CHAPTER II
ADAM'S SLAIN CHILDREN

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries

Bring us farther from God and nearer to the dust.

T.S. Eliot.

In October 1945, Lowell sent Randall Jarrell the manuscript of Lord Weary's Castle; it carried ten poems from Land Of Unlikeness, each of these slightly revised and thirty new poems. Jarrell wrote back declaring that LWC "will be the best first book of poems since Auden's Poems ... I think you are potentially a better poet than anybody writing in English" (qtd. in Hamilton 104). Lowell's LWC poems are undoubtedly worthy of the laudatory remarks made by Jarrell. In LWC Lowell uses the mythical mode to order his experience. Steven Gould Axelrod points out that the myth of LWC admits a wide range of experiences—of religion, history, literature, contemporary events, culture—all the communal experience that might be seen as archetypal (51). The catholicism of LWC is a method of organizing and illuminating shared contemporary experience.

These poems probe the complexities of the Age and of the consciousness that experiences the Age complexly. Outwardly, they are impersonal. "They nevertheless ring with 'personal vibrance,' the voice at their centre, intense and 'all out,' is Robert Lowell's own" (Alvarez 43).
The Second World War setting which serves as a frame for the whole book _LWC_ dominates the introductory poem, "The Exile's Return," which is a microcosm of this volume. Commenting on "The Exile's Return" at his last reading at the YMHA in New York on December 8, 1976, Lowell said he wrote it towards the end of the War, borrowing from Thomas Mann's _Tonio Kroger_ and it's about a German coming back to Germany after it's been blasted to pieces (qtd. in Rudman 17). He has used phrases and ideas freely from Thomas Mann's novella _Tonio Kroger_. And just as the German refugee returned to his battered homeland following the Second World War, Lowell himself re-entered the world following his wartime incarceration in a federal prison. As a Conscientious Objector, Lowell spent a few months in the West Street Jail during World War II and had later felt exiled at home in America. He documented this period in his life in a later poem, "Memories of West Street and Lepke," in which he incorporated his own history into that of the world at large. The returning prisoner and the returning American soldier were the poet himself.

According to Phillip Cooper, "The Exile's Return" fables against the disappointment, dispossession, disinheritance a man finds when he tries to recover the lost promises of childhood" (51).

... You will not see

Strutting children or meet

The peg-leg and reproachful chancellor

With a forget-me-not in his button-hole (3)

The "strutting children" or the "peg-leg chancellor" can now be only memories of the distant past. The lost promises of childhood are never recovered.

Though man is born into time and lives in its stream, he does not readily believe that time is good. Man fears time, for it is totally outside his control. Despite anything he can do, it moves inexorably on, never reversing itself, never allowing him really
to recapture a moment of his past, even when the past grows in charm and poignancy, as it recedes into the distance. The past for the exile has receded; will never be experienced again. Elizabethans called the relentless movement of time "thieving time". Marvell's well known lines are concerned with "time." He tells his "Coy Mistress":

But at my back I always hear

Time's winged chariot hurrying near,

And yonder all before us lie

Deserts of vast eternity. (lines 21-24)

Time's "wing'd chariot" has no reverse gear; it can only move forward into the future. Time is a "runner" who can never "stop" in Baudelaire's "The Voyage" (Le Voyage).

Shall we move or rest? Rest, if you can rest;
move if you must. One runs, but others drop
and trick their vigilant antagonist.

Time is a runner who can never stop. (qtd. in Rudman 142)

The dynamism of the verbs in "The Exile's Return" expresses violent action or motion.

There mounts in squalls a sort of rusty mire,

Not ice, not snow, to leaguer the Hotel

De Ville, where braced pig-iron dragons grip

The blizzard to their rigor mortis. A bell

Grumbles when the reverberations strip

The thatching from its spire,

The search-guns click and spit and split up timber (3)

Adjective clauses introduced by "where" and "when," that follow rather than precede the main clause are a hallmark of Lowell's early poems. In the twenty four-lined
"Exile's Return" three such clauses are used. "Where braced pig-iron dragons grip / The blizzard to their rigor mortis."

The Exile returns in Staples's words to a "Land of unlikeness" (34). Nothing is as it was, the war has changed everything, and the country is harsh and forbidding. The boys are old men now. The promise of renewal gives way to a tone of disenchantment. Similar disenchantment grips the "Tamil mind" of the Indian poet V.R. Parthasarathy, when he decides to return to Madras to renew links with his Tamil past. Parthasarathy thought that England, would be his adopted future home and the English language would help him belong there. But events proved otherwise. Disappointed with England he decided to return home. But when he returns to the world he has left, he finds no sign of the remembered or expected past. He explores this "disappointment in home-coming" in "Rough Passage."

... What have I come  
here for from a thousand miles?  
The hourglass of the Tamil mind  
is replaced by the exact chronometer  
of Europe (RP 24)

The ancient Tamil civilization is being replaced by the advanced European civilization; hourglass by chronometer. "Torn-up milestones," "dynamited Walnut tree" greet Lowell's Exile. Conspicuous, attractive advertisements of the celluloid world, high-breasted, multi-coloured paper goddesses welcome the Exile in Parthasarathy's poem. But the disenchantment is the same to both.

Lowell describes the victorious Americans as "unseasoned liberators." Lowell was able to see the possibility of a Vietnam in the very victory during the Second World War. The sons of those "unseasoned liberators" come by the end of the 1960s
to "fall in small war on the heels of small war." Hence Fein calls him a true "Historian" (41).

The world that Lowell has re-entered may prove to be hellish or heavenly. The poet will spend the rest of his life by writing about it and much of what he writes will be the product of his own memories. But Lowell does not abandon hope altogether, because

... already lily-stands

Burgeon the risen Rhineland, and a rough

Cathedral lifts its eye. (3)

Spotless considers Lowell's explorations of history, dramatically focussing on the tragedy of war, as close to Yeats's theory and practice in poems like "Long-Legged Fly" and "The Second Coming" (33). In "The Exile's Return," Lowell chronicles the death of a tradition and a way of life, but at the same time suggests the possibilities of rebirth. Similarly "Long-Legged Fly" begins with almost a desperate warning,

That civilisation may not sink,

Its great battle lost, (lines 1-2 p., 381)

moves on to a more muted apocalypse,

That the topless towers be burnt (line 11 p., 381)

and to the final stanza's affirming act of creation,

There on the scaffolding reclines

Michael Angelo. (lines 25-26 p., 382)

Lowell's Exile returns to the world after the "gaze blank and pitiless as the sun," the gaze of the Second World War, has ravaged the world, "the blood-dimmed tide is loosed" and "innocence drowned." Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" in 1919. When in 1936, he felt that "every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe," he told his correspondent Ethel Mannin to look up "The Second Coming"
because it "foretold what is happening" (qtd. in Cullingford 162). Was Yeats horrified or delighted by the advent of the rough beast? The same ambiguity prevails in "The Exile's Return." Does Lowell welcome the termination of war or not? According to Mark Rudman, "The end of the poem points to an uncertain future when the collective psyche will no longer be able to vent some of its darkest feelings through the guise of a common cause" (16). The world offered to the exile by the "unseasoned liberators" and to Lowell himself by the victory- proud America is as frightening to them as it was to Dante seeing the gates of Hell, LASCIATE OGNE SPERANZA VOI CH'INTRATE (Abandon every hope, you who enter). Lowell and the Exile re-enter the post war world, the inevitable hell of the human condition, clutching their lives in their hands. It is a well-known fact that for a decade or so following the withdrawal from Vietnam, all the services were troubled by poor morale, drug abuse and deteriorating discipline. They were also the victims of disappointed "home coming," who were unable to adjust themselves to the changed conditions of the society they came from, but did not belong to any more.

With a title recalling Malcolm Cowley's influential book about modern artist-exiles, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s, and using details from Mann's Tonio Kroger, the poem posits exile as the condition of the modern artist- Joyce, Lawrence, Conrad- -and Lowell himself, self-exiled from Boston's traditions, and from the war which produced the 'Land of Unlikeness' described in the poem (Crick 30-31).

The "Holy Innocents" paints the twentieth century world, that the Exiles re-enter into. The victims of the state are seen in "The Holy Innocents" as "speechless clods and infants" ruled over by the murderous Herod. The Protestant State in the form that it took in Puritan New England, is viewed ambivalently by Lowell. Alienated from what Lowell feels to be the humane tradition of catholicism, the pilgrims mercilessly
exploited the land and the Indians under cover of a twisted conception of themselves as agents of God. Subsequent American History merely changed the targets and rationale of exploitation. Wars fought in the seventeenth century under the banner of religious zeal are fought in the twentieth century under the banner of the Capitalistic system.

"The Holy innocents" is a tense, difficult poem, in which Lowell characteristically reinforces a shock encounter between the past and the present. The landscapes of biblical Israel and wartime New England have mysteriously merged. As Herod slaughtered the Holy Innocents in a vain attempt to destroy the infant Christ, so in 1944 "the nineteen hundred forty-fifth of grace" the world was smoking under the bombs and military campaigns of both the Allies and the Axis-powers. The ruthless world of today has actually out- Heroded Herod. As in many of his other poems, the sense of the contemporary world is too rich in Lowell for his literary and cultural reminiscences to survive only as such. From the memory of Herod's slaughter, "King Herod shrieking vengeance at the curled / Up knees of Jesus choking in the air" (4), emerges a thoroughly modern scene.

    Listen, the hay-bells tinkle as the cart
    Wavers on rubber tires along the tar

    ... The oxen drool and start
    In wonder at the fenders of a car, (4)

The ancient oxen, straying from some Christmas crib, and the modern automobiles are seen to be climbing the same hill in New Hampshire. This constant fusion of the traditional and the present, a sense of history and the religious spirit gives a rare poetic quality to many of Lowell's early poems.
Randall Jarrell made an acute observation when he wrote that Lowell's mind was completely "non-scientific," but completely "historical" and in fact all his poetry is historically oriented, the continuity of the past and the present finding concrete expression in the poet's recurring use of historical figures and events (qtd. in Anzilotti 82). The returned exiles of "The Exile's Return" are weak and powerless as the pleasant beasts who "blunder hugely" up the hills of the church. The image of the Child Christ choking in death magnifies the helplessness of the "clods and infants" and the "exiles", measured against the cruel strength of King Herod, and by extension the cruel strength of the State and its machinery.

While the cruel strength of the modern "State" exasperates Lowell, the indifference of the "Government" pains Jussawalla, an Indian poet writing in English.

Economists enclosed in History's
Chinese boxes, citing chairman Mao,
Know how a people nourished on decay
Disintegrate or crash in civil war
Contrarily, the Indian diplomat,
Flying with me, is confident the poor
Will stay just as they are. ("Approaching Santa Cruz

Air Port, Bombay")

The Hungarian workmen of the Second World War also do not escape the State, mechanically slaving throughout their lives in the defence plants of Black Rock, Connecticut.

... In Black Mud

Hungarian workmen give their blood (5)

Throughout LWC, Lowell conflates history by abolishing the distinction between the past and the present, equating the sins of Adam and Cain with those of
his New England forebears and with the sins of the present world as well. And because he tacitly adopts Max Weber's theory of the malignant bond between Calvinism and Capitalism, he equates what he sees as commercial and mercantile sins with religious and historical offences such as the massacre of King Philip and his Indians by the Puritans and the senseless killing of the innocent whales by the Quakers. "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" suggests life's futility and the senselessness of death. It is an attack on an immoral social order, a furious rant in the face of impending disaster, a painful examination of the paradox of religious grace.

"The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" a kind of elegy in memory of Warren Winslow dead at sea is divided into seven parts. It is mostly impersonal as it focuses attention on the objects of the poet's reflections rather than on himself or his own experience. Lt. Warren Winslow died on January 3, 1944, when his ship the USS destroyer Turner, sank as the result of an accidental explosion in the Ambrose Channel, off New York harbour: "The terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death / In these home waters." "In the course of the elegy, Lowell presents the sea first as death dealing, then as death and consequently as hell, since in the Christian tradition the only lasting death is that of hell" (Rink 39).

Marking the sea as death-giving is the dedication: "FOR WARREN WINSLOW DEAD AT SEA." This dedication is immediately followed by the Genesis 1:26: "Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moves upon the earth."

Alan Williamson sees the epigraph as crucially important, for this passage forms the basis for the theological doctrine of Stewardship, according to which, man (like the ideal feudal noble) holds his authority over those beneath him only conditionally as a trust from his Lord, and is required by God to govern, not to exploit. It is the failure of this stewardship that
provides the subtle link across time between the three great instances of human wrong-doing Lowell is concerned with; the exploitative Quaker Whaling industry of the nineteenth century; Captain Ahab's revengeful hunt in Moby Dick; and the technology of modern war, which has killed Lowell's cousin (36).

The Quakers are a Christian group that arose in the mid-seventeenth century in England and the American Colonies, advocating direct inward apprehension of God without creeds, Clergy or other ecclesiastical forms. They practise silent waiting for the "inward light" or "that of God in everyman" at their meetings and are especially known for their efforts for social reform. But though pacifists in their human dealings, they are greedy and cruel in their fishing methods, and nearly exterminated the whole species of whales.

Just as the unlimited greed of the Quakers resulted in the near-extinction of the whales, human greed may also result in a horrifying global technological war. Though written before Hiroshima, the poem foresees an escalation of destructive power, possibly leading to the suicide of the human race.

In an interview with Alvarez Lowell said, "There are two great symbolic figures that stand behind American ambition and culture. One is Milton's Lucifer and the other is Captain Ahab; these two sublime ambitions that are doomed and ready, for their idealism, to face any amount of violence" (104). Axelrod observes, "The image of Ahab killing whales in "The Quaker Graveyard" stands for three contemporary evils (which are really one): the murder of nature for selfish ends (capitalism), the murder of young men like Winslow (war) and the murder of Jesus Christ (Secularism)" (58).

There is evidence of Weber's influence in this poem. Max Weber noted the statistical correlation in Germany between interest and success in capitalist ventures on the one hand and the Protestant background on the other. He then went on to
attribute the relationship to certain psychological consequences of the notions of predestination and the calling in Puritan theology, notions that were deduced with the greatest logical severity by Calvin and his followers. According to Axelrod, "In Lowell's Weberian View, the hideous capitalism, war, and atheism of the present age derive inevitably from America's Calvinist-Quaker beginnings. The doomed sailor—representative of us all—has been the victim of his own sinfulness, the victim of his participation in his own deeply sinning culture" (58). Echoing the same sentiment, Alan Williamson raises the question, "Where is there another elegy which concludes that its subject died partly because he deserved to?" (35).

The first section visually reconstructs the sailor's death. Lowell, though a pacifist, uses aggressive energetic language and strong rhythms in order to grapple with the world and subdue it:

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket -
The sea was still breaking violently and night
Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,
When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light
Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
He grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdlng muscles of his thighs: (6)

Though the actual event narrated in the poem occurred near New York, Lowell has "set" the poem in Nantucket. The Nantucket landscape reminds one of the language - thrust in the poem. There was the sea, impinging on all sides, walled out by dunes and cliffs, natural fortresses. And there was the harsh beach grass, and the wind flailing one's eyes. One was struck—literally blinded—by the tenuousness of existence in a place where the elements vent themselves furiously — "...The winds' wings beat upon the stones, / ... and scream."
Borrowing from Thoreau's account of the wreck of an Irish brig off Cohasset in Cape Cod, Lowell launches into an image of the drowned sailor's eyes as "lustreless dead-light/ Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk/Heavy with sand." Yet Lowell significantly rearranges Thoreau's details, in order to integrate them into his own inspiration. He contrasts details suggesting kinaesthesia, (the sailor's "coiled, hurciling muscles," with features suggesting statuary ("marble feet") or a still-life ("a batch of reds and whites"), thereby highlighting the pathos of the sailor's movement from the energy of life to the stasis of death. The body which seemed actively to "clutch" and "grapple" is revealed to be passively "stranded," "heavy"; the "light" which "flashed" from his head darkens into the "lustreless dead lights" of his eyes. Although partly fictional and partly expressed in borrowed language, the passage is in a sense highly personal. "Lowell brilliantly transforms his borrowed details into a new entity that contains his own deep response to the pathos of mortality" (Axelrod 56).

The serious tenor of the poem is enforced by the reference to fated Ahab's "Void and forehead." Lowell shares with Ahab his monomania and the restlessness and tension which cannot be relieved by anything on earth. The annihilation of the whale cannot be enacted without the concomitant death of the self. Ahab had to die to kill his own pain and Lowell uses this death in his poem as an omen. Lowell's conflicts are insoluble and his vision is tragic. No worldly resolution is possible. The anguish of the conflict is constant.

Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea
Where dreadnaughts shall confess
Its hell-bent deity,
When you are powerless
To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced
By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste
In his steel scales: ask for no Orphean lute
To pluck life back. The guns of the steel-ed fleet
Recoil and then repeat
The hoarse salute. (6)
The poet addresses the sailors who buried the corpse, and all sailors who have foolishly tried to "sandbag this Atlantic bulwark." When the sucking sea takes, it does not give back. Not even the lute of the Thracian Orpheus could make the Atlantic release its hold on the thousands of Eurydices it has taken into itself. The image of the "steel scales" links the contemporary naval force and the sea deity, the "earth shaker" Poseidon. The poem constantly unites classical and contemporary experiences—the death of one sailor killed at war, the deaths of many sailors killed in the same war, and previous deaths at sea. Warren Winslow, a Harvard graduate of about Lowell's age, represented in the poet's view, a close ally whose untimely death mirrored all the wasted lives lost in wars.

All you recovered from Poseidon died
With you, my cousin, and the harrowed brine
Is fruitless on the blue beard of the god,
Stretching beyond us to the castles in Spain,
Nantucket's westward haven. (7)

Lowell, only once in the poem shows personal warmth towards the sailor by addressing him as "my cousin." Except this, there is no expression of personal grief and he has made no allusion to his personal career as a poet. This is more surprising when it is remembered that Lowell like Shelley and Milton was just under thirty, when he composed his elegy. The full significance of the poem's epigraph from Genesis is evident here. The Quakers of the past had taken the lines 'Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea' as a justification for their materialism and their ruthless
exploitation of nature. Their dreams of success, 'their castles in Spain' are now lost in the seas of time. The theme of the vanity of worldly acquisitions and ambitions introduced in Part II is applied to the cousin--the wartime sailor--"All you recovered from Poseidon died / With you, my cousin," as well as to the Quakers:

Whatever it was these Quaker sailors lost
In the mad scramble of their lives.

... 

I see the Quakers drown and hear their cry:

"If God himself had not been on our side,
If God himself had not been on our side,
When the Atlantic rose against us, why,
Then it had swallowed us up quick." (7-8)

Here Lowell uses harshly alliterative, heavily consonantal words, in colloquial constructions. The Quakers were convinced that God was on their side, because he made them so immediately successful; success equalled justification; ends means. The repetition of "If God himself had not been on our side," adapted from Psalm 124, suggests not only their smugness, but also perhaps a need to convince themselves of God's sympathy for them and others through sheer repetition and assertion. The island of Nantucket, lying south of Cape Cod off the eastern seaboard, was the centre of the whaling industry in the nineteenth century. In Moby Dick Melville wrote, "The Nantucketer, he alone resides and rots on the sea; he alone in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and fro, ploughing it as his own special plantation. There is his home; there lies his business, which a Noah's flood would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China. He lives on the sea, as prairie cocks on the prairie, he hides among the waves; he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps" (qtd. in Raban 160).
Section four of "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" could be an eloquent epilogue to *Moby Dick*. According to Axelrod,

in order to achieve an air of anonymity for what is at base a confession of loathsome self knowledge and guarded hope, Lowell takes his images from the impersonal source of *Moby Dick*. In Lowell's version of the *Moby Dick* myth, the white whale dies like Christ on the cross, "spouting out blood and water" - harpooned, crucified. By repeating the murder of Christ through ceaseless violence, the human race (including now the speaker) has brought Apocalypse upon itself (59-60).

The action in "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" is made sensible to us through the physicality of the language and the complexity of the form. The nine sections of the poem as originally printed in *Partisan Review* contained 194 lines, divided into a loose stanzaic structure of pentameter lines, varied by the occasional trimeter. The *Selected Poems* version has 143 lines. The stanzas also vary a good deal in length. Each stanza has its own highly intricate rhyme scheme, yet is different from the other.

For example in section IV it is an inventive ten-line stanza with a truncated sixth line and a well defined rhyme-scheme- -a,b,c,b,c,a,a,c,c,a in the first and a,b,c,b,c,a,d, e,e,d in the second.

This is the end of the whaleroad and the whale (a)
Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell (b)
And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools (c)
To send the Pequod packing off to hell: (b)
This is the end of them, three-quarters fools, (c)
Snatching at straws to sail (a)
Seaward and seaward on the tumtail whale, (a)
Spouting out blood and water as it rolls,
Sick as a dog to these Atlantic shoals:
*Clamavimus, O depths. Let the sea-gulls wail*
For water, for the deep where the high tide
Mutters to its hurt self, mutters and ebbs.
Waves wallow in their wash, go out and out,
Leave only the death-rattle of the crabs,
The beach increasing, its enormous snout
Sucking the ocean's side.
This is the end of running on the waves;
We are poured out like water. Who will dance
The mast-lashed master of Leviathans
Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned graves?"  

According to Mark Rudman, the headlong run-on lines, all ending on 'l' sounds, gather into sound-chords that echo some submerged trauma culminating in the "rime-riche" - "Whale/ "wail" (28). "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" is a traditional elegy and its affiliations with other great elegies- -Milton's "Lycidas", Shelley's "Adonais" and Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland" have been noted by critics and commentators, from the time of its first appearance. On the level of ideas and structure, in its mingling of Christian and Pagan symbolism and its interweaving of criticism of aspects of the world and of human behaviour it resembles these other great elegies. And like Milton, he continues the elegiac tradition by going beyond his lament to a larger consideration of contemporary and universal issues.

The following lines are comparable to Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland":

Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time
When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime
And breathed into his face the breath of life,
And blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.

The Lord survives the rainbow of His will. (10)

The line "The Lord survives the rainbow of His Will" is the poet's dedication to man's sphere of constant struggle. The force of Lowell's Christianity makes us face the turbulent reality that marks both our destruction and the swell of any glory we possess. God created man out of the sea and God receives man from the sea. The world of death and suffering is man's world; the world within the rainbow. The rainbow that arches from the sea and into the sea, the rainbow of life has the beginning and the end in the sea. By extension, the sea is not only Quakers' Graveyard but everyone's:

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
The recumb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
Stanching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;
Ground of being, and granite of it: past all
Grasp God, throned behind ("The Wreck of the Deutschland"

lines 249-55)

The "it" of this famous sixth stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is, crudely, the apparently senseless suffering of the innocent. Any statement is crude because Hopkins's thoroughly vague "it" represents the awful mystery of his perception. "It rides time like riding a river."
The world of God is simply outside time. Hopkins's vision of God and his role in the tragedy of the sea is remarkably like Lowell's. Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides. "The Wreck
of the Deutschland" does not stop here, but its vision of God "throned behind/Death" is only a step away from Lowell's last line (Dolan 179).

There is no "ego" in the poem. Lowell becomes what he beholds; the perceiver identifies himself with the perceived. His hatred for and anger towards the Puritans for their killing of whales combine with his subliminal identification with their action—which he condemns. Lowell was a Puritan, it was part of his heritage, it was in his bones, so the hatred is also self-hatred. The Puritans were willing to conquer nature, to exhibit rage and violence against the elements. But if a whale could "send the Pequod packing off to hell" then think what the ocean could do to the fragile human being. The poem contains only pain and sadness for self and the wider world.

As Lowell said some thirty years after the poem was written: "A poem changes with each inspection. Variability is its public existence. Yet variety has limits; no one could call Macbeth or my "Quaker Graveyard" hilarious minuets. That would take an insensately amusing theorist" (114).

"Concord" deals with the same paradox found in "The Quaker Graveyard"; the paradox of a religious faith that believing in the value of hard work accumulated so much wealth and power that its values became this worldly and led to its modern capitalist power. It is a sonnet in a strict order—an octave rhyming a,b,b,a, and a sestet of six lines.

Ten thousand Fords are idle here in search

Of a tradition. Over these dry sticks—
The Minute Man, the Irish Catholics,
The ruined bridge and Walden's fished-out perch—
The belfry of the Unitarian Church
Rings out the hanging Jesus. Crucifix,
How can your whitened spindling arms transfix
Mammon’s unbridled industry, the lurch
For forms to harness Heraclitus’ stream! (LWC 27)

Here both the order of faith and order of metre are deeply rooted in history and tradition. But can the order of faith or the order of metre still work in a century whose contact with its historical roots grows ever more shaky? This poem depicts the constant sense of abrasion, of incongruity of the tug and turmoil of a man whose head is full of history, but whose eye can only pick out the contemporary scene of the "Ten thousand Fords" and strangely enough they are in search of a "tradition."

Jawaharlal Nehru while writing about culture and tradition said, "The individual human being or race or nation must necessarily have a certain depth and certain roots somewhere. They do not count for much unless they have roots in the past, which past is after all the accumulation of generations of experience and some type of wisdom. It is essential that you have that. Otherwise you become just pale copies of something which has no real meaning to you as an individual or as a group" (122-23). And according to W.H. Auden, " Tradition no longer means a way of working handed down from one generation to the next; a sense of tradition now means a consciousness of the whole of the past as present, yet at the same time as a structured whole, the parts of which are related in terms of before and after" (43).

For Lowell, according to Agostino Lombardo, "tradition is an alive, active and dynamic internal experience: not a dead or merely literary past, it is on the contrary a past which, as Eliot taught in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is an integral part of the present, a necessary condition for and itself an expression of, it" (80). "Concord" is an indictment of America’s severance from its own history, and attempts to hammer home, the value of the past, faith and tradition.

Concord, the village centre of nineteenth century transcendentalism, embodies the proudest aspects of New England’s religious and philosophical traditions. Emerson
produced his strings of immaculate epigrams here and Lowell's "Concord" stands in ironic, though, complementary relation to Emerson's "Concord Hymn."

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world. ("Concord Hymn" lines 1-4)

Lowell called the line about "the shot heard around the world," "a fine line with conscious urbane exaggeration." According to him, "Emerson always maintains an ironic and urbane distance from the Concord farmers who themselves simply thought they were out-shooting the English tax-collectors. In this poem you have got freshness, gentleness, calmness. And the most exciting work is in the last stanza. The poem becomes more internal as it goes on, and you find Emerson's old themes-time, world, spirit-flashing in one historic moment" (28).

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare

The shaft we raise to them and thee. ("Concord Hymn" lines 13-16)

In Lowell's "Concord" the "shot heard around the world" is substituted with the "death dance of King Philip and his scream, whose echo girdled this imperfect globe." King Philip (1638-1676) Chief of the Wampanoag Indians, led an uprising against New England colonists known as King Philip's war. Known by his Indian name of Metacomet, he tried to avoid open engagements with the English, and the war was mainly a series of ambushes and massacres in many towns of inland Connecticut and Rhode Island. In the summer of 1676, when colonial troops began burning the Indians' crops, many of his tribesmen deserted Philip rather than face starvation. After his wife and son were captured and sold into slavery, Philip took refuge in a
swamp near present day Bristol, R.I., where he was killed on August, 12, 1676. The peace-loving activities of Thoreau are here juxtaposed with the brutal facts of history, the grim realities of the wars against Indians.

The poet also searches for the Concord "where Thoreau named all the birds without a gun to probe." But the Concord of to-day has only "a ruined bridge and fished-out perch." The Second World War has destroyed bridges and buildings and man's greed has totally exhausted nature.

Heraclitus had remarked that no harmony could exist without discord but Heraclitus could not have imagined the urban jungle of the twentieth century America, where harmony is impossible. It is a stew of fecund industry and exhausted Nature, and in Lowell's poem the city of Concord has deteriorated into a catalogue of fruitless discords and we recognize the irony of the town's being named as "Concord."

The "Ten thousand Fords" represent their Mammonish owners, who have no sense of history and hence do not realize that "unbridled industry" cannot harness Heraclitus's stream. In "Concord" Lowell uses a vocabulary of mixed blame and praise. The past is presented neither as a heroic contrast to prevent evil nor as the sole source for present evil, but as part of a historical continuum ambiguously composed of both good and evil.

Lowell, like Thoreau, had a lot of sympathy for the American Indians. Emerson said of Thoreau, "every circumstance touching the Indian (was) important in his eyes." The echo of the Indian King's scream of death still is heard in the countless screams of soldiers in bombing raids. The guilt of the near total extermination of the Indians haunts Lowell, by extension every American.

The poem "At the Indian Killer's Grave" is the consequence of this guilt. The poem is a slap in the face of the whole country, modern America with all its talk of
achievements, global supremacy and patriotism. The poem is direct, savage and personal. Lowell ruthlessly attacks himself, his ancestors and his country here.

The epigraph from Hawthorne's "Gray Champion" recalls the slaughter of Indians in King Philip's war (1675-76). This war caused by the colonists' territorial expansionism was the bloodiest of all the wars between the newcomers and the native Americans. The colonists' eventual victory over the forces of King Philip in 1676, marking the end of the Indians as a national entity in New England, serves Lowell as a symbol of American violence, idealism and ambition. The theme of "At the Indian Killer's Grave" has enduring significance. In the poem's epigraph, Lowell changes Hawthorne's past tense to present tense to suggest that we all "are veterans of King Philip's war who burned villages and slaughtered young and old with pious fierceness"—a slaughter of innocents that recurs in the present day. Though written in the tradition of Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard", Longfellow's "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" and Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead", the poem reveals not the virtues of its subjects, but their sins.

The King's Chapel is in Boston, behind which there is a cemetery, dating from colonial days, where the meditation takes place. The colonialists buried here were the murderers of Indian natives, including King Philip.

Lowell's public poem has a personal dimension as well. During Philip's war, the leader of the colonists' military forces was Josiah Winslow, Commander-in-Chief, Governor of Plymouth colony, and Lowell's direct ancestor on his mother's side. "John and Mary Winslow" whose cenotaph is in the graveyard, are the other ancestors of Lowell.

Behind King's Chapel what the earth has kept
Whole from the jerking noose of time extends
Its dark enigma to Jehoshaphat;
Or will King Philip plait

The just man's scalp in the wailing valley!... (24)

King Philip's head was exhibited at Plymouth for many years after his death. But now "Philip's head grins on the platter" and warns them that the "judgement is at hand."

Who was the man who sowed the dragon's teeth,

That fabulous or fancied patriarch

Who sowed so ill for his descent, beneath

King's Chapel in this underworld and dark? (26)

The men lying in their graves, "the fabulous or fancied patriarchs" built a kingdom for their heirs, but they "sowed so ill for their descent," as they now do not have security with the constant threat of nuclear warfare. We are all Cadmus's giants fighting amongst ourselves. The fight between the Kauravas and the Pandavas at Kurukshetra, between brothers, between kith and kin, is the power struggle between the children of Abel and Cain.

"Between the Porch and the Altar" is another savage epitaph on the history of New England. It is the pivotal poem in LWC. It treats religious experiences in the context of contemporary personal problems that are presumably in part autobiographical. The poem's title is from the Ash Wednesday epistle of the Book of Joel:

Let the priests, who minister to the LORD,

Weep between the porch and the altar. (Joel 3)

It was also the title of a short story by Jean Stafford. Both the poem and the story reach for the autobiographical, the experience of self as opposed to the restrictive voices of otherness, a clear renunciation of the metaphysical in favour of the physical. The setting is Concord, where the 'Farmer' who 'sizzles on his shaft all day' is the statue of the Concord Minute Man.
"Between the Porch and the Altar" looks forward to Lowell's later works, because the suffering in the poem is caused by the parents and the family of the protagonists. By the time Lowell wrote this poem, Freudian theory had permeated every level of culture. The speaker is concerned with his personal history, a biography fraught with sin and aberration of which he is intensely guilty. His family's past is blamed for his obsession with his sin and also for his obsessive indulgence in it, yet he is uncertain as to what conclusion should be drawn about his inheritance of guilt and fear. According to Freud, "a thing which has not been understood, inevitably reappears; like an unlaied ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken" (qtd. in Wallingford 56). The unlaied ghost reappears at the very beginning of the poem.

Meeting his mother makes him lose ten years,
Or is it twenty? Time, no doubt, has ears
That listen to the swallowed serpent, wound
Into its bowels, but he thinks no sound
Is possible before her, he thinks the past
Is settled. (15)

The son is half-paralyzed by his mother's presence. He retreats into memory in order to regain the sense of autonomy that he felt and took refuge in, as a boy. His mother impedes his sense of freedom.

Into the sack and selfhood of the boy
Who clawed through fallen houses of his Troy,
Homely and human only when the flames
Crackle in recollection. (15)

The autobiographical allusion is a vivid symbol for the impact of the parents' unhappy marriage on the child, Lowell himself. Lowell's mother Charlotte Winslow Lowell was
suffocatingly domineering, his father Robert Traill Spencer Lowell was ineffectual and distant. And the family life was filled with bitter arguments.

But Lowell never strays too far away from his Puritan guilt. His personal anguish leads him on to public anguish. His grand father’s image evokes ambivalent emotions. To the poet, he is an epitome of the Puritan heritage that he continually fought against, but of which he is a part.

The forehead of her father’s portrait peels
With rosy dryness, and the school boy kneels
To ask the benediction of the hand, (15)
His whole history resides in the room domineering him in the guise of the portrait.
The past history is never "settled", one can never escape it.

Herbert Leibowitz discussing Lowell’s early poetry says that Lowell’s ambivalent attitude to the Puritans is central to an understanding of his poetry. Although he repudiates them intellectually, he is at home with their buffettungs and morbidity. From them he takes or corroborates the habits of self-examination (27).

.... They lied,
My cold-eyed seedy fathers when they died,
Or rather threw their lives away, to fix
Sterile, forbidding name plates on the bricks
Above a kettle. Jesus rest their souls! (16)

There is a conflict between the protagonist’s senses and his historical, religious and intellectual heritage. Frustrated, he lashes out at the Puritans and of course at his own family for the vanity and pretence behind the tradition they have passed down to him, reinforced by their own self-sacrifice.

Lowell told the interviewer Frederick Seidel that "Katherine’s Dream" was a real dream. He found that he shaped it a bit, cutting it and allegorizing it, but still it
was a dream someone had had (53). But the Browningesque monologue generates questions- -Is it a mere dream or a waking reality?- -Is she the only friendless soul? Does the poem express sympathy to those countless women all over the world, who, betrayed by lovers, parents and society lead lonely lives longing for friendship from fellow beings and Pardon from the Supreme being? According to Mark Rudman, "the feelings behind the poem, the fear of punishment for sexual misconduct, the breaking of taboos, the loneliness of sudden isolation from God are actualized in imagination, not rhetorical and willed" (45). Lowell uses the married man's lines often said throughout the world. "... You know / I want to leave my mother and my wife, / You wouldn't have me tied to them for life .... "

After Lowell's breakup with Jean Stafford, Lowell courted Gertrude Buckman. Marriage between them never materialised and Gertrude Buckman later said that marriage between them was never a serious possibility. The spoof verse that Buckman wrote for Partisan Review in 1947 again reflects the hypocritical relationship that very often exists between husbands and wives.

So the symbolic wedding ring
Often does not mean a thing
And infidelity runs rife
While everyday is simply strife
And everyone loves another's mate
And looks upon his own with hate. (qtd. in Hamilton 126)

A later poem "The Mills of the Kavanaughs" also sympathetically conveys a woman's experience of a man who fails her. And both "The Mills of the Kavanaughs" and "Katherine's Dream" anticipate "To speak of Woe that is in Marriage" in Life Studies. In "To speak of Woe" her "hopped up husband drops his home disputes" to "hit the streets to cruise for prostitutes" and safely swaggerers home "at five." But the lovers here
are not so fortunate. The car ride through "seven red lights," violating the traffic rules because, "the road is unpatrolled and empty" ends in a fatal collision against a gothic church.

... I am dying. The shocked stones
Are falling like a ton of bricks and bones
That snap and splinter and descend in glass
Before a priest who mumbles through his Mass
And sprinkles holy water; ... (19)

The joy ride (sex) and the church (religion) are in constant conflict and destroy each other. Lowell's psychological portraits are indeed unique. Few writers give us so vivid or dramatic a sense of the interpenetration or confusion of the personal with the archetypal which Jung holds to be characteristic of some extreme neurotic experience, as Lowell does. And no style in literature captures so well the process of formalization by metaphor; the disturbing object becoming still as it becomes impersonal, yet suffused with a violent-almost a caricatural-emotionalism, as the buried feelings assume control over reality.

The sinners in "Between the Porch and the Altar" have no escape. They face inevitable death in the flames of hell. "Mr.Edwards and the Spider" laments a faith based on unbearable fear of that Hell-Fire, a religion to which an authoritarian unyielding God is a central construct.

According to Auden, "It is extremely difficult to use public figures as themes for poetry because the good or evil they do, depends less upon their characters and intentions than upon the quantity of impersonal force at their disposal" (44). Lowell confers authenticity on the present by linking it to the past. Thus, when he writes on the worthy men of the past, he stands outside his own history and evaluates it with ironic detachment. Hence, Lowell's Jonathan Edwards poems have a past and
present existence, rarely found in lyric poetry. Lowell's Edwards poems like certain passages in Eliot and Pound, follow original documents with such an archaeological closeness that only a few phrases can be attributed solely to the poet's imagination. Thus Edwards is allowed to speak very much for himself. It is only by the subtle effects that usually betray the poet's hand in such poems—arrangement, changes of context, the building of image patterns—that we can sense Lowell leading us toward interpretations of his own, beyond those that Edwards draws.

The sources for "Mr. Edwards and the Spider" are from "Of Insects," a treatise Edwards wrote at the age of twelve and the sermons "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God" and "The Future Punishment of the Wicked unavoidable and intolerable."

I saw the spiders marching through the air,
Swimming from tree to tree that mildewed day
In latter August when the hay
Came creaking to the barn. But where
The wind is westerly,
Where gnarled November makes the spiders fly
Into the apparitions of the sky,
They purpose nothing but their ease and die
Urgently beating east to sunrise and the sea; (27)

Though Lowell's stanza comes directly from the essay, he makes significant changes. He makes the whole passage a foreshadowing of the adult Edwards's view of the divine purpose behind human action.

Josiah Hawley, the man threatened in the last stanza was Edwards's uncle.

But who can plumb the sinking of that soul?
Josiah Hawley, picture yourself cast
Into a brick-kiln where the blast
Fans your quick vitals to a coal -
If measured by a glass,
How long would it seem burning! Let there pass
A minute, ten, ten trillion; but the blaze
Is infinite, eternal: this is death,

To die and know it. This is the Black Widow, death. (28)

Josiah Hawley cut his throat at the height of the Great Awakening in a fit of melancholy, such as Edwards’s sermons might be expected to produce. Williamson observes,

that the last sentence has no source in Edwards; by it, Lowell broadens the vision of death far beyond the physical torments of hell, and makes the reader connect it with the many meanings the “spider” has had in the poem. On the one hand, there is man delighting in sensuous "ease", man entrapped into destruction by his illusory freedom, man as a loathed victim in the hand of God, man’s "last retreat" into despair; On the other hand, there is the death dealing power of God working inexorably through time (28).

The persona in "After the Surprising Conversions" is also Jonathan Edwards. In the earlier poem Edwards is in the midst of "The Great Awakening" and is directly addressing Josiah Hawley. In the latter, the revival is over and he is assessing its effect. The poem with its emphasis on time- -in this instance through its addition of "September twenty-second", pictures man against the timeless cycle of nature. The poem ends with the minute and characteristic, but essentially meaningless scrutiny of nature for symbolic insights which we find in much Puritan writing.
September twenty-second, Sir, the bough
Cracks with the unpicked apples, and at dawn
The small-mouth bars breaks water, gorged with spawn (30)

Mazzaro notes that the purpose of this picture is to show that living does not end with one's dying or even with the deaths of many, but is a continuous cycle like the poem's paradisiacal "apples" and redemptive "small mouth bass" (70). The same concept that "living does not end with one's dying" is evoked in Auden's "Musee Des Beaux Arts."

... the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse

Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

... and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

Something amazing; a boy falling out of the sky,

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. ("Musee Des Beaux Arts" lines 11-12, 18-20 pp.79-80)

To determine one's moment of death is the primary argument for suicide, and here the determination on the part of Hawley becomes almost a virtue especially when one contrasts his person with the world around him and with the man preaching to him, "To die and to know it."

In "Pearl Harbor, 1976; An Agony Against Suicide" Thomas Whitbread writes,

... Better
Keep going, die only unavoidably, try
Against time's foul cigar-smoked tooth-tear, than
Out of desperate non-knowledge what to do
To kill yourself... (lines 40-44 p.,59)
One cannot help thinking of Scobie in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* for, both Hawley and Scobie seem to commit suicide as the ultimate act of faith in God's mercy. For that very reason, suicide is one of the occupational hazards of the evangelist. Isn't it after all better to commit suicide than to exist outside God's grace?

... as though some peddler groaned

At it in its familiar twang: "My friend,

Cut your own throat. Cut your own throat. Now! Now! (30)

"The real point of the poem is of course that there is no room in the theocracy of New England for the person who takes the tenets of Calvinism seriously—-that the man who perseveres in pure calvinistic meditation ends either as a suicide or a heretic" (Jumper 58). Lowell never misses an opportunity to outrage his Calvinistic heritage. He can never forgive his ancestors, who in the name of Puritan faith ruthlessly murdered the native Red Indians. The "spiritual evil" which led Hawley to his death is violent and specific in the poem "Children of Light."

Our Fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones

And fenced their gardens with the Redman's bones;

Embarking from the Nether land of Holland,

Pilgrims unhoused by Geneva's night,

They planted here the Serpent's seeds of light;

And here the pivoting searchlights probe to shock

The riotous glass houses built on rock,

And candles gutter by an empty altar,

And light is where the landless blood of Cain

Is burning, burning the unburied grain. (LWC 28)

"After the surprising conversions" is closely modelled on, almost a word for word copy of a passage at the end of Jonathan Edwards's "Narrative of Surprising Conversions."
The poem works with logical and frightening clarity from the beginning to the end. It uses narrative as its framework in a monologue of letter form. The form of the poem is Crashaw couplet—without the irregular line length. At line ends, phrases break over violently and strong masculine rhymes are used to define the form despite the runover.

Edwards' hell is fictitious. But Lowell's stay in Danbury prison, a hell hole, is a true event. America entered the war in December 1941, Lowell in that year had registered for the draft and throughout 1942 had attempted to enlist. Finally Lowell was given a date for his induction: September 8, 1943.

On September 7, Lowell wrote a letter to President Roosevelt:

Dear Mr. President,

I very much regret that I must refuse the opportunity you offer me in your communication of August 6, 1943 for service in the Armed Forces...

Attached was the Declaration of Personal Responsibility which declared:

In 1941 we undertook a patriotic war to preserve our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor against the lawless aggressions of a totalitarian league. In 1943 we are collaborating with the most unscrupulous and powerful totalitarian dictators to destroy law, freedom, democracy and above all, our continued national sovereignty. With the greatest reluctance, with every wish that I may be proved in error, and after long deliberation on my responsibilities to myself, my country, and my ancestors who played responsible parts in its making, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot honorably participate in a war whose prosecution, as far as I can judge, constitutes a betrayal of my country (qtd. in Hamilton 89).
Lowell was sentenced to a year and one day in the Federal Correction centre at Danbury, Connecticut. "In the Cage" gives his experiences. It is a sonnet that compresses both his inner and worldly experiences.

The Lifers file into the hall,
According to their houses - twos
Of laundered denim. On the wall
A colored fairy tinkles blues
And titters by the balustrade;
Canaries beat their bars and scream.
We come from tunnels where the spade
Pick-axe and hod for plaster steam
In mud and insulation. Here
The Bible-twisting Israelite
Fasts for his Harlem. It is night,
And it is vanity, and age
Blackens the heart of Adam. Fear,
The Yellow chirper, beaks its cage. (LWC 53)

An emphasis on personal apprehension of history marks the dramatic monologue "Falling Asleep Over the Aeneid." According to Randall Jarrell, Lowell's mind is literary and traditional as well; he uses the past so effectively because he thinks so much as it did. Lowell's present contains the past especially Rome, the late Middle Ages, and New England - as an operative skeleton just under the skin. This is rare among contemporary poets (49-50).

But contemporizing the past has risks, because unless art has meaning for living people it has no meaning, and that our life, our sense of our own condition, is what reaches out to the work and measures its relevance. But linking Virgil's Aeneid
to Freudian theories of to-day, Lowell in his poem "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid" shows that Virgil's age was no different from ours, in that it was losing "Shared metaphors that any society requires in order to exist" and not disintegrate into "separate and divided worlds". Thus "the purpose of Vergil's epic was not so much to celebrate Augustus's "Pax Romana" as to examine what it is like to live in a world closed to hope, justice, truth and certainty" (Manousos 22).

Robert Langbaum in The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition, points out:

The poets use a dramatic narrative technique in order to dramatize an ancient time suitable for analysis and discussion in the present day. Because in this form a persona of unusual character representative of a singular point of view, can be enhanced by placement in a past setting. The extraordinary moral position and the extraordinary emotion become historical phénomena. The past becomes, in other words a means for achieving extraordinary point of view" (95).

That is just what Lowell does in the poem "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid". The poem with its demythologized vision of The Aeneid opens with an epigraph:

"An old man in Concord forgets to go to morning service. He falls asleep, while reading Vergil and dreams that he is Aeneas at the funeral of Pallas, an Italian Prince".

Dream visions have had a long tradition among English poets from Chaucer through Coleridge. In Tamil Literature, Silappadikaram (The jewelled Anklet) tells the story of the luckless Kovalan and Kannagi. The queen of Nedunjeshiyan, King of the Pandyas has a dream which foretells the doom of the king owing to the wrath of Kannagi.
I saw, alas, I saw in a dream
the sceptre fall and the royal umbrella,
The bell at the palace gate rang of itself,
while the whole heaven shock in confusion!

Thus spoke the Queen,
and took her maids and her body guard,
and went to the King on the lion-throne
and told him her evil dream. (qtd. in Basham 472)

In *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare gives us this scene:

Caesar: - Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace to-night:
Thrice hath Calphurnia in her sleep cried out,

Help, ho! They murder Caesar! - who's within? (Act 2 Scene 2)

The dramatic situation in this poem recalls Freud's interpretation of dreams. According to Freud, "On falling asleep, the undesired ideas emerge, owing to the slackening of a certain arbitrary (and, of course also critical) action, which is allowed to influence the trend of our Ideas, the emerging 'undesired ideas' are changed into visual and auditory images" (193). It was W.B. Yeats who wrote the epigraph "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" and Delmore Schwartz gave this as a title to his famous short story. Lowell's poem like the story, reflects the Freudian idea that in their dreams men are artists compelled to imagine their condition.

Schwartz's story is about a man who imagines the ineluctable family influences on his life and Robert Lowell's "Falling Asleep Over the Aeneid" is about a man dreaming of early influences in his life. The old man in Lowell's poem has his dreams because of the emergence of some undesired ideas.
Freud also insists that any interpretation of a dream's symbolism must depend on the context of an individual's life. It is thus significant that Lowell carefully supplies us with many biographical details to justify a psychoanalytic reading of the old man's dream. Since Lowell's speaker is situated both in place and time, it is easy to see why his reading of the particular passage from the Aeneid XI would trigger childhood memories.

The sun is blue and scarlet on my page,

And yuck-a, yuck-a, yuck-a, yuck-a, rage

The yellowhammers mating . . . . . . . . . . (40)

The "yellowhammers mating" provide the stimuli needed for the generation of dreams. The controlled use of clotted consonants incorporates the cries of the birds into the fabric of the verse.

In The Interpretation of Dreams Freud refutes the argument that external or somatic stimuli determine certain dreams; In Freud's view the "subconscious simply incorporates such stimuli into the dreamwork, creating a unified whole that expresses the dreamer's suppressed wishes" (289-90). The external stimulus in Lowell's poem is the sound of "yellowhammers mating," which becomes a kind of leitmotif: the rhythmic clanging of armour, chanting of soldiers, shrieking of the bird priest, yelping of dogs and finally beating of drums are all related to the piercing sexual cries of the mating birds.

. . . Yellow fire

Blankets the captives dancing on their pyre,

And the scorched lictor screams and drops his rod.

Trojans are singing to their drunken God,

Ares. Their helmets catch on fire. (40)
An image of nightmarish human sacrifice is evoked here, yellow fire licking the captives suggests the fate of the Jews during the Second World War. Trojans' slaughter of the Italians recalls the genocide of Indians by America's founding fathers and their descendants.

"Falling Asleep over the Aeneid" embraces four wars: the struggle for the founding of Rome; the American revolutionary war; the Civil war; and the Second World War. Lowell constantly searches the past for a clue to the meaning of our own lives. Here the past dates back to the ancient times, 1000 B.C. The readers are given a selective history of Western culture from the Italian civil war, the second Punic war (200 B.C.), the American Civil War (1865) to 1950-51. Through self-identification with such historical or legendary parallels, Aeneas or Pallas, either accurate likenesses or wish-fulfilling ones, a personality can express the character of his inner self in a manner far more revealing than conventional habits are. The dramatic monologue allows for such an exploration of the subconscious, and thereby yields a richer appreciation of personality and motivation than do standard narrative techniques.

As all dreams, the old man's dream also comes to an end. Finally he wakes from sleep, but not into lucid reality.

\[ \ldots \] Church is over, and its bell
Frightens the yellowhammers, as I wake
And watch the whitecaps wrinkle up the lake.
Mother's great aunt, who died when I was eight,
Stands by our pador sabre . . . . (42)

Mother's great-aunt, who died when he was eight, standing by the "parlour sabre," admonishes the poet speaker to put away his Virgil and honour the sabbath and immediately eighty years disappear. "It all comes back." The Greek funeral scene changes into an American scene. He is present at the funeral of his uncle Charles, a
hero so glorious that Phillips Brooks and General Grant pay their respects at his funeral.

There is a connection between the old man and Lowell and the fascination military heroism has for them. The old man cannot separate his sense of Aeneas’s military exploits from his respect for the military exploits in the family tradition exemplified by his uncle Charles. Yet his uncle is not unrelated to descendants of Aeneas who have climbed "The knees of Father Time, his beard of scalps, / His scythe, the arc of steel that crowns the Alps." Lowell’s poem was written at the point of time when in American culture military heroism was still honoured, though the military impact has been increasingly destructive.

The Uncle Charles of the poem is a fusion of Shaw, Charles Russell Lowell and Major Mordecai Myers, an Officer in the war of 1812 and an ancestor whom Lowell fondly celebrates in "91, Revere Street." In his admiration of officers like Shaw, Charles Russell Lowell, Stark and Myers: in his ambiguous fascination for Che Guevara: in his fear of Caesar, Hannibal and Napoleon: in his description of peace marchers; in his shame of, but attachment to colonial ancestors who fought in wars against the Indians: in the mock condemnation of his father’s impotent naval career; in his own conscientious objection during the Second World War: - - in all these associations we find ample evidence of Lowell’s critical attachment to military figures. Beyond that military admiration, however, Lowell also leads us to the response of William James to the movement honouring Robert Gould Shaw and his black volunteers. At the time he made the dedication speech for St. Gauden’s frieze, James asked the poets to celebrate not only Shaw’s military courage, but also that lonely civic courage which in times of peace enables a man "to risk his worldly fortunes all alone in resisting an enthroned abuse" (57-58). Lowell exhibited that kind of civic courage throughout his career.
Philips Brooks and Grant
Are frowning at his coffin, and my aunt,
Hearing his colored volunteers parade
Through Concord, laughs, and tells her English maid
To dip his yellow nostril hairs, and fold
His colors on him... It is I. I hold
His sword to keep from falling, for the dust
On the stuffed birds is breathless, for the bust
Of young Augustus weighs on Vergil's shelf:
It scowls into my glasses at itself. (42)

The old man in this Browningesque poem searches for a way to make sense out of "loss". He stares into the face of his long-dead uncle, sees not only his mortality (Charles is "dust" now) but also the identity of the self that emerges only after the excessive expectations of family and tradition have been burned away. He accepts that he is just a dreamer incapable of the heroic exploits of his illustrious ancestors. The dream also exhibits the violence and frustrated sexuality lurking at the bottom of every civilized man's psyche.

... When my thumb
Tightens into their wind-pipes...

... Our cost
Is nothing to the lovers, whoring Mars
And Venus, father's lover... (41)

Lowell's poem works through a pattern of related but shifting images. Lowell deliberately tries to set up a contrast between the present and the past, between the great world of history and art and the mundane world of local experience with the
impingement of the realistic and the daily. According to Vivian Smith," we have here an example of a poem which attempts to be a criticism of society without at any point actually formulating or stating its criticism" (46). The poem successfully creates a pattern that sets one reflecting. The psychic conflict and the global conflict are well expressed through Lowell's classicism.

"Falling Asleep Over the Aeneid" is a political poem expressing "discontent." Lowell was able to write such a poem, only because of the relative stability of his nation. Edmund Wilson's opinion is that,

the writer who is seriously intent on producing long-range works of literature should, from the point of view of his own special personal interests, thank his stars if there is no violent revolution going on in his own country in his time. He may disapprove of the society he is writing about, but if it were disrupted by an actual upheaval he would probably not be able to write (250).

And in a good poem such as this one, creative political action and a complex kind of imaginative writing unite well, because they have arisen from the same vision of History and have been included in the career of one man, Lowell.

With his reticence about his private circumstances, his relative indifference to History and his advice to poets to avoid "the pressure of reality," Wallace Stevens stands at one end of a modern spectrum. At the other is Robert Lowell—fashioning a drama from his own life, obsessed by a sense and knowledge of the past, and resolved to come to terms with the political realities of his own time in both word and action. Lowell carries on the tradition of Yeats as that tradition was exhibited in "Easter 1916", "Pamela's Funeral" and other poems which found historical human destiny to be immanent in crises of the state, thus making these crises a crucial focus for any poet with aspirations to centrality.
Works cited


