Voice and Address in the Poetry of Robert Lowell

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VOICE AND ADDRESS
IN THE POETRY OF
ROBERT LOWELL

by
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INTRODUCTION

Some definitions are best arrived at by the process of elimination. This is true of defining purposes as well as of defining poetry or essences or colors. In the statement of the purpose of this thesis, the process of elimination is most apt. It places the most conclusive limitations on the scope of the work. For one thing, the purpose here is not to discover anything new, nor to prove anything unique about Robert Lowell and his poetry. There is no attempt to perform any autopsy on his verse forms, nor to show their relation to the poems that will be discussed. This is no pedantic argument to prove that there is, after all, only one sane way to analyze poetry. Nor is this an attempt to open fire on any of the schools of criticism. The purpose of this thesis is simply to demonstrate that a poem's scope is more easily seen and more comprehensively understood if viewed from the aspect of voice and address. Robert Lowell is both a modern poet and a difficult poet to read. It seems, then, that his poems would be an excellent proving ground for the purpose of this thesis.

James Craig La Driére, of the Catholic University of America, has set up the definitions of voice and address
which we will observe in this thesis. In the definitions of his terms, he has pared away, to a minimum, the possibility of a subjective, or reader's interpretation of poetry. He has skillfully stripped analysis down to its skeleton.

In the analysis of a speech or literary composition, nothing is more important than to determine precisely the voice or voices presented as speaking and the precise nature of the address (i.e., specific direction to a hearer, an addressee); for in every speech reference to a voice or voices and implication of address (i.e., reference to a process of speech, actual or imagined) is a part of the meaning and a frame for the rest of the meaning, for the interpretation of which it supplies an indispensable control.

Using the framework of voice and address, then, Dr. La Drière explains poetry analysis. He follows the principles established by Plato and Aristotle and makes the classical distinction of determining who speaks in a poem, for we cannot assume that the poet's voice per se is the sole spokesman of the poet. He may choose to speak in his own person and expose his unique thinking. Again, he may choose to take upon himself another voice, to assume a personality not his own, and speak through this creation or adaptation. This assumed voice of the

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2 Ibid., 615. Unless otherwise stated, all future references to voice and address in this thesis will follow the definitions enunciated by Dr. La Drière.
poet may be individual or choral, but it is a single expression. A third manner of speaking or "voicing" a poem is for the poet to use more than one voice. This entails dialogue in which there would be direct quotation to explain, amplify, contrast, or comment on the basic voice, which is the one that the poet assumes.

In other words, when the poet speaks in his own voice, he translates all that he wants to say into a communication so that the reader sees the story or the exposition as it reflects from the poet's mind. Even what would ordinarily be direct discourse is, in this mode of speaking, made indirect so that only the poet's voice is heard. Of course, whether the poet is the poet in reality is a fact that only God and the poet can tell. The point is, however, that there is but a single voice heard.

In the second mode of speaking, there is a distinct dramatic element. Going back to Aristotle's Poetics as a starting point, the poet imitates the character or the speech of the character he would represent in his poem. This is the type of voice Browning used so well in his dramatic monologues. "My Last Duchess" is not Browning's, but the Duke's whose personality and voice Browning assumed in order to achieve the dramatic impact of the poem. The line of demarcation need not be so prominent as a Browning monologue. Lyric poetry, for a great part, is expressed through
an assumed voice of a poet.

The last mode of expression subdivides neatly into two divisions. There are some poems in which the speech is completely in dialogue, with no narration, like a scenario for the stage or radio. Again, the idea will be used, but with a narrator's comments to link the dialogue. The former achieves a greater objectivity, of course. It has the isolation of Hemingway's "The Killers" in the short story field, where the reader is an observer of action and is left free to draw his own conclusions about the incident. There is no direct influence by the author on the story. He has presented the framework; it is for the reader to fill it in.

We might linger on this point of objectivity for a moment, since it seems to be one of the merits of an investigation of the nature of this thesis. In the three modes or styles of analyzing poetry according to voice that we have considered here, there is a steady advance made, as Dr. La Drière points out in his comment on his definitions, to an extreme objectivism. It is not that the poet leaves nothing to the imagination of the critic in the third mode. He does not draw a diagram for the reader and then stand back with folded arms, and say complacently, "Behold, here is a word picture of my idea. You need not think, for everything is instantly visible to the mind's eye. I have
sketched it boldly and loudly for you." Rather, if we progress through the three modes, we find that we need to employ our mind most completely in the third mode, for the poet has limited the possibilities of interpretation to his words and the mind must ferret out his meaning down to the one point of its significance. Objectivity entails discipline and discipline, in turn, demands a certain healthy mental rigidity.

One more point before we go on to address. The practical worth or truth of the fact that poems are written (or spoken) in definite voices (even if the voice be that of an imaginary and inanimate entity) is easily recognized if we go back to Browning's "My Last Duchess" again and realize the difference in the poem if: 1) Browning had told the story of the Duke and his complex emotions as one would tell a story to a friend; 2) Browning had permitted the Duke's guest to converse with his host as they walk down the stairs past the paintings.

What the voice says or voices say in a poem is what constitutes the address. To borrow from philosophy for a moment, the voice is the "who" or the "person" of the poem; the address is the "what" or the "nature" of the utterance of the voice. Now if something is said, it must be directed to someone, whom Dr. La Drière styles the addressee.

Sometimes the addressee will be a single person
and sometimes he may be a plural concept. In some poem, the addressee may be a very definite someone (as in "My Last Duchess"), or a more general anyone, or even an inclusive everyone. There is this possibility, also, that the addressee may not be distinguished. In this case, the address and addressee assume an impersonal nature. In the Romantic apostrophes to the West Wind, to the Grecian Urn, or to the Nightingale, the addressee is either not human or inanimate. The more particular the addressee, the more objective the interpretation of the poem.

In this thesis, we will analyze some of the poems from Lord Weary's Castle and The Mills of the Kavanaughs according to a method derived from the modes of interpretation we have just explained. The poems will be divided into three sections: poems in the author's voice (or, rather, a single voice); poems with more than one voice; and poems in which there is a voice within a voice. This last category is the one that seems particularly native or natural to Lowell. The reader is not aware, often, in his poems, that another voice has been introduced until the addressee is suddenly apostrophized.

The three groups of Lowell poems, then, will form the three main chapters of this thesis and a final chapter of summary will form the conclusion. Wherever the interpretation of a poem is deemed necessary, we will cite the
complete poem. Otherwise, such portions of poems will be quoted as clarify the meaning. Each new chapter has its own explanation of the mode of analysis.

The nature of this thesis did not lend itself to a wide use of secondary sources. Articles of Lowell are scarce and the majority of the sources that were read were not suitable for this thesis without wrenching the problem to fit the sources. Some of the periodicals that were consulted but which did not prove applicable are the English Journal (Paul Engle, "Five Years of Pulitzer Poets," February, 1949), New York Times (Selden Rodman, "Review of Lord Weary's Castle", November 3, 1946; William C. Williams, Review of Mills of the Kavanaughs", April 22, 1951,), Saturday Review of Literature (E. Sidgewick, "Lowells, Inc.", September 21, 1946), Kenyon Review (Richard Eberhardt, "The Mills of the Kavanaughs", Winter, 1952).
CHAPTER I

POEMS WITH A SINGLE VOICE

Once a poem is created, it is independent of its maker. It does not need the poet's life nor his beliefs to give it meaning. It is an entity in itself. When we interpret a poem, we look at the meaning the words convey, not at the poet. When the poet writes, in a sense, he writes from the inside out. The experience he crystalizes in words stands apart from him. In order to produce the poem, the poet has to identify himself with that of which he writes so that he, figuratively, can give it his flesh that it may live its own life. That is why Keats could say that the poet is forever "filling some other Body—the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Man and Women."¹

This identification, however, loses for the poet his personal identity in his poem. This is easily seen in a dramatic poem, in which the poet assumes the role of his created character and speaks this character's mind. In a dialogue-poem the example is still more evident. The poet

¹ The Selected Letters of John Keats, edited with introduction by Lionel Trilling, New York, 1951, 152.
alternates between his characters, first giving voice to one, then the other. Neither character, however, need be the poet himself.

In lyric poetry, the distinction between the poet and the speaker of the poem is less obvious. Here too, however, the poet is merely a voice expressing an idea. The more personal nature of the lyric does not identify the poet's voice with the poem's voice. Rather, it tends to minimize the number of voices that the poet is free to assume.

It is because the poet and his poem are distinct that we err if we say that the poet thinks one way or another in his own life merely because he makes a statement in his poem. It is not the poet (a Browning, Eliot, Auden, or Lowell) who speaks in a poem; but a person the poet has fashioned who gives voice to the poet's idea. Poetry is a fiction, a creative device.

If one person seems to speak the entire poem, if there is no dialogue, no interruption to the speaker's talk, we will consider the poem as spoken in a single voice. It is this category of Lowell's poems which we will consider first. It is, by far, the largest of the groups of poems because Lowell is a lyric poet and the lyric is an expression, to a great extent, of a single mind.

The first poem in Lord Weary's Castle is called "The Exile's Return." A person describes the scene to which
the soldier exile returns and then addresses the exile. In terms of voice and address, what the person (we will call this person the "speaker" and this voice the "poem's voice" hereafter; but we understand in these terms the distinctions we made above) describes and what he says to the exile is the address. The one addressed, the addressee, is, of course, the exile. In implication, he is addressed even in the first description, as we would speak about an ocean scene to a friend without referring to the "you".

The single voice first sets the scene. In squalls there is a sort of slush that beats against the Hotel DeVeille, a hospital for wounded veterans. The two large iron dragons, evidently in front of the hospital, stolidly endure the blizzard. The wind nudges at the bell in the spire and sets it vibrating as search guns of the army of occupation sound off over the already battle-scarred roofs that are the crown of the conquerors. Season in and season out, the guns are brought up (Lowell says "unlimber") and they are marched down the narrow German streets past the exile's old home. Here the address turns specifically to the addressee, who is not a vague anyone nor everyone but an army man returning home. He is real enough to have a war-scarred walnut tree in his front yard. This tree used to cast its shadow on a
"squat, old, wind-torn gate."² Now its existence intimidates and reminds the Yankee commandant of the causes of its scars. The exile will return to a different Germany. The strutting children, aping their goose-stepping heroes, are gone from the streets, as is Hitler himself. Instead, unseasoned conquerors, men who have not even tasted the full of war, march into the Market Square and come to attention before the City Hall. The speaker consoles the returning soldier. It is as if he would say, "Ah well! Look, the Rhineland has come into its own again, for flowers blossom freely and the Cathedral is being rebuilt." He ends with the warm sympathy that must say something in the face of depression: "This is all pleasant enough, returning exile. Your life is your own again!"

If one were not aware of voice in this poem, it would be an all too easy matter to skim over the lives without noticing that this is a man-to-man poem. With subtlety, Lowell brings the exile into focus. We are not aware of his actual presence to the speaker until the casual line:

And lumber down the narrow gabled street 
Past your gray, sorry and ancestral house.³

² Robert Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, New York, 1946, 3. ³ Ibid.
The "your" in the line gives direction to the speaker. This is outside the realm of voice, really, except insofar as the voice must choose appropriate words to make itself understood; but the use of the word "house" rather than "home" is significant to the total effect of the poem. The exile, the conquered soldier, does not return home. His home is part of the cost of war and only the house remains.

A consideration of the selection of words in a poem sets up a relationship between the poet and the voice in a poem. It is the poet's task to make the voice he creates eloquent. Once he has given the poem words, however, he steps back and lets the poem speak for itself. The poet is something like the manipulator of puppets. He pulls the strings (writes the words) that produce the effect (poem). Only, the poet's work is done in advance while the puppeteer must continually act if the puppets are to live.

The poem, "The Exile's Return", is difficult. Allen Tate is of the opinion that much of contemporary poetry (the word "contemporary" is used consciously to avoid confusion with what "modern poetry" connotes) is difficult, and he ascribes the reason not so much to the poetry as to "the decline of the art of reading— in an age
in which there is more print than the world has seen before. We agree with Tate and, for our own purposes, add that the art of reading is obscured because the reader fails to determine the direction of what he reads. He fails to see the poem as a framework of meaning from someone to someone: a voice speaking an address to an audience, however large or limited.

The problem of direction, and, therefore, meaning, is not so great in the poem "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." Lowell has subtitled the poem with its dedication to his cousin, Warren Winslow, who died at sea. The theme of the poem is also labelled before the first stanza (the poem is divided into seven parts and includes a unit to "Our Lady of Walsingham" which forms the sixth part). The passage which expresses the theme is taken from Genesis and shows men's total mastery over the animal kingdom.

A single voice again sets the scene and reports the events. The place: a shallow off Madaket, Nantucket, in the Atlantic, right off Massachusetts. Night has already fallen; and the sea is heaving violently when the North Atlantic Fleet finally succeeds in its task: it is dragging the ocean for a drowned sailor. Next follows the description

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of the corpse that snagged the net. In the dark, the light from the boat reflected off his snarled head and his seeming blocks of feet. Lowell calls them "marble feet" with a visual eye to the whitish flesh of the drowned man with the blue veins showing. Marble also connotes hardness and coldness. It is this corpse, then, that

...grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
Its open, staring eyes
Were lustreless dead-lights
Or cabin windows on a stranded hulk
Heavy with sand.5

The two metaphors for the dead sailor's eyes are particularly apt, and they maintain in the poem this far the initial objectivity of the reporter at the scene. The sailor's eyes, dead-staring, are lightless for want of life, like vacant portholes on an abandoned ship. The imagery here is triply good: for the sense of the words themselves; for the particularly pointed comparisons; for the connotative Christian images that the death here, the soul-body separation, recalls.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a little over a half-century before Lowell, wrote of a drowned sailor, too, in "Loss of the Eurydice". The descriptions both poets use parallel each other. How much Lowell might be indebted to

5 Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 8.
Hopkins is debatable and not essential here; but the comparison between the two poem-corpses is interesting. Hopkins wrote:

They say who saw one sea-corpse cold
He was all of lovely manly mould,
Every inch a tar,
Of the best we boast our sailors are.

Look, foot to forelock, how all things suit! he
Is strung by duty, is strained to beauty,
And brown-as-dawning-skinned
With brine and shine and whirling wind.

O his nimble finger, his gnarled grip!
Leagues, leagues of seamanship
Slumber in these forsaken
Bones, this sinew, and will not waken.6

Lowell's corpse is hoisted onto the ship where "we weight the body, close its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came".7 The voice is identified now as one of the crew on the search-ship. As the body is returned to the waters, the speaker is reminded of Melville's Ahab in Moby Dick and the sharks that will feed on the burden the crew is burying. After the launching of the corpse there but remains the momento: Winslow's name "blocked in yellow chalk."

Up to this time in the poem the speaker has been addressing anyone. He has been telling his story of the search, the recovery, the burial to anyone who might care


7 Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 8.
to listen. Now, however, he turns to the burial crew and addresses them directly:

Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea\textsuperscript{8}

The body is a portent, a symbol of the irrecoverability of life once it has fled from the body. The speaker tells the sailors that battleships will testify to the finality of the sea's grasp. He tells the sailors to ask not even for the gift Orpheus received to recover life in the Greek myth once they are without life, without power to defend America's coast. Then the speaker turns from the sailors again and remarks objectively, as in the first part of the poem, that the guns on the boat "recoil and then repeat the hoarse salute"\textsuperscript{9} in tribute to the buried seaman.

In the second part of the poem, the voice not only directs the address, but it gives the setting, the point of view of the speaker. He stands on the Atlantic pier and thinks of his dead cousin. There is a dramatic element in the poem, but different from that in Browning's monologues. This is a soliloquy. Quite simply the speaker says, with a touch of feeling:

\begin{verbatim}
Whenever winds are moving and their breath
Heaves at the roped-in bulwarks of this pier,
The terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death
In these home waters.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{verbatim}

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 19.
The implication seems to be not so much the pathetic fallacy as the inscrutableness of fate that would bring a sailor through the dangers of war to see him drowned in his home port.

In this section of the poem the speaker addresses the dead sailor from the beginning reference to "your death", through the apostrophe in the next line, to the end.

Sailor, can you hear
The Pequod's sea wings, beating landward, fall
Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall
Off 'Sconset, where the yawing S-boats splash
The bell buoy, with ballooning spinnakers,
As the entangled, screeching mainsheet clears
The blocks: off Madaket, where lubbers lash
The heavy surf and throw their long lead squids
For blue-fish?

The speaker returns to the remembrance of Moby Dick as he wonders if the corpse buried at sea hears the Pequod, Ahab's ship in Melville's novel, churn the waters as it makes for port. He pictures the boat, with its billowed triangular sails and its whining-in-the-wind mainsail just clearing the suspended blocks for hoisting the sails, crashing through the wild Atlantic waves off Narragansett where the submarines, tossed by the riot of waves, splash the bell buoys. All this happens off Madaket, where fishermen, land-lubbers, beat the ocean with their casting rods in the hope of a catch. With

11 Ibid.
all the churning water and storm-activity Lowell manages to
get into these eight lines, there is little wonder left the
reader why the speaker-voice would question the corpse if he
hears the racket.

There is a tranquil line to break the foaming
waves, or rather, to separate the noise of the crashing
ocean from the screaming wind.

Sea-gulls blink their heavy lids
Seaward. 12

And then the storm returns in all its fury:

The winds' wings beat upon the stones,
Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush
At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush
Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones
Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast
Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East. 13

This section of the poem is vibrant with sug-
gestions. The wind, representative of the land in dis-
tinction to the sea, is at war with the ocean in its an-
guish, almost passion, for the dead seaman. The wind beats
at the implacable rocks that bound the waters and screams
at the waves and claws at the surf. Especially graphic is
the image of the wind grappling with the sea's throat, the
beachwater, and wringing the water into a sprayed slush
hurled over the Quaker graveyard where the bones cry out
for the wounded and fabulous whale bobbing in the waters by

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Ahab's boat. The rounded unity in the parallelism of the drowned sailor, and Ahab's adventure with the white whale is noteworthy. The addressee is single in this section of the poem, which could stand alone as an isolated unit, as could the succeeding portions of "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." In fact, because the third part of the poem uses a different voice technique, we will consider it in a later chapter without marring the effect of the poem in this chapter.

Lowell is evidently well-experienced in interpreting the ocean's moods. The reality of his writing would confirm this even if we did not know that he is a New Englander and has lived with the very pulse of the Atlantic in his ears. It is rather natural, then, for so many of his poems to depend for their address on the ocean.

In analyzing the *raison d'être* of poetry, T. S. Eliot goes into the problem of experience and expression as necessary grist for the poet's mills. He says, with some acuity:

... the contemporary poet, who is not merely a composer of graceful verses, is forced to ask himself such questions as "what is poetry for?"; not merely "what am I to say?" but rather "how and to whom am I to say it?" We have to communicate—if it is communication, for the word may beg the question—an experience which is not an experience in the ordinary sense, for it may only exist, formed out of many personal experiences ordered in some way which may be very different from the ways of valuation of practical life, in the expression of it.
If poetry is a form of "communication", yet that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it. The poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to "express", or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as a reader. Consequently the problem of what a poem "means" is a good deal more difficult than it at first appears.14

Eliot's statement supports what we have said about the relative independence of the poem on its maker. That is why the poems of Lowell on the Quaker graveyard need no foreknowledge of the poet's interior revolt from his Puritan heritage which is his biographically through the Lowell line in New England. If we could measure the degree of the temperature of his resentment for New England's loss of tradition, we might add keen objective analyses to his poems. As it is, to hinge the poems onto the poet's life and real experiences is rather a subjective, if not hazardous, task.

There is consolation for the befuddled critic of poetry in a further comment by Eliot. He says that "a poem is not just either what the poet 'planned' or what the reader conceives, nor is its 'use' restricted wholly to

what the author intended or to what it actually does for the readers.\textsuperscript{15}

We need never have seen the ocean to appreciate the remarkably fine imagery voiced in part four of the "Quaker Graveyard." It is enough to read and understand the poem. Lowell returns to the \textit{Moby Dick} theme, or rather, he continues it, as a single elegiac voice speaks the finality of the ocean depths. They are the end of whaling and searching. The waters finally are the end of whalers, "three-quarters fools, /snatching at straws to sail/ seaward and seaward on the turntail whale."\textsuperscript{16} The animal, harpooned and spouting blood as well as water, comes into the New England shallows. Then the speaker turns to the ocean in a direct address of appeal. It is a single word, "Clamavimus", more intense for its Latin and its association with the one hundred twenty-ninth psalm: "De profundis clamavi, ad te Domine." This stark, plaintive plea uttered, the speaker looks at the water and considers its side of the death story:

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 21-22.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Lowell, \textit{Lord Weary's Castle}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Beyond the bold, the perfect imagery of the lines, there is another feeling the poet manages to get. The water becomes a cringing, repentent object, backing away as if it would hide its guilt. It mumbles in its ebb and the sea gulls cry for the tide. The slush of the retreating waves is audible in the alliteration of the "waves wallow in their wash." It is as if the poet, not satisfied with describing what he sees, would take the addressee, anyone, to the shore to hear the lapping water. Only the hard noise of the crabs moving about in their shells, burrowing in fear of death until the tide, is left behind the ebb. Then Lowell has the remarkable image of the increasing beach nuzzling at the ocean fringe. The figure is so striking that the reader for a moment stands with the objective voice and watches the "snout" suck at the water.

Again Lowell borrows from the psalms. He takes the verse "Our bones are like water poured out" from psalm twenty-one and likens it to the helplessness, the fear, perhaps, of frail men against such an insuperable foe as the water. Throughout the poem, the speaker has addressed no one in particular; and now he raises his voice in a call to anyone:

Who will dance

The mast-lashed master of Leviathans
Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned groves?18

The call is a presumptuous, if not a sarcastic one. Who is there to call from the water's grave that has no tomb markers ("unstoned"), this field of Quakers, the master of ill-fated ships? The question is left hanging.

In part five the conflict of good and evil imaged in *Moby Dick* and brought into the poem continues in a single-voice description of the death of the whale, a figure for elusive good.

When the whale's viscera go and the roll
Of its corruption overruns this world
Beyond tree-swept Nantucket and Wood's Hole
And Martha's Vineyard, Sailor, will your sword
Whistle and fall and sink into the fat?
In the great ash-pit of Jehoshaphat
The bones cry for the blood of the white whale,
The fat flukes arch and whack about its ears,
The death-lance churns into the sanctuary, tears
The gun-blue swingle, heaving like a flail,
And hacks the coiling life out: It works and drags
And rips the sperm-whale's midriff into rags,
Gobbets of blubber spill to wind and weather,
Sailor, and gulls go round the stoven timbers
Where the morning stars sing out together
And thunder shakes the white surf and dismembers
The red flag hammered in the mast-head. Hide,
Our steel, Jonas Messias, in Thy side. 19

Once the whale is pierced, (and the whale is hunted; therefore it is assumed to be evil), its blood seeps out. The blood of any animal is a necessary good to it;

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 12.
but if the animal is supposed to be evil, that which maintains its life is labelled as a kind of corruption also. Since Lowell has likened the whale in this poem to *Moby Dick*, it is a safe assumption that the whale here is the literally accepted symbol of Truth and Goodness. These qualities are abstractions, and if they are pierced, their effects have no bounds. In an allegorical sense, then, the speaker asks the drowned Sailor, the addressee, if he would kill Truth that overruns New England. Knowledge of New England's history proves that Catholicism, the one Truth, has moved into New England and made inroads on the Calvinistic stronghold. Whether the allegory can be carried that far or not, only God and Lowell know. At any rate, the speaker tells how the bones in the Hebrew burial pit of Jehosaphat cry for the death, the blood of Truth. Dead bones cannot want revenge; therefore they seek meaning or help or life. The fate of the white whale is told graphically. The large harpoons fly out, arch, and "whack" about the whale's ears. The head finds its mark and bores into the whale's "sanctuary." This is no ordinary struggle. Truth itself is fighting here. The hunter's "swingle", sharp knife, tears the flesh and plunges into the body over and over again until it "hacks" out the trailing life. Still the knife works until the very belly of the whale is
slashed into rags. The whale is a sperm-whale, which is an important consideration; for from this whale comes valuable spermaceti used for candles. The death of a sperm-whale, then, spreads, in a sense, light. It is important to note that the animal is a sperm-whale, too, because already oil exudes from the pierced body. The speaker calls to the dead Sailor as if he would have him concentrate on the picture. The gulls, lured by the death, these scavengers circle round the broken body. But beyond the gulls the morning stars shine out, literally sing out, together. In concordance with the crime committed on earth, the skies roll out their thunder and the white surf, suddenly heaved up, slashes the red whaler's flag nailed to the mast. The similarity between the apparent destruction of Truth symbolized by the white whale, and the events of Good Friday are so evident that the speaker says openly in the last line, addressed to Christ, prefigured in Jonas who was in the whale, and titled Messias, that He should hide our steel, our weapons of destruction in His side, His Merciful Heart.

This part of the poem presents a problem in voice. In the last line the speaker speaks, in one sense, for all mankind when he says "our steel." In this event, there is a voice, so to say, within a voice as we shall demonstrate in a subsequent chapter. Since there was no reference, how-
ever, in the earlier part, to a different voice from that of spokesman for all mankind, the poem also fits in the present chapter.

The reader is given an introduction to the sixth part of the poem in its title, "Our Lady of Walsingham."20 Again there is an echo of Hopkins' "Loss of the Eurydice" in which the English poet deplores his country's forgetfulness of the Virgin Mary, who was once so loved "That a starlight-wender of ours would say/ The marvellous Milk was Walsingham Way."21

In Lowell's poem, the speaker's voice addresses anyone at first. It is as if he is thinking aloud. He recalls how, at one time, pilgrims walked barefoot to Walsingham, an English shrine to Our Lady. As the pilgrims walked down the English lane, they passed small trees and a stream and hedgerows which seem to march along "like cows" to the shrine. The pilgrims, lost in the wonder of the contentment, soon forgot their pain. The stream flows down under an old tree and as the old pool of Shiloah was disturbed by the hand of the Angel, so the stream ripples into Whirlpools and makes the pilgrim, God's temple or castle, happy. The speaker addresses the Sailor and

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20 Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 13.
21 Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 33.
reminds him that once he had asked for Truth at that place as the Jews in captivity centuries ago had longed for Sion beside another stream.

The speaker calls to the Sailor to look at the shrine, and with a clever word device, he picks out the details the Sailor and reader should see. The statue of Our Lady is not under the shrine's canopy, but off to the side of the altar where her Son is sacrificed. The speaker describes the statue's features in an Isaian echo:

There's no comeliness
At all or charm in that expressionless
Face with its heavy eyelids. As before
This face, for centuries a memory,
"Non est species, neque decor,"
Expressionless, expresses God: it goes
Past castled Sion.

The face of the statue, of Our Lady, is not lovely. It is expressionless. Because it is without personal beauty and liveliness, it is free to express God. It goes back to the days before the glorious temple of Sion, beyond time itself to God's Infinity and Eternity. Because Our Lady goes back that far

She knows what God knows,
Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem
Now.

No one particular event. She knows God, Truth itself.

... and the world shall come to Walsingham.

The last section of "The Quaker Graveyard in
Nantucket—does not speak to the drowned sailor, but rather addresses the Atlantic, which caused his death.

The empty winds are creaking and the oak
Splatters and splatters on the cenotaph,
The boughs are trembling and a gaff
Bobs on the untimely stroke
Of the greased wash exploding on a shoal-bell
In the old mouth of the Atlantic. It's well;
Atlantic, you are fouled with the blue sailors,
Sea-monsters, upward angel, downward fish:
Unmarried and corroding, spare of flesh
Mart once of supercilious, wing's clippers,
Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil
You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
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. 22

A single voice records first the setting. The effects of the opening lines are chilling as the oak tree splatters its leaves on the proxy-grave of the Sailor.
The oak boughs shake and one spear-like branch suddenly bobs down at the moment an Atlantic wave cracks on the shoal-bell near shore. Then the speaker addresses the ocean. It is well that the Atlantic show its power since it is glutted with sailors whose bodies now are sea-monsters, like mermen whose upper bodies are of a spiritual, rational order; but the lower body is fishlike. These sailors are alone and rotting. "Mart" is a Gaelic term for meat that is salted down in brine, and the speaker says the corpses, once proud

22 Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 14.
sailors, are spare for this. Then the voice repeats its apostrophe to the Atlantic and credits it with its inalienable power to take life. He says that the ocean could get up a wave sharp enough to cut the salt-wind and upturn even time to that first time when God formed man from the sea's slime and breathed into him a living soul. The ocean has the secret of life as well as death. The speaker sees both phenomena taking place on the shore, for it was not long before man lived that other men, wayward beachcombers, took his life. The speaker ends out the long elegy with the resigned line that the Lord will last even longer than the created goods He wills.

This last line is the best argument against the article in Life magazine shortly after Lowell won the Pulitzer prize for Lord Weary's Castle. Life commented that Lowell is a poet of "hard-bitten, gloomy verse."23 There are numerous gloomy passages in "The Quaker Graveyard", for instance; but the conclusion, the total effect, is one of optimism. Truth will win out.

The shortest poem in the Pulitzer volume is "Children of Light."

Our Fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones
And fenced their gardens with the Redman's bones;

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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. 24

Again a single voice speaks the poem. The New England Fathers struggled with the land till it yielded them sustenance. Then they fenced in their gardens with the bones of the dead Indians, supposedly killed in early settler wars. The pilgrims had come over from Holland looking for religious peace after Geneva, Zwingli’s city, had dictated stringent restrictions. Once here, the pilgrims, refugees from religious intolerance, planted the Devil’s seeds of false truth; for they were no more tolerant than those from whom they fled. The seeds of false light have now sprung up on searchlight stocks; they veer and peer around to catch established families doing the wrong thing. There is no truth on altars erected by such zealots; so that candles burn there to no avail, to no spread of light. The only light for these “respectable” people is the light that burns the fratricidal Cain: the light coming from Satan himself.

This poem is addressed to anyone in a quiet, narrative voice.

24 Lowell, Lord Weary’s Castle, 28.
A very different use of a single voice is in the poem "The Drunken Fisherman" in which the fisherman himself soliloquizes, first to anyone, then to himself, then to the wind in a kind of sing-song, and finally back to anyone.

Wallowing in this bloody sty,
I cast for fish that pleased by eye
(Truly Jehovah's bow suspends
No pots of gold to weight its ends);
Only the blood-mouthed rainbow trout
Rose to my bait. They flopped about
My canvas creel until the moth
Corrupted its unstable cloth.

A calendar to tell the day;
A handkerchief to wave away
The gnats; a couch unstuffed with storm
Pouching a bottle in one arm;
A whiskey bottle full of worms;
And bedroom slacks; are these fit terms
To mete the worm whose molten rage
Boils in the belly of old age?

Once fishing was a rabbit's foot—
O wind blow cold, O wind blow hot,
Let suns stay in or suns step out;
Life danced a jig on the sperm-whale's spout—
The fisher's fluent and obscene
Catches kept his conscience clean.
Children, the raging memory drools
Over the glory of past pools.

Now the hot river, ebbing, hauls
Its bloody waters into holes;
A grain of sand inside my shoe
Mimics the moon that might undo
Man and Creation too; remorse,
Stinking, has puddled up its source;
Here tantrums thrash to a whale's rage.
This is the pot-hole of old age.

Is there no way to cast my hook
Out of this dynamited brook?
The Fisher's sons must cast about
When the shallow waters peter out,
I will catch Christ with a greased worm,
And when the Prince of Darkness stalks
My bloodstream to its Stygian term...
On water the Man-Fisher walks.25

The drunken fisherman tells anyone who cares to
listen to him that he has been wallowing about in a blasted
mud-hole casting for fish he'd especially like to hook; but
God doesn't let good things come so easily. Instead, only
suckers take his bait. These flop inside his fishbasket
until the creel breaks.

Stanza two is a typical drunken mutter. What
does a fisherman have? A calendar, handkerchief, an old
sofa with whiskey hidden in one arm, another bottle full
of worms, old trousers. "Now, I ask you," he mutters, "are
these enough to satisfy an old man?" Especially an old
man enlivened by drunkenness!

The tippler goes on to comment that once upon a
time fishing was a matter of luck. Then he wanders off on
a rather delightful ballad spree. He catches himself, how-
ever, and returns to the luck problem. He recalls those
days when a man could curse and swear at the hard time his
catches gave him. In those days, though, a fisherman's
conscience was free from "the-one-that-got-away." In a

25 Ibid., 31-32.
magnanimous proclamation, the drunk tells everyone, mellowed into the filial aspect of children, that those were the days.

Now the river ebbs and "hurls its bloody waters into holes." The moon is responsible for the flow and ebb; and as a grain of sand gets into the fisherman's shoe and pesterz him, he can understand how the moon can work its power on nature and man. The grain of sand can drive him crazy; how much easier the moon! Then he thinks of being sorry for being drunk; but "stinking remorse" is clogged up and he gives way to the giant rage his drunkenness unleashes in himself. This is the fate of old age.

Still drunk, the fisherman wonders if there is any way to get out of his riotous drinking. As soon as the whiskey goes shallow in him and sense begins to return he, someone who knows Christ, begins to plan against a future spree. Not yet free from the influence of the whiskey, he couples in his mind his two dominant thoughts: reform and fishing. He resolves to catch Christ with a slick piece of bait and then, when the Devil starts tempting him back to his hellish stream, why Christ, who fishes for men, can walk on the water!

Lowell did not have to add a stanza of post-script showing the drunken fisherman surfeited with the wisdom of his remedy, "sleeping it off!"
The last poem we will analyze of the single-voice category, is "The Dead in Europe." Evidently a war poem, Lowell speaks the poem in the voice of one of those innumerable bomb victims.

After the planes unloaded, we fell down
Buried together, unmarried men and women;
Not crown of thorns, not iron, not Lombard crown,
Not grilled and spindle, spires pointing to heaven
Could save us. Raise us, Mother, we fell down
Here hugger-mugger in the jellied fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Our Mother, shall we rise on Mary's day
In Maryland, wherever corpses married
Under the rubble, bundled together? Pray
For us whom the blockbusters marred and buried;
When Satan scatters us on Rising-day,
O Mother, snatch our bodies from the fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Mother, my bones are trembling and I hear
The earth's reverberations and the trumpet
Bleating into my shambles. Shall I bear,
(O Mary!) unmarried man and powder-puppet,
Witness to the Devil? Mary, hear,
O Mary, marry earth, sea, air and fire;
Our sacred earth in our day is our curse. 26

The planes dropped their bombs and the victims fell indiscriminately. The poet remarks that these unmarried men and women (with whom he is counted) are buried together in the rubble. William Elton has a note on these lines. He says that Lowell stoops to Bathos here in his concern for the unmarried state of the dead rather than for the fact of the deaths themselves. 27 Rather, it would seem,

26 Ibid., 68.
following Lowell's usual studied use of words, the poet stresses the "unmarried" state of the dead to add fullness to the name of "Mary" in a poetic pun-technique.

Nothing could save the bomb victims! The speaker cites generally that Christ's nor man's nor religion's power was of any avail. Then he turns to the Blessed Virgin, and he addresses the rest of the poem to her specifically. He asks her to raise the dead who fell just anywhere in the path of the flame throwers. Then he gives his reason why he and the other dead look to Mary for pity. The earth was the reason for their death. It was not their fault they died when they did. This single line haunts the end of each of the three stanzas and gives a pleading sincerity to the prayer to Mary.

The dead man questions Mary as a child questions his all-wise mother. He wants to know if all these dead with him will rise on her day, in her land. He seems obsessed with the idea of their married state and thinks of the corpses as marrying under the rubble. He asks Mary urgently to pray for the bombed. Remembering judgment, he pleads again for Mary, Mother, to guard these dead from Satan's fire. He argues that they have not been bad; rather, the earth has been bad to them.

Now the speaker forgets the others who have fallen
dead with him and he addresses himself alone to his Mother. He is his own spokesman, now, in fear of judgment that shakes him thoroughly. He cringes in fear that he, an unmarried man who is the tool now of the bomb's disposal, will bear witness to Satan, will endorse evil. He pleads with Mary to hear him and unite all the elements of creation. He has had enough of earth which is a curse in his judgment.

The fright in this poem and the loathing for earth are strong. One is almost tempted to brand the poem Jansenistic, or at least, Puritanical. The force of feeling comes from the single voice that speaks its terror and disgust. All the poems, in fact, handled in this chapter, seem to receive their potency and effect from the direction given them by the single voice. We have examined four modes of speaking in a single voice: an elegy, narrative, soliloquy, and prayer; and we have not nearly exhausted this category of poems in Lowell. There is, however, sufficient weight for a judgment on the nature of a single voice in a poem and the aid it is, by determining the direction of the voice, to clarity of meaning.
CHAPTER II

POEMS WITH MORE THAN ONE VOICE

With each additional speaking character in a poem, the poet increases the number of voices in the poem. Many poems, as we saw in Chapter I, have a single voice, a single source for what is said. If this single voice merely lays the setting for, say a husband-wife conversation, the poem would admit three voices: the poet, the husband, the wife. With the introduction of other voices into a poem, the poet heightens the dramatic quality of what he writes; for the reader, in a sense, becomes a spectator of what the poem says and does. The mode of address is affected, too, by the increase of voices, because a new speaker will inject his own personality into the poem. More than one voice demands more than one addressee, also; for while one voice speaks, the other listens.

What of "dialogue" or, rather, quotations that are not human voices? If a statement is made by anyone or anything who is not the narrating voice, it is another voice in the poem. Robert Lowell uses the device of quoting historical figures, of making inanimate things vocal in eight...
of the poems in Lord Weary's Castle. We will look at these briefly, at some of them merely in passing, before we go on to the more dramatic poems of more than one voice.

In the third part of the elegy, "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket," the speaker addresses his drowned cousin and laments to him that the body he recovered from the god of the sea was a dead body. Lowell uses a striking image in his identification of the sea with Poseidon:

...and the harrowed brine
Is fruitless on the blue beard of the god.¹

The waters, raked with the drag net, yield no life. These waters, the speaker goes on to say, stretch out to Spain, across from Nantucket. The gun-salute for the dead blasts toward Cape Cod and flattens the eelgrass around a high water mark of bilge and backwash. The discharge splashes the water and shore, beating at the beach. The recoil shudders the ships that are really kept afloat by the hand of God. In God's hand, the speaker reflects, time's contrition forgets just exactly what its cause is and what the drowned Quaker sailors searched so frenziedly for in their lives.

Then the speaker thinks about these soldiers who died so early in time. Only their bones remain to tell of their brief search for the white whale of Truth. The cost

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¹ Lowell, Robert, Lord Weary's Castle, New York, 1945, 10.
of their search only they know. The speaker pictures to himself the Quaker sailors drowning in the whale's oily discharge. As they drown they cry a parody of Psalm 123:

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.2

The Quakers' cry is really a chorus, but a united chorus, which gives the effect of a single voice. There are two voices audible, then, in this poem; the speaker's and the Quaker chorus. The address changes direction three times. First, the speaker addresses his cousin; then he speaks to anyone, describing the volley to Cape Cod. The Chorus, however, parodying a psalm prayed to God in thanksgiving for victory, can be safely said to address God. There is a puzzle in the Quakers' lines. They say that had it not been for God they would have ended in the Atlantic. Since the Quakers did drown, and since there is no perfect solution to the meaning of their words, the reader is left with alternative interpretations. Either the speaker is mocking the Quakers and saying, in effect, "Well, God wasn't on your side; so the Atlantic did make short shrift of you!"—which is satirical; or, the Quakers may be saying that the Atlantic has not made a real end of them at all, for they have died march-

2 Ibid.
ing for Truth and the Truth brings freedom.

The fact that the quoted passage is open to various interpretations is in no way a weakness in the poem. Both interpretations are valid and meaningful. David Daiches, commenting on this point, says aptly: "To touch as many significant truths as possible while nominally presenting a single subject...that is the function of technique in poetry."³

In the first part of the poem, "The First Sunday in Lent," subtitled "In the Attic," the poet describes blustery March, "Time's fool", ⁴ borrowed from Shakespeare. While the wind storms the streets, the speaker goes up to the attic and rummages through its contents: childhood's toys, relics from Bunker Hill, the Civil War, and World War I. He grows reflective at the damage cached in the attic and compares the festivity of the last day of Troy in the face of the wooden horse, to the more serious manner in which we today harbor our relic-weapons to remind us of past wars and treacheries. The speaker addresses God then and prays for an "unblemished Adam," one unstained with the practicalities of this world, who can delight in the trees vibrating outside with the March winds crying, "The Lord of Hosts will overshadow us."⁵

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⁴ Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 15.
⁵ Ibid.
new voice, of the winds, has the answer to war and fear: God, who stands at the head of Armies, will take charge of men.

"Christmas Eve under Hooker’s Statue" is a disgruntled, satirical sort of poem. The speaker talks to anyone and lays the setting: in front of the Statehouse on Christmas Eve during war. There is a blackout, and as the speaker stands in front of a statue of Connecticut’s founder, Thomas Hooker, he recalls previous brightly-lighted, gay Christmases. In the second stanza, he considers the war. Hooker’s statue and the cannon and cairn by it do not daunt Mars from proceeding in his bloody business and Christmas seems futile. The speaker says:

I ask for bread, my father gives me mould:
His stocking is full of stones. 6

In the pointed quoting of the Gospels, the speaker shows the coldness of man, the hardness of hearts. Then he turns to Mars and addresses him, asking where peace is: the peace of summer gardens. He muses that the serpent is probably there, too, alongside the innocent flowers. Then he recalls Melville’s comment after the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863, and he hears him say, "All wars are boyish." This quotation introduces a new voice into the poem, for the speaker is not so much quoting Melville as he is rehearing
The man's statement. The reader hears Melville in the line rather than the poem's speaker. The poem ends with a note of both pessimism and hope. The original voice says that he and his contemporaries are old and yet there is war. There is hope, though, for wars will end when Christ again walks the earth. This is not necessarily a sarcasm nor a wishful thinking for parousia. Christ walks in His Mystical Body. It remains for His Body to be aware of its Divine Burden.

It is the chapel bells that add another voice to the speaker's in the poem "Mary Winslow." This relative has died and for the most part the speaker addresses anyone by relaying the facts of his relative's life and death. In the second stanza, he turns abruptly to the neighbors and calls for respect for the grand lady propped among the pillows.

Through the air

The bells cry: "Come, Come home," the babbling Chapel belfry cries: "Come, Mary Winslow, come; I bell thee home."7

This voice, addressed to Mary Winslow, has the sonorous and mournful tone of the funeral toll with its repetitiive "o" sound. All the monosyllables heighten the doleful note. We might say that here the voice has a double poetic effect: the device of the bells voicing their beckon is one; and the very onomatopoetic sound of the words is the other.

7 Ibid., 25.
Lewell has another device he uses in Lord Weary's Castle. He himself calls attention to it in a prefatory author's note to the volume. There are a number of selections in which he consciously imitates another poet's style. One of these poems is "Charles the Fifth and the Peasant," an imitation, according to Lewell, of the style of Paul Ambroise Valery, a French poet and philosopher who lived from 1871 to 1945.

Charles the Wise, "so middle-aged and common," reigned in the last half of the fourteenth century during the French brighter side of the Hundred Years' War. Lowell's poem reads like a picture, with that same visual objectivity. The voice of the speaker tells of the plain-lookingness of the "Kaiser, burgher, and a knight," who, for all his commonness was uncommon in his military and governing wisdom. As the speaker pictures him riding along against a background of fir-trees, the needles of the trees cry out to the rhythm of the hooves, "How can we stop it, stop it, stop it?" From this point on, the poem is obscure enough to make the reader wonder who is at fault, Valery or Lowell. The ambiguity of the "it" is disconcerting. Do the needles question how to stop the long war? This is a noble and legitimate fear on their part. Do they, perhaps, question how to stop

8 Ibid., 37.
the cannonballs, used for the first time during the reign of Charles V? This is also a legitimate, and very practical, fear. Do they question how they might stop the king’s horse that is leading their monarch to battle? This is surely a just fear, for the successor to Charles the Wise would be Charles the Insane. Whatever the query of the pine-needles, a peasant sits in the corner of this poem, "braining perch against a bucket" and again, the reader isn’t certain what Ark it is this industrious peasant does not fear drowning in the King’s deluge, whatever that may be. This much is certain: The sonnet is obscure. In face of it, the statement by I. A. Richards defending the attack of modern poetic obscurity has an ironic twist. He says, "Yet no one who has once made out the sense (of a poem) will easily persuade himself that his (charge of obscurity) is so." That seems to be the point: Put meaning where there seems to be no tangible meaning, and there will be meaning. But first put meaning!

The next poem is a lament for the loss of Boston’s pristine religion. In "As a Plane Tree by the Water," a title given to Mary in the book of Ecclesiasticus, the speaker sings that the Virgin has lost place in Boston, whose streets religiously speaking, are drying up. The speaker

sorrows because Boston has become another Babel and the
Virgin patron must become Our Lady of Babylon if she is to
stay in a stagnating city. When the speaker talks, he ad-
dresses first anybody, and then Our Lady. In the last
stanza, remembering that Christ conquered death in the tomb,
the very streets of Boston cry out, "Sing, sing for the re-
surrection of the King." This street-chorus addresses those
who hope for Boston's recovery.

The poem, "The Crucifix," also has a select audi-
ence. The voice of an American speaks the poem to Americans
getting into the War. The voice does not flatter England,
which rages for help in the Greece campaign and then pro-
ceeds to throw into the battle as many of ours as she can.
The picture looks bed in the poem. The speaker says:

We are sinking. "run, rat, run."
The prophets thunder.10

Untrue, however, to the instinct for safety, the speaker finds
courage in a chance crucifix he finds on Ninth Street. The
prophets' voices, of course, turn back on the speaker him-
self, or rather, the American who is disgruntled at the turn
of the war.

The last of these device-poems is "The Slough of
Despond."11 Here there are three distinct voices with two

10 Lowell, Lord Weary's Castle, 48.
11 Ibid., 62.
addresses.” The speaker’s voice, the “I,” addresses anyone. Both the pool and the tree address the first voice.

It is the more dramatic poems we will look at now: those in which there is human, living (except for “The Mills of the Kavanaghs” from the volume of the same name) dialogue.

There is no true dialogue, however, in “1790.” Rather, it is a monologue with a line of out loud thinking. The dramatic quality of the poem, though, merits its position in the dialogue group. The poem is described as “From the Memoirs of General Thiebault” and the poem is spoken and characterized by a member of the National Guard of France as he is on duty “watching” King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

On Maundy Thursday when the King and Queen
Had washed and wiped the chosen poor and fed
Them from a boisterous wooden platter; here
We stood in forage-caps upon the green:
Green guardmen of the Nation and its head.
The King walked out into the biting air,
Two gentlemen went with him; as they neared
Our middle gate, we stood aside for welcome;
A stone’s throw lay between us when they cleared
Two horse-shoe flights of steps and crossed
the Place Vendôme.

“What a dog’s life it is to be a king,”
I grumbled and unslung my gun; the chaff
And cinders whipped me and began to sting.
I heard our Monarch’s Breughel-peasant laugh
Exploding, as a spaniel mucked with tar
Cut by his Highness’ ankles on the double-quick
To fetch its stamping mistress. Louis smashed
Its backbone with a backstroke of his stick;
Slouching a little more than usual, he splashed
As boyish as a stallion to the Champs de Mars.

12 Ibid., 40.
The poem, simple enough, is just an incident in human observation. The custom of monarchs to keep Maundy Thursday by imitating the example of Christ when He washed the feet of His disciples before the Last Supper, is the starting point of the poem. The guardsmen who tells of this particular event in 1790 records systematically and objectively the king's exit from the "chosen poor." Then the guard utters his paradoxical conclusion that it is a dog's life to be a king. Right after that a real dog, a spaniel, hoves onto the scene and the king gives it a stout thwack on its spine. Louis, never really the stuff of which kings are made, and slouching more than usual under the strain of the French conflict, was nevertheless emboldened by the power he wielded over the spaniel and his pride carried him on. A dog's life made him feel like a king.

Lowell's book of poems, The Mills of the Kavanaghs, though it has fewer poems in number by reason of their length than Lord Weary's Castle, has proportionately more poems of a dramatic character. Frank O'Malley points out accurately that Lowell enters the realm of the dead in The Mills since all the poems have an elegiac note about them.13

"David and Bathsheba in the Public Garden" is

divided into two parts. The first part of the poem is complete dialogue without a line of narration. In the Introduction to this thesis, we mentioned that the more dramatic poems achieve an objectivity similar to Hemingway's in the short story, "The Killers." The first part of "David and Bathsheba" is a striking example of what we mean. The lovers speak to each other and all that the reader infers comes from their conversation. The poet does not inject any line that influences the reader one way or another. The case is presented by the lovers and the reader draws his own conclusions. It is almost as if the reader is an objective witness to this meeting in the public garden.

David speaks to Bathsheba first. In his passion for her, he had sent Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and an obstacle to David's marrying Bathsheba, into the front line of the current war the Jews were waging. Uriah has been, in this way, diplomatically murdered in the king's service, now David tells Bathsheba that while they sit together in the Public Garden by the lion-shaped fountain, the year is running out and sounds of fall are heard: children coming home from school and playing. Abruptly he questions:

You mourn Uriah? If he were alive
O Love, my age were nothing but the ball

Of leaves inside this lion-fountain, left
For witch and winter.

In this first speech, David introduces two ideas
that wind in and out through the rest of this poem: the
lion and the leaves. The lion is the symbol of Jewish
royalty. Christ was born of David's line under the symbol
of the lion of Juda. The leaves, of course, are symbols of
the passing of time.

Bathsheba picks up the leaves-symbol David used
to show his lifelessness without her; and she says:

Yet the leaves' complaint
Is the King's fall...whatever suffers theft.

David had had the trees transplanted from Europe
and Bathsheba blames the falling leaves on the theft, as
she seems to imply that he will fall, too, for his theft
of her. The king tosses off her suggestion by changing
the topic slightly.

The Latin labels on the foreign trees are quaint.
Then he returns to the thrust Bathsheba made and
he says, with practicality, that the trees have always lost
their leaves on strangers and his presence under the trees
is no omen. They rustle with the old stir of the Mediterr-
anean in their boughs.

Bathsheba melancholically returns to the thought
of Uriah, or rather, does not give up the thought of her dead
husband. She muses that Uriah would have found the falling
colors of the trees lovely had he sat here. Again the word "fall" occurs in a very clever pun. David throws off Bathsheba's moroseness with the rationalization that Uriah was dead before they met here at the lion-fountain. The lion-image that keeps recurring brings the flavor of the Offeratory prayer from the Mass for the Dead that asks God to free the souls from the lion's mouth: Satan's power. David urges Bathsheba to forget her sadness and kiss him. Darkness begins to fall and the leaves stir like harpstrings.

Bathsheba speaks rapidly to her Lover-King, as if she does not give in to David's request.

My Lord, observe
The shedding, park-bound mallards, how they keep Circling and diving for Uriah's sleep;
Driven, derided, David, and my will a curve.
The fountain's falling waters ring around The garden.

Bathsheba's thoughts are bound to Uriah's death.
The characterization shows her guilt-conscious mind skirting the edge of her guilt as best it can. She comments, nervously almost, on the sound of the fountain.

David, knowing that her mind is filled with guilt-sorrow, brushes aside the reference to the fountain and comes to the point. He tells her tenderly that, if he hadn't taken care to dispose of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband never would have understood their romance which David falsely justifies by referring to the love they experience at the
lion-fountain now. Bathsheba, speaking her fears in sarcasm, asks David if Uriah is reduced now to dust, anger, and anguish. Then she wonders if the love she and David experienced the previous summer was merely a prelude to a double fall: autumn and their own.

David would still soothe her concern:

Perhaps, I live. I lie
Drinking our likeness from the water. Look:
The Lion's mane and age! Surely, I will not die.

The first part of the poem, then, ends on a note of self-assured superiority. King David will prevail. The second and final part of the poem has no dialogue. Bathsheba soliloquizes after David's disloyalty to her. The poem is entitled "Bathsheba's Lament in the Garden." Since it has no dialogue in it, we will not consider it in this chapter beyond noting the fact that David, after four years, leaves Bathsheba with a child and marries Abishag. Bathsheba, contrary to David's conviction in the first part of the poem that he will never die, is certain that she soon must die. Her grief is intolerable.

Lowell's poem, "Thanksgiving's Over," uses a dream-device to speak the dialogue. In a note before the poem, Lowell explains the theme: "Thanksgiving night, 1942: a room on Third Avenue. Michael dreams of his wife, a Ger-

15 Ibid., 50-54.
man-American Catholic, who leapt from a window before she died in a sanatorium." This introduction to the poem gives the effect of stage setting and time. The poem's objectivity heightens the dramatic aspect.

Michael speaks the setting to an all-inclusive audience. It is Thanksgiving night and he is in his room on Third Avenue. Outside the snow is falling heavily. Then he hears "her" voice whisper. She remembers last year's Thanksgiving. She watched the people, leaving the steamer Normandie, stop in at the Franciscan church on Thirty-first Street and drop their overshoes by the holy-water font. Inside herself, she remembered that the birds sang as she became aware that the Holy Spirit possessed her soul in a Divine Indwelling, and she seemed to sing to the little Christ the St. Anthony figure held.

Then the voice changes tone. She had been addressing Michael, but now she speaks more to herself than to anyone else:

Now Michael sleeps,
Thanksgiving's over, nothing is for keeps.
Everything changes: earth, sky, life. Her mind slips around in a rational, irrational way as she says that Michael is at war with himself but the Lord is a friend.

With the keenness dreamers have that enables them to realize they are dreaming and yet not check themselves,
Michael asks, "Whose friend?" He is aware of many impressions jumbled together at once in a telescope of time. The bell clanged, he saw the old Thanksgiving decorations his wife's aunt had made for her barred window at the Sanatorium. Her window is right by his window: "my window's window." He sees her there, fingerling a toy bird with beebees in its tail. She laughs weakly and whispers that she wants to kill Michael. With that, she and the bars on her window crash down into the neon sign below.

Still Michael does not waken. Though he tells this poem for the greater part, his wife speaks her lines in his dream. Even after the crash, time suspended in the unconscious world, she speaks. She accuses Michael of killing their love by committing her to the Vermont asylum. She tells him she was harmless.

Michael, was there warrant
For killing love? As if the birds that range
The bestiary-garden by my cell,
Like angels in the needle-point, my Aunt
Bequeathed our altar guild, could want
To hurt a fly!...But Michael, I was well;
My mind was well;
I wanted to be loved—to thaw, to change,
To April!

The pathos in the lines is tremendous. The futility of her claim to sanity heightens the pity both Michael and the reader feel for her.

She speaks lyrically of the beautiful Vermont moun-
tain scenes changing to suit the season. She tells Michael that she will always love him and serve him, if only he will believe in her. Faith moves mountains and she asks only his trust.

She returns to her accusation of Michael's not loving her anymore and she calls him an adulterer. At a noise from her toy, she screams and takes up a glass which she brandishes in the air. Her aunt had tied little bells into the girl's hair so that the others in the house would know when she approached. She comes to Michael again and goes from tender memories to accusations once more. Then she fades from his dream.

Sleep dispelled
The burden of her spirit. But the cars Rattled my window.

The noise from the El invades Michael's sleep and brings back her voice. She screams a frenzied, "Where am I to go?" In his sleep, Michael sees her shining eyeballs like the stars.

The poem moves into a softer key. Michael goes out into the snowy, winter-night. He enters the Franciscan church and hears her voice talk about the St. Francis statue in the gloom. The Franciscans, she ponders, say that their burden is light and that all should follow their spirit. Then she wonders if she and Michael, whose marriage has be-
some such an onerous duty, should wait in line with the children around the Saint. "Sit and listen," she tells Michael. He does. He sits in the Church, counting off his rosary beads. He asks for mercy and hears nothing.

The intensity of feeling in the poem is maintained by the voice of the wife which babbles with reasoned incoherence in Michael's dream. This poem seems to have more dramatic impact than any other in either this same volume or Lord Weary's Castle. One general reason is because of the great objectivity Lowell achieved in limiting the address of the speakers. The wife speaks only to Michael and Michael speaks only of the circumstances concerning his wife. Michael's role primarily is to set the stage and give direction to the character and action of his wife.

In poetry of the nature of "David and Bathsheba" and "Thanksgiving's Over," since interpretation is confined by reason of the characters speaking in the stated circumstances, the expression of art is heightened; for, the greater rules to which an artist limits himself, the greater feat he produces in successfully carrying out his purpose. The end of all judgment must eventually be: what has the artist set out to do? is it worth doing? and has he done it? Lowell has done it.
CHAPTER III

POEMS WITH A VOICE WITHIN A VOICE

According to the Introduction to this thesis, we are now at a third mode of analysis of poems following Dr. La Drière's definitions of voice and address. His first definition and our first analysis correspond; however, we have omitted his second use of "voice" because, simply, Lowell does not speak his poetry in the style of dramatic monologues, except for "1796" and "The Drunken Fisherman" which are better placed under other headings because of the lack of characterization ascribed to the addressee in the poem, as we have demonstrated. Our second analysis, therefore, corresponds with Dr. La Drière's third definition. Now we are going to analyze poems which have a voice within a voice. Dr. La Drière does not specify this particular use of voice and therefore we move into an original, though derived, mode of analysis. The derivation is one of necessity, not of creative ingenuity, for Lowell has a number of

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1 See Introduction, 1.
poems that seemingly go along in a single voice until suddenly the reader is aware that it is not the original voice that is speaking at all. Somewhere along the line, some other voice crept in, or the speaker's voice blended into another voice. Until we actually analyze a poem, this sounds like some piece of poetic ventriloquism. Perhaps it is. The usual key to a new voice is in the realization that the audience is completely different from the one the poet started out with. The addressee does not determine the new voice, however; it merely indicates that the voice has changed speakers.

An apt example of the type of poem of which we speak is "The Holy Innocents."

Listen, the hay-bells tinkle as the cart Wavers on rubber tires along the tar And cindered ice below the burlap mill And ale-wife run. The oxen drool and start In wonder at the fenders of a car, And blunder hugely up St. Peter's hill. These are the undefiled by woman--their Sorrow is not the sorrow of this world: King Herod shrieking vengeance at the curled Up knees of Jesus choking in the air.

A king of speechless clods and infants. Still The world out-Herods Herod; and the year, The nineteen-hundred forty-fifth of grace Lumbers with losses up the clinker'd hill Of our purgation; and the oxen near The worn foundations of their resting-place, The holy manger where their bed is corn And holly torn for Christmas. If they die,
As Jesus, in the harness, who will mourn?
Lamb of the shepherds, Child, how still you lie.²

The very first word of the poem indicates that
the voice is speaking to someone. The first lines are de-
scriptive of both time, occasion, and setting. It is winter;
there is a hay-ride; and the route lies below the burlap mill
along the Atlantic seacoast, for the ale-wife fish are plenti-
ful. The rubber-tired cart is pulled by drooling oxen that
are car-shy. True to their symbolism, they "blunder blindly"
up St. Peter's hill. This name, St. Peter, has strong con-
notive sense, especially since the hill is referred to later
as one of purgation. St. Peter, traditionally heaven's af-
fadavit of acceptance, waits at the top of this hill, which,
in the association with Peter, becomes symbolical also for
life. At any rate, now comes the exciting statement that
"These are the undefiled by woman." According to the Church's
liturgy for December 26, the words used here are referred to
the babies killed in Herod's attempt to slay Christ, as the
poem later mentions. And yet, in the poem, the speaker does
not say that those in the cart are the undefiled, supposedly
young people. No, these are the undefiled. The only ante-
cedent for "these" is the oxen, and the reader is jolted

² Lowell, Robert, Lord Weary's Castle, 4.
at the realization that it is precisely the blundering, blind animals that the speaker is talking about. Then he offers a statement of explanation: "their sorrow is not the sorrow of this world." What is the sorrow of this world? The speaker answers that question to explain his own statement. Herod sorrowed at the birth of a Baby who threatened his royal security, so he thought. This new King, however, was no one to be feared on a natural level; for he ruled over stupid Jewish shepherds from the hills, and babies who would die for Him before they could pledge their allegiance to Him.

The poet continues that the world today out-Herods Herod; sorrows at even more futile sorrow, more non-existing sorrows. And the year 1945, like the dumb oxen, symbolized in the oxen, lumbers up a rough hill making up for its mistakes, its losses. Nineteen hundred forty-five, the speaker says, rumbles on, carrying our, the speaker's and addressee's and everyone's, mistaken values. But just as an ox found its way to the manger to be at Christ's birth, so the hay-cart oxen, symbolizing our plodding lives, find their manger, their rest. The speaker asks, then, as if he has just realized a tremendous fact, "Who will mourn for these oxen carrying our load of purgation?" If the question refers to the oxen, it refers to the year which the oxen represent. The stag-
gering realization is that the oxen are doing the very same
job now that Christ came on earth to do for us. Then,
quietly, a voice turns to the manger and speaks to the in-
fant Christ that the oxen led us to: "How still you lie."

The impact of the poem comes, not only from the
reader's appreciation of the bold truth the speaker states,
that Christ's life has seemingly borne about as much fruit
as any work animal's that man employs to do his heavy and
odious tasks; not only from the realization that the Infant
Christ realized this even in the manger; but from the sudden
change in voice. In the last line of the poem, the speaker
is no longer telling someone to listen to the haybells! He
is a completely different person, whispering an awed truth
to his Infant God. The contrast is well-timed and succeeds
in effectiveness. The boldness of it lacks no reverence, as
Thompson's term "Hound" is nothing but the dearest and most
correct title for Christ in the circumstances of the poem
which the poet chooses. The voice within the speaker's
voice at the end of the poem is a powerful dramatic device.

Similar to "The Holy Innocents," yet unique in
itself, is the poem "Christmas in Black Rock." The poem
places Black Rock on Long Island Sound. Just glancing
through the poem, we see that Christ's name is mentioned
three times. The first time it is used in the third person,
as description: "Christ God's red shadow." This use speaks plainly to an objective addressee: anyone. The next two times that Christ's name is used, it is in direct address which implies that the direction of the poem has shifted. If we look at the poem more carefully, we will see that a voice sets the stage for action in the first stanza and that a voice within that voice speaks its problem to Christ.

Since the first-stanza-voice has the role of descriptive narrator, every word must carry some significance for the setting and atmosphere of the poem. Words in poetry, in fact, always have a great connotative and denotative sense. In support of this statement, David Daiches says that it is the use of words that, to a great extent, determines the very nature of poetry. He says, further, that "good poetry is the result of the adequate counterpointing of the different resources of words (meaning, associations, rhythm, music, order, and so forth) in establishing a total complex of significant expression."³

In Lowell's poem, the first voice says:

Christ God's red shadow hangs upon the wall
The dead leaf's echo on these hours
Whose burden spindles to no breath at all;
Hard at our heels the huntress moonlight towers
And the green needles bristle at the glass

Tiers of defense-plants where the treadmill night
Churns up Long Island Sound with piston-fist.
Tonight, my child, the lifeless leaves will mass,
Heaving and heaping, as the swivelled light
Burns on the bell-spar in the fruitless mist. 4

It is late evening and the last red rays of the
setting sun, reflecting God, the God who was Incarnate,
catches one dead leaf left hanging on a bough. The ray pro-
jects the leaf’s shadow onto the wall and it does not move
for there is no wind this Christmas night. Right behind the
sunset, the moon, classically the huntress, like a light on
a tower, picks out the pine needles on the trees and they
seem to resent the squat new defense plants that are quickly
swallowed in the black night. The voice, explaining to his
child-audience, says that tonight the wind will heap together
and unfurl all the dead leaves in the beacon’s light.

Then a quieter voice speaks to this night’s Christ
Child and describes a contrast of Christmases. The moon
moves behind the evergreen screen and a shaft of light strikes
Mary’s hand reaching to the Child while, at the same time,
drunken Poles from the night-shifts stagger along to the in-
congruous juke-box blare of “Hosannah in excelsis Domino.”
The original voice returns in an address to the child after
having made the observation of incompatibilities. He says

4 Lowell, Robert, Lord Weary’s Castle, 6.
that Christmas night is the time when the saints in heaven are free to roam the earth. And he observes, going back to the swirling leaves from the first stanza, that the leaves will all fall to the ground.

Lowell seems to like the leaf-image. He used it consistently in the poem "David and Bathsheba," as we have seen in the second chapter of this thesis. In this poem, "Christmas in Black Rock," he again keeps repeating the word. In the third stanza he personifies December, "old leech," as leafing through Autumn's store in a clever pun. The first voice continues in its address to the child. It goes back on another earlier idea and says that this leafing goes on out on the causeway where

Poland has unleashed its dogs
To bay the moon upon the Black Rock shore.5

a not-too-flattering rehearsal of the image of the drunken Poles in stanza two. This picture is counterpointed with a delicate image (Lowell seems to like to use shocking contrasts within a poem):

Under our windows, on the rotten logs
The moonbeam, bobbing like an apple, snags
The undertow.6

We are back, here, to the leaves again. Then that second voice, a voice within the first voice, which

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
addresses Christ, moans its complaint or disappointment.

After all the years of Christmases, there are still men who are not affected by Christ God.

O Christ, the spiralling years
Slither with child and manger to a ball
Of ice; and what is man? We tear our rags
To hang the Furies by their itching ears, 7
And the green needles nail us to the wall.

There is a wholeness to this poem; it comes full circle. The intertwining of the leaves and the moonlight is effective; and in the last stanza, there is a distinct echo of the first stanza. Christ God's red shadow had hung a dead leaf's shadow upon the wall. Now the moonlight shining through the pines nails the speaker and those he includes in the "us" to the wall. The comparison can be extended to its limits, of course, since the speaker places the suggestion before the reader.

Very different in tone from "Christmas in Black Rock" is the poem "Salem."

In Salem seasick spindrift drifts or skips
To the canvas flapping on the seaward panes
Until the knitting sailor stabs at ships
Nosing like sheep of Morpheus through his brain's Asylum. Seaman, seaman, how the draft
Lashes the oily slick about your head,
Bearing up whitecaps! Seaman, Charon's raft
Dumps its damned goods into the harbor-bed--
There sewage sickens the rebellious seas.

7 Ibid.
Remember, seamen, Salem fishermen
Once hung their nimble fleets on the Great Banks.
Where was it that New England bred the men
Who quartered the Leviathan's fat flanks
And fought the British Lion to his knees? 8

A Life article characterizes this poem as one of
Lowell's best-known shorter poems, "a lament for dead sailors
and for the past greatness of the port of Salem." 9 This con-
clusion is evident from the poem itself, but the device Lo-
well uses to achieve his result is not immediately apparent
unless we first hear out the voice speaking. The first four
lines evidently set the scene again. The tossed sea-spray
slaps against the canvas on the outgoing ships as a drowsy
sailor sits on a dock in Salem and sews canvas. As the sail-
or stitches he nods sleepily and, instead of counting the
proverbial sheep, he needles ships sailing around in his
sleepy mind. By the fifth line the sailor is asleep and a
voice within the first voice penetrates his dream where he
is sinking by his boat. The wind swirls the oil from the
sinking boat around the drowning sailor's head as the sea
is churned up. Then the voice proposes another image for
the sleeping sailor: Charon dumps his load of hell-bound
souls into the harbor where the dead bodies pollute the
churning waters. A third image links up with the harbor.

8 Ibid., 26.
9 "Prize Poet Wins the Pulitzer Prize", New York.
XXII, May 19, 1947, 91.
It was here at the Salem port that the fishermen used to dock their light boats. This idea calls up a fourth, a more poignant image: where are those noble seamen now, where can such be found as those who sailed from Salem and conquered the British?

This poem gives evidence of the statement by A. Harrigan that "Lowell in his poetry wars against...the decay of New England tradition." The omission in the quotation refers to the two other Lowell targets: "Satan in all his works, and modern Boston." Just in passing, we might mention that these two attacks are well-made in "Christmas in Black Rock" and "The Crucifix," respectively.

Lowell has a long poem called "Between the Porch and the Altar." The title smacks of criticism because it recalls Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees who stoned the prophets between these two limits. Lowell's poem is sectioned into four parts: "Mother and Son," "Adam and Eve," "Katherine's Dream," and "At the Altar." It is the second and fourth poem that we will consider, since each part of the whole poem may be considered as a unit without losing nor destroying the meaning.

In the second poem, the interior rebellion and

11 Lowell, Robert, Lord Weary's Castle, 42.
disgruntledness that mounts up until the last line makes a staggering impact on the reader's mind. A voice begins the poem and gives us the point of view, the location. We are in Concord of glorious memories and the person who speaks looks at a monumentary statue of one of the Concord farmers who left his plough to insure freedom and equality in a New World. Only now the statue, the farmer, standing out in the sun,

sizzles on his shaft all day.
He is content and centuries away
From white-hot Concord, and he stands on guard.
Or is he melting down like sculptured lard?
His hand is crisp and steady on the plough.

There is a note of resentment sounded already for the "safe" farmer in his field. He is far removed from the threat of Concord now and he can afford to stand there.

Now this initial voice gives way to a more personal voice that addresses a woman, a modern Eve, as the title suggests. The voice now becomes a new Adam's voice; not the new Adam of the New Testament, but the fallen Adam from Eden. He speaks the situation:

I quarreled with you, but am happy now
To while away my life for your unrest
Of terror. Never to have lived is best;
Man tasted Eve with Death. I taste my wife
And children while I hold your hands. I knife
Their names into this elm. What is exempt?

The age-old curse of death and decay is upon this Adam who has again betrayed truth, his life, for pity of
this Eve. The discontent that heckles man for death bothers the lover. These lines are filled with the nervousness of wrong. The Adam is reconciled to be unhappy because he sees no way out. Never to have lived seems better than to meet death day by day, for death lurks in each pleasure. The discontent does not seem so much to be in the knowledge of the certainty of death as in the reminder of what could have been if sin had not come between. Adam carves the symbols of Truth, of wholeness and life, into the elm-tree; but there is the certainty that the tree, too, will decay. Nothing is free from death.

Then he faces that Concord farmer, complacently fondling his plough.

I eye the statue with an awed contempt
And see the puritanical facade
Of the white church that Irish exiles made
For Patrick—that Colonial from Rome
Had magicked the charmed serpents from their home,
As though he were a Piper. Will his breath
Scorch the red dragon of my nerves to death?

There are three objects of contempt that Adam names here. The farmer earns his scorn because he looks as if it is all so simple: just to stand there as a symbol for freedom when Concord can still be so tyrannized, as Adam is within himself. Then he looks at the stolid little church, another bulwark of freedom and the people are not free. The church was built by the Irish in honor of St. Patrick who freed their land from snakes. But Adam is contemptuous for
such magic as long as he still harbors the Serpent of desire
and sin.

Adam and his Eve walk along. He describes the
action:

By sundown we are on the shore. You walk
A little way before me and I talk
Half to myself and half aloud. They lied,
My cold-eyed seedy fathers when they died,
Or rather threw their lives away, to fix
Sterile, forbidding nameplates on the bricks
Above a kettle. Jesus rest their souls!

His contention is voiced. The New England farmers
of the Revolution didn't fight for freedom. They gained re-
nown, instead.

While modern Adam mulls over the lack of integrity
he finds around him because of the lack in himself, Eve has
a little trouble:

You cry for help. Your market-basket rolls
With all its baking apples in the lake.
You watch the whorish slither of the snake
That chokes a duckling. When we try to kiss,
Our eyes are slits and cringing, and we hiss;
Scales glitter on our bodies as we fall.
The Farmer melts upon his pedestal.

Eve, paralleling her namesake, cries for the apple
she should not retrieve. She sees the seductive snake bring
death to a duckling and yet there is no understanding. This
new Adam and new Eve become their own seducers, and they will
meet death.

The last line of the poem goes back again to the
initial voice. Adam, silent now, reduced to death, vanishes.
The Farmer statue in the sun seems to melt on its pedestal, proving the old adage to be reversible: "Like son, like father."

The fall of this later Adam and his little likelihood to rise again leaves a futile taste in the mouth. As Lowell moves into the fourth part of the poem, he does not relieve the futility, but rather, he speeds up the tempo so that the reader submerges a little more quickly. After the opening description with its bright lights and noise, the action and pulse of the poem is noticeably accelerated.

The first voice explains to the general addressee the situation.

I sit at a gold table with my girl
Whose eyelids burn with brandy. What a whirl
Of Easter eggs is colored by the lights,
As the Norwegian dancer's crystalled tights
Flash with her naked leg's high-booted skate,
Like Northern Lights upon my watching plate.
The twinkling steel above me is a star;
I am a fallen Christmas tree. Our car
Races through seven red-lights--then the road
Is unpatrolled and empty, and a load
Of ply-wood with a tail-light makes us slow.

He and his girl, after a gala evening of brandy and floor-shows, and bright lights, get into the car and speed through red-lights to the highway in a breathlessness until they are slowed down behind a truck poled high with lumber. He takes advantage of the break:

12 Ibid., 45.
I turn and whisper in her ear. You know
I want to leave my mother and my wife,
You wouldn't have me tied to them for life...
Time runs, the windshield runs with stars. The past
Is cities from a train, until at last
Its escalating and black-windowed blocks
Recoil against a Gothic church.

The voice takes care of all the action in the poem.
The voice within that first voice, however, speaks to the
woman in the car and we get their relationship for the first
time. To have called her his "girl" in the first line was
not so accurate. Actually, the woman, if not his mistress,
is well on the way to assuming the role. This inner voice,
which reveals the conflict in the poem, speaks the three
lines, and is interrupted. Evidently the car has been able
to pass the truck and the race is resumed. The car streaks
down the road, past darkened houses, until it crashes into a
church.

The clocks
Are tolling. 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; and the Day
Breaks with its lightning on the man of clay,
Dies amara valde.

The impact of the car crashes the church down and
kills the driver. The woman drops out of the poem complete-
ly since death is a personal and lonely adventure. The poet
handles a cliché in a unique way when he invests the falling
church "like a ton of bricks" with all the possible literal
truth the words can have. Whether a priest was actually saying Mass behind the crumbling walls, or whether he is there only by association in the dead man's mind, is not important. What is of note is that the voice carries us from the realm of time into eternity. In a consecutive account, we see the man very much full of life, then dying, and finally we see him on his particular day of judgement. Now he is a very mortal man and with appropriateness, the speaker describes the day with words from the Libera of the Requiem Mass: a day exceedingly bitter. We have followed the man through to condemnation. Now he goes on speaking, this time from hell:

Here the Lord
Is Lucifer in harness: hand on sword,
He watches me for Mother, and will turn
The bier and baby-carriage where I burn.

Lucifer is only the Lord's tool for justice.

Now the man who would break from his mother and wife, finds that he is very much an infant in the wisdom of the world.

The poem is unusual in its course through the events that finally end in hell. This poem is probably one of the best examples of the type of poem we are considering in this chapter. The change in voice without a change in person is very evident.

It is not difficult to separate the voices, either, in the second part of the poem entitled "The Death of
the Sheriff." The sheriff, we learn in the first part of
the poem, had gone insane and had been locked away. Now
he is dead and the undertaker removed the body for its
burial preparation. One important thing: the sheriff is
an uncle to the one who speaks the poem.

In the second part of the poem, "The Portrait," the
nephew's voice sets the scene and the condition. He has
been drinking until the whiskey makes him vengeful and hot.
He sweeps the candelabrum from the mantel's top where he is
leaning and his hot breath seems to scorch the figured panel
of Poseidon in the classical pose with his trident in the
air. The nephew stares into a painted cup on the mantel
and sees the busy chipmunk etched there. The burning pine-
cones in the fireplace pop and flash on the oil-portrait of
his now dead uncle. The nephew's bile, aroused by emotion
and whiskey, forces beads of perspiration to roll off his
forehead onto a ship-model that he scrapes with his uncle's
file.

Next the nephew turns to a copy of Vergil and
tries translating a pencilled line that he points out. He
reminiscences and a voice within the first voice that merely
described his actions to anyone, speaks to his uncle. He
notes that human nature has not changed from Aeneas' day

13 Ibid., 67.
down to his own. Helen was dishonored then and brought on a war. He would choose Helen, too. Snatches of the Aeneid come back to him. He leaves off speaking to his uncle and the voice within the voice is silent. The nephew speaks out:

I am chilled,
I drop the barbless fly into my purse
Beside his nickel shield. It is God's curse, God's, that has purpled Lucifer with fear
And burning. God has willed;
I lift the window. Digging has begun,
The hill road sparkles, and the mourners' oars Wheel with the whitened sepulchres of stars
To light the worldly dead-march of the sun.

The casual narrative of the end of this poem has about it the stark funeral grief one would expect. In a detached way, almost, the nephew drops the useless fishhook remembrance into his purse by the sheriff's badge. He represents God's curse of death that makes men fear hell. The nephew throws open the window and hears the grave diggers at work. It is a bright night and the cars reflect the stars which, in turn, are the heralds of the sun, a symbol in its turn for passing time.

The human touch of body reactions in this poem is interesting. The nephew himself speaks his own distraughtness by repeatedly mentioning his temperature. In the first stanza he is dripping with perspiration, induced by fear of death and whiskey. In the last stanza he is alternately chilled and then warm enough to open the window. There is a clamminess of death about the poem.
There is an advantage in using this mode of voice in poems. The voice within the voice offers a variation in tempo that is a successful technique. Ordinarily, the inner voice is the quieter voice.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Life's article on Robert Lowell, to which we have already referred, says that the poet "writes with Old Testament sombreness about death and about a world of violent passions in which the individual soul battles against the inertia of society. He uses established and familiar forms, but his tight, allusion-packed images are not easily understood." There is no doubt in our mind that the fourfold statement here is correct. We would, perhaps, amend the quotation only insofar as we would give the last clause more prominence. Lowell writes with such dovetailed and close-fitting symbols, that his meaning is often difficult to understand. It is precisely because of this difficulty that he makes a good testing-case of the aid to interpretation of poetry by means of viewing a poem from the aspect of voice and address.

To hear all poems as a poet's personal and un-

1 "Prize Poet Wins the Pulitzer Award", New York, XXII, May 19, 1947, 91.

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qualified opinion on the particular topic is not to hear the poems at all. It is for this reason that we make the earliest distinction in the voice of the poem. Just as anything spoken must be made vocal by a person, so everything written must be made vocal also. The difference, however, is that when a person speaks, he takes the responsibility of his speech to himself. He utters his own convictions in his own name. Stallman, upholding Eliot on the matter of the way in which a poet writes, says that the poet produces a "fusion of these two poles of the mind: emotion and thought"; but it may be anyone's emotion and thought, not necessarily his own.

Since it is not accurate, then, to stylize all that a poet pens as if it were his own direct quotation, we say that the poet adapts his words to a voice. Some poems have one voice, which we have called "the speaker's voice", not because it was to be identified with the person of Robert Lowell; but because it was the initial voice he used to speak the emotion and thought he wished to have expressed.

If more than one voice is used in a poem, there is some element of dialogue introduced. It does not matter

who speaks with the first voice nor even if an inanimate object is made vocal; if another voice is recognized, a new category of poems is introduced. It is interesting to note that Lowell's Pulitzer winner, *Lord Weary's Castle*, has proportionately fewer poems in this second group than his later volume, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*.

Where there is dialogue, there is more potential drama than where a single voice speaks. This is very understandable, for dialogue presupposes some sort of characterization; and this, in turn, demands action. Poems of a single voice may be concerned with an emotion or idea written for the sake of its beauty, uniqueness, poetic value. There can be no dramatic impact, however, unless the voice assumes the role of a definite objective character.

The third mode of expression we have looked at is that which utilizes a voice within the original voice of the poem. The poet speaks through his words as one would think in his mind. To carry the analogy further, when the voice within the voice speaks, it is as if the person thinking is made to say something, to carry on a discussion within himself. His voice, his mind, has within itself a second voice which can be made vocal. Or, it may be that in a poem a poet addresses one person (as the voice in "Christmas in Black Rock" addresses the child) and suddenly turns to address a second addressee. This is an expression of the
versatility of the mind that can follow more than one channel of thought at a time without getting the different ideas misplaced and without the different ideas being responsible for each other.

This mode of interpreting poetry arises organically from poetry itself. It is more compact than I. A. Richards' analysis of poems into four kinds of meanings: sense, feeling, tone, and intention, in which "sense" would be comparable to what we have been terming "address" and "tone" would be a by-product of "voice" which changes with the audience or hearer's attitude.

One word yet on Lowell's personal opinion of poetry. Since poems do not the poet make, it would be of interest to know at first-hand what qualities a successful poet like Robert Lowell considers essential for poems. This time, it is actually Lowell who speaks in an article he wrote on John Crowe Ransom for the Sewanee Review. He says that there is, in good poetry, an "unusual structural clarity, the rhetorical fireworks of exposition, description and dialogue; but even more: the sticking to concrete human subjects—the hardest; and a balance, control, maturity, nimbleness, toughness, and gentleness of temperament."4

Although the list of qualities is distressingly long, they are all apparent in Lowell's poetry; if not corporately in his single poems, at least throughout his poetry. From reading his poetry, we could have arrived at the conclusion Lowell has stated for us here. His is a poetry of vibrant voices and forceful addresses. Because of this, it is a poetry rich in meaning.
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The thesis submitted by Sister M. Pacis, O.S.F.
has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Jun 2nd 1952
Date

[Signature]
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