

Malcolm Lowry and Modernism

Nigel H. Foxcroft

University of Brighton

2nd Sussex Modernism Lecture Series, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, May-June, 2016

Abstract

This paper presents Malcolm Lowry (1909-57) as a Modernist writer under the influence of primitivism, surrealism, and European avant-gardism.

In examining Lowry's links to Rye and Ripe in East Sussex, it traces his relationships with the American writer, Conrad Aiken (1889-1973) and with the latter's friend, the illustrious English surrealist painter, Edward Burra (1905-76), famous for his watercolour of Mexican night-life, *El Paseo*, c. 1938.

It asserts that it was through Burra that Lowry was influenced by the founder of surrealism, André Breton (1896-1966) [who met Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and Frida Kahlo (1907-54) in Mexico]; the prominent Sussex surrealist and poet, Edward James (1907-84); and the British-born, Mexican surrealist painter and novelist, Leonora Carrington, OBE (1917-2011) – all of whom were enchanted by Mexico.

Through the visual arts, connections are made between Burra's surrealism and Lowry's interpretation of the Dia de los Muertos, or Mexican Day of the Dead. An eye-witness to this fiesta, Lowry refers to it in his novel, *Under the Volcano* (1947) – focusing on murals by Diego Rivera (1886-1957) – and in *Sursum Corda: The Collected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*.

Nigel H. Foxcroft, 15th November 2015