

Poetics and Politics in Robert Lowell's "The March 1" and "The March 2"*

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Typographical ellipsis, diverse forms of repetition, an array of rhetorical devices, sonnet configuration, and prosodic maneuvers are salient features of Lowell's poetics that deserve close attention in any consideration of the political workings of "The March 1" and "The March 2." So does Lowell's self-representation, which he spoke of in a 1969 interview, casually linking himself with Horace. He was the most classically oriented American poet of his generation, and Horace will help in my discussion of the truthfulness, biographical or otherwise, of his rhetorical poetics.¹ Lowell was also the most historically minded, and his quatorzains call for the sort of historical contextualization that I provide. To highlight his rhetorical strategies I will draw on the classical rhetorical terminology that he was conversant with. In a 1971 interview, he linked his rhetorical practice with his adoption of sonnet form in *Notebook* (1970), which comprises over three hundred quatorzains, among them "The March 1" and "The March 2." He declares that "unrhymed loose blank-verse sonnets [...] allowed me rhetoric, formal construction, and quick breaks. [...] It was a stanza, as so much of my work—a unit blocked out a priori, then coaxed into form" (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 270-71). The formal construction that Lowell coaxed his quatorzains into is, I will argue, a variant of Petrarchan sonnet form, sans rhyme scheme but with a rhetorical turn or "quick break" at line 9. Poetics and politics converge crucially toward the close of "The March 2," when verbal repetition, apostrophe, and

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typographical ellipsis invite the reader to construe out of textual indeterminateness an emblematic tableau.

“The March 1” and “The March 2” appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on November 23, 1967, barely a month after the March on the Pentagon on October 21.² The biggest pre-march rally that day was held at the Lincoln Memorial, where protesters lined the Reflecting Pool several rows deep, and listened, listened, listened to speeches against the war in Vietnam. Four years earlier, on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King had delivered his “I have a dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the end of another mass march, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. But on October 21, 1967 the March, this time not on Washington but the Pentagon, across the Potomac in Virginia, had not yet begun as the “amplified” speeches droned on. It was time to get going:

The March 1
(For Dwight Macdonald)

Under the too white marmoreal Lincoln Memorial,
the too tall marmoreal Washington Obelisk,
gazing into the too long reflecting pool,
the reddish trees, the withering autumn sky,
the remorseless, amplified harangues for peace—
lovely to lock arms, to march absurdly locked
(unlocking to keep my wet glasses from slipping)
to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers,
then to step off like green Union Army recruits
for the first Bull Run, sped by photographers,
the notables, the girls ... fear, glory, chaos, rout...
our green army staggered out on the miles-long green fields,
met by the other army, the Martian, the ape, the hero,
his newfangled rifle, his green new steel helmet.

Scenic presentation demarcates a notional octave, as visual panning ranges from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument, to the Reflecting Pool, then upward to the withering sky, then downward to the surrounding trees. The focus then shifts to a row of front-line notables, then to one of them, the poet himself, and finally to his

close-up view of his own hand: “to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers.” The grand panorama with which the octave began contracts at the end to a single match.

Lowell begins his octave with the weighty spatial marker “Under.” Nothing moves and everything is too something—“too white, too tall, too long.” The “too long” of line 3 is not temporal, but “Gazing into the too long reflecting pool”—the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool is in fact 2,029 feet long—almost suggests that the pool has been reflecting too long.³ It is not the only thing, though, that is too long. Lowell’s “too long” renditions of the iambic pentameter of English-language sonnets begin with a fifteen-syllable line, long enough for one and a half pentameters: “Under the too white marmoreal Lincoln Memorial.” The virtual repetition “marmoreal [...] Memorial” itself claims eight syllables.⁴ Line 2 makes do with thirteen syllables, but not without a reiteration of “marmoreal” and another “too”: “the too tall marmoreal.” Then, in line 3, “too” itself aurally multiplies, “into the too.” “The remorseless, amplified harangues for peace” are a form of “tooness” for which the rally organizers and relentless speechmakers are responsible.⁵ I take “amplified” not only as a reference to turned-up loudspeakers, but as a characterization of the “amplified” speeches themselves, in the rhetorical sense of “amplificatio,” that grab bag of rhetorical devices used to expand upon a simple statement. It is as if the long dash that terminates line 5 had to be called in to impose a halt not only to the “amplified harangues for peace” but to a profusion of loosely connected phrases lacking a grammatical subject and finite verb.

After the long dash comes a fresh syntactic start, with “lovely” the launching pad for a series of infinitive phrases: “to lock arms,” “to march absurdly locked,” “to keep my glasses from slipping,” “to see the cigarette match.” How “lovely” it all is, after all the grandiose, remorseless, lethargic “tooness” of lines 1-5. Something is finally happening, or at any rate beginning to happen. How lovely. How absurdly. Lowell’s arch, amused detachment turns to comic self-portrayal, when repetition in the form of polyptoton—*lock, locked,*

unlocking—and a flutter of sonic repetitions register his fluster: “(unlocking to keep my wet glasses from slipping) / to see the cigarette match quaking in my fingers.” Thus our hero caught up in the quasi-military preparations for battle as media event that he is slated to play a prominent role in. No media, no march.⁶ Before the march really gets underway he must first unlock arms in order to push his glasses back on his nose, while somehow or other striking a match and lighting a cigarette. This fumbling is the stuff of silent screen comedy, as Lowell “films” himself as a kind of Charlie Chaplin. That the match he holds in his fingers is “quaking” suggests anxiety that the march may turn into a real battle. So does the need for a last cigarette. As for his glasses being wet, it was presumably a hot and humid Washington afternoon under a “withering autumn sky,” and perhaps he has been sweating, but anxiety may play a role.

Lines 1-8 were less about the march than the protracted rally that preceded it. “Then to step off,” a new infinitive at the outset of line 9, marks a shift from waiting to marching, from anticipation to action, from end-stopped lines to enjambment.⁷ Not all those who were at the Lincoln Memorial rally joined the march, and the roughly 54,000 who did first had to cross the Potomac over the Arlington Memorial Bridge, which took two hours.⁸ Only then could they commence their march into Virginia and the “miles-long green fields” of Lowell’s sestet, there to be met by “the other army.” Formally, “then to step off” at line 9 is a stepping off into a sestet, releasing rhythmical energy that presses on into line 10: “Then to step off like green Union Army recruits / for the first Bull Run.” The historical analogy evokes another march a century earlier, on another twenty-first, when on July 21, 1861, 35,000 green Union Army recruits, having marched from Washington into Virginia, engaged in the first major land battle of the Civil War, the First Battle of Bull Run. The Union commander, General Irvin McDowell, worried about the inexperience of his troops, had been assured by President Lincoln: “You are green, it is true, but they are green also; you are all green alike.” In his history of the battle, David Detzer comments: “The line was classic Lincoln: pithy, home-

spun, seemingly incontrovertible. Unfortunately, it was also banal nonsense, and fatal for many soldiers. He was making a *military* judgment about the comparative quality of troops and of their officers, a subject about which he himself was far too 'green'" (67-68). The battle turned into a rout, and panicked Union troops ran back toward Washington. In *Specimen Days* Walt Whitman records that expectations of a "triumphant return" were blasted by the "terrible shock" of the North's defeat, and that Union soldiers "exploded in a panic and fled the field." After "a terrible march of twenty miles" they poured into Washington "baffled, humiliated, and panic-struck" (707-08). Stepping off, Lowell's "Green Union Army recruits" are blissfully unconcerned with the fate of their antecedents at the first Battle of Bull Run, which endues Lowell's historical analogy with dramatic irony.⁹

The "newfangled rifle" in line 14 adds a curious historical touch. The Civil War, so it has been argued, might have come to a rapid end if Gen. James Ripley, the Union Army's Ordnance chief, had not opposed Abraham Lincoln's December 1861 directive for purchase of 10,000 Spencer repeating rifles. Ripley was hostile to all breechloaders, which he called "newfangled gimcracks" (see Leigh 2). The latter-day "Confederate" forces, as toted up by Mailer, consisted of "1,500 Metropolitan Police, 2,500 Washington, D.C., National Guardsmen, about 200 U.S. Marshals, and unspecified numbers of Government Security Guards, and Park, White House, and Capitol Police. There were also 6,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division flown in from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the same 82nd Airborne which once parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and was now fresh from Santo Domingo and the Detroit riots. MP units had been flown in from California and Texas, the U.S. Marshals had been brought from just about everywhere—Florida, New York, Arizona, Texas, to name a few states—it was to be virtually a convention for them. In addition, 20,000 troops stationed nearby were on alert" (245).

When the green troops "step off" into the sestet, things begin to move quickly. The march as media spectacle is now truly in progress, featuring the usual suspects—the front-line notables; the squads of

photographers rushing to keep up, in fact to get ahead of the marchers to photograph them head on, while the marchers, “sped by” the photographers, struggle to get close to the photographers; nameless girls are also hurrying forward, photogenic bit-players eager to be part of it all. Lowell uses typographical ellipsis to fashion a two-phase asyndeton: “photographers, / the notables, the girls ... fear, glory, chaos, rout ... [.]”¹⁰ The first phase is like a series—click, click, click—of photos taken. After the second typographical ellipsis, it is as if the ongoing pellmell action had been halted, or temporarily frozen in time. The poet, no longer marching, assumes the voice of an omniscient historian who already knows the outcome of what is still, for its participants, an impending battle. The classic military instance of asyndeton is Caesar’s *veni, vidi, vici*, which makes Caesar his own historian. The staccato pace of the three echoic verbs, lacking any personal affect, conveys a sense of inevitability of what will happen—and happen quickly—whenever Caesar “comes.” Those barbarians don’t stand a chance. Lowell’s asyndeton does not form an “inevitable” sequence proclaimed by a conquering hero. It proffers instead a detached historical perspective on a battle that is so to speak “over” before it has started, which lends Lowell’s asyndeton a certain inevitability, too. The poet now speaking as a sententious historian observes how passions of those involved in battle swing from one emotional pole to another, until chaos finally turns into rout.¹¹ A particular instance confirms a general truth of what goes on in warfare, while the earlier analogy to the First Battle of Bull Run augments a sense of inevitability, of history repeating itself.

The three additional dots that follow “rout” shore up the status of the asyndeton as an independent speech act, while bringing the verse line silently to an end. Lowell’s vestigial sestet instigates no rhyme scheme, but “chaos, rout” (end of line 11) and “our green army staggered out” (beginning of line 12) provide a sonic bridge between its two halves, in Petrarchan terms the two tercets rhyming *cdecde* or some variation thereof that make up the sestet. There is also a contrastive link between “then to step off like green Union Army recruits”

(line 9) and what would be the initial line of the second tercet, "our green army staggered out on the miles-long green fields." The confident pace of "then to step off" that initiated the volta has diminished to "staggered" under the rigors of the hours-long march from the Lincoln Memorial, finally out onto the miles-long green fields of Virginia. In my reading, eight of the thirteen syllables in line 12 are heavily stressed: "our *green* army staggered out on the *miles-long green fields*." The staggering verse resolutely makes its way toward completion of the sonnet's first grammatical clause: noun phrase ("our green army"), verb phrase ("staggered out") drawn-out prepositional phrase ("on the miles-long green fields"). But the clause is not over, the sentence is not finished.

That by the end of line 9 a "rout" occurs before a battle has begun, indeed even before one army has been "met" by the other army, makes lines 9-10 in rhetorical terms a hysteron proteron, a reversal of temporal order, the classic military instance being Virgil's "moriatur et in media arma ruamus" (*Aeneid* II.353), "Let us die and rush into the midst of arms" (Virgil 318-19). Lowell's marchers do not die and rush into the midst of arms, nor are they any longer "sped by" photographers, but are "met by the other army, the Martian, the ape, the hero / his new-fangled rifle, his green new steel helmet" (ll. 13-14).¹² It is as if an evolutionary process takes place in a series of epithets, from Martian to ape to hero. Then we are told what he has in his hands, then of what he has on his head, as if to fulfill the arming of the hero topos.¹³ Adding prosodic weightiness to the topos, the unorthodox adjectival word order "green new" foregrounds "green" and forces four consecutive stresses upon us: *green new steel hel*. A grim play on "helmet" as "hell met" may be heard, while "hero" and "helmet" as end-words form an alliterative pair. The entire sequence began with "met" and ends only when it runs into "helmet," with *met-met* homoioteleuton providing a sonic frame. Within the larger frame of the sestet, the passive participial construction "met by" brings to a halt the mounting action that began with "to step off." The addition of a rhyme scheme might even detract from the rhetorical dynamics of

Lowell's employment of Petrarchan sonnet form. The reader must "discover" the operations of the form, which emerges all the more powerfully without the trappings of rhyme.

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A reader who descries a Petrarchan ghost behind the arras in "The March 1" will readily discern the octave-sestet rhetorical structure of "The March 2." More crucially, the reader will be called upon at the end to identify whose "kind hands" helped the poet stagger to his feet:

The March 2

Where two or three were heaped together, or fifty,
 mostly white-haired, or bald, or women ... sadly
 unfit to follow their dream, I sat in the sunset
 shade of their Bastille, the Pentagon,
 nursing leg- and arch-cramps, my cowardly,
 foolhardy heart; and heard, alas, more speeches,
 though the words took heart now to show how weak
 we were, and right. An MP sergeant kept
 repeating, "March slowly through them. Don't even brush
 anyone sitting down." They tiptoed through us
 in single file, and then their second wave
 trampled us flat and back. Health to those who held,
 health to the green steel head ... to your kind hands
 that helped me stagger to my feet, and flee.

Lowell again begins his quatorzain with a spatial marker, "Where," which along with "heaped" recalls "Under" at the outset of "The March 1." Typographical ellipsis again occurs twice, motifs are repeated, and repetition becomes literal at the volta in line 9, "repeating, 'March slowly through them,'" which heralds another march. The title "The March 2" acquires a double meaning at this point, as the second quatorzain on the March on the Pentagon and as a second march, which itself will feature a "second wave."

"The March 1" was a syntactic patchwork loosely organized as one sentence, and early in "The March 2" typographical ellipsis forestalls completion of a complex sentence. Only in line 8 does a sentence, held up by a semi-colon, reach a definitive end. In the sestet a series of syntactically distinct sentences progresses steadily via enjambment: the only end-stopped line is the last. From the beginning, however, Lowell's loose blank verse lines are more regular than what one was used to in "The March 1." Seven lines (4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14) are decasyllabic and either quite regular iambic pentameter or else vary from the norm only minimally. Five lines (1, 2, 6, 11, 10, 12) are hendecasyllabic, and four of them can be read as "orthodox" feminine-ending iambic pentameter. This switch to virtually regular blank verse—no blank verse is ever entirely regular—and build-up of enjambment in the sestet foster a more personal speaking mode, in which "I," "my," "we," "us," "us," and finally "your" and "me" predominate.

The typographical ellipsis in line 2 leaves unspoken the rest of Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Now as many as fifty are "heaped together," but no photographers, or notables, or girls are in evidence—only a tried and true remnant, mostly white-haired, or bald, or women (no longer girls, with all the condescension that term implies). Their being "heaped together" brings to the mind's eye an image of corpses, such in Alexander Gardner's famous photographs of heaped corpses at the Battle of Gettysburg, or as in Stephen Crane's depiction of "heaped-up corpses" in *The Red Badge of Courage* (82).¹⁴

As for Lowell himself, the faintly risible pairing "I sat in the sunset" does not add to his heroic stature. That there was a sit-down demonstration at the West Wall of the Pentagon, and that Lowell was not the only one who "sat in the sunset," he omits from his unheroic self-representation.¹⁵ One is led to think that he has dropped out of the march and has become a detached bystander, or rather "bysitter." Line 9 forces us to correct that assumption, when the sergeant orders "March slowly through them. Don't even brush anyone sitting down." There were those who had sought to levitate the Pentagon by

chanting (see Freeman), while others dreamed of occupying it, which lends Lowell's "sadly / unfit to follow their dream" a soberly ironic note. His remark acquires a more complex tonality for readers who, like myself, hear in "sadly unfit to follow their dream" an echo of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial at the end of a March on Washington four years earlier. King voiced presentiments of an assassination, and he in truth became "sadly unfit" to "follow" his dream into the promised land. One should not press analogies too far, and I am not trying to make Lowell into a Martin Luther King, nor "our Bastille" into the promised land, but I cannot get out of my head a tonally complicating association with another march, another "naive" protest, another "dream."

In Lowell's octave the "weakness" of the protesters is audibly conveyed in weak rhymes, i.e., end rhymes on unstressed terminal syllables: "fifty," "sadly," "cowardly." Their weak rhyme and falling rhythm, carried on by "Mostly" at the head of line 2, is joined by alliterative, weak-ending "Sunset," "speeches." All but the stolid "Pentagon" are weak. Weak rhyme carries on disyllabically into line 6 in the oxymoron "cowardly, / foolhardy," culminating sonically in "heart"—"my cowardly, / foolhardy heart." After a semicolon, line 6 resumes with "heard," which further clogs the *heart* with sonic repetition: "cowardly, / foolhardy heart; and heard." The line trails off on a stoically ironic note, and ends in falling rhythm, "alas, more speeches."¹⁶ But we are not done with "heart." Unexpectedly, in line 7 "words took heart," and with the strong stress on monosyllabic "weak" at the end of line, the weak become strong.

If "weak" is a theme of "The March 2," so is "health." When Lowell employs typographical ellipsis in line 13, he invites the reader to voice a third "health": "Health to those who held, / health to the green steel head ... to your kind hands / that helped me stagger to my feet, and flee." The rhetorical formula of a toast is unsurprising as a commendation of those who withstood a "second wave," when a tide of assonance "trampled us flat and back," wrenching the indolent idiomatic phrase "to lie flat on one's back." What does come as a surprise is the

second “health to”—“health to the green steel head.” “Greén steél heád” gets three heavy stresses, hardened by “green steel” assonance. Against the “green steel head,” the “green Union army recruits” of “The March 1” stood no chance. The “health to” rhetorical formula extends nonetheless to all who played their assigned roles in the engagement.¹⁷ Whichever side they were on, they were “green,” essentially innocent, like their “green” forerunners at the First Battle of Bull Run.

In “The March 1” Lowell’s jittery hands had a lot to do, pushing his glasses back to keep them from slipping and holding a match in one hand and lighting a cigarette in another. In “The March 2” one of his hands still has something metaphorically to do insofar as the “health to” toast formula evokes the gesture of someone raising a glass in his hand.¹⁸ After the poet voices his “health to” formula twice, typographical ellipsis enacts a rhetorical pause, followed by a change to a more intimate tone of voice and to second-person “your,” when “green steel head” becomes “your kind hands.” The consonance sequestered in “*kind hands*” unites with the alliterative triad *health, hands, helped*, while *health/helped* counters the *helmet* of “The March 1.” This sonic chorus culminates in “hands / [...] helped,” bringing to mind the idiom “to lend a helping hand.” But whose “kind hands” helped? After the typographical ellipsis, the poet conjures up, in an apostrophe, an I-Thou relationship with a nameless other. In my reading, the dehumanized “green steel head” becomes a human person whose “kind hands” helped the poet “stagger to my feet, and flee.”

The sonnet began with a reference to Matthew 18:20 and concludes with an analogue of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), in which a purported “enemy” comes to the aid of one who has fallen. Hands play a vital role in the parable, as they do in several biblical passages in which Christ’s “kind hands” heal through touch. G. B. Caird explains the significance of touch in the Good Samaritan parable: “It is essential to the point of the story that the traveler was left half dead. The priest and the Levite could not tell without touching him whether he was dead or alive; and it weighed more with

them that he might be dead and defiling to the touch of those whose business was with holy things than that he might be alive and in need of care" (148). It took a semi-pagan foreigner to extend kind hands to the victim, helping him to rise.¹⁹

Tropes of falling, rising, standing, often associated with hands, recur throughout Lowell's poetry, beginning with the title-page vignette in *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), which depicts a different biblical episode. Abel has just fallen in a field after having been struck by Cain, whose left hand, with which he presumably assaulted his brother, is still clenched as he turns to steal away from the scene of the crime.²⁰ "The March 2" converts this primal scene of human violence into a healing fiction of reconciliation and amity. The battle is long over, and strangers have again become strangers, except in a rhetorically conjured up tableau in which two are gathered together, as if in fulfillment of the suspended allusion to Matthew 18:20.

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Is all this too good to be true? Unfortunately, there is no evidence that on October 21, 1967 Robert Lowell was helped to his feet by a "Martial" who morphed into a Good Samaritan. And what about Lowell's "staggered to my feet," did he really stagger to his feet, and flee? Or could it be that Lowell wanted his own exit line to recall the marchers' entry, when they, and presumably he, "staggered out" on to Virginia's miles-long green fields? The myriad repetitions implanted in the sonnets suggest the madeness, the rhetoricity, the artful contrivance of the sonnets, not their extra-literary facticity. They have an end in view, and Lowell bends all his rhetorical skills to achieve it.

What certainly is true is that Lowell laid claim to the poet's privilege to tinker with facts, especially when apparently writing autobiographically. What should we make, then, of Lowell's putative confessionalism, at least with respect to "The March 1" and "The March 2"? Is he confessing at the end to having ignominiously fled a scene of battle as soon as he had a chance, leaving his stalwart comrades behind?²¹ Was he a traitor to the cause?

Ever after the publication of *Life Studies* in 1959 Lowell was doomed to walk the earth as a “confessional poet,” although he resisted this fate as best he could. In a 1961 *Paris Review* interview with Frederick Seidel titled “The Art of Poetry: Robert Lowell,” he explained that in writing his poems he fabricated “the *real* Robert Lowell”:

They’re not always factually true. There’s a good deal of tinkering with fact. You leave out a lot, and emphasize this and not that. Your actual experience is a complete flux. I’ve invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented. So there’s a lot of artistry, I hope, in the poems. Yet there’s this thing: if a poem is autobiographical—and this is true of any kind of autobiographical writing and of historical writing you want the reader to say, this is true. In something like Macaulay’s *History of England*, you think you’re really getting William III. That’s as good as a good plot in a novel. And so there was always that standard of truth which you wouldn’t ordinarily have in poetry—the reader was to believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell. (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 246-47)

As for the “standard of truth” that applied to Mailer’s account of the March on the Pentagon, Lowell told Ian Hamilton in a 1971 interview: “In everything I saw and could test, I felt he was as accurate as memory should be. His story is actually, not literally, true. Accuracy isn’t measuring faces through the eye of a needle” (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 283). There is a nice ambiguity in “should be”; “actually, not literally, true” propounds a jaunty paradox; and an askew biblical allusion links a camel with the earnest literal truth-teller.²²

Mailer’s version of the *real* Robert Lowell may or may not be “truer” than his own, but it pleased Lowell.²³ In a 1969 interview with V. S. Naipaul he duly praises Mailer, but goes on to link himself with Horace, another battlefield poet who fled:

His description of me is one of the best things ever written about me, and most generous—what my poetry is like and that sort of thing. He records a little speech I made about draft dodgers and I felt he was very good on that. I am trying to think whether my reaction to the march differed from his. I don’t think mine was at all his, but it’s not opposed to his either. It was mainly the fragility of a person caught in this situation ... as in that poem of Horace’s where you throw away your little sword at the battle of Philippi

and get out of the thing. But I believe in heroic action, too. (Lowell, "Et in Arcadia Ego" 144; typographical ellipsis Lowell's)

No one has followed up Lowell's casual linkage of himself with Horace, but it may be worth doing here so here. Lowell is alluding to lines 9-14 of Horace's *Odes* II.7: "tecum Philippos et celerem fugam / sensi relictā non bene parmula, / cum fracta virtus, et minaces / turpe solum tetigere mento. / sed me per hostis Mercurius celer / denso paventum sustulit aere" ("With you beside me I experienced Philippi and its headlong rout, leaving my little shield behind without much credit, when valour was broken and threatening warriors ignominiously bit the dust. I, however, was swiftly caught up by Mercury in a thick cloud"; Loeb text and translation 108-11). Both Horace and Lowell, writing autobiographically and "confessionally" of purported battlefield cowardice, tinker with the facts. Horace's "relictā non bene parmula" is, Daniel H. Garrison points out in his edition of the odes, "literary rather than autobiographical. Though we must assume that Horace fled this rout with the rest of his comrades-in-arms, he wraps himself in the poetic mantle of Archilocus, Alcaeus, and Anacreon, all of whom admitted in verse to throwing away their shields ingloriously (*non bene*) on the field of battle [...]. As a *tribunus militum*, Horace would not actually have carried a shield. Moreover, the small round *parmula* was at this time obsolete" (269). Garrison reveals that Horace tells an even greater fib when he records that he was whisked away on a cloud by Mercury: "in epic, defeated heroes are wrapped in mist and spirited off to safety by their tutelary god: so Aphrodite rescues Paris in *Iliad* 3.380ff. Though Horace admits to having had a bad fright at the time (*paventum*), he jokingly paints his escape home to Italy in epic colors" (269).²⁴ Lowell tinkers with Horace's non-facts by converting Horace's non-existent little shield into a little sword, which sounds rather like the fearsome weapon a child might swing in imagined combat. Odds are that Lowell was fully aware of his "mistranslation," since he got *pamula* right in his translation of Horace's *Odes* II.7 that was published, along with his translations of two other Horatian odes and a version of Juvenal's *Tenth Satire*, in *Near the Ocean* in 1967,

the same year as the March on the Pentagon and the two sonnets it prompted. There he translates *parmula* correctly, but cannot resist throwing in an Egyptian to make matters worse ("Like an Egyptian, / I threw away my little shield" 399). Like Horace, Lowell wrote "autobiographically," and if you will "confessionally," but Horace could depend on his readers to know that he was playfully and self-ironically making use of commonplaces in Greek poetry. Lowell joins the game, picking up where Horace left off. One need not track down all of his classical allusions or identify all the classical rhetorical devices he employs, but Garrison's caveat about taking literary for biographical truth applies equally to Lowell.

Lowell not only alludes to Horace's spurious "little sword" in the interview, he belittles his "little speech" to "draft dodgers." On Friday, October 20, the day before the March on the Pentagon, he had spoken at the end of a march on the Department of Justice, which had its own potential dangers. Young men had come from across America to turn in their draft cards, and to aid, abet, or encourage them was to make oneself an accessory to a crime. Lowell himself had been sentenced to a year and a day as a conscientious objector for refusing to serve in World War II after the firebombing of Hamburg in August 1943 (see Kearful, "The Poet as Conscientious Objector"). The march ended on the steps of the Department of Justice and, according to Mailer, when called on Lowell spoke quietly but eloquently, after which "students began to file up the steps to deposit their solitary or collective draft cards in the bag, and this procession soon became a ceremony. Each man came up, gave his name, and the state or area or college he represented, and then proceeded to name the number of draft cards he had been entrusted to turn in" (Mailer 74).

Thursday night Lowell had spoken to a gathering at the Ambassador Theater, and received a standing ovation after concluding with the last stanza of "Waking Early Sunday Morning": "Pity the planet, all joy gone / from this sweet volcanic cone; / peace to our children when they fall / in small war on the heels of small / war—until the end of time / to police the earth, a ghost / orbiting forever lost / in

our monotonous sublime" (*Collected Poems* 385). Lowell had done more than enough during the weekend of anti-war protest, but he could not avoid being cast as a front-line celebrity in Saturday's March on the Pentagon. Readers of *The Armies of the Night* will see him in a photograph on the cover, glasses in place, cigaretteless, arms linked with those of other notables. His celebrity status had been confirmed by a June 2, 1966 cover story on him in *Time*, titled "Poetry in an Age of Prose," but he had already become an anti-war luminary in June 1965, when he wrote a letter to President Johnson rejecting an invitation to read at a White House Festival of the Arts. The following morning the letter was printed in a *New York Times* front-page story "Twenty Writers and Artists Endorse Poet's Rebuff of President" (see Hamilton 323). Lowell wrote to J. F. Powers four months later: "You may have heard about my White House business. Nothing I've ever done had such approval, and I've been plagued ever since to sound off on Viet Nam programs till I wish I could go to sleep for a 100 years like Rip van Winkle" (*Letters* 462-63). No such luck.

On October 21, 1967 Lowell had good reason to feel uneasy about what he was letting himself in for, not only given the massive forces ranged against the demonstrators. Diverse groups joined the march, ranging from pacifists to motor cycle gangs:

An array of federal marshals and military police stood ready to quell them. Several demonstrators goaded the soldiers with the ugliest personal slanders they could think of. Some threw bottles and tomatoes. Others wielded clubs and ax handles. An assault squad breached security lines, hurling themselves, amid a fog of tear gas, against flailing truncheons and rifle butts. When the march ended, one thousand demonstrators had been arrested and dozens injured. The Pentagon remained stolid and undefiled. (Bufithis 85-86)

Is it disreputable that Lowell, by his own testimony, felt "the fragility of a person caught in this situation?" He didn't even have a "little sword." Nor does he sing "We shall overcome" or quote from the Sermon on the Mount, but the allusion to Christ's promise and the analogue of the parable of the Good Samaritan in "The March 2"

acquire a force of their own, and Lowell's communal declaration "how weak / we were, and right" proclaims not so much ineffectualness as unbowed perseverance. It is an affirmation that had to be learned by many "trampled back and flat" while engaged in civil disobedience in the 1950s and 1960s. Weakness can overcome strength, good can overcome evil. But it may take time. Mailer records the immediate political effect of the March on the Pentagon as less than a great triumph: "In six weeks, when an attempt was made in New York to close down the draft induction centers, it seemed that public sentiment had turned sharply against resistance. The Negro riots had made the nation afraid of lawlessness. Lyndon Johnson stood ten points higher in the popularity polls—he had ridden the wave of revulsion in America against demonstrators who spit in the face of U.S. troops—when it came to sensing new waves of public opinion, LBJ was the surfboarder of them all" (286). But on March 31 of the following year, Johnson chose discretion as the better part of valor and declared himself out of the running for the Democratic presidential nomination. American soldiers began withdrawing from Vietnam in 1973, and the last Americans fled on a helicopter from the Embassy roof in 1975.

Horace fled Philippi more expeditiously, thanks to Mercury, in a cloud. Poets can do that. Lowell merely hightails it without divine assistance, on foot. Poets can also do that. And they can do it in order to write a poem. Mailer gives his own version of Lowell's flight, in the literal sense of his flight back to New York. Instead of fleeing in panic, Lowell "eventually went home [...] to begin a long poem a few days later" (265). On this account, it was not so much fear that caused him "eventually" to leave after the march and the battle were over as an intent to write. And write he did. "The March 1" and "The March 2" appeared the following month in *The New York Review of Books*, and the "long poem" of which they became a part, *Notebook 1967-68*, was published a year later.²⁵

Lowell's asseveration "how weak / we were, and right" repeals the historian's pronouncement "fear, glory, chaos, rout." The "right"

response to “rout” is steadfastness, even as Lowell’s prosody and his employment of hyperbaton and epiphraasis make “weak” strong.²⁶ It is something of a paradox that “words took heart now to show how weak / we were, and right,” insofar as words might be expected to cause “us” to take heart. It is as if words had a life of their own, and gathered courage and determination and “heart” (paronomasia with “art”) in order to imbue us with fortitude. “The March 1” and “The March 2” are not only themselves highly rhetorical, they incorporate a great deal of speechmaking—the “remorseless, amplified harangues for peace,” “more speeches,” the sergeant’s order to his troops, the poet’s declaration “how weak / we were, and right,” and finally the most eloquent speech of all, the poet’s toast to all those who were involved in the march, whichever side they were on, but especially to the soldier who helped him to his feet. A new “we” is thereby rhetorically constituted that nullifies the us-them division of peacemakers and warriors.

Verbal repetition, apostrophe, and typographical ellipsis have enabled the reader to summon up an emblematic tableau whose motto might be the feminist rallying cry of the period “the personal is political,” or better yet “the political is personal.” Politically construed, the tableau affirms tropologically a personal politics of reconciliation and unity that undermines designated oppositional roles. The enemy/alien—the Martian—takes the initiative, when an individual soldier becomes a kind of Good Samaritan. The “*real* Robert Lowell” undergoes his own transformation from ironic observer to committed peacemaker during the course of twenty-eight lines, which extend temporally from the pre-March rally on October 21, 1967 to the post-March fictive time of the utterance of the apostrophe. Everything has headed toward the apostrophe that brings closure to Lowell’s rhetorically orchestrated double sonnet.²⁷ The political is not only personal, it is rhetorical, since everything hinges on the individual reader’s responsiveness to the closing interpretive option that Lowell’s rhetorical poetics offers and that I have advocated.²⁸

NOTES

¹Lowell learned to wield classical rhetorical terms such as chiasmus and brachylogia as part of his primary-school instruction in English grammar (see “91 Revere Street,” *Collected Poems* 133, his memoir of early childhood incorporated as Part 2 of *Life Studies*). His real grounding in Latin and Greek and in classical rhetoric began at St. Mark’s prep school, and at Kenyon College he earned a summa cum laude degree in classics. In 1948 he wrote to George Santayana, “I don’t regret my Latin—some of the writers are marvelous. Propertius, Vergil, Horace, Catullus, Tacitus, and some of Juvenal. And it connects us historically through the church. And how can one understand what English words mean without it? And yet to read Homer fluently, what a happiness that would be!” (*Letters* 82). Fluent in Homeric Greek or not, at age eighteen Lowell wrote an essay on *The Iliad* impressive enough for inclusion in his *Collected Prose* 145-51; his translation of Aeschylus’s *Promethueus Bound* appeared in 1967. He expertly reviewed A. E. Watts’s 1955 translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (*Collected Prose* 152-60), and Ovid was an important presence in his work (see Jerome Mazzaro’s *Robert Lowell and Ovid*). Lowell translated a host of poems by Horace, Juvenal and Propertius, and classical allusions pervade his poetry up to his last volume, *Day by Day* (1977), which begins with a long “autobiographical” poem, “Ulysses and Circe.” Lowell’s problem was not “small Latin and less Greek,” but if anything too much at any rate of the former. In 1961 he recalled how he found a simpler style for himself when writing *Life Studies* (1959): “I began to paraphrase my Latin quotations, and to add extra syllables to a line to make it clearer and more colloquial” (*Collected Prose* 227).

²The two quatorzains, given Roman numerals I and II as suffixes, are placed side by side as a kind of poetic diptych. In *Notebook 1967-68* (1969) they are prefixed 3 and 4 in a six-sonnet mini-sequence titled “October and November.” On the composition of *Notebook 1967-68*, see Alex Calder, who discusses the “October and November” sequence as a “well-unified whole” (128). Marcel Inhoff discusses the thematic integration of the quatorzains within *Notebook 1967-68* as a whole and their embodiments of recurrent motifs in what Lowell conceived of as a book-length poem (see 165-69). In a revised, expanded edition titled *Notebook* (1970), they retain the prefixes 3 and 4 in the same six-sonnet sequence, but also regain their original I and II suffixes. In *History* (1973), no longer part of a numbered sequence, they acquire 1 and 2 as suffixes. I quote the texts of the sonnets in the 2009 reprint edition of *Notebook 1967-68*, which retains the original pagination (27); for convenience I adopt 1 and 2 as suffixes. The three excerpts from other Lowell poems are quoted from his *Collected Poems* (2003), which does not include *Notebook 1967-68*.

³Alan Williamson notes that the Reflecting Pool redoubles duplications in lines 1-4: “The atmosphere is made even more unreal by the sense of duplication: Washington Monument paired off with Lincoln Memorial, both redoubled in the reflecting pool—the nearly endless replications another version of centerlessness. The effect is heightened, as a friend who heard the poem without having read it observed, by an auditory pun on *too* and *two*. Doubtless, this imagery is partly

intended to suggest the narcissism of imperial America, screening out all reality that does not mirror its power and glory" (184). Implicit in Williamson's commentary is the myth of Narcissus brought associatively to mind by "the too long reflecting pool." Helen Vendler points out that Lowell evokes two ancient empires that ultimately fell, insofar as "marmoreal" suggests Rome and "obelisk" Egypt (244). In his survey of twentieth-century American poems about Washington, including "The March 1" and "The March 2," Christoph Irmscher comments on Washington's "function in the literary imagination not just as a metonymy for American politics, but as the embodiment of unimaginative, brute political power" (168).

⁴Initial trochaic substitution followed by an iamb ("Únder the tóo") is common in iambic verse, as in the opening of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" ("Sóomething there ís" 39). Frost's initial trochaic substitution is followed by regular iambs ("Something there is that doés'nt lóve a wáll"), making the decasyllabic line a variant of iambic pentameter so frequent that it hardly amounts to a metrical "irregularity." Lowell's line doesn't continue on regularly as Frost's does, but a determined metrist might identify five primary stresses ("Under the *too* white marmoreal *Lincoln Memorial*") accompanied by a motley assortment of unstressed, or lesser stressed, syllables. The line might thereby pass muster as loose blank verse. What rhythmically comes to pass, however, as we thus read the line aloud is not so much "irregular" iambic pentameter with an abundance of supernumerary syllables, as a dactylic pentameter that perfectly correlates with the line's syllable count. The line stops dead in its tracks, though, as if exhausted, unable to deliver another dactyl to sustain the propulsion of classical epic hexameter.

⁵Mailer writes: "In the apathy which had begun to lie over the crowd as the speeches went on and on (and the huge army gathered by music, now was ground down by words, and the hollow absurd imprecatory thunder of the loudspeakers with their reductive echo—you must FIGHT ... *fight* ... fight ... ite ..., in the soul-killing repetition of political jargon which reminded people that the day was well past one o'clock and they still had not started)" (102).

⁶Mailer records: "[T]he order to form the ranks was passed around the roped enclosure, and Lowell, Macdonald, and Mailer were requested to get up in the front row, where the notables were to lead the March, a row obviously to be consecrated for the mass media. Newsreel, still, and television cameras were clicking and rounding and snapping and zooming before the first rank was even formed" (105).

⁷The presence of an adversative conjunction to mark a turn or volta at line 9 is not decisive for a sonnet to be "Petrarchan." By my count, only about 5% of Petrarch's own sonnets in his *Rime sparse* employ *ma* ("but") or another adversative at line 9. Shakespeare sometimes embedded a Petrarchan rhetorical structure in his sonnets and employed an adversative conjunction at line 9 to signal a turn, outdoing Petrarch at his own game: "But" (Sonnets 62, 93, 151, 153), "Yet" (Sonnet 74), "Not" (Sonnet 102), and "Ah, yet" (Sonnet 104). A "but" or "yet" may also introduce a reversal couplet ending, as in Sonnet 130 ("And yet, by heaven, I

think my love as rare"). Lowell follows Shakespeare's alternative use of "then" at line 9 to mark a Petrarchan-like rhetorical turn: see Sonnets 5, 9, 15, 30, 37, 51, and 76. English poets from Wyatt to Donne systematically use a rhyming couplet to terminate what had started out as a Petrarchan sonnet rhyming *abbaabba*. The couplet ending entailed converting the sestet into quatrain plus couplet, as in a Shakespearean sonnet. One cannot rigidly segregate Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet form in the sonnet's golden age, but an octave/sestet rhetorical structure remains the defining characteristic of Petrarchan sonnet form, however flexible the rhyme scheme, or in Lowell's case, however lacking in rhyme. On Lowell's use of Petrarchan octave-sestet structure in his loose blank verse sonnets, see Robert von Halberg's chapter on Lowell's *History in American Poetry and Culture 1945-1980* (148-74).

⁸In *The Armies of the Night* Norman Mailer reckons that 75,000 to 90,000 people were at the Lincoln Memorial. He follows the *The New York Times* estimate that 54,000 of them crossed the bridge (245), which connects the Lincoln Memorial on one side of the Potomac and Arlington House, a former residence of the family of General Robert E. Lee, on the other. The "Arts of War" sculptures "Valor" and "Sacrifice" preside over the southeastern entrance to the bridge. Arlington Memorial Cemetery, with its acres upon acres of military dead from the Civil War to Vietnam, was passed on their right as the marchers made their way toward the Pentagon. Lowell plays a leading role in Mailer's New Journalism classic published in spring 1968, roughly half a year after the *New York Review of Books* printed "The March 1" and "The March 2." For another marcher's account of the March, with photos and other marchers' recollections appended, see Freeman.

⁹For a contemporary account of the euphoric reaction to the victory when news reached Richmond, the Confederate capital, see Mary Chestnut's diary entry for July 24, 1861 (Simpson, Sears, and Aaron 506-21). Diederik Oostdijk suspects that Lowell had Herman Melville's "The March into Virginia" in mind when he wrote "The March 1" (217). Helen Vendler compares the two poems (cf. 241-45).

¹⁰Some would restrict "asyndeton" to the omission of conjunctions between clauses. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (4th ed.) defines "asyndeton" more broadly as "[t]he omission of conjunctions between phrases or clauses." It notes: "Omission of conjunctions between words is technically brachylogia—fundamental to all forms of series and *catalogs—but many writers now use a. as the cover term for all types of conjunction deletion" (97). I am among them, but would not spoil the fun of those who insist on *brachylogia* for such instances of asyndeton cited by *The Princeton Encyclopedia* as: "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers" (98; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 5.601). The 3rd ed. (Preminger and Brogan) also cited "Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Dens, and Shades of Death" (106; *Paradise Lost* 2.261).

¹¹Grzegorz Kość takes a quite different tack: "Straining toward his innermost feelings, the poet is eventually forced to lapse into silence. If he manages to resume speaking for a moment, he can utter only four abstract mutually contradictory adjectives [sic], 'fear, glory, chaos, rout,' which devoid of any auxiliary connectives, annul each other completely" (164).

¹²The play on “Martian” (Mars/warrior and the extraterrestrial fellow) probably had popular-culture resonance for many 1967 readers, thanks to the hugely successful TV show *My Favorite Martian*, starring Ray Walston, which ran well into the 1960s. But the only Martian I know of who wore a green steel helmet was Marvin the Martian, an old Looney Tunes and Merry Melodies character: see <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/3/31/Marvinthemartain.jpg>.

¹³The arming of Achilles (*Iliad* XVIII.203-31) and of Agamemnon (*Iliad* XI.15-46) are two classic examples of the arming of the hero topos. The topos also lends itself to parodic treatment, as in Edmund Spenser’s *Muioptomos, or The Fate of the Butterfly* when the butterfly puts on its armor (ll. 57-96).

¹⁴Crane’s classic Civil War novel is based on the Battle of Chancellorsville in spring 1863. The heaped-up corpses are of Union soldiers. In a February 1, 1951 letter to George Santayana, Lowell remarks: “Crane’s Civil War novel is sort of like a series of Tate and Brady photographs done in the style of Claude Monet—fresh, compact, impressionistic—the best of all imagist poems, perhaps, and the opposite of Stickney in that he throws out all show of grand style, symbolic experience, etc. His (Crane’s) subject is a slice of life, while his technique like Monet’s is a tour-de-force. Looked at one way there is only the subject; but looked at another, there is only the art, the execution and the subject are only an excuse. It’s a wonderful book, though” (*Letters* 169).

¹⁵The Wikipedia “Pentagon” entry includes a photograph of the sit-down demonstration: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentagon_\(building\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentagon_(building)).

¹⁶Mailer notes that “two rallies had been planned from the beginning, the first at the Lincoln Memorial and the second at the North Parking Lot of the Pentagon “with more speeches [...]. But obviously the parking-lot rally in the wake of a two-hour speechfest at the Lincoln Memorial was another deterrent to large civil disobedience” (242).

¹⁷Whitman voices a version of the toast formula, “Vivas,” in section 18 of “Song of Myself” (40-41), addressed to all those, victors or slain, who have engaged in battle.

¹⁸Lowell had employed the formula earlier in his personal lyric “The Old Flame” in *For the Union Dead* (1964): “Health to the new people, / health to their new flag, to their old / restored house on the hill!” (*Collected Poems* 323). There is a certain irony to the toast insofar as the poem, set in Maine, recalls the difficulties of getting a taxi to go to “Bath and the State Liquor Store” (323).

¹⁹A dead body was considered unclean, and a priest who became unclean (*tumah*) through touching one would be prohibited from entering a temple. Only through ritual cleansing could he again become “clean” (*tahor*) and resume his temple functions; on the concept of purity and impurity, see Jaffee 171-72. *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis*, an illuminated sixth-century manuscript, contains a depiction of the parable in which Christ, assuming the role of the Good Samaritan, bends over a recumbent figure and extends his hands to him: see the cover and cover flap of *Te Deum: Das Stundengebet im Alltag*. Sister Charis Doepgen’s commentary draws attention to the salience of Christ’s hands (319-21). Constance

Classen discusses hands and touch in connection both with prohibition and with healing from the middle ages to modern times; Santanu Das has much to say about kind hands extended to a fallen comrade in World War I literature; Susan Stewart considers touch and the other senses in both aesthetic and philosophical terms.

²⁰On tropes of falling, rising, standing in *Lord Weary's Castle*, sometimes linked with hands, see Kearful, "'Stand and Live': Tropes of Falling, Rising, Standing in Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*" and "Lilies and an Olive Branch: On Robert Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*."

²¹Not all critics have looked kindly on Lowell's self-representation and its political implications. Metres contends that "Lowell's overidentification with power and reliance on 'Great Man' historiography probably led him to represent war resistance as simply the strivings of the weak" (48). A paragraph-long probing of Lowell's psyche ends on a guardedly upbeat note, thanks to symbolic castration: "Insofar as Lowell does not deny his symbolic castration in his mature phase, we might be tempted to see Lowell's depiction of resisters as antipatriarchal, and therefore oppositional to the patriarchal energies of warfare" (48). Somewhat similarly, Diederik Oostdijk finds that "throughout the two poems Lowell complains about his health and about how physically weak his fellow marchers are" (217), but Oostdijk opts for a less gruesome symbolic act: "Despite his reservations and discomfort, he is there, but not to tell off 'the state and president' this time, as the righteous conviction that had characterized Lowell in World War II is gone. He is there because he feels he ought to be there. Like the writing of the poem, protesting the war is a symbolic act, Lowell knows. It will not have an immediate political effect, but it is an important gesture to make. At this point in his life, Lowell would have concurred with Nemerov who claimed in his poem 'To the Poets' that 'it's a pretty humble business, singing songs.' Yet it is the nature of birds and poets to sing" (217-18). Charles Altieri comments on "the politics of directed sympathy" in "The March 1" (169-71), while Jerome Mazzaro attributes Lowell's estrangement from his fellow marchers to his estrangement from his youthful self (*Robert Lowell and America* 161). In "Poet and State in the Verse of Robert Lowell" Dwight Eddins contends that the sonnets depict "political futility [...] rooted in a modern preference for private fantasies over the difficult world of action" (52). Kość adds political irrelevance to the sonnets' political futility: "The marchers, treated ironically, are denied a certain degree of integrity necessary for ascertaining the unconditional importance and urgency of their cause. Moreover, it seems that for a poem to be politically relevant it has to contain definite judgments, something the poet clearly wanted to avoid as that would have required him to sacrifice what he cherished most—a potentially unlimited area of intelligibility that is most successfully conveyed either by irony or meaningful silence" (165). Earlier, Steven Gould Axelrod also stressed Lowell's inveterate irony as a determining feature of his politics: "Lowell's politics, no less than his art, exemplifies the dominant role played by irony in his mind's life" (198). In *Notebook 1967-68* he proffers a "political vision that is essentially inward. He aims neither to score partisan points nor to advertise himself, but to explore

the moral ambiguity in himself and his culture" (Axelrod 198). Ernest J. Smith comments on how Lowell's use of sonnet form affects his political stance: "[E]ven in such poems as Lowell's 'The March' I and II, where he presents himself participating in the march on the Pentagon, the poet is more witness than activist. Part of what enables this dual sense of involvement and detachment is the use of a traditional poetic form, the sonnet, sufficiently varied in structure, subject, and tone to be completely contemporary" (289). Robert von Halberg is attentive to tonal complexity in "The March 2" and contends that "[t]he poem is richly sensitive, intelligent, and wholly conscionable, as rather few political poems in 1967 are" (156).

²²Lowell was not giving a lecture on rhetoric in his "Art of Poetry" interview, but his stress on invention—"I've invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented"—accords with the primacy of *inventio* (invention) in classical rhetoric as the first order of business of the orator or poet, finding arguments to elaborate on a theme or topic. The problematic relationship between "invention" and fact is touched on by Lanham: "Aristotle felt that factual proof lay outside the art of rhetoric and so an inquiry into the facts of the case was not a part of invention. Roman theorists such as Cicero and Quintilian disagreed. First, the speaker investigated the facts of the case. Then he determined the central issue of the case. Then he explored the available means of persuasion" (92). Mundane facts may be left behind on the cutting room floor in Renaissance invocations of "invention," which sometimes can be understood in the modern sense of creative imagination (*OED* 4.), as in the Chorus's opening lines of Shakespeare's *Henry V*: "O for a muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention, / A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene" (Pr. 1-3). Wallace Stevens outgoes Shakespeare in the opening tercet of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea / Of this invention, this invented world, / This inconceivable idea of the sun" (329). Lowell's invented world in "The March 1" and "The March 2" is limited to a single day in American history, but one linked by allusion to a century earlier. A swelling scene encompasses the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Reflecting Pool, the green fields of Virginia, and the Pentagon, while a cast of thousands, Lowell among them, enact their assigned roles. Lowell's "invention" may be less sublime than Shakespeare's or Stevens's, but it oversees "the whole balance of the poem as something invented." It thus plays a central role in *dispositio* (disposition), the apt arrangement of the parts of a poem or arguments of a speech through *electio* (selection) and *ordo* (ordering) so as to achieve the desired effect in the reader or hearer. Critics who still regard "confessional" as the key to Lowell's poetics in effect concentrate on *elocutio* (utterance, expression), which comes only third as a concern of the orator or poet, after *inventio* and *dispositio*. This is something that Astrophil, "loving in truth and fain in verse my love to show," must learn in in Sonnet 1 of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. The play on fain/feign is fine, but putting elocution first by seeking to "paint the blackest face of woe" is, without "invention's stay," a poetic dead end (153). Still and all, poets like politicians and lovers are inveterate liars. Shakespeare's *Touchstone*, thinking principally of lovers, uses Sidney's

truth/fain dyad: "the truest poetry is the most feigning" (*As You Like It* 3.3.15-16). The New Arden editor notes: "The debate about poetry and lies underpins the whole play, and was central to attacks on the theatre" (266). W. H. Auden uses Touchstone's line as a title for his own variations on the topos (315-17).

²³Axelrod finds that "Mailer's social portrait of Lowell as a genteel Boston aristocrat is more a projection of his own insecurities than a relevant description of Lowell [...]. Nevertheless, his psychological portrait of Lowell as 'a disconcerting mixture of strength and weakness,' of potential aggression and detestation of that very capacity for aggression, provides authentic insight into the ambiguous nature of Lowell's moral activism" (196-97).

²⁴Garrison remarks that Mercury was an apt choice for coming to Horace's assistance, given his status as "patron of poets, who are *Mercurialis viri* (2.17.29) and inventor of the lyre (*curvae lyrae parens*, 1.10.6). Some see this Mercury as a projection of Augustus, under whose auspices Horace was rehabilitated" (269). Garrison's parenthetical references are to other Horatian odes in *Odes* Books 1 and 2.

²⁵In an Afterword to *Notebook 1967-68* Lowell fends off the idea of his book-length poem as "confessional" and he disclaims any pretensions to "literal pornographic honesty," but he also somewhat spoils Mailer's account of the immediate origins of his long poem by recording "I began working sometime in June 1967" (262). The truth of the matter, if we are to go by Alex Calder, whom I invoked above (see n2), is rather more complicated, insofar as *Notebook 1967-68* emerged over a period of time beginning with inchoate, fragmentary manuscript jottings in summer 1967. The two sonnets on the March on the Pentagon do appear to have got the project decisively rolling. Perhaps we should settle for Lowell's general comment about Mailer's fidelity to facts that I quoted earlier: "His story is actually, not literally, true."

²⁶On "weak" as a prosodically strong line-ending, see my earlier comments. The clause "how weak we were, and right" proceeds iamb by iamb, with accompanying alliteration, and "we" merging into "weak," to form an insistent iambic trimeter, with a caesura before the most heavily stressed iamb, "and right." Lowell's use of hyperbaton, generally speaking an alteration of normal prose word order, involves placing a noun between its two modifiers, as in Milton's "in this dark world and wide" in his sonnet on his blindness (332) or "temperate vapours bland" in *Paradise Lost* (5.5). Lowell's hyperbaton is a special case insofar as it involves an addition to a complete sentence that elaborates on its contents (i.e., epiphraisis), in Lowell's case putting the sentence in a radically new light. Robert von Halberg gives a slightly different tonal slant to Lowell's clause: "The end of the first sentence, closing the octave, is above all else convincingly good-humored: 'how weak we were, and right.' To speak of a political poem of 1967 as good humored, urbane, and yet serious is high, rare praise" (156).

²⁷Throughout I have referred to Lowell's two quatorzains as sonnets and as poems, but they may also be read in sequence as a double sonnet, perhaps influenced by Elizabeth Bishop's double sonnet "The Prodigal," which concludes with another eventual fleeing homeward: "But it took him a long time / finally to

make his mind up to go home" (54). In the Prodigal's case, no "kind hands" assist his flight, but touch plays a decisive role in the immediately preceding lines, when the bats' "flight" provokes "shuddering insights, beyond his control, touching him." For both Lowell and Bishop, hands and touch are master tropes—along with falling/rising/standing—in their formations of healing fictions. In Lowell's double sonnet, a political healing is allegorically enacted in a biblically imbued tableau that Lowell's rhetorical poetics invites the reader to envision. In Bishop's double sonnet a personal recovery from alcoholism is covertly projected in a sympathetic parody of a biblical parable (see Kearful, "'The Prodigal' as Sympathetic Parody").

²⁸Lowell critics generally do not bother with whose "kind hands" helped the poet rise. Health to Robert von Halberg, who not only ventures an identification, he constructs an imagined scene: "Lowell's seriousness might possibly be questioned in the octave, but surely not in the sestet, where the poem turns and turns again, in the plainest of idioms. The trampling second wave of troops comes without warning or explanation, all the more surprising after the first contingent—and also without reason. There is no suggestion of malice or motive at all, the stunning charge is only part of unexplained circumstances, perhaps even a goof. [von Halberg notes that Mailer (294-95) suggests that the two waves, one apparently peaceful, were part of a calculated strategy.] Lowell renders no reproach, only an urbane plain toast to 'those who held' but also to a soldier who, out of simple human kindness that knows nothing of political encampments, broke ranks and helped him regain his footing" (156).

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