I, are essentially mechanical—mechanical in the sense of a wheel-like repetition—interestingly, such a repeated reading process is not purely mechanical anymore. With each new reading, the careful reader will discover a new level of meaning inherent in the Volcano and retrospectively integrate this newly gained meaning into the total of his previous interpretations. Thus, the mechanical re-reading of the novel itself is transcended by the synthesizing capacity of the reader. This capacity is not only more important than the pure mechanization underlying the novel, but is also in keeping with Ezekiel's original vision of the Wheel. It will yield for the reader what it yielded for Ezekiel: a revelation, not destruction.
Endnotes

1 In the short story "Through the Panama," collected in Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1961), Lowry's anti-Joyceanism comes even more clearly to the forefront. In this short story, the protagonist and writer Sigbjorn Wilderness makes an entry in his journal, in which he vents his hatred for Joyce: "And indeed I do sometimes hate Joyce" (73). Since Wilderness the writer, just like Geoffrey Firmin the writer, is on one level an alter ego of Malcolm Lowry, Wilderness' opinion very probably approximates that of his creator. Lowry's letters certainly endorse that position.

2 Devouring Conrad Aiken's fiction in England, Lowry wrote several complimentary letters to the American writer-critic. In these letters, Lowry not only expressed his admiration for Aiken's style, but also asked him to serve as in loco parentis. Lowry, then a fledging nineteen-year-old writer in search for a creative mentor, had considerable problems with his parents, who did not share their son's creative aspirations. Consequently, Malcolm had to look for a mentor and spiritual father elsewhere, as the following excerpt from one of his letters to Aiken clearly shows: "The
bewildered parent in question [Lowry's father] would be willing to pay you 5 or 6 guineas a week...if you would tolerate me for any period you would like to name between now and then as a member of your household. Let me hasten to say that I would efface myself and not get in the way of your inspiration when it comes toddling along, that my appetite is flexible and usually entirely satisfied with cheese..." (in Day 104).

Aiken agreed, much to the joy of the young Lowry. Wasting no time, Lowry jumped on the next cargo freighter in Liverpool headed for Boston. Once there, he and Aiken met and immediately struck up what was to become a long-lasting and prosperous father-and-son relationship.

Stephen Spender holds a different point of view. For him, Lowry was a purely autobiographic writer in total opposition to Eliot and Joyce: "The difference was that Lowry's approach to writing was autobiographic, personal, subjective even, whereas the aim of writers like Joyce and Eliot, whom he adored [], dreaded [], imitated [], misunderstood [], was to invent a modern 'objective' literature which was purged of autobiographic, subjective elements" (ix).

To say that Lowry's aims were in opposition to those of Eliot and Joyce is, of course, nonsense. Lowry was as much an autobiographic writer as, for example, Joyce was. Many
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of the details in *Ulysses*, such as Joyce's satire of Oliver St. John Gogarty in the figure of Buck Mulligan, for example, are deeply rooted in the author's experience, and thus only barely "objective." Similarly, on one level, Stephen Dedalus and Geoffrey Firmin can certainly be seen as the alter egos of their creators. Both writers achieve the "objectivisation," the impersonality of their novels through their respective use of myths.

4  In his famous letter to his publisher Jonathan Cape, Lowry himself said that the Cabbala "is used for poetical purposes because it represents man's spiritual aspirations." However, he hastens to add that "all this is not important at all to the understanding of the book; I just mention it in passing to hint that, as Henry James says, 'There are depths'" (Breit 65). Thus, Epstein's rather single-minded reading of *Under the Volcano* certainly is too narrow. Apart from Douglas Day, her reading has been criticized by many Lowry scholars. In his essay review on the first full-length studies on Malcolm Lowry—Richard Hauer Costa's *Malcolm Lowry*, Douglas Day's *Malcolm Lowry*, and Tony Kilgallin's *Lowry*—Dale Edmonds excludes Epstein's revised dissertation: "I do not consider Perle Epstein's 1969 *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry*: 'Under the Volcano' and the Cabbala a 'study'; it is something like the Pale Fire of Lowry criticism" (133). In "A Reader's Guide to *Under the*
Volcano," diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1972, Carl Mark Silverman "finds that book [Epstein's] to be an unfair, overly esoteric and unbalanced approach to Lowry's Under the Volcano" (quoted in DAI). And in the preface to his study of Malcolm Lowry, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York: Times, 1978), David Markson puts it even more succinctly: "By comparison, in her single-minded investigation of Lowry's cohabitation with the Cabbala, Dr. Epstein is practicing secret Faustian incantations where I am making house calls" (ix).

In the same letter, Lowry even pondered the possibility of writing a screen adaptation of Under the Volcano. He insisted that if the project were to be realized, then only in Germany: "Nothing could make us [Lowry and Margerie] happier--happy is not the word, in fact--and what an opportunity it is!--than for a film to be made of the Volcano in Germany, providing it were done in the best tradition of your great films" (in Tiessen 40).

How much Lowry revered Jean Cocteau's play, La Machine Infernal, becomes apparent in a letter to the French translator of Under the Volcano, Clarisse Francillon. In this letter, Lowry "wondered if you [Francillon] could somehow smuggle a copy, with my compliments, of your translation to Jean Cocteau, and tell him I have never forgotten his kindness in giving me a seat for La Machine
infernale at the Champs Elysees in May, 1934: I shall never forget the marvellous performance as long as I live..." (Breit 192).

7 This discussion was not an invention, but a record of an argument between Lowry and Aiken. Quoting Aiken, Day says that "it took place between him [Aiken] and Lowry in 1937 in Cuernavaca, with Lowry taking Hugh's position and Aiken speaking for the Consul. Lowry, says Aiken, was always of vaguely left-wing sympathies, but was not well enough informed politically to make much of a case for his side" (342).

8 Very coincidentally, Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus (Frankfurt: Fischer) was published in 1947, the same year as Under the Volcano. In this novel, the composer Adrian Leverkuhn also enters into a pact with the devil. Just like in Under the Volcano, this pact with the devil, or devilish forces, is not traditionally sealed with the blood of the protagonist, but with the contraction of syphilis, thus irreversibly contaminating the body. In Under the Volcano, Firmin gets syphilis from the prostitute Maria; Leverkuhn in Doktor Faustus from a prostitute he calls "Esmeralda"--a name Leverkuhn's father used to describe a particular kind of butterfly (18).

Leverkuhn "contracts" the devil to lead him out of the creative impasse with which he was faced as a composer. For
him, all the forms of music at the turn of the 20th century were completely exhausted. Consequently, he is looking for what he calls a "Durchbruch" (322), a breakthrough towards complete innovation that yet employs old and superseded musical forms. In exchange for Leverkühn's soul and at the expense of cerebral disintegration (the long-term effect of syphilis), the devil indeed bestows the desired creativity on the suffering composer, reminiscent of Geoffrey's newly-gained vitality (309). As a further stipulation for this creativity, the devil even prohibits him to love, the sickness from which all the major characters in Under the Volcano suffer. As the devil says to Leverkühn: "Dein Leben soll kalt sein--darum darfst Du keinen Menschen lieben" (250).

After twenty-four years of loveless but creative life, Leverkühn dies. His death has been foreshadowed by the death of his little nephew Nepomuk Schneidewein. This nephew came for a visit to his uncle Adrian, where he was suddenly seized by "Cerebrospinal-Meningitis" (474). Similarly, in Under the Volcano, Geoffrey's death--among many other things--is also foreshadowed by the death of a young child suffering from meningitis. Even though Geoffrey is not related to that child, it proves to be the son of Yvonne's first marriage. As Geoffrey's thoughts tell us: "And the child, strangely named Geoffrey too, she had had by the
ghost [Yvonne's first husband Cliff]..., and which would now be six, had it not died...of meningitis in 1932" (64).

Despite these incredible parallels, Lowry did not seem to know of Mann's novel until after several years of its publication. As he remarked in a letter to his friend, Anabel Porter: "His [Mann's] protagonist and mine seem to have raced almost neck and neck to perdition" (unpublished letter; reprinted in Cross 130).

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart," the anonymous psychopathic murderer of the old man seems to perceive a sound similar to the one the Consul's believes to hear: "I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart" (196). Even though in the case of the Consul, the ticking he perceives is most likely the ticking of his wrist watch, the mental overlap of the watch-ticking and the heart-beat are in both cases signs of psychological disturbances.
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