

The 'Marriage Poems' by Lawrence and Lowell

Amitava Banerjee

要約

ロレンスとローウェルの『結婚詩』

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Look! We Have Come Through! と *The Dolphin* というふたつの『結婚詩』において、ロレンス (D. H. Lawrence) とローウェル (Robert Lawell) は大きく異なる自伝的詩を産み出している。ロレンスがその恋愛と結婚の経験を普遍的なレベルに高め得ているのに対して、ローウェルはその個人的な自己に深く捉えられているように思われる。その結果、ローウェルの詩はひどく主観的で混濁している。また、ロレンスが人生の勝ち誇った、肯定的なヴィジョンを提供するのに成功している一方で、ローウェルは幻滅、敗北、絶望に屈伏している。ふたりの詩人が同様のテーマに対して取った態度のこの際立った分裂は、彼らの異なる個性や経験ばかりでなく、その詩人としての戦略と、彼らを取り巻いていた社会・文化的な風潮によって説明される。

D H Lawrence's *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917) and Robert Lowell's *The Dolphin* (1973) are two significant volumes of 'marriage poems' of this century. To use a modern term, they both are "confessional" poems, though Lawrence's poetry is not so narrowly autobiographical as Lowell's so markedly is. When the *Look!* volume was first published, the people who objected to it did so not on grounds that the poems were incomprehensible without the relevant knowledge of the author's biography at the time, as they did in the case of *The Dolphin* (Hamilton, 432-3), but because they felt that Lawrence was dealing with rather embarrassingly personal experiences which are best kept private. Aldous Huxley, though a great admirer and perceptive critic of Lawrence, said that "reading these poems was like opening the wrong door" (Jones 24). And Bertrand Russell is reported to have remarked (with a touch of envy and impatience?), "They may have come through but I don't see why I should look." It was, however, Amy Lowell who advanced a more critical objection to the personal subject-matter of Lawrence's poems. She praised Lawrence as a poet of genius but felt that in the present volume he had tried to tackle material that was artistically intractable:

As a book, the volume is a masterpiece: as poetry perhaps it is not quite that. Art is not raw fact. Poetry cannot rise to its rightful being as the highest of all arts if it be tied down to the coarse material of bald, even if impassioned, truth. Truth has its own beauty, but it is not the beauty of poetry. In the greatest poets, the two go or seem to go, hand in hand, for the highest poetry is also the most simple. (Banerjee 90)

Subsequent critics have, of course, seen these poems as not just a revelation of the poet's personal experiences but as the transmutation of those experiences into achieved work of art. On the other hand it is debatable whether such a claim can be made for Lowell's work. Indeed, it is this fact that separates Lawrence from Lowell in their handling of the marriage theme in their respective volumes.

It is ironic that Amy Lowell's remarks about Lawrence can be more aptly applied to her cousin Robert, who happened to be approvingly use precisely the word "raw" which she had used in a negative context: when he was given the National Book Award for his "confessional" volume *Life Studies* (1959), Robert Lowell explained in a draft speech the new kind of poetry that he and his fellow poets like Ginsberg, Corso and Ferlinghetti were writing:

The cooked, marvellously expert and remote, seems constructed as a sort of mechanical or catnip mouse for graduate seminars; the raw, jerry-built and forensically deadly, seems more often like an unscored liberetto by some bearded but vegetarian Castro.

And so far as his own poetry was concerned, he showed his awareness that he too had taken the plunge in that direction but was not quite sure about the future of his poetry:

When I finished *Life Studies* I was left hanging on a question mark. I am

still hanging there. I don't know whether it is a death-rope or a life-line.
(Hamilton 277)

His subsequent poetry became increasingly "raw." The "rawness" that Lowell spoke of referred to both the theme and technique of his poems in *Life Studies*. He explained that when he chose to write "autobiographical poetry," he decided to abandon formalist modes and metres:

When I was working on *Life Studies* (*sic*) I found I had no language or meter that would allow me to approximate what I saw or remembered. . . . So I wrote my autobiographical poetry in a style I thought I had discovered in Flaubert, one that used images and ironic or amusing particulars. I did all kinds of tricks with meter or the avoidance of meter. (Hamilton 232-3)

He continued to write "autobiographical poetry" for the rest of his life—less than a year before he died, he wrote to Elizabeth Hardwick, "Autobiography predominates, almost forty years [of my poetry]" (Hamilton 455). *The Dolphin* poems are particularly "raw," especially thematically, in that Lowell actually quotes excerpts from letters and telephone conversations with his wives, especially Elizabeth Hardwick, in them. But it must be noted that though Lowell's 'autobiographical' poetry became "acceptable" and indeed led to the development of the fashionable cult of "confessional" poetry in America and elsewhere, he was criticized in his own time as well as subsequently for writing verse which had little or no poetic merit. It may be recalled that when the first volume of Lowell's "confessional" poems, *Life Studies*, was published, Allen Tate had pointed out to him that he did not succeed in giving literary significance to his intensely private experiences and feelings:

. . . the poems are composed of unassimilated details, terribly intimate, and coldly noted, which might well have been transferred from the notes from your autobiography without change. . . . they have no public or literary significance. (Hamilton 237)

And this remained Lowell's problem throughout his poetic career. *The Dolphin*, especially, seldom rises above being merely personal:

The Dolphin is more gossip (fact, data, raw material) than gospel (parable, pattern, truth). Lowell's sequence is so relentlessly documented (even if the documents are doctored, as the familiar style of the quotations from letters and conversations itself suggests) that the pattern of experience cannot emerge. (Yenser 397)

By contrast, "the pattern of experience" does emerge from Lawrence's *Look!* volume. As he himself had said in the Foreword to the volume, the poems reveal "the intrinsic experience of a man during the crisis of his manhood, when he marries and comes into being" (Lawrence, *Complete Poems* 191). In other words, Lawrence shows the individual development of the modern man as he goes through the process of establishing a meaningful relationship with a woman which culminates in marriage. In the words of M L Rosenthal,

Lawrence took as his main theme the need for modern man and woman to

'come through' in this way. They must rediscover true communion with one another and with the whole existence, the instinctive communion possessed by ancient civilization but destroyed by the death drive of latter-day civilization. Death of the old ego-self, resurrection of the bodily self, are needed. (Banerjee 224)

The *Look!* volume, therefore, constitutes an integral part of the whole body of Lawrence's poems which explore the possible ways in which an individual can discover himself, his relationship with the world he inhabits and its creatures in order, finally, to achieve fulfilment in life.

A brief recapitulation of the biographical backgrounds to these two volumes of "marriage poems" will give us an insight into the very different ways these two poets handled personal themes. When Lawrence first met Frieda in March 1912, he was a sick man who had resigned from his school-teaching job in Croydon. His formidable mother, with whom he had an unusually close relationship, had died a couple of years earlier. His past relationships with women had left him unhappy: he had broken off his "unofficial betrothal of six months" with Jessie Chambers in November 1910, and his engagement to Louis Burrows in February 1912. When he met Frieda, he was immediately drawn to her mainly because she was different from any woman he had known in the past:

There was more blaze about her than about Englishwomen: she had the assured Continental manner and throaty, strange-accented voice, and she could range in a moment from sophisticated poise to childish eagerness. Physically, she was a magnificent blond tall animal, with high cheekbones and greenish 'Tartar' eyes flecked with brown. (Moore 182)

Frieda too, though she was already married, with three children, was fascinated by this "strange bird." Though her husband was kind to her, she found him just "another Englishman, a scholar interested in books about words" (Moore 190). Lawrence, in contrast, struck her as alive and vital:

As Andre Maurois perceptively remarks in *Prophets and Poets*, "women discerned in Lawrence something primitive, something akin to their own nature." He had their taste for magic. Frieda "said that he alone could teach human beings the art of living." ... Frieda stated she had not lived at all before living with Lawrence. (Moore 189-90)

As for Lawrence, he wrote to Sallie Hopkin that he had at last known what love really was:

I love Frieda so much I don't like to talk about it. I never knew what love was before. ... the world is wonderful and beautiful and good beyond one's wildest imagination. Never, never, never could one conceive what love is, beforehand, never. Life *can* be great—quite god-like. It *can* be so. God be thanked I have proved it. (Lawrence, *Letters*, I, 414)

The attraction between the two being mutual, it is not surprising that when Lawrence proposed to Frieda that they should elope and go to Germany, she agreed, though with

understandable reluctance. She worried first about her children and also about betraying her husband and the social consequences of such a betrayal for the whole family. She was torn between her loyalty towards her children on the one hand and her newly-found love for Lawrence on the other. Lawrence also worried about the fact that he was instrumental in the break-up of the Weekley family and for causing so much pain to Frieda. Moreover, he was deeply unhappy because his moral conscience made him feel guilty of living with a married woman whose husband was refusing to grant her a divorce. But in spite of all these problems, both Frieda and Lawrence cherished their love and intimacy. Lawrence wrote, again, to Sallie Hopkin in August 1912:

For ourselves, Frieda and I have struggled through some bad times into a wonderful naked intimacy, all kindled with warmth, that I know at last is love. I think I ought not to blame women, as I have done, but myself, for taking my love to the wrong women, before now. Let every man find, keep on trying till he finds, the woman who can take him, then who will grumble about men or about women. But the thing must be two-sided. At any rate, and whatever happens, I do love and I am loved—I have given and I have taken—and that is eternal. Oh, if only people could marry properly, I believe in marriage. (Lawrence, *Letters*, I, 440-41)

The *Look!* poems cover this part of Lawrence's biography. One can already see from these utterances in his personal letters that Lawrence the poet was able to view his own experiences as a paradigm of the ideal man-woman relationship in general. When he came to write poems about his experiences he did not simply re-enact them. Instead he succeeded in imaginatively creating a relationship in which the man and the woman come to realize that pain is a part of love and that love, in fact, not only survives but is strengthened by the obstacles that it encounters.

Lowell's biographical experiences which form the basis of *The Dolphin* poems are complex as well as negative. Before he met, and subsequently married, Lady Caroline Blackwood, Lowell had been married to his second wife Elizabeth Hardwick for over twenty years, and they had a daughter, Harriet. During this period he had many extra-marital affairs with various women, e. g. with "a young New York poet called Sandra Hochman" (Hamilton 184) and later with a Latvian dancer Vija Vatra. But these were the results of sudden and impulsive infatuation, often during one of his many "manic episodes," and they soon fizzled out. All through he remained faithful—in his own way—to Elizabeth and their daughter. As Martha Ritter, a twenty-one year old student in one of Lowell's classes, recalled she had fallen in love with Lowell but he had made it clear to her that "he 'was very proud of the fact that he was one of the very few people he knew who'd had such a long marriage.' Unless he got sick, he said, he would never think of leaving Hardwick" (Hamilton 393). Perhaps Hardwick herself had some such assurance, which might explain why she thought Lowell had had one of his fits when she first learnt that he had fallen in love with Caroline and was living with her. Lowell was then in England, having taken up appointments first at Oxford and then at the University of Essex. Hardwick, who had given up her teaching job at Bernard College for one

year and had made arrangements for Harriet's schooling in order to be with her husband, was furious over his conduct. She immediately went over to England to see things for herself. She discovered that he did indeed have a fit and had been admitted to Greenways Nursing Home in London. She saw to his needs and made sure that he was well looked after. However, she also realized that Lowell was seriously involved with Caroline. But soon after her return to New York, she received a letter from him in which he said:

You couldn't have been more loyal or witty. I can't give you anything of equal value. Still much happened that we both loved in the long marriage. I feel we had much joy and many other things we had to learn. There is nothing that wasn't joy and told us something. (Hamilton, 402)

These words convey his love for and gratitude to her but the letter also indicated that he had finished with her. He decided to divorce her and marry Caroline not long after she had given birth to their son, Sheridan. But Lowell's feelings for Elizabeth remained ambiguous for the rest of his life. He kept on vacillating between his feelings for Elizabeth on the one hand and for Caroline on the other. Apparently, he still loved Elizabeth and this created tension in his relationship with Caroline who, additionally, found it difficult to cope with his frequent mental illnesses which sometimes led him to indulge in physical violence. Lowell's friend Blair Clarke, who was a witness to all this, noted:

About Caroline he [Lowell] said that she could not take his manic periods, that they frightened and exhausted her. I had the impression that she was at least as much for the end of marriage as he was. He rather quickly said that he was sort of moving back with Lizzie, and could he have the apartment on the third floor back, the one that I had been renting since last Sept. from Eliz. (Hamilton, 464)

Though he did not actually divorce Caroline, he told friends that he had decided that "the marriage should be ended" (Hamilton 465). He was, in fact, returning to Elizabeth in New York when he collapsed in a taxi and died.

Three volumes of verse, *For Elizabeth and Harriet*, *The Dolphin*, and *Day By Day* grew out of his experiences mentioned above. They all deal with his two later marriages and their break-up and in a curious way the themes and preoccupations of the first volume intrude upon the second and the third ones. As Lowell said, *The Dolphin* is "the story of changing marriages, not a malice or sensation, far from it, but necessarily according to my particular talent, very personal" (Axelrod 215). Unlike Lawrence's, Lowell's volume is about his deep involvement with more than one marriage, and the impression that one forms, from this story of changing marriages, is that marriage is a frustrating and ultimately unsatisfying experience. The poet is attracted to both the women but at the same time he finds each of them inadequate in some ways. Both the marriages are, therefore, desirable and needed but neither of them is or can be fulfilling in itself. However, such a theme is not projected as a coherent vision in the poems. They simply record and frequently re-enact the poet's experiences and moods as they happened.

Frank Bidart, whom Lowell had summoned to help him in the sorting out the poems which went to form *The Dolphin*, has recorded how the genesis of the poems was closely associated with what Lowell was living through:

. . . we talked a little bit about his personal situation, but he had the beginning of *The Dolphin*. At that time there was no image of the dolphin in it, so the whole controlling symbolic scheme was not there. It was more nakedly a ninety-odd sonnet narrative, but very much without an ending. He'd already begun writing the Christmas stuff—he was absolutely writing it as he was living through it. (Hamilton 409)

Lowell wrote these poems rapidly and in quick succession, apparently without much thought about artistic consistency. They were written rather to satisfy an urgent personal need. He wrote to Elizabeth Hardwick that he had attempted to “bury [his] indecisions” (Hamilton 408) in those poems. Like most of Lowell’s “confessional” poems, *The Dolphin* poems therefore are revelations of the poet’s deep personal experiences and thoughts which his “threadbare art” is not able to redeem entirely: in the last poem ‘Epilogue’ of his last volume *Day By Day* (1977), Lowell says:

But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All’s misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?

(*Day By Day* 27)

Lowell recognizes the need for art to “heighten” the picture of life but he feels that his own art is “paralyzed by fact,” that he has not been able to achieve a perfect “alliance” between his art and his life. He, therefore, is content with saying “that happened”. This is in line with what Lowell had said about “confessional” poetry in general. He had remarked that its central objective was that his poetry should ring “true” to the reader, that it should satisfy the reader that he was “getting the *real* Robert Lowell” (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 246–7). The “*real* Robert Lowell” who went through the trauma of divorce from Elizabeth Hardwick whom he continued to love, and whose subsequent marriage alliance, after an initial burst of passion and love, proved untenable for a lasting relationship, is what we get from *The Dolphin*.

Two points which significantly separate the Lawrence of *Look! We Have Come Through!* from the Lowell of *The Dolphin* are that (a) while Lawrence’s experiences of love and marriage are elevated to the level of the modern man’s experiences, Lowell’s poems are “paralyzed by the fact [s]” of his own life, and (b) while Lawrence achieves a certain triumph—he and his wife “come through” at the end—Lowell appears as a man who has been defeated by both love and marriage, indeed life.

Vereen Bill, in one of the more recent studies of Lowell’s poetry, has come to the

following judgement about the poet's world-view:

Robert Lowell's poetry is identified by nothing so much as its chronic and enervating systematic pessimism. One is hard pressed to come forward with even remotely sanguine or assuaging poems from Lowell's canon, and the few that we might call forth seem in the end to be momentary aberrations in an otherwise desolate philosophical context. (1)

Lowell was aware of this as the following account by Helen Vendler makes clear:

One afternoon in spring, I walked with Lowell through Harvard Yard. "Did you see that Christopher Ricks had written a piece about me?" he said. "No, what did he say?" I asked. "He said I'm violent," said Lowell with a mixture of humor and irony. "And Ehrenpreis says you are comic." I said. "Why don't they ever say what I'd like them to say?" he protested. "What's that?" I asked. "That I am heartbreaking," he said, meaning it. (Bloom 104-5)

Lowell's own marriage experiences fit into such a pessimistic mould. His introduction to 'marriage' was inauspicious in the sense that he found that both his parents were unhappy in their marriage. It could not have been otherwise because they seem to have been a totally incompatible couple. His mother was domineering and ambitious whereas his father was weak and spineless. They would often be engaged in quarrels and recriminations, leaving young Robert Lowell with the feeling that marriage was an exhausting business:

During the weekends I was at home much of the time. All day I used to look forward to the nights when my bedroom walls would once again vibrate, when I would awake with rapture to the rhythm of my parents arguing, arguing one another to exhaustion. (Lowell, *Collected Prose* 317)

Unfortunately, Lowell's own marital experiences proved to be equally negative, though his wife of the time and he had moments of happiness. This is often reflected in the poems which deal with the marriage theme. His first marriage with Jean Stafford was apparently harrowing and disastrous for both the parties. Perhaps the experiences of this relationship formed the basis of the theme of *The Mills of The Kavanaghs* in which marriage is seen in terms of bitterness and desolation. Lowell's biographer Ian Hamilton believes that the poet imparts to the poems in this volume "a new spitefulness by echoes of the letters that Lowell had been getting—throughout 1947—from Jean Stafford, and echoes too (we might reasonably speculate) of the 'adder-tongued' invective that she used to pour into their quarrels" (182). Lowell's other early husband-wife poems (in *Life Studies*)—based on his relationship with Elizabeth Hardwick—are ostensibly impersonal but are in fact deeply subjective and autobiographical. Surely Marjorie Perloff is right in believing that 'Man and Wife' is too deeply rooted in his own personal experiences and surroundings to have any wider symbolical significance:

One notices immediately the factual documentation quite alien to the romantics: the allusion to *Miltown*, to Marlborough Street, to the Rahvs of Greenwich Village, as well as the peculiar insistence on numerical accuracy:

“five days white,” “a fourth time,” “you were in your twenties,” “twelve years later.” Conversely, ‘Man and Wife’ does not have the dense web of symbolic implication that characterizes romantic and symbolist poetry. (85)

Similarly, the much-anthologised ‘To Speak of Woe That is In Marriage’ does not quite achieve the universal perspective that a symbolist or romantic poem can possess. In fact, the poem contained direct quotations from private letters and conversations. Robert Giroux recalled:

I had not known until after *Life Studies* was published that ‘To Speak of Woe that is in Marriage’ made use of private letters and conversations, and no one objected. (Hamilton 434)

Evidently, driven by his confessional muse, Lowell went on to openly and flagrantly use—or, as some would say, misuse—Elizabeth’s private letters, conversations and telephone calls in *The Dolphin*. Adrienne Rich, who had been a friend of Lowell’s, was outraged at this and she made a stinging attack on him:

Finally, what does one say about a poet who, having left his wife and daughter for another marriage titles a book with their names, and goes on to appropriate his wife’s letters written under the stress and pain of desertion, into a book of poems nominally addressed to his new wife? If this kind of question has nothing to do with art, we have come far from the best of the tradition Lowell would like to vindicate—or perhaps it cannot be vindicated.

(Hamilton 433)

William Pritchard made a more acute critical observation when he remarked that these narrowly autobiographical poems did not attain artistic independence or relevance to the world outside the poet’s own:

... one should feel uneasy about this and should say at one point, yes, Lowell has finally gone too far: you can’t turn life into literature twenty minutes or a year later; many of these sonnets are almost inaudible, don’t rise above a private mumble, resist being dragged into a social relationship of poet and reader. (597)

Indeed, the problem of *The Dolphin*, at the very outset, is twofold: the poet finds it difficult to turn into literature the verse the sole content of which is his life, and secondly, it is “inaudible” in the sense that it is opaque and impenetrable. We know that fellow-poets like Elizabeth Bishop and W H Auden had criticized the first version of *The Dolphin* for Lowell’s use of private material (Hamilton 422–25). Lowell responded by making a few “minor and half-hearted” alterations in order to depersonalize the poems. But, as Hamilton noted, “nothing very ‘outrageous’ was suppressed; fairly often his revisions have slightly muddled the meaning of the original” (504). Critics like Yenser and Bell have complained about the difficulty that the reader encounters in deciphering these poems. Unlike the poems in the *Look!* sequence, or Shakespeare’s Sonnets (Lowell’s model?), very few of Lowell’s poems in this volume can be understood as individual poems. Ever since he wrote *Life Studies* Lowell was too deeply entrapped in self-revelation to worry about poetic communication with his readers. What I A Richards

noted in 1969 on receiving *Notebook 1967–69* is true of Lowell's later poems too:

So many things about the form, the tone, the address, the reiteration, the *lacunae* in connexity, the privacy of the allusions, the use of references which only the PhD duties of the 1990s will explain, the recourse to contemporary crudities, the personal note, the "'tis enough if I say it" air, the assumption that "you must sympathise with *my* moans, *my* belches, etc." puzzle me. (179)

This being the case, all that a reader can do is to respond—however tentatively—to the story of "changing marriages" that the poems unfold. Lowell has tried to cohere the poems around the dolphin as a symbol, though it must be remembered that it was not there when the poems were originally composed. As a matter of fact, Lowell had previously used the dolphin as a symbol of some kind of ideal love that promised renewal in a poem 'Morning' which was addressed to his twenty-one year old student Martha Ritter:

In this ever more enlightened bedroom,
I wake under the early rising sun,
sex indelible flowers on the air—
shouldn't I ask to hold to you forever,
body of dolphin, breast of cloud?
You rival the renewal of the day,
clearing the puddles with your green sack of
books. (For Lizzie and Harriet 21)

In *The Dolphin* it is Caroline who is the dolphin and it would seem that the poems seek to present Caroline/dolphin as one who would rescue the poet from the doldrums of marriage he is in and introduce him to moments of beauty and grace, "the flashing fish;"

Any clear thing that blinds us with surprise,
your wandering silences and bright
trouvailles,
dolphin let loose to catch the flashing
fish. . . . (The Dolphin 15)

And in the last poem of this volume, he speaks of the ways she/dolphin has rescued him:

My Dolphin, you only guide me by surprise,
forgetful as Racine, the man of craft,
drawn through his maze of iron composition
by the incomparable wandering voice of Phedre.
When I was troubled in mind, you made for my
body
caught in its hangman's knot of sinking lines,
the glassy bowing and scraping of my will. . .

(The Dolphin 78)

Though there are negative aspects to it/her—she is also "a baby killer whale" (36), "None swims with her and breathes the air. . . She kills more bottles than the ocean sinks, / and

serves her winded lover's bones in brine, / nibbled at recess in the marathon," (35)—she also offers him freedom and love:

"Do this, do that, do nothing; you're not
chained.
I am a woman or I am a dolphin,
the only animal man really loves,
I spout the smarting waters of joy in your
face—
rough weather fish, who cuts your nets and
chains". (The Dolphin 54)

With Caroline's pregnancy, his relationship with her is seen as "sealed," leading to lasting happiness:

For weeks, now months, the year in burden
goes,
a happiness so slow burning, it is lasting;
(The Dolphin 60)

And with the arrival of the child, who is named Robert Sheridan Lowell, she can assure him, "Darling, / we have escaped our death struggles with our lives." (The Dolphin 61)

But Caroline/dolphin in these poems as a whole, which centre round only three closely-related characters (and the shadowy figures of their children), becomes more and more unreal in an artificially insulated world. The real presence that the poet has to reckon with is his 'wronged' wife Elizabeth Hardwick. It is she who jolts the poet into a recognition of the real world, in her own voice. In contrast to the dreamy figure of Caroline/dolphin, Elizabeth appears as an intelligent and highly articulate woman who is capable of offering real, mature human love which is both demanding and rewarding:

"Your student wrote me, if he took a plane
past Havard, at any angle, at any height,
he'd see a person missing, *Mr Robert Lowell*.
You insist on treating Harriet as if she
were thirty or a wrestler—she is only
thirteen.
She is normal and good because she had normal
and good
parents. She is threatened of necessity. . .
I love you, Darling, there is a black black
void.
as black as night without you. I long to see
your face and hear your voice, and take your
hand—
I'm watching a scruffy, seal-colored woodchuck
graze
on weeds, then lift his greedy snout and

listen;
then back to speedy feeding. He weighs a ton
and has your familiar human aspect munching."

(*The Dolphin* 41)

This is one of the few comparatively achieved poems in this volume. Ironically, it is entirely 'written' by Elizabeth Hardwick as the quotation marks make clear. It poignantly evokes the kind of love that she has offered and how inadequate he has been as a lover, husband and father. He is more like the "scruffy, seal-colored woodchuck" whose greedy feeding is identified with *his* "familiar human aspect munching." Elizabeth's pain, caused by his desertion of her and their young daughter, and her anger at his callousness and irresponsibility make Lowell wonder (in his hospital bed) about the wisdom of the choice he has made:

"You left two houses and two thousand books,
a workbarn by the ocean, and two slaves
to kneel and wait on you hand and foot—
tell us why in the name of Jesus." Why
am I clinging so foolishly alone?

(*The Dolphin* 23)

He wishes to dissolve "like a cube of sugar" (52) or be swallowed by Caroline and her love:

I am waiting like an angler with practice and
courage;
the time to cast is now, and the mouth open,
the huge smile, head and shoulders of the
dolphin—
I am swallowed up alive. . . . I am.

(*The Dolphin* 55)

However, Elizabeth keeps *his* feet firmly planted on the ground. She had warned him that he was "doomed" to live in a world of "unreality" (31), so that his wish to dissolve or be redeemed by Caroline, like Jonah's whale and be reborn ("I am"), is no more than just that—a wish. Lowell's constant use of Elizabeth Hardwick's (often harsh and accusatory) letters and telephone conversations shows that he is aware of the demands of the real world, of his past which would not go away. Elizabeth's pleadings as well as her admonishments, her reminders that his desertion of the family would have a damaging effect on their daughter's development—"They say fear of death is a child's remembrance / of the first desertion" (47)—make him cry out, "Family, my family, why are we so far? (46). He dreams,

This morning, as if I were home in Boston,
snow
the pure witchery-bitchery of kindergarten
winters;

but Elizabeth reprimands him with the words:

You can't carry your talent with you like a

suitcase,
Don't you dare mail us the love your life
denies;
do you really know what you have done?

(*The Dolphin* 48)

However, his roots are with Elizabeth in America
Change I earth or sky I am the same;
he is "overtrained" for England,
Overtrained for England, I find America
under unmoved heaven, changing sky.

(*The Dolphin* 66)

Therefore Lowell abandons the fragile joy that his relationship with Caroline has offered: he is not entirely comfortable in his new role with her—"the shine and stiffness of the new suit" which leaves him "not wholly happy" (72). He returns to New York:

flown in to New York. . . . I see the rising
prospect,
the scaffold glitters, the concrete walls are
white,
flying like Feininger's skyscraper yachts,
geometrical romance in the river mouth,
conical foolscap dancing in the sky. . .
the runway growing wintry and distinct.

(*The Dolphin* 73)

Seen in this light, it is easy to recognize *The Dolphin* as Lowell's revelation or even re-enactment of his tormenting vacillations caused by his "changing marriages" that represented a hopeless choice between a dismaying "old world" and "the blank new:"

From the dismay of my old world to the blank
new—water—torture of vacillation!

(*The Dolphin* 42)

But it is more difficult to determine his artistic strategy and poetic achievement. It may be claimed that poetically speaking what "comes over with relative strength is the intervention of Lizzie in the shape of letters and telephone calls," but in that case the credit must rest with "Hardwick's prose rather than the efficacy or otherwise of Lowell's verse" (Hobsbaum 164-5). So far as Lowell is concerned, he emerges both as a man and poet as an anguished individual who is driven by forces over which he neither has any control nor any will or ability to confront them or shape them into artistic form. Vereen Bell feels that Lowell was too faithful to his ingrained nihilism and to his actual experiences to imaginatively project a positive vision as he had intended to do in the poems:

The Dolphin wants to be a volume that it cannot be: it cannot be the book it wants to be, that it dreams of being, because of its author's inability to be self-deceived. Nihilism is held at bay but not transcended. We may think we

see in it the happy erotic ending that we hope all such stories achieve, but Lowell is scrupulous to present this outcome unsentimentally, as only one dimension of an existential palimpsest. We expect a Lawrentian breakthrough that never comes. (195-96)

It is perhaps wrong to expect from Lowell the "Lawrentian breakthrough" because he had none of Lawrence's distinctive advantages: the personal experiences which, despite their inevitable disappointments and frustrations, proved to be fulfilling, the poetic mind that was able to transmute those experiences into art of universal relevance and the positive vision of life that he tirelessly sought to maintain. In other words, like all great creative writers, Lawrence measured up to Eliot's definition of the "perfect artist:"

... the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material. (18)

On the other hand, Lowell, far from being able to "digest and transmute the passions" (his personal emotions and experiences), proved to be an 'imperfect' artist in whom the man who suffered and the poet who created were the same person.

The crucial difference between these two poets is that though both of them have written personal poetry about their respective marriages, Lawrence has created autobiographical and Lowell "confessional" poetry. Whereas Lowell's *The Dolphin* is largely incomprehensible without a knowledge of his biographical details, Lawrence's *Look!* poems are mostly achieved, independent poems even though they are based on the poet's own experiences. It is true that Lawrence had asked the reader of the *Look!* volume "to fill in the background of the poems, as far as possible, with the place, the time, the circumstance" (Lawrence, *The Complete Poems* 28). But obviously he was not inviting the reader to delve into his private letters and papers. He was asking him to keep in mind the circumstances of the young man who had eloped with a married woman from England to Germany. Lawrence was merely reiterating the traditional critical belief, most authoritatively articulated by Dr Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets*, that poems can be best appreciated when they are seen in the historical context out of which they arose.

It may be recalled that Lawrence had said that the *Look!* poems aimed at revealing "the intrinsic experiences of a man during the crisis of manhood, when he marries and comes to himself." That is to say, they dramatize the struggles of a young man who tries to realize himself as an individual through his relationship with the woman he has fallen in love with. In the opening poem of this volume 'Moonrise,' he expresses his faith "that perfect, bright experience never falls / To nothingness" (193) and the "perfect, bright experience" for him at that time in his life was love for the woman whom he was eventually to marry. The experience is cherished, especially because it is preceded by the death of someone (his mother) who obviously had been very close to him:

Still, you left me the nights,
The great dark glittery window,
The bubble hemming this empty existence with

light. ('Elegy' 193)

As a result.

I am weary of myself!

('Nonentity' 194)

But his newly-found love changes the direction of his life and also of his poetry. 'Bei-Hennef' (203) embodies his freedom from his old self. The poem's disregard of traditional rhymes and metrical patterns go with his abandonment of his earlier ways of living and loving. He is in a state of "almost bliss:"

The little river twittering in the twilight,
The wan, wondering look of the pale sky,
This is almost bliss.

And everything shut up and gone to sleep,
All the troubles and anxieties and pain
Gone under the twilight.

Now he knows that he has found the kind of love in which both he and the woman complement each other:

You are the call and I am the answer,
You are the wish and I the fulfilment,
You are the night, and I the day.

Even if the poem were simply an outburst of joy on the discovery of love, it would have been successful enough. What makes it more impressive is the fact that in the midst of this intense emotional experience, the poet's intelligence is at work which shows a greater understanding on his part. The repeated lines "trouble, anxiety and pain" save the poem from becoming sentimental because the undeniable realities of life that the couple confront suggest his recognition that our greatest joys are fraught with pain and suffering:

Strange, how we suffer in spite of this!
(203)

Thus fortified, he can face their failure on their first night together, in the next poem 'First Morning:' since he could not free himself "from the past," their love "was a confusion." But because their love is there, they will be the source of the transformation of everything around them:

The mountains are balanced,
The dandelion seeds lay half-submerged in the grass,
You and I together
We had them proud and blithe
On our love
They stand upright on our love,
Everything starts from us,
We are the source. (204)

The other side of the coin, as it were, is also recognized and faced unflinchingly. As

we had previously noticed, the man in the poems had his 'past' which made the woman "recoil", thus rendering their love a "confusion." Now, in 'She Looks Back,' (205-8) he is confronted by the fact that the woman has to reckon with *her* past which holds her back. He is enraged to discover that she longs for her children whom she has left behind in England and that her "joy" of their love, therefore, is just a pretence or even a "lie." But, just as in 'First Morning,' he is convinced about the power of their love to overcome such hurdles. He is firmly persuaded that her / their "joy was not to be driven off so easily":

Therefore, even in the hour of my deepest, passionate malediction
I try to remember it is also well between us
That you are with me in the end.

It is apparent that the lovers' recognition of their need of each other forms the very foundation of their love. But Lawrence also shows that love, in this sense, achieves joy and bliss only through bitterness, regret and sometimes rancour. He is fully aware of the conflicting emotions of the lovers, the strains of the demands that they make on each other and the difficulties that they must encounter as they go through the processes of their relationship. In one poem 'Both Sides of the Medal,' (235-6) he goes on to assert that, just as there is no such thing as an unmixed blessing, love inevitably involves hatred:

And because you love me,
think you do not hate me?
Ha, since you love me to ecstasy
it follows you hate me to ecstasy. (235)

If man (and woman) can survive such tests of understating and trials, love can be blissful and joyous.

But the joy of love that Lawrence celebrates is very much a matter of "blood and body." 'Frohnleichnam' (209-10), which literally means "joyful body," embodies the joy of such physical, bodily love. Unlike the neo-platonic, 'spiritual' woman in traditional love-poetry dating back to Dante's Beatrice, the woman that Lawrence is in love with is entirely mortal. Her physical beauty leaves him entranced. He lingers to watch her when he discovers her in her bath:

She stoops to the sponge, and her swung
breasts
Sway like a full-blown yellow
Gloire de Dijon roses.
(*'Gloire de Dijon'* 217)

So that once they are able to repudiate their respective 'pasts'—"you have come your way. I have come my way"—they are able to meet "at last." They achieve fulfilment, a "heaven of [their] own" and they dance in triumph:

As we dance
Your eyes take all of me in as a
communication;
As we dance

I see you, ah, in full!
 Only to dance together in triumph of being
 together
 Two white ones, sharp, vindicated,
 Shining and touching,
 In heaven of our own, sheer with repudiation.
 (209–10)

The *Look!* poems, therefore, do not tell the “story” of the Frieda–Lawrence marriage so much as they explore the nature of their love and of its effect on their lives. Furthermore, the poems attempt to dramatize Lawrence’s belief, born out of his personal experiences, that the love between man and woman brings them in direct contact with forces that govern the universe. He had said in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* that man must “know that he is half, and the woman is the other half: that they are two but that they are two-in-one” (128). The two “halves” complement each other, become one only through the love and sexual union between the man and the woman. This was a part of Lawrence’s beliefs or “vision” as he explained in a letter (written in September 1914, the period during which he was composing the *Look!* poems) to Gordon Campbell:

I believe there is no getting of a vision, as you call it, before we get our sex right: before we get our souls fertilized by the *female*.

Once such a ‘fertilization’ is achieved, the lovers will realize that there are
 . . . tremendous unknown forces of life, coming unseen and unperceived as
 out of the desert to the Egyptians, and driving us, forcing us, destroying us
 if we do not submit to be swept away. (*Letters*, II, 218)

How love can lead to, and be enriched by, such a confrontation with the “unknown forces of life” is the theme of ‘Song of a Man Who Has Come Through!’ (250). It is one of the most significant poems in *Look! We Have Come Through!* because it evocatively integrates into one poetic whole his “discovery which is simultaneously love and knowledge, and incidentally, art, the creative vision” (Gilbert 105). The lover whose soul has apparently been ‘fertilized’ by the female opens himself to the unknown life-force:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
 A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.

The unrestrained lines which are unrestrained by rules of rhyme and rhythm of conventional poetry take him “through the chaos / of the world” into a condition of blessedness and “wonder:”

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
 I would be good fountain, a good well-head,
 Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

Characteristically, however, Lawrence’s fidelity to human experience compels him to acknowledge natural fears of unknown dangers too—“What is the knocking at the door in the night?” But his faith that the knockers on the door are “three strange angels,” and hence messengers of grace and holiness, inspires him to “admit them.” Thus, the man and the woman “transcend into some condition of blessedness,” as Lawrence had pointed

out in his 'Argument' to the *Look!* volume.

All this, of course, is a far cry from the self-centred and enclosed world of *The Dolphin*. In the diminished post-war cultural situation that surrounds him, Lowell cannot conceive of a universe or a life-force which are integral parts of Lawrence's vision of human life. Rosenthal has pointed out that behind Wordsworth's personal poetry in *The Prelude* there is a sense of an "immortal spirit" which eases the pain of human experience. The absence of this external force is, according to Rosenthal, at the centre of "confessional poetry" of which Lowell is the chief exponent:

Doubtless the chilled feeling that the "immortal spirit" either does not care what happens in one's mind or does not exist lurked in the shadows of human thought from the start, and has created its own varieties of psychological pressure, but this feeling is central in the confessional poetry of the last generation. (393)

As a result, Lowell's poetry is confined to his deeply subjective experiences which, being limited by definition, he kept on quarrying relentlessly. His *Notebook 1967-68* (May 1969) poems are worked and reworked in at least three volumes, *Notebook* (1970), *History* (1973) and *For Lizzie and Harriet* (1973), and yet, unlike Lawrence, he did not seem able to make any sense of his life and experiences. To Donald Davie, it seemed that Lowell was playing a "game" with his readers:

We can begin by saying that it's an exceptionally *intimate* game: we are to be with him, we *have* to be with him, as he runs a distracted hand through his hair, leafing through his old files and trying to see what his recent writing amounts to; where and how, if at all, it 'adds up.' As much with *History* as with any *Notebooks* (*sic*) we are really left to do the adding up ourselves—if we *can*, the poet himself having virtually admitted that for his part he can't.

(262)

And we have seen that whereas Lawrence in the *Look!* poems can searchingly explore the meaning of love and marriage in the development of an individual personality, Lowell in *The Dolphin* merely re-enacts the ("heartbreaking") experiences of his two marriages. Moreover, in contrast to the wider significance which Lawrence is able to relate and communicate to his readers, Lowell is entrapped in his egotistical world, and the opacity of his style and the private nature of his subject matter virtually shuts out the common reader.

Both Lowell's own personality and the post-war ethos in which he grew up shaped the nature of the poetry that he wrote. He had admitted the "difficulty" that he had "with ordinary living, the impracticability, the myopia" (Hamilton 309). Lowell's, and by implication modern man's, "difficulty" with "ordinary living" can be connected with the "narcissism" which, according to Christopher Lasch, pervades the contemporary American society. Lasch argues that as people are "fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future" (5), they look inwards, become narcissistic and they reject all kinds of obligations in personal as well as social relationships. The resultant celebration

of the self is not without its dangers because it leads to an inability to form and nurture emotional relationships, and a gnawing consciousness of emptiness and loneliness within. Lasch believes that this phenomenon can go some way to explain the origins of modern man's psychological illnesses and ailments: his psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenia and depression. Psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists may or may not agree with Lasch's arguments, analyses or methodology but I think his general thesis can help us to understand the predicament of Robert Lowell the man and the poet.

Lowell's prose autobiographical writings (see his *Collected Prose*) make it clear that as a young "romantic boy" (312) he felt cheated and disillusioned as he discovered that neither his parents nor their ancestral families measured up to much. Early in life he started his "adolescent war on [his] parents" (311) because he found them inadequate. Such an upbringing led to the development of neurotic traits in the son who was "disappointed" when his parents did not tear each other apart in personal rancour: "I writhed with disappointment on the nights when Mother and Father only loved harmoniously together like cows. . ." (318). He came to identify man with feebleness and woman with domination and power. So much so that when he went to Brimmer School he wished he was a girl: "I wished I were an older girl. I wrote to Santa Claus for a field hockey-stick. To be a boy at Brimmer was to be small, denied and weak" (325). Inevitably, it would seem he would become, indeed as he did become, a 'psychological case.' As a teenager at St Mark's School, Lowell was not only physically ungainly and unkempt but mentally disturbed also, often flying into uncontrollable rage and indulging in violent and maniacal behaviour. His mother was forced to enlist the services of a Boston psychiatrist Merrill Moore whom she herself had been seeing about *her* "neurosis" (Hamilton 28). Psychological ailments continued to strike him throughout his life so that he was in and out of mental institutions, thus causing much distress to himself, his family and friends. I would argue that this psychological state can be directly linked to the "narcissism" in his poetic personailty.

Christopher Lasch's related point that such "narcissism" is also the result of the breakdown of tradition, a disregard of and disenchantment with the past, can be chillingly confirmed by a look at Lowell's relationship with his own ancestors. He saw himself as a victim not only of his parents' relationship but also that of their forbears whom he found to be greedy, exploitive and hypocritical. His great-grandfather Mordecai Meyer "was a dark man, a German Jew—no downright Yankee, but maybe such a fellow as Napoleon's mad, pomaded son-of-an-innkeeper-general Junot, Duc D'Arbantes; a man like mad George III's pomaded disreputable son, 'Prinney,' the Prince Regent" (310). And this founding-father's legacy to his progeny was: "My children, my blood, accept graciously the loot of your inheritance. We are all dealers in used furniture" (344). Marjorie Perloff suggests that by presenting his family in these terms, "Lowell creates a devastating image of a tradition gone sour" (98). And Axelrod notices a wider implication: "The internal failure of the Lowells coincides with social change. The 'seated and rooted social order' of the Boston of Henry James's youth has given way to the collapsing civilization [Henry] Adams foresaw in the *Education* and James himself

in *The American Scene*. In the boy Lowell's nightmare, the Social Register symbolically yields to the cash register" (105-6).

Lowell's early poems grew out of his concern about the crumbling world around him. Given the experiences of his early childhood and manhood, it is not surprising that he saw human life in terms of gloom and despair. But such pessimistic feelings were, in the first instance, 'impersonalized' (Lowell had started his poetic career under the influence of Eliot, Tate and Ransome) in *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) and *The Mills of The Kavanaughs* (1951). However, a close reading of the poems in those volumes reveals the fact that behind the mask of 'impersonality' Lowell's personal experiences were asserting their claims for more direct expression. When Lowell finally dropped that mask in *Life Studies* (1959), he clearly felt relieved and free. From then on he yielded to his 'narcissistic' personality and wrote "confessional" verse. However, this personal subject-matter proved to be too narrow and poetically intractable. Soon after the publication of *Life Studies*, Lowell said, in 1961, that he had said all that he had inspiration to say about his personal experiences, and that "more would just dilute" (Hamilton 246). The poetry that he wrote during the next sixteen years until his death does not alter the picture very much. He acted and re-enacted his tensions and conflicts with masochistic intensity. *The Dolphin* poems clearly fall within the general framework of such a poetic landscape.

In one of the last poems, poignantly titled 'Unwanted' (in *Day By Day*) Lowell envies the poets who could be impersonal and imaginative, and he laments, "Alas! I can only tell my own story" (121). One may wonder why was Lowell so severely handicapped by the personal nature of his subject-matter when writers throughout the history of English literature have used personal experiences in their works: long ago Philip Sidney's Muse had advised him "to look into thy heart and write." The answer must be that, as this comparison with Lawrence shows, Lowell's psychological make-up and his lack of access to the traditional poetic strategies prevented him from creating achieved poems. Basically, I think Lowell's subject-matter was unprecedented in literature. He was a typical product of the post-war narcissitic society in America. He was a victim of his psychic urges which forced him to act out rather than digest and sublimate his deepest feelings and tensions. The need for self-expression left no room for self-examination or self-exploration. I think it is right that his poetry is called "confessional" (whereas Lawrence's can be described as "autobiographical"). However, the word "confessional" should be used without its religious connotation because Lowell does not "confess" in the hope of forgiveness. His "confession" is that of a psychiatric patient (the other "confessional" poets, Plath, Sexton, Berryman were similarly afflicted and they all, in fact, committed suicide) who feels the impulsive need to express himself. We do indeed know "the *real* Robert Lowell" from his poetry, but we remain curiously uninvolved and unscathed. We seldom feel that we are fellow-sufferers with Lowell: we remain only spectators who just feel sympathy for what we are witnessing and watching. In sharp contrast, we get involved with Lawrence in the process of his development and in his vision of blessedness on earth.

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