

BRYAN BIGGS and HELEN TOOKEY (eds). **Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World**. Pp. 160. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press & the Bluecoat, 2009. Cloth, £14.95.

This is a compelling and beautiful book, both to read and to look at. Published in conjunction with the festival and exhibition held at the Bluecoat in Liverpool in the fall of 2009 to celebrate the centenary of Lowry's birth, *Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World* is a suggestively hybrid collection of personal reminiscences, scholarly pieces, fiction and photographic reproductions of visual works. As Bryan Biggs and Helen Tookey point out in their editors' introduction, the volume addresses the geographical, psychological and creative 'voyaging' undertaken by Lowry throughout his life, from his notorious first voyage out to sea in 1927 as a young, middle-class Liverpool schoolboy looking for adventure, to the reluctant return to East Sussex from the squatter's beachfront paradise he left behind in Dollarton, British Columbia, in 1954, now as the famous author of *Under the Volcano*. Throughout, the focus is on place and on journeys—not only Lowry's, but also often the contributors' own, inspired in each case by illuminating, occasionally life-changing, encounters with Lowry and his writing.

The key, perhaps, for navigating one's way through such a varied and rich mix of creative, literary, theoretical and fictional pieces comes roughly halfway into the collection, in Mark Goodall's essay, "'Lowrytrek': towards a psychogeography of Malcolm Lowry's Wirral'. Asserting how, with its emphasis on imagination, movement, mysticism and consciousness, psychogeography has recently been adopted as a means of interpreting literary texts, Goodall argues persuasively for this approach as a particularly apt way to address Lowry's texts, and indeed his life, as a kind of text. Lowry was much admired by such mid-twentieth-century theorists of psychogeography as Guy Debord, and Goodall proposes that we approach Lowry's writing and the spaces they and he inhabited (and continue to inhabit) from a psychogeographical perspective. 'A text is only part of the effect,' Goodall insists. 'The rest must be achieved out in the "real" world with a pair of stout boots, one of Lowry's books and a hip flask of very strong drink' (p. 82).

This seems, too, if perhaps only figuratively (although the books and flask could surely stay), an apt way to negotiate one's way through this collection. Cumulatively, the essays and images in the book come across not as a set of discrete pieces but rather as a series of interlocking, interlocutory engagements, both with the spaces that Lowry inhabited in his life and work and those from which the contributors themselves now speak to and about him. The reader is encouraged, as it were, to stroll leisurely through the text, and we experience the book as itself a place to negotiate, invited as we are to make connections, sometimes recognizable and familiar, sometimes surprising, as we go. 'Identification with a place is measured and shaded by distance,' Cian Quayle writes in one of the essays in this volume. 'Processes of memory, myth, fact and fiction merge and are interwoven around an event or narrative which is the beginning of a journey' (p. 52). Each of the pieces in this collection constitutes a journey into the psychogeography of place—Wirral, Liverpool, the Isle of Man, New York, Dollarton and Ripe.

The pieces in the volume are obviously meant to speak to each other. Thus, Alberto Rebollo's "'It is not Mexico of course, but in the heart...": Lowry seen from Quauhnhuac' revisits the oft-discussed deep connections Lowry had to Mexico, but the highly personal, intimate approach taken by Rebollo to his subject resonates with similarly private, singular reflections elsewhere in the volume, such as in Ian McMillan's 'Malcolm Lowry: who he was and who I was and who I am.' 'You all know the book,' writes

McMillan, 'so I won't offer you an analysis, but there are certain paragraphs I carry round with me whole like a tattoo or a taste or the echo of a shopping list that you memorized as a child' (pp. 20–21). This assumed sense of a shared familiarity, a kinship even, between Lowry and his readers and amongst his readers themselves permeates much of this book. Often, the name 'Malcolm Lowry' is itself a marker for nostalgic memories of spaces that no longer exist, as in Vancouver writer Michael Turner's 'The Malcolm Lowry Room,' a simultaneously melancholic and celebratory recollection of the now-defunct bar in Burnaby, BC, that once bore Lowry's name and perhaps even a little, Turner as its founder remembers, of his soul and spirit.

Turner's is a deeply affectionate look at the writer, that surfaces (however subtly) elsewhere in the text, even in the most scholarly pieces in the collection, such as, for example, Annick Drösdak-Levillain's "'Eridanus, Liverpool': echoes and transformations at the edge of eternity.' Her reading of Lowry's long short story 'The Forest Path to the Spring' teases connections to Wirral and Liverpool out of Lowry's meditative description of the forest and sea at Dollarton. The result is itself a compelling mix of the poetic and scholarly. Even in those essays where we recognize what we might call more conventional literary/biographical criticism—Michele Gemelos' 'Lunatic city: Lowry's *Lunar Caustic* and New York'; or Nicholas Murray's 'Uxorious prose: Malcolm Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola*'—we detect that pleasurable mix of the scholarly and the personal.

Always in this collection, that does indeed take the reader from the Mersey to the world, or at least Lowry's world, we return to the intimate, the idiosyncratic even. It is in the end an appropriate approach to a man whose life and work were themselves a wonderful mix of the singular and the universal. Readers will discover their own favourite pieces: Colin Dilnot's careful and illuminating research into the spaces of Lowry's youth in 'Lowry's Wirral'; Ailsa Cox's short story, '*No se puede vivir sin amar*,' inspired by those famous words from *Under the Volcano*; Cian Quayle's 'Elliptical journeys: Malcolm Lowry, exile and return,' in which Quayle reads the short story 'Elephant and Colosseum' through his own memories of the Isle of Man, where he was born and grew up; Robert Sheppard's moving account in 'Malcolm Lowry's land' of his pilgrimage from Liverpool, the place of Lowry's birth (and Sheppard's present home) to Ripe, the place of Lowry's death, and back again.

I have not yet mentioned the photographs and illustrations in the book, but these are integral to the collection as a whole. Ranging from historical to contemporary photographs, from fragments of telegrams and letters to reproductions of paintings referencing or inspired by Lowry, these images both bring the book to life and haunt it with its rich evocations of spaces and places associated with Lowry's work and life. The book ends with an essay by Lowry's biographer Gordon Bowker. 'Malcolm Lowry: neglected genius' that provides the reader with a succinct summary of Lowry's life and some of the themes in his work. This is an impossible task, of course, and Bowker's piece reminds us of the frustration that must accompany any attempt to give a final habitation and name to the complex and even frustrating figure that is so well, yet inevitably fleetingly, captured in the rest of this book.

MIGUEL MOTA *University of British Columbia*
doi:10.1093/res/hgq105
Advance Access published on 21 October 2010