CHAPTER V
THE FUTURELESS PRESENT

I think it better that in times like these
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right.

W.B. Yeats

Lowell could not be silent during the Vietnam conflict; He actively opposed the Vietnam War by engaging in various forms of protest, the most subtle and daring being his poems in Near the Ocean. Beginning in 1965 Lowell entered a new phase of his life and career, writing poetry more explicitly political than he had ever written before. For the first time since the mid-1940s he sought to become a "Carlylean - Emersonian hero of deed as well as thought" (Axelrod 177). Vereen Bell calls "Near the Ocean" Lowell's "Vietnam Volume" and says that "the problem is that the poet has lived long enough now to see America's military power once again blindly misused. History is now so hopelessly overdetermined that it seems pointless to resist" (452). Lowell refused to accept that it is pointless to resist and Near the Ocean is his attempt to set a "statesman right." According to Walter Lowenfel, "In the 1960s, in our country, the question has arisen: who are the patriots? those who say, 'Our country, right or wrong,' or those who say, 'Our country, if wrong let us help make her right?"
In helping to make his country right, Lowell following the footsteps of W.B. Yeats made use of his personal experience to interpret the universal. Lowell and Yeats are aware that the private lives of the human beings and their public lives are linked together. They agreed with Georg Lukacs that "every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, i.e. with politics; whether the humans themselves are conscious of this, unconscious of it or even trying to escape from it, objectively their actions, thoughts and emotions nevertheless spring from and run into politics" (9). And hence W.B. Yeats described himself "as a man of my time, through my poetic faculty living its history."

Yeats's sense of the destruction of innocence by socialist revolutions in Russia, Germany and Italy was the motive force behind "The Second Coming," written in 1919. This theme is taken up again in "A Prayer for My Daughter," composed between February and June 1919. The birth of his first child into a world full of terror and destruction led Yeats to picture innocence in its cradle threatened by the levelling wind. "Established things were shaken by the Great War. All civilized men had believed in progress, in a warless future, in always increasing wealth but now influential young men began to wonder if anything could last or if anything were worth fighting for" (qtd. in Cullingford 118). Yeats's poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" reflects this mood. The Great War, the Bolshevik revolution, the Anglo-Irish War, and the civil war, destroyed whatever historical optimism he had once possessed. As the Anglo-Irish war intensified the focus of the poem narrowed: Yeats informed Lady Gregory in April 1921 that the poem was "on the state of things in Ireland." But for Yeats, Ireland was a microcosm of the world and only through concentration on the familiar and the personal could he satisfactorily interpret the
universal. His characteristic self-accusation was yet another way of emphasizing his own involvement in events:

We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show

The Weasel's twist, the Weasel's tooth. (Collected Poems lines 88-92 p.,235-36)

Weasels are active predators, generally hunting alone and at nights, feeding principally on rodents, fish, frog and birds' eggs. Lady Wilde in Ancient Legends of Ireland recorded that they are "spiteful and malignant, and that old withered witches sometimes take this form" (qtd. in Jeffares 231). And Yeats had seen Weasels fighting at Coole (Jeffares 231). Lowell's "Skunks" and Yeats's "Weasels" are more suited for survival in today's violent world than human beings.

Yeats had once shared Morris's optimism for social and political amelioration:

O but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow

Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed. (Collected Poems lines 83-87 p.,235)

Yeats described, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" as 'thoughts suggested by the present state of the world' which were not philosophical but simple and passionate, a lamentation over lost peace and lost hope" (qtd. in Cullingford 119). Near the Ocean is Lowell's expression of thoughts suggested by the "futureless present" state of the world and his lamentation over "lost peace and lost hope." Just as Yeats lives the history of his time through his poetical faculty, Lowell's poems have a remarkable
power to evoke the historical moment in which they were conceived. A fundamental reason for his decision to write poems about contemporary affairs lay in the overwhelming nature of the political events. In mid-1965 Lowell, like the nation as a whole, was affected by the developing war in Vietnam. He found that "When your private experience converges on the nation's experience you feel you have to do something" (qtd. in Axelrod 178).

Lowell was most disturbed by the spectre of American attacks on defenceless civilians: "I have never gotten over the horrors of American bombing. For me anti-Stalinism led logically—oh, perhaps not so logically—to my being against our suppression of the Vietnamese" (qtd. in Axelrod 179). The technologically primitive Vietnamese, perhaps even more than the German and Japanese civilians in the later phases of World war, resembled in Lowell's eye the first victims of American ambition and power, the Indians. Once again he thought he saw "the death-dance of King Philip" and heard his scream / whose echo girdled this imperfect globe (LWC 27); the lines resemble the lines from "Nineteen Hundred Nineteen." Yeats wrote,

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare,
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood and go scot-free. (Collected Poems lines 24-28 p.,233)

Yeats here refers to the atrocities committed by the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans in the pre-treaty fighting in Ireland. The American soldiers behaved like the Black and Tans. After the Mass murder of Vietnamese peasants by the American soldiers at My Lai, Lowell exclaimed, "No stumbling on the downward plunge from Hiroshima . . . In a century perhaps no one will widen an eye at massacre, and only scattered corpses express a last histrionic concern for death" (qtd. in Axelrod 179).
The screams of the Vietnamese peasants echoed the scream of King Philip. And Lowell rejected after much thought a White House invitation extended by Lyndon Johnson to a luncheon honouring prominent artists, commenting that his disapproval of the Vietnam war would not permit his attendance at a national function. He believed the government was acting hypocritically to honour artists for their achievement at the same time that it conducted such a war, for the two pursuits are irreconcilable. Lowell told President Johnson, "... every serious artist knows that he cannot enjoy public celebration without making subtle public commitments." When Johnson learned of Lowell's refusal, according to Eric Goldman: "the roar in the Oval Office could be heard all the way into the East Wing." Within days Arthur Schlesinger and other administration defenders began to criticise Lowell publicly. The refusal was publicly endorsed by twenty prominent writers and artists. Murray Kempton praised Lowell for demonstrating that "Courtesey is a form of eloquence," and Dwight Macdonald wrote that, "rarely has one person's statement of his moral unease about his government's behaviour had such public resonance" (qtd. in Axelrod 181). Phillus McGinley, the Festival's representative for light verse condescendingly ad-libbed a new couplet while reading her poem "In Praise of Diversity": "And while the pot of culture's bubblesome / Praise poets even when they are troublesome." According to Goldman, a furious President Johnson put in only a token of appearance, convinced by now that Lowell and all other intellectuals "were not only, sons of bitches" but they were 'fools' and they were close to traitors" (qtd. in Axelrod 181). But Lowell and other poets were not "traitors" but "patriots." Their patriotism motivated them to try to make their country right. According to Whitman, "to be a poet is to be commensurate with a people... of all the nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets, ... Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall..." (qtd. in Lowenfel 9).
Several months after Lowell's boycott of the White House Festival of Arts, President Johnson intended to make a magnanimous gesture by reciting and praising a line of poetry he identified as being Robert Lowell's—but which in fact was from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." But as Axelrod points out even if Johnson had not mistaken the authorship of his quotation, the recitation would have proved an embarrassment to him. He approvingly quoted the line, from "Dover Beach." "The world which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams" and applied it to present day America, unaware of Arnold's intended point that the world which seems like a land of dreams "hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." All things considered Johnson could not have chosen a more inappropriate text than this one, with its concluding vision of ignorant armies clashing by night. To complete the circle of ironies, Lowell, when reached for comment at first identified Johnson's quotation as being from the end of Paradise Lost. He then recalled that, "the line was Arnold's and that he had used it as an epigraph for "The Mills of the Kavanaughs," where Johnson or his speech writer had most likely seen it" (qtd. in Axelrod 191).

"Waking Early Sunday Morning" is a poem where Lowell acts as a referee and President Johnson who is very much in the poem is relegated to the backstage.

Both the poet and the President try to escape the political responsibilities—the chance assassination of Kennedy, the Vietnam war, the political state of the country.

O to break loose, All life’s grandeur
is something with a girl in summer . . .
girdled by his establishment
this Sunday morning, free to chaff
his own thoughts with his bear—cuffed staff,
swimming nude, unbuttoned, sick
of his ghost - written rhetoric!

Lowell wants to "break loose" and find "Life's grandeur" in the company of a "girl" in "summer" and the President by swimming nude this Sunday morning and shedding his cares for a moment. But no escape is possible for either of them. The poem is a lament for the planet itself and particularly for the young Americans dying or already condemned to die in a series of police actions all over the world--Korea and Vietnam and also a meditation on the human condition. Though the poem begins with the most general consideration of man's place in nature, by comparison with some of the lower animals, it goes on to define man in religious cultural and political contexts. The attractiveness of the poem is that from "the jumping and falling Chinook Salmon" the poem quickly advances to matters of Church and State and Society. The very first line, "O to break loose," suggests that he feels himself to be in chains. Yet the freedom he seeks is curiously restricted: the freedom of Chinook Salmon and rainbow trout to obey nature's inexorable demands. Seemingly self-affirmative, Lowell's opening stanzas possess a strong suicidal content. The Salmon are "alive enough" only "to spawn and die." The trout's freedom consists in their "smashing a dry fly" a seizing of their own demise. In "Waking Early Sunday Morning" as in "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket," Lowell collocates within a single image paired opposites: freedom and constraint, life and death. Like the drowned sailor with his "hurdlng muscles," the fish exude a seeming vitality, but they in fact perish; like Colonel Shaw awaiting the "blessed break," they "break loose" only to die. Thus Lowell envies these fish not for their freedom, for they are no more free than he, nor for their vitality, for they are no less death-bound than he. He envies their unconsciousness. Unlike himself they know nothing of their lack of freedom, nothing of death, nothing of injustice, remorse, cruelty, anguish. Throughout the rest of the poem Lowell prays for
a condition of simplicity, for relief from mental pain: "O that the spirit could remain / tinged but untarnished by its strain!" Yet short of death, such surcease of pain is not possible. "The poet (Lowell) is condemned to consciousness and conscience and it is precisely his bearing of this burden that constitutes his present poem" (Axelrod 183-184).

In May 1965, Walter Lippmann wrote in Newsweek that, "We could, if we take the President's words seriously and literally, become engaged in an endless series of interventions . . . our official doctrine is that we must be prepared to police the world" (23). He foresees the human race and the whole hurling globe itself "Forever Lost" in the limitless vacancies of God-empty space. The poem presents obvious parallels to Stevens's "Sunday Morning," since the decline of religious tradition and the resulting sterility of modern life are the subjects of both the poems. "But while Stevens's "complacencies of the peignoir" dominate his poem, making it an investigation of a materially satisfied culture unalarmed by the spiritual struggles of the past, yet with new, unsatisfied longings, Lowell's "Waking Early Sunday Morning" is a feverish forecast for our addled society" (Scholl 156).

Stevens celebrated in "Sunday Morning" as elsewhere, the hedonistic delight in luxury, in beauty, in the impermanent earthly paradise. He said that the poem is simply "an expression of paganism." The grave of Jesus for Stevens, is not a symbol of the resurrection, but a promise of the death of God. For the new age which this promise heralds there will be a new myth more powerful than the old, by means of which the human imagination will be moved to a freer worship and a fuller life.

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men

Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn

Their boisterous devotion to the sun,

Not as a god, but as a god might be. (lines 91-94)
Helen Vendler analyzes Stevens's attitude towards God thus:

The extinction of religious belief represented for Stevens a crisis of the imagination, which had possessed, in the past, various therapeutic, solacing and inspiring notions (those of God, heaven and hell, eternity, omnipotence, transcendence, Incarnation and so on) which it had now to do without. "It was their annihilation," Stevens writes of the gods, "not ours, and yet it left us feeling dispossessed and alone in a solitude, like children without parents, in a house that seemed deserted." For many writers, the sense of religious loss provoked a religious nostalgia. Stevens thought this a false position. The Gods are remembered, of course, because they are represented in our art and literature: "they had been a part of the glory of the earth. At the same time, no man ever uttered a petition in his heart for the restoration of those unreal shapes" (123).

Stevens's woman in the poem, "Sunday Morning" and the poet Lowell in "Waking Early Sunday Morning" are mirror images of each other. Both of them seek a harsh reality of a world without religion, but their reactions differ. For Stevens's woman it is a cause for celebration but Lowell talks about the limitless vacancy of god-empty space. Lowell feels "dispossessed and alone in a solitude, like "a child without its parents," and exhibits a religious nostalgia in his poem. Lowell has wakened "early" Sunday morning, glimpsing reality coldly and clearly. For all its errors, Christianity at least "gave darkness some control, / and left a loophole for the soul." Whereas Stevens's poem celebrates human life without God as "unsponsored, free," Lowell experiences such a life as utter constraint, bound by violence and death. No alternative moral force now exists to counter the "darkness" of the human spirit, which manifests itself in a rising tide of oppression, atrocity, and war. "The disappearance
of God has brought neither pagan joy nor a divinity of the imagination, but anguish (Axelrod 184-185).

Axelrod further observes,

Lowell’s love of Stevens’s poem, fostered by Tate, Winters and Blackmur, could never have been for the poem’s neo-pagan affirmations but rather for its verbal and prosodic brilliance and perhaps for its elegiac undertones. In its aspect as an elegy for the Christian idea of God, “Sunday Morning” is an unironic precursor of “Waking Early Sunday Morning”; Stevens’s concluding images of chaos and descent into darkness are faithfully reflected in Lowell’s own imagery (270).

Another such precursor is MacNeice’s poem, also entitled “Sunday Morning,” which includes a satiric indictment of the failure of modern Christianity:

But listen, up the road, something gulps, the church spire
Opens its eight bells out, skulls’ mouths which will not tire
To tell how there is no music or movement which secures
Escape from the week day time which deadens and endures.

(lines 11-14 p., 19)

A third precursor is Baudelaire’s bleak prose - poem “Anywhere Out of the World,” which supplies Lowell with his refrain, “Anywhere, but somewhere else.”

The Twentieth century is a century of knowledge explosion. Now man-made space crafts voyage into inter stellar space. Earth viewed from six billion kilometres away is a blue dot in an ocean of blackness. Earth has become a very small stage in the cosmic arena. Lowell realizes the magnitude of the vast universe and also recognizes in the traditional “Sunday Morning” the same hypocrisies which Stevens had rejected but he also sees in retrospect the value of that slim contact with order and divinity which they had provided. “He has no doubt that the emblems of
conventional Christianity are ‘vanishing,’ but in their absence there is now no control, only incipient madness“ (Lunz 271).

“. . . I see His vanishing / emblems, His white spire and flag-/ pole sticking out above the fog, / like old white China door knobs, sad, / slight, useless things to calm the mad” (143).

Emerson wrote in ”Brahma,"

"And I the hymn the Brahmin sings"

But the hymns in which God resides get “chopped and crucified” in the modern world. “O Bible chopped and crucified in hymns we hear but do not read.” But still Lowell realizes that these hypocrisies give “darkness some control.” Lowell understands that Stevens’s constant subject is the imagination; and its search for forms, myths or metaphors that will make the real and the experienced coherent without distortion or simplification.

But in 1967, Lowell could not have the Stevensonian leisure and complacency. ”Waking Early Sunday Morning” was written by Lowell when he suffered great political distress. Less than two months after Lowell’s refusal to visit the White House, President Johnson committed the nation to war. Johnson gave a nation-wide address and concluded it with precisely the kind of “globe written rhetoric” Lowell found chilling.

"We must have the courage to resist or we'll see it all- -all that we have built all that we hope to build all of our dreams for freedom, all, all- -will be swept away on the flood of conquest. This shall not happen. We will stand in Vietnam.” And incidentally Johnson’s chief foreign policy aide who advised the President to commit American forces to battle was Lowell’s cousin as if to prove that national history is a familiar affair for Lowell.
"Waking Early" is a celebrated political poem of Lowell's. In *Amics of the Night* Norman Mailer brilliantly describes how Lowell read this poem to an audience of war demonstrators in Washington on the eve of the Pentagon March in 1967.

"After Lowell read 'Waking Early' the audience gave Lowell a good standing ovation much heartiness in it, much obvious pleasure that they were there on a night in Washington when Robert Lowell had read from his work - 'It was as nice as that' - (46). And Alan Williamson remembers another occasion when Lowell read out the poem to the public. "I heard him read "Central Park" and "Waking Early Sunday Morning" in Sanders Theatre at a benefit for an anti-war organization called Massachusetts Pax":

Only man thinning out his kind
sounds through the Sabbath noon, the blind
swipe of the pruner and his knife
busy about the tree of life . . . (144)

In the question period a man- -I think a reporter rose from the second row and said, you speak in your poem of man thinning out his kind "Do you regard the (largo; all capitals) UNITED STATES OF AMERICA as the agent of this thinning out?" Lowell said, 'Don't you?' He let atleast two minutes go by in total silence, then insisted, "I asked you a question, and I would like an answer." Another minute of silence; then his point made, Lowell continued very softly, "I said man thinning out his kind; and that's what I meant; it's going on all around us; and pray God it will stop" (266).

Jonathan Raban considers that Lowell "has a strong affinity for Marvell" (76) the public poet of the seventeenth century and author of the "Horatian Ode on Cromwell's Return from Ireland." Lowell's poem hunts like Marvell's for the private
men behind the public faces; it shares the same equivocal obsession with heroes and heroic action. It comes to the same tortured and ambiguous conclusions about the final virtue of privacy. Marvell's famous, double-edged tribute to Cromwell in the "Horatian Ode."

Who, from his private Gardens, where
He liv'd reserved and austere,
As if his highest plot
To plant the Bergamot,
could by industrious Valour climbe
To ruine the great Work of Time,
And cast the Kingdome old
Into another Mold. (lines 27-36)

is here echoed in Lowell's portrait of the American President "swimming nude, unbuttoned, sick / of his ghost-written rhetoric!"

A poet (be it Lowell or Marvell) whose ordinary role is contemplative judgement, becomes aware of a public figure (be it Cromwell or President Johnson) whose powers seem mysteriously too large for such contemplation to assess. It looks for a time as if poetry will have to give way, as if the only way to live in the same world with powerful men is to abandon the imagination and join or oppose him in arms. But this the poet doesn't do; rather he goes ahead and writes a poem anyway. And in these poems the poet must neither imitate and echo public voices nor refuse entirely to hear them; rather he must find an art, a "language" that will both admit power into his own world and resist its tendency to transform his world into just another arena of power (Edwards 76).
Lowell never abandoned the imagination, and never stopped opposing the powerful men publicly even though he gained the animosity of powerful people in the process.

According to Eveline Bates,

... A nation

That does not invite rebellion among her poets has already destroyed them. I swear that every tree is top secret, green with shady clues That will inevitably suggest a subversive line of inquiry No, there is never a society that is doomed before its poets choose To accept doom. (qtd. in Lowenfel 9)

Robert Lowell continuously protested against “state” and “society” and paid a very heavy price for the same. He believed that poetry was for “freedom, justice and fair play” and never sought support of the establishment.

In 1967, President Johnson was enraged to discover that a government agency (The national Endowment for the Arts) had awarded $10,000 to Lowell’s play, an adaptation of Prometheus Bound. He even demanded that the award be withdrawn. Ian Hamilton, Lowell’s Biographer comments,

President Johnson, though, could hardly have seen the text of Lowell’s Prometheus, since it was not finished until the last moment; nor is it likely that he heard rumours that Lowell’s Zeus, in his more dangerously potent moments, might easily be seen as a Cartoon of LBJ (360).
Nor was Lowell intimidated by the enormous Government machinery connected with power and world ambition. On May 17, 1967 when he introduced the Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky, he announced that, "both our countries, I think, have really terrible governments. But we do the best we can with them and they'd better do the best they can with each other or the world will cease to be here" (New York Times 43). Lowell continued to do the best he could with the politicians. He supported the Democratic nominee Eugene McCarthy, but at the same time was aware of his shortcomings, his inability to lead: "Picking a quarrel with you is like picking the petals off a daisy" (NB line 10 p., 123). He wrote about Robert Kennedy after he was assassinated. Lowell saw in Kennedy that class of American hero of whom epic poems are sometimes written--another Robert Gould Shaw, another Charles Russell Lowell.

"R.F.K." is similar to "Waking Early" in that though it admits "power" it resists a tendency to convert the world into a battleground of power.

Doom was woven in your nerves, your shirt,

woven in the great clan; they too were loyal,

and you too more than loyal to them, to death.

For them like a prince, you daily left your tower
to walk through dirt in your best cloth. Untouched,

alone in my Plutarchian bubble, I miss

You, you out of Plutarch, made by hand -

forever approaching our maturity. (NB lines 7-14 p.,174)

People like to have politics personified so that leaders may have private lives to speculate about and Lowell does just that here:

elated as the President

girdled by his establishment

this Sunday morning, free to chaff
his own thoughts with his bare-cuffed staff,
swimming nude, unbuttoned, sick
of his ghost-written rhetoric! (144)

Emerson's remark that there is no history, only biography, states our disposition—our needs—to make history consist of the decision of individual men and the personal causes of those decisions. "Evidently we must believe that power is subject to human influence, that politics at its best can serve our human needs (Edwards 4). The grossness of Johnson's figure is matched only by the poet's degrading portraits of Caesar, Mussolini, Stalin and other morally depraved dictators in his volume History.

The presidency although of a different age, forged its way into Lowell's prose as well. In 1965, he contributed a brief essay on Abraham Lincoln to an anthology on the Gettysburg address, published by the University of Illinois Press, in which he wrote that "Lincoln was the last President of the United States who could genuinely use words" (qtd. in Heymann 457). A sonnet for Lincoln in History demonstrated further faith in the Commander-in-chief: "You, our one genius in politics."

Lucie Smith Edward calls the poem an attempt to adapt Marvell to the twentieth century. According to her,

"Waking Early Sunday Morning" is a poem which belongs to a very particular kind of modernist tradition—that of the attempt to come to terms with the events and feelings of the present by adapting the literary devices of the past, and then using these as a kind of persona—a mask through which the poet speaks, something held a little apart from his own personality (167).

The form of the poem calls attention to this. The stanza pattern is the same as the one which Marvell uses in "The Garden" and there are other stylistic devices—such as the frequent use of paradox which encourage us to read this as a work
which is "metaphysical," in the seventeenth century sense. But of course Lowell
remains a twentieth-century writer. And "his poem moves forward by the freest
possible play of association, and such a progression would have been impossible to
a writer of an earlier pre Freudian epoch" (Lucie Smith Edward 167).

Though the form of the poem may be similar to "The Garden," the tone of the
poem is different. Lowell concludes the poem with an elegy for the Earth. But Marvell
on the other hand is exuberant with happiness. Life is a rapturous game, the return
to the Eden like earthly paradise and state of innocence before the Fall had made
Nature the enemy of Man. The language and varied but formal rhythms bespeak the
seventeenth century gentleman, scholar and wit, privileged and lucky at home and
certain of his place both in the world of action and the world of relaxation.

What wond'rous Life is this I lead!
Ripe Apples drop about my head;
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;
The Nectarine, and curious Peach,
into my hands themselves do reach;
stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
In snar'd with Flow'r's, I fall on Grass (lines 32-40)

Marvell's world is a soothing one, whereas Lowell's is a menacing one.
Marvell's world abounds with nature's plentiful bounty. Mechanical and material
aspects are strong in Lowell's. Lowell writes,

Pity the planet, all joy gone
from this sweet volcanic cone;
peace to our children when they fall
in small war on the heels of small
war-until the end of time

to police the earth, a ghost
orbiting forever lost
in our monotonous sublime. (144)

Lowell has in mind the war in Vietnam and perhaps Orwell's prophecy in Nineteen eighty-four that "the Great powers will not risk, in future, attacking each other directly but instead play their murderous chess games with the citizens of the half-starving undeveloped Third world countries as their pawns" (Fraser 76). Lowell's fears have been proved right. Vietnam, Indo-Pakistan conflict, Iran-Iraq battle, civil War in Srilanka, Israel-Palestine friction, the ethnic differences in Fiji, South Africa and other small wars have deprived the earth of all "Joy." The world now seems to accept the slogans of "The Party" ruling "Oceania" in Orwell's Nineteen eighty-four.

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (7)

Yenser considers the line "peace to our children" as, "a parody of the benediction at the end of the church service and the passage itself as a comprehensive summary of those forces that prohibit radical freedom" (298-299). But Williamson calls the line, "peace to our children" "a grim benediction" and analyzes the passage thus:

The war in Vietnam is made to bear a further bitter lesson; as man's experience has become in so many ways "small," he must now either confine his violence to "small" wars or else annihilate himself. Whichever happens, his fate will be no release but (following the ambiguity of the line- break) "war until the end of time." Our knowledge makes the world rather like a manned satellite; but the
consequence is that it is as precarious as one as lacking in an innate, inexhaustible vitality. Depopulated or not, it is a "ghost"; while the direct echo here is Johnson's "ghost-written rhetoric," the word recalls all the forms of mental consciousness and organized activity seen in the poem as cut off from their sources in a full corporeal life. The last line of the poem seems a final abnegation of the possibility of a visionary release: "Our" sublime, the infinites of our scientific philosophy, the grandeur our poetry envisions are merely monotinous (127).

The poem abounds with images of failure in politics and institutional religion. Elizabeth Lunz calls "Waking Early Sunday Morning" one of "Lowell's confessional poems" (270). It is not even a monologue so much as it is the direct, personal musing of the poet on his own condition. Not all the despair which he describes is the result of contemplating the earth's destiny. His own situation and mood are bleak; he despairs of his fate not only as a man, but as an individual and a poet. Lowell wishes to embark on a fatal journey inspired just like that of the Salmon which jumps the Waterfall; fighting his way up "and then / to clear the top on the last try alive enough to spawn and die." And Lowell describes the coming of dawn as the "Sun's / daily remorseful blackout." And the poet confesses his torment and his inability to find the freedom he had imagined earlier. The poet's mind is no longer fired by imagination. His mind is "fireless" now. He admonishes himself to "look up and see the harbor fill" hoping for a Homeric Vision of "the wine-dark hulls of yaws and ketch." But instead his vision is confined to water in a glass, and to other minutiae of his existence.

The nut house of modern America is made up of paradoaxes, basically that of the immense possibilities--of good-comfort, liberalism, decent living, good-will and equality--offset by an equally immense potentiality for destruction; the assassination of Kennedy, the prejudice, the indifference, the mechanical inhumanity, and most of
all, the continual undertone of violence and racial antagonism. They are paradoxes which are not resolvable.

The paradox of equality on the one side and racial antagonism on the other comes out clear in "Fourth of July in Maine." The poem opens with Maine village Independence Day celebrations. The myth of equal opportunity is acted out as a fair in which children compete for ribbons, but every child is assured of winning something. "Each child has won his blue, red, yellow ribbon." Against the myth, Lowell sets the harsh reality of the racist poor whose very belief in self help and voluntarism maintains them in bovine resignation to their lot: upholders of the American dream, who will not sink and cannot swim - Emersonian Self-reliance, lethargy of Russian peasants : "The paradox of inertia disguised in will, mental stupefaction in rigid opinion, is a recurrent psychological motif in the poem" (Williamson 129).

In these circumstances the statue of the union soldier who is the representative of a more heroic past can only be "elbowed off the stage/while the canned martial music fades." In "For the Union Dead" Lowell wrote,

The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier
grow dimmer and younger each year -
wasp - waisted, they doze over muskets
and muse through their sideburns . . . (136)

As the poet grows from childhood to manhood, the stone statues inevitably lose their gigantic and commanding proportions. At the same time it becomes more poignant in increasing suggestion of the grace and youth which were sacrificed for the cause of other's freedom. But the statues are of "the abstract union soldiers" - an embodiment of the quintessential ideal, which is becoming more and more attenuated
as "the possibility of its fulfilment recedes" (Marwick 16). All the statues can now only stick like fishbones in cities' throats.

Lowell's cousin belongs to the past, but his daughter "Blue-ribboned, blue-jeaned, named for you and cartwheeling on the blue- -"belongs to the troubled future. Here Williamson points out that though Lowell wants his "blue-ribboned" American daughter to be happy, yet he is more than half convinced that in our age, happiness requires a certain small-mindedness and blindness to the ultimate (132).

may your proportion strengthen her

to live through the millennial year

Two Thousand, and like you possess

friends, independence, and a house, herself

God's plenty, mistress of your tireless sedentary love. (147)

Lowell's syntax suggests that "love" is an object to be possessed rather than a spontaneous feeling. Cousin Harriet's materialistic attitude may infect the young Harriet. Even though she was "ten years paralyzed" cousin Harriet hung on to her material possessions. "We had to look around the room / to find the objects you would name" (147).

Yeats was another poet who was much troubled by the future world in which his daughter would have to live. "For an hour" "he walks and prays" because of the "great gloom" that permeated his mind. His "state of mind" is apparent in "A Prayer For My Daughter."

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour

And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,

And under the arches of the bridge, and scream

In the elms above the flooded stream;

Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzyed drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea. (Collected Poems
lines 9-16 p.212)

The sea-wind screams upon the tower and below the arches of the bridge connecting
the castle with the main road, and in the elms above the flooded river. The poet's
(W.B. Yeats) mind is haunted by fear and he imagines that the future years have
come out of the sea, dancing the frenzyed dance of war and bloodshed.

Though both the poems have parallel themes, Yeats’s “I” is passionately
involved in the events and situations of which he speaks, the
protagonist of Lowell’s elegy seems to stand outside the experience of
his fellow men, surveying their activities with the jaundiced eye of the
stern and disenchanted witness (Perloff 158).

In "Fourth of July in Maine" Lowell, as a disenchanted witness begins to understand
the "grindingness of life." The theme of the "grindingness" of life, "repeating and
repeating" is brought out by converting the mishaps and irritations of a holiday,
("ailing cedars," "dinner in the cold oven," "icy plates," "White maps recalling china
trade," "the endlessly repeated Joan Baez") into a genuinely disturbing intuition of the
absurd after giving us a picture of Harriet Winslow--Harriet Winslow represents in
some sense the apotheosis of the old fashioned New England qualities--She was
courageous, hard-headedly materialistic, bright, sturdy, anti-spiritual, and moderate.

A quite enjoyable evening--whisky in the cool summer evening after tennis or
swimming, music on the record player, - slowly succumbs to the loving hostility that
characterizes many marriages, the battle of the sexes, the condition of perpetual
argument which dominates the evening, "monologue that will not hear / logic turning
its deaf ear," Marjorie Perloff finds the final stanza more effective than the rest of the
poem. The poet's real prayer is not for his daughter and has nothing to do with
Harriet Winslow; it is a prayer for himself. "Great ash and sun of freedom, give / us
this day the warmth to live, / and face the household fire" (149).

But he knows that his is not the grand gesture or the heroic act. Fatigued and
cowardly, he gives up the challenge and so, "We turn / our backs, and feel the
whiskey burn."

If the ending of "Fourth of July in Maine" seems so much more effective
than the rest of the poem it is surely because here the poet turns
inward assessing his own impulses and behaviour with the same irony,
pathos and candor one finds in "91, Revere Street" and the Life Studies
poems. Like Yeats, Lowell is at his best when he can make a drama out
of his own life, when his "I" rooted firmly in time and space, undergoes
a particular experience which leads to illumination and insight (Perloff
162).

Alan Williamson calls Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" the formal precursor of the
poem "Fourth of July in Maine" (136). Marvell's poem is written in the same stanzaic
pattern and within a time-scheme of a single day, a house is described, its family and
political history are told, and it is seen as a symbolic organization of life which leads
the poet into ultimate religious and ethical questions of Value. But Lowell's poem
strains at its limits because it belongs to an age in which for better or worse, a house
does not provide a man with his absolute location his "harmonies / of lust and
appetite and ease."

"The Opposite House" across the street from the poet's New York apartment,
represents the opposite of Harriet Winslow's house in Maine. For the first time in the
series Lowell abandons the eight-line Marvellian stanza of rhymed tetrameter couplets,
in favour of a lax free-verse. This is appropriate to the shift in setting, from small town
Maine to New York city, but in contrast to the Maine house "the Americas' best artifact produced en masse," the opposite house lacks grace which is described as "square enough." It is graceless and symmetrical. An abandoned "police stable," it is filled with "gangling" pigeons like gangs of obstreperous juvenile delinquents unheard of in quiet Castine, Maine, where children are "well behaved."

But the house is "just an opposite house" only during daylight. But at night and, perhaps during a fire, the picture is different:

Tonight, though, I see it shine
in the Azores of my open window.
Its manly, old-fashioned lines
are gorgeously rectilinear.
It's like some firework to be fired
at the end of the garden party,
some Spanish casa, luminous
with heraldry and murder,
marooned in New York. (150)

The Azores, the Portuguese ARQUIPELAGO DOS AÇORES (Encyclopaedia 700), were Columbus's last port of call on the way to America. What Columbus discovered was the unspoilt New World but what Lowell discovers as the "marooned Spanish Casa" suggests an America corrupted by class society, the authoritarian passion for order and the quickness to violence. Alan Williamson perceives sinister designs beneath the casual images.

Thus the "gorgeously rectilinear" building might stand for the rationalization of American foreign policy; the "firework" for the hydrogen bomb; the "end of the garden party" for the end of the world, which our polite governing classes may precipitate (138).
The last line of the poem "Viva la muerte!" (Long live death!) alludes to Unamuno’s famous anti-fascist speech during the Spanish Civil War, which was spontaneously prompted by hearing a crippled fascist general shout this slogan at a meeting. Unamuno (1864 - 1936) was a Spanish scholar and one of the most influential Spanish thinkers of his time, and was also often in trouble because of his political views. Lowell and Unamuno have similarities. Both are detached men of letters forced into unanticipated political commitment by the strength of a momentary, epiphanic perception. The twentieth century worships the power to kill; the power to kill is the "deterrent terror," the "violence machine" that all the nations build in order to maintain "order." This so called "order" is set outside the bounds of human emotion and moral choice and it amounts to "Viva la muerte!"

A stringy policeman is crooked
in the doorway, one hand on his revolver.

He counts his bullets like beads. (150)

As the title "The Opposite House" suggests, the readers are immediately involved in the problems of self and world, observer and observed, like those that the readers encountered in "Memories of West Street and Lepke" and "For the Union Dead." The chaotic multiplicity of outside reality affecting the individual residing in a house opposite to the one under police surveillance is the experience of anyone living under similar conditions (curfew, military rule, terrorists’ attacks) in any part of the globe. The theme of "The Opposite House," an individual's helplessness before the violence of life is reinforced in "Central Park."

The "Central Park" is the most perfect poem, in Near the Ocean. Its exquisitely modulated unifying patterns, its subtly related images give it a sense of organic wholeness and imaginative coherence unequalled by the other more expansive and ambitious Marvellian poems. It is a poem of complex, paradoxical symmetries, aimed
like the other poems in the collection to show the state of human helplessness while
confronting the prevailing violence and cruelty and the counter violence used to
oppose it.

The series of opposites and oppositions, relationships and equivalents,
that the poem moves up, reveals the paradoxes of a society of violence
and affluence - riches just out of reach, help which comes too late,
strength which is weakness, positions of power which make their
possessors weaker than ever, and under it all the metaphysical paradox
of the human condition, torn between body and soul, life and death
(Smith 107).

"Central Park" is a "Walker in the city" poem. As Goldsmith did in "The City Night
Piece," Lowell observes humanity in a detached manner. The wide disparity between
the rich and the poor made Goldsmith write in "The City Night Piece:"

But who are those who make the streets their couch, and find a short
repose from wretchedness at the doors of the opulent? These are
strangers, wanderers, and orphans, whose circumstances are too
humble to expect redress, and their distresses are too great, even for
pity.

Humanity is seen by Lowell as imprisoned like the "lion" in his "slummy cell"
of the zoo. The air of the city is so polluted with "smog" that he even exhales it.
"exhaling smog," he watches lovers "occupy every inch of earth and sky." Eroticism
is seen as a means of escaping the fear and poverty that traps humanity - -their
single, pathetic recourse from the brutalizing conditions of their life. Keats wrote of
escaping life's sorrows in "Ode to a Nightingale:"
Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of poesy.

Lowell's lovers also wish to forget their sorrows:
All wished to leave this drying crust,
borne on the delicate wings of lust
like bees, and cast their fertile drop
into the overwhelming cup. (151)

They reject the "wings of poesy" and choose the "delicate wings of lust." And the
Pharaohs tried to escape "death" by rich trappings, which merely add to their
vulnerability.

Old Pharaohs starving in your foxholes,
with painted banquets on the walls,
fists knotted in your captives' hair,
tyrants with little food to spare -
all your embalming left you mortal,
glazed, black, and hideously eternal,
all your plunder and gold leaf
only served to draw the thief . . . (152)

The Egyptian imagery is appropriate to an imperial nation (America) with its extremes
of wealth and poverty.

The Egyptian imagery springs from the surroundings, Cleopatra's
Needle and the Metropolitan Museum, but it is stunningly appropriate,
both to the architecture of Fifth Avenue and to an imperial nation with
extremes of wealth and poverty and an overextended foreign policy
(Williamson 142).
According to Norman O. Brown, "the city is man's most perfect sublimation; in it he flees both the body and death by identifying himself with pure geometries, with indestructible ethereally beautiful metals and stones. But the "plunder" and "gold leaf" of the pharaohs only left them mortal" (281).

The inordinate attachment that the people of India have to gold ornaments may also be because identification with the beautiful yellow metal provides a spurious form of transcendence of mortality. Brown also has said that repressed death-instinct like repressed sexuality has its "return of the repressed" in a sense of emptiness, death-in-life, and in the breaking loose of aggressive impulses (281-287). A sense of emptiness and breaking loose of aggressive impulses pervades the poem.

At the concluding point of the poem the urban death-instinct seems to have both a homicidal and a suicidal dimension since the rich become increasingly obsessed with the violence their splendour may provoke. Hence the rich are scared of the violence of the poor. In Lowell's translation of Juvenal, "The Vanity of Human Wishes" Lowell writes. "If you take a walk at night, / carrying a little silver, be prepared / to think each shadow hides a knife or spear" (70). But the "deterrent terror" the counterviolence of the society against the poor is also everywhere. "The poor weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny; and every law which gives others security, becomes an enemy to them" ("City Night Piece").

We beg delinquents for our life

Behind each bush, perhaps a knife;

each landscaped crag, each flowering shrub,

hides a policeman with a club. (152)

Hence Williamson calls the "Central Park" a scathing radical critique of our class system" (143). It was Shelley who wrote "I met Murder on the way - / He had a mask like castlereagh -."
In Lowell’s poem “murder” is hidden behind the carefully controlled and tended rocks and shrubs, ("Landscaped crag," "flowering shrub"). Murder continues to lurk in the Central Park. Time magazine dated May 8, 1989 reports,

From time to time a new word bursts into the lexicon, capturing with shocking force the latent fears of a troubled age. The latest such word is "wilding" the term used by a band of New York city teenagers to describe the mischief they set out to commit on a clear April night in Central Park. Looking, they said for something to do, they roamed the park’s northern reaches, splintering into smaller groups and allegedly assaulting one hapless victim after another. Finally, one pack came upon a 28-year-old woman jogging alone past a grove of sycamore trees. According to police, they chased her into a gully, then spent the next half an hour beating her senseless with a rock and metal pipe, raping her and leaving her for dead. She went into a coma and the story resonated across the country because the victim was a wealthy, white financier with degrees from Wellesley and Yale, and because the scene was Central Park, the backyard of powerful news media and a symbol of everything Americans most fear about New York city... (22).

Lowell expressed his fears about the violent nature of modern society in the poem “Central Park.” What actually happened in the Central Park shows that his worst fears have been realised and when the world continues to become more and more violent, a jogger cannot be safe in a park (the park standing as a symbol for the whole country) because there is a "knife" behind each "bush."

Robert Lowell is the voice of the American social conscience. The reality he encounters is gruesome; hence the poem is also gruesome. It was Joyce who said,
"Welcome O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (qtd. in Fraser 75). Lowell forges in the "smithy of his soul" the uncreated conscience of his race and his voice rings with convincing honesty. Lowell wrote "Central Park" at a time when he was undergoing psychoanalysis and had to cross the park each afternoon to visit his analyst. Raban observes that "the tone of the poem's brooding introspection is perhaps connected with the rehearsal of personal history made by someone undergoing psychotherapy" (178). From the centre of the richest and possibly most violent city of the history of the world, Lowell contemplates a civilization trapped by its own errors; only the paper kite symbol of the earliest human aspirations to transcendence, manages to rise through the smog that lies over this doomed patch of ground. "Central Park" also has a "private" as well as "public" resonance. The city and its suffering citizens mirror Lowell's own psychic "strain" and "darkness," his own "climbing soul." The park, as Lowell wrote explicitly in an early draft of the poem, symbolizes the "dark wood of my life" (qtd. in Axelrod 190). Everywhere he perceives images of despair that is at once his nation's and his own: grounded kite and snagged balloon, spreading stain and failing sun, savages armed with "knife" and "club," creatures "deprived, weak, ignorant and blind, / squeaking, tubular, left behind." Within this tableau of brutishness and death, he characteristically detects yearnings, however balked and pathetic, for freedom and endurance.

The future does not promise them either. The "Present" that Lowell paints in this volume is "bleak" and "futureless," both for the individual, and the society. Agitated in private life and tormented by public questions Lowell once again desperately attempts to find those facts of life that are fundamental, enduring and essential.
Works Cited


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