A C T A U N I V E R S I T A T I S L O D Z I E N S I S
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GEOFFREY FIRMIN'S PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS DEATH; LOWRY'S VISION OF THE WORLD SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF ELIOT'S WORKS AND BECKETT'S WRITINGS

The message of *Under the Volcano* is quite obviously centred around death which becomes a leitmotif surfacing in various sets of images. The awareness of dying comes up now and again in people's minds, and haunts them like funeral chants which permeate the sultry air of the Day of the Dead. Vultures are the only birds to fill the space between the earth and the sky. A stray pariah dog follows the Consul wherever he goes, like Cerberus that watches over the dead. Even the landscape seems to be saturated with qualities which weigh down individuals and make them think of unavoidable annihilation.

This becomes conspicuous as early as in the first chapter where J. Laruelle and Dr Vigil reminisce about the Consul's tragedy against the background of a lurid sky, the whole nature being still in the tense expectancy of a storm. The description of the evening teems with sinister undertones due to the frequent occurrence of black and red hues. They bring to mind violence and wartime destruction ravaging the European continent far away from the quiet Mexican town. On his way home Laruelle grows aware of a nightmarish aspect of the well-known surroundings. He has to confront desolation and barrenness of the town which is enveloped in:

> the gigantic red evening whose reflection bled away in the deserted swimming pools scattered everywhere like... mirages...[1]

[1] M. L o w r y, *Under the Volcano*, London 1985, p. 10. For the discussion of Laruelle's role in *Under the Volcano* see: T. Y o r k, *The Post-Mortem*

The evening itself is described as "baleful" with "black clouds" and volcanoes "terrifying in the wild sunset". The tragedy that happened a year ago contributes to the atmosphere of fatality.

One of the passages depicts a row of dead trees and an abandoned plough which seems to "raise its arms to heaven in mute supplication". The catastrophic message of this image provides an apt comment on the deadly impact of war viewed as an offence against the natural order. Laruelle watches a train of lorries on which groups of boys, their faces bandaged against the dust, are heading blindfolded towards death. Dust and dusk bring about the obliteration of contours. They become a metaphor for moral obscurity which makes it impossible to separate light from darkness, that is to say good from evil. The image of "an immense archangel black as thunder" and "beating up from the Pacific" lends an Apocalyptic dimension to the sinister signs. The landscape of lush southern nature is blasted by the realization of destruction. Laruelle's imagination invests it with deadly qualities since he himself is burnt out because of his passion for Yvonne.

> A black storm... That was what love was like love which came too late. Only no sane calm succeeded it. It slaked no thirst to say what love was like when it came too late[2].

Laruelle's recollections anticipate the main problem of the book, namely the characters' inadequacy to cope with a statement that comes up now and again in the book. The statement which says "No se puede vivir sin amar" (One cannot live without loving) is first treated as absurd, then it becomes a frustrating commandment to be finally embraced as a kind of ultimate reality. Basically, it is the loss of ability to love that underlies the Consul's fall[3]. The book appears to focus on the attempt to re-

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Point of View in »Under the Volcano«, "Canadian Literature" 99, Winter 1983, p. 35-46; D. F a l k, *The Descent into Hell of Jacques Laruelle. Chapter I of »Under the Volcano«*, "Canadian Literature" 112, Spring 1987, p. 72-83.

[2] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 16. For the interpretation of this fragment see: K. D o r o s z, *Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise*, Uppsala 1976, p. 42.

[3] For different interpretations see: S. T i f f t, *Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself. Reflexiveness in »Under the Volcano«*, [in:] *The Art of Malcolm Lowry*, ed. A. Smith, London 1978, p. 46-72; G. R h y s G a r n e t t,

capture the state of harmony resulting from love. It turns out to be the only way of saving the characters and restoring the unity between people and nature, or people and the Absolute. Consequently, the whole work dwells on the idea of a quest that is akin to the Grail motif. The quest is, however, doomed to fail. The outward emblem of its futility is the image of Maximilian's palace. When passing its ruins, Laruelle is actually retracing the topography of Eliot's Waste Land. A shattered, evil smelling chapel is overgrown with weeds and its walls crumble.

> The place where love had once brooded seemed part of a nightmare and Laruelle was tired of nightmares[4].

The ruin cannot but bring to mind the description of the Grail chapel in Eliot's poem.

> In this decayed hole among the mountains
> In the faint moonlight the grass is singing
> Over the tumbled graves about the chapel
> There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home[5].

What surfaces in the imagery of the first chapter gains predominance in the course of events. In the further part of my essay I shall try to prove how in the characters' consciousness the Earthly Paradise tends to be irretrievably obliterated by the Waste Land.

Under the Volcano is based on the juxtaposition of the two sets of images. The first one which is at the same time tantamount to the tangible reality concentrates on the paradisal scenery epitomized by the Consul's garden or the Mexican town with its luxuriant verdure. The exuberance of nature, however, seems to be a screen covering up another kind of reality with the desert as its main symbol. All the characters involved in the Consul's tragedy experience momentary revelations in the course of which the paradisal setting is effaced by its opposite, the Waste Land.

»*Under the Volcano*«. *The Myth of the Hero*, "Canadian Literature" 84, Spring 1980, p. 31-40.

[4] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[5] T. S. E l i o t, *The Waste Land*, [in:] T. S. E l i o t, *Poezje*, Kraków, 1978, p. 78; for other parallels with *The Waste Land* see: R. B i n n s, *Malcolm Lowry*, London, New York 1984, p. 53.

When Yvonne and Geoffrey come back home from the cantina, Yvonne's first impression is that the garden is "a wreck". The Consul himself feels ill at ease listening to the sound of water dripping from the hose and filling the silence between them with "a deadening sound". Hugh notices Yvonne plucking out "the dead blossoms". Her comment on the place is:

> My God this used to be a beautiful garden. It was like Paradise[6].

The Consul has an impression that the tall exotic plants are

> perishing of unnecessary thirst, staggering and yet struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency or of a collective desolate fecundity[7].

The sensuous look of plaintains and pear-trees and their overt phallic symbolism might be said to play a similar role as the hyacinth garden in Eliot's poem[8]. Yet, Lowry's equivalent of Eliot's garden proves to be an illusion, since the Consul fails to restore his union with Yvonne.

The illusory aspect of all the paradisal props is enhanced by the characters' constant obsession with unquenchable thirst. It is primarily the Consul who experiences it in the most acute way. It appears that the garden with its swimming pool and the fountain is but a mirage of an oasis in the desert. Eliot's Waste Land is in literal terms a plain covered with red rocks and slashed by cracks gaping in the mute expectancy for a drop of water. In *Under the Volcano* water is often heard dripping and yet, paradoxically, it has no power to satisfy thirst. The Consul gazes at the garden fountain and asks himself:

> Might a soul bathe there and be clean or slake its drought?[9]

Obviously, as in *The Waste Land* the motif of thirst is related to sterility and spiritual vacuum. An ideal metaphor of Geoffrey

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[6] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 20. For the significance of the Consul's garden as paradise see: D o r o s z, *op. cit.*, p. 112-115; P. E p s t e i n, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry. Under the Volcano and the Cabbala*, New York, Chicago, San Francisco 1969, p. 60-61, 83, 98.

[7] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

[8] E l i o t, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[9] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

and Yvonne's state of mind is Yvonne's postcard received by him on the very day of her arrival. The postcard showed

> a highway leading over a white fenced bridge, between desert and desert. The road turned a little corner in the distance and vanished[10].

Yvonne sees their love as "wandering over some desolate cactus plain, stumbling, falling and dying of thirst there". Geoffrey and Yvonne's wish to find each other is all the time viewed against the wider background, that of nature awaiting its revival in the gathering storm. The possibility of reconciliation is never openly denied. It might be compared to the symbolic message of the name of the cigarettes smoked by the Consul. The name is "Alas", which might be interpreted either as an English word crossing out all hope or, which is equally plausible, a chance of rebirth hidden in the Spanish "Alas" (Wings).

As the characters struggle on towards the fulfilment of their destiny, the thunder is often heard on the fringe of their conversations and silences. Actually the thunder makes another character since it accompanies the characters wherever they go. During the meeting at Laruelle's house Geoffrey's rambling thoughts are interrupted by his friend's commonplace remark:

> Lovely day isn't it? I think we'll have thunder[11].

When Yvonne and the Consul manage to reach understanding in Tomalin, she grows aware of black clouds climbing from the sky, a temporary ominous darkness and thunder which sounded in the mountains. The proximity of a violent change in nature seems to influence people's actions. Yet, the dream cherished by Yvonne and the Consul becomes more and more unreal. On a closer look, a silver lake proves to be a broken greenhouse roof, which makes the Consul reflect upon a similar experience:

> The Bishop of Tasmania... or somebody dying of thirst in the Tasmanian desert saw... water... it turned out to be sunlight blazing on myriads of broken bottles[12].

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

The chance of putting an end to the conflict seems to recede like a mirage, and paradise ceases to be called undiscovered. Instead, the Consul terms it undiscoverable. Suspense before the storm hovers over Geoffrey's violent argument with Hugh and Yvonne. Frequent thunderclaps are a prelude to the scenes of death of both the Consul and his wife. It appears that the unleashing of elements is a final sign of the fact that the curse of Waste Land is still redeemable. One can risk a statement that Yvonne and the Consul regain their unity through death.

Exposing the illusory aspect of the Earthly Paradise, Lowry drops some clues as to why the quest for this kind of reality must eventually come to nothing. The Grail mystery merges with the biblical elements since *Under the Volcano* is a re-enactment of the Fall. Individual and anonymous dying as well as prevailing spiritual annihilation are the outcome of a sin by which people definitely cut themselves off from God. The essence of the sin is, as in the biblical scene, a rebellion against the Absolute, with the difference that here the whole humanity commits the sin collectively. It repeats the Faustian gesture of revolt and rushes into self-destruction ensuing from the total negation of divine harmony. The Consul, who undergoes an ordeal in the Machina Infernale of the funfair, epitomizes humanity imprisoned in the ever-speeding Machina Infernale of its own destructive ideas.

Evil with the war as its most glaring exponent is the cause of traumatic dychotomy in human nature. Its outward manifestation is the recurring image of a film poster advertising "The Hands of Orlac". The title character is obsessed with a sense of guilt because he has a murderer's hands. Laruelle glances at the poster and sees "Germany itself in the gruesome degradation of a bad cartoon". What is more, Orlac is identified with Laruelle by some "uncomfortable stretch of imagination". Nazism and fascism were born in the countries with rich cultural heritage. Orlac is an emblem of the times and a representative of ostensibly impossible combination of high refinement and savage instincts. There is something of Orlac complex in the Consul who aspires to the role of an artist seeking the ultimate reality, and whose sensitivity seems to have been rendered sterile due to the memory of some cruel deed accomplished in the past. A similar parallel can be discovered in Lowry's treatment of Hugh,

who in his student times was a failed guitar player and an anti--Semite, his early life recalling "that of another frustrated artist Adolf Hitler". Hugh's inward disharmony is due to a two-fold betrayal. He feels guilty of having fled Spain in its critical moment. Besides, he had a share in destroying Geoffrey's relationship with Yvonne. It is this transgression that brings about his identification with Judas. Hugh, too, sees through "the deceptive innocence" of paradisal setting. "It is all a bloody lie" is his violent comment on the idyll spreading in front of his eyes.

Eliot's *Waste Land* portrays a group of characters who are deprived of their own identity and must take on the gestures of past generations because there is nothing else to give them any characteristics. The Waste Land surrounding them is a consequence of their separation from the Absolute and reducing love to a mechanical and sterile routine. Oddly enough, the Consul's journey into his private Waste Land is also connected with the loss of identity, which finds its grotesque and disastrous culmination in the final scene where he actually claims to be called William Blackstone. His plight results from renouncing the omnipresent "one cannot live without loving" principle. Geoffrey's denial of love condemns him to spiritual death since he refuses to transcend everything that is by nature passing and incomplete.

> Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways - not precisely a discovery I'm afraid[13],

he says in his letter to Yvonne. The moment that Geoffrey starts to detach himself from this conviction his existence becomes reduced to nonsense. Hundreds of bottles mark off the successive stages of his withdrawal into the lonely hell which he himself terms "horror". The association with Conrad seems compulsory here. The Consul journeys into his own soul but his discoveries are momentarily erased in a drinking bout. His very last effort to turn back is expressed in a prayer which lets him recover the soundness of judgement for an instant.

> Teach me to love again, to love life. Where is love? Let me truly suf-

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

fer. Give me back my purity, the knowledge of the Mysteries that I have betrayed and lost[14].

Getting back to normal is, however, impossible since the Consul's life his already ceased to be shaped by any identity whatever.

How indeed could be hope to find himself, to begin again when somewhere perhaps in one of those lost or broken bottles in one of those glasses lay for ever the solitary clue to his identity. How could be go back and look now, scrabble among the broken glass, under the eternal bars, under the oceans[15].

The question of identity underlies the works of Eliot, Lowry and Beckett. The three authors show human beings who are dispossessed of their harmonious self. The collapse of coherent psychological structure is related to the loss of spiritual dimension. When the awareness of sacred things declines, people become limited to what is finite, passing and hence insufficient. Each of the above authors creates his own vision of human predicament which consists in the essential loneliness of people who are left at the mercy of the barren world and faced with the finality of death.

Lowry's portrait of humanity is in many respects complementary to Beckett's vision. In fact, both the authors are haunted by the same obsessions, although the tenor, style and imagery of their works are very different. A great deal of what Lowry says in *Under the Volcano* finds its concise equivalent in Beckett's short piece of prose entitled *From an Abandoned Work*[16]. Beckett's narrator in the above story shares one significant trait with the Consul, namely frenzy. It is quite interesting, since on the whole Beckett's characters are very static in their cutting themselves off from life. Murphy ties himself up to a chair and immobilizes his body with metres of bandage. The characters in the plays are paralyzed by their incapacity to live, which gains its outward expression in their inability to move. It refers to

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14 *Ibid.*, p. 291.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 294. Cf: analysis of the fragment, [in:] D o r o s z, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

16 S. B e c k e t t, *Z zarzuconego dzieła*, [in:] S. B e c k e t t, *Pisma prozą*, tłum. A. Libera, Warszawa, 1982, p. 8-17.

the characters of *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, as well as Vladimir and Estragon, who are not held by any external emblems of imprisonment, and yet cannot break the spell of the place which seems to constrict them. In other pieces of prose human beings appear to be engrossed in moving that lacks a convincing purpose. Thus their activity is reduced to a meaningless imitation of living. The narrator of *From an Abandoned Work* is aware of leaving his home and returning there. He is bound to move forward in defiance of all the obstacles that might be in his way. His going on is presented as quite an ordeal. He is scratched by stiff ferns and risks getting drowned or burnt when passing too near the fire or water. The journey is a source of physical and spiritual suffering. The narrator has the fits of fury, the reasons for which remain unfathomable and can only be guessed at. The Consul resembles him in this respect since the last day in his life is a constant change of places, a restless ramble from one cantina to another, and the hectic grappling with imagination which makes his own garden an abode of destructive powers. Neither tequila nor mescal are any good in appeasing his despair and fury which appear to abet the fate in destroying him and his wife. In a way, the Consul and Beckett's narrator wish to achieve one goal which may be called self-destruction. The narrator describes his posthumous lot with apparent relish. He believes in hell and wants to be there. He thinks his misery too great to be erased[17]. It seems that the Consul finds the same malignant joy in bringing the lowest forms of degradation upon himself.

> Hell he finished absurdly. I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact, I'm almost back there already[18].

The narrator of *From an Abandoned Work* rebels against his mother's religion and father's wisdom. He wants them to hear him calling from hell, which would certainly disturb their paradisal bliss[19]. The fiery renouncement of values represented by his parents is tantamount to an outcry against the divine authority embodied by them.

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17 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

18 L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

19 B e c k e t t, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

The Consul's rebellion repeats the pattern introduced by the myth of Prometheus. It is not by accident that the Consul's reflections are often interrupted by a sinister image of vultures circling overhead. The recurring motif is the description of his stay in Oaxaca where he and Yvonne had once been happy together. After Yvonne's departure Geoffrey went to Oaxaca by himself as if to emphasize the finality of the break-up. The most striking detail about his night in a hotel room was that "there was a vulture sitting in the washbasin". The image takes on a double meaning. It is first of all related to the torture and loneliness of Prometheus. Besides, it symbolizes the death of love and an irrevocable severance of ties between the Consul and Yvonne.

Another motif that surfaces in both works is the fall in its literal and figurative meaning. After Yvonne's arrival the Consul leaves his house to go for a walk. The delirium makes him lose his balance.

> Suddenly the Calle Nicaragua rose up to meet him. The Consul lay face downward on the deserted street[20].

The incident is quite significant since it highlights Geoffrey's condition which is basically that of a fallen man. All the time he is aware of existing on the edge of an abyss. The little Mexican town becomes symbolic here since it is cut by innumerable ravines to the extent that

> wherever you turned the abyss was waiting for you round the corner[21].

Hence, the Consul goes on living among the literal abysses which stand for the spiritual ones. His eyes are often bent on the depth of both. The two aspects combine in the final scene. After the utmost contamination the Consul gets involved with Mexican fascists, is shot down and dies falling into the ravine and falling into the hell of spiritual self-destruction. The catastrophe is a logical outcome of Geoffrey's ordeal. At one point he asked himself a question:

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[20] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Cf.: R. C r o s s, *Malcolm Lowry. A Preface to His Fiction*, Chicago, London 1980, p. 37-38.

[21] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 21. For the meanings of the barranca see: T. B a r e h a m, *Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in »Under the Volcano«*, [in:] *Malcolm Lowry. The Writer and his Critics*, ed. B. Wood, Ottawa 1980, p. 105-106.

God. Is it possible to suffer more than this... out of this suffering something must be born and what would be born was his own death[22].

This death enhances the Consul's relation to Faustus. He is shown flying headlong into the earth, which is what his Marlowian predecessor wanted to do. Besides, his end is summarized in a line accidentally picked out by Laruelle from Elizabethan dramas.

Faustus is gone. Regard his hellish fall[23].

Beckett's narrator is fascinated with the fall, with the difference that his account is devoid of overt biblical symbolism. His fate is as precarious as the Consul's. When he happens to fall down, his attention is suddenly taken up by the sky, which might suggest a subconscious desire to reach for a higher dimension. But the sky seems to respond with mysterious emptiness. Hence the fall is rendered absurd.

Both Beckett's narrator and the Consul are seen as martyrs in the cause of human pilgrimage towards death. Each of them is torn by contradictory impulses. First is the desire to die, "to dissolve"[24], as Beckett's narrator has it. The earthly existence is regarded as something imposed from without and therefore a hindrance. Beckett's narrator wishes he had never been born. The Consul detaches himself from his own plight and assumes the role of a spectator who takes in the drastic changes in a passive way. This kind of death instinct is all the time counterpointed by a longing for some ideal reality which in both works reveals itself through the imagery connected with light and whiteness. Beckett's story focusses on the contrast between various shades of darkness on the one hand, and the white colour permeated with sunlight on the other. The narrator is obsessed with the idea of white.

His first memorable experience is leaving home on the first of recounted days. The moment gains significance due to the

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22 L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 40. For the parallels with Faust see: D o r o s z, *op. cit.*, p. 72-81; T. H e i l m a n, *The Possessed Artist and the Ailing Soul*, "Canadian Literature" 8, Spring 1961, p. 7-16.

24 B e c k e t t, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

presence of his mother who waves him goodbye, and the sunlight makes her white dress stand out from the wall of the house and the interior of the room[25]. The narrator's turning back on her might be treated as a wilful rejection of the whiteness. Yet the white colour or light gets materialized for the second time and appears in front of the narrator in the shape of a mysterious white horse which passes the boy and vanishes into the greenness[26]. The incident stirs up indefinite anxiety in the boy's soul. He claims never to have seen a similar horse and goes on to reveal the impact of white upon his mind.

Considering the symbolic aspects of white, one can treat the encounter with the horse in terms of a revelation, since white expresses perfection and fullness[27] because of its potential which is all colours in one. In the *Bible* white is associated with wisdom, spirituality and purity. All the above meanings contribute to the importance of the image of the horse which appears as a promise of self realization in walking towards light. Yet, the narrator does not accept the challenge of whiteness, much as he is attracted to it. The persistence with which the white colour encroaches upon the narrator's consciousness might provoke his disquiet. It is possible that he shuns this colour because he feels unable to cope with its message and fears to be destroyed by it.

The narrator's further progress is marked by falls, fits of destructive fury and masochistic relish in getting wounded when struggling through the thicket of stiff ferns. He is eager to perish in the battle against the elements. If he comes across the sea, he will get drowned; if fire breaks out on his way forward, he will jump into it and change into a live torch[28]. In fact, the narrator becomes a kind of focus for the fierce self-destructive tendencies. He is an individual case but through his anonymity he stands for the experiences of the human kind. His behaviour finds its counterpart in *Under the Volcano*, which portrays

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25 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

27 A. de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, London 1978, p. 499.

28 Beckett, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

humanity in the frenzy of inflicting pain and yielding to senseless suffering. The narrator's behaviour might be very well illustrated by a sentence from Lowry's book.

> Hugh regarded his cigarette which seemed bent like humanity on consuming itself as quickly as possible[29].

While the narrator is moving on, the white colour gets hold of him again. The encounter is almost fatal since he is attacked by a pack of ermines and hardly avoids being bitten to death. He is convinced that the others would have probably been bitten and sucked white[30]. The word is again used in a very conscious way but this time it is applied to the body that bled itself away. This menacing meaning obliterates former glamour. In spite of its perfection, the whiteness is capable of wounding and taking one's life away.

A very similar motif can be detected in *Under the Volcano*. The Consul seems to be haunted by light which takes on a hurting quality. The more aware he becomes of his journey into darkness, the more difficult it is for him to cope with light in all its manifestations. As the narrator from Beckett's story, the Consul grows more and more weary of living. He calls himself an outcast, but it is his own decision that casts him out of the paradisal harmony he once shared with Yvonne. His sun-glasses become an outward symbol of the tendency to separate himself from reality. Yvonne observes sympathetically that his eyes have got "such a glare". This minute detail has got its symbolic value; it intensifies the impression of the Consul's being oppressed, hurt and destroyed by the surrounding world. This world is thus transformed into hell where water does not quench thirst, and all the fountains, swimming pools, drops seem to be spurious. The sun might be compared to a kind of fierce divinity because its light is described by means of words suggesting violence. The image of Yvonne and Geoffrey walking home after their meeting is enriched with the passage about the sunlight which

> blazed down on them, blazed on the eternal ambulance whose headlights were mo-

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[29] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[30] B e c k e t t, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

mentarily transformed into a blinding magnifying glass, glazed on the volcanoes - she could not look at them now[31].

Seen as a blazing and blinding entity, the sun is a destructive agent which exposes the hidden guilt, sorrow and incapacity.

> The Consul looked at the sun. But he had lost the sun; it was not his sun. Like the truth, it was well nigh impossible to face; he did not want to go anywhere near it, least of all sit in its light, falling it. Yet I shall face it. How? -There was not even a consistent basis to his self-deceptions. How should there be then to his attempts at honesty. Horror he said[32].

Both the Consul and Beckett's narrator are essentially lonely in their grappling with life. In some oblique way their loneliness is related to the absence of the Absolute. *Under the Volcano* is a deeply religious book since it centres on guilt which splits up the unity of paradise and banishes love from it. Hell and heaven clash in the Consul's imagination. On the one hand, he desires to be saved through a re-discovery of harmony. His heaven is a dream about going to Canada and starting everything anew. His description of these plans in the letter to Yvonne ends in a sentence:

> We face east like Swedenborg's Angels[33].

East is here a distant remembrance of Resurrection regarded as the overcoming of physical death and deadly qualities that ruin spiritual harmony. Yet, the hope of revival is effectively blocked by the intrusion of darkness. The Consul feels his soul dying in the clamour of demoniac orchestras filling his ruined garden. In his inability to seize the distant heaven he resembles Faustus who sees Christ's blood flowing across the firmament and knows that one drop would be enough to save him. Yet, he is certain of being past any redemption.

The paradisal look of the earth is thought to be a trick played on people by the Absolute. The Consul formulates his idea of human predicament.

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[31] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 208. For the analysis of light and darkness imagery see: D o r o s z, *op. cit.*, p. 34-44.

[33] L o w r y, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

What if Adam wasn't really banished from the place at all. What if his punishment really consisted in his having to go on living there, alone of course - suffering, unseen, cut off from God[34].

The message of Beckett's vision is similar in its implications. His work is pervaded with the sacred absence of the absolute dimension. The title of the short piece of prose might suggest that God is not to be found because He refused to concern himself with human beings. The statement can be borne out by the title, *From an Abandoned Work*, since in the light of it human being is God's work which was abandoned by him. Abandoned may have two meanings: the work was left unfinished and therefore imperfect; it was abandoned to its lot, it is uncared for and hence worthless. The idea of active divinity is replaced by a belittled embodiment of authority as represented by mother and father of the narrator from this piece of prose. Perceiving God as either indifferent or absent means depriving a human being of the possibility od redemption. Consequently, life is reduced to an absurd struggle through fire, water and ferns as in the case of Beckett's narrator In the Consul's case it is the eternal anguish of the inability to come into contact with the Absolute which seems steeped in its placid indifference. Both visions make death and spiritual annihilation the logical and awaited outcome of senseless existence. The Consul anticipates it in a cheerful and laconic remark:

I am taking the only way out semicolon Goodbye full stop Change of paragraphs change of chapters change of worlds[35].

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34 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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WIZJA ŚWIATA M. LOWRY W KONTEKŚCIE PISARSTWA ELIOTA I BECKETTA

Artykuł jest analizą porównawczą powieści M. Lowry *Pod wulkanem* i poematu T. S. Eliota *Jałowa ziemia*. Istniejące między dwoma utworami podobieństwo przejawia się w obecności następujących motywów: 1) pragnienie dosłowne i metafizyczne, 2) utrata tożsamości, 3) obraz spustoszonej ziemi. Książka M. Lowry jest również porównana z utworem S. Becketta *Z zarzuconego dzieła*. Obydwa dzieła ukazują obsesję samozniszczenia. Ulegający jej bohaterowie są zanurzeni w rzeczywistość śmierci, rezultat odrzucenia Absolutu, który jest miłością.