

IN PURSUIT OF THE WORD:
ROBERT LOWELL'S INTEREST IN THE WORK OF OSIP MANDELSTAM

BY

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ABSTRACT

Lowell was initially attracted to Mandelstam at the start of the sixties because he was little known, providing the possibility of writing original translations. However, Lowell and Mandelstam's common focus on concrete detail, complex imagery and intellectual subject matter quickly caught Lowell's interest. These affinities along with Lowell's poetic skills enabled him to produce some excellent translations--in The Atlantic Monthly (1963) and The New York Review of Books (1965)--which compare favourably with other major Mandelstam translations. Lowell was also quickly inspired by the affirmation of Mandelstam's poetry in the face of difficult external circumstances.

From 1967 onwards, Lowell's interest was sustained because Mandelstam's poetics was a realisation of what eluded Lowell in his own poetry. Both wished to escape the dualism of language and experience, achieving a harmonious merging of self and culture. They both tried specifically to transcend words to the Word by way of the word's polysemy--its ability to have multiple meanings. Mandelstam's success is seen in his affirmative descriptions of the polysemous word in his poetry and critical prose. Lowell's failure is seen in his undermining of the polysemous power of the following Notebook words: blood, green, window, walk, fall, back, breathe, by expressing a lack of faith in their ability to describe his experience. Notebook thus remains nihilistic and trapped in language.

However, Lowell does gain brief respite from his own language by absorbing some of Mandelstam's language into Notebook through literary allusion. Drafts of Notebook contain a large number of Mandelstam translations which only remain as fragments in the final Notebook. The ultimate removal of these drafts suggests that Lowell may have accepted he could only rely on his own language. Indeed, Lowell's expressions of failure as poetic theme are ultimately what contribute to his poetry's success.

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A NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration used is that outlined in J. Thomas Shaw, The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English-Language Publications (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967). Other systems of transliteration in quoted material have been changed to conform to this system in this book. Exceptions are names where I have used familiar forms.

Introduction

Poetry at its best should appear to escape the following dualism: the division which lies between language and experience. In the words of Ernst Cassirer: 'The work of art is something singular and apart, which is its own basis and has its goal purely within itself, and yet at the same time in it we are presented with a new whole, and a new image of reality and of the mental cosmos itself.'¹ Such poetry gains a further quality such as Gaston Bachelard describes: 'For it is a fact that poetry possesses a felicity of its own, however great the tragedy it may be called upon to illustrate.'² As poetry transcends language it becomes affirmative, as Bachelard's reference to 'felicity' implies, a reflection of the poet's achievement.

Seamus Heaney sees just such attributes in Lowell's poetry. He suggests that Lowell is indeed able to be free of dualism and to achieve this affirmation through the transcendence of art:

A sense of something utterly completed vied with a sense of something started into escape and freedom. The reader was permitted the sensation of a whole meaning simultaneously clicking shut and breaking open, a momentary illusion that the fulfilments which were being

¹ Ernst Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought, trans. James Haden (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), p. 307. Here Cassirer is interpreting Kant's theory of art as defined in The Critique of Judgement.

² Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (1964; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xxvi.

experienced in the ear spelled out meanings and fulfilments available in the world.³

For Heaney, Lowell's poetry has the ability to express a 'whole meaning', to provide a resonance indicative of the complexity of life itself, the raw material from which poetry is created. 'Illusion' is appropriate here because, ultimately, poetry must be artificial; it cannot be the real world but can only suggest, as Schelling puts it, that the 'ideal world of art and the real world of objects are products of one and the same activity.'⁴ The more effective the poet is in creating this illusion, the more effective the poem.

However successful Lowell's poetry may have been in fact, there is a certain unintended irony in Heaney's words, for Lowell repeatedly expresses a lack of faith in his own ability to achieve a whole meaning such as Heaney describes. As Lowell says of himself, 'In truth I seem to have felt mostly the joys of living; in remembering, in recording, thanks to the gift of the Muse, it is the pain.'⁵

Lowell's interest in foreign poets is inseparable from his own poetic struggle with language, as he told Frederick Seidel in 1961: 'I felt a kinship. I felt some kind of closeness to Rilke and Rimbaud poems I've translated, yet they were doing things I couldn't do. They were both a

³ Seamus Heaney, Lecture notes for 'Lowell's Command,' T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures, Kent University 27th Oct. 1986, p. 4, courtesy of the author; rpt in The Government of the Tongue (London: Faber and Faber paperback, 1989), pp. 129-147.

⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, System of Transcendental Idealism, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 12.

⁵ Notebook, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p. 263.

continuation of my own bias and a release from myself.'⁶ In a later interview with D. S. Carne-Ross in 1968 he focuses more on differences than similarities. He pinpoints why he believed so many American poets were translating poetry at the time: 'I think we have the feeling of discovery of what we lack. Someone like Neruda has something that no North American poet has. So has Pasternak, so has some quite small-scale poet from, say, Sweden.'⁷ Such a view relates to a further comment in the same essay:

In a way the whole point of translating--of my translation, anyway--is to bring into English something that didn't exist in English before. I don't think I've ever done a translation of a poem I could have written myself...It's a great grief to me that I can't write my original poems in the styles I have used in my translation.

(pp. 173-174)

Together, these views suggest that when Lowell looked to foreign poetry for what was lacking in his own verse, he considered not only style, but all that makes a poem. Translation, for Lowell it seems, is a kind of consolation prize: the chance to do things with language not available to him in his own poetry; the opportunity to enter a different self; a temporary reprieve from his personal and cultural responsibilities; for Lowell, a very necessary escape.

This study is concerned with Lowell's interest in the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam. The absence of Mandelstam's poetry from Lowell's Imitations (1961) and the fact that the

⁶ 'An Interview with Frederick Seidel,' Paris Review, 25 (Winter/Spring 1961); rpt. in Robert Lowell: Collected Prose, ed. Robert Giroux (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 235-266 (p. 252).

⁷ D.S. Carne-Ross, 'Conversation with Robert Lowell,' Delos: A Journal on and of Translation, I (1968), 165-174 (p. 170).

poetry of Mandelstam is still not that well-known outside Russia mean that few people readily associate Lowell with Mandelstam. Lowell's interest in Pasternak, by contrast, is better known, for Lowell's translations of Pasternak are included in Imitations, and Pasternak, if only because of Doctor Zhivago, is well-known to western readers. However, Lowell was interested in Mandelstam for a number of years and, as his own comments on translation suggest, his own poetry will provide the greatest clues to why this should be so.

Any poet's work will necessarily be affected by an encounter with another poet, and an exchange between poets from different cultures involves a complex linguistic interaction. On the one hand, there is the opportunity to work with a foreign language to produce a translation which is not merely a weak literal version but, in George Steiner's words, 'criticism in the highest sense.'⁸ On the other hand, there is the influence that the translated poet may have on the translator's own work. This influence may show itself overtly in the poetry, or may work a more subtle effect on his or her poetic sensibilities.

No one was more aware of the significance of such poetic interaction than Osip Mandelstam. His wife, Nadezhda Mandelstam, commented on Robert Lowell's translations of her husband's poetry with significant Mandelstamian terminology: '... a great moment, the meeting of two poets writing in two different languages. There is sudden recognition between them, as if the poet and his translator had struck a close friendship.'⁹ For Mandelstam, 'recognition' is a term rich

⁸ 'To Traduce or Transfigure: On Modern Verse Translation,' Encounter, 27 (August 1966), 48-54 (p. 52).

⁹ Letter to Robert Lowell, March 1967, MS. 823, Robert Lowell Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, as quoted in Olga Carlisle, Poets on Street Corners: Portraits of Fifteen Russian poets (New York: Random House, 1968), p. xiii.

in meaning. On one level it describes poetic empathy such as Nadezdha Mandelstam here suggests, on another it is the more complex poetic 'recognition' of his essay 'Word and Culture':

Write imageless verses if you can, if you are able. A blind man recognises a beloved face by barely touching it with seeing fingers, and tears of joy, the true joy of recognition, will fall from his eyes after a long separation. The poem lives through an inner image, that ringing mold of form which anticipates the written poem. There is not yet a single word, but the poem can already be heard. This is the sound of the inner image, this is the poet's ear touching it.

Only the instant of recognition is sweet to us!¹⁰

Here Mandelstam uses the term 'recognition' to describe how poetry is created: the result of inspiration rather than craft. For Mandelstam both meanings of 'recognition' combine for he believed in an elite brotherhood of poets all similarly inspired with the gift of hearing this 'inner image' which 'anticipates the written poem'.

This study, therefore, involves an examination of Lowell's translations of Mandelstam's poetry and a consideration of how Lowell's own poetry relates to his interest in Mandelstam's work. My study of Lowell's poetry will be focused on Notebook (1970). I have selected this volume, firstly, because I believe it provides a climax to much that concerned Lowell throughout his writing career and, secondly, because it shows evidence of the direct influence of Mandelstam's work on Lowell.

¹⁰ in Mandelstam: The Complete Critical Prose and Letters, trans. Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), pp. 112-116 (p. 116).

Lowell's interest in Russian poetry is inseparable from the political atmosphere of the sixties. He was only one of many American poets who developed a fascination with all things Russian at this time. This interest resulted from the access to Russian culture which had been almost totally shut off throughout the Stalinist period. The change in the political situation between Russia and America developed after the death of Stalin in 1953. Nikita Khrushchev became the Secretary General of the Communist Party and gradually there was less tension between Russia and the West. A significant year was 1956 when, at the 20th Russian Party Congress, Khrushchev felt confident enough to make an attack on Stalin. The result of this was that Stalin's name was blackened, and Khrushchev's power was increased. Stalin's body was moved to a less honoured spot. There was still a great deal of suspicion between America and the Soviet Union, of course. A major event in October 1957, for example, was Russia's first launching of the artificial earth satellite, Sputnik I. This came as a shock to the West who were previously unaware of how technologically advanced the Soviet Union had become. Such an event did not help ease relations. However, gradually there was a more enlightened period, though short-lived, for Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964. Although the 'Thaw'¹¹ was taking place in the fifties, its effect wasn't really felt in the West until 1960. Olga Carlisle, who worked with Lowell on his Mandelstam translations, points to reasons for this:

Up to about '57 to '58 there was very little exchange between Russia and the United States, in this country particularly because of the McCarthy period and its aftermath. Then when Stalin died it took quite a long time for people to figure out just what trend events

¹¹ A term used to describe the easing of restrictions in Russia after the death of Stalin. It derives from Ilya Ehrenburg's novel The Thaw, trans. Manya Harari (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1961).

would take. I think people generally started travelling to Russia in '59 and '60.¹²

Periodicals of the sixties, notably The New York Review of Books, reflect the excitement felt at the discovery of a previously hidden culture. Most importantly there were a number of exchanges and visits.

When considering the visits it is necessary to distinguish between diplomatic exercises and genuine poetic exchanges. Stanley Kauffman, in his 1964 review of Frost in Russia by F. D. Reeve¹³, suggests that Robert Frost's visit to Russia was something of a token gesture with Frost as 'a kind of portable Roman ruin'. This was a visit which was more of a scandal than a forging of connections with Russia. In contrast, the visits to America by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Andrei Voznesensky established genuine links between Russian and American poets. Stanley Kunitz's description of his own visit to Russia shows the value such genuine exchanges had, and captures what many American poets envied about the Russian poet's role:

I came back from the Soviet Union in the spring of 1967 full of affection for the writers I had met, sharing the frustrations and anxieties of their predicament and, to a degree, strangely envious of them. A writer is dignified by the attention of the state, even when it is the wrong kind of attention. As Mandelstam remarked, there is no denying the importance of poetry when people are killed for it.¹⁴

¹² Personal interview, 1-5 August 1988.

¹³ 'Traveling Light,' New York Review of Books, 25 June 1964, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ 'A Visit to Russia,' in A Kind of Order, A Kind of Folly: Essays and Conversations (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975), pp. 18-38 (p. 18).

There was a revitalised interest in translation and Russian translation in particular. And there also developed tremendous debate over literal versus free translation. Lowell as the winner of the Bollingen Translation Prize in 1962, openly admitting in the Introduction to Imitations 'I have been reckless with literal meaning, and laboured hard to get the tone,'¹⁵ was seen, along with George Steiner, as the major supporter of free translation. Vladimir Nabokov, on the other hand, embarked on a personal vendetta against any writer who presumed to deviate from a literal translation of Russian poetry. The distinctive characteristic of his various articles was the entertaining quality of the abuse. The following is typical of the tone of many of them: 'For something must be done, some lone hoarse voice must be raised to defend both the helpless dead poet and the credulous college student from the kind of pitiless and irresponsible paraphrase whose product I am about to describe.'¹⁶ He goes on to argue that non-Russian speakers have no right to translate Russian at all, and are comparable to 'actors who have forgotten their speeches'. In the above article, without mentioning Lowell by name, he condemns the professors who award the Bollingen prize. He produced a translation of Alexander Pushkin's Eugene Onegin (1964) which he used to illustrate what he saw as the only valid form of translation. There was also a very public debate which developed between Nabokov and Edmund Wilson¹⁷ on the subject of translation. Edmund Wilson, in his review of Nabokov's Eugene Onegin, captures the tone of Nabokov's articles on translation beautifully:

¹⁵ 2nd. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. xi.

¹⁶ 'On Translating Pushkin: Pounding the Clavichord,' rev. of Eugene Onegin, trans. Walter Arendt, New York Review of Books, 30 April 1964, pp. 14-16.

¹⁷ See Simon Karlinsky, ed. The Nabokov/Wilson Letters 1940-1971: Correspondence between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson 1940-1971 (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) for a picture of their relationship.

Since Mr Nabokov is in the habit of introducing any job of this kind which he undertakes by an announcement that he is unique and incomparable and that everybody else who has attempted it is an oaf and an ignoramus, incompetent as a linguist and scholar, usually with the implication that he is also a low-class person and a ridiculous personality, Nabokov ought not to complain if the receiver, though trying not to imitate his bad literary manners, does not hesitate to underline his weaknesses.¹⁸

My initial attempt to track down the extent of Lowell's interest in Russian poetry led to a series of dead ends, particularly regarding Mandelstam. There were some indications of the importance of Pasternak. Elizabeth Hardwick, for example, emphasised the importance that Pasternak had for Lowell,¹⁹ and there is the presence of the translations in Imitations as well as Lowell's reference to Pasternak's attitude to translation: 'Boris Pasternak has said that the usual reliable translator gets the literal meaning but misses the tone, and that in poetry tone is of course everything' (Imitations, p. xi). When it came to Mandelstam, however, there seemed nothing but a series of missed opportunities. Clarence Brown, one of Mandelstam's earliest critics in the West, mentioned meeting Lowell at meetings of the Executive Council of the National Translation Center and pointed out a conversation he had with Lowell, 'He was always very cordial and asked me to come to see him and talk about OM, which, to my immense regret, I never did.'²⁰ Seamus Heaney, who became friends with Lowell during Lowell's time in Ireland, and who has a keen interest in Mandelstam, if not always able to be

¹⁸ 'The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov,' rev. of Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, trans. Vladimir Nabokov, New York Review of Books, 15 July 1965, pp. 3-6. In the article Wilson provides examples of how Nabokov veers from a literal translation of the novel.

¹⁹ Personal interview, 25 July 1988.

²⁰ Letter received. 21 March 1986.

informative can at least be relied upon to be humorous:
'Caroline once told me a story about somebody taking tea and marmalade to Nadezhda. Perhaps it was even Caroline herself. Anyhow that would suggest that whatever there was to know about the Mandelstams the Lowells would know it.'²¹ The one poet who almost certainly discussed Mandelstam with Lowell was Stanley Kunitz who did many Mandelstam translations during the sixties, but he, now in his eighties, was unavailable for comment. Though frustrating, it is not all that surprising that Lowell discussed Mandelstam with few people. Even today, those interested in Mandelstam are pleased to find someone able to discuss his work with them. Fortunately however, Lowell did have one good friend with whom he discussed Mandelstam extensively, the Russian émigré Olga Carlisle who first introduced the poetry of Mandelstam to Lowell.

I first became aware of the association between Olga Carlisle and Robert Lowell after a brief mention of her in Mark Rudman's Robert Lowell: An Introduction to his Poetry.²² Rudman was discussing an echo of Mandelstam's poetry in Notebook and, in passing, mentioned that there were some Lowell translations of Mandelstam's work present in Olga Carlisle's book of translations, Poets on Street Corners: Portraits of Fifteen Russian Poets. I wrote to her by way of her publisher Random House in 1985 and enquired about her work with Lowell. Her reply was encouraging but she insisted that I would need to come to America to carry out my study. In July 1987 I managed to do this, and during my year of study Olga Carlisle kindly invited me to come to San Francisco. The result of this invitation was a taped interview which took place over five days, August 1-5 1988.²³ Throughout the week Olga Carlisle was extremely hospitable,

²¹ Letter received, 9 April 1986.

²² (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), p. 156.

²³ All comments made by Olga Carlisle are from this interview unless footnoted otherwise.

and dedicated herself to recalling as much detail as she could about her working partnership with Lowell as well as more general reminiscences of the period. Her commitment is best illustrated by the fact that she risked the wrath of her husband Henry Carlisle in neglecting their joint work on a book with a tight deadline. After this extended interview we continued to correspond and met again in Paris in April 1989 for further discussion.

Olga Carlisle was a pivotal figure for American poets interested in Russian poetry during the sixties. Here she describes her own perception of that role:

I really had the saintly and totally undeserved reputation among American poets as someone who had the key to Russian poetry. I have one book from Marianne Moore with the inscription: 'To Olga Carlisle whom we all revere'. This reverence was purely for my role in acting as a bridge between the two.

Her book, Poets, which consists of a selection of Russian translations by various American poets, reflects this role. Her most significant action, however, was to make a journey to Russia in 1960 in order to interview various Russian poets on their home ground. She had the fortune of being the granddaughter of the playwright Leonid Andreyev and this assisted her in her task. The result was a series of interviews with Akhmatova, Pasternak, Ehrenburg, and Yevtushenko which were published together in Carlisle's book Voices in the Snow: Encounters With Russian Writers (1962)²⁴. When the poets Yevtushenko and Voznesensky came to America she served as their interpreter and she performed a similar role when Stanley Kunitz reciprocated the exchange.

²⁴ The Pasternak interview first appeared as 'Three Visits with Pasternak,' Paris Review, 6 (Summer/Fall 1960), 46-69; the Ehrenburg interview appeared as 'The Art of Fiction: Ilya Ehrenburg,' Paris Review, 7 (Summer/Fall 1961), 99-117.

When Olga Carlisle's book Poets came out in 1968, it was not the first book of its kind. As early as 1948 Maurice Baring edited the fourth edition of The Oxford Book of Russian Verse with a few Mandelstam poems included, though not in translation. Baring's notes to these poems reflects the sparsity of information about Mandelstam's poetry at this time, making the comment 'He wrote little' (p. 300) unlike Pasternak of whom he wrote, 'He is universally recognised as the greatest living Russian poet' (p. 300). A major predecessor to Carlisle's book was the Two Centuries of Russian Verse: An Anthology from Lomonosov to Voznesensky (1966) edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky with translations by Babette Deutsch. Yarmolinsky's anthology of Russian poetry had appeared under a number of different titles between 1921 and 1966 with numerous revisions. As early as 1949 it appeared as A Treasury of Russian Verse with three anonymous Mandelstam translations. In 1962 it was again revised with the title An Anthology of Russian Verse: 1812-1960 with a selection of Mandelstam translations by Babette Deutsch.

It is not surprising to encounter competition over discoveries about Russian culture since so little was known before 1960. A particularly useful volume is Dorothy Brewster's East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships (1954) which surveys the beginnings of Russian/European awareness of one another's culture through nineteenth-century periodicals. Prince D.S. Mirsky's A History of Russian Literature from the Earliest Times to the Death of Dostoevsky, 1881 (1927) and Contemporary Russian Literature: 1881-1925 (1926) are valuable early literary surveys. Edmund Wilson's writings also provide a wealth of information about Russia which goes back to the forties.

Often however, literary histories emphasise the lack of information available. N. Kershaw, in his Introduction to Russian Heroic Poetry (1932), makes the comment, 'There is hardly a country of which, in its entirety, we know so little,' and P. Kropotkin, in his preface to Russian

Literature: Ideals and Realities (1916), states, 'It is no means an easy task to speak or to write about the literature of country, when this literature is hardly known to the audiences or to the readers. Only 3 or 4 Russian writers have been properly and at all completely translated into English' (p. x). Gleb Struve, in his Soviet Russian Literature (1935), argues that in 1935 there exists no general survey of Soviet Russian literature in any language. His useful bibliography of existing books about Russian literature and all available translated literature, illustrates the sparsity of information.

If knowledge about Russian literature is sparse, Mandelstam himself appears as a non-person. Gleb Struve refers only briefly to Mandelstam in Soviet Russian Literature, though he does show an appreciation of his talent. Similarly, Marc Slonim in An Outline of Russian Literature (1958) writes little on Mandelstam but shows perception in stating that Mandelstam's 'work ranks with the highest achievements of Russian twentieth-century poetry' (p. 202). However, Vera Alexandrovna in A History of Soviet Literature (1963) only refers to Mandelstam in passing, while Richard Hare's Russian Literature from Pushkin to the Present (1947) and Harold Swayze's Political Control of Literature in the USSR 1946-1959 (1962) have no mention of Mandelstam at all.

However, although Olga Carlisle's Poets had its predecessors, its originality lies in the attitude to translation which it reflects, emphasising the cultural exchange which may happen in the translation process. It is striking that the cover lists not the names of the Russian poets but those of the translators. Thus Poets captures the interest in the process of translation of the time. In her interview Olga Carlisle made her purpose plain:

My feeling was that by choosing very different and interesting translators, each with their own eccentricities, something would come through of the variety of voices and talent. Also I was doing it

essentially in some way for myself. Every poem in some way in this book is something that I liked, for some reason or other.

There was certainly competition in the sixties regarding Russian translation and Mandelstam translations in particular. It seems more than coincidental, for example, that Avrahm Yarmolinsky, who edited Two Centuries of Russian Verse, should criticise the Lowell translations produced in collaboration with Olga Carlisle.²⁵ It is possible that there was resentment at the fact that Olga Carlisle was seen as such a central figure in the eyes of so many American poets. When I interviewed Elizabeth Hardwick, she made the comment 'Olga felt she had introduced Mandelstam to America'. One can see how Yarmolinsky might have resented such a suggestion but, nevertheless, one cannot question the tremendous amount of work that Carlisle did to make Americans aware of Russian poetry, Mandelstam's poetry in particular. Lowell puts the excitement of this period of new discovery in healthy perspective: 'Well, there's a great charm in doing a first--or a near first, nobody ever seems to do a real first. But you do an almost first, Mandelstam, say, and that's wonderful' (Carne-Ross, p. 171). So Lowell, along with other poets such as W. S. Merwin, Stanley Kunitz, Adrienne Rich, Richard Wilbur and Denise Levertov, learned much about Russian poetry by way of Olga Carlisle and their route to Mandelstam initially was via Pasternak.

Olga Carlisle described to me how her friendship with Lowell began. After returning from Moscow she had her Pasternak interview published in the Paris Review in 1960. Lowell read this because he was interested in Pasternak at the time. He got in touch with her because he wanted to rework some of the Pasternak translations which were to appear in

²⁵ Letter, Encounter, 27 (November 1966), 90-91; 'Translation from the Russian,' letter, Atlantic Monthly, 215 (February 1965), 42.

Imitations. She suggested that the Russian interest for Lowell began with the immense impact Doctor Zhivago had when it appeared in 1958, and added that it was important to all Lowell's circle. She felt that Lowell's request to her for help grew into a more long-term working relationship for two reasons: firstly, she had time to discuss the poetry at a leisurely pace at that stage in her career, and secondly, she was very involved with translation because she was working on Poets. She felt that both the relaxing pace of their work together, and the material they were working with, was an emotional benefit to Lowell who was still suffering frequent manic attacks: 'I think it was the healthiness, the joie de vivre of those Russian poets with whom, with the exception of Pasternak, Lowell was not really acquainted at all.' Ultimately their friendship developed out of a common interest in poetry and art. For Olga Carlisle, the opportunity to discuss such subjects with Lowell was a wonderful learning experience, particularly as then, in her early thirties, English was still very much a second language for her. She maintained a warm friendship with him which endured throughout the sixties until he went to live in England and married Caroline Blackwood, and Olga Carlisle and her husband moved to Connecticut. She also became good friends with Elizabeth Hardwick, and she and her husband frequently stayed in the downstairs apartment of The Lowells' New York home in West 67th street. The last time she actually saw Lowell was in 1974 when he came to Boston with Caroline and their five-year-old son Sheridan.

Lowell, by way of Olga Carlisle, almost certainly must have gained a much closer encounter with Russian poetry and culture than he had previously experienced. Her Russian literary background provided a link with the world of Akhmatova, Pasternak and Mandelstam. She had grown up in a Russian émigré environment where poets and writers such as Marina Tsvetaeva and Alexei Remizov were regular visitors. At one point in their friendship Lowell met Carlisle's father, Vadim Andreyev, also a poet. At that time she

really felt a Russian-American poetic connection: 'It was very exciting because my father told Lowell about Mandelstam and Lowell showed some of his favourite Boston sights such as Beacon Hill.' Vadim Andreyev read some of his poetry to Lowell and she translated it. Thus through Olga Carlisle, Lowell established a connection with the pre-Soviet Russian poetic past.

Once they both started working on the Pasternak translations in Imitations Carlisle began to feel that Mandelstam would be the perfect poet for Lowell to translate, preferable to Pasternak: 'I don't think in that period he did more Pasternak. In a way his fascination with Pasternak seemed obsessive and it seemed to me that Mandelstam would be the perfect poet for Lowell to translate, more cerebral even than Pasternak and neoclassic'. The result of this was perhaps more effective than she planned for, as she puts it: 'There were all those years of regular involvement in the Russian poetry, and after the great turmoil of Pasternak there came the Mandelstam turmoil for Lowell. Lowell remained extremely involved with Mandelstam throughout our acquaintance'.

Another significant Lowell characteristic that she notes was his involvement not just with the poetry but with the whole predicament of the Russian poet. This concern was shown by his reaction to the Olga Ivinskaya trial which took place after Pasternak's death. In December 1960 this close friend of Pasternak, along with her daughter, was tried for alleged currency offences. It was felt in the West that they were being victimised for Pasternak's views. Lowell along with other poets campaigned on Ivinskaya's behalf. When he became closely interested in Mandelstam his interest similarly extended to his widow Nadezda Mandelstam. Carlisle cites this as an illustration of Lowell's good nature:

Lowell was always extraordinarily sympathetic and supportive in all those undertakings and he would lend me personally a great deal of support. So did my husband, but Lowell could always be called on to write Madame Mandelstam a letter if she needed attention or buy a book she wanted or find someone to take it to Russia--not that it happened often, but there was this kind of extended support to hand. And then when Yevtushenko and Voznesensky came to New York Lowell received them both very warmly.

She notes regarding these two later poets that he was more sympathetic to the poetry of Voznesensky. There are indications that he was closer to him than Yevtushenko, though even in the case of Voznesensky she felt it was more an illustration of Lowell's generosity than a very strong friendship. Lowell introduced Voznesensky's reading at the New York YMCA²⁶ on May 17th 1967 and went to lunch with Carlisle, Voznesensky and Yevtushenko. There are also a number of short letters from Voznesensky to Lowell in the Lowell Papers at Harvard.

These examples of Lowell's courtesy point to the need for caution in considering the nature and depth of Lowell's interest in Mandelstam's poetry at the beginning of the sixties. Olga Carlisle's account of Lowell's involvement with Russian poetry is biographically interesting in that it uncovers little known facts about Lowell, yet it is vital to distinguish a superficial interest from a profound one. For this reason the following should be borne in mind when considering Lowell's early encounter with Mandelstam's poetry.

Lowell became involved with Mandelstam's poetry after the appearance of his Imitations, the work which gave him wide recognition for his work with translation. For this reason he might have seen it as his public role to provide hospitality to visiting foreign poets. Olga Carlisle's

²⁶ Lowell's opening address is published as 'Andrei Voznesensky,' in Collected Prose, pp. 119-121.

comments on Lowell's courtesy to Voznesensky and Yevtushenko very much support this impression. His involvement in the Ivinskaya trial and his support of Nadezhda Mandelstam might also be seen to stem from a sense of responsibility rather than close involvement with a poet's work.

The fact that knowledge of Russian culture had been almost entirely closed off throughout the Stalinist period caused inevitable excitement when there was access in the sixties. The interest in all things Russian, therefore, became something of a fashion. Mandelstam, in particular, would have been attractive to writers seeking the obscure. Clarence Brown, for example, points to the appeal of Mandelstam's 'obscurity':

After so long an association with him it is not easy to say what first drew me to him. An equally long association with the processes of graduate education, and a wish to be honest, compel me to admit that his then obscurity, in every sense, had a seductive appeal...His fate was utterly mysterious, even the little that was known of his life was a web of surmise, for the most part, and his poetry, in the context of what I then knew of Russian poetry, seemed even more miraculously sui generis than it later proved in fact to be.²⁷

Lowell also confessed to the attraction such mystery has for translation, allowing the poet the novelty of 'doing a first'. Olga Carlisle makes the intriguing comment that Lowell was 'obsessive' about Pasternak. These two comments suggest that Lowell's strong interest, initially in Pasternak and later in Mandelstam, may have been part of the early sixties' euphoria for all things Russian.

However, if one places Lowell and Mandelstam side by side, it is also hard to imagine that Lowell would not have been attracted to Mandelstam's poetry. Olga Carlisle, in emphasising that it was the 'cerebral' quality of

²⁷ Mandelstam (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973), p. 7.

Mandelstam's poetry which she saw as appealing to Lowell, provides the ideal adjective to describe Lowell and Mandelstam's most distinctive common characteristic. Renato Poggioli's summary of Mandelstam's work gives what is, in my view, an excellent synopsis of what is typical of Mandelstam's best-known poetry:

Mandelstam seems to have chosen historic erudition and literary learning as a mainspring of his poetic work....Mandelstam's preoccupation with the classical and the Hellenic is not exclusive and as serious as Ivanov's [previously mentioned]: generally he prefers to project his philological and archaeological reconstruction into an ironic atmosphere, as if he would place them in the cold and abstract light of a museum. All his learned poems are conversation rather than period pieces, and yet they typically convey the static and abstract quality of Mandelstam's vision. Hence the significance of the title of the poet's first collection, Stone; hence his predilection, rare in Russian poetry, for composition and architecture, for the 'frozen music' of pure design. Thus even when minuscule in scope, Mandelstam's art is monumental in quality, and it tries to transform the historical and the temporary into the untimely and the timeless. The poet once affirmed, paradoxically, that the poetry of the Russian Revolution would be classical in temper, and he saluted its advent with a neo-Pindaric ode.²⁸

Although the objective permanence of Mandelstam's poetry, suggested by Poggioli's 'static', 'abstract', 'frozen music', is far removed from the subjectivity of much of Lowell's baring of the soul, 'I'm tired. Everyone's tired of my turmoil', both poets were initially inspired by intellectual subject matter which came from the wealth of their personal reading. Both were particularly drawn to the classical world: Lowell was both attracted and repelled by the violence of Roman history; while Mandelstam saw Hellenic civilisation as the birth of world culture as well as its height. Not surprisingly, the resulting poetry of both writers is difficult. Clarence Brown's description of

²⁸ Poets of Russia: 1890-1930 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 310-311.

the intellectual content of Mandelstam's prose could as easily define Lowell's poetry: 'One has the sense of reading a document written for a close circle of acquaintances, all of whom share an immense fund of cultural resource, available upon demand.'²⁹ Both Lowell and Mandelstam draw, without apology, on their own wide range of reading, thus expecting a great deal from their readers. When I asked Elizabeth Hardwick if Lowell had read certain books for example, she replied, 'yes, yes everything, everything!' Given the fact that Lowell and Mandelstam did have so much in common therefore, one would expect Lowell to be drawn to Mandelstam's work.

Lowell's comments on the attraction of foreign poetry, 'the feeling of discovery of what we lack', points to the broader focus of this study: the implications that foreign poetry has for Lowell's poetic language. In my opening I suggested the poet's task is to break beyond the limits of dualism, the boundaries of language and thought. This struggle with language was a perennial problem for Lowell. The clearest evidence of his struggle is seen in the dramatic changes of style throughout his career, from the formal stanzas of his early poetry, Land of Unlikeness (1944) and Lord Weary's Castle (1946), to the freer style of Life Studies (1959). By the time of Notebook (1970) the search for an appropriate method of expressing his experience becomes more urgent. Alan Williamson captures the nature of this quest for an appropriate language, and suggests where Notebook fits in:

All of Lowell's work since Life Studies might be seen as an attempt to find a center for his enormously complex and self-divided personality in the act of finding a totally adequate language...In Notebook--despite its unevenness, and despite its many moments of roughness, crudeness, banality--Lowell seems to me to come closer than ever before to achieving this central language...

²⁹ In his critical essay, 'The Prose of Mandelstam,' in The Prose of Osip Mandelstam, trans. Clarence Brown (Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 3-65 (pp. 27-28).

For this reason...Notebook seems to me Robert Lowell's happiest book.³⁰

The task of finding a 'totally adequate language' that is able to transcend the words into life is extremely complex, involving the problems of expressing human perception and memory.

Translation has a significant role to play in achieving this 'totally adequate language' as the following description of translation by Stanley Kunitz should illustrate. He sees a threefold relationship between translation, language and culture:

Poets are attracted to translation because it is a way of paying their debt to the tradition, of restoring life to shades, of widening the company of their peers. It is also a means of self-renewal, of entering the skin and adventuring through the body of another's imagination. In the act of translation one becomes more like that other, and is fortified by that other's power.³¹

Kunitz argues that translation offers a means of taking part in the continuity of the literary tradition and developing one's personal encounter with language. He thus shows how language, translation and cultural continuity interact. Also Kunitz, like Lowell, was concerned about how foreign poetry affects the poet's own work. However, before being able to consider the implications of Kunitz's comments on translation the word 'translation' itself needs to be defined.

Any discussion of translation will almost inevitably involve a debate over 'free' versus 'literal' translation. The

³⁰ Pity the Monsters: The Political Vision of Robert Lowell (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 215.

³¹ 'On Translating Akhmatova,' in A kind of Order, pp. 38-46 (p. 46).

following divisions which Dryden describes are perhaps especially appropriate to begin with since Lowell himself draws on Dryden's terminology in the introduction to his own book, Imitations:

All translation, I suppose, may be reduced to these three heads.

First, that of metaphrase, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another...The second way is that of paraphrase, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be, amplified, but not altered...The third way is that of imitation, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion: and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases.³²

Although Lowell adopts the term 'imitation', his own translations are not always as free as the term implies, but vary between Dryden's definitions of 'imitation' and 'paraphrase'. Nabokov's own translation veers towards Dryden's 'metaphrase' but, at times, approaches 'paraphrase'. Although translation appears in many guises, I will be using the term 'translation' to cover all these types, and shall mainly use the simple subdivision of 'free' versus 'literal'. 'Free' I take to range broadly between imitation and paraphrase while 'literal' moves between paraphrase and metaphrase.

There is also, I believe, a form of translation which goes one step beyond imitation--literary allusion: 'borrowings' of words, phrases or lines from the language of others. The poet, by moving beyond imitation to using only fragments of

³² 'Preface to Ovid's Epistles (1680),' in John Dryden: Selected Criticism, ed. J. Kinsley and G. Parfitt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 179-188 (p. 84).

the original work takes free translation to its limits. This is perhaps the most subtle means whereby the poet can become 'more like that other, and is fortified by that other's power.' My discussion of Lowell's encounter with Mandelstam translations will include an examination of how, in Notebook, Lowell absorbs Mandelstam's language into his own by way of literary allusion.

I do not intend to debate at length the merits of free versus literal translation, as, in my view, the inadequacies of literal translation are apparent. Fierce fidelity does little for the original, and can only act as a crib to those who already have some knowledge of the poem's language. Behind Nabokov's criticisms of free translators, as those who are like 'actors who have forgotten their speeches', is an implication that they should attempt to study the language, that they should encounter the Russian culture at first hand. Such a stance provides the strongest argument against literal translation. For to state that one may only have access to a culture by way of the original language means that cultures such as Russian, Greek or even Latin are available only to the few. C. H. Conely, discussing Renaissance translation, highlights the problem of such exclusion. He approves of translation as a means of enlightenment and fostering literacy, arguing that, during the Renaissance, while classics in the original were supposed to represent freedom of thought, they actually 'served to defeat liberal influences and fostered a reactionary social and literary aristocracy'³³. He also sees the accessibility of translation as a factor in the success of the Reformation, providing 'a direct appeal to the people in their own language' (ibid., p. 16). H. Lathrop in his study of translation³⁴ supports this view though with the

³³ The First Translators of the Classics (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1927), p. 2.

³⁴ Translation from the Classics into English from Caxton to Chapman 1477-1620 (1932; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1967).

caution that, free translation was often used for propaganda or censorship. He points out, for example, how Virgil and Ovid were cloaked to fit the moral expectations of their audience. Translation is a necessity if there is to be general access to culture, and such translation needs to be free of the limitations of fiercely literal restrictions if it is to benefit its audience. Although I see little to support the argument for literal translation, in chapter one I shall consider the validity of Nabokov's view versus Lowell's by comparing how Nabokov and Lowell attempt to translate one of Mandelstam's poems.

If literal translation is rejected then an acceptable alternative must be found. The view that the translator must develop a critical awareness of a poet's work before trying to translate it is the one I have found the most convincing. The translator must earn the right to interpret the poetry freely. This is what is implied in Steiner's description of good translation as 'criticism in the highest sense'. Alexander Pope provides very specific advice on how a critical sense should be developed by the translator, referring to translation of Homer:

What I would farther recommend to him, is to study his Author rather from his own Text than from any Commentaries, how learned soever, or whatever Figure they may make in the Estimation of the World. To consider him attentively in Comparison with Virgil above all the Ancients and with Milton above all the moderns.³⁵

and Hugh Kenner in his Introduction to The Translations of Pound: 'as the poet begins by seeing, so the translator by reading; but his reading must also be a kind of seeing.'³⁶

³⁵ 'From the Translation of Homer,' in Selected Prose, ed. Paul Hammond (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 89-128 (pp. 106-107).

³⁶ (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 10.

Yet who is to judge what is good criticism? The opposed viewpoints of George Steiner and Matthew Arnold illustrate the problem. Arnold insists that one must translate objectively without distorting the translation with subjectivity. Here he is referring to translation of Homer:

It may be said of that union of the translator with his original, which alone can produce a good translation, that it takes place when the mist which stands between them--the mist of alien modes of thinking, speaking, and feeling on the translator's part--'defecates' to a pure transparency,³⁷ [Coleridge] and disappears.

Steiner argues the impossibility of translating with such objectivity as Arnold describes. In Steiner's view every attempt to communicate or interpret language is an act of translation for 'All communication interprets between privacies.'³⁸ This includes interpretation between two individuals with the same mother tongue. Thus there can never be total objectivity when one translates the language of any individual or culture through time or space. One cannot step out of one's language any more than one can enter that of another. The most one can hope to achieve in translation is the following: 'Vital acts of speech are those which seek to make a fresh and 'private' content more publicly available without weakening the uniqueness, the felt edge of individual talent' (ibid., p. 205). I consider this view of Steiner's on translation to be the most satisfactory, and will base my judgment of the quality of Lowell's translation on his criteria. Thus I do not condemn subjectivity in the translation provided the poet reflects intelligent empathy with the work and thought of the poet.

³⁷ 'On Translating Homer,' in On the Classical Tradition, Vol. I of Complete Prose Works, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 97-216 (p. 103).

³⁸ After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (Oxford Univ. Press paperback, 1976), p. 198.

Thus, in chapter one I shall compare Lowell's critical awareness of both Mandelstam and Akhmatova's poetry in order to decide how appropriate a poet he is to translate their work.

Steiner's ideas also provide a suitable introduction to the relationship culture has with translation and language. Steiner argues that 'we possess civilization because we have learnt to translate out of time' (ibid., p. 31). He believes that the ability to translate intelligently the culture of the past allows it to become unified with the present, enabling a form of cultural synthesis. As he puts it, 'We re-enact, in the bounds of our own secondary but momentarily heightened, educated consciousness, the creation by the artist' (ibid., p. 26).

Two critics who further illuminate the relationship the culture of the past has with the poet in the present are T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold. Eliot argues that:

the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of ^{the temporal and of} the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.³⁹

Matthew Arnold sees cultural synthesis in this way:

The deliverance consists in man's comprehension of this present and past. It begins when our mind begins to enter into possession of the general ideas which are the law of this vast multitude of facts. It is perfect when

³⁹ 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920; rpt. London: Methuen University Paperbacks, 1960), pp. 47-59 (p. 49).

we have acquired that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us; when we have lost that impatient irritation of mind which we feel in the presence of an immense, moving, confused spectacle which, while it perpetually excites⁴⁰ our curiosity, perpetually baffles our comprehension.

For Lowell, the quest for an 'absolute language' and the way translation is implicated is inseparable from a need to incorporate his own experience of the literary tradition into his work, to achieve some form of cultural synthesis. He possessed Eliot's 'historical sense' and suffered from an inability to achieve a form of 'deliverance' such as Arnold describes.

In order to examine Lowell's specific encounter with Mandelstam's poetry and to explore how Mandelstam's poetry is implicated in Lowell's desire for an 'absolute language', I will discuss in chapter one Lowell's entitlement to translate Russian poetry, making reference to Nabokov's views on translation. In chapter two I will explore Lowell's early sixties' encounter with Mandelstam's poetry by examining the translations produced with Olga Carlisle. Chapter three outlines Lowell's sustained interest in Mandelstam's work throughout the sixties and the implications this interest has for his concerns in Notebook. Chapter four provides an examination of Lowell's treatment of language in Notebook and chapter five shows how the use of Mandelstam translations and poetics affects that language.

⁴⁰ 'On the Modern Element in Literature,' in On the Classical Tradition, pp. 18-37 (p. 20).

Chapter 1

Lowell as a Translator of Russian Verse

Before providing a survey of Lowell's interest in the life and work of Osip Mandelstam I wish to discuss how qualified Lowell is to translate Mandelstam's poetry⁴¹. This chapter tests out the two opposed arguments for translation set forth in my introduction: are non Russian speakers like 'actors who have forgotten their speeches' when they attempt to translate Russian, as Nabokov argues, or can they produce a valid translation, provided they acquire the appropriate critical awareness of the poetry to be translated. Lowell's own view that translation should be left to poets, will also be discussed. He argues that, 'Innumerable people for some reason want to be poets, and the only way they can be poets is by doing Virgil or Pasternak into English verse, and it's very bad, very dull poetry' (Carne-Ross, p. 172). This discussion will be limited to Lowell's translations of the following two poems by Mandelstam, 'Lines to the Unknown Soldier'⁴² and the poem best known as 'The Wolf'⁴³, along with a poem by Akhmatova, 'Requiem'⁴⁴.

⁴¹ All reference to Mandelstam poems in Russian will be from Stikhotvoreniia (Poetry), Vol. I of Osip Mandelstam: Sobranie Sochinenii (Collected Works), ed. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filipoff, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Inter-language Literary Associates, 1967), subsequently cited as M.I. It should be noted that Mandelstam rarely gave a title to his poems, they will therefore be identified by number.

⁴² No. 362, M.I, pp. 244-245, Poets, pp. 157-163.

⁴³ No. 227, M.I, p. 162, Poets, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁴ Stikhotvoreniia i Poemy (Poetry and Longer Verse), Vol. I of Anna Akhmatova: Sochineniia (Works), 2nd rev. ed. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura (Artistic Literature), 1990), pp. 188-194, Poets, pp. 59-73. All reference to Akhmatova's poetry in Russian will be from the above volume, subsequently identified as A.I. Her poems will also be identified by number.

These translations have been selected for very specific purposes. A comparison of Lowell's version of sections of 'Unknown Soldier' with other translations of the poem, should show whether Lowell's lack of Russian places his translation at a disadvantage; a comparison between Nabokov's translation of 'The Wolf'⁴⁵ and Lowell's, should provide discussion on their opposed views of translation and, finally, Lowell's translation of Akhmatova's 'Requiem' will act as a useful contrast with Lowell's translations of Mandelstam's poetry. I hope, thus, to be able to judge whether Lowell is qualified to translate Mandelstam's verse.

This survey of the available translations of Mandelstam's 'Unknown Soldier' is not comprehensive, but reference has been made to all the major collections of Mandelstam's translations in print. Mandelstam is a difficult poet and the fact that relatively few poets or linguists have translated his verse has, in my view, allowed some inadequate versions to get into print. Although, in general, Lowell may be unfair to suggest that linguists should be excluded from translating poetry, available versions of 'Unknown Soldier' do help support his view. Mandelstam translations to be included in this discussion are those of Bernard Meares⁴⁶, Burton Raffel and Alla Burago⁴⁷, James Greene⁴⁸ and David McDuff⁴⁹. Because this

⁴⁵ in 'On Adaptation,' New York Review of Books, 4 Dec 1969, pp. 50-51, (p. 50).

⁴⁶ Osip Mandelstam: Fifty Poems (New York: Persea Books, 1977), pp. 91-95.

⁴⁷ Mandelstam: the Complete Poetry (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1973), pp. 272-276.

⁴⁸ Poems Chosen and Translated by James Greene, (London: Paul Elek, 1977), pp. 78-79. It should be noted that Greene is also a published poet.

comparison refers to so many translations of the poem it is limited to verses one and two.

Some of the translators have had their translations endorsed by way of introductory comments from others. James Greene has the prestigious support of Donald Davie and Nadezhda Mandelstam. Although when Lowell's translations appeared Madame Mandelstam was very supportive of them, she later describes James Greene's translations as superior, implying criticism of Lowell's freedom with her husband's verse: 'Mr Robert Lowell's translations of Mandelstam are very free; Mr Paul Celan's into German also free. Both are a very far cry from the original text. As far as I know the translations of Mr Greene are some of the best I ever saw.'⁵⁰ Donald Davie is equally flattering: '...as never before there is no line of the Russian poems that is not made poetry in English. Previous British versions have been wooden; this one rings--it is bronze, properly Roman bronze.'⁵¹ Bernard Meares' selection is endorsed by an introduction by Joseph Brodsky. The comparison between Lowell's version of 'Unknown Soldier' and those of the other translators should provide evidence as to whether such judgements are valid.

Mandelstam's 'Unknown Soldier' is difficult to translate largely because of its reliance on free association. The subject of the poem, the horror and futility of war, not novel in itself, is here given original treatment. Mandelstam keeps us aware of the enjoyment he gains from the world around him and at the same time shows how warfare prevents such simple pleasure. The unknown soldier of the poem is shown both in his role of symbolic anonymity, and as

⁴⁹ Osip Mandelstam: Selected poems (Cambridge: Rivers Press, 1973), pp. 151-159.

⁵⁰ 'Foreword by Nadezhda Mandelstam,' in Poems Chosen and Translated by James Greene, p. 8.

⁵¹ Foreword to Poems Chosen and Translated by James Greene, p. 11.

an individual granted all the powers of intellect and perception. By the end of the poem we are more acutely aware of the outrage of war because more fully conscious of the highest qualities of the individual: we see war reduces not just life to nothing, but life experienced by thinking individuals using their senses to the full.

Consider first of all my literal version of verse one which immediately establishes a First World War setting:

Let this air be a witness,
with its long range heart,
and in the dugouts, omnivorous and energetic,
is the ocean, matter without a window.

How informed these stars are:
they have to look at everything--why?
to the censure of the judge and the witness,
into the ocean, matter without a window.

Rain, the unfriendly sower, remembers
with its nameless manna,
how ^{a forest of} little crosses aimed at
the ocean or the battle area.

People will become cold and sickly;
they will kill, grow cold and starve,
and in his famous grave
the unknown soldier will be laid.

Teach me sickly swallow
who has forgotten how to fly,
how to cope with this airy grave
without a rudder or wing.

And for Michael Lermontov
I will give a strict account
of how the grave teaches the hunchback
and the airy pit attracts.

Air is the omnipresent observer of wars suggested by 'long range' but it is also the choking impenetrable air of the poem's oppressive battle field setting, 'the ocean, matter without a window.' The injustice of war is reinforced by the poet's demand that the elements: air, stars and rain act as infallible witnesses to the crime. The poet can do

little, but can at least record such injustice. In stanza three Mandelstam magnifies the rain image so that it is transformed into a rain of crosses. Such magnification intensifies our impression of the poet as seer and helps to increase our awareness of the value of human perception. Here, as elsewhere in the poem, horrific scenes of war are juxtaposed with the beauty of nature. The 'little crosses' are not only raindrops but are also both war graves and a rain of bullets into the trenches. The last two stanzas show how, for Mandelstam, life and poetry are inseparable: the inability to enjoy one's perception of the natural world is synonymous with a failure in poetic perception. The swallow of stanza five is one of Mandelstam's frequently used images, and it often represents the poetic word. For me, the swallow in this stanza associates with the role of the poet when external forces interfere with the freedom to write. Mandelstam put his swallow to similar use in a poem of 1918, 'The Twilight of Freedom'. Seeing the outcome the Revolution was to have for poetry, he sets his swallows an impossible task:

Brothers let us glorify the twilight of freedom,
the great crepuscular year, this heavy forest
lowered like snares in the seething water---
raised from darkness, O sun---judge and people.
And praise the people's leader, tearfully
assuming the sombre unbearable burden of power---
we've bound the swallows into battle legions
and now we cannot see the sun. Yet nature
is stirring and twittering--through the snares, the sun
unrisen, and the earth is afloat. Well, we'll try:
a vast, clumsy, creaking turn of the helm.
The earth's afloat. Take heart, men. We furrow the
ocean
with a plough, and shall remember even when buried--
for us the earth has been worth a dozen heavens.⁵²

⁵² No. 103, M.I, p. 72, Notebook: Unpublished Drafts, TS. 2737, Lowell Papers. This is a translation by Lowell making use of the prose translation in The Penguin Book of Russian Verse, ed. and trans. Dimitri Obolensky (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 355-356.

Here the swallow, against overwhelming odds, is engaged in the Herculean task of helping Mandelstam's precious earth to survive. And in 'Unknown Soldier' the swallow is once more required to assist in survival. Mandelstam sees poetry as almost ineffectual but still defiantly insists on utterance as the only means of release from external circumstances. Lermontov, like Pushkin, ranks high in Mandelstam's list of predecessors, so in his concluding stanza Mandelstam expresses the wish to write his poem in loyalty to such a poetic intellect of the past.

Lowell illustrates a more thoughtful approach to the language and ideas of 'Unknown Soldier' than the other translators. This is shown in his treatment of the poem's free association and in the choice of vocabulary. A poem with no clear narrative may cohere in the original language by way of rhythm and sound, but in translation can become meaningless. Carelessly chosen vocabulary can even make the translation sound contrived or unnatural. One way to avoid such traps is by making sure the translation reads, at least, as good prose. Lowell's comments to Carne-Ross along with the prose clarity of his translation suggests to me that he may have used the qualities of prose as his guide:

There could be a law, although I don't really believe in it, that almost nobody would be allowed to do a verse translation of poetry. He'd have to do an accurate prose trot. And these trots are usually better poetry than the professor's or even the minor poet's poetic translation of a masterpiece.

(Carne-Ross, p. 172).

Lowell's opening stanza reads as clear natural prose which helps to hold it together. Note the absence of prose clarity in the other versions. Raffel's and McDuff's read like a series of notes not yet put into a coherent whole, and although Meares and Greene have attempted to move beyond a list, the clumsiness of their language fails to reach Lowell's standards of good prose:

Let this air here be a witness
to his distant, pounding heart
out in the trenches--all-seeing, hungry air:
ocean without a window, matter.

(Lowell)

Let this air be called as a witness:
The long-range heart that it has,
And in dugouts, omnivorous and active
Is the ocean, windowless stuff.

(Meares)

Let this air be a witness:
his far away beating heart,
even in dugouts all-poisonous, active,
is an ocean, a substance without a window.

(McDuff)

Let this air witness--
his long-range heart--
omnivorous, energetic in mud-huts--
ocean, substance with no window.

(Raffel and Burago)

Let this air be a witness--
His long-range omnivorous heart--
All-poisoning even in the action of the dug-out--
Is water, is windowless substance

(Greene)

Lowell gives the stanza cohesion by establishing a connection between 'air' and 'ocean', achieved by mentioning 'air' again in his third line: 'out in the trenches--all-seeing, hungry air:'. This is a freedom which, along with the colon at the end of the line, provides a simple but effective way of showing that the air and the ocean are one. Greene is the only other translator who suggests a definite connection between the 'air' and 'ocean' (oddly translated as 'water'). This connection is made through the syntax, with the following logic: the air's heart which is poisonous in the dugout is also water. However, this logic is then

spoiled by his long-winded third line: 'All-poisoning even in the action of the dug-out--'. Although Meares' stanza is also more than a list it fails for a number of reasons: the self-consciously poetic 'the long range heart that it has' is clumsy and inappropriate for contemporary English verse; the colon serves no purpose; and the first comma is used incorrectly as the 'And' which follows begins a new sentence.

Lowell also shows the poet's skill at selecting the most appropriate vocabulary. It must be noted that he, along with McDuff, does begin with an error in translation. Both mistranslate 'dal'nobóinoe' (long-range), mistakenly thinking that 'dal'nó' (distant) and 'bóinoe' (beating) together mean 'distant beating'. Thus Lowell has 'distant pounding heart' and McDuff has 'far away beating heart'. But this error aside, Lowell's sensitivity to language stands out from the other translators. Most of the others retain the dictionary definition of 'væíadnyi' (omnivorous) but Lowell selects the simpler 'hungry', a touch which helps the translation sound more natural. Lowell's choice of 'trenches' is also more appropriate for the World War One setting, than 'dug-out' or far worse, Raffel's ludicrous description of the ocean 'energetic in mud-huts'. I see little purpose in Greene's decision to substitute 'water' for the literal 'ocean' with its claustrophobic, all-consuming impact and Meares' translation of 'veshchestvó' as 'stuff' seems particularly ill chosen. 'Matter' or 'substance' would have suited the subject matter of the stanza--the earth's elements--and would have achieved the correct tone of solemnity. The unsuitability of 'stuff' is highlighted further by its placing at the end of the last line, giving the stanza an unintentionally humorous anticlimactic tone.

Lowell's principle of good prose is seen again in stanza two:

These stars--how inquisitive
their look at all times--but why inquire
into the downfall of the judge and witness,
into an ocean without a window, matter?

(Lowell)

How denunciatory these stars are, for all that:
They need to see all (but what for?)
In condemning the judge and the witness
To the ocean, windowless stuff.

(Meares)

How denunciatory are these stars:
they need to see everything--why?
To convict the judge and the witness,
into the ocean, the substance without a window.

(McDuff)

Are these stars informers?
They stare down all the time--why?--
into the judge's sentence, the witness' sentence,
into the ocean, substance with no window.

(Raffel and Burago)

The stars are the informers of the sky:
They need to see everything--why?--
To condemn the judge and the witness,
Into the water, the windowless substance

(Greene)

All the other versions stick rigidly to the order and ending of Mandelstam's lines and they all adhere closely to a literal version of line two 'they need to look at everything--why?'. In all cases this produces a rather disconnected line. Meares introduces an inexplicable bracketing with 'They need to see all (but what for?)'. McDuff and Greene opt for 'They need to see everything--why?' and Raffel uses the even more blunt and disjointed 'They stare down all the time--why?'. The simple difference in Lowell's version is achieved by the use of good prose which automatically produces run on lines. There is an apparent effortless in such a simple alternative as 'but why inquire'. This change means that 'but why inquire' can

then proceed naturally to the unifying repeated 'into'. Thus all the problems present in a literal translation have been avoided.

Stanza three shows Lowell taking serious liberties with the original:

The heavy-booted sower aches in his joints
from the rain, the nameless manna,
the forest of crosses dotting
the ocean like a suicide battalion.

(Lowell)

The rain recalls, like an unwelcoming farmer,
And the anonymous manna it sows,
The forests of crosses branding
The ocean or formation of soldiers.

(Meares)

The rain, unfriendly sower, remembers
his nameless manna,
how the wooden crosses marked
an ocean or a battlefield.

(Mcduff)

The rain remembers, cheerless sower,
anonymous manna,
how wooded crosses aimed at
the ocean, or at battlefields.

(Raffel and Burago)

Rain, a sullen sower,
And his nameless manna;
A wood of crosses to remember
Ocean and battle-field

(Greene)

The literal meaning of the first two lines can be either 'the unfriendly sower remembers the rain' or 'rain, the unfriendly sower remembers'. Lowell's free interpretation derives from the first meaning. All the other versions have opted for the alternative, which does, at first, seem more likely, with rain as the unfriendly sower. Ultimately the

difference is slight for if rain is the sower then it is the sower of itself, the rain, which is also the rain of battle destruction. In the original poem the sower is portrayed as a Godlike being able to cause havoc on the earth, an impression reinforced in Lowell's free interpretation. His free phrase, 'aching in his joints', embroiders the image so that the reader can readily visualise and empathise with the sower. Another effective freedom is 'suicide battalion' which reinforces the theme of futile death with which the stanza is concerned, and keeps in mind the First World War context. This change helps to avoid the problems of the last line which, taken literally, is very clumsy: 'ocean or battle area'.

Again the other versions fail to make Mandelstam's rather disparate ideas hang together, or avoid a list-like result. There are some odd interpretations of 'Métili' which can be translated as 'marked' or 'aimed at'. Because 'rain, the sower' does the action, 'aimed at' seems more appropriate. Raffel's 'how wooded crosses aimed at the ocean' absurdly suggests the crosses aimed something at the ocean. Meares' stanza is particularly clumsy. The 'it' in the second line, 'The rain recalls, like an unwelcoming farmer, / And the anonymous manna it sows', most closely connects with the sower, and would therefore be better translated as 'he'. The literal translation of 'klin boevói' in the last line is 'battle area'. Meares has interpreted this freely as 'formation of soldiers', resulting in the inexplicable juxtaposition of 'ocean' and 'formation of soldiers'. Finally, Greene's stanza detracts from the image of the sower planting destruction by changing the 'rain of crosses' to 'A wood of crosses'.

In the fourth stanza Lowell continues to show greater skill than the other translators, making skilful use of assonance and alliteration:

The thin, cold people will kill,
or they will starve, or they will freeze to the wires.
The unknown soldier expatiates on his rest
in the unknown graves.

(Lowell)

Sickly cold folk shall keep existing,
Keep killing, keep chilling, keep starving,
While under his illustrious tombstone
the unknown soldier is laid.

(Meares)

Men will grow cold and sick,
will kill, be cold and hungry,
and in his notorious grave
the unknown soldier is laid.

(McDuff)

Cold, sick people will
kill, will endure, will
starve, and an unknown soldier
lies in his famous grave.

(Raffel and Burago)

Men will freeze and hunger,
Will kill, sicken and starve,
And in his well-known grave
Unknown will be laid the soldier

(Greene)

Lowell achieves cohesion through the assonance of 'thin' 'will' and 'kill', the alliteration of 'will' and 'wire', and the repetition of 'or they will'. The short 'i' vowel and the hard 'k' and 'c' both reinforce the cold of the poem, further intensified by the very emotive free phrase, 'freeze to the wires'. There is also an effective change of mood achieved as the pattern of sounds shifts in the last two lines with the soft 's' sound of 'expiation' and 'rest' coupled with the long vowel sounds of 'unknown graves'. These vowel sounds also slow down the pace of the final line helping it to conclude the stanza emphatically. Lowell utilises the sounds and rhythm of English in a way comparable with Mandelstam in the Russian. Mandelstam

emphasises the freezing cold setting with the harsh 'kh' sound of 'kholódnye' (cold) and 'khílye' (thin) of the first line. He then softens the sounds in the last two lines, 'i v svoéi znamenítoi mogíle/neizvéstnyi polózhen soldát.' The metre of the second line in the Russian is very pronounced, 'ubivát', kholodát', golodát''. Though Lowell hasn't reproduced the metre he has made the rhythm stand out.

The other versions also make some attempts at emphasising the rhythm of the poem, but with appalling results. Meares again manages to choose the most inappropriate word for any context: 'Sickly cold folk' is language more appropriate to Enid Blyton and it certainly does not draw the desired response from the reader. His attempt at rhyme fails; the internal rhyme, 'keep killing, keep chilling', is particularly ineffective. Greene's attempt to make the rhythm stand out works better however, with, 'Men will freeze and hunger,/Will kill, sicken and starve'.

The other characteristic of Lowell's stanza, which separates it from the rest, is the way he presents the unknown soldier. By changing 'grave' to the plural 'unknown graves' the soldier's representative role is emphasised. The choice of vocabulary in the other versions obscures the soldier's role. McDuff describes the grave as 'notorious' which has mild suggestions of infamy. Meares uses the verbose 'while under his illustrious tombstone', and Raffel's decision to change to the indefinite article with, 'and an unknown soldier/lies in his famous grave' removes the soldier's universality. Greene, inexplicably decides that he wishes to rhyme this stanza although he has felt no need to do so in the other five. To this purpose he puts in an awkward inversion of noun and verb which I find inappropriate for contemporary English verse, 'Unknown will be laid the soldier'.

Stanza five was particularly difficult to translate which led to some rather ineffective results:

Oh thin little swallow who has all
but forgotten how to fly, teach me
how to handle this airy grave,
without wings, without a rudder.

(Lowell)

Teach me, puny sick swallow,
Now you've forgotten how to fly
How I can, rudderless, wingless,
Cope with that tomb in the sky?

(Meares)

Teach me, sickly swallow
that has forgotten how to fly,
how shall I master this airy grave
without rudder or a wing?

(McDuff)

Puny swallow, teach me,
oh you have forgotten flight,
teach me to control this aerial grave
with no rudder, no wing.

(Raffel and Burago)

Teach me unwell swallow, now you've unlearnt to fly:
No wind, no rudder,
To master
This ground-less airy grave

(Greene)

The presence of a Russian past participle provides problems for translation in the stanza. The participle is used in Russian with great versatility. A literal translation of the past participle, 'razúchivshaiasia', would produce the underlined, 'the having forgotten how to fly swallow'. Similarly, in the Mandelstam poem 'Tristia' the ^{adjective} 'prostovolósyi' would result in, 'wearing no hat night'. It is usually necessary in English to convert such participles ^{or adjectives} into clauses. Lowell's neat enjambment of 'swallow who has all/but forgotten how to fly' avoids the

long-windedness of some of the other attempts. McDuff and Meares get round the problem quite well, unlike Greene and Raffel. Greene uses the clumsy 'now you've unlearnt to fly', while Raffel's grandiloquent 'Oh you have forgotten flight' is like a parody of poetry. Greene and Meares have also further problems with the stanza. Greene seems to have put little effort into providing a coherent structure to his stanza. The clumsy opening line, 'Teach me unwell swallow, now you've unlearnt to fly:' is glaringly at odds with the brief third line, 'to master'. Meares' interpretation is painfully clichéd with echoes of the stock phrase 'the great pasture in the sky': 'How I can, rudderless, wingless,/Cope with that tomb in the sky?'

The final stanza of this verse introduces the writer Mikhail Lermontov. Lowell takes liberties with the original in order to provide clarity. As Lermontov is not that well-known in the West few of Lowell's readers would have known that Lermontov was killed in a duel. Such information is useful for it helps to reinforce the theme of futile death with which the poem is concerned. Lowell does not refer overtly to the duel but does suggest Lermontov experienced a violent end. Note that this stanza was not translated by Greene:

Ah, Michael Lermontov killed for sport!
I'll give you a strict accounting,
tell how huddled flesh is broken by the grave,
by an ocean without a window, matter.

(Lowell)

And for the poet, Mikhail Lermontov,
I'll provide you the strictest account
Of how the grave trains the round-shouldered
And the air pocket sucks us all down.

(Meares)

And for Lermontov, Mikhail,
I will give you strictly to understand
how the grave instructs the hunchback
and the airy chasm attracts.

(McDuff)

And I'll give you a strict report, on behalf of
Lermontov, Mikhail,
the way the grave straightens
a hunchback, the way the aerial pit pulls you in.

(Raffel and Burago)

Lowell's 'Huddled flesh is broken by the grave' is freer than the other versions, but conveys a sense of the grave's power to impose itself on the body. His final line, 'by an ocean without a window, matter', is a near repetition of stanza one's last line rather than a literal translation. As a result, the grave of the final stanza is associated with the trench of the first. Though something is lost in the removal of the literal line, the verse's cohesion and free association is enhanced. Throughout this first verse Lowell has consistently tried to unify and interpret the poem, concentrating on the thought as well as the words.

The second verse which I intend to use for comparison needs care in translation because of its complexity and its heavy dependence on onomatopoeic effect in Russian. The whole verse consists of a single stanza. Below is my literal version:

These worlds threaten us
like grapes(vines) rustling.
They hang like stolen cities,
golden slips of the tongue, slanders--
like berries of poisonous cold--
tensile constellations of tents--
golden constellations of oil.

According to Jennifer Baines, these lines were inspired by Mandelstam's first hand experience, in 1919, of shells flying through the air, 'the flying gas-shells appear as constellations loaded with promise of destruction.'⁵³

⁵³ Mandelstam: The Later Poetry (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 214.



It is a difficult stanza, and provides one of the many instances of Mandelstam magnifying his perceptions. The flying missiles are perceived as images which range from small to immense. They are compared to the stars of the heavens, the reference to 'tents' suggesting a great Milky Way of stars. They are also seen as 'cities', 'berries', 'grapes' and 'oil'. One notes in particular the way the 'grapes' image can be seen as a magnification of drops of oil. All in all, we are left with a series of highly unusual associations. By undermining these images with vocabulary which places a negative emphasis, such as 'golden slips of the tongue, slanders--' and 'berries of poisonous cold', Mandelstam points to the contradiction between the aesthetically beautiful sight and what it portends. The motif of light initiated in the opening verse is also developed; it is the light both of human perception and battle destruction. Thus, by way of free association, Mandelstam continues both the war theme and the idea of the human intellect as valuable. All these subtle connections are given cohesion in the original by way of rhythm and sound patterns, causing problems for would-be translators.

Lowell's translation of this verse stands apart from all the other attempts. He provides the poem with a new structure to replace that which has been lost in translation. One might argue that Lowell begins to move here into 'imitation', further away from Mandelstam than is necessary in order to find this new structure. It is certainly true that Lowell uses the verse as a foundation for creating something new, producing something which compares favourably with the other versions:

These worlds go on proscribing us,
as they rustle through their frost-killed vineyards,
as they hover like a mirage of golden, stolen Meccas,
taletelling children,
wet, poisonous berries,
crashing pavilions of stars--
like the golden fat of the stars.

(Lowell)

Like shivering clusters of grapes
These worlds are a threat to us here,
And the golden constellations of stars,
Fatty tent-tops of constellations reaching out,
Hang overhead like kidnapped cities,
Like gold slips of the tongue, slanders of gold,
Like berries of poisonous cold.

(Meares)

These worlds threaten us
like rustling grapes,
and they hang like stolen cities,
golden slips of the tongue, slanders--
like berries of poisonous cold--
tents of tensile constellations,
the constellations' golden oils.

(Mcduff)

These worlds threaten us
like moving grapes,
hang like stolen cities,
like golden tongue-slips, like slander--
berries of poisonous cold--
tents of extendible constellations--
golden oil of constellations.

(Raffel and Burago)

These worlds threaten us
Like rustling grapes,
They hang like stolen cities,
Like golden stars, slurs,
Slips of the tongue, slanders

(Greene)

Lowell's 'frost-killed vineyards', 'hover like a mirage of golden stolen meccas', and 'tale-telling children' are all free lines but, in my view, they are justified because they reinforce the tone and message of the original. The same cannot be said of the other versions.

In Russian the first line depends on the onomatopoeic effect of 'sheveliashchimis¹ia' to describe rustling foliage. The sound also suggests, to me, that the movement of foliage indicates someone spying. This is why 'vines' is a more appropriate choice than 'grapes', both of which are

linguistically correct. Raffel's line, 'these worlds threaten us like moving grapes', is a nonsense, conjuring up an image of grapes moving in a row. He continues with the phrase 'golden tongue-slips' which is neither good poetry nor good English. His version has nothing to unify it and reads like little more than a list. His odd translation of 'rastiazhímykh' as 'extendible' rather than 'tensile' is inexplicable and spoils the flickering effect of Mandelstam's original. His last lines read particularly inappropriately with the shift from the plural references of 'berries' and 'tents' to the singular 'golden oil'. McDuff's version keeps the translation of 'grapes' rather than 'vines', but otherwise provides a simple literal translation. This leaves us however with an uninspired list of images which translates nothing of the original's power. Meares tries to do more than provide a literal translation but with disastrous results. He recaptures something of the onomatopoeic effect of Mandelstam's opening line in his use of 'shivering clusters of grapes', but in the process makes the 'grapes' image less aggressive by suggesting that it is they who are threatened. He also produces the clumsy and meaningless 'fatty tent-tops of constellations reaching out'. The word 'fat' needs special care because of its possible meanings in English. Meares, in using 'fatty', has made the worst possible choice, suggesting both solidified fat and the fatty part of the meat. He has added the free phrase 'reaching out' but for no clear purpose. On a positive note, his rearrangement of the lines of the original does give the verse a more effective structure than Raffel or McDuff, but his inappropriate choices in language mar the positive effect that such a structure might have.

Lowell's structure, on the other hand, draws the disparate images together making them build up gradually to a final great crescendo. The verse is united by its own momentum. In the course of this build up Lowell brings both pattern and variety to the verse. The following lines group

together because they are both long lines and because of their repetition of 'as they' plus verb:

as they rustle through their frost-killed vineyards,
as they hover like a mirage of golden, stolen Meccas,

They are further united through the assonance of 'golden' and 'stolen' and the dominance of long vowel sounds throughout the two lines. Lowell then varies the verse with:

taletelling children,
wet, poisonous berries,

two lines which provide a contrast with the switch to the short, emphatic vowel sounds: 'tell', 'chi', 'wet' and 'ber'. Lowell thus retains Mandelstam's list but avoids the monotony of the other translations. The list is further varied and developed in the final two lines:

crashing pavilions of stars--
like the golden fat of the stars--

The use of 'crashing' contributes to the suggestion of a musical crescendo with the repetition of the monosyllabic 'stars' emphatically drawing the verse to its conclusion. The effect of this final crescendo is to show the awe that such a horrific vision of light inspires at the same time as its beauty is reinforced. Note here also how Lowell uses 'fat' more effectively than Meares, appropriately suggesting the glistening oily effect that Mandelstam conveys in the original. Its careful placing also contributes to the strong beat of the last line, helping to bring the verse to an emphatic conclusion, 'like the golden fat of the stars'. Lowell's freedom with the verse is a means whereby he makes

up for what is lost in the original. The lines 'frost-killed vineyards', 'golden stolen Meccas' give depth to the poem without obscuring Mandelstam's imagery. The phrase, 'golden stolen meccas', for example, develops the mystery, beauty and wonder of the 'worlds' and thus reinforces the sense of awe of the original poem. Although it is difficult to translate sound effects, Lowell achieves this in 'as they rustle through the frost-killed vineyards' which recreates both the threat and onomatopoeic effect of Mandelstam's original lines. This version shows Lowell providing the reader with poetry by making the language new.

Olga Carlisle's view that Mandelstam as a 'cerebral' poet would be attractive to Lowell is well illustrated in his treatment of 'Unknown Soldier'. The intelligence which he brings to the endeavour is only further highlighted by much that is substandard in the other attempts at this difficult poem. Throughout, Lowell shows himself involved with Mandelstam's life, poetry and culture. Of the others who attempt^{it}, McDuff and Greene often cope quite well with the poem, but Meares and Raffel are almost consistently bad. Lowell's treatment of this poem provides evidence to support the view that a poet is better fitted to translate poetry than a linguist, for he shows an involvement with language not present in the other versions. Of course, James Greene has also published his own poetry, but I found little in his translation to suggest poetic skills comparable to Lowell's. Lowell provides prose clarity in his free verse, explains obscurer parts of the poem, keeps his language natural--avoiding the use of 'dictionary' language--, provides the poem with cohesion and structure, shows empathy with Mandelstam which enables him to make the imagery vivid, and finally, and most importantly, possesses critical understanding of Mandelstam's poetry; thus he achieves translation in the way Steiner perceived it.

Nabokov, in his article 'On Adaptation', provides a detailed dissection of Lowell's version of the Mandelstam poem 'The

Wolf' and gives his own translation of the same poem as a preferable alternative. Consider, first of all, Nabokov's version:

For the sake of the resonant valor of ages to come,
for the sake of a high race of men,
I forfeited a bowl at my fathers' feast,
and merriment, and my honor.

On my shoulders there pounces the wolfhound age,
but no wolf by blood am I;
better, like a fur cap thrust, me into the sleeve
of the warmly fur-coated Siberian steppes,

--so that I may not see the coward, the bit of soft muck,
the bloody bones on the wheel,
so that all night the blue-fox furs may blaze
for me in their pristine beauty.

Lead me into the night where the Enisey flows,
and the pine reaches up to the star,
because, no wolf by blood am I,
and injustice has twisted my mouth.

Jennifer Baines calls 'Wolf', 'a magnificent affirmation of principle and human dignity under threat of annihilation by the forces of evil' (The Later Poetry, p. 21). Nadezda Mandelstam provides further information and points out that the poem is part of a cycle:

In the 'Wolf' Cycle M. dwelt on his fear of succumbing to falsehood ('my mouth is twisted by lies'), the need to preserve his own voice ('Save my speech forever'), and there are echoes of the idea that so haunted him in Cherdyn: that he might be executed with an axe as in Peter's time.⁵⁴

Following these comments she explains that for Mandelstam the fur coat was a recurring image with multiple significance. It could indicate a cosy stable existence

⁵⁴ Hope Against Hope: A Memoir, trans. Max Hayward (1970; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 231.

including social status, but also preparation for exile in the cold.

For me, the overcoat image is central to the poem's meaning, showing what is both honourable and dishonourable in human action. The only coat that is adequate is that of exile. Mandelstam connects the setting of exile with the fur coat of the Siberian Steppes. One should note that Nabokov's 'the warmly fur-coated Siberian Steppes' is not the literal translation. Word for the word the translation is 'the warm fur coat of the Siberian Steppes', which means the fur coat could be that which is worn in the area or an image of the landscape in the way Nabokov describes. The alternative overcoat is that of the wolf age of compromise and conformity. The image of the twisted mouth is used to describe what Mandelstam perceives as his dishonest present.

Consider, first of all, Nabokov's attitude to his own version as described in his article 'On Adaptation' and what that reflects of his view of translation:

I am well aware that my laborious literal reproduction of one of the masterpieces of Russian poetry is prevented by the rigor of fierce fidelity from parading as a good English poem; but I am also aware that it is true translation, albeit stiff and rhymeless, and that the adaptor's good poem is nothing but a farrago of error and improvisation defacing the even better poem it faces in the anthology.

What does Nabokov really want to argue? He accepts that his 'true translation' is almost worthless because of the inadequacies he mentions and that Lowell's adaptation is at least a 'good poem' which, taken logically, makes Lowell's poem superior to Nabokov's translation. Since he condemns the freedoms of Lowell's 'good poem' but is no more positive about his own 'stiff and rhymeless' translation, perhaps he is suggesting only the original poem has any true worth. Yet if there are certain inconsistencies in Nabokov's

argument regarding translation, an examination of his literal translation shows even more contradictions. Although he argues the need for 'fierce fidelity' he does not always adhere to his own rules.

He is fairly faithful to word and line order. This is evident in the clumsiness of much of the phrasing. Thus we have, 'on my shoulders there pounces the wolfhound age' instead of the more natural, 'the wolfhound age pounces on my shoulders'. There are a few occasions when he has altered word order, where the text would be otherwise meaningless. Word for word translation of line seven, for example, would be 'stuff me better, like a cap into the sleeve'. The fact that Nabokov is capable of immaculate prose, suggests that he could transform his literal version into more natural prose if he so desired. It is as if he is deliberately keeping it clumsy as a matter of principal, rather than as a means of benefiting the reader or Mandelstam. There is little point in such rigidity even for those who adhere to literal translation. In my view, shifts in word order can clarify without removing the literal meaning of the original. Nabokov also keeps the punctuation, for the most part, as in the original which leads to the clumsy, rambling sentence which makes up the second and third stanzas. Again tighter sentence structure could only clarify the literal meaning of the original.

What is more intriguing, however, is Nabokov's selective choice of vocabulary, for it is here that he most clearly defeats his own argument. Throughout his article, although he accepts there are certain 'details in the text' which may be 'ambiguous', he generally suggests there is a single solution which produces the literal translation. In his discussion he focuses on vocabulary rather than syntax. The tone of his article is that he, the Russian, has the key to Russian vocabulary. He ignores the fact that a variety of supposedly literal translations may still vary tremendously in choice of vocabulary, a fact which is illustrated in

Nabokov's own choice of words. In line one, for example, Nabokov translates 'gremúchuiu' as 'resonant', arguing that it is a development on a Russian stock phrase 'gremíashchaia sláva' which, he argues, can only be translated as 'ringing glory'. The mere fact that he consequently translates Mandelstam's phrase as 'resonant valor' shows a choice of 'resonant' rather than 'ringing'. It is hard to see the logic in this. The dictionary choices are 'thundering'/'roaring'. Even if one accepts Nabokov's idiomatic knowledge of stock phrases in Russian, that does not mean that the stock phrase must then only be translated as 'ringing glory'. It might as easily be translated as 'ringing', 'resonant', 'thundering', or 'roaring'. In line two he has made a very 'male' choice in transforming 'liúdi' (people) to 'men'. Some differences in vocabulary are less crucial than others, but still illustrate the impossibility of claiming there is an unquestionable choice that can be made. 'Race' could be 'breed' or 'tribe', 'feast' could be 'banquet' and so on. Some words are more emotive than others, however. In his concluding line he makes the rather unfortunate choice of 'merriment' which, to me at least, suggests lighthearted fun, rather than the more dignified word 'happiness'. Mandelstam, in 'The Wolf', is describing how he has been deprived of the freedom to live the life he would have wished; therefore, in my mind, 'happiness' would have been much the better word. In stanza two Nabokov uses the phrase 'pounces the wolfhound age'. By choosing 'pounces' he is specifically relating the action to the animal image. The general meaning of the word is 'to fling oneself' as in 'to fling one's arms around someone'. Thus, Nabokov is interpreting the language rather than providing a literal translation. In stanza three he has made the choice of 'blue fox furs' whereas 'peŕstý' can mean 'fox furs' or 'foxes'. Finally, in the concluding line he has translated 'untruth' as 'injustice' which again is a far from literal translation.

Nabokov, in his article, provides an apparently minute dissection of Lowell's translation. It is in this section of his article that he seems to me most dishonest, under the guise of possessing knowledge in depth of the Russian language. In full below, it is striking that although Lowell's translation has certain freedoms it is a fairly close translation:

The Century of the wolf

In the name of the higher tribes of the future,
in the name of their foreboding nobility,
I have to give up my drinking cup at the family feast,
my joy too, then my honour.

This cutthroat wolf century has jumped on my shoulders,
but I don't wear the hide of a wolf--
no, tuck me like a cap in the sleeve
of a sheepskin shipped to the steppes.

I do not want to see the small dirt of the coward,
or wait for the bones to crack on the wheel.
I want to run with the shiny blue foxes
moving like dancers in the night.

There the Siberian river is glass,
there the fir tree touches a star,
because I don't have the hide of a wolf
or slaver in the wolf trap's steel jaw.

Nabokov first of all condemns Lowell's description of 'foreboding nobility'. He makes the vague statement that it is 'meaningless, both as translation and adaptation'. One might agree that as a literal translation it has no meaning, one might also condemn adaptation, but within the terms of adaptation it at least has meaning. It is certainly a free phrase, but is effective in conveying the superiority of the future ages that may appreciate poetry unlike the wolf age of the present that doesn't. As English it certainly sounds more natural than Nabokov's 'resonant valor'. Nabokov refers to 'adaptation' because Olga Carlisle uses the term to describe the translations in Poets (Poets, p. xii). He criticises her for this with venom later in his article:

Although some of the English versions in Miss Carlisle's collection do their best to follow the text, all of them for some reason or other (perhaps in heroic protection of the main offender) are branded 'adaptations'. What, then, is there especially adaptive or adaptional in an obvious travesty? This I wish to be told, this I wish to comprehend. 'Adapted' to what? To the needs of an idiot audience?

In his next criticism Nabokov has more valid grounds for complaint, noting how Lowell mistranslates 'wolfhound' for 'wolf': "wolfhound", volkodáv: lexically "wolf-crusher," "wolfstrangler"; this dog gets transformed by Mr. Lowell into a "cutthroat wolf," another miracle of misinformation, mistransfiguration and misadaptation'. The implication is that Lowell has come up with cutthroat because of a misunderstanding of the lexical translation. It is more likely that Lowell is providing a free interpretation of the phrase. The use of cutthroat is certainly totally appropriate to the context of the poem. Nabokov is justified in his complaint here, however, for Lowell is acting on incorrect information.

Nabokov goes on to make the following absurd statement, "Wear the hide of a wolf" would mean to impersonate a wolf which is not at all the sense here.' Nabokov is denying the possibility of metaphorical meaning for the image. Here Lowell suggests that wearing 'the hide of the wolf' is comparable to adopting the worst characteristics of the age. The reference is particularly fitting as it develops the negative side of the overcoat image, providing a contrast to the overcoat of the steppes, that of exile.

Nabokov certainly has grounds for complaint in his next criticism although in the process he makes some questionable observations:

actually 'of the Siberian prairie's hot fur coat', zhárkoi shúby sibírskikh stepei. The rich heavy pelisse, to which Russia's Wild East is likened by the poet (this being the very blazon of its faunal opulence) is demoted by the adaptor to a 'sheepskin' which is 'shipped to the steppes' with the poet in its sleeve. Besides being absurd in itself, this singular importation totally destroys the imagery of the composition. And a poet's imagery is a sacred, unassailable thing.

His criticism of Lowell's interpretation of warm fur coat as 'sheepskin shipped to the steppes' is valid. However, it is paradoxical that Nabokov can make the comment 'and a poet's imagery is a sacred unassailable thing' at the same time as he makes a pedantic, limiting interpretation of Mandelstam's overcoat image. All the translation provides is 'hot fur coat' and Nabokov insists that it is a particular fur coat that is comparable to the look of the steppes.

Nabokov, in his criticism of Lowell's 'shiny blue foxes', is deliberately misleading. He implies that Lowell's translation is less literal than it is. Here is Nabokov's extremely subjective interpretation:

the magnificent metaphor of L. 8 now culminates in a vision of arctic starlight overhead, emblemized by the splendour of gray-blue furs, with a suggestion of astronomical heraldry (cf. Vulepecula, a constellation). Instead of that the adaptor has 'I want to run with shiny blue foxes moving like dancers in the night,' which is not so much a pretty piece of pseudo-Russian fairytale as a foxtrot in Disneyland.

First of all Nabokov fails to point out to his reader that 'peštsý' can mean either 'foxes' or 'fox furs'. Nabokov is describing one possible interpretation as the only possible one. There is something lost in the removal of Mandelstam's original line, 'so that all night the blue foxes/fox furs/may shine for me in the primal beauty', depriving the poem of the primordial theme, but at the same time there is some point in making the change. In Lowell's drafts there

is evidence that he attempted to make the image of the foxes clear in his mind before attempting to translate it. The following attempts in his drafts 'Uncollected Translations' aren't particularly successful but they do show this visualising process:

Let me see the shiny blue foxes
in their elemental grace.

(TS. 2779, p. 6)

I want to run with the shiny blue foxes
jumping like puppies through the night.

(ibid., p. 7.)

I want to run with the shiny blue foxes
tumbling like puppies in the night.

(ibid., p. 8.)

The introduction of 'I' is useful also for cohesion, for it provides a link with the first line of the stanza, 'I do not want to see the small dirt of the coward'. Lowell's freedom, 'I want to run', also reinforces the view expressed elsewhere in the poem that Mandelstam wishes to participate in that which the steppe represents, the world where his art is not compromised.

Finally, Nabokov argues further that Lowell has once more been misinformed with some absurd observations. Consider the following:

Why does the adaptation read 'there the Siberian river is glass'? Perhaps because the techét (flows) of the text gives tekíá in the past tense, and its form stekíá (flowed down) also happens to be the genitive case of stekló (glass)--a really outstanding howler, if my supposition is correct, and an inexplicable cliché, if it isn't.

First of all Nabokov knows well that 'techét' is Russian vocabulary which any informant even with only basic knowledge of Russian would be familiar with. If they weren't they would be even less likely to associate the various forms of the word in the way Nabokov describes. This is a blatant example of Nabokov attempting to blind the non-Russian speaker with science. In one draft Lowell translates the line as 'where the Siberian river congeals' (TS. 2779, p. 6) which proves he knew the literal meaning. Nabokov further argues that the image is clichéd. It is difficult to see why for it effectively describes the frozen river. Lowell seems to have been fond of the image as he used it also in his translation of Akhmatova's 'Requiem', 'Grief turns the Neva to green glass' (Poets, p. 61). Nabokov rounds off his criticism with a final pedantic observation about Lowell's translation of 'sosná' as 'pine' rather than 'fir tree', two definitions that most would regard as synonymous.

Throughout, Nabokov makes dogmatic assertions which are questionable. Although he criticises Lowell's freedoms, he provides no valid alternative. He makes assertions for literal translation but cannot adhere to his own rules. He is neither fair to Mandelstam's language, which he attempts to limit, nor to language which he restricts in a way which does not allow for its subtlety or complexity.

By examining how Lowell deals with the language of a very different Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, useful comparisons can be made with his treatment of Mandelstam's poetry. In Mandelstam's 'Unknown Soldier' Lowell rose to the challenge of translating complex images, providing an English equivalent that did justice to the original. It was a task well suited to his poetic temperament. The challenge of Anna Akhmatova's poem 'Requiem' is quite different. Consider, first of all one of her early love poems:

I wrung my hands under my dark veil...
'Why are you pale, what makes you reckless?'
--Because I have made my loved one drunk
with an astringent sadness.

I'll never forget. He went out, reeling;
his mouth was twisted, desolate...
I ran downstairs, not touching the banisters,
and followed him as far as the gate.

And shouted, choking: 'I meant it all
in fun. Don't leave me, or I'll die of pain.'
He smiled at me--oh so calmly, terribly--
and said: 'Why don't you get out of the rain?'⁵⁵

This is one of her early poems, written in 1913, when her work was focused on personal love poetry. However, it shows many of the features of her later public poetry of which 'Requiem', written 1935-1943, is a part. Renato Poggioli wrote of her, 'she represents objectively a past which has only a subjective reality' (Poets of Russia, p. 231). The poem, 'I wrung My Hands', exemplifies this objectivity, achieved by reducing the expression of emotion to the minimum and accurately recording events. In the poem, we are provided with a cinematic shot, with brief snatches of dialogue. The poem's subtlety is achieved by the gaps both in the scene and dialogue. The noncommittal lover is captured in glimpses. All we see is the lover's 'mouth... twisted, desolate...' making a statement of ambiguity, '"Why don't you get out of the rain?"'. The cause of this particular conflict is also kept a mystery. The image of the woman at once frenzied and spiritual, 'I wrung my hands under the dark veil', provides a suggestion of what caused the Soviet critic, B. Eykhenbaum, to condemn Akhmatova as 'half "harlot" burning with passion, half mendicant nun able

⁵⁵ No. 7, A.I, p. 25, Poems of Akhmatova, trans. Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1974), p. 43.

to pray to God for forgiveness.⁵⁶ The juxtaposition of the sensual and spiritual is distinctive of her style, a fact any translator needs to be aware of. The bareness and transparency of the poetry make translation difficult offering little to work on. Stanley Kunitz notes precisely this problem in translating her verse:

The translator of Akhmatova, like the translator of Pushkin, is presented with no idiosyncrasy of surface or of syntax to simplify his task. Her poems exist in the purity and exactness of their diction, the authority of their tone, the subtlety of their rhythmic modulations, the integrity of their form. These are inherent elements of the poetry itself, not to be confused with readily imitable 'effects'. The only way to translate Akhmatova is by writing well. A hard practice!

(*'On Translating Akhmatova,'* p. 40)

Although I agree with Kunitz for the most part, I do not believe that simply 'writing well' will solve the problem. If one creates a fine poem which drowns Akhmatova's voice in the process then the objective has not been achieved. This, for me, is the key problem in Lowell's translation of 'Requiem'.

In 1935, at the onset of the Stalinist purges, Akhmatova's son Lev Gumilev was arrested. Soon after, her husband Nikolai Punin was also arrested. Both were imprisoned in Leningrad. 'Requiem' concentrates on her shared experience with other women who had sons or husbands imprisoned. That the poem is to act as a dedication to such women, is made plain in her opening comments. She describes a conversation with a woman who recognised her in the crowd:

'Can you describe this?'
I said, 'I can!'

⁵⁶ Anna Akhmatova (Petrograd, 1923), p. 114, as quoted in Amanda Haight, Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage (1976; rpt. Oxford Univ. Press Paperbacks, 1990), p. 72.

Then something resembling a smile slipped over what had once been her face⁵⁷

Objectivity such as was used to describe the love affair of 'I Wrung My Hands', will provide her with the most honest way of describing accurately these terrible events, offering the best kind of fidelity to her fellow women. Her need to record some of the worst events in Russian history is similar to that emphasised in Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs of her and her husband's lives. Only by recording the truth can the falsehood of the Stalinist years be counteracted.

There are a number of translations of 'Requiem'. After examining the versions by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward, Lyn Coffin⁵⁸ and Richard McKane I came to the conclusion that Richard Mckane's is the most satisfactory. In my view, this is because he does not attempt to do anything ambitious; he simply translates as accurately as possible and then shapes the language into free verse. I shall refer to either my own literal version of the poem or Mckane's translation for comparison when discussing Lowell's version.

'Requiem' begins with a single 28-line stanza entitled 'Dedication'. It is a dedication to the women who have shared Akhmatova's vigil outside the prison gates in the hope of either passing parcels or hearing news of those imprisoned. Lowell's translation breaks this single stanza into five-line stanzas. I shall use Lowell's stanzaic divisions when discussing Lowell's translation against my literal version. Consider the opening:

⁵⁷ Anna Akhmatova: Selected Poems, trans. Richard McKane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 90.

⁵⁸ Akhmatova: Poems, trans. Lyn Coffin (New York: Norton and Co., 1976).

The mountains bend before this grief,
the great river does not flow,
but the prison locks are strong,
and behind them the convict-holes,
and the anguish of death.

(literal)

Grief turns the Neva to green glass,
soon the abiding hills are dust,
and yet the prison locks stand fast,
the convict, kicking in his lair,
breathes the consuming air.

(Lowell)

In the opening lines, the cosmic imagery of both 'mountains' and 'river' reacting to events gives immensity and dignity to the grief. Though one assumes the grief to be that of the women, it is left hanging in the air, ambiguous, as though it is autonomous, a force beyond itself. Lowell's interpretation of these two lines immediately reinforces Kunitz's view that Akhmatova has 'no idiosyncrasy of surface or of syntax' to help the translator. Lowell's attempt to develop the imagery immediately provides some idiosyncrasies of language which, for this very reason, do not sound like Akhmatova. Although one may admire the image of the Neva as 'green glass', its very virtuosity prevents it from sounding like Akhmatova's language, which is dependent not on cleverness but understatement. Lowell, in his translation, fails to convey genuine grief both because of this 'cleverness' and because he has removed the dignified images of 'the mountains' which 'bend before this grief' and 'the great river' which 'does not flow'. Without reference to the original it would not be clear why he has included the line 'soon the abiding hills are dust', for it in no way reinforces the grief. Above all, though, it is the removal of Akhmatova's imagery which discredits his own. In the opening stanza Lowell alters 'behind them the convict-holes, / and the anguish of death,' to 'the convict kicking in

his lair,/breathes the all consuming air.' The effect of this is to focus more on the state of the imprisoned males than on the predicament of the grieving women. I also find a lack of subtlety in the rhyming of 'lair' and 'air' which detracts from the moving restraint of the original.

In the next five lines Lowell continues to drown Akhmatova's voice with his own:

For someone a fresh wind blows,
for someone the sunset basks.
We don't know, we are everywhere the same;
we hear only the hateful scrape of the keys
and the heavy steps of the soldiers.

(literal)

For someone somewhere, a fresh wind;
for someone the sun is a live coal,
but we know nothing. Blind and small,
we hear the keys clang through the wards,
the sleepwalk of the guards.

(Lowell)

This stanza provides a good example of the bareness of Akhmatova's language. If she uses imagery at all, it is generally restrained. Here, the stanza works by way of plain description and simple actions. Lowell, in his stanza, draws away from this simplicity and literalism to more dense metaphoric language. The sun, for example, is changed to a 'live coal'. Line four of the original describes something truly experienced and detested, 'we hear only the hateful scrape of the keys'. Lowell's, 'we hear the keys clang through the wards', mars the effect with a more neutral description which could even describe welcoming sounds of life. And, in the final line, Akhmatova's literal 'the heavy steps of the soldiers' is

made metaphorical by Lowell's 'the sleep walk of the guards'. Again, there is a rather contrived rhyme in 'wards' and 'guards'. The most crucial loss however is in the change from Akmatova's simple, 'we don't know we are the same everywhere' to Lowell's more specific, 'but we know nothing. Blind and small'. Though 'blind and small' helps to portray the women as ineffectual, it reduces our sense of Akhmatova's empathy with them; she becomes distanced, externalising them, rather than experiencing with them. Kunitz also noted that Akhmatova's diction contributed to her poetry. Any attempt to ornament or alter the simple restrained choice of language in, 'we don't know, we are the same everywhere' detracts from the powerful emotion contained in her words. The line is also vital to reinforce female solidarity, fitting in well with that which follows, for the 'hateful scraping of the keys' is familiar to them all.

In Lowell's following stanza the sense of the women's solidarity is further reduced:

We rose, as if for early mass
and went through the savage capital.
There we met more breathless than the dead,
the sun lower and the Neva more misty,
and hope always singing in the distance.

(literal)

Up, out as if for early Mass--
when we prowled through wild Leningrad,
we were more breathless than the dead,
and lower than the sun. Low fog
soon leveled out to fog.

(Lowell)

The change from 'we rose' to 'up out' alters the tone completely. The bareness of subject plus simple past allows readers to visualise the action for themselves, whereas Lowell's 'up out' specifies a brisk action. Likewise the change from 'we met' to 'we prowled' limits the verb's transparency, undermining the poem's subtlety and removes the vital point that the women came to congregate. Lowell's, 'when we prowled through wild Leningrad', paints a very specific picture of the women roaming wildly through Leningrad. Again, therefore, the poem's narrator is made to externalise the women rather than experience with them. Lowell's alterations also disrupt a sequence of simple statements, in this and the preceding stanza, to provide an elusive portrayal of the women: 'we don't know, we are everywhere the same', followed by, 'we rose' and 'we met'. The reader is left to fill in the gaps and the women remain both individualised and unified in their plight.

On a more positive note, Lowell's freedom, 'Low fog/soon leveled out to fog', works quite well. Although it is an alteration of Akhmatova's language, it retains a certain bareness in keeping with her tone. Lowell's use of this fog image highlights some of his problems in translating Akhmatova. In lines like, 'the convict, kicking in his lair,/breathes the consuming air', he is not being true to Akhmatova, but neither is he being true to himself, for such contrived imagery and rhyme are not what one finds in Lowell's own poetry. The fog image however, provides him with an opportunity to produce something of his own which also fits in with Akhmatova. Fog is a frequent literal and metaphoric reference in his verse, particularly in Notebook:

...For
the hundredth time, I slice through fog, and round
the village with my headlights on the ground,
as if I was the first philosopher,
as if I were trying to pick up a car
key...It can't be here, and so it must be there

behind the next crook in the road or growth
of fog--there blinded by our feeble beams,
a face, clock-white, still friendly to the earth.

(p. 21)

and:

Squalls of the seagull's exaggerated outcry,
dimmed out by fog...

(p. 22)

In the Notebook lines the fog represents the literal and symbolic value of blindness, a lack of vision. By way of the fog image he creates a subtle association between the blindness of the fog and that of the women 'blind and small' in the previous stanza.

In the next stanza, although the rhyme is less contrived than in the previous stanzas, Lowell continues to clot the meaning which is both moving and stark in Akhmatova's lines. In the face of the solidarity there must ultimately be only total isolation in grief for those who receive bad verdicts:

The sentence. Immediately the tears flow.
She is already separated from the rest
as though, through pain, life is ripped from her heart,
as if roughly she has been knocked over,
but she walks, sways, alone.

(literal)

Lowell obscures the photographic image with his own attempts at imagery:

We hoped! The verdict!... only tears,
each one cut off from everyone,
rudely cut off, tripped up, thrown down,
blood siphoned from the heart. Dead stone,
she walks still, sways... alone.

(Lowell)

He is certainly creating poetry here, providing a violent expression of grief with the emphatic rhythm of, 'rudely cut off, tripped up, thrown down', but the effect is quite different from that which Akhmatova's tone conveys, for she describes a grief more comparable to Mary's grieving at the cross. Lowell has also altered the emphasis so that the suffering could be that of one individual or of many. Note also the first example of Lowell's use of exclamation marks in his treatment of 'Requiem'. Here, as a result, tragedy comes across more like melodrama, and the solemn tone of the original is changed into that which is emphatic and somewhat jerky.

Again Lowell makes use of imagery close to his own. He frequently refers to blood in Notebook and also associates blood and rock, as in 'Che Guevara': 'Manhattan, where our clasped, illicit hands/pulse, stop the bloodstream as if it hit rock...' (p. 51). Yet even though one can accept the skill with which Lowell uses blood imagery in the 'Requiem' lines, one is still conscious of Lowell's cleverness rather than his involvement with the woman's predicament.

In the concluding stanza Lowell's lack of sensitivity to Akhmatova's thought is most blatantly illustrated:

Where now are my unwilling friends
of my two possessed years?
What do they imagine in the Siberian snowstorms
what appears to them in the moon's circle?
to them I send my farewell greetings.

(literal)

Oh two years' hell-black, line-up nights,
cry, cry for your imprisoned friend,
clothe him from the Siberian wind,
shine in the haloed moon's snow eye...
I say good-bye, good-bye.

(Lowell)

Lowell's purpose is unclear though he does create some wonderful images with Akhmatova as his source. He completely removes the female emphasis. Akhmatova's dedication to her fellow sufferers is obliterated and Lowell inexplicably associates the 'line-up nights' with some particular male friend. It is unclear who the you of 'cry for your imprisoned friend' is, perhaps a reference to the imprisoned male in the first stanza. Lowell has certainly produced a lovely image with 'shine in the haloed moon's snow eye', but it is unfortunate that he failed to incorporate it into a more accurate account of Akhmatova's meditations on the women of that horrific time.

'Dedication' is followed by an Introduction, a cycle of ten verses and an Epilogue. Lowell's treatment of all of these is well worth examination, but I shall only discuss only verses 1-9. In verse one there are more blunders but there is also some success. Lowell gets closer to Akhmatova's poetry but also tries something of its own:

They took you away at dawn,
I walked behind after you as though you were being borne
out,
the children were crying in the dark room,
the candle swam by the ikon-stand.
The cold of the ikon on your lips.
Death sweat on your brow...Do not forget!
I will howl by the Kremlin towers
like the wives of the Streltsy.

(McKane)

They led you off at dawn. I followed,
as if I walked behind your bier.
In the dark rooms, the children bellowed,
wax melted in the icon's glare.

Cold the small icon's final kiss,
cold the lined forehead's greenish sweat--
like the wives of the Streltsis,
I'll howl beneath the Kremlin's gate.

(Lowell)

This verse works better because it keeps fairly close to the original and reads more like free verse. The rhyme is more subtle, and appears less obtrusive because of the caesura of the first line and the enjambment into the second. Also, the stress on the first syllable of 'Streltsis' makes the rhyme less obvious. Lowell manages to convey something of the Russian Orthodox atmosphere of Akhmatova's verse, though once again there is a significant omission, here Akhmatova's 'do not forget!'. She insists these dreadful events be engraved like marble in the memory.

Yet as Lowell proceeds to verse two he makes some dreadful interpretations:

The quiet Don flows quietly,
the yellow moon goes into the house,

goes in with its cap askew,
the yellow moon sees the shadow.

This woman is sick,
this woman is alone,

husband in the grave, son in prison,
pray for me.

(McKane)

The dragging Don flows slow, so slow,
the orange moon climbs through a window.

Its hat is slanted on its brow,
the yellow moon has met a shadow.

This woman is alone
no one will give the dog a bone.

Her husband's killed, her son's in prison;
Kyrie eleison!

(Lowell)

The switch from yellow to orange is mystifying, but it is the clumsiness of many of the lines which stands out, line

two and four in particular. In the original Akhmatova does speed up the tempo of the verse so that it has a nursery rhyme effect. Perhaps Lowell is attempting to recreate something similar in lines like 'no one will give a dog a bone', but if so he fails badly for the line jars. His use of the Latin response to the Mass does convey something of the religious tone of Akmatova's verse, but any positive effect is marred by its incongruity with this reference to the dog's bone.

For me, verse three is one of the most moving in 'Requiem', but its effect is lost in Lowell's translation. He changes the harrowing, speaking voice of the opening, into some kind of grand rhetoric--note again the melodramatic exclamation mark. In my view, the only way to translate such a statement is to be as close as possible to the original:

No, it isn't me, it's someone else who is suffering.
I couldn't stand it, let that which happened
be covered with black cloths,
and let them take away the lights...
Night.

(literal)

Myself! No, she is someone else,
I couldn't take it. Light
no lanterns in these death cells--
black cloths for windows...night!

(Lowell)

He also changes the meaning dramatically, for Akhmatova wishes black cloths to be placed not over the setting as Lowell attempts, but over events. Presumably he is making a reference back to the prison cells of the 'Dedication'. The second exclamation continues the distancing from Akhmatova's experience. In the Russian there is a gradual fading away of the memory of the events, 'i pust' unesút fonarí...noch'

whereas Lowell's exclamation mark implies some kind of
triumph in the blacking out of the windows.

I mentioned earlier that a feature of Akhmatova's poetry is the shifting of the female persona of her verse between the sexual and the spiritual. Already the poem has conveyed a mood of religious vigil in the women outside the prison. In verse four, however, we encounter the sensual side:

If I could show you, the mocker,
everybody's favourite,
happy sinner of Tsarkoe Selo,
how your life will turn out:
you will stand at Kresty
three hundredth in the line with your prison parcel,
and set fire to the new year ice
with your hot tears.
There the prison poplar sways,
silence--and how many
innocent lives are ending there...

(Mckane)

Think back on Tsarskoe's play world, soon
outgrown, soon dated, show off child--
the tree house built to reach the moon...
O what happened to that child?

Number 300 in the queues
of women lugging food and news
for felons...Will your scalding tear
burn an ice hole in the new year?

No sound. A prison poplar waves
over the deadly closeness, waves
of white leaves whiten in the wind--
what innocent lives have reached the end!

(Lowell)

Lowell has completely removed this specific female focus, the opposite of innocence, and replaced it with the innocent and neutral image of the 'child'. Akhmatova's reference is there to contrast the flirtatious and carefree freedom of female youth against the profound grief which women must ultimately suffer when they reach maturity. Although both

men and women may experience such a change between youth and adulthood, Akhmatova is focusing specifically on the female predicament. Note also that Akhmatova sets up a religious/sexual contrast between the young and older female persona by way of the reference to 'Kresty'. As McKane points out (p. 96), 'Kresty' is both the name of a prison on the Vyborg side of Leningrad and suggestive of Mary suffering under the cross, by way of its literal meaning 'crosses'. Lowell has destroyed this contrast. However, he has managed to produce some very effective imagery which is appropriate for Akhmatova's poetry. The line, 'Will your scalding tear/burn an icehole in the new year?' works, because it conveys the same authoritative tone Lowell achieves in his own verse. It also gives Lowell the chance to work with imagery similar to his own. Take the following, for example: 'Ice. Ice. Our wheels no longer move,'⁵⁹ and:

Listen, the hay-bells tinkle as the cart
Wavers on the rubber tires along the tar
And cindered ice below the burlap mill
And ale-wife run.⁶⁰

Lowell's third stanza works well, keeping in tune with Akhmatova's tone for the most part, though there is some misinterpretation of the original in the last two lines. The rhyme is made subtle because the lines are broken up by the opening caesura and the series of run-on lines. Alliteration contributes to the cohesion. Lowell's freedom, 'waves of white leaves whiten in the wind' is effective to enhance Akhmatova's original image, 'there the prison poplar sways'. The description is similar to that of leaves in the Notebook poem 'Stalin': 'a hundred hues of green, the

⁵⁹ Life Studies, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 15.

⁶⁰ Lord Weary's Castle (1944; rpt. with The Mills of the Kavanaghs, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1974), p. 10.

darkest shades/short of black, the palest leaf-backs far from white' (p. 207). His own interpretation of the setting is effective because he uses a photographic technique comparable with Akhmatova's. Yet this said, there is still, I feel, some loss in the transformation from, 'silence--and how many/innocent lives are ending there...' to, 'what innocent lives have reached the end!'. Again one notes the use of an exclamation mark, which here transforms a tragic line into a dramatic one.

In verse five Akhmatova describes her increasing neurosis as a result of her son's imprisonment:

For seventeen months I have been screaming,
calling you home.
I flung myself at the executioner's feet.
You are my son and my terror.
Everything is confused for ever,
and I can no longer tell
beast from man,
and how long I must wait for the execution.
Only the dusty flowers,
the clank of censers, and tracks
leading from somewhere to nowhere.
An enormous star
looks me straight in the eye
and threatens swift destruction.

(McKane)

For one month, five months, seventeen,
I called you back. I screamed
at the foot of the executioner.
You are my son, my fear.

Thoughts rush in circles through my head;
I can't distinguish white from red,
who is man, and who is beast,
or when the firing squad will rest.

Here are only musty flowers,
old clock hands tramping out the hours,
old incense drifting from a censer,
and somewhere, boot steps leading nowhere.

See, see it pins us down from far;
now looking straight into my eye,
'Move quickly, be prepared to die,'
says the huge star.

(Lowell)

As is shown in McKane's version, the woman's (now clearly Akhmatova's own) suffering is becoming more internalised. Her neurosis is shown by her confusion between her son and the executioner. Although most of the images in her mind are elusive, providing uncertain messages, the bright star of destruction enters with absolute clarity. One thinks of Mandelstam's destructive stars in 'Unknown Soldier'. Lowell's version is fairly literal but it fails to convey this neurosis and muddles some of the connections; it is not clear, for example, that she is afraid of her son rather than feeling fear on his behalf. The last stanza is also confusing because the star is introduced in the last two lines rather than at the beginning. The opening stanza works well, but then the nursery rhyme tone and rhythm of stanza two trivialises Akhmatova's experience. We can feel sorrow for the woman who sees her son both as her 'son and her terror', but can feel little for the emotions of the woman described by Lowell, 'Thoughts rush in circles through my head;/I can't distinguish white from red'.

The freedoms Lowell takes in verse six creates very vivid images in the poem, but unfortunately he shows himself unaware of the famous Leningrad 'White Nights' in the process:

Weightless weeks fly by,
I will never grasp what happened,
how the white nights looked
at you, my son in prison,
how they looked again
with the burning eye of the hawk,
they speak of your tall cross,
they speak of death.

(McKane)

These weeks are lightweight runners. Light
of foot, they skim the oblivious snow.
Son, tell me how the white-capped night
looks through your prison window.

'It watches with the owl's hard eye,
or chokes the air with its white snow.

It speaks to us of Calvary,
it speaks of death.'

(Lowell)

Leningrad, situated so far north, experiences the 'White Nights' at the height of the summer; a period of almost complete daylight. For Akhmatova, these bright nights illuminate the picture of her son in prison, intensifying her imagined vision of him. Lowell however, assumes the 'white' refers to winter nights, and therefore creates his whole setting around the snow. He has also failed to note the chronology of the poem: in verse four there is the reference to 'the new year ice' and then in verse five specific reference to the passage of time, 'For seventeen months I have been screaming'. By verse six, 'the weightless weeks fly by' until they reach the period of the 'White Nights'. Lowell's references to snow break up this chronology. His version also makes it less obvious that Akhmatova is making an analogy between herself and her son, and Mary and Christ. It is something of a shame that Lowell has missed the mark for he produces some lovely 'snow' imagery. Snow, so much a part of Lowell's home setting of Boston, is an image he relates to strongly, as in lines in Notebook: 'Lying in bed, letting the bright white morning/ rise to mid-heaven through a gag of snow' (p. 79). Lowell makes use of his own experience of Boston's dry winter air, and bright white snow, introducing the lines: 'it chokes the air'; and the 'owl's hard eye'. This cold winter imagery also contributes to feelings of fear at approaching death.

In verse seven, 'Verdict', there is an example of that which is characteristic of Akhmatova's verse: affirmation in the face of disaster:

The stone word fell
on my still living breast.
Never mind, I was prepared,
somehow I'll come to terms with it.

Today I have much work to do:
I must finally kill memory,
I must, so my soul can turn to stone,
I must learn to live again.

Or else...The hot summer rustle,
like holiday time outside my window.
I have felt this coming for a long time,
this bright day and the empty house.

(McKane)

At last the silent judge spoke out,
and struck us with his stony word--
but never mind, I will make out,
I was prepared.

Stones, chores...I'll manage. Splitting rock
stops the split mind from looking back.
I can forget you now and then,
turn stone and live again--

or else? The woods' hot rustle, boughs
bursting, a window flying open...
I had long had a premonition
of this clear day and empty house.

(Lowell)

In the midst of the most unbelievable suffering, nature will
force itself in with mysterious affirmation. A famous
example of such affirmation is seen in 'Everything is
plundered, betrayed, sold', here translated by Kunitz and
Hayward:

Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold,
Death's great black wing scrapes the air,
Misery gnaws to the bone.
Why then do we not despair?

By day, from the surrounding woods,
cherries blow summer into town;
at night the deep transparent skies
glitter with new galaxies.

And the miraculous comes so close
to the ruined, dirty houses--
something not known to anyone at all,

but wild in our breast for centuries.⁶¹

This poem, written in 1921, describes how the destruction which followed revolution and the Civil War in Russia meant a harsh existence for many Russians. It is hard to know what affirmation Akhmatova can possibly find, yet something in the natural world gives her hope. Although Lowell retains this particular Akhmatova trait in verse seven, he has the wrong tone through most of the rest of it and misinterprets the main point she is making. He removes the personal note and suggests that the judge speaks to them all rather than to the individual. McKane emphasises the slow weight of sorrow with the long vowel sounds of, 'the stone word fell/ on my still living breast'. A similar effect is achieved in the original, 'i upála kámennoe slóvo' (and the stone word fell) where the emphatic beat of 'ka' and 'pa' suggests the slow weighty falling of words. Lowell, on the other hand, suggests fierce abuse with 'spoke out' and 'struck us'--a bursting forth rather than a weighing down. He also trivialises Akhmatova's emotion with 'I will make out', a statement suggesting a practical sense of coping rather than an adaptation of one's life to a tremendous loss such as Akhmatova's 'I'll come to terms with it' implies. In the second stanza Lowell is juggling with Akhmatova's emotions rather than expressing empathy. She argues that she must begin to construct a perception that can enable her to live in the world. There is a degree of bitter irony in her comment because of the contradiction between the deadening of her mind in order to cope and the poem's main message--fidelity to the past. She is close to stating that she must cease being a poet. Lowell's translation reflects nothing of this. He has taken Akhmatova's reference to 'stone' and transformed it into a totally inappropriate reference to working as a convict. He is insensitive to Akhmatova's poetry because he transforms her profound,

⁶¹ No. 268, A.I, p. 155, Poems of Akhmatova, p. 73.

almost sacrilegious statement about her poetic self into that which is mediocre: Akhmatova argues that she must kill memory so that her 'soul can turn to stone'; this Lowell reduces simply to occupying her mind to prevent her 'looking back'. Lowell's final stanza works much better, because he has retained an almost literal version of the original.

Throughout verse eight Lowell achieves an acceptable translation of Akhmatova's lines because he keeps close to the original and avoids obvious rhyming, but verse nine, 'Madness', has some of the most inadequate lines of all the verses and is insensitive to Akhmatova's description of her poetic self:

Already madness has covered
half my soul with its wing,
and gives me strong liquor to drink,
and lures me to the black valley.

I realized that I must
hand victory to it,
as I listened to my delirium,
already alien to me.

It will not allow me to take
anything away with me
(however I beseech it,
however I pester it with prayer):

not the terrible eyes of my son,
the rock-like suffering,
nor the day when the storm came,
not the prison visiting hour,

nor the sweet coolness of hands,
nor the uproar of the lime trees' shadows,
nor the distant, light sound--
the comfort of last words.

(McKane)

Already madness--on my breast
the three black moles. I see a fox:
two ears, black muzzle. Let me rest,
this bed I lie on is a pine box.

So simple and so wonderful!
Careful to stress each syllable
the allegoric voices hiss,

I lie decoding images.

I've breathed in red wine from the air!
Now sickness gathers up its grains,
and kicks me as I kneel in prayer,
and nothing of my own remains--

no, not my son's shy smile of wonder
that turned the bars to lines of shadow,
the woods' hot rustle, summer thunder,
our whispers at the prison window--

no, not the roughhouse of the boys,
birch boughs filled with the new birds,
light noises changing to a voice,
the ache of the last words.

(Lowell)

Akhmatova describes how, overpowered by grief and madness, she is unable to write. McKane's translation conveys the subtlety of her thought: she is the poet whose perceptions are covered by the black wing of madness which drags her down into the 'black valley'. Lowell obliterates such thought at every point. His opening stanza is baffling. He has produced a grotesque transformation of Akhmatova's soul, which I take to mean her poetic perception, into a physical image of a breast. The description of the breast covered in moles is in bad taste and his decision to compare it to a fox, absurd. The concluding line, 'the bed I lie on is a pine box', presumably describes impoverished death, but is crammed into the verse and doesn't scan properly. The next stanza does show Akhmatova discussing her poetic perception, but Lowell has completely reversed her point. He implies that she can deliriously write when her point is that she cannot. The exclamation mark is inappropriate suggesting something marvellous, whereas she is experiencing the ultimate deprivation. Kunitz and Hayward's version of verse eight is worth quoting here, for it interprets her attitude to her writing more accurately, 'The tongue/of my ravings in my ear/is the tongue of a stranger' (Poems of Akhmatova, p. 111). Though, in the last two stanzas, Lowell describes nature effectively, I see no point in transforming the picture of the son from, 'the terrible eyes of my son' to,

'not my son's shy smile of wonder'. Lowell's description is more appropriate for a young child's reaction to a mother and, like the earlier reference to 'so simple and so wonderful!', is inconsistent with the mood of the poem.

All in all therefore, I feel that Lowell translation of 'Requiem' is not successful. The only other commentary on Lowell's 'Requiem' I have encountered is that by Avrahm Yarmolinsky. He is also negative, but I point to his criticisms to show how they differ rather than coincide with my own, providing further fuel for discussion about free and literal translation. Before its appearance in Poets, Lowell's translation of 'Requiem' was published in Atlantic Monthly⁶², quickly provoking a response from Yarmolinsky. In his letter to the Editor of The Atlantic Monthly (February 1965) he makes a number of criticisms. He accepts that Lowell's free translation is 'engaging', but then proceeds to criticise deviations from a literal translation with the explanation, 'It seems only fair to the Russian poets to call attention to these departures from what they wrote'. He then goes on to criticise certain freedoms of Lowell's with vague negative comments. In response to Lowell's freedom, 'the Bronze Horseman wipes his eye and melts', Yarmolinsky states, 'the appearance and behaviour of the statue of Peter the Great is utterly baffling'. Lowell changes a line in verse ten, 'The Crucifixion', from 'no one dared to look' to 'none dared or cared to look at her'. Yarmolinsky responds to this with, 'The insertion of 'or cared' in the last line, presumably for the sake of the internal rhyme, is on Mr Lowell's conscience. It works havoc with that beautiful and terrible line.' I would agree that this last change is counterproductive but Yarmolinsky does not pin down the nature of the damage caused to Akhmatova's original. His criticisms seem to be based purely on the right to question any deviation from the

⁶² 'Poems by Anna Akhmatova: Translated by Robert Lowell,' 214 (October, 1964), 60-65.

literal. There is a certain lack of subtlety in such a view, for it does not allow that freedoms can help or hinder the original. Yarmolinsky is right to criticise Lowell's 'Requiem' but I believe he is doing it for the wrong reason.

Lowell's main problem with regards Akhmatova, I feel, is his inability to relate to her specifically female experience. It may be a question of attitude. Although Lowell had a number of female friends whose poetry he admired, such as Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich, he generally saw poetry written by women as minor. He made the comment to one interviewer, 'Few women write major poetry. Can I make this generalization? Only four stand with our best meh: Emily Dickenson, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath. It's a rough road.'⁶³ Even if history and conditioning has forced such a situation on women, his blatant reinforcing of the fact is something few women will appreciate. Yet when one comes to consider his treatment of 'Requiem', perhaps it is not so much that ^{there are} few great women poets, but that he cannot always recognise them when he sees them.

In conclusion, these three examples of Lowell translation show, in different ways, the validity of Steiner's view that translation should be the 'criticism in the highest sense'. Limited though my discussion of literal translation is, it does bring into question Nabokov's views on translation as well as the possibility of producing a truly literal translation. Nabokov's insistence that one should translate literally or not at all is undermined by the fact that he makes subjective choices in vocabulary when discussing the 'Wolf' poem. His criticism of the poem also brings into question his suitability to translate Mandelstam's poetry. His verbose and delimiting interpretation of the imagery is

⁶³ 'A Conversation with Ian Hamilton,' The Review, No. 26 (Summer 1971); rpt. in Collected Prose, pp. 267-290 (p. 287).

particularly inappropriate in the case of Mandelstam who always argues for the multiple significance of the word in the poem. A comparison of Lowell's treatment of Akhmatova's verse with his treatment of Mandelstam's highlights the fact that one must have empathy with the poet one is translating. Lowell clearly has with Mandelstam, whereas with Akhmatova he has not. To be true to her one must let the poetic ego remain dormant and allow her voice to come through as accurately as possible. Otherwise one fails to convey the characteristics Kunitz described so astutely, and one is working against her aim to record accurately the truth of the past.

However, his inappropriate interpretation of Akhmatova's poetry only makes me more aware of his suitability to translate Mandelstam. Here he has the ideal opportunity to let his poetic virtuosity come into play. His translation of 'Unknown Soldier' shows him engaging with Mandelstam's complex imagery so that his version, unlike those of the other translators, is truly 'criticism in the highest sense'. In reading Lowell's translation the reader is provided with an intelligent and sensitive elucidation of a difficult poem. In my next chapter, I shall explore further Lowell's suitability to translate Mandelstam's poetry, by considering the nature of Lowell's empathy with him.

Chapter 2

The Mandelstam Translations of 1963/65.

Robert Lowell and Osip Mandelstam are poets who speak with quite different voices. Lowell shows a relentless pessimism moving in its own frustration: 'I am tired. Everyone's tired of my turmoil.', 'We are like a lot of wild/spiders crying together,/but without tears,'⁶⁴ 'we aging down stream faster than a scepter can check?' (Notebook, p. 30). In contrast, Mandelstam expresses calm assertion, an unquestioning faith in the power of poetry: 'my lips move even in silence', 'for the blessed and meaningless word I shall pray in the Soviet night,'⁶⁵ 'the handsome arrow of the Gothic belltower rages because its function is to stab the sky, to reproach it for its emptiness.'⁶⁶ Yet beyond the difference in voice there is a startling degree of common ground.

One of the reasons Olga Carlisle introduced Mandelstam's poetry to Lowell was because she believed the 'cerebral' quality of Mandelstam's verse would appeal to him. The skill with which Lowell translated the complex imagery of 'Unknown Soldier' suggests that she judged correctly. Both Lowell and Mandelstam were intellectual poets with a common interest in culture--their interests ranging widely in history, art, philosophy, and politics. Mandelstam's definition of Acmeism 'a longing for world culture'⁶⁷ might

⁶⁴ For the Union Dead, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 19 and 11.

⁶⁵ No. 118, M.I, pp. 85-86.

⁶⁶ 'Morning of Acmeism,' in Critical Prose, pp. 61-65 (p. 63).

⁶⁷ According to Madame Mandelstam, this was a comment made, either in the Press House in Leningrad during the thirties, or a response Mandelstam gave to a heckler at a poetry reading to the Voronezh branch of the Union of

as easily be applied to Lowell's poetry. Furthermore, they were both concerned to unify their cultural interests through poetry, and their poetry reflects an inseparability between their life and their art. As Lowell puts it, 'one life, one writing!' (For the Union Dead, p. 68), a phrase equally suited to Mandelstam.

Although common denominators may only act as guides in studying one poet's interest in another, Lowell's translations discussed in chapter one do suggest to me that he was attracted to like elements between his own and Mandelstam's poetry. His treatment of 'Unknown Soldier', for example, indicates that he did enjoy the 'cerebral' quality of Mandelstam's verse and could clarify the complex imagery, while his treatment of 'Requiem' suggests the difficulties of empathising with Akhmatova's experience were lessened when he encountered imagery similar to that used in his own verse.

In examining Mandelstam's poetry, Lowell had two problems in particular: the language barrier and the sparsity of information about Mandelstam. Below he describes ways he dealt with the first:

Well, I have translated I think in five or six different ways. With Baudelaire, for instance, all that I had were bad verse translations, not prose crib. I did my own translation and as I read French fairly well, the text was very available to me. When I did Pasternak, I didn't have prose cribs either. I had rather uninspired verse translations and I tried to make them into English poems. In other cases I have had absolutely accurate prose versions and sometimes they were more important to me than the originals. There you are trying to put flesh on some kind of dry bones

(Carne-Ross, p. 168)

He goes on to explain that the original Russian poem was of little value to him:

Writers in 1937. See Hope Against Hope, p. 295.

It just bores me to hear a language I don't understand. People have sometimes read me Russian and so forth. But the worst Russian poet would sound like the best, I couldn't tell. You could get the meter, but I don't think sound effects are transferable from one language to another.

(pp. 168-169)

As long as he could gain access to the literal meanings of the poems he could proceed independently, even if this meant access to bad verse translations. Mandelstam's obscurity, however, was a different matter.

There were few Mandelstam translations available in 1961 and hardly any in anthologies. One of Lowell's common means of access to foreign language poetry was by way of the series of anthologies published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth. This includes volumes such as The Penguin Book of Italian Verse, edited with translations by George Kay (1958). Elizabeth Hardwick, for example, confirmed that he used them frequently. Lowell's Notebook sonnet 'Volveran' (p. 210) is a translation of Becquer's poem, 'Volveran las oscuras gondrinas', with lines drawn from the translation in The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse.⁶⁸ The selection of Villon poems in Volume one of The Penguin Book of French Verse⁶⁹ is almost identical to that of Lowell's selection in Imitations. Lowell also praises the prose in The Penguin Book of Italian Verse in one of his interviews with Carne-Ross: 'I checked the changes of phrasing when he [George Kay] turned his Penguin Prose into verse and two-thirds of the time they were worse. I still think his versions are awfully good, but I wish he had printed them as prose' (Carne-Ross, p. 172).

⁶⁸ ed. and trans. J. M. Cohen, 2nd rev. ed. (1960), pp. 320-321.

⁶⁹ ed. and trans. Brian Woledge (1961), pp. 302-335.

Dimitri Obolensky's The Penguin Book of Russian Verse appeared in 1962 and included a selection of Mandelstam's poems. Early as this was, it was too late for Lowell, who was introduced to Mandelstam by Olga Carlisle certainly by 1961, possibly even late in 1960. Olga Carlisle advised me to check any dates she gave me and the Paris Review provides the best means. Her Pasternak interview appeared in the Summer/Fall edition in 1960, and shortly after that Lowell got in touch with her. In the Summer/Fall edition in 1961, along with her Ehrenburg interview, she had published 'A Portfolio of Russian Poetry.'⁷⁰ This was a preliminary selection of translations later to be included in Poets. Some of Lowell's Pasternak translations were included. Since Lowell's initial motive for getting in touch with Carlisle was to get help with his Pasternak translations, their appearance in the Paris Review would probably have been the culmination of that work. Carlisle pointed out that their discussions on Mandelstam followed immediately on from those on Pasternak. Carlisle's 'Portfolio' also included some Mandelstam translations by Rose Styron, so Lowell would certainly have become aware of Mandelstam by the summer of 1961, though probably well before that. However, Lowell almost certainly got hold of The Penguin Book of Russian Verse when it appeared, for among his 'Carlisle' translations in 'Uncollected Translations' (TS. 2779) are some of Obolensky's prose translations reworked by Lowell.

The fact that, initially, Lowell did not rely on the guidance of an anthology may ultimately have enabled him to achieve a more individual involvement with Mandelstam's work. It is this charting of the unknown that, in my view, sets his encounter with Mandelstam apart from a lot of the foreign poets he studied. The role of the mediator, in such an exploration, of course, is vital. Olga Carlisle's explanation of how she and Lowell worked on the poems

⁷⁰ 7, (Summer/Fall 1961), 118-140.

illustrates this. The initial impetus would come from her. She would select Mandelstam poems that she thought Lowell would like. She would then read them in Russian and give quick oral translations. Poems that appealed to Lowell from this initial reading would then be further explored. Her own preferences must have come into play in these selections. In comparing Mandelstam and Akhmatova's poetry, for example, she told me 'Akhmatova touches me less'. Her attitude to Akhmatova's poetry may have affected Lowell's receptivity to the language of 'Requiem'. When I asked her why she and Lowell avoided some of the more well-known Mandelstam poems, such as those anthologised in the Penguin Russian Verse, she mentioned one or two that she found rather didactic and emphasised that she did not particularly like Mandelstam's poems on architecture (a well-known theme in his verse). One can see therefore that Lowell had to take the accuracy of Carlisle's translations on trust and depend on her view of what poems he would like.

Lacking the 1967 Struve and Filipoff gathering of all the scattered Mandelstam poetry, letters and prose into Osip Mandelstam: Collected Works in three volumes, Olga Carlisle provided Lowell with Mandelstam poems by way of two sources. One way, the Struve and Filipoff Collected Works (1955)⁷¹, and the other, notebooks of unpublished Mandelstam poems acquired from her father, Vadim Andreyev. Andreyev had travelled to Russia and had brought back a selection of Mandelstam poems which he typed up in a number of notebooks. Olga Carlisle was not certain of dates, but showed me the remaining notebook in her possession, printed in 1958 with an afterword to the poems, by Vadim Andreyev. Lowell therefore had access not only to the little known published poems of Mandelstam but also to poetry not yet gathered into book form.

⁷¹ Sobranie Sochinenii (New York: Chekhov Publishing House).

Andreyev's notebooks provide a selection of Mandelstam's later poetry of 1930-37. Poems of this period, not surprisingly, were the last to be made available and were not published in Mandelstam's lifetime. When Struve and Filipoff published them in 1967, they simply grouped them together with poems not part of a published collection (M.I., pp. 119-270). Olga Carlisle told me that Madame Mandelstam was unhappy about the many inaccuracies in the way Struve and Filipoff had published these final poems. Jennifer Baines' Mandelstam the Later Poetry can be seen as an attempt to correct such mistakes. Her book has been greatly aided by discussions with Madame Mandelstam as well as access to Madame Mandelstam's own annotated typescript of her husband's poetry. According to Baines, Mandelstam's late poetry divides into five collections written between 1930-1937. These five collections were grouped into two books by Mandelstam. Both books were entitled 'Novye Stikhi' (New poems). The first consists of two Moscow collections (1930-34) and the second three Voronezh collections (1935-1937). Her comments on how this section of Mandelstam's writing was generally perceived, even in 1976, has implications for Lowell's interest in it: 'The conventional wisdom that Mandelstam's later work is obscure and significantly weaker than his early poetry still seems to be widely accepted, and the need to explode this myth has inevitably conditioned my approach' (p. x). The work in the Andreyev volumes, therefore, had two possible forms of appeal to Lowell: the excitement of exploring almost completely untouched material for translation, the novelty of 'doing a first', and the opportunity to interpret difficult poetry. Lowell's translation of 'Unknown Soldier' shows how well he rises to such a challenge.

I will be concerned with the poems Lowell worked on with Olga Carlisle as well as later unpublished translations which he produced independently. The first Lowell/Carlisle

translations appeared in The Atlantic Monthly⁷² in 1963. The remainder appeared in 1965, in The New York Review of Books⁷³, facing a review of Clarence Brown's, The Prose of Mandelstam. All these translations were later reprinted in Poets. There are also many drafts of Mandelstam translations in the Lowell Papers at the Houghton Library, Harvard. From my study of these drafts I have identified two distinct groups which I shall henceforth call the 'Carlisle' and 'Obolensky' translations. The first consists of the translations Lowell produced with Olga Carlisle and the second, reworkings of Dimitri Obolensky's prose translations in The Penguin Russian Verse. There are also a few poems whose source is uncertain though they are definitely not part of the Obolensky group. These are 'Ariosto', 'I lie on the Ground and only move my lips' and 'I drink to the Astors of War'.

The bulk of the drafts are collected together in 'Uncollected Translations' (TS. 2779), which consists of three folders containing mainly drafts of the published translations along with the three mystery translations. Further Mandelstam translations are present in drafts of Notebook's 'Long Summer (10)' (TS. 2362, 2370, 2376), all of which come from the Obolensky source. There are two unpublished final drafts of these Obolensky translations in 'Notebook: Unpublished Drafts' (TS. 2733 and 2737). A further selection of both Carlisle and Obolensky drafts are in 'Uncollected Poems' (TS. 2759, 2760, 2771 and 2772). Finally there are a few 'Carlisle' translations on the back of drafts of For the Union Dead (TS. 2289) and of Near the Ocean (TS. 2338 and 2340).

These Lowell drafts appear to have been ordered in the Houghton Library by way of pencil markings on the drafts.

⁷² 'Poems by Osip Mandelstam,' 211 (June 1963), 63-68.

⁷³ 'Robert Lowell a Translation of Nine Poems,' 23 December 1965, pp. 5-6.

However, where drafts were also typed on the back of other drafts, the Houghton have not been able to place them in order. In such cases, I have examined the pencil changes myself in order to establish the placing of a particular draft. All manuscripts and typescripts cited come from the Lowell Papers, catalogued at Houghton. From here on therefore, I shall identify them by cataloguing number, page number and '(b)' to indicate a draft on the back of a page.

Olga Carlisle told me that Lowell's way into Mandelstam was via Pasternak. Her many memories of how she and Lowell studied this poet shows how they negotiated the degree of freedom acceptable in the translations. After Lowell's initial request for help with his Pasternak translations, she and Lowell became good friends. They would generally work on the poetry in a relaxed way, mixing this with visits to New York art galleries or walks. One memory that stuck in her mind from one of these outings was the way Lowell associated the Pasternak poem 'With Oars at Rest'⁷⁴ and the lake in Central Park: 'He liked to go to the big lake where you could rent a rowing boat and if he went there the Pasternak poem would always be mentioned as the definitive poem'. Here we see Lowell connecting his own immediate experience with Pasternak's. This tendency to connect has already been seen in his translations of Mandelstam, and Akhmatova and will happen again in the Mandelstam translations to be discussed. Olga Carlisle pointed out that she and Lowell both frequently made such connections: 'yes poems and paintings that is what made our friendship so interesting because I like to do that... because an emigre has to rely on such connections more than a person who lives with family from a given place.' Yet although she could share Lowell's encounter with the Pasternak poem in a real

⁷⁴ Stikhotvorenniia u poemy (Poetry and Longer Verse), Vol. I of Boris Pasternak: Izbrannoe v Dvukh Tomakh (Collected Works in Two Vols) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura (Artistic Literature), 1985), p. 84; subsequently cited as P.I.

setting, she did not agree with his method of translating the poem itself. This was because he chose to merge it with two other Pasternak poems, 'My Sister Life' (P.I, pp. 74-75) and 'Hamlet' (P.I, pp. 390-391); a freedom she found unacceptable. But she liked the translation as a 'poem in its own right and got around the problem quite neatly:

I worked very hard to get him to unlock those poems and you see I didn't use it in the text [of Poets] because it was too free; it's in the introduction. I just used it as a Lowell poem because in terms of the very loose and liberal regulations I had set for poets that was really taking too much freedom.

The way she uses this 'three-in-one' translation, in her introduction to the Pasternak poems in Poets, provides information about Lowell's possible motives in merging the poems in such a way. I have underlined the sections which make up the poem Lowell so particularly liked:

Hamlet

'My heart throbbed like a boat on the water.
My oars rested. The willows swayed through the summer,
licking my shoulders, elbows and rowlocks--
wait this might happen,

when the music brought me the beat,
and the ash-gray waterlilies dragged, and a couple of
daisies blew
and a hint of blue dotted a point offshore--
lips to lips, stars to stars!

My sister, life!
the world has too many people for us,
the sycophant, the spineless--
silently, like snakes in the grass, they sting.

My sister!
embrace the sky and Hercules
who holds the world up forever
at ease, perhaps, and sleeps at night

thrilled by the nightingales crying...

The boat sits throbbing on the water...

The clapping stops. I walk into the lights
as Hamlet, lounge like a student against the door
frame,
and try to catch the far-off dissonance of life--
all that has happened, and must!

From the dark the audience leans its one hammering brow
against me--
ten thousand opera glasses, each set on the tripod!
Abba, Father, all things are possible with thee--
take away this cup!

I love the mulishness of Providence,
I am content to play the one part I was born for...
quite another play is running now...
take me off the boards tonight!

The sequence of scenes was well thought out;
the last bow is in the cards, or the stars--
but I am alone, and there is none...
All's drowned in the sperm and spittle of the
Pharisee--
To live a life is not to cross a field.'

(Poets, pp. 92-93)⁷⁵

Carlisle then proceeds to provide her own explanation of Lowell's reasons for merging the poems. Such insight is useful because Lowell does a similar process of merging with some of his Mandelstam translations in Poets--which apparently slipped through Olga Carlisle's net:

This English version of 'Hamlet' is as much a poem about Boris Pasternak as an adaptation from Boris Pasternak. An extremely free adaptation--or rather 'imitation,' as Robert Lowell calls it...Robert Lowell points out that the new English 'Hamlet' tells us of the Russian poet's life in a way that he himself might not have perceived it. It opens with a pastoral version of youth, a boating scene which could have been depicted by an Impressionist. The poem ends tragically with the poet's crucifixion by the mob. In the adapter's interpretation, the clapping of the river ripples and that of the audience which greets the poet about to enact his own tragic ending

⁷⁵ The poem appeared earlier entitled 'Hamlet in Russia, A Soliloquy' in Imitations, pp. 147-148. There is a single line change from 'Take me off the hooks tonight!' to 'Take me off the boards tonight!'

merge with each other, providing a transition for poems belonging to very different periods and moods.

(Poets, pp. 91-92)

Here, Lowell's treatment of the Pasternak translations are seen as a reflection of his own absorption of the poet's life and work. He is described as not simply translating but as passing on to his audience his own definition of how he understood the life and sensibilities of Pasternak. Again there is the tendency to make connections, this time between the different phases of Pasternak's life and poetry.

Carlisle's early memories of Lowell's interest in Pasternak set the scene for the relaxed way they worked their way through the poetry of Mandelstam. They also bring to the fore the issue of free versus literal translation, topical at the time Lowell and Carlisle were working on Mandelstam's poetry. The scene for such debate had been set earlier with the appearance of Imitations. For me, what is striking about some of the resulting criticism is the relish with which critics conjure up imagery to make their point. John Simon argues that Lowell's freedoms are an abuse of his privileged position as a poet and defines his activity as such: 'A poet runs out of poetry of his own, so he makes it out of someone else's, rather like the fly that lays its eggs in the living body of a certain caterpillar for the larvae' to feed on.'⁷⁶ Ben Belitt, although excluding Lowell from his own group of 'parasites', uses similar imagery to discuss the dangers of bad translation:

In the 'parasitology' of translation, it is true, there are certain crustaceans which castrate their hosts, others which attach themselves to large aquatic animals

⁷⁶ 'Abuse of Privilege: Lowell as Translator,' Hudson Review, 20 (Winter 1967/68); rpt. in Robert Lowell: A Portrait of the Artist in His Time, ed. Michael London and Robert Boyers (New York: David Lewis Pub., Inc, 1970), pp. 130-151 (p. 151).

for the ride and prestige, others which strangle and infect...[Lowell's] talent is massive enough to invite and master each of the dangers mentioned, in the service of a commanding identity, and survive.⁷⁷

And C. Chadwick, like Simon, condemns Lowell's audacity:

WHAT, PRECISELY, does Robert Lowell mean when he says that, in his Imitations he has been 'reckless with meaning but has laboured hard to get the tone'? All too often he seems on the contrary to labour hard to get the literal meaning, but fails to do so and, as a consequence, gets the tone wrong as well.⁷⁸

Olga Carlisle remembered how she and Lowell had to act as partners in crime against their critics, after the appearance of the Mandelstam translations. Two defendants were George Steiner and Isiah Berlin, and their main critics were Nabokov and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. Isiah Berlin had this to say of the translations:

Robert Lowell in his translations that follow, seems to me to have accomplished what Pasternak did for the poets of Georgia: both transform poetry from a wholly unfamiliar language and perform the task of imaginative utterance in the persona of another as expressively and profoundly as it can be done. The similarity of the classical interests of Mr Lowell and his original may have played a part. The result is beautiful and moving.⁷⁹

A literary dialogue which took place in Encounter between Steiner and Yarmolinsky shows their position in opposed

⁷⁷ 'Imitations: Translation as a Personal Mode,' Salmagundi, 1 (Winter 1966/67); rpt. in London and Boyers, pp. 115-129 (p. 117).

⁷⁸ 'Meaning and Tone,' in Essays in Criticism, 13 (1963); rpt. in Critics on Lowell, ed. Jonathon Price (Aylesbury: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974), pp. 89-91 (p. 89).

⁷⁹ 'A Great Russian Writer,' rev. of The Prose of Osip Mandelstam, ed. Clarence Brown, New York Review of Books, 23 December 1965, p. 4.

camps. Steiner, citing Lowell's Mandelstam translation 'My eyelash prickles--a tear boils up from my chest,'⁸⁰ gives the highest praise to Lowell:

A great poetic translation--Holderin's Sophokles, Valery's restatement of Virgil's Eclogues, Robert Lowell's readings of Osip Mandelstam--is criticism in the highest sense. It surrounds the original with a zone of unmastered meaning, an area in which the original declares its own singular life.⁸¹

Yarmolinsky replies to this article in his letter in Encounter with the damning observation:

George Steiner's stimulating reflections on translation in your August issue include some specimens of the art. One of these exhibits, intended to exemplify 'a great poetic translation' is unfortunate. I refer to Robert Lowell's rendering of an octave by Osip Mandelstam.

He then proceeds, in the vein of Nabokov, to criticise literal errors in a number of the translations Lowell produced in collaboration with Olga Carlisle. Like Nabokov's criticisms, some of Yarmolinsky's are justified in my view, pointing to obvious mistakes in the literal source, while others are stated as though deliberately ignoring what may be valid motives for translating freely. Yarmolinsky concludes with some justification, 'It would seem to be axiomatic that whatever liberties the translator may now avail himself of, he must at least be certain of the prose sense of the original'. One particular error he points to is Lowell's mistranslation of 'kúrva' in the poem 'No I will not hide from the great mess.'⁸² The first version is Yarmolinsky's literal one, the second is Lowell's original version:

⁸⁰ No. 229, M.I, pp. 163-164, Poets, p. 147.

⁸¹ 'To Traduce or Transfigure,' p. 52.

⁸² No. 232, M.I, p. 165, New York Review of Books.

You do as you wish, but I will take no chances,
I, who have not enough heat under my glove
To ride around all Moscow, the whore.

You do as you wish, but I am not afraid
who has enough heat behind his gloves to hold the reins
and ride around Moscow's ribbons of boulevards.

Olga Carlisle described to me her version of events with
some wry amusement:

'Kurva' means whore and I did not know that when I was
translating it first so we only had the ribbons. Enraged
critics were more than happy to show up my ignorance but
Lowell was delighted and stuck it right in there and
then, and it all worked out very well but ... it was one
of my less glorious moments when I didn't know what
'kurva' was. I was brought up in such a protected
Russian environment.

However she made no apologies for the reference to 'ribbons
of boulevards':

The ribbons I lay claim to entirely...it was my first
translation. Having just returned from Moscow, knowing
that it has indeed rings of boulevards, I made the
connection between them and the reference to 'kurva'. Of
course clearly in Mandelstam it has both meanings, both
the Latin for curve and the Russian whore that left me so
red-faced.

Here one might argue that she is attempting to justify an
obvious error. But, as will be more apparent when I discuss
Mandelstam's use of language, she is arguing with some
justification, for Mandelstam, almost always, used words with
an awareness of their full range of meanings. In general,
Olga Carlisle was quite sympathetic to Lowell's freedoms
with the translations. Her attitude to their working

partnership is well illustrated in another amusing comment (the reference to skeletons refers to his desire to add skeleton images to 'Requiem'): 'How could I ask him to throw out 'the shiny blue foxes like dancers in the night'. It's just so wonderful. But he would tend to put in certain lines and I would prevail upon him, especially skeletons... I would just draw the line at skeletons.' Her translation of a certain phrase in Lowell's translation of Mandelstam's 'Stalin'⁸³ caused her further embarrassment: 'Critics didn't like in the famous poem where each death to him is 'kak malina'. It means that you're content. Lowell took this and translated it literally, 'putting a raspberry in his mouth'--if you knew how I suffered for that raspberry!' She emphasised the fact that, although she did not desire strictly literal translations in Poets, she nevertheless had to restrain Lowell when he wished to go further than her own 'rather loose boundaries' would allow. She was willing to go a long way down Lowell's route of free translation, for in some of the poems of Poets Lowell not only takes liberties with the language of the poems but also with their structure.

Once Olga Carlisle had persuaded Lowell to read some of Mandelstam's work she had to decide which poems he might like. Areas of common interest between the two poets provided the easiest way in. She remembered being directed by her own knowledge of Lowell's poetry as well as information from Lowell who she discovered did, indeed, like poetry close to his own concerns. Two particular themes which Olga Carlisle remembered providing this early way into the poetry were history/power and love affairs.

Lowell's ambivalent attitude to power in his poetry has been repeatedly noted. He is opposed to the repression that power inflicts throughout history but is nevertheless fascinated by the nature of that power. H.B. Staples

⁸³ No. 286, M.I, p. 202, Poets, p. 151.

suggests the violence inherent in Lowell's early poetry when he describes it as 'learned and savage'⁸⁴ and also notes Lowell's ambivalence towards those figures of power whom Lowell condemns: 'Lowell's satirical analysis of the deficiencies of the rulers of early New England is' a dominant feature of the early poetry. Yet even in Land of Unlikeness there is a kind of wistful admiration for their achievements' (ibid., p. 18).

The sequence 'the Powerful' in Notebook reinforces impressions of this ambivalence. Alan Williamson provides a Freudian interpretation of such contradictions in Lowell's nature, here discussing 'the Powerful': 'The old theme of the psychopathic appeal of power, the crossing of the dividing-line beyond which impulse is an absolute unto itself, is also very prominent: Hitler, Tamerlane, Richard III' (Pity the Monsters, pp. 196-197). Ian Hamilton, in Robert Lowell: A Biography, goes as far as to suggest that the attraction to such destructive figures is part of Lowell's own nature. He gives examples of Lowell's physical aggression, particularly when young, and also, rather unfairly, when suffering from manic depression. He also explains that Lowell came to be called Cal because of his obsession with the violent figure, Caligula.

Olga Carlisle was very much aware of Lowell's contradictory attitude to power. She told me that in his more manic moments he appeared to have a fascination with Stalin comparable to his earlier attraction to Caligula. Perhaps this is why he translated Mandelstam's poem dedicated to Stalin:

We live. We are not sure our land is under us.
Ten feet away, no one even hears us

But wherever there's even a half-conversation,

⁸⁴ Robert Lowell: The First Twenty Years, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) p. 13.

we remember the Kremlin's mountaineer.

His thick fingers are fat as worms,
his words reliable as ten-pound weights.

His boot tops shine,
his cockroach mustache is laughing.

About him, the great, his thin-necked, drained
advisors.
He plays with them. He is happy with half-men around
him.

They make touching and funny animal sounds.
He alone talks Russian.

One after another, his sentences hit like horseshoes!
He
pounds them out. He always hits the nail, the balls.

After each death, he is like a Georgian tribesman,
putting a raspberry in his mouth.⁸⁵

She also observed that he was attracted to references to the violence of early Russian history. Of 'Preserve my words for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke'⁸⁶ she said, 'He simply adored those lines, "I have promised to build you forests of log wells, /such as the Tartars built to lower the princes in wooden buckets"'. However, 'Somehow we got through the miles of Moscow'⁸⁷, which describes a particularly violent event in Muscovite history, shows that Lowell's fascination with power, in this poem at least, provided him with what is, in my view, a rather misleading introduction to Mandelstam's poetry. Here is Lowell's fairly literal version: .

Somehow we go through the miles of Moscow.
Left the Sparrow Hills, and found the small, familiar
church.
Our open sled was filled with straw, and roughly hooded
with coarse, frozen cloth that hurt us.

⁸⁵ No. 286, M.I, p. 202, Poets, p. 151.

⁸⁶ No. 235, M.I, p. 167, Poets, p. 145.

⁸⁷ No. 85, M.I, pp. 58-59, Poets, p. 141.

Then in Uglitch the children played knucklebones.
When we drove through it, I reached for my lost hat,
the air smelled like bread left in the oven,
three candles were melting in the chapel.

They were not three candles but three meetings--
one of them had been blessed by the Lord Himself.
There couldn't be a fourth--Rome was so far away,
and the Lord had never been Himself there.

Our sled stuck in a black rut,
and people shuffled by us to stare.
The men were all bones, the woman were crows.
They gossiped and wasted time by the door.

Birds blackened the bare distance with spots--
his tied hands were icy. The Tsarevitch's
body was like a frozen sack when they drove him in,
and set fire to the reddish straw.

Olga Carlisle provided me with background to the poem:

It is dedicated to Marina Tsvetaeva with whom he had a brief friendship or love affair before Madame Mandelstam came into his life. Like Mandelstam and Petersburg, Tsvetaeva was an incarnation of Moscow and a perpetrator of Russian history. The poem has to do with the whole complex of Boris Godunov who assassinated the tsarevitch the rightful heir. It is dealing with the subject of the false pretender. I would imagine that it was Pushkin's Boris Godunov which was Mandelstam's prime inspiration here.

The poem describes a violent struggle for power such as would have so much fascinated Lowell, yet the period in history is an untypical choice for Mandelstam. Olga Carlisle's distinction between Petersburg and Moscow in relation to Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva is apt: Tsvetaeva's poetry is rich in references to the early Muscovite history which Moscow symbolises, while Mandelstam's, with its emphasis on the classical and Hellenic, associates more readily with Petersburg, where the westernising influence of Peter the Great is reflected in classical architecture. In dedication to Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam places the Muscovite

emphasis on the poem. Of course, Lowell is not obliged to focus only on Mandelstam's more typical poetry but, because he may be unaware of Mandelstam's chief concerns at this stage, I feel he is being guided away from any genuine encounter with Mandelstam's thought. Clarence Brown, in his discussion of the poem, suggests what it lacks: 'The poem seems to me, then, for all its evident reference to questions of great moral and historical import to be morally and historically mute' (Mandelstam, p. 225). By looking at a poem which reflects Mandelstam's more typical historical/cultural concerns one can gain a sense of why the 'Tsvetaeva' poem may have appeared 'mute' to Brown:

Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails.
I've read to the middle of the list of ships:
the strung-out flock, the stream of cranes
that once rose above Hellas.

Flight of cranes crossing strange borders,
leaders drenched with the foam of the gods,
where are you sailing? what would Troy be to you,
men of Achaea, without Helen?

The sea--Homer--it's all moved by love. But to whom
shall I listen? No sound from Homer,
and the black sea roars like a speech
and thunders up the bed.⁸⁸

This poem reflects Mandelstam's love of the classical world and shows him linking past and present culture. Lowell would certainly have related to the classical associations, and might also have been drawn to such attempts to achieve historical synthesis for, in Notebook, he tries to do something similar, stating, 'I am learning to live in history./What is history? What you cannot touch' (p. 103). The harmonious tone of the poem is also typical of much of Mandelstam's verse. The 'Tsvetaeva' poem reflects nothing of this love of the Hellenic world and although it does make

⁸⁸ No. 78, M.I, p. 48-47, Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems, trans. Clarence Brown and W.S. Merwin (1973; rpt: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 29.

connections between the past and the present--a contemporary journey to a place of historic import--the tone does not suggest any of the harmonious co-existence between past and present such as is reflected in 'Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails.'

Olga Carlisle told me that Lowell was also attracted to the poem because it refers to a literary friendship. She said that he was interested in poetic friendships, particularly those with women, and added that this was his motive for wishing to translate Akhmatova's 'Requiem'. She made the analogy between Mandelstam's friendship with Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva, and Lowell's friendship with Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich. Lowell must certainly have been interested in how Mandelstam made such friendships into subjects for poetry. Notebook has numerous poems dedicated to friends, male and female, and some of those to Elizabeth Bishop, with whom he maintained a life-long correspondence, are his most moving: 'We wished our two souls might return like gulls to the rock./In the end, the water was too cold for us' (Notebook, p. 234). Although the themes of friendship and power provide an interesting way into Mandelstam's poetry, one feels with regards the subject matter of the 'Tsvetaeva' poem that Lowell is dipping into unknown territory, feeling out for points of contact.

On the other hand, Lowell's interpretation of Mandelstam's imagery in the 'Tsvetaeva' poem shows him immediately involved with Mandelstam's language. Clarence Brown's view of Mandelstam's work provides hints of why this might be so: '[Mandelstam] was preeminently the poet of the present moment, of the literal fact in all its particularity' ('The Prose of Mandelstam,' p. 24). One could as easily apply such a description to Lowell's work, indeed Lowell himself states (here referring to Notebook), 'I wished to describe the immediate instant.'⁸⁹ One of the means both

⁸⁹ 'Conversation with Ian Hamilton,' p. 272.

poets use to give this impression of 'particularity' is by employing 'concrete detail', which I take to be the description of both animate and inanimate objects so that an impression of solidity is conveyed. H. B. Staples, for example, speaking of Life Studies, mentions the 'somewhat immobile quality' of the poetry, which he puts down to Lowell's 'dependence on inanimate physical detail' (First Twenty Years, p. 72). Marjorie Perloff usefully compares Lowell's language with that of two other writers of the 'literal fact with all its particularity', namely Tolstoy and Chekhov.⁹⁰ Gabriel Pearson has also focused on the apparent solidity of Lowell poetry but suggests the illusory nature of such solidity: 'A Lowell poem, however solid its architecture, never looks other than fragile, friable, only just mastering the pulls and pressures that threaten to disintegrate it.'⁹¹ It is this common reliance on concrete detail, I believe, which enables Lowell to interpret Mandelstam's imagery so effectively in the 'Tsvetaeva' poem.

In the poem, Mandelstam vividly paints a scene, providing a sequence of images with little comment. Lowell keeps fairly close to the original but the few changes that he makes enhance Mandelstam's images. Take, for example, the opening two lines to the poem:

On a low wide sledge piled with straw
scarcely covered with fatal bast matting

(literal)⁹²

Our open sled was filled with straw, and roughly hooded
with coarse, frozen cloth that hurt us.

(Lowell)

⁹⁰ See her chapter 'Romanticism and Realism,' in The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 80-99, in particular pp. 86-90.

⁹¹ 'Robert Lowell,' The Review, No. 20 (March 1969), 3-36 (p. 30).

⁹² From here on, all use of (literal) refers to my own translations unless stated otherwise.

With simplicity, Lowell brings immediacy to the scene so the reader can almost feel the freezing uncomfortable journey and visualise the frozen cloth. In the penultimate verse Lowell changes the description of old men and women:

Thin men and malicious women
loitered at the gate.

(literal)

The men were all bones, the women were crows.
They gossiped and wasted time by the door.

(Lowell)

Lowell's use of 'bones' and 'crows' enhances the image of the men and women by making it more metaphorical without distorting the original meaning. In the last verse he also makes changes to intensify the scene:

The grey distance grew black with birds,
and the bound hands have become frozen.
They brought in the tsarevich, a body terribly numbed,
and set fire to the reddish straw.

(literal)

Birds blackened the bare distance with spots--
his tied hands were icy. The Tsarevitch's
body was like a frozen sack when they drove him in,
and set fire to the reddish straw.

(Lowell)

Mandelstam's poem concentrates on the present setting of Uglitch until the final stanza. He then introduces the tsarevitch with a shocking intimacy, focusing on his frozen hands before the mention of the tsarevich himself. Lowell retains this and then proceeds to enhance the horrific description of the corpse. Lowell's reference to 'frozen

sack' creates an emotive and visually effective image of the scene, increasing our feelings of horror at the event. The use of 'frozen' also links with the 'frozen' cloth of the opening verse.

Another translation which Olga Carlisle felt resulted from Lowell's fascination with powerful figures was 'Chapayev'⁹³, a translation which merges the two Mandelstam poems, No. 311 and 313. Mandelstam was inspired to write about this Bolshevik war hero as a result of seeing the film Chapayev in April 1935. The two Mandelstam poems do naturally connect because Chapayev is referred to in both. Olga Carlisle provided me with some useful background to the film as well as pointing out that Lowell saw it:

I prevailed upon the Osbornes who were in the habit of arranging movies from the Museum of Modern Art library to get the Chapayev film and they did, and the Lowells came and we showed it. It's a kind of pro-Stalinist film of propaganda just before The Terror. It was one of the first sound movies in the Soviet Union and very patriotic. It was used by the Stalinist movement to get patriotism going and of course Chapayev, later, after the film, became an object of ridicule and there were always Chapayev jokes. It's quite beautiful in some ways. It is propaganda but before the cult of personality really became quite as obnoxious as it did.

Earlier we saw Lowell making connections between his own experience and Pasternak's. Here again Lowell makes connections. Just as Mandelstam watched the film before writing his poem so Lowell watches the film before writing the translation.

The first 'Chapayev' poem (No. 311) equates with Lowell's first stanza. The poem focuses on a scene where the Whites make a psychological attack on Chapayev's men by

⁹³ No. 311, M.I, p. 216, and No. 313, M.I, p. 219, Poets, pp. 151-155.

refurbishing ranks of fallen men with supporting troops.
Compare Lowell's version with the literal one:

From the damp speaking sheet,
you know, it was found on the sound-shepherd of a fish,
a vibrating picture was approaching
on me, on everything, and on you.

Having sneezed at crooked losses
with deadly cigarettes in their mouths,
the officers of the last formation
are entering the plains of the gaping groin.

A low buzzing of planes is heard
burning to nothing,
as the english horse razor
scraped the Admiral's cheek.

Re-measure me, land, cut me again--
the excellent heat of the fastened land!--
Chapayev's rifle has misfired--
help, untie, unbind!

(literal)

Unreeling, speaking from the wet film--
they must have had a shepherd of sounds for the fish--
the loud images were moving in
upon me--and upon all, upon you too...

They had given up their privileged smallness,
their teeth gripped the deadly last cigarettes.
The brand new White Russian officers
stood against the open loins of the steppes.

a low roaring was heard--airplanes
streaking in burning to the very end--
an English razor blade, large enough to shave a horse,
scraped Admiral Kolchak's cheek.

Alter me, Oh land, refit me--
the heat of the fixed earth is beautiful--
Chapayev's smoking rifle has jammed.
Help me, untie me, separate me...

(Lowell)

Lowell deals intelligently with much of the poem's language.
He interprets the literal 'sheets', for example, as the

sheets of the film. The reference to the 'sound-shepherd' is ambiguous and Lowell does not elucidate but does make the image less clumsy than a literal translation. His opening 'Unreeling, speaking from the wet film', by way of its 'ee' assonance, foregrounds the line's steady pace and helps suggest the film's images are relentlessly moving towards its audience. His change from 'the vibrating film was approaching' to 'the loud images were moving in', prepares us for the dramatic image from the film that is described in the next verse. In an earlier draft of the poem he had, 'the shouting images were moving in' (TS. 2779, p. 23), which is perhaps even more powerful to convey the battle atmosphere. His final verse hangs together well with the change from the imperatives, 'help', 'untie', 'divide', to 'help me, untie me, separate me...'. The addition of 'me' establishes an effective rhythm to bring the poem to a conclusion and gives the poem cohesion by associating with the first verse 'upon me, upon all, upon you too...'.

Stanza three is worth noting in particular, for Lowell appears to me to be using his own impressions of the film to interpret Mandelstam's descriptions of Kolchak's soldiers. His emotional response to the Whites comes across as quite different from Mandelstam's, for example. Jennifer Baines argues that Mandelstam approved of the image of the White soldiers as it appealed to his 'love of hierarchy' (The Later Poetry, p. 133). Mandelstam's line, 'having sneezed at crooked losses', reflects this approval, suggesting that the Whites are fearless in spite of the carnage around them. Lowell's 'they have given up their privileged smallness', on the other hand, implies they were insignificant before they had their chance of martyrdom. Lowell also makes changes which increase the immediacy of the image of the White soldiers. Consider for example the change from 'with deadly cigarettes in their mouths' to 'their teeth gripped the deadly last cigarettes'. The assonance of the short vowel-sound 'i' coupled with the hard consonants of 't' and 'g' creates a harshness which reinforces impressions of the

soldiers bracing themselves for almost certain death. The change from 'the officers' to Lowell's 'brand new White Russian officers' makes the soldiers' action appear all the more futile by emphasising the youthfulness and freshness of each new batch of soldiers which appears.

The second 'Chapayev' poem (No. 313) equates with Lowell's second stanza. Mandelstam's poem describes Mandelstam's train journey into exile after his arrest in 1934 for writing the poem to Stalin. He recalls young Russian soldiers guarding himself and his wife on the journey. While Madame Mandelstam read Pushkin to him the soldiers sat and listened. The poem associates once more with Chapayev because Mandelstam's impressions of the journey through the Urals remind him once more of images from the film Chapayev.

This poem is difficult to translate both because of its free association and its line length. In my discussion of 'Unknown Soldier' I provided some examples of how free association becomes nonsense if not translated intelligently. Long lines can also cause the translation to lack cohesion and become rambling. Lowell has got round both problems. In the original Mandelstam brings the train journey to life largely through the sounds of the poem. Consider the opening two lines:

Den' stoial o piati golovakh. Sploshnye piat' sutok
Ia zhimaias', gordilsia prostranstvom za to chto rosló na
drozhzhakh.

(Mandelstam)

The day stood about five heads. For five continuous days
I, clenching, was proud of the vastness, because it was
rising like dough.

(literal)

Passing the dragon with five heads. For five whole days,
I shrank back, I was proud of our huge open spaces rising
like dough.

(Lowell)

Lowell's final transformation removes the clumsiness of earlier versions. The first effective change is to place 'Chapayev spoke' at the end of line one. The line break provides a pause after 'spoke' which helps give authority to Chapayev's voice, suggesting that he spoke and all listened. In the final draft of the last two lines, Lowell's careful ordering of the action enables the verse to come to a dramatic and emphatic conclusion. The rather wistful and exclamatory 'Oh, to clear', suggests both an upward movement and rising of expectation which is continued with the phrase 'go through'. There is then a sudden sense of falling and resolution with 'and drown'. The repetition of 'drown' combined with the alliteration 'to drown, to die', reinforces this sense of falling and contributes to the emphatic conclusion of the lines. For me, Chapayev's death is made heroic and dignified by this careful placing of words.

Another theme which appealed to Lowell, according to Olga Carlisle, was the subject of love affairs. Lowell's various affairs have been catalogued with great relish by Ian Hamilton in Robert Lowell: a Biography, and throughout Lowell's poetry they are used as material for poetry. One thinks of certain sonnet sequences of Notebook: 'Through the Night', 'Mexico' and the whole exploration of infidelity which makes up The Dolphin. Lowell translated two of Mandelstam's poems which deal with love affairs. The first is 'The Turkish Woman'⁹⁴ which is devoted to a certain poet, Maria Petrovykh. The second is 'To the Memory of Olga Vaxel'⁹⁵. Both these affairs are discussed frankly and with some wry amusement by Nadezhda Mandelstam in Hope against Hope. Olga Carlisle told me he was particularly intrigued by the two poems about affairs which he translated, making the comment 'I think Lowell had a kind of fascination with these two poems. He put particular care into them.'

⁹⁴ No. 295, M.I, p. 208, Poets, p. 149.

⁹⁵ No. 314, M.I, p. 220, Poets, p. 155.

Lowell's treatment of 'the Turkish Woman' is interesting to examine, because he has left two drafts of the translation which are both quite different from the final version. The variety in the drafts suggests the pleasure he must have experienced grappling with the poem's complex imagery. When one reads the poem, it is hard to imagine how Jennifer Baines, using superlatives, can argue that the poem is 'justly well-known and too transparent to need any comment' (The Later Poetry, p. 106):

A seamstress of guilty gazes,
a small holder of shoulders--
dangerous male obstinacy has been *pacified*
speech like someone drowned no longer sounds.

Fish move glowing with fins,
blowing gills. Now take them
silent 'o's of their mouths--
feed them with the half bread of the flesh.

But we are not golden red fish,
we are the usual sisterly ones:
the little thin ribs in the warm body
and the useless damp lustre of the pupils.

Poppy eyebrows marked a dangerous journey.
How much is my love, like the Turkish soldier's,
for this tiny flying red one,
this pitiful crescent of lips?

Don't be angry Turkish woman dear,
I will see us both up in the hollow bag,
swallowing your dark words,
for you false water I will drink.

You, Maria--aid to those dying,
it's necessary to give advance warning to *death, to sleep*
I stand at a *firm* threshold.
Walk away, go away, *stay* awhile.

(literal)

Mandelstam is concerned not only with a love affair but with his much loved subject, language; here, untypically, he describes its inadequacy rather than its power. The poem relies a good deal on free association and, as with 'Unknown

Soldier', leaves the impression that Mandelstam is looking at his object through a magnifying glass. This is suggested by the focus upon impressions not of the woman as a whole but on specific parts of her body. The stanzas shift between descriptions of Maria Petrovykh herself and the effect she has on the poet. The opening emphasises her alluring illicitness. The use of 'seamstress' suggests that she has cultivated her gaze into a conscious art. The first three stanzas show how the man is completely overpowered by her. Her fragile frame, 'a small holder of shoulders', acts only to reinforce the devastating effect she has on men. The description of words as a 'drowned person' suggests they are inadequate to describe her, and the image of fish silently mouthing shows the man's loss of words, his ineffectuality and his imprisonment. The woman's dominance over him is emphasised by her feeding these incapacitated, voiceless fish. In the third stanza the male image is changed to the orphan-like 'little thin ribs in the warm body' which emphasises his weakness even further. In the fourth stanza Mandelstam captures the attraction of the woman by magnifying his image of her face. Such magnification helps to make novel the potentially clichéd image of red rosy lips. Mandelstam concentrates on her gaze which is both frail and lethal: the fragility of her 'zhálki' (pitiful) lips contrasting the 'dangerous journey' of her 'poppy eyebrows'. A link is then made between the drowned words of the opening stanza and the poet swallowing the Turkish woman's words, presumably in praise of her skill as a poet. The final stanza reinforces the fact that Mandelstam both wishes to be free and enslaved by her.

Lowell's treatment of the first stanza of version I (TS. 2779, p. 41) is reminiscent of his treatment of 'Requiem', because of the way he places a greater male emphasis on the poem than exists in the original:

A seamstress of guilty gazes,
a small holder of shoulders--
dangerous male obstinacy has been sacrificed,

speech like someone drowned no longer sounds.

(literal)

Your fragile small shoulders bear up this world,
man's evasive conscience-burdened glances end in you,
his dangerous bearish intensity is appeased,
his words, like a drowned man, are dumb.

(Version I)

He removes the description of the woman, 'a seamstress of guilty gazes' and adds that of the man, 'man's evasive conscience-burdened glances end in you', as well as focusing the last line on the man. As a result, three lines describe the man rather than the woman. The phrase, 'Conscience-burdened', suggests male guilt not present in the original, and is followed by a clumsy, rather arrogant image of the male sexual appetite with, 'his dangerous bearish intensity is appeased'. The male image thus changes from that which has been made helpless to that which has been appeased sexually. Though not particularly effective, the stanza does show Lowell engaging with Mandelstam's poem and absorbing his own experience into the poem.

In the second and third stanzas, however, Lowell does, in my view, interpret Mandelstam's difficult imagery well, showing his ability to move with ease through the free association of Mandelstam's poetry:

Fish move glowing with fins,
blowing gills. Now take them,
the silent 'o's of their mouths--
feed them with the half bread of the flesh.

But we are not golden red fish,
we are the usual sisterly ones:
the little thin ribs in the warm body
and the useless damp lustre of the pupils.

(literal)

All shining red fins and gills like bellows,
the fish dart and flicker. Their mouths are rounded
in wordless and wondering O's.
Here, take this, feed them the half-bread of your flesh.

But we are not red-finned fish streaking
through the lacy water ferns and bubbling when we meet;
ours the fever of the fragile body, the little ribs
like wishbones, the rain wet glitter of the eyeball.

(Version I)

Again one gets the impression that Lowell enjoys imagery close to his own; in this case fish and eye imagery. Olga Carlisle told me, 'I think in 'Turchanka' there are those fish that come up. That somehow pleased him very much and I don't know if there is anything like this in Russian he seems to have made it his own'. Here is an example of Lowell using such imagery in his own poetry:

My whole eye was sunset red,
the old cut cornea throbbled,
I saw things darkly,
as through an unwashed goldfish globe.

(For the Union Dead, p. 18)

In Version I, Lowell takes Mandelstam's fish imagery and develops it. The phrase 'gills like bellows' is more visually effective than the literal 'blowing gills', for example, and the addition 'fish dart and flicker' makes the impression of fish imagery more vivid. 'Wondering' is also effective to capture the look of the fish swimming, reinforcing an impression of the man in awe of the woman. The development of 'little thin ribs' to 'little ribs like wishbones', provides an effective simile to accentuate the brittleness of the ribs, and the change from, 'the useless damp lustre of the pupils' to, 'the rain wet glitter of the eyeball' provides a vivid eye image such as one finds in Lowell's own verse.

In the fourth stanza he clarifies the ambiguity of some of the seemingly disconnected images:

Poppy eyebrows marked a dangerous journey.
How much is my love, like the Turkish soldier's,
for this tiny flying red one,
this pitiful crescent of lips?

(literal)

The eyebrows have a dangerous way of arching and
fluttering,
Below them, all that is dearest to me,
a tiny, fluttering fish-gill-red thing,
the pitiful small half moon of your lips.

(Version I)

Lowell's first line provides an explanation of the image in Mandelstam's first line and the addition of 'Below them' makes it more obvious that it is the woman's eyebrows and lips which are being described. In the original there is a slight suggestion that the woman's lips, 'this tiny flying red one', are to be associated with the fish imagery of the preceding stanzas. Lowell's translation makes this connection more obvious by describing the lips as a 'fish-gill-red thing'. He has removed the reference to the Janissary (Turkish soldier) in this draft, though he restores it in later drafts. All in all, this stanza shows evidence of Lowell not merely translating but interpreting the poem for his reader.

In the next stanza Lowell continues with freedoms which assist an interpretation of the poem:

Don't be angry Turkish woman dear,
I will sew us both up in the hollow bag,
swallowing your dark words,
for you false water I will drink.

(literal)

Dear Turkish woman, do not be angry,
I will tie us together in a tightly woven sack,

I'll knot the neck, Ill swallow your pouring dark words,
I'll drink the strangling water.

(Version I)

By the addition of 'pouring', in his free 'I'll swallow your pouring dark words', he associates the woman's words with the 'false water' which follows. He concludes the poem with a wonderful freedom, in tune with Mandelstam's own affinity for classical references:

You, Maria--aid to those dying,
it's necessary to die give advance warning to sleep.
I stand at your threshold.
Walk away, go away, still impel.

(literal)

Maria, comfort those who are dying,
put me to sleep, warn off death,
I stand on its steep Tarpeian Rock.
Go away from me, go--stay for a while!

(Version I)

Tarpeian of Tarpeia was said to have betrayed the Capitol at Rome to the Sabines. For this he was buried beneath the Tarpeian rock on the Capitoline hill, from which criminals were henceforth thrown. By using this classical allusion, Lowell raises the status of the love affair and increases our sense of the hold that the Turkish woman has over Mandel'stam.

Version II (TS. 2771) provides further variety:

Everything rests on your small shoulders:
man's sidelong, conscience tainted glances rest,
his undependable bearish simplicity is appeased
his frightened words, like a drowned woman, are dumb.

Red fins shine and gills blowing like bellows,
the fish zip hither and thither. Their wondering mouths
are rounded in wordless and famished O's.
Here, take this, feed them the half-bread of your flesh,

But we are not goldfish feathering through the globe,
and bubbling when we meet a lacy fern;
ours the fever of the warm-blooded body, the little ribs
like fishbones. The vein wet glitter of the eyeball.

I am gathering poppies in a dangerous field.
The opium drowns me. I am kissing
a tiny, fluttering fish-gill-red thing,
the pitiful small half moon of your lips.

Dear Turkish woman, do not be angry,
some Janissary will tie us together in a strong sack,
and throw us in the Black Sea. I'll do it myself.
I'll drink the strangling water.

Maria, comfort those who must die,
put me to sleep, warn off Death.
I stand on a steep Tarpeian Rock.
Go away from me, stand off---another minute!

There are a number of individual words changed, but Lowell's new treatment of stanza four is the most interesting. In the first draft Lowell removed Mandelstam's 'poppy eyebrows' and interpreted the image with, 'the eyebrows have a dangerous way of arching and fluttering'. In this second draft, however, he reverts to 'poppy' and experiments with it. The result is not particularly effective, but again it does show Lowell getting involved with Mandelstam's imagery. Lowell's treatment of the Janissary is intriguing. As if lost for somewhere to put him, Lowell ends up making the Janissary tie the two lovers up in the sack! Lowell refers to the Black sea in his translation, although Mandelstam does not in the original. This addition suggests Lowell was aware of the Black Sea's importance to Mandelstam. Due to its location, he considers it a fitting symbol of the association between Russian and Hellenic culture.

And finally the end result:

Everything rests on your small shoulders:
the sidelong glances of conscience,
our dangerous, wolfish simplicity--
my words, like a drowned woman are dumb.

Red fins shining, red gills fanning,
their wondering mouths rounded in wordless
and famished O's, the fish fin here and there.
Take this, feed them the half-risen bread of your flesh!

But we are not goldfish swimming around the globe,
and bubbling when we meet by a water fern;
ours the heat of the warm-blooded body, little ribs
vain as fishbones, the wet, white glitter of the eyeball.

I am gathering poppies from the dangerous fields
of your eyebrows. I love
your tiny, fluttering fish-gill red lips,
as a janissary loves his pitiful, small crescent moon.

Dear Turkish woman, do not be angry,
we will be tied together in a strong sack
and thrown in the Black Sea. I'll do it myself,
while drinking your words, their black water.

Maria, comfort those who must die;
death must be frightened off, and put to sleep.
I stand on a steep cliff by the sea.
Go away from me, stand off--another minute!

This final version tightens up the ideas but there are losses in removing the reference to Tarpeian rock. From the drafts one can see how Lowell ended with the line 'I stand on a steep cliff by the sea' but one can also see why Yarmolinsky, provided only with the final version, would be mystified by it. Here are further comments made in his letter in Encounter: '...sometimes real howlers, occur in Lowell's other translations from the Russian. A line of a love poem by Mandelstam reads, in the original: "I stand at your threshold." This is rendered: "I stand on a steep cliff by the sea" '. Yarmolinsky criticises the line because it is too free but, for me, it is only its banality that is at fault. I think 'Tarpeian rock' was justified because it fitted in with Mandelstam's own tendency to use classical allusion and intensified the poem's impact.

The second love poem translated by Lowell, 'To the memory of Olga Vaxel'⁹⁶, deals with another serious affair in

⁹⁶ No. 314, M.I, p. 220, Poets, p. 155.

Mandelstam's life. Here is Lowell's final version:

Is it possible to praise a dead woman?
She was an alien to her people, and full of strength.
The power of her love for a stranger
brought her to a hot and violent grave.

The firm black swallows of her eyebrows
swoop down at me from the grave.
They tell me they've lain too long
in their cold bed in Stockholm.

Your people were proud of an ancestor's violin--
Your neck bending over its neck improved its looks.
When you opened your mouth to laugh
you looked more Italian, and better-looking.

I keep your heavy memory,
wild one, little bear, Mignon...
But the wheels of the mills are fast in winter.
the horn of the postman is thinly blowing.⁹⁶

The three drafts of this poem⁹⁷ are all similar, and are close to the original. Here Lowell, as if happy to let Mandelstam speak for himself, provides a simple, well written, literal translation.

My impression is that the subjects of power and love affairs are only important insofar as they helped Lowell make choices about which Mandelstam poems to read. However, although Lowell may not be thematically engaged with Mandelstam's poetry, the same cannot be said about his involvement with Mandelstam's language. Here Lowell seems very much in tune with Mandelstam, interpreting the imagery intelligently, and repeatedly enhancing the concrete detail. In the remaining poems to be discussed, however, Lowell does get involved in what Mandelstam has to say as well as how he says it.

The bulk of Lowell's Mandelstam translations in Poets comes from the poetry which Mandelstam wrote between 1930-1937,

⁹⁶ No. 314, M.I, p. 220, Poets, p. 155.

⁹⁷ TS. 2779, p. 24, p. 24 (b) and p. 11 (b).

the period which Jennifer Baines covers in Mandelstam: the Later Poetry. This was a particularly productive time for Mandelstam. The height of his literary fame was 1928 when a collected edition of his poems⁹⁸ appeared along with an edition of all his prose.⁹⁹ Yet in spite of public recognition, he experienced a poetic silence from 1925 to 1930. However, from 1930 to his death in 1938, during which time he was constantly hounded by the authorities and his work was suppressed, his poetic voice returned to him with an urgency which is well described by Nadezhda Mandelstam:

Everything suggested that the end was near, and M. was trying to take full advantage of his remaining days... The poems poured out of him, one after another. He worked on several at once, and he often asked me to take down at one sitting two or three which he had already completed in his head.

(Hope against Hope, p. 218)

Lowell and Carlisle's introduction to the translations in New York Review of Books shows the focus on the thirties to be quite deliberate:

These poems, among the last by Osip Mandelstam, were written during the apocalyptic days of the great Stalinist purges in the thirties. Our translations, while trying to be as faithful as possible to Mandelstam's images and meters are not literal. Rather they are adaptations, attempting to recapture Mandelstam's tone and the atmosphere of his terrible last years.

A theme which stands out in these late poems is poetic survival. Focusing on his poetic self, Mandelstam, in a tone of marvellous defiance, shows himself no longer able to

⁹⁸ Stikhotvoreniia (Poetry) (Moscow/Leningrad: State Publishing House, 1928).

⁹⁹ Egipetskaia Marka (The Egyptian Stamp), (Leningrad: Priboi, 1928). This is the Russian source for Brown's The Prose of Osip Mandelstam.

compromise with the authorities. Consider, for example, the lines of many of the poems: 'Preserve my words forever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke', 'No I will not hide from the great mess/behind the coachman's back of Moscow', 'I'm not afraid. I know what's on the calendar--a storm/ Someone marvellous is hurrying me on to forget everything.'¹⁰⁰ It is such defiance in the face of real difficulties that, according to Olga Carlisle, Lowell found so inspirational in Mandelstam's poetry, as she put it: 'These poems had enormous cathartic appeal for somebody in Lowell's position which essentially in terms of social and political predicament was really so positive'. She also noted, that Nadezhda Mandelstam's work to preserve the poetry, left Lowell optimistic about poetry in general:

I remembered discussing with him how extraordinary it was to meet Madame Mandelstam who survived under those unlikely circumstances when the imperative of the times was not only that his poetry be destroyed but that she, or anyone of that class who could remember Mandelstam's poems, would also die. So this lost word was in fact preserved by her.

Lowell translation 'Fragments' (Poets, pp. 147-148), made up of a number of Mandelstam poems, shows evidence of Lowell's increasing involvement with Mandelstam's poetic concerns. Earlier Lowell merged Pasternak poems to provide an interpretation of Pasternak's life and poetry. Now, in 'Fragments', he takes liberties with Mandelstam's poetry to provide an interpretation of Mandelstam's state of mind in the final phase of his life. His choice of the title 'Fragments' is, presumably, because he has collected together short or incomplete poems into a whole.

It is surprising that Olga Carlisle was happy to include 'Fragments' in Poets, if one considers that earlier she had

¹⁰⁰ Nos. 235, 232, 229, M.I, pp. 167, 165 and 163, Poets, pp. 145, 145, and 147.

found Lowell's Pasternak translation, 'Hamlet', too free to include in Poets. As in 'Hamlet', Lowell merges a number of poems, and parts of poems, to create a single translation. Carlisle explained how 'Fragments' came to be written: 'In that edition typewritten by my father we would see so many poems that seemed of one mood, and Lowell would then arrange them into a poem. There was some collaboration in those choices'. All the poems used are placed opposite Lowell's translation in Poets, with their appropriate dates. They are: 'Oh how we love to pretend', 'Azure and Clay, clay and azure', 'Help me Lord live through this night', 'I am no longer a child'¹⁰¹.

Consider first of all Lowell's finished product:

Now that I have learned to be discreet,
now that I am brown and brittle for my harvest,
shall I go on pretending
death was much closer in my childhood?

The children still grow drowsy with apprehension,
and hurt all over when they are forced to eat;
but I have lost my taste for sulking,
I am alone no matter where I look.

I look at sky and fields, sky and fields,
What more do I want? Suddenly I am squinting
like a nearsighted sultan at his turquoise ring.
The earth is just another book--so bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth
that tortures me like talk or music.
My God, help me to live through this night.
I fear for my life, my life, your slave....

Living in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin.
But I am no longer a child!
The grave can teach
the cripple to run in circles.

Look, my lips cake
and crack like red clay.
I am everyone speaking
for the sky to remain sky.

¹⁰¹ Nos. 253, 215, 223, 240, M.I, pp. 176-177, 155, 160, 169.

The first two stanzas of Lowell's 'Fragments' come from Mandelstam's poem 'Oh how we love to pretend' (No. 253). It consists of three stanzas of which Lowell has made use of the first two. Here is my literal version of the poem:

Oh how we love to pretend,
easily forgetting that we were
much closer to death in childhood
than in our adult years.

Still injury is pulled from the dish
of the sleepy child,
but I no longer sulk at anyone,
I am alone on all paths.

The animals shed their coats, fish play
in the dead faint of the water
and do not look at the progress
of human fears, at human trouble.

The poem deals with the pain of human experience. The first stanza suggests it is only adult nostalgia that makes childhood appear free of adult anxieties such as a concern about death. In the second stanza, however, the child appears to be insulated, to a degree. Mandelstam, with the use of 'I no longer sulk', implies that he has previously seen himself in a childhood role but now accepts the isolation of reaching full adulthood--'alone on all paths'. Finally, in the third stanza, he contrasts the pain of human experience with animals' intuitive enjoyment of life--not in a particularly novel way in this case. For me, therefore, little is lost in its removal by Lowell for the purposes of his translation.

Once Lowell has extracted what he requires he gives the poem his own personal treatment:

Now that I have learned to be discreet,
now that I am brown and brittle for my harvest,
shall I go on pretending

death was much closer in my childhood?

The children still grow drowsy with apprehension,
and hurt all over when they are forced to eat;
but I have lost my taste for sulking,
I am alone no matter where I look.

Some changes are effective but others provide inexplicable reversals of meaning. The suggestion, for example, that the adult is naive to see death as closer for the child than for the adult is the opposite of the original. Lowell's change from 'adult years' to 'now that I am brown and brittle for my harvest' works well, however, providing imagery similar to that of ageing in Notebook with, 'men, like ears of corn, /fibrous growths...green, sweet, golden, black' (p. 31). Lowell's description of the child as one who 'hurts all over when forced to eat' is effective simply because it rings true as a description of how a child behaves.

In the remaining stanzas of the translation Lowell takes even greater liberties with Mandelstam's poetry. The next section of his translation is outlined below, showing where each new Mandelstam poem begins along with Lowell's stanza breaks:

(No. 215)

I look at sky and fields, sky and fields,
What more do I want? Suddenly I am squinting
like a nearsighted sultan at his turquoise ring.
The earth is just another book--so bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth
that tortures me like talk or music.

(No. 223)

My God, help me to live through this night.
I fear for my life, my life, your slave....

Living in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin.

(No. 240)

But I am no longer a child!
The grave can teach
the cripple to run in circles.

Look, my lips cake
and crack like red clay.
I am everyone speaking
for the sky to remain sky.

Poem No. 215 is part of the Armenia cycle, a group of poems which resulted from a trip he made to Armenia in 1930. It was this stay which, according to Nadezda Mandelstam, marked the end of his poetic silence. She gives reasons for why it inspired him:

The Mediterranean was for him a holy land where history had begun and which by a process of continuity had given Christian culture to the world...The ancient link between these areas, (particularly Armenia) with Greece and Rome seemed to him a token of the unity of the world (or, rather, European) culture.

(Hope against Hope, pp. 296-299)

Jennifer Baines has more to say:

The vivid red clay of the bare Armenian mountain slopes is inextricably linked through the idea of layers of rock accumulating down the ages with the advent of christian culture, relatively early in Armenia's history, its civilising influence gaining strength in time.

(The Later Poetry, p. 8)

No. 215 is difficult to understand removed from the context of its cycle. In order to discuss it therefore I have provided a literal translation, along with the poem which precedes it in the Armenia Cycle:

I shall never see you again
short-sighted Armenian sky.
I shall never again squint and look at
this nomad's tent of Ararat.
I shall never open again,
in this library of clay authors,

this beautiful land's hollow book
that taught the first people.

Blue sky and clay, clay and blue sky,
What more do you want? Just squint
like a short-sighted Shah over a turquoise ring,
over this book of resounding clay, over the land of the
book,
over the poisonous book, over the precious clay,
with which we torture ourselves, as with music and the
word.¹⁰²

From these two poems one gets an impression of Mandelstam's attraction to the strong colours of the Armenian landscape as well as the symbolic value of the Armenian setting as the birth of language. The 'book' is now more obviously seen as a symbol of the landscape. It is the first book because it is in Armenia that language/history is seen, in Mandelstam's eyes, to begin. The association between the sky and the turquoise ring also becomes more obvious.

Lowell, takes liberties in merging No. 215 with the first two lines of No. 223:

(No. 215)

I look at sky and fields, sky and fields.
What more do I want? Suddenly I am squinting
like a nearsighted sultan at his turquoise ring.
The earth is just another book--so bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth
that tortures me like talk or music.

(No. 223)

My God, help me live through this night.
I fear for my life, my life, your slave....

Lowell reasonably interprets clay/blue sky as, 'I look at sky and fields, sky and fields', but much is lost in the following change from:

¹⁰² Osip Mandelstam: The Moscow Notebooks, trans. Richard and Elizabeth Mckane (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), p. 29.

over this book of resounding clay, over the land of the
book,
over the poisonous book, over the precious clay,

to:

the earth is just another book so--bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth

Mandelstam's lines are dignified: with the repetition of 'over the' they provide an incantation to this landscape so rich in cultural significance for Mandelstam. Lowell has removed this repetition and has left the reader with the puzzling, 'the earth is just another book, so bookish'. 'Just another' seems particularly badly chosen for it trivialises the landscape suggesting it holds no surprises. Lowell's 'I too am earth, this dear, dear earth', however, provides a simple poignancy which restores a dignified role to the earth and produces a line in keeping with Mandelstam's tone. It is the suitability of the tone that enables the line to merge well with the next line of Lowell's translation: 'My God, help me live through this night'. Lowell's translation of 'slovo' as 'talk' rather than 'the word' suggests he is at this point unaware of the part the 'word' plays in Mandelstam's poetics as described in his critical prose, as well as its use in the poetry. Take, for example, the following line from 'We shall meet again in Petersburg': 'for the blessed and meaningless word I shall pray in the Soviet night.'¹⁰³

Finally Lowell makes use of the two short Mandelstam poems Nos. 223 and 240:

¹⁰³ No. 118, M.I, pp. 85-86.

(No. 223)

Help me Lord, live through this night:
I fear for my life--for your--slave--
To live in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin.

(No. 240)

I am no longer a child, you the grave,
do not know how to teach the cripple, be quiet!
I speak for all with such strength,
that my palate should become the sky, that the lips should
crack like pink clay.

(literal)

(No. 223)

My god, help me to live through this night.
I fear for my life, my life, your slave....

Living in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin.

(No. 240)

But I am no longer a child!
The grave can teach
the cripple to run in circles.

Look, my lips cake
and crack like red clay.
I am everyone speaking
for the sky to remain sky

(Lowell)

Apart from the inexplicable reversal of meaning with Lowell's change to 'the grave can teach/the cripple to run in circles', Lowell has kept quite close to a literal translation.

The finished translation shows that Lowell has managed to make the various extracts merge very well. One can understand where changes have been made in order to provide adequate introductions or conclusions to stanzas. The result is not a random collection of fragments but a unified poem with 'I', namely Mandelstam, as the subject. Lowell achieves this unity by adding 'I' in places, as well as changing existing references to 'you' or 'we' to 'I':

Blue sky and clay, clay and blue sky,
what more do you want. Just squint
like a short-sighted Shah over a turquoise ring
over this book of resounding clay, over the land of the
book,
over the poisonous book, over the precious clay,
with which we torture ourselves, as with music and the
word.

(R. and E. McKane)

I look at sky and fields, sky and fields.
What more do I want? Suddenly I am squinting
like a nearsighted sultan at his turquoise ring.
The earth is just another book--so bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth
that tortures me like talk or music.

(Lowell)

The patterning of 'I look' and 'I too am earth' gives cohesion and makes 'I too am earth' read as an appropriate opening line rather than part of that which preceded it. One can now see some logic in the shortened 'the earth is just another book--so bookish', for the line brings the stanza to a neat conclusion in a way not possible with the original lines. The least effective connection is between lines one and two of Lowell's fifth stanza, because the association between 'Living in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin' and 'but I am no longer a child' is not clear, especially when the two lines are connected with 'but':

Living in Petersburg is to sleep in a coffin.
But I am no longer a child!
The grave can teach
the cripple to run in circles.

The final two lines of the last stanza, however, provide a concise and simple conclusion:

Look, my lips cake
and crack like red clay.

I am everyone speaking
for the sky to remain sky.

What is most effective, however, is the way Lowell has drawn together common themes and images from various Mandelstam poems. The end result, as in the earlier Pasternak three-in-one translation, is not merely a translation but an interpretation of the writer's life and work. Consider once more the first two stanzas of No. 215 set beside Lowell's free translation:

Oh how we love to pretend,
easily forgetting that we were
much closer to death in childhood
than in our adult years.

Still injury is pulled from the dish
of the sleepy child,
but I no longer sulk at anyone,
I am alone on all paths.

(literal)

Now that I have learned to be discreet,
now that I am brown and brittle for my harvest,
shall I go on pretending
death was much closer in my childhood?

The children still grow drowsy with apprehension,
and hurt all over when they are forced to eat;
but I have lost my taste for sulking,
I am alone no matter where I look.

(Lowell)

Mandelstam's relationship with the authorities becomes the focus of the translation. The use of 'I' establishes Mandelstam as the subject of the poem. The repetition of 'now' in the first two lines reinforces the impression that Mandelstam has reached a point of change in his life: he will no longer persist in a 'naughty child' relationship with the authorities but has moved to an 'adult' position of independence.

The rest of the translation is focused on Mandelstam's self-image through the various 'earth' images in the chosen poems and extracts. 'Earth' imagery is appropriate because it is used frequently in Mandelstam's later poetry. Lowell was aware of at least two such poems for he translated 'Now I lie in the earth'¹⁰⁴ and 'My body, all I borrowed from the earth.'¹⁰⁵ Both of these describe Mandelstam as though speaking from the grave. The following is perhaps Mandelstam's most well-known poem on the 'earth/grave' theme:

You took all the oceans and all the room.
You gave me my shoe-size in earth with bars around it.
Where did it get you? Nowhere.
You left me my lips, and they shape words, even in
silence.¹⁰⁶

In 'Fragments', Lowell begins the earth theme with the reference to the Armenian landscape. He then describes how Mandelstam must live in the earth of his beloved grave Petersburg. Finally, he shows the poet defying death by speaking as clay in the earth. Lowell makes a subtle connection between the Armenian soil--the birthplace of language--and Mandelstam speaking from the grave; a return to the grave becomes a return to the word. Mandelstam, even as he speaks from the grave, is shown participating in the continuum of language. Such connections are reinforced in the final lines of No. 240, by associating Mandelstam with 'lips' more intimately than in the original:

I speak for all with such strength,
that the sky remains sky, that the lips
flow like pink clay.

(literal)

¹⁰⁴ No. 306, M.I., p. 214, TS. 2779, p. 45 (b).

¹⁰⁵ No. 306, M.I., p. 214, Poets, pp. 155-156.

¹⁰⁶ No. 307, M.I., p. 214, Brown and Merwin, p. 108.

Look, my lips cake
and crack like red clay.
I am everyone speaking
for the sky to remain sky.

(Lowell)

Lowell also makes the 'earth' associations work well in the translation by additions of his own. Consider No. 223 again:

Blue sky and clay, clay and blue sky,
What more do you want? Just squint
like a short-sighted Shah over a turquoise ring,
over this book of resounding clay, over the land of the
book,
over the poisonous book, over the precious clay,
with which we torture ourselves, as with music and the
word.

(R. and E. McKane)

I look at sky and fields, sky and fields,
What more do I want? Suddenly I am squinting
like a nearsighted sultan at his turquoise ring.
The earth is just another book--so bookish.

I too am earth, this dear, dear earth
that tortures me like talk or music.

(Lowell)

By using the free phrase, 'I too am earth', Lowell suggests that Mandelstam, just as much as Armenia, is a book to be read. Thus Mandelstam is both perceived and perceiving. His intimacy with the earth is reinforced by Lowell's free 'this dear, dear earth', a phrase which provides an appropriately poignant tone to precede 'My God, help me live through this night./I fear for my life, my life, your slave....' In the final stanza Lowell brings the child, death, clay themes full circle, reinforcing the view that Mandelstam is one who both faces yet defies death. Death cannot restore life and vitality to the cripple but

Mandelstam can utter from the very clay of the grave in a defiant expression of life. All in all, in 'Fragments', one feels that Lowell has provided an informed interpretation of Mandelstam's self view in the final years of his life.

The remaining Mandelstam translations by Lowell focus on this portrayal of the poet, poetically liberated though externally in a dangerous predicament, and what stands out is Lowell's skill at translation. This is best illustrated by comparison with versions by other translators. The poem 'I spoke with a child's gibberish to authority,'¹⁰⁷ for example, seems fairly literal at a first glance but in fact is given careful treatment by Lowell. Consider a literal translation compared to Lowell's final translation--note the way he has altered the poem from four to three line stanzas:

I was only childishly tied to the world of the powerful.
I feared oysters and watched the guards distrustfully.
And I am not indebted a grain of the soul,
like I do not worry myself about someone else's
likeness.

With stupid respect, scowling in the bishop's mitre
I did not stand beneath the Egyptian portico of the
bank
and above the lemon yellow Neva under the crackle of 100
rouble notes,
the gypsy girl never danced for me.

From the future executions, from the roar of mutinous
events
I ran to^{the} Nereids on the Black Sea,
and from the beauties of the times--from those European
tender ones
how much embarrassment, strain and grief I took!

Why then from that time does this town prevail
over my thoughts and feelings like an ancient truth?
It becomes increasingly impudent from fires and frosts,
proud, cursed, empty, youthful!

Is it because in a children's picture book I saw,
Lady Godiva with her loose-flowing red mane?

¹⁰⁷ No. 222, M.I, p. 159, Poets, p. 143.

Still I repeat to myself on the sly
Lady Godiva... I do not remember, Godiva...

(literal)

I spoke with a child's gibberish to authority,
I was afraid to eat oysters,
I looked at the guardsmen out of the corner of my eye.

Everyone tortured me about this,
but how could I sulk in the foolish beaver miter of a
bishop
by the Egyptian porticoes of the banks?

No gypsy girl ever danced for me
under the crackle of hundred-ruble bills
in a cafe high over the lemon-yellow Neva.

Far from the sirens and the ominous crush of events,
I shivered at the oncoming wave of murders,
and fled to the nymphs of the Black Sea.

I had to put up with much pain and anguish
from the famous beauties of the day,
those delicate continental ladies.

Why then does this city move me like an old Mass,
when its fires and ice storms only make it
more arrogant, self-loving, empty and youthful?

Is it because I saw the naked, red-haired
Lady Godiva in some old picture book?
Lady Godiva, I do not remember, Lady Godiva.

(Lowell)

This poem provides an account of Mandelstam's love/hate relationship with Petersburg and continues to show Mandelstam refusing to compromise with the authorities. Olga Carlisle gave me some useful information which she gleaned from Madame Mandelstam: 'Madame Mandelstam explained how, unlike others, Mandelstam would not adapt himself to the times expressed in "everyone tortured me about this". In other words people would have been happier if he had agreed to compromise'. She also provided the following amusing account of her discussion of the poem with Lowell, as well as pointing to the important theme of forgetting:

ladies. In Mandelstam's fifth stanza, Lowell is again economical with his language. Compare the three attempts:

So why does this city have the right
to dominate my thoughts and feelings to this day?

(E. and R. McKane)

Why then does this city, even now, satisfy
my thoughts and feelings at home in its ancient night?

(Brown and Merwin)

Why then does this city move me like an old Mass?

(Lowell)

Lowell reduces the two lines to one with an effective simile to suggest St Petersburg's pre-Soviet past. Note the apparent ease with which Lowell reduces 'dominate my thoughts and feelings' to 'move me'. Finally, in the Mandelstam's last stanza, Lowell continues with his economical use of language by removing the line, 'Still I repeat to myself on the sly'. Little is lost, in my view, for Lowell's final line, 'Lady Godiva, I do not remember, Lady Godiva,' allows the whispered lament to speak for itself.

Olga Carlisle felt the theme of forgetting was important in Mandelstam's poetry, and she remembered discussing it with Lowell. She had a vivid memory of a dinner party where Lowell insisted Stanley Kunitz listen to Mandelstam's 'the Decembrist' in Poets--a poem which also touches on the theme of forgetting in its concluding stanza:

The flame is dying fast, the night grows cold,
Reason and right have shifted, gone awry,
And it is sweet to whisper to oneself:
Russia, Lethe, Lorelei...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ No. 94, M.I, p. 66, Poets, p. 131, translated by Rose Styron.

Another translation which shows Lowell at one with Mandelstam's thought is 'My body all I borrowed from the earth.'¹⁰⁹ According to Baines, Mandelstam dedicated this poem to a certain V. Kuibyshev, who died in a plane crash at a time when Mandelstam was particularly depressed about his own fate. In the poem he uses the tragedy of one soldier's life to reinforce the fragmentary nature of life in general. The earth theme that Lowell focused on in 'Fragments' is again seen. Lowell's treatment of the opening stanza provides further evidence of his skill in interpreting Mandelstam's language. This stanza is a single sentence which is held together in the original by way of rhyme, alliteration and rhythm. Without careful treatment the resulting translation can be rather wordy, as my literal translation illustrates:

Not like a mealy white butterfly do
I wish to return to the dust I owe the earth--
I want my thinking body
to be changed into a street a country--
this charred, vertebral body
recognizing its length.

If one compares Brown and Merwin's translation with Lowell's one can see how they fall into the trap of wordiness whereas Lowell finds ways around it:

I want to give back this dust I've borrowed,
not as the flour from a white butterfly;
I want this thinking body
this vertebrate, this burnt body
that once knew its length, to be changed
into a thoroughfare, a country.

(Brown and Merwin, p. 112)

¹⁰⁹ No. 320, M.I pp. 222-223, Poets, pp. 155-156.

My body, all I borrowed from the earth,
I do not want it to return here--
some flour-white butterfly.
My body, scratched and chewed with thought,
I want it to become a street, a land--
it was too full of vertebrae.

(Lowell)

Brown, embroiled in words, fails to recreate the poignant tone of Mandelstam's original poem, whereas Lowell, through careful use of language, succeeds. The tone of Mandelstam's poetry here may also have struck a chord with Lowell, who frequently provides such poignancy in his own verse. Lowell gives pattern and cohesion to Mandelstam's sentence in translation. He splits the single sentence into two, making lines one to three the first sentence, and lines four to six the second. He then establishes a pattern between the first and second sentence through repetition of language and pauses. He places 'my body' plus comma at the beginning of each sentence and a dash at the end of lines two and six. This placing of 'my body' at the opening of the poem, emphatically and briefly makes plain the subject of the poem: the self. The death of a young pilot may have been Mandelstam's inspiration, but he unapologetically shows that it is his own mortality with which he is concerned. One way Lowell recreates the poignancy of the original, is by keeping the language direct. Where Brown and Merwin have, 'I want to give back this dust I've borrowed,/ not as the flour from a white butterfly' Lowell has, 'I do not want it to return here--/some flour-white butterfly'. Lowell's line adheres to what is seen by many as a rule of thumb for modern poetry: keeping the language close to natural speech. Simple direct statements can also be a good means of expressing strong feeling. Thus, Lowell movingly expresses Mandelstam's wish not to die and become dust. One thinks of the naiveté of young Nikolai Rostov of War and Peace facing death for the first time, 'Can they be running at me? And

why? To kill me? Me whom everyone is so fond of?'¹¹⁰. In line three, Lowell makes the image of the floury white butterfly stand out by setting the line apart from that which precedes it. He does this by way of the dash at the end of line two. In the second sentence, the change from, 'I want my thinking body' to, 'My body, scratched and chewed with thought' suggests the poet's love/hate relationship with the intellect. Though this relationship is one closer to Lowell's poetic state of mind than Mandelstam's, in this instance it reinforces what is central to the poem, the intellect as unique and precious, its survival vital. Finally Lowell provides a free interpretation of Mandelstam's literal, 'this carbonizing, vertebral body/created from its length' with, 'it was too full of vertebrae'. He thus creates a subtle, slightly ambiguous statement which enhances the verse, in my view, providing a phrase which is open to various meanings.

Lowell's remaining Mandelstam poems in Poets, as well as belonging to this group of later poetry, also belong to a specific cycle of poems called the 'Wolf' cycle. They are 'the Wolf', 'Preserve my words for ever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke', 'No I will not hide from the great mess' and 'My eyelash prickles a tear boiling up from my breast'¹¹¹. There is also the unpublished draft, 'Sing to the Astors of war'¹¹² (which suggests that this 'mystery' translation, at least, was done at the time of the Carlisle translations).

¹¹⁰ War and Peace, trans. Rosemary Edmunds (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 216.

¹¹¹ Nos 227, 235, 232, and 229, M.I, pp. 162, 167, 165 and 163-164, Poets, pp. 143-144, 145, 145 and 147.

¹¹² No. 233, M.I, pp. 165-166, TS. 2779, p. 45.

'Preserve my words forever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke' continues Mandelstam's theme of defiance. It is a translation which Olga Carlisle particularly liked. She has this to say about it:

My personal feelings, when we read this in Russian, is I think it is a triumph in both versions--magnificent. It has to do with speech or the word. One freedom was 'apostate from the people's family' and the original was more like 'black sheep of the family'. Lowell's use of 'Apostate' is stronger, putting the image in a religious context.

Nadezda Mandelstam makes these comments about the poem:

He speaks of himself as an 'unrecognised brother'...M. had not been accepted by the 'tribe' of his fellow writers, he had been cast out of Soviet literature, and even the wretched priest's coat on his shoulders was held to bear witness to his bourgeois ideology.

(Hope Against Hope, p. 233)

Here then is Lowell's final translation of the poem:

Preserve my words forever for their aftertaste of
misfortune and smoke,
for their tar of collective patience and conscientious
work--
water in the wells of Novgorod must be black and
sweetened
to reflect a star of seven fins at Christmas.

Oh my Fatherland, my friend, my rough helper,
remember your unrecognised brother, the apostate from the
people's family--
I have promised to build you forests of log wells,
such as the Tartars built to lower the princes in wooden
buckets.

If only your executioners, those frozen blocks, could
love me,
as the Tsar Peter, a deadly marksman, loved the balls he
bowled on the lawn--

for your love, I'll walk through life in an iron shirt,
for my execution, I'll walk the woods like Peter, and
find a handle for the axe.

This version is fairly literal but there are a number of subtle touches which show careful use of language and interpretation of Mandelstam's ideas. In 'I was a child in the world of the powerful' Lowell got around a difficult line length by abbreviating the poem wherever possible. In 'Preserve my words forever' he keeps the lines long yet still manages to hold the poem together well. How he achieves this can be seen by comparing an earlier version with his final translation. Consider stanza one:

Preserve my speech forever for its aftertaste of
misfortune and smoke,
for the resin of collective patience, for the
conscientious tar of work.
This water in the wells of Novgorod is black and
sweetened,
at Christmas it reflects a star with seven fins.

(TS. 2779, p. 22 (b))

Preserve my words forever for their aftertaste of
misfortune and smoke,
for their tar of collective patience and conscientious
work--
water in the wells of Novgorod must be black and
sweetened
to reflect a star of seven fins at Christmas.

(Poets)

In the final version Lowell has tightened up some of the lines so that the alliteration stands out more effectively. Thus we have 'for the resin of collective patience, for the conscientious tar of work' changed to the more effective 'collective patience and conscientious tar of work' and 'this water in the wells of Novgorod' changed to 'water in the wells'. Both changes are apparently slight but greatly assist the poem's cohesion. Here is stanza two:

Oh my father, my friend, and rough helper,
here is your brother, the apostate in the people's
family,
I promised to build a forest of log wells
for the Tartars to lower their princes in wooden buckets.

(TS. 2779, p. 22 (b))

Oh my Fatherland, my friend, my rough helper,
remember your unrecognised brother, the apostate from the
people's family--
I have promised to build you forests of log wells,
such as the Tartars built to lower the princes in wooden
buckets.

(Poets)

Changing 'and rough helper' to 'my rough helper' tightens up line one through repetition of 'my'. The change from 'father' to 'Fatherland' removes the ambiguity of the addressee of the poem. Baines argues that 'the appeal to preserve this work is in fact addressed to Nadezhda Mandelstam' (Later Poetry, p. 31), but this would suggest that the poem has more than one addressee, for it seems unlikely that Mandelstam would refer to his wife as 'father'. Lowell's change makes Russia itself the addressee which at least makes sense. The 'b' alliteration of the last two lines is onomatopoeic in effect suggesting the harsh battering sound of the log wells being built. The addition of 'built' in the final line helps make this alliteration more pronounced as well as providing the poem with cohesion.

The final stanza is quite free in places, so I have included my literal version along with Lowell's versions:

If only these ^{ancient} blocks loved me
as aiming at death, skittles get bruised on the lawn.
For this all my life I will wear an iron shirt
and for Peter's execution will find an axe handle in the
forest.

(literal)

If only the frozen blocklike executioners could love me
as the Czar Peter, a deadly marksman, love his bowling
balls,
for this I'll walk through life in an iron shirt,
like Peter I'd walk the woods for an axe handle.

(TS. 2779, p. 22 (b))

If only your executioners, those frozen blocks, could
love me,
as the Tsar Peter, a deadly marksman, loved the balls he
bowled on the lawn--
for your love, I'll walk through life in an iron shirt,
for my execution, I'll walk the woods like Peter, and
find a handle for the axe.

(Lowell)

The word 'Love', used only once in the original, is seen three times in Lowell's translation, creating a complex interpretation of Mandelstam's relationship with both Russia and those that persecute him. Lowell describes Mandelstam desiring to be loved by his 'executioners' and willing to sacrifice himself for Russia, presumably for the sake of his art. The evolution from 'these frozen blocks', to 'the frozen blocklike executioners' and then finally, 'your executioners, those frozen blocks', shows Lowell gradually suggesting that the 'executioners' are those of the 'Fatherland' of the previous stanza. Russia is thus shown attempting to sacrifice the poet, Mandelstam. The change from 'for Peter's executions' to 'for my execution' reinforces this theme of sacrifice. Lowell has some effective patterning in this last verse with, 'for your love I'll walk' and, 'for my execution I'll walk'. He thus interprets the poem in a way similar to Baines, 'it was the final, total acceptance of exile and death, coupled with a plea for some immortality' (The Later Poetry, p. 32).

Lowell's encounter with Mandelstam's poetry which led to the 1963/65 translations, begins tentatively feeling out for points of contact. Quickly, however, one feels he has found a poet with whom he has much in common with regards language and subject matter. Above all, I feel, Mandelstam's life

and work are seen to be important to Lowell, for the same reasons that they have been important to so many poets: as a monument to poetry's survival and a means of reaffirming one's sense of poetic purpose. This is well illustrated by Homage to Mandelstam, a world-wide collection of poems dedicated to him. Here, by way of conclusion, is a poem from that volume, 'Encounter' by Peter Kantor:

I never saw how between your delicate fingers
the paper trembled and changed into blue aeons,
into trickling sand, into cathedrals--
you, Osip, singer with fretted chest.

Nor did I see how the sledge sped you
towards the Yenisey, or how the high dark
pine-trees of imagination bewitched you,
scattering stars before your feet:

salt tears, pure snowflakes falling.
No, I never saw you, never heard your voice.
With light and cheerful heart, I'd expected
Greek field-sports, everlasting Mays.

But you did pour some punch in my glass,
a precious fire-liquor, a music of splendour--
'Drink,' you said. 'This sorrow is yours,
and yours the shrill cry of every cockerel.'

Now yours is each dawn--great wool-tassled scarf
I had wrapped around me, as if my own,
yours my wild flings, bearers of crystal night,
and yours my memories of countless desert days.

I never kept watch on the banks of the Neva
or among the high forests of Ararat--
not even for one night. Nor did I seek you out
in the blind mud of Voronezh or Vladivostok.

Here I sat, and you followed here after me:
I read you, shaking with chattering teeth.
I bent closer towards you, as a candle bends:
as over cool water, over white-blazing sand.

God has flown--He never existed.
There is only our unquenchable thirst.
Was it you who said that? Or, me, thinking of you?
Through earth's dawn our love and loneliness burst.¹¹³

¹¹³ Richard Burns and George Gömori, ed. (Cambridge: Los Poetry Press, 1981), p. 77.

Chapter 3

Greater Involvement with Mandelstam: the Creative Process.

Stanley Kunitz said foreign poetry provided the poet with 'a means of self-renewal, entering the skin and adventuring through the body of another's imagination' ('On Translating Akhmatova,' p. 46). For Lowell, the opportunity to experience such renewal becomes crucial as he moves away from a focus on translation for its own sake, as reflected in the appearance of Imitations (1961), to an involvement with the difficulties of his own writing, of particular concern to him by the writing of Notebook (1967-1970). Lowell's observation that foreign language poetry leads to a 'feeling of discovery of what we lack' gains particular relevance in this volume where poetic inadequacy is so frequently the theme.

In discussing Lowell's early encounter with Mandelstam it was possible to rely on the 'Carlisle' translations and Olga Carlisle's testimony. His attraction to Mandelstam's poetry seemed heightened when he found in it similarities with his own, evidence of which was shown in the quality of the imagery in the resulting translations. Olga Carlisle reinforced the point that he was drawn to like elements between himself and Mandelstam. She also emphasised that he saw the survival of Mandelstam's poetry as a hopeful sign for poetry. An exploration of his sustained interest in Mandelstam's poetry in the second half of the sixties becomes more speculative and one must rely more on what Lowell's poetry reveals. Though For the Union Dead (1965) and Near the Ocean (1967) might have some relevance to such a study I have chosen to focus on Notebook (1970). My justification for this limitation is not only the strong presence of Mandelstam material in the Notebook drafts but also the fact that in poetic terms Lowell in Notebook is

writing with his 'heart on his sleeve'. Because he is so blatant about what his poetry 'lacks' in Notebook an understanding of what it reveals of his poetic self may say more about his attraction to Mandelstam's poetry than the information gained from Olga Carlisle and the 'Carlisle' translations.

What evidence is there that Lowell did remain interested in Mandelstam's poetry in the second half of the sixties? First there are the 'Carlisle' translations themselves. Although Lowell starts by tentatively examining little known material, ultimately, he provides his reader with an informed interpretation of Mandelstam's poetic self as revealed in his poetry of 1930-38. This suggests, to me, that Lowell has encountered a poet of importance to him.

After the 'Carlisle' translations the first concrete sign I could find that Lowell was exploring Mandelstam's work further was his contribution to a Book Week questionnaire in 1965. Various writers were asked 'to name three books they read and enjoyed or found especially worthwhile during 1965, regardless of when the books were published.'¹¹⁴ Lowell's choice included Clarence Brown's The Prose of Osip Mandelstam (1965). This work consists of a critical and biographical introduction to Mandelstam as well as a selection of Mandelstam's prose pieces, one of which, 'Noise of the Time', describes his early life. Although Brown had completed a PhD at Harvard on Mandelstam's poetry in 1961 and was seen as one of Mandelstam's earliest critics, his book Mandelstam wasn't published until 1973. His detailed introduction in The Prose of Osip Mandelstam therefore, offered very welcome criticism and biographical information. Lowell had learned a lot about Mandelstam's life through his conversations with Olga Carlisle but Clarence Brown's volume must have filled in many gaps. The fact that Lowell had

¹¹⁴ 'Answer to a Questionnaire,' Book Week, 5 Dec. 1965, p. 12.

asked Clarence Brown to come and discuss Mandelstam with him¹¹⁵ suggests that Lowell would have read any information Brown had to give with interest.

Olga Carlisle's testimony is also evidence of his long term interest in Mandelstam. Although I feel there is need for caution in relating a current interest with an old friendship--for friends may go over old ground when the subject of interest has passed--there is much to suggest that this was not the case. First it must be emphasised that Lowell and Carlisle remained close friends from 1960 up to Lowell's departure to England in 1969. This impression is gained both from Olga Carlisle's own account and from the letters and post cards in Lowell's papers (MS. 337-354). From my conversations with her I gathered that she had a good knowledge of Lowell's interests, characteristics and poetic concerns as well as major events in his life throughout the sixties. Many of her memories of Lowell were centred around events described in Notebook, drafts of which he frequently read when they met. If for Lowell life and poetry are inseparable, 'one life, one writing!' (For The Union Dead, p. 68), one might say of Olga Carlisle that life and Russian poetry are inseparable. Evidence of Lowell and Carlisle's sustained joint Mandelstam interest, however, is in the three way association between Lowell, Carlisle and Mandelstam's widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam.

According to Olga Carlisle, Lowell wished to cultivate a correspondence with Nadezhda Mandelstam. This suggests he was still involved in Mandelstam's poetry from 1967 onwards. In the Lowell papers there are three letters (MS. 823-825) from Nadezhda Mandelstam to Lowell between 1967 and 1968, and two letters (MS. 1997-1998) from her to Olga Carlisle in 1967, where Lowell is discussed. Lowell also hoped at some point to meet her. Olga Carlisle, in chapter sixteen

¹¹⁵ Mentioned in letter received, 21 March 1986.

of her book Solzhenitsyn and the Secret Circle¹¹⁶ outlines plans for a trip which was to include herself, Lowell and Blair Clark. She mentions in her book that one of the purposes of the trip, along with plans to go to various art galleries, was the visit to Nadezhda Mandelstam. Unfortunately they cancelled the trip because Olga Carlisle was refused a visa. Elizabeth Hardwick also told me that Lowell wished to visit Nadezhda Mandelstam and that shortly before his death in 1977 he and Hardwick did go to Russia. They went on a writer's trip which Hardwick had already planned before Lowell's return to her. Unfortunately Nadezhda Mandelstam was not in Moscow at the time so they did not manage to meet her.

Evidence of Lowell's sustained interest in Mandelstam's poetry with the greatest implications for his own poetry, however, is the presence of the large number of Mandelstam translations among the drafts of Notebook.¹¹⁷ Olga Carlisle had no knowledge of these translations. This is not surprising for they come from a different form of mediation: the Mandelstam prose translations in Obolensky's Penguin Book of Russian Verse. As well as in the Notebook drafts there are also some Obolensky translations in 'Uncollected Poems' (TS. 2759, and 2760) and 'Uncollected Translations' (TS. 2779, pp. 3, 4, 5, 25, 26 and 3 (b)). An examination of the translations in the Notebook drafts shows similarity in vocabulary, and sentence structure with Obolensky's prose translations. Consider the following two translations of the poem 'The Age' (No. 135), the first by Obolensky, the second by Lowell:

My age, my beast, who will be able to look into the
pupils of your eyes and stick together the vertebrae of
two centuries with his blood? The blood that builds

¹¹⁶ (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1978), pp. 132-136.

¹¹⁷ Notebook: Unpublished Drafts, TS. 2733 and 2737 and Long Summer (10), TS. 2362, 2370 and 2376.

gushes out of earthly things; the parasite only trembles on the threshold of the new days.

The creature, so long as it has life enough left, must carry the backbone to the end; and a wave plays upon the invisible spine. Once again life's vertex has been sacrificed like a lamb, as though it were a child's tender cartilage--the age of the earth's infancy.

In order to wrest life from captivity and start a new world, the figures of knotty days must be linked together by means of a flute. It's the age rocking the wave with man's anguish; and a viper in the grass breathes the golden measure of the age.

And the buds will swell again, and the green shoots will sprout. But your spine has been smashed, my beautiful, pitiful age. And you look back, cruel and weak, with an inane smile, like a beast that has once been supple, at the tracks left by your own paws.

(Obolensky, pp. 361-362)

My age, my beast, who will look
in your blank white eyes, and stick
together two centuries
of vertebrae with his blood?
The blood that builds us flows
from earthly things; the parasite
can only wait trembling
on the threshold of the new day.

The creature, so long as enough
life's left, must carry the backbone
to the end; and a wave plays
upon the invisible spine.
Life's vertex is sacrificed
like a lamb, as if it were
a child's tender cartilage--
in the age of the earth's infancy.

To start a new world to wrest
life from captivity,
the figure of knotty days
must be danced together by a flute.
It's the age rocking the wave
with man's anguish; the viper
in the black grass breathes
the measure of the golden age.

And the buds will swell again,
and your green shoots will sprout,
but your long spine has been smashed,
my beautiful, pitiful age.
You look back, cruel

and weak, with an inane smile,
like a beast who has once been supple,
at the spoor left by your paws.

(TS. 2759)

There is some variation between Lowell and Obolensky's versions. If one looks at the last verse of each, however, there seems little doubt that Lowell relied on the Obolensky source, for they are almost identical. The fact that almost all the Mandelstam selection in Obolensky's anthology are present in some form in Lowell's Notebook drafts provides further evidence.

What is certain therefore is that Lowell did remain interested in Mandelstam's life and work throughout the sixties. Why this should be so it not so easy to explain. Lowell took up a teaching appointment at the University of Essex in 1970 and Gabriel Pearson, who got to know Lowell at this time, provided me with a particularly useful memory¹¹⁸. He recalled Lowell say that he admired Mandelstam for his 'directed way', a comment that does fit in with Olga Carlisle's view that Lowell was attracted to Mandelstam as a symbol of poetic survival. Considering the severity of Mandelstam's personal circumstances his poetic voice was particularly single-minded. If one sets Mandelstam's 'directed way' against Lowell's expressions of poetic inadequacy one is provided with a contrast between the two poets which may well provides clues to why Lowell remained interested in Mandelstam's poetry.

I have chosen to limit my discussion of poetic success or failure, to the linguistic division set forth in my introduction: poetry should create the illusion that it has broken through the dualistic division between language and experience. Although the reader of Lowell's poetry may agree with Seamus Heaney's view that Lowell's poetry

¹¹⁸ Personal interview, 12 February 1985.

achieves 'the sensation of a whole meaning simultaneously clicking shut and breaking open, a momentary illusion that the fulfilments in the ear spelled out meanings and fulfilments available in the world,' Lowell's view, as expressed in his poetry, is that this is not realisable. Therefore one is provided with a reason why Lowell may have found in Mandelstam a poet who could provide him with what he 'lacks', for Mandelstam is certain of poetry's power to realise such a difficult task. For Mandelstam, expressing 'reality' in art is not problematic. One has only to accept the superiority of art over life and then allow the poem to do the work, with the word in the central role:

To exist is the artist's pride. He desires no other paradise than existence, and when people speak to him of reality he only smiles bitterly, for he knows the infinitely more convincing reality of art... too often we fail to see that the poet raises a phenomenon to its tenth power, and the modest exterior of a work of art often deceives us with regard to the monstrously condensed reality within. In poetry this reality is the word as such.¹¹⁹

Lowell's poetry frequently presents his experience in an uneasy relationship with his art. By the time of his writing of Notebook through to Day By Day (1977) the difficulty of conveying life in art is one of Lowell's most dominant themes. 'Epilogue', the final poem of Day By Day, is Lowell's last word on his perennial struggle to escape the dualism of language and experience:

Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme--
why are they no help to me now
I want to make
something imagined, not recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:
The painter's vision is not a lens
it trembles to caress the light.
But sometimes everything I write

¹¹⁹ 'Morning of Acmeism,' in Critical Prose, pp. 61-65 (p. 61).

with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralysed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.¹²⁰

The desire to express the figure's 'living name' is, for Lowell, the end of a failed journey initiated in the questioning of Notebook's opening sonnet, 'things whirl/in the chainsaw bite of whatever squares/the universe by name and number' (p. 21).

The struggle between language and life becomes more problematic by the time of Notebook due to a shift in how Lowell perceived the 'reality' he wished to portray:

I wished to describe the immediate instant. If I saw something one day, I wrote it that day, or the next, or the next. Things I felt or saw, or read were drift in the whirlpool, the squeeze of the sonnet and the loose ravel of blank verse. I hoped in Life Studies--it was a limitation--that each poem might seem as open and single-surfaced as a photograph. Notebook is more jagged and imagined than was desirable in Life Studies. It's severe to be confined to rendering appearances. That seems the perfect way, what War and Peace is, but it is flattening poetry's briefer genius...¹²¹

This comment describes the beginning of Lowell's efforts to render his experience more fully than was possible in the photographic technique of Life Studies. He defines this

¹²⁰ (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 127.

¹²¹ 'Conversation with Ian Hamilton,' p. 272.

difference as more 'imagined', a term echoed in 'Epilogue', 'I want to make something/imagined not recalled'. The poem suggests he is no longer happy to describe experience as so many retrieved photographs, but wishes to convey the inner workings of the mind: all its complex contemplations on present, past and future experience. Frank Bidart, who worked closely on Notebook with him, describes how obsessive this desire became for Lowell:

Lowell wanted to provide the reader with what was immediately present. Notebook was the most extreme attempt to do this, but he couldn't cope with it, he couldn't stop. See the copy of Notebook in the Houghton library. He carried this book around with him for a year and continually jotted down alterations.¹²²

Bidart was among the friends and critics who advised Lowell to tidy up the rambling inclusive form of Notebook into the more structured History, and by Day By Day Lowell has circled back to the photographic technique of Life Studies but now, 'Epilogue' suggests, aware of its inadequacies.

Chapters four and five will provide a detailed exploration of how Lowell deals with this problem of dualism in Notebook. For the moment, however, a suggestion of Lowell's dissatisfaction with the writing process in Notebook can be seen by way of overt expressions of the inadequacy of language. Consider the violence of the following lines:

This year runs out in the movies, it must be written
in bad, straightforward, unscanning sentences--
mine were downtrodden, branded on backs of carbons,
lines, words, letters nailed to letters, words, lines;
the typescript looked like a Rosetta Stone.
A year's black pages.

(Notebook, p. 172)

¹²² Personal interview, 21 November 1987.

One is struck by the brutality of the imagery which not only suggests the effort need to write anything but also the debasement of what is achieved. The words are described as suffering torture comparable to Christ's suffering on the cross. In Notebook Lowell frequently describes writing as something of a curse. Consider the lines from 'The Literary Life: A Scrapbook':

I rest on a tree, and try to sharpen bromides
to serve the great God, the New Critic,
who loves the writing better than we ourselves....

...

Who wouldn't rather be his indexed correspondents
than the boy Keats spitting out blood for time to
breathe?

(pp. 86-87)

Odd lines in Notebook also suggest the difficult division between word and thought 'words are given a fighting chance to speak' (p. 86), '--His imagination has lost the word for dying' (p. 94) and of the young, 'words are what get in the way of what they say' (p. 71).

George Steiner, in After Babel, explores the difficulty of moving beyond the 'single-surfaced' photograph to something 'more jagged and imagined'. He considers the implications of capturing experience in language, and shows that any discussion of language must consider the nature of truth, the relation between the world and language. Steiner stresses the impossibility of bringing these two worlds together, seen in his reasons why a universal language can never be achieved: 'Roughly stated the epistemological obstacle is this: there could only be a 'real' and 'universal character' if the relation between words and the world was one of complete inclusion and unambiguous correspondence' (p. 203).

All definitions of experience must be enclosed in and limited by language. Thus, although writers, philosophers and theologians all attempt to merge 'word' and 'world', they are trying to do the impossible. What they can do, however, is create an effective 'illusion' of transcendence and experience the affirmation that follows. Therefore the writer may achieve the felicity of Bachelard's successful art described in the introduction, the 'fact that poetry possesses a felicity of its own, however great the tragedy it may be called upon to illustrate', while the philosopher may attain Wisdom¹²³ and the theologian, oneness with God.

Aristotle and Plato's opposed perceptions of the 'physical world provide a means of dividing concepts of dualism into two categories. For Plato, the world is, 'A unique copy of a unique, perfect, and eternal model,'¹²⁴ whereas for Aristotle, it is the only reality, 'the essential actuality of God is life most good and eternal.'¹²⁵ From here they develop different routes out of dualism. They both agree that the escape from dualism can only be achieved by the philosopher, the seeker of Wisdom, but have differing perceptions of what this Wisdom is. For Plato, Wisdom is the 'realm of the absolute, constant and invariable,'¹²⁶ obtainable only by journeying out of the physical world, whereas for Aristotle, it is knowledge of 'first principles and causes' ('Metaphysics,' p. 317), gained by closely categorising the universe with the mathematician's precision. Plato's writings lead to what I shall term

¹²³ I am taking here the definition of the philosopher as the seeker of Wisdom seen both in Aristotle and Plato.

¹²⁴ Timaeus, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 42.

¹²⁵ 'Metaphysics,' trans. Hugh Tredennick, in Aristotle, ed. Abraham Edel (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 314-355 (p. 353).

¹²⁶ 'Phaedo,' in The last Days of Socrates, trans. Hugh Tredennick, 3rd rev. ed. (1969; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 99-183 (p. 131).

'transcendental' theories, attempts to escape dualism by looking for a truth beyond the physical world, whereas Aristotle's give rise to theories which presume that truth comes from human logic alone. They also regard language differently. For Plato, words are, 'a description of a likeness of the changeless,' and 'being a description of a mere likeness will be merely likely,' (Timaeus, p. 41) whereas for Aristotle, thought (as expressed in words) 'becomes an object of thought by the act of apprehension and thinking, so that thought and the object of thought are the same' ('Metaphysics,' p. 353). Plato here maintains that close examination of the physical world necessarily remains within the dualistic divisions of 'word' and 'world', whereas Aristotle argues that it unifies the two. For Plato, it is only withdrawal from the physical world to a contemplation of the 'realm of the absolute' which facilitates this merging of 'word' and 'world'.

This contrast between Plato and Aristotle is no more than a simple tool to help understand how Lowell and Mandelstam experienced language and does not claim to be an all inclusive survey of dualism. This accepted, the history of ideas certainly shows cyclical shifts between the two. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas reinstates Aristotle, largely neglected in favour of Plato throughout the Dark Ages. One then sees affinities between Plato's thought and the Rationalism of Bacon and Descartes which is later displaced by a growing reliance on human reason, seen in John Locke's Empiricism. The nineteenth century shifts back to transcendentalism with Kant, Hegel and Schelling, who in turn are displaced, by the twentieth century focus on human reason which results, in Steiner's view, as a reaction against the, 'unworriedly eloquent metaphysics which had dominated European philosophic argument from Schelling to Hegel and Nietzsche' (After Babel, p. 206). Throughout, one notes that a natural consequence of the reliance on human logic is an equal reliance on the language in which such logic is expressed. Locke argues, for example, that,

'Truth' seems to 'signify nothing but the joining or separating of signs'¹²⁷ and modern thought is now dominated by discussions on language.

Steiner has noted this twentieth century focus on language: 'The turn of the century witnessed a change from an 'outward', hypostatized concept of truth--as an absolute accessible to intuition, to will, to the teleological spirit of history--to a view of truth as a property of logical form and language' (After Babel, p. 206). Aristotle's belief that language could express the 'truth' of experience is taken to new heights in the twentieth-century. Modern movements such as Phenomenology, Logical Positivism, and Structuralism give language an autonomy not previously attributed to it. Dualism is evaded by giving language special qualities, making it a reality in its own right. Ernst Cassirer's writing, for example, epitomises this eulogising, arguing that reality only exists as a formulation of language: 'The content of the spirit is only seen in its [language's] manifestations; the ideal form is only known by and in the aggregate of the sensible signs which it uses for its expression.'¹²⁸ The Post-structuralist Jacques Derrida shows how this focus on language continues into more recent philosophy. Although he reacts against Structuralism, he still reinforces a reliance on human reasoning through language and, like Cassirer, sees language as the creator of reality. He moves away from the autonomy of product but only to the autonomy of process and not to the transcendental: 'Meaning is neither before nor after the act. Is not that which is called God, that which imprints every human course and recourse with its secondarity, the passageway of deferred reciprocity between reading and

¹²⁷ An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. A.S. Pringle-Pattison (1924; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 291.

¹²⁸ Language, Vol. I of The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), p. 86.

writing?'¹²⁹ Throughout he argues for, 'the profound reassurance of the certainty of meaning' (ibid., p. 60).

Although, as I shall discuss later, Lowell and Mandelstam were influenced by Plato's transcendentalism by way of secondary sources they were also directed by literary movements which fit into this modern concern for language: New Criticism in America and Formalism in Russia. The closeness of these two movements and the extent of the poets' involvement in them helps to explain similarities between Lowell and Mandelstam's poetic aims. Victor Erlich made the following observation about these two movements: 'The points of contact between the Formalist School and the Anglo-American 'New Criticism' are especially worth exploring.'¹³⁰ Peter Zeeman, in summarising the joint concerns of the two movements, points to what I consider to be the dangers of giving autonomy to the text:

This doctrine led to a mode of intrinsic or text-centered criticism which was preoccupied either with the description of literary 'devices' and conventions (conceived as deviations from ordinary language) as well as various sound effects and syntactic patternings of verse, or with the analysis of tensions, paradoxes and ambiguities created by the meanings of words, images and symbols, which the literary work as an elegantly balanced verbal structure--a 'well-wrought urn'--reconciled through the unity of its central theme.¹³¹

New Criticism influenced Lowell during his poetic apprenticeship but he gradually saw the danger of making the verbal construct override content, as he told A. Alvarez:

¹²⁹ Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 11.

¹³⁰ Victor Erlich, Russian Formalism: History and Doctrine, 4th ed. (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1980), p. 274. See also pp. 274-275 for a detailed comparison of the two movements.

¹³¹ The Later Poetry of Osip Mandelstam: Text and Context, (Amsterdam: Rudolph, 1988), pp. 12-13.

Well, that's [new Criticism] in my blood very much, and about 1950 it was prevailing everywhere in America. There were poets trained that way, writing in the style, writing rather complicated, difficult labored poems, and it was getting very dry.¹³² You felt you had to get away from that at all costs.

Russian Formalism was likewise influential to Mandelstam during his youth. His personal reaction against Symbolism is influenced by Formalist theories. One can see, for example, the similarity between his description of the Symbolist destruction of language, 'They sealed up all words, all images, designating them exclusively for liturgical use,'¹³³ and B. Eykhenbaum's summary of Formalist aims: 'The desire to liberate the poetic word from the fetters of philosophical and religious tendencies, which had received considerable prominence in Symbolism' (Russian Formalism, pp. 71-72). Formalism differed from new Criticism in that it concerned linguists as well as writers, so that the focus on poetry was not necessarily automatic. However, as Erlich points out, the Formalists focused on poetry as the most effective means of giving language autonomy, making use of Alexander Potebnia's belief that in poetic language, 'the emancipation of the word from the tyranny of the idea--comes closest to realization' (ibid., p. 24). The exploration of poetic language had the greatest interest for Mandelstam, but he only got involved as far as was necessary for him to create his own very individual theory, making use of certain Platonic elements in this movement which epitomised the modern concern for language. Thus, although like the Formalists he maintained the need to give autonomy to the word, when this led to close linguistic

¹³² 'Robert Lowell in Conversation,' The Review, No. 8 (August 1963) 36-40 (p. 39).

¹³³ 'On the Nature of the Word,' in Critical Prose, pp. 117-132 (p. 11).

analysis of language he parted with their concerns. Lowell used New Criticism as a learning ground but from there set out on a life long struggle with language which could not be satisfied with the 'dry' verbal artifacts of the New Critics. Poetry's task was to provide a true rendering of experience. Mandelstam, although within the Formalist camp, created a very personal formula of his own which was far removed from the close linguistic scrutiny which concerned many of the Formalists. Both writers followed a route which, in my view, is more aligned to the transcendental tradition established by Plato.

Plotinus saw Plato's pursuit of Wisdom as the means to 'the perfect life.'¹³⁴ This is an apt description of the affirmation of Plato's philosophy, which is more persuasive and moving than Aristotle's pragmatism, just as systems of belief are more persuasive and moving than various forms of atheism. Lowell and Mandelstam were both attracted to theories of language which strive towards both the transcendentalism and affirmation of Plato's philosophy, and the best illustration of this is in their joint concern with one particular theory of Platonism, namely the theory of the Logos or Word.

The following words of St Bonaventure help suggest how the Logos provides an inspiring formula for religious and artistic transcendence: 'so that by faith in the Word one recovers spiritual hearing and vision...by love of the Word, one recovers taste and breath.'¹³⁵ It is difficult to pin the source of the Logos down before the advent of Christian definitions when it is presented as the Word of God incarnate. Lowell's following lines take their inspiration from an early interpretation of the Logos: '--things

¹³⁴ The Enneads, trans. Stephen Mckenna, 4th rev. ed. (1917-1930; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 43.

¹³⁵ as quoted in William Anderson, Dante the Maker (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1982), p. 345.

whirl/in the chainsaw bite of whatever squares/the universe by name and number' (Notebook, p. 21). Here, Lowell is expressing a need to discover the harmony which supposedly exists behind the chaos of objects perceived. His use of 'name' and 'number' equates with the Greek meaning of Logos as 'number' and 'word', and it is this double meaning which gives clues to early interpretations. In Luciano De Crescenzo's view the Logos comes from Heraclitus for whom, the 'apparent chaos of the cosmic conflict concealed a rational order which he defined in a single word: Logos',¹³⁶ while Bertrand Russell cites Pythagoras as the source. In Russell's view, not only the Logos, but the whole of Platonism derives from Pythagoras, who combined mathematics with theology to give the resulting Greek religious philosophy and Christianity an intellectual slant not present in Eastern religions:

Mathematics, the world of ideas, and all thought about what is not sensible, have, for Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus, something divine;...It was this intellectual element in Plato's religion that led Christians--notably the author of St John's Gospel--to identify Christ with the Logos.¹³⁷

The interpretation of the Logos which I have found the most useful in trying to understand how Lowell and Mandelstam use language, is that made by Plotinus in The Enneads:

All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and form, as long as it remains outside of Reason and Idea, is ugly by that very isolation from the Divine Thought. And this is the Absolute Ugly: an ugly thing is something that has not been entirely mastered by pattern, that is by Reason, the matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal Form.

¹³⁶ The History of Greek Philosophy :the Pre-Socratics (London: Picador, Pan Books 1989), p. 55.

¹³⁷ History of Western Philosophy (1946; rpt. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979) p. 293.

But where the Ideal-Form has entered, it has grouped and co-ordinated what from a diversity of parts was to become a unity: it has rallied confusion into co-operation: it has made the sum one harmonious coherence: for the Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may.

And on what has thus been compacted to unity, Beauty enthrones itself, giving itself to the parts as to the sun: when it lights on some material unity, a thing of like parts, then it gives itself to that whole. Thus for an illustration, there is the beauty, conferred by craftsmanship, of all a house with all its parts, and the beauty which some natural quality may give a single tone.

This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful--by communicating in the thought(Reason/Logos) that flows from the Divine.

(Enneads, pp. 57-58)

Here Plotinus builds on Plato's ideas adding subtlety and complexity. If we take the 'house with all its parts' to be the work of art then one can see how Plotinus's ideas fit into an aesthetic mould. When all the diverse parts of the work of art have been brought into harmony, then the Logos is realised. The work of art becomes a means of making sense of the chaos and multiplicity of experience. Both Lowell's and Mandelstam's poetry reflect an attempt to achieve harmony out of the multiplicity of personal and cultural experience. Lowell in his poetry, however, also suggests that such harmony is not realisable, whereas Mandelstam consistently expresses faith in the power of poetry to achieve the Logos.

By the time Lowell has redrafted Notebook into History he has this to say about words:

Words

Christ's first portrait was a donkey's head,
the simple truth is in his simple word,
lies buried in a random, haggard sentence,
cutting ten ways to nothing clearly carried....
In our time, God is an entirely lost person--
there were two: Benito Mussolini and Hitler,
blind mouths shouting things into things.
After their Chicago deaths with girls and lugers,

we know he gave a plot to what they planned.
No league against the ephemeral Enemy lasts;
not even the aristocracy of the Commune
curing the seven plagues of economics,
to wither daily in favor of the state,
a covenant of swords without the word.¹³⁸

Here his personal anxiety about the inadequacy of language is transferred to the public realm where language is debased for the purpose of political power. Lowell describes the original corruption of God's Word as stemming from twentieth-century rhetoric. In Notebook, however, specific suggestions of the Logos (as opposed to the more general attempt to move from 'word' to 'world') are more concerned with his own personal attempt at self definition, implied in two related themes: his own quest for definition, and his infant daughter Harriet's evolving articulation. Ultimately the two themes relate, for in Notebook Harriet is described as destined to inherit Lowell's attempts at self articulation as they struggle to be realised in Notebook. The opening poem sets the scene with Harriet's attempts to define the world about her:

Half a year, then a year and a half, then
ten and a half--the pathos of a child's fractions, turn-
ing up each summer. God a seaslug, God a queen
with forty servants, God...she gave up--things whirl
in the chainsaw bite of whatever squares
the universe by name and number.

(p. 21)

This connection between Harriet's definitions and the Logos is shown later in the book when Lowell passes on his own problem of definition to his daughter. Consider 'Another Circle':

The modulation is most alive and firm,
when three or four colors are about the same,
when three or four words sound much the same,

¹³⁸ (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 132.

clear without monopoly--not us,
the first ride of summer, Harriet: I trapped in words,
you gagging your head-over-heels articulation.
The search. The circle. We can't hunt God. He hunts us,
and his story is sad...

(p. 197)

And in 'Words of a young girl' Harriet's own words show her seeing herself defined in relation to her father: 'We met a couple, not people, /squares asking father whether he was his name--/none ever said that I was Harriet' (p. 146). The most clear evidence that she is fated to complete the struggle is seen the following lines of 'Growth' where it is suggested she must complete Notebook:

'I'm talking the whole idea of life, and boys,
with Mother; and then the heartache when we're fifty....
You've got to call your next book, Book of the Century,
but it will take you a century to write,
then I will have to continue it, when you die.'

...
'UNTITLED, would have to be the name of it....'
You grow apace, you grow too fast apace,
too fast adult; no, not adult, mature.

(p. 247)

The suggestion in Harriet's words that the writing of Notebook is a life and death struggle is reinforced by Lowell's comment in 'Reading Myself' where he calls Notebook 'this open book...my open coffin' (p. 213). The following poem from the sequence 'My Death' reinforces the same point further, here associated with the original corruption of Christ's Word:

Reading this book to four or five that night
at Cuernacava, till the lines glowered and glowed,
and my friend Monsignor Illich, ascetic donkey,
braying, 'will you die when the book is done?'
It stopped my heart and not my mouth, I said,
'I have begun to wonder.' Lapsed R.C.
caught mid journey to atheist, I knew
I must pay for this opportunist violation.
Or was his die: as if, his gracenote saying,

'It is writing, if you run, as if to die.'
Christ's first portrait is a donkeys' head,
the simple truth is in his simple word,
lies buried in a random, haggard sentence,
cutting ten ways to nothing clearly carried.

(p. 129)

From these examples one sees a consistent expression of poetic inadequacy: Lowell is seen as trapped in words unable to move into the transcendent realm of the Logos.

Mandelstam's poetry, on the other hand, suggests there is no division between the poet's words and the Logos. Although words may elude him, as he puts it, 'I have forgotten the word I wanted to say,'¹³⁹ the calm certainty of his tone helps suggest that the Logos is available to him. Consider, for example, the following:

We shall meet again in Petersburg,
as though we had buried the sun there,
and utter for the first time
the blessed and meaningless word.¹⁴⁰

A good way of understanding Mandelstam's use of language in his poetry is by reading his critical prose. Drawing on the wealth of Platonic theory available to him he creates an individual and imaginative reformulation of the Logos, which enables him to express faith in the transcendence of poetic language.

Mandelstam's views on poetic language arose initially as a reaction against what he saw as the damaging effects of Russian Symbolism. Symbolist poetry as well as that of Mandelstam and his contemporaries was written during the Silver Age of Russian Poetry (1900-1914), a label which

¹³⁹ No. 113, M.I., pp. 81-82.

¹⁴⁰ Obolensky, p. 359. I have altered the line endings of this prose version to make it read more as a poem.

distinguishes it from the Golden Age of Poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Symbolists reinstated poetry after the long domination of prose as well as reviving a long neglected poetic language. This groundwork helped the movements that followed. Symbolists freed writers from social responsibility enabling them to write art for art's sake, and saw poets as members of a special caste, gifted with powers of perception. Symbolist poets used metaphysical symbols to represent reality, showed musical qualities of rhythm and form, and leaned towards mysticism and eroticism. By 1910 these characteristics had become exaggerated and without direction, as Clarence Brown points out:

By the end of the first decade of this century, the original Symbolist impulse towards reform of taste and technique had become fragmented and drained off into various neo-Romantic dead-ends such as diabolism, an exaggerated absorption with the ego of the poet, various embarrassing forms of the occult and mystical religion, and, in general, a sort of hankering after the drastic for its own sake.¹⁴¹

The crisis in Symbolism brought opposed ideas from younger poets. This led to various movements such as Futurism and Acmeism. It was to this second group that Mandelstam belonged.

Renato Poggioli, in Poets of Russia (pp. 211-218), describes the Acmeist viewpoint as outlined in the various manifestos of the time. Acmeists disliked the extreme mysticism of the Symbolists and lack of clarity in their language. Mikhail Kuzmin's 1910 manifesto, entitled 'On Beautiful Clarity', called for poetry to return to earth, to consist of solid shapes formed by clarity and light. He suggested that the movement be called 'Clarism'. In 1913 Nikolai Gumilev

¹⁴¹ Introduction to Brown and Merwin's Osip Mandelstam: Selected Poems, p. 8.

became the founder of Acmeism with his manifesto 'Symbolism's legacy and Acmeism'. The term was derived from the Greek word 'acme' meaning the supreme degree to which a thing may attain, its peak or bloom. He saw that Symbolism had involved itself with the unknown world at the expense of the known. The new movement was to accept its place in reality without transforming it into a reflection of the self. Sergei Gorodetsky, another key figure, followed immediately with a manifesto entitled 'Some Currents in Contemporary Russian Poetry', which restated Gumilev's ideas more simply:

What is primarily at stake in the contention between Acmeism and Symbolism is this resounding colorful world of ours: this world made of time, volume and form, this planet, this earth. After so many refusals to accept it, the world is now accepted without reservations, in all its varying aspects, either beautiful or ugly.¹⁴²

Their message was that poetry should be formed from reality, presenting concrete images free from self obsession. The movement was short-lived and had practically died out by 1915. Gumilov was the leader and Mandelstam and Akhmatova were the only other names of significance. In spite of the brevity of the movement Mandelstam remained concerned with an adequate definition of Acmeism throughout his life. After the movement was no longer active a need to understand the implications of Acmeism became part of his more mature poetics. Towards the end of his career he made the much quoted statement that it was 'a longing for world culture'. This comment suggests a more complicated interpretation of the Acmeist return to the real world than the other manifestos had described.

Plotinus described the Logos as a move from multiplicity to unity. He compared such aesthetic harmony with 'the beauty,

¹⁴² 'Some Currents in Contemporary Russian Poetry,' as quoted in Renato Poggioli, Poets of Russia, p. 215.

conferred by craftsmanship, of all a house with all its parts'. Lowell, 'trapped in words' and unable to make sense of all that, 'whirls in the chainsaw bite of whatever squares the universe by name and number', shows himself unable to move from multiplicity to unity. The Logos lies beyond his grasp. Mandelstam's theory of the word, as described in his critical prose, on the other hand, suggests he believed poetry can enable unity between poetic language and the Logos.

In 'Morning of Acmeism' Mandelstam describes the privileged position of the poet who has the power to realise the Logos in art:

But too often we fail to see that the poet raises a phenomenon to its tenth power, and the modest exterior of a work of art often deceives us with regard to the monstrously condensed reality contained within. In poetry this reality is the word as such.

(p. 61)

He goes on to explain that the 'word' means specifically poetic language: 'Right now, for instance, in expressing my thoughts as precisely as possible, but certainly not in a poetic manner, I am essentially speaking with my consciousness, not with the word' (p. 61). He sees this poetic word as distinct from the Logos but able to achieve oneness with it, not because poetic language can move beyond words to the Logos, but because the Logos is made more 'down to earth'--evidence of a reaction against the esoteric language of the Symbolists:

'The word as such' was born very slowly. Gradually, one after another, all the elements of the word were drawn into the concept of form. To this day the conscious sense, the Logos, is still taken erroneously and arbitrarily for the content. The Logos gains nothing from such an unnecessary honor. The Logos demands nothing more than to be considered on an equal footing with the other elements of the word.

(p. 61)

Mandelstam uses architectural imagery to show how the Logos works with other 'elements of the word' to produce the work of art. He begins by describing the 'word' as the 'building stone':

It was as if the stone thirsted after another existence. It revealed its own dynamic potential hidden within itself, as if it were begging admittance into the 'groined arch' in order to participate in the joyous cooperative action of its fellows.

(p. 62)

He then compares the poet to the builder of the gothic cathedral:

Genuine piety before the three dimensions of space is the first condition of successful building: to regard the world neither as a burden nor an unfortunate accident, but as God-given palace...To build means to conquer emptiness, to hypnotize space. The handsome arrow of the Gothic belltower rages because its function is to stab the sky, to reproach it for its emptiness.

(p. 63)

The metaphor of the gothic cathedral, presumably to suggest the presence of God/the Logos on earth, helps to show how the work of art remains firmly planted in the real world but at the same time symbolises the transcendent Logos.

'Morning of Acmeism' provides a flavour of the imaginative way Mandelstam explores the notion of the word as well as his uncompromising faith in the poet's ability to realise the Logos. Poetry is described as free of the problem of dualism because Mandelstam's poetic word and the Logos are seen to become one. The poet is the one gifted with the means to express this combined word/Logos.

Because Lowell's interest in culture was so wide--covering art, literature, history, philosophy and politics--his personal quest for the Logos also becomes an attempt to bring the chaos of his cultural experience into harmony. In the remaining Mandelstam essays to be discussed Mandelstam provides a formula of the word which enables such personal and cultural synthesis. In formulating such a synthesis the interpretation of time needs special attention for if personal and cultural experience of past, present and future are to be unified then it follows that past, present and future time must also be unified.

In order to provide a theory of cultural synthesis Mandelstam makes use of the time philosophy of Henri Bergson, in particular his concept of 'duration'. Bergson argues that causal time is split into artificial boundaries of past, present, and future. In reality the past, present and future all merge to create a concept of time which is outside such boundaries: 'Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation.'¹⁴³ When one looks at Plato's view of time and that of his later interpreter, Plotinus, one can see possible sources for Bergson's view of time. When Plato described the physical world as a copy of a transcendent world, 'A unique copy of a unique, perfect and eternal model,' he also described this physical world as one of flux and change unlike the transcendent world, eternity, 'the realm of the absolute, constant and invariable'. Plotinus, in The Enneads, also describes something which is outside the artificial boundaries of causal time:

We know it [time/eternity] as a life changelessly motionless ever holding the universal content in actual presence; not this now and now that other, but always

¹⁴³ Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1913), p. 5.

all; not existing now in one mode and now in another, but a consummation without part or interval.

(p. 224)

In contrast he perceives causal time in the following way: 'the definite quantity is (not time but) merely something occurring within time, for otherwise Time is not everywhere but is something belonging to movement' (p. 230). Bertrand Russell, reinforces the view that Bergson's philosophy is derivative but also suggests to me why Bergson may have been particularly appealing--his use of poetic images:

His imaginative picture of the world, regarded as a poetic effort, is in the main not capable of either proof or disproof. Shakespeare says life's but a walking shadow, Shelley says its is like a dome of many-coloured glass, Bergson says it is a shell which bursts into parts that are again shells. If you like Bergson's image better, its just as legitimate.

(Western Philosophy, p. 764)

Although Mandelstam may well have come across Platonic concepts of time through numerous secondary sources, it is the very clear Bergsonian images which Mandelstam uses in his critical prose which are memorable, and assist in visualising Mandelstam's interpretation of cultural synthesis. In the following essays Mandelstam provides a formula for cultural synthesis making use of Bergson's theory of 'duration'. His definition of the word is central to that formula. He goes beyond the argument of 'Morning of Acmeism', which shows the poet as the one gifted to express the Logos, and explores exactly how the word is empowered to express the Logos.

In 'On the Nature of the Word' he continues to contrast the Acmeists favourably against the Symbolists and points to what he sees as inadequate causal interpretations of literary history before the arrival of Acmeism. His

condemnation of the Symbolist treatment of language is seen in his epigraph to the essay--an extract from a Gumilev's poem 'The Word':

We have forgotten that the word alone
Shone radiant over the troubled earth,
And that in the gospel of St. John
It is written that the word is God.
But we have limited its range
to the paltry boundaries of this world,
And like dead bees in an empty hive
Dead words emit a foul odor.

(p. 117)

He opens by posing the question whether Russian literature is a unified whole. He then argues that Bergson's philosophy provides a formula which one can use to interpret the continuity of Russian literature:

Bergson does not consider phenomena according to the way they submit to the law of temporal succession but rather according to their spatial extension. He is interested exclusively in the internal connection among phenomena. He liberates this connection from time and considers it independently. Phenomena thus connected to one another form, as it were, a kind of fan whose folds can be opened up in time; however, this fan may also be closed up in a way intelligible to the human mind.

(p. 117)

Mandelstam sees this theory of synthesis as an ideal alternative to what he calls the nineteenth century 'theory of progress':

The theory of evolution is particularly dangerous for literature but the theory of progress is nothing short of suicidal. If one listens to literary historians who defend evolutionism, it would appear that writers think only about how to clear the road for their successors, but never about how to accomplish their own tasks; or it would appear that they are all participants in an inventors' competition for the improvement of some

literary machine, although none of them knows the whereabouts of the judges or what purpose the machine serves.

(p. 119)

Having rejected a causal formula for cultural continuity in favour of a Bergsonian synthesis, Mandelstam then proceeds to argue that it is by way of language that such cultural unity is realised: 'Language alone can be acknowledged as the criterion of unity for the literature of a given people' (p. 119). To show how the language of the past is seen to absorb the influence of culture and history into the language of the present, he uses the term 'Hellenism'--by which he means the way Hellenic culture has passed into the Russian language along Latin and Byzantine paths. In order to suggest the 'down to earth' language of Acmeism, as opposed to the 'other worldliness' of much Symbolist language, he further defines 'Hellenism' as 'Domestic Hellenism':

Hellenism is the conscious surrounding of man with domestic utensils instead of impersonal objects; the transformation of impersonal objects into domestic utensils, and the humanizing and warming of the surrounding world with the most delicate teleological warmth. Hellenism is any kind of stove near which a man sits, treasuring its heat as something akin to his own internal body heat.

(pp. 127-128)

These 'domestic utensils' were to surround the poet for use as symbolic material, like Bergson's fan of phenomena, while still remaining part of the reality from which they were drawn. He saw no need, therefore, for a separate symbolic language such as the Symbolists were using. He describes how the Symbolists had 'sealed up' images making them into 'scarecrows', reducing the word to 'serfdom'. Because a word could no longer be itself but must always represent

something else, it had effectively been killed off by the Symbolists. They had restricted the word's freedom by creating a separate symbolic language, to be used for poetic purposes only. Mandelstam, on the other hand, provides a formula which emphasises the multiple meanings of language, including its literal meaning:

A verbal representation is a complex composite of phenomena, it is a connection, a 'system'. The significance of the word may be viewed as a candle burning inside a paper lantern, and conversely, its phonetic value, the so-called phoneme, may be located inside the significance, just as the candle may be inside the lantern.

(p. 129)

The liberation of the word enabled the development of a new school such as Acmeism. As a direct result of the Acmeist taste for this densely signifying word he argues that a Russian taste for European culture also developed. This question of 'taste' develops naturally out of Mandelstam's theory of the 'word': If the language of the past is absorbed into that of the present and unified with it then logically this must involve an attraction to culture of the past. In contrast, the 'theory of progress', where writers are 'participants in an inventors' competition for the improvement of some literary machine', would involve considering literature of the past as something to be disposed of as inferior to that of the present.

'Conversation about Dante' (Critical Prose, pp. 397-442) comments further on the two main ideas described in the first essay--the word as a 'complex composite of phenomena' and the question of 'taste' for European literature--and offers more examples of how Bergson's theories are realised in poetry. The essay is ostensibly about Dante, whom Mandelstam describes as a 'raznochinets' (a name he uses to describe the ideal writer and interpreter of poetry), but in essence it acts as an exposition of his own poetics. The

ideal form of poetry is produced and understood by instinct and once created can be visualised in terms of Bergson's 'system' of phenomena. the material from which it is made is not drawn from the imagination but culture and literature which has preceded it.

Mandelstam uses the following Bergsonian metaphor to describe how he feels Dante's poetry is created:

We must try to imagine, therefore, how bees might have worked at the creation of this thirteen-thousand-faceted form, bees endowed with the brilliant stereometric instinct, who attracted bees in greater and greater numbers as they were required. The work of these bees, constantly keeping their eye on the whole, is of varying difficulty in different stages of the process. Their cooperation expands and grows more complicated as they participate in the process of forming the combs, by means of which space virtually emerges out of itself.

(p. 409)

Lowell describes the creative process in a similar way in Notebook but with one crucial difference:

No honeycomb is built without a bee
adding circle to circle, cell to cell,
the wax and honey of a mausoleum--
this round dome proves its maker is alive,
the corpse of such insect lives preserved in honey,
prays that the perishable work live long
enough for the sweet-tooth bear to desecrate--
this open book...my open coffin.

(p. 213)

Here Lowell assigns a spatial design to Notebook but conveys none of the awe or affirmation seen in Mandelstam's description of Dante's creative process, suggested by: 'we must try to imagine'; 'brilliant stereometric genius'; and 'space virtually emerges out of itself'. Lowell's bees do create individual cells which contribute to the whole, but

only in order to produce a work of art which symbolises death, the 'mausoleum' or 'open coffin'. It is the 'dome' which only survives long enough to be attacked by the 'sweet-tooth bear'. The closest the poem comes to any form of affirmation is the statement, 'this round dome proves the maker is alive' which acts only to reinforce the ultimate nihilism of the poem--to be alive signifies little but is at least one degree better than the ultimate nihilism of death. This beehive metaphor provides another example of Lowell's negative view of the creative process set dramatically against Mandelstam's unquestioning faith in the power of poetry.

Mandelstam then proceeds, in 'Conversation about Dante', to develop the description of the word as a 'complex composite of phenomena'. The 'word' is densely signifying because once uttered it resounds with all its previous uses and contexts:

Any unit of poetic speech, be it a line, a stanza or an entire lyrical composition, must be regarded as a single word. For instance, when we enunciate the word 'sun', we do not toss out an already prepared meaning--this would be tantamount to semantic abortion--rather we are experiencing a peculiar cycle.

Any given word is a bundle, and meaning sticks out of it in various directions, not aspiring toward any single official point. In pronouncing the word 'sun', we are, as it were, undertaking an enormous journey to which we are so accustomed that we travel in our sleep. What distinguishes poetry from automatic speech is that it rouses us and shakes us into wakefulness in the middle of a word. Then it turns out that the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road.

(p. 407)

Mandelstam also considers how 'allusion' relates to the question of taste, discussed in 'On the Nature of the Word'. Education is seen as an absorption of references from the past: 'Education is schooling in the swiftest possible

associations. You grasp them on the wing, you are sensitive to allusions--therein lies Dante's favorite form of praise' (p. 400). These allusions themselves have special powers, helping the language of the past to resound in the present; as Mandelstam describes it: 'A quotation is not an excerpt. A quotation is a cicada. Its natural state is that of unceasing sound. Having once seized hold of the air, it will not let go' (p. 401). Mandelstam further emphasises the importance of allusion by showing Dante to be, not a writer of the imagination, but one who 'writes to dictation', 'a copyist, a translator' (p. 436). It is significant therefore that both Lowell and Mandelstam rely heavily on the use of allusion in their verse.

Mandelstam's account of how Dante produces poetry also helps one visualise how individual experience, which takes place in time, participates in the whole of experience, which transcends time. To this purpose, the essay is filled with numerous spatial images to describe the individual acting in harmony with the whole, for example, 'a river crammed with Chinese junks moving simultaneously in various directions' and a, 'carpet fabric containing a plethora of textile warps' (p. 398). Mandelstam also notes that this individual momentum is suggested by, what he calls, Dante's tendency to 'glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm of walking' (p. 400). Mandelstam suggests that Dante's individual walk is used to show individual momentum working in harmony with the whole. In Notebook, Lowell also uses language to suggest the rhythm of walking but, unlike Dante, individual momentum is there to reinforce the inevitable passage of time rather than to show it harmonising with transcendental time.

In the essay 'the Word and Culture', Mandelstam elaborates further on cultural synthesis, focusing in particular on the notion of 'recognition'. He continues to argue against the view that art progresses logically from one period to the

next improving as it goes, here reflected in his description of poetry:

Poetry is the plough that turns up time in such a way that the abyssal strata of time, its black earth, appear on the surface. There are epochs, however, when mankind, not satisfied with the present, yearning like the ploughman for the abyssal strata of time, thirsts for the virgin soil of time. Revolution in art inevitably leads to Classicism, not because David reaped the harvest of Robespierre, but because that is what the earth desires.

(p. 113)

Poetry is seen as the 'plough' which turns up the past so that it can participate in a timeless present, suggested by the term 'virgin soil of time'. The rightness of the process is captured in, 'that is what the earth desires', as if to say, such a view cannot be logically denied. The poet who is able to make the poetry of the past participate in the 'virgin soil of time', is repaid with a strong experience of affirmation--'the profound joy of recurrence':

We are free of the burden of memories. On the other hand, we have so many rare presentiments: Pushkin, Ovid, Homer. When in the stillness of the night a lover gets tangled up in tender names and suddenly remembers that all this already was: the words and the hair and the rooster crowing outside his window, exactly as it had been in Ovid's Tristia, the profound joy of recurrence seizes him, a dizzying joy:

Like murky water, I drink the turbid air
Time is upturned by the plough, the rose is as the earth.

(p. 114)

Mandelstam also describes the poet as inspired rather than skilled. The poet's ability to experience unity between the past and the present is the result not of labour but the ability to 'hear' the 'inner image':

Write imageless verses if you can, if you are able. A blind man recognises a beloved face by barely touching it with seeing fingers, and tears of joy, the true joy of recognition, will fall from his eyes that ringing mold of form which anticipates the written poem. There is not yet a single word, but the poem can already be heard. This is the sound of the inner image, this is the poet's ear touching it.

Only the instant of recognition is sweet to us.

(p. 116)

That 'recognition' is both the action of the poet's inspiration and the merging of past and present culture, is made all the more plain when one sees how Mandelstam has merged sentences from each of the above extracts in the poem 'Tristia'¹⁴⁴: 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight'. Mandelstam's view of recognition is linked with his theory of the word. When the poet succeeds in achieving the word then the language/culture of the past becomes unified with that of the present.

My aim, in discussing Mandelstam's theory of the word, is primarily to illustrate a contrast between his and Lowell's perceptions of dualism, rather than to suggest that Lowell was directly influenced by Mandelstam's work in the writing of Notebook. However, Mandelstam's poetics did also have a direct impact on Notebook, and this is largely the subject matter of chapter five. Because I do wish to show concrete evidence of influence where it exists, it is also vital to point to other sources which may have provided Lowell with similar perceptions of language and culture to those provided by Mandelstam.

Victor Terras made an astute comment when he argued that it is not 'novel concepts or insights' but 'the originality,

¹⁴⁴ No. 104, M.I, pp. 73-74.

plasticity, and beauty of Mandelstam's formulations,¹⁴⁵ which makes Mandelstam's critical prose so appealing. Though one reads the critical prose with the same pleasure that one does the poetry, Mandelstam is not here stating anything new about language. He is only one of many who have contributed to the tradition of the 'polysemous' word, by which I mean its ability to have multiple meanings. There are also many who have put forward theories of cultural synthesis.

I have already mentioned two critics who offer a formula for cultural synthesis. T. S. Eliot argues the need to develop 'an historical sense' so that 'the whole of literature' has 'a simultaneous existence and a simultaneous order' and Matthew Arnold defines the 'deliverance' as 'man's comprehension of this present and past', realised when the 'mind begins to enter into possession of the general ideas which are the laws of the vast multitude of facts'. Lowell would almost certainly have been aware of Eliot's view of culture as well as that of another of Lowell's major predecessors, Ezra Pound. Both Pound's and Eliot's poetry, with their wealth of literary allusion, embody what Mandelstam recommends, that one should be, like Dante, one who 'writes to dictation...a copyist, a translator'. They both saw the value of absorbing the language of the past into that of the present to produce poetry which could be a living enactment of cultural synthesis.

The simplest way to examine the tradition of Polysemy is to see it in relation to Platonism, which I discussed earlier. My discussion of Platonism focused on an emotional state, a belief that words could lead to the Word. Parallel with such subjectivism Platonists were also concerned with practical methods of transcending language. One way of achieving such transcendence was by exploiting the word's polysemy. Two distinctive forms of polysemy that stem

¹⁴⁵ 'The Time Philosophy of Osip Mandelstam,' Slavonic and East European Review, 47 (1969), 344-54 (P. 344).

from the Platonic tradition are the polysemy of biblical exegesis such as is reflected in Dante, for example, and nineteenth century organic theories of language which arose out of the philosophy of the influential German Idealists.

William Anderson, in his book Dante the Maker (pp. 330-334), argues that biblical exegesis is a form of polysemy which goes back at least to Philo (for interpretation of Judaic/Hellenistic texts), undergoing various variations before it its final definition in the thirteenth century. It comprises in examining the fourfold meanings of words as literal, allegorical, anagogical (hope), and moral. Dante used this definition for literary purposes. His own particular view of it is outlined in his letter to Can Grande:

the meaning of this work [La Commedia] is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as 'polysemous', that is having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signifies; the former of which is called literal, while that latter is called allegorical or mystical.

(Dante the Maker, pp. 333-334)

Dante proceeds to break down the allegorical into the three non literal forms I have mentioned, and then goes on to describe how, as the reader of the text becomes spiritually awakened, the full significance of the allegorical meanings is realised. Lowell may well have become aware of biblical exegesis through secondary sources such as Dante, or through his interest in theology during the time of Land of Unlikeness and Lord Weary's Castle¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of Lowell's interest in mysticism and theology while writing these two volumes see Verome Mazzaro, The Poetic Themes of Robert Lowell and to a lesser extent H. B. Staples, Robert Lowell: the First Twenty years.

M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition describes how nineteenth century theories of organicism, 'the philosophy whose major categories are derived metaphorically from the attributes of living growing things,'¹⁴⁷ were formulated by the influential German Idealists and passed into English aesthetics largely by way of Coleridge. This organicism was to have an impact on theories about language. Abrams calls the polysemy outlined by Dante, 'medieval polysemy', and its evolution in the nineteenth century under the influence of organicism, 'romantic polysemy'. He cites Schlegel as the source of an organic, polysemous formula for works of art: 'According to Schlegel a "romantic" work may be multiple in meaning, but in the particular sense of having, like God's creation bi-directional reference-both outward and inward, "objective" and "subjective" ' (p. 240). Coleridge sums up the organic view of words by describing them as 'living things'¹⁴⁸. The word is seen as organic because it has dynamic qualities, absorbing changes in individual and social consciousness. Like Abrams, William Gura, in The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology and Literature in the New England Renaissance, describes Coleridge passing on the ideas of the German Idealists, only this time to American writers and thinkers. The influence of German Idealism on nineteenth century writers has been noted by many¹⁴⁹, and is seen particularly in the work of Transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau. Lowell would certainly have been familiar with

¹⁴⁷ (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), p. 168.

¹⁴⁸ Unpublished Letters, ed. E.L. Griggs (London: Constable, 1932), i, 256, as quoted in Stephen Yenser, Circle to Circle: The Poetry of Robert Lowell (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, George Hochfield, 'New England Transcendentalism,' in American Literature to 1900, Vol. VIII of Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, ed. Marcus Cunliffe (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1973), pp. 160-193; and Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 112-118 in particular.

their work and may well have become aware of the idea of the organic word through their writings. The similarity between Emerson's and Mandelstam's view of both language, and the poet, is striking. Consider, for example, how the following lines of Emerson compare with, in particular, Mandelstam's description of poetry as 'the plough that turns up time':

The poets made all the words and therefore language is the archives of history, and, if we must say it, a sort of tomb of the muses. For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolised the world to the first speaker and to the hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have once been a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin. But the poet names the thing because he sees it, or comes one step nearer to it than any other.¹⁵⁰

Finally, New Criticism, so influential to Lowell during his poetic apprenticeship, also shows this concern with the polysemy of language. Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, and Maud Bodkins's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, texts which both reflect the influence of New Criticism, show a minute, scientific dissection of the word and a focus on its polysemous qualities. Lowell could not have escaped an encounter with the polysemy of New Criticism in some form. These various sources of polysemy are mentioned simply by way of caution, to show that Lowell's own focus on polysemy, in Notebook, may have resulted from different writers' and thinkers' ideas, working on his consciousness.

¹⁵⁰ 'The Poet,' in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Comprising his Essays, Poems and Orations, in two vols (London: Bel and Daldy, 1873), I, pp. 154-172 (pp. 162-163).

However, there is also some evidence that Mandelstam's theories about poetry exerted a direct influence on Notebook, seen by examining the Mandelstam translations among the drafts of Notebook. This I do in depth in chapter five. As a prelude to that discussion I should like to conclude this chapter by outlining what specific knowledge Lowell did have of Mandelstam's poetics, aside from what is reflected in the Mandelstam translations among the drafts of Notebook.

The three letters Madame Mandelstam wrote to Lowell provided him with some information about Mandelstam's poetics. In her first letter, written March 1967 (MS. 823), she outlines her view of what she calls 'the poetical act and the art of translating verses'. She makes the distinction between lesser poets, ironically termed 'great poets', and poets such as Mandelstam who have a genuine poetic gift. The 'great poets' use the following technique:

The usual one is to do it using one's skill. Many great poets have done it. Usually those who do it bear in mind what is called the poetical style of the day or are working according to their own style. That is literature. People do like such kind of verses. The contemporaries are never tired of praising them as every word and every idea in such verse are made of stale elements which is always welcomed as readers are lazy people. What we call innovation in literature generally agrees with this way of composing verses: find your manner of composing and go on firing away whatever you like.

In contrast, the true poet is one who acts as a vessel for the transcendent Logos: 'The other way of composing is a spontaneous one and it has nothing to do with skill as every element is always fresh and comes for the first time and would never return'. In her second letter, written 3rd December 1967 (MS. 824), though she is less critical of those she does not consider real poets, she still places skill in the lesser role of artisan: 'I really think that we

speak one language but only when you we speak about the very soul of human existence--of the Word. For me there exists poetry, and the pleasant, the naive, the childish art of painting'.

She makes a similar distinction between skill and inspiration with regards translation, stating in her first letter: 'As for practical translations they as well are of two different kinds. One is rendering verses with great skill but rather mechanically...it is pure translation and nothing else'. Lowell is, thus, given the highest praise by being placed in the second category: 'The other way is a great moment. It is a meeting of two poets of two different languages. There is sudden recognition as if these two--the poet and his translator--have struck up a close friendship.'

She also speaks about the poet's ability to gain happiness in her second letter. This is useful when considering Lowell's and Mandelstam's expressions of affirmation in their poetry. She focuses on the problems caused by the poet's inability to compromise during the Stalinist period. This lack of compromise is seen as inevitable, for if poetry results not from craft but inspiration, it cannot be modified to what society will accept:

I can say more: the artist, is the happy one; but I never heard about a happy poet. They seem to attract any kind of misfortunes on themselves, and I can't make out why it is so. There is a stock of state phrases and polite fibbing which helps us to deal with people. The artist is possessed of a lot of these charming tricks, and he is so pleasant in any society. And what about the poet? Has he got the gift of pleasant intercourse? As far as I know they have got none of it. Both Akhmatova and Pasternak did every effort to master this kind of artistic art but try as they could, they were a failure in this respect.

She extends these feelings of happiness to her own life:

'The main mistake I made was that I did not die younger. I simply missed the moment when I could die and so I had to live this life up till today...I think I stood the test but I can but regret that it happened so'. In her third letter, written January 6th 1968 (MS. 825), there is a suggestion that Lowell has responded to these comments about unhappiness in a way which leads Nadezda to elaborate:

You write that your life is rather happy. I can say that any poet knows that feeling happiness can't avoid to come with verses, with love and simply with every moment of life. Though our life was far from happy, as long as my husband lived with me, we had always been happy...What made us happy? I can't make out but it was so. That is the nature of a true poet who is happy even when he is sadly sad.

These comments point to the difficulty of distinguishing between the poet's actual experience and its reflection in the poetry. Consider, for example, Lowell's own comments about his life as expressed in 'Afterthought' to Notebook: 'In truth I seem to have felt mostly the joys of living; in remembering, in recording, thanks to the gift of the Muse, it is the pain' (p. 263). In these three letters, though Nadezda does not provide Lowell with specific details about Mandelstam's poetics, she does provide him with a clear picture of the poet as part of a small elite privileged with the inspirational gift of writing poetry.

Lowell also had numerous discussions with Olga Carlisle about Mandelstam's poetry. When I asked her whether they discussed the 'word', she had this to say:

He would have known it because there are poems on the subject and ...it is part of the Russian strict reverence of the Word which I suppose is a religious echo that an entire generation, that of my father, a poet younger than Mandelstam by a generation, had. This I think would have intrigued Lowell and fascinated him, maybe in its religious implication. But it's not the way I think he

experienced English, his own poetic language. I don't think he sanctified the language in this precise manner. We spoke of it often but in those general terms about the transcendental significance that Russians place on language and to the Word. We often spoke about that because I was brought up in that ethic.

These comments are illuminating because they show that Lowell was aware of how Mandelstam's poetics fitted into a specifically cultural context. In her introduction to the Mandelstam section of Poets, which Lowell would undoubtedly have read, she provides a specific reference to the Acmeist interpretation of the word, focusing on its polysemous, organic qualities: 'the Acmeists endeavored, in Mandelstam's words, to reinstate "the power of the word itself," because "each word is a psyche, a live soul choosing its own sweet body" ' (Poets, p. 117). Olga Carlisle also told me that Lowell was interested in the whole process whereby Mandelstam's poetry reached the West, and particularly Madame Mandelstam's function in this. She opens her comments below with a paraphrase of how Mandelstam believed poetry was created, as interpreted by Madame Mandelstam in her memoirs Hope Against Hope:

The fact that the poem exists somewhere on the outside and the poet is the medium like figure who captures this music of the spheres. I remember doing a verbal translation of that passage¹⁵¹ for Lowell of how Mandelstam wrote poetry. I don't think Lowell himself wrote poetry like that, but the whole variety of it just fascinated him, as something Mandelstam recognised as happening to him and Nadezhda then describing it, writing it out, and then passing the book to the West and of the reader reading it. All those various poetic events would have the power of moving him much.

Her views show her reinforcing the information that Lowell received from Nadezhda's letters about the inspirational view of poetry. These comments also suggest something of

¹⁵¹ Hope Against Hope, pp. 82-83.

the tremendous respect Lowell felt for Madame Mandelstam in having managed to preserve Mandelstam's poetry.

From both Nadezda Mandelstam's letters and from Olga Carlisle's comments, it is fairly certain that Lowell had a good general impression of how Mandelstam saw the poetic act. It is harder to ascertain how much specific knowledge he had of Mandelstam's critical prose, most of which was unavailable in translation when Lowell was writing Notebook. All that can be said with certainty, is that Lowell was aware of 'Conversation about Dante', because Clarence Brown mentions it briefly in his Introduction to The Prose of Mandelstam. Brown also includes two quotations from the essay, one of which may have some relevance to Lowell's method in Notebook:

It is no accident that, in his essay on Dante, Mandelstam apprehends the rhythmic cadences of the Divine Comedy first of all as a literary sublimite of the physical motion of walking:

'The question occurs to me--and quite seriously--how many shoe soles, how many ox-hide soles, how many sandals Alighieri wore out in the course of his poetic work, wandering about on the goat paths of Italy. The Inferno and especially the Purgatorio glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm of walking, the foot and its shape. The step, linked to the breathing and saturated with thought: This Dante understands as the beginning of prosody. In order to indicate walking he uses a multitude of varied and charming turns of phrase.'

('The Prose of Mandelstam,' p. 58)

In Notebook Lowell also emphasises the 'measure of rhythm of walking' using a 'multitude of varied and charming turns of phrase', evidence of which I shall provide in chapter four. The fact that he almost certainly read this extract in Brown's introduction, suggests that the emphasis on a walking rhythm in Notebook may have resulted from the direct influence of Mandelstam's essay 'Conversation About Dante'.

Lowell would have gained an impression of Mandelstam's poetics mainly by way of the poetry itself. Most of the poems Lowell published in 1963/5 are more concerned with Mandelstam's personal survival than with his views on language and culture. However, there are other poems Lowell would have read, which touch on some of the subjects discussed in his critical prose. Along with Lowell's Mandelstam translations in Poets, there are those by Rose Styron, Stanley Kunitz and W. S. Merwin. There is also the selection in Obolensky's Penguin Russian Verse, a large number of which are present as Notebook drafts in the Lowell Papers. It seems reasonable to assume that Lowell would have read all the Mandelstam poems in both these selections. These poems provide, in places, specific reference to the 'word' and 'recognition', as well as a more general impression of the affirmative power of poetry, its ability to suggest cultural synthesis.

Both in Poets and Obolensky's selection, Lowell had the chance to read 'Tristia'¹⁵², which contains the line which has almost become Mandelstam's catchphrase: 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight' (Obolensky, p. 358). Also in Obolensky he would have encountered the beautiful nostalgic lines of poem No. 118, 'We shall meet again in Petersburg, as though we had buried the sun there, and utter for the first time the blessed and meaningless word.'¹⁵³ Poem No. 108, both in Poets and Obolensky, uses language and a view of time close to that described in the essay 'Word and Culture': 'Time has been ploughed up, and the rose was earth. In a slow vortex [love] has woven the heavy tender roses, the heaviness and tenderness of the rose, into double wreaths.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² No. 104, M.I, pp. 73-74, Obolensky, p. 358.

¹⁵³ M.I, pp. 85-86, Obolensky, p. 359.

¹⁵⁴ M.I, pp. 76-77, Obolensky, p. 359.

Poem after poem in these two selections shows attempts to merge Mandelstam's immediate cultural setting with that of the past. Take No. 84 for example:

And the five-domed cathedrals of Moscow, with their
Italian and Russian soul, remind me of the rise of
Aurora, but with a Russian name and clothed in a fur-
coat.¹⁵⁵

No. 101, which is in both selections, actually suggests this cultural merging by describing St Petersburg thus, 'Petropolis is dying.'¹⁵⁶ Finally, the poem 'The Age' continues the theme of cultural continuity, though here showing how the Revolution has severed the link between present and past ages:

And the buds will swell again, and the green shoots will
sprout. But your spine has been smashed, my beautiful
pitiful age. And you look back, cruel and weak, with an
inane smile, like a beast that has once been supple, at
the tracks left by your own paws.¹⁵⁷

This chapter has been concerned with outlining one particular problem for poetry: how does the poet move from word to Word in order to experience the affirmation of transcendental experience. I have also considered specific ways language can achieve such transcendence. When language possesses all the variations of historic and personal consciousness then the polysemous word is able, in the words of George Steiner, to, 'wake into resonance...its entire previous history' (After Babel, p. 24). Words are given the task of expressing experience weighted down with all the complexities of space and time. An impossible endeavour,

¹⁵⁵ M.I, pp. 57-58, Obolensky, p. 354.

¹⁵⁶ M.I, pp. 70-71, Obolensky, p. 354.

¹⁵⁷ No. 135, M.I, pp 102-103, Obolensky, p. 363.

but Lowell and Mandelstam both take up the challenge of escaping the bounds of time and space by way of the polysemous word. In this chapter I have emphasised how ultimately polarised Lowell and Mandelstam's language is. My next two chapters will consider how far the Lowell, Mandelstam encounter brings their language closer together.

Chapter 4

Words and the Struggle With Dualism in Notebook

By the time of his final volume, Day By Day, Lowell is expressing regret at his failure to capture life in art:

But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralysed by fact.
All's misalliance.

(Day By Day, p. 127)

However, for a brief period, in the method of Notebook, he does, in my view, come close to realising his aim to convey the complexity of his experience in his poetry: as he puts it to 'describe the immediate instant' and produce something 'more jagged and imagined'. It was to be his most sustained effort to break through language into life.

My interest in this chapter is to focus on one particular method Lowell uses in Notebook to break through the dualistic division between language and experience: bringing out the polysemy of language through the repeated use of specific words. He establishes a network of significant words (and phrases) which are given particular force in the volume, so that their meaning interacts in the various poems of Notebook. It is a technique which is commonly associated with Mandelstam's poetry but less explored by critics of Lowell's poetry.

Because Mandelstam's own critical prose is so concerned with discussions about the polysemy of language, it is not

surprising that so many other critics focus on polysemy in his poetry. One of the most popular methods of exploring Mandelstam's poetry, which shows this concern with the patterning of words and phrases, is 'subtextual analysis' as Omry Ronen explains:

'An already existing text (or texts) reflected in a new one' was termed the subtext by Kiril Taranovsky. 'Subtextual analysis' (i.e., identification and interpretation of subtexts) has become the essential hermeneutic tool in the new approach to Mandelstam's poetry.¹⁵⁸

Ronen's book is the most comprehensive guide to subtextual words and images in Mandelstam's poetry. Ronen discusses how lines from a poem of the past becomes redefined in the framework of the new poem:

Fragments of the past, as they enter a new text (...) undergo synchronization and various complex transformations of their meaning, while the poetic text based on such fragments, inasmuch as their original meaning is not cancelled but co-exists as it were, with the new 'shifted' meaning, enters a diachronic relationship with its sources.

There is a need for caution in using the subtextual method of analyzing Mandelstam's poetry. Peter France points to the danger that, 'critical writing on Mandelstam and its awareness of these complex interrelations, may be drawn into an over-elaborated elucidation of sources and allusions in the belief that only after such a long process can the poems be "properly" read.'¹⁵⁹ However, accepting the need not to put too much emphasis on such analysis it is a useful method for examining Notebook.

¹⁵⁸ An Approach to Mandelstam (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1983), p. xi.

¹⁵⁹ Poets of Modern Russia (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), p. 100.

It is surprising how little critics have focused on Lowell's particular treatment of words in Notebook. Stephen Yenser's description of Lowell's symbols comes close to a polysemous interpretation of language: 'That a symbol in a poem contains ab ovo the whole poem; that any particular symbol is its interactions with other symbols; and that a poem is thus a dynamic structure whose action constitutes its meaning' (Circle to Circle, p. 3). Yenser goes on to suggest that Lowell's language can subsequently break beyond its limitations, because of its, 'tendency to press against the boundaries of the poem, to expand into the space beyond the lyric' (*ibid.*, p. 273). Unfortunately Yenser, in my view, does not examine the way 'any particular symbol is its interactions with other symbols', but is content simply to consider the causal sequence of the symbols: 'To understand the variegated, honeycombed whole that its author claims Notebook 1967-68 is, one need only move in his circles' (*ibid.*, p. 283). These lines provide a weak argument. The purpose of examining the patternings of words is not simply to examine themes running through Notebook, but to show how a word's use in one poem can affect how we perceive that word's meaning in another. Of course, one must be thematic in exploring the uses to which an individual word may be put, but only in order that the word may then be read with an awareness of its multiple significance in the volume.

My own research has been guided by the use of a Notebook concordance. This has helped me see inaccuracies in comments made by critics who have noticed the patterning of words in Notebook. Jerome Mazzaro, for example, is scathing about the value of following motifs through Notebook, which perhaps explains his own inaccuracies: 'The tactical recurrences of 'flight' throughout the book, for example, or of 'green' or 'pig' or tree' or 'half' form seeds about which the volume's vicarious insights into liveliness and

decline may be clustered'¹⁶⁰. His inclusion of 'flight' and 'pig' in the list is not valid since their occurrence is quite rare. Vivian Smith has made closer observation, but has also achieved hit and miss results:

There are related images of stars and water, winter and cities, fish and animals, stones and flowers, images of Eden and Hell. Peculiarly personal motifs recur and set up emotional reverberation--window, wall, grass, leaf, the moon, and most insistently recurrent but without thematic development, the motif of blood, which occurs in forty poems. Also threading through the book are characteristic colours--white, yellow, blue, red and most important green.¹⁶¹

Her opening pairs are mystifying. The relationships between stars and water, and stones and flowers refer to single references and it is misleading to cite them as frequently used patterns. The city is no more readily associated with winter than it is with the other seasons. The grouping together of fish and animals is meaningless, not only because a fish is an animal but because there seems no support for the comment in the book. Her list of frequently used words is, however, accurate and the section that follows on from these comments provides quite an informed account of Lowell's use of green. However, the general comments she makes on colours are misleading. A detailed look at his use of colours apart from green shows that much of Lowell's use of blue and red are incidental to the description and used quite differently from his very conscious treatment of green. There are some very specific metaphoric uses of yellow and white, but these are isolated examples. Thus it is not true to state that there is structured patterning of colours throughout Notebook. Also Smith's observations on 'blood' as 'lacking thematic

¹⁶⁰ 'Robert Lowell's Notebooks, ' American Poetry Review, 10 (January/February 1981), 39-47 (p. 45).

¹⁶¹ The Poetry of Robert Lowell (Sydney Univ. Press, 1974), p. 116.

development' are inaccurate. Indeed, I shall attempt to show in this chapter, that Lowell's references to blood are some of the most significant in the volume. John Reed provides a detailed exploration of the use of green, but in the process makes misleading comments on the patterning of colours, 'Several colors recur in the volume, among them versions of red, green, gold and black.'¹⁶² He comes to this conclusion as a result of two or three poems which repeat this schema of colours, and he implies that it is a pattern of colours recurring throughout the volume. He, like Smith, also points out the significance of green.

If green represents life, hope, decay, and death because human existence is grass, corn, flower and weed, how can man escape its terrible ambiguity? The answer is that he cannot. He can, in this life, simply accept, endure, and appreciate all that greenness means, all that life means.'

(ibid., p. 95)

Although it is not clear what he means by stating that 'human existence is grass, corn, flower and weed', his view of the implication of green's ambiguity is ultimately sound.

These are the only critics who, to my knowledge, have noticed the emphasis on particular words in Notebook, and without close examination of the text, one might question just how conscious this patterning of words is. Frank Bidart worked closely with Lowell on the drafting of Notebook. However, when I interviewed him, he had no memory of discussions about the conscious patterning of words, but he did have this to say:

From my experience Lowell was always extremely conscious of anything he did in his poetry. He made poetry from

¹⁶² 'Going Back: The Ironic Progress of Lowell's Poetry,' in Profile of Robert Lowell, ed. Jerome Mazzaro (Columbus: Charles Merrill Pub. Co., 1971), pp. 81-96 (p. 94).

that which was around him and infused symbolic significance into it. This did not create a fixed significance to objects but was continually changing, yet I am sure that he would have retained a memory of the various implications given to words at particular times.

Examining the work with the help of a concordance left me fairly certain that Lowell was giving special significance to certain words. Stronger evidence was provided by comments in an early draft of Notebook's 'Afterthought':

I can distinguish six kinds of object. 1) The solid object: 'A man enters a house.' If man, house and entering are described accurately, identifiably, the object is solid, even if none of the written particulars ever existed, or might exist. 2) The soul-object: 'A man enters a house.' The object is intellectual or soul-object, if man, house or the entering symbol beyond themselves to some definable or indefinable universal, to metaphysical constriction, guilt or joy. 3) The hollow object: 'A man enters a house.' The particulars are not described as if seen or experienced by the author, or anyone; nor are they animated with soul. This would seem to be superficial or bad writing, but any poem, or even novel, that tries to advance without hollows, or tokens is likely to be picture-book reportage, or choke on cramming. Symbols can be built on either hollow or solid particulars. The usual journalism is nothing but hollows; Swinburne, at the other extreme, is bits of hard brass. 4) The true object: the man really did enter this house in his life, or something like his life, or the reader has much this impression. Truth would seem to be a slight category, but it is one that has something to do with how a passage rings, how it pleads to be respected. 5) The fictional object: but this defines itself; a fiction is any object imagination can contrive: Madame Bovary. 6) The unintelligible object 'A man enters a house'; no--'A man enters a police-whistle,' or 'Sea-sick with marital happiness, the wife plunges her eyes in her husband swimming with vagueness on the grass.' Or some bent generalisation: 'Weak wills command the gods.' Some of these phrases are close to clinical hallucinations, or the mannered rhetoric of surrealism; but many others are coolly, passionately and thoughtfully contrived, means of knowledge and vision. The objects I have listed are neither good nor bad. As the common punctuation signs are useful in controlling and jointing a sentence, these figures are the junk we throw into construction.

I hope no one will suppose that I am trying to talk esthetics.

(TS. 2708)

Pencilled comments on the draft show that this section of 'Afterthought' was removed at the suggestion of Lowell's editor Bob Giroux. One can certainly understand why; there is something amusing in Lowell's apologetic, 'I hope no one will suppose that I am trying to talk esthetics'. Lowell's explanation of how he sees the literal and symbolic interpretations of the object suggests that when writing Notebook he was concerned with the multiple meanings that can be placed on any individual word. His comments on the 'true object' also emphasise that poetry should stem from authentic actual experiences, for this is how a 'passage rings, how it pleads to be respected'. Any discussion of Lowell's patterning of words in Notebook must necessarily be selective. My examination of the concordance suggested to me that the following were the most worth examination: air, back, blood, breathe, fall, green, leaf, night, walk, window, and girl. The following important words had to be omitted or only mentioned briefly: down, day, first, last, river, sun, tree, water and wind.

Although, in Notebook, Lowell achieves some success in creating language which breaks down the dualistic barrier of language and experience, ultimately this volume fails him as much as the others. This failure is due not so much to a lack of technique but more to a lack of faith. Lowell's word, as much as Mandelstam's, is 'a bundle, and meaning sticks out of it in various directions', but unlike Mandelstam, his discovery of such polysemous language does not inspire him with faith in the power of the word. The ability that Lowell's words have to transcend themselves is continually undermined by Lowell's state of mind, reflected in expressions of personal and poetic inadequacy along with a generally nihilistic world-view.

Lowell is immediately seen to be writing poetry at odds with itself in his use of 'window'. He shows inadequate poetic

perception by using the very obvious division created by the glass of the window. His obsession with windows in Notebook shows part fascination, part frustration at the distorting effects of glass, a problem close to him due to his own myopia. He makes the following comment for example: 'Being myopic has its advantages. It's like having two different visions, the world you see through glasses and the one you see without them--a blurred, romantic and much more mysterious one.'¹⁶³ In spite of this comment, the windows in Notebook provide Lowell not with a blurred romantic world but the world of nihilism. Windows frequently suggest poetic and religious failure. There are references to double vision and blocked out or restricted windows and frequent personification of the window as a judge on the poet. The open window which appears in Notebook and continues into Day By Day seems at first to provide an exception, but ultimately only allows the poet the freedom of a vision that is unbearable, or alternatively to escape through the open window, by suicide.

The poet is frequently described in an interior in Notebook. The house acts as an extension of the self, and the poet, thus trapped and shielded, views life via the window, his eye onto the world. In 'Through the Night (2)' the poet can only gaze on the peaceful night scene of his loved one walking in the night air, in superior, magical isolation: 'for at the window of my house I looked,/I saw you walking with the simple ones, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black, in the night' (p. 44). Although he is limited to observation in these lines, at least he is permitted to look, elsewhere he is even more restricted: 'White side, black window, white side, black window, white side,/my empty house...' (p. 245), 'my window, five feet wide, is cracked a foot,/much of the view blanked out by blind brick' (p. 260).

¹⁶³ 'Conversation with Jane Howard,' as quoted in Jerome Mazzaro, 'Robert Lowell's Notebooks,' pp. 28-29.

Nor does the academic life free him from this it seems,
'college depression darkens his small-pane window' (p. 188).

Reference to the city window takes the discussion a stage further, for the coldness and anonymity of the post-industrial city epitomises the loss of faith of the modern age: 'We open the window and there is no view,/no green meadow pointing to the green meadow,' (p. 63). High rise windows act as a means of universalising Lowell's individual blindness, 'miniature view-windows that gleam like cells' (p. 57) and he inverts the role of the city windows so that they make judgements on that which they see: 'The windows face/the unilluminating city lights,/ as a goldfish might estimate the universe' (p. 112). The universalised window is perhaps most tragically and poignantly given significance in 'Memorial Day':

Sometimes I sink a thousand centuries,
bone tired or stone asleep, to sleep ten seconds--
voices, their future voices, adolescents,
go crowding through the chilling open windows:
fathomless profundities of inanimation.
And we will be, then, and as they are here.
But nothing will be put back right in time,
done over, thought through straight again--not my
father
revitalizing in a simple Rhineland spa,
Mussolini's misguiding roosterstep
in the war year, just before our War began....
Ah, ah, this house of twenty foot apartments,
all the windows yawning--the voices of its tutees,
their fortissimo Figaro, sunk into dead brick.

(pp. 195-196)

The poet dreams that he hears the voices of the young from different historic periods. They do not express hope for the future but show the failure of history, proved above all by the continuance of war. The 'open' windows show the truth of history that nothing improves in time. The youths of the past become the dead soldiers of the future. The sounds that come from the 'yawning windows' at the end of

the poem, though the voices of the young therefore, do not sound out hope for the future with their music, as their fate is predestined. For this reason they can only fall on dead brick.

We see this open window of history elsewhere, such as in 'Vigil' which compares the horrors of history with windows being forced open: 'we breathe, we live,/since our death is useless to killed or killing,/since our window shatters and the wind is blowing' (p. 132). Here the destructive wind of history rushes through the smashed window, providing a dramatic contrast from the poem 'Thirst'. In this poem he expresses the hope that the revitalising wind of faith will be allowed to force its way in: 'we hope the wind will rush/through a smashed window, that Faith will move the mountain' (p. 133). It is only a hope, however, and one which is not realised in Notebook.

An unusual use of windows is as the poet's conscience, images of judgement. In 'Sleep (1)' (p. 88) the poet is lying awake at the still point between night and day, enduring the four hour wait till morning. His wife lies beside him asleep. Lowell's obsession with windows is shown in the slightly absurd opening line: 'Four windows, five feet tall, soar up like windows.' The religious significance of the windows is shown by the regal tone of 'rinsing their stain-glassed angels in the void,' and 'four streak windows of the uncreating dawn'. Stature is established with words like 'soar' and 'streak' as though the windows are actually straining heavenwards. Their role is ambiguous: as well as judges they are also company for the poet during his long vigil. Time is also contradictory: although the slow passing of each second is tedious, the still point is also precious; dawn is described as 'the uncreating dawn,/not night or day, here stealing a brief life from both'. The scene is frozen, captured like a photograph to preserve it forever. The delicate picture of

his wife asleep lit up by the windows, contrasts the sordid paraphernalia of the outside, of the 'ashcan and alley':

--Flesh of my Flesh,
elastic past the mind's agility,
hair coiled back on a guard like the spring of a watch,
legs showing pale as wooden matches,

and is present to emphasise the value of the moment. The poem thus offers a tribute to the minutiae of existence. It is not chance that his wife is portrayed alongside the dignified, religiously weighted windows, for his guilt associates with infidelity to his wife as will be seen repeatedly in the course of Notebook. Poems (3) and (4) of 'Through the Night' also reflect this theme, the window a god-like force, mediating between night and day:

... and the window
holds out its thin, terminal disk of joy,
its blissfully withdrawing glimmer of immoral
retribution, as I lie awake basking,
trying to extend the dark, unspent minute;
as the window frame gradually burns green;
three panes still beam the polar blue of night.

(p. 45)

Lowell has a love-hate relationship with the window which is empowered to speed up or slow down the undesired arrival of day. The window is able to act, forcing the poet to accept the guilt which attempts to evade him in the peace of the night. The presence of the frame emphasises the limited vision, as day imposes itself onto the window. With the arrival of day the window's judging role becomes more clearly defined:

one great window, one bright watching eye--
as achingly I awake to go the home-walk,
each pane, each windshield, familiar, unfamiliar,

each shingled, checkered window is sheer face,
the blindingly visible breasts freckle to brilliance.

(pp. 45-46)

Lowell frequently personifies the window, showing it as a living force on his life. In 'Harvard (4)' the window observing the poet's illicit affair, is a 'basement window, / angular, night-bluish, blear-eyed, spinterish-- '(p. 80). Marjorie Perloff questions the use of 'spinstersh' (Poetic Art, p. 126), but I feel this provides a humorous image of the window as a frumpish disapprover of Lowell's affair. Similarly, in 'La Ignota', there is the description of the aging opera singer, whose 'grandiose, arched wooden window frames/haven't felt paint or putty these twenty years' (p. 113).

Inadequate vision is also shown as double vision. In the poem 'Lunch Date' (pp. 194-195) the contrasting effects of the 'mullioned windows', one 'astream with noonday, the other sundown' are used to meditate on the false double life that one is forced into living in the city. The mock quaintness of the 'English pub' indicates the city's falseness, as the window's light focuses on an English sporting print of, 'Old England tarted up with boor and barmaid, /her color line roused and rouged by horsier custom'. The unclear lines of the divided window indicate the city's lack of vision; 'Often color lines are dulled and blurred/in the great city'. Individuals are forced into a double life which prevents relationships developing; the city is merely a place where 'exotics mate'. In the relationship described the lovers cannot penetrate one another's thoughts. Like the inert city dwellers they are unable to act, and are two windows which reflect nothing but the need to be continually on the move without knowing the reason why:

I touch your lifeline; no one is disarmed,

or handcuffed. It's not malevolence but inertia gives men the legs to meet their obligations. Is it active sloth that ties our hands? Two windows, two reflections, one bypasser doubled and hurrying from the double life.

The Dolphin is a much more joyful volume than Notebook because of Lowell's new found relationship with the dolphin, Caroline, and this is reflected in the more positive use of the window, as is shown in the poem 'Window.'¹⁶⁴ Here the two lovers are looking through their window onto Radcliffe Square. Although the window is still restrictive, the frame's limit a series of enclosing lines, the lovers are free of its limitations. Paths for meeting are all blocked by houses so relationships cannot flourish, yet the lovers can 'stand talking in the storm', and are free of the poet's earlier vulnerability before the wind blowing 'through a smashed window'. The unusual use of 'windowed', 'the crude and homeless wet is windowed out', transforms the window into the new role of protector allowing the poet to gaze safely at the storm. Elsewhere in Dolphin, however, there is the old poet of Notebook struggling to achieve vision, but now the possibility of suicide is also suggested: 'the beefy, flustered pigeons swish their quills--/in time the pigeons will forget the window;/I cannot--I, in flight without a ledge' (Dolphin, p. 27). The poet's need to 'forget the window' indicates what a ponderous image it is for Lowell. These lines introduce the open window of suicide which continues into Day By Day. Finally, Dolphin shows the window reflecting the poet's guilt, here related to Lowell's desertion of his family for another woman:

my window whitens like a movie screen,
glaring, specked, excluding rival outlook--
I can throw what I want on this black screen,
but only the show already chosen shows:
Melodrama with her stiletto heel

(p. 48)

¹⁶⁴ (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 16.

The window of Day By Day is not one of restriction but of a vision that is too heightened to bear: 'When I close my eyes, the image is too real' (p. 50) and 'as I decamp from window to window/to catch the sun./I am blind with seeing' (p. 74). Elsewhere in Day By Day windows 'cast bright oblique reflections/unnerving with their sparkle' (p. 76). There are still moments when the window of separation breaks through, as in 'Ulysses and Circe' (pp. 3-10) where the poet separated from his loved one states, 'I love you through the locked window' (p. 9), along with the favoured analogies with the goldfish bowl, 'he circles as a shark circles/visibly behind the window--' (p. 9), yet more frequently he shows the open window. The break though glass provides not answers, however, but more questions:

I don't need conversation, but you to laugh with--
you and a room and a fire,
cold starlight blowing through an opening window--
whither?

(p. 72)

The open window suggests suicide as an option, a path taken by many of Lowell's fellow poets, as Lowell notes in 'Afterlife II': 'the old boys drop like wasps/from window-sill and pane' (p. 24). Indeed, he contemplates his own possible suicide in a poem of that title:

I go to the window,
and even open it wide--
five floors down, the trees are bushes and weeds,
too contemptible and small
to delay a sparrow's fall.

(p. 16)

The use of 'even' shows that the poet has moved on from the blocked, closed windows of Notebook, yet the lack of

splendour in the view shows an anti-climax when the window barrier is finally broken down. The open window shows a two-fold failure: death seems a cowardly means of evading the imprisonment of life, yet the poet's inability to do more than speculate suicide shows him unable even to aspire to such a limited gesture.

Lowell's use of window reinforces his own sense of dualism. Similarly his use of 'green' also fails to transcend itself towards a satisfactory form of self-expression. Lowell provides an exhaustive exploration of every nuance of green, in an effort to transcend language, but fails because of the negative world-view he expresses in the process. The transcendent word, so available to Mandelstam, eludes Lowell because he cannot believe it is within his range.

Lowell's use of green highlights what is so attractive about his poetry, to use his own word, its 'heartbreaking'¹⁶⁵ quality. This epithet suggests, to me at least, Lowell's tendency to immediately undermine positive perceptions with negative ones. By way of example, consider the following two lines from the poem 'The Nihilist as Hero': 'the beautifully unchanging fire of childhood/betraying a monotony of vision' (Notebook, p. 211). The poignancy of the lines is intensified by undercutting the positive image with a negative statement. Vereen Bell, in his study of Lowell's nihilism points to such opposed elements in Lowell's work but comes to conclusions the reverse of my own:

What encourages us to find such pictures in the clouds is the element in his work that I consider to be fully as significant as its chronic pessimism (...) this feature is Lowell's conditioned and wholly understandable reluctance to accept the consequences of his own vision--

¹⁶⁵ as quoted in Helen Vendler, 'Last Days, Last Poems,' in her, Part of Nature, Part of Us: Modern American Poets (Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 161-167 (p. 165).

a kind of scruple that causes him to consider again and again what life might be if it were not in fact what it is.¹⁶⁶

Bell believes Lowell's poetic vision is of a totally nihilistic world but that he cannot accept the truth of this vision. In my view, Lowell's nihilism prevents him from accepting the positive perception of the world which is also his poetic vision. He may desire the affirmative green of pacifism, youth, heroism, creativity and nature, but the green of aging, death, illness and envy are much closer to his felt experience and the simultaneous presence of desire and actuality illustrates his divided perception. The common denominator to the various 'green' themes in Notebook is the green of the natural world. Lowell struggles between a genuinely experienced enjoyment of the natural world and a drive to work against its positive implications.

There are numerous examples of Lowell's spontaneous enjoyment of the natural world. Consider for example the sheer sensuous^{ness} of the following: 'The willowstump puts out thin wands in leaf, / a green and fleeting taste of unmerited joy, / the first garden, each morning, the first man' (p. 40). These lines suggest the newness of the natural world as it must have appeared to Adam in the garden. Associating green with taste contributes to the effectiveness of the lines. Another description shows similar intensity and also treats green in a novel way: 'June steamed up in greenness; in the sopping trees / the green frog whistled to the greener sigh of the new leaf--' (p. 84). Throughout Notebook there are these intense references to the direct natural beauty of green, a prelapsarian enjoyment of nature, 'Discovering, discovering trees are green at night' (p. 244), 'a hundred hues of green, the darkest shades short of black, the palest

¹⁶⁶ Robert Lowell: Nihilist as Hero (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), p. 1.

leaf-backs far from white' (p. 207), 'this midday torn from the whole/green cloth of summer' (p. 238).

Yet such eulogy of the natural world seems to slip in unawares, for Lowell is more intent on undermining green's positive drive with negative uses of the word. The various negative uses of green are implicated in this attempt to corrupt the positive green of nature: there is the negative drive of ancestry, death of nature in the city, the passage of youth, sickness and death, war and pacifism, and most importantly the difficulties of the creative process. Most of these themes are developed by use of imagery from the natural world.

A feature of Lowell's use of green that should also be mentioned is best explained by reference to lines from Marvell's 'The Garden':

Mean while the Mind from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does streight its own resemblance find:
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.¹⁶⁷

The last line is ambiguous. This ambiguity is created by the trick of attaching green to an abstract idea and yet retaining its association with nature. Both references to green manage to be both abstract and concrete at the same time. Lowell uses the same kind of technique in a number of uses of green. This kind of treatment is largely absent from his other colours. I pointed to the earlier examples which attach green to senses other than sight: 'a green and fleeting taste' and 'the greener sigh of the new leaf' and

¹⁶⁷ J. Reeves and M. Seymour-Smith, ed., Selected Poems of Andrew Marvell (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), p. 65.

another example to describe himself and his wife '--our bodies/smelling green as the weeds that bruise the grass' (p. 239). There are other odd uses such as 'stalking a far more greenly brutal quarry' (p. 84) and 'greens washed to double greenness' (p. 56).

The poem 'Caracas II' gets right to the heart of green's implications:

With words handled like the new grass writhing,
in an urban brook, greens washed to double greenness--
one could get through life, though mute, with courage
and a merciful heart--two things, and a third thing:
humor...as the turned-out squatter clings
with amused bravery that takes the form of mercy
to the Old Square in Caracas, his shaky, one-man hovel,
the spoiled baroque cathedral from the age of Drake.
The church has hay in its courtyard; householders own
the Common--
conservatives reduced to conservation:
green things, the well, the school, the writhing grass;
the communist committed to his commune,
artist and office-holder to a claque of less
than fifty souls...to each his venomous in-group

(p. 55-56)

This poem makes the contradictory nature of green the subject of the poem. The opening lines introduce the organic word such as has been used by Mandelstam, Coleridge and Emerson, only here it suffers urban restraints. Lowell's description of 'Green' words babbling in an 'urban brook' heightens our sense of the poet trying to maintain poetic powers in the face of industrialisation. The line 'greens washed to double greenness' is illuminated by a negative reference to green in another poem, 'a green year a green year, twenty percent for peace' (p. 132), where I feel green suggests the unspoken presence of lean or barren. The urban brook appears to be stripping words bare of all meaning. However, the resignation of 'one could get through

life, though mute' implies that the poet stripped of words can gain a certain contentment. The theme of nature's destruction in the cause of progress then begins to dominate. Ironically, the 'one-man hovel' of the poem is a relic from the splendour of the past. The incongruity between wealth and poverty leads Lowell to meditate on the social and political implications of green: it is the pre-industrial society, the rural community of the well and the school. That householders now own the common shows the encroachment of the urban on the rural. The cathedral represents power but also suggests that planners build without attempting to preserve the past. Finally the poem withdraws from any clear political comment. Lowell initially moves towards support of conservation but then suggests fear of any single-minded groups. Idealism and power ultimately lead to the same result. As will be clearer when we look at the poem 'Chairs', the 'venomous in-group' is also related to the opportunism of writers.

'Caracas II' establishes the modern poet's function and his problem. He is there to express the positive green forces of nature but without the means to do so. Emerson and Thoreau were able to escape dualism through the perception of nature. Unlike Emerson though, Lowell is unable to be the poet who 'names the thing', for his consciousness of how nature is destroyed in the modern world, means he cannot allow positive green forces to thrive in his poetry.

Lowell's attitude to writing is inseparable from the totality of his experience. In his own words, it is 'one life, one writing !' and this is seen in the way he uses green in relation to his writing. The green of writing itself is seen to move in diverse directions. Lowell aspires to the transcendence of the green, organic word and to achieve a secondary transcendent, green world of ice, but the mundane realities of literary competition are more proximate and are realised as the green of envy.

The following poem, 'Reading Myself', which could almost be taken as Lowell's poetic manifesto provides clues to the various directions for the green of writing:

One wants words meat-hooked from the living steer,
but the cold flame of tinfoil licks the metal log,
the beautifully unchanging fire of childhood
betraying a monotony of vision.
Life by definition breeds on change,
each season we scrap new cars and wars and women.
Sometimes when I am ill or delicate,
the pinched flame of my match turns living green,
the cornstalk in green tails and seeded tassel....
A nihilist has to live in the world as is,
gazing the impossible summit to rubble.

(p. 211)

This poem beautifully captures the contradictory nature of Lowell's perception. Vereen Bell uses these lines to support his view of the total nihilism of Lowell's world, yet still, for me, Lowell is the poet who perceives the transcendent but won't allow himself to believe in it. This poem shows the two worlds of green which are the realisation of transcendent art. There is the green organic world of the word we have already seen in 'Caracas II', but there is also another more mysterious green world of ice, reminiscent of Yeats' 'The Cold Heaven', in its association between art and a cold world:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more
ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of
season
With the hot blood of youth, of loved crossed long
ago:¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 140.

There is a strange network of associations in 'Reading Myself'. The green, organic word is introduced in the opening lines, but we then encounter a 'cold' flame that ultimately is a flame on a mock fireplace. However, the flame mentioned later in the poem is used to reinforce the intermittent possibilities of realising the organic word. The cold green of ice is not overtly stated in this Lowell poem but suggestions of its presence are made more plain by references to green in other poems, providing a good illustration of subtextual analysis. There are also undertones of 'Henry and Waldo', where the intensity of Thoreau's perception is emphasised through a wonderful cold metal image such as we see in 'Nihilist as Hero':

but he easily heard voices on the river,
wood groans from the banks and gliding of bark canoes,
twilight flaking through the manes of trees;
the color that killed him was perhaps a mouse,
zinc eating at the moonstalk, or the starlings
flocking and lighting, a dash of poisonous metal.

(p. 91)

Note how this image of the mouse, 'zinc eating at the moonstalk' provides another example of sheer enjoyment of the natural world astutely perceived. References to organic green and the green of ice, in relation to writing, are repeated in a number of poems.

Descriptions of organic green are frequently associated with blood, making a connection between the natural and the physiological. One way of making this connection is by the punning of leaves of nature with leaves of paper. The poem 'Onion Skin' shows how these relationships are established:

This typing paper pulped in Bucksport, Maine,
onion skin, only merchandised in Maine,
creased when I pulled the last sheet, and seemed to

scream,

as if Fortuna bled in the white wood,
first felt the bloody gash that brought me life.

(p. 43)

Here a painful intimacy is created between the tools of Lowell's trade and the natural world he is attempting to describe. Immediately following this poem, though in a different sequence, is 'Through the Night (1)' which continues the association: 'The pale green leaves cling white to the lit night:/this has been written, and eaten out on carbons' (p. 44).

Yet the cold green of creativity is perhaps more unusual. The poems, 'Seals' and 'Milton in Separation', are two more poems which act as subtexts to one another. 'Seals' shows Lowell quite humorously describing the difficulty of writing. He envies the seal as the ultimate symbol of muteness, presumably because to be a seal would mean freedom from the poet's pain of having to define, comparable to the 'turned out squatter' of 'Caracas II':

If we must live again, not us; we might
go into seals, we'd handle ourselves better:
able to dawdle, able to torpedo,
all too at home in our double elements,
our third of rocks and ledges--if man were dormant....
We flipper the harbor, blots and patches and oilslick,
so much bluer than water, we think it sky.
Creature could face creator in this suit,
fishers of fish, not men. Some other August,
the easy seal might say, 'I could not sleep
last night; suddenly I could write my name.'
Then all the seals, preternatural like us,
take direction, head north--their haven
green ice in a greenland never grass.

(pp. 249-250)

Elizabeth Bishop's elegy to Lowell assists an understanding of 'Seals':

You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,
afloat in mystic blue...And now-you've left
for good. You can't derange, or rearrange,
your poems (But the sparrows can their song.)
The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot
change.¹⁶⁹

North Haven was a place with personal memories for her and Lowell. In this poem she associates the place with Lowell's obsession with redrafting. Her poem thus acts as a subtext to 'Seals', so that the references to 'north' and 'haven' also connect with the drafting process. In 'Seals', Lowell begins by contemplating the freedom of the life of the seal, which would change if it were cursed with language. For humans and seals the ice world represents the quest for transcendent art. The first seal to learn to write is doomed upon the journey of definition and must take direction to 'the green ice in a greenland never ice'. Thus Lowell's cryptic concluding lines become clarified by way of the poem's subtext--here Lowell's ice green theme.

'Milton in Separation' also makes the ice green connection, with images which very closely compare with those in 'The Nihilist as Hero'. Milton, separated from his wife, makes an aesthetic journey into the green world of ice:

Through the blank dawn of separation, he learned
he only cared for life in the straights. Her flight
put a live elbow in his marble Eve;
she filled the thirst for emptiness--
they struck and then fell hookloose from the
fireflash....
Live-cold in some Greenland on the globe's eyebrow,
free now to study what wooed you most, your writing,
your overobsession posterity must pay....
The pure skim milk of your study is blue to blindness;
the goldfinch flame through the tinderbush. You wished
to set the woods on fire and melt the glacier.

(p. 206)

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Bishop: Collected Poems (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p. 189.

Again we see the flame, ice, nature association, presented with a series of vivid images. Compare lines in 'Milton' with those in 'The Nihilist': 'but the cold flame of tinfoil licks the metal log' and 'the pinched flame of my match turns living green'. Using 'Seals' as a subtext, we are also left in little doubt about the significance of 'Greenland' in the poem.

There is much in Notebook that provides a lament to the death of the Pastoral. One way this underlying motif comes across is by way of Lowell's concern with the absence of nature in the city:

We open the window, and there is no view,
no green meadow pointing to the green meadow,
to dogs, to deer, Diana in her war-skirt....
Heaven must be paved with terra-cotta tile.

(p. 63)

Lowell cannot see the death of nature in the city separately from his own personal decay. To this purpose, he uses the ever adaptable method of associating the seasons with the journey from youth to old age. The poem 'Heavenly Rain' shows this interaction and also provides an example of a 'colours' motif used to link a few poems in Notebook. The poem describes the rain which falls from heaven but gets little response from the cemented city:

The rain falls down, the soil swims up to breathe,
the squatter sumac, shafted in cement,
flirts its wet leaves to heaven like the Firebird.
Two girls clasp hands in a clamshell courtyard to watch
the seed of the sumac aging visibly;
the girls age not, are always young as last week,
wish all rains one rain--this, that will not wash
the fallen leaf, turned scarlet, back to green.

(p. 65)

Here, the 'girl' acts as an image of eternal youth for Lowell. She is placed beside the patterning of colour which describes the path from youth to old age. Such patterning is seen elsewhere. A poem which focuses on his and his wife's aging has '--men, like ears of corn,/fibrous growths...green, sweet, golden, black' (p. 31). He uses the same analogy for the death of Che Guevara: 'as the leaves light up, still green, this afternoon,/and burn to frittered reds' (p. 53). In contrast, Lowell's admiration for Dante's talents are shown as youthful precocity, 'Dante found this path/even before the first young leaves turned green' (p. 245).

Green is also frequently associated with the theme of ancestry. Throughout his poetry, Lowell tends to present his forebears in a negative light and Notebook is no exception. In 'These Older' ancestry is implicated in negative perceptions of history:

No fence stands up between us and our object:
approaching nearer, edging out the old,
and free to pick those neither ripe nor young,
as the hollow green wilderness sings the guillotine,
sings those before us....I've had them fifty years:
all those grander, or finer, or simply older,
gone astraying down a backward street, the trees,
late-lopped, tar-boned, old prunes like stumps of
martyrs;

(p. 124)

The rather haunting phrase, 'hollow green wilderness', suggests that the contemplation of nature provides not a sense of hope or rejuvenation but thoughts of history and the bloodshed that one associates with it, symbolised by the 'guillotine'. Here green, in a fairly natural association with trees, symbolises Lowell's ancestors. Lowell uses trees to represent relatives in a number of poems. The title of the poem 'The stump and green shoots', which involves

snatches of dialogue between relatives, is clarified by knowledge of this trees/relative connection. 'Half a Century Gone (1)' is dedicated to Elizabeth and implicates her in the theme of ancestry. Olga Carlisle told me about a rather embarrassing scene which sheds light on the situation of the poem. She describes Elizabeth presenting Lowell with a laurel wreath to wear at his fiftieth birthday party. Lowell makes symbolic use of this laurel in 'Half a Century Gone (1)'. In the poem he considers his place in family tradition, with particular emphasis on what he sees as the male role within marriage:

We can go on, if free to leave the earth;
our blood, too high, resumes the mortal coil,
hoping past hope to round the earth of Greenbeard,
our springtide's circlet of the fickle laurel,
a funeral wreath from the Despot's Gangster
I feel the woven cycles of His pain,
articulations of His spawning cells,
the intimations of my family cancer.
With us no husband could sit out the marriage;

(p. 258)

Lowell, has pushed the literal and symbolic significance of green to their limits. Although occasionally he allows himself to simply 'enjoy' the green images around him, for the most part one is struck by the almost total consistency of his negative world-view.

Lowell's use of 'blood' provides a similar consistency. Vivian Smith has argued that in Notebook, of all the motifs, blood is the 'most insistently recurrent but without thematic development'. Just a superficial glance at the uses of blood in Notebook, shows the inaccuracies of her comment. Lowell's nihilistic interpretations of green were focused on the external natural and human world. His portrayal of blood shows him looking both outward and inward: outward using blood both to symbolise history's crimes; to intensify red images in the natural world and,

most importantly, inward at his own physiological makeup. Blood, the stuff which keeps him alive, becomes the ultimate symbol of the self. Although Vivian Smith is wrong to say there is no thematic development in the use of blood, she is correct in pointing to the frequency with which it is used. The word blood, itself, is used 42 times and there are numerous associated words: blood-baked, blood-colored, blood-crossed, blood-drinking, blood-eyed, blood-feud, blood-trim. Also there is bloodclots, blooded, bloodflukes, bloodied, bloodiest, bloodstream(s), bloodthirsty, bloody. There are also a number of other key words which blood interacts with: river, leaves and rock.

'High Blood' is central to an understanding of the significance Lowell places on blood, touching on the main uses he puts it to elsewhere in Notebook:

I watch my blood pumped into crystal pipes
red sticks like ladycrackers for a child--
nine-tenths of me, and yet's it's lousy stuff.
Touched it stains, slips, drips, sticks; and it's
lukewarm.
All else--the brains, the bones, the stones, the soul--
is peripheral flotsam on this live flow.
On my great days of sickness, I was God--
my flesh shimmers, I catpad on my blood,
the universe moves beneath me when I move.
It's the aorta and heartbeat of my life;
acid rock turned high, teen-age record purring,
as if we stuck a cat with a diamond needle--
cry of high blood for blood that gives both tyrant
and tyrannized their short half-holiday.

(p. 223)

The poem floods the reader with many of the associations the word has for Lowell. It opens with reference to Lowell's high blood pressure, used elsewhere in Notebook to emphasise his feelings of personal decline. His description of blood flowing, captures his love-hate relationship with it: It is 'lousy stuff' but also vital to him, 'this live flow' and 'the aorta and heartbeat of my life'. Although the poem's mood is pessimistic, blood also provides Lowell with a brief

transcendental experience. There is the invigorating sensation suggested in 'my flesh shimmers' combined with the light, free movements of 'I catpad on my blood'. Self and history then become part of the same flow as 'the universe moves beneath me when I move'. Unfortunately, this positive experience is undermined by the fact that it takes place during Lowell's 'great days of sickness' when he deludes himself that he is God. The last two lines introduce a final function for blood--a symbol of the negative forces of history. It is a function only mildly suggested here by way of the 'tyrant' who, in this instance, is shown to be as vulnerable as those he normally suppresses, for all are subject to the state of their own health.

Lowell also associates blood with the organic world, achieved mainly by associating blood and 'leaves'. As a result the inseparability between his life and his writing is shown. The poem 'Onion Skin' lies at the heart of the theme of blood/leaves and writing. Blood seems to be superimposed on to paper--the materials of his trade:

This typing paper pulped in Bucksport, Maine,
onion skin, only merchandised in Maine,
creased when I pulled the last sheet, and seemed to
scream,
as if Fortuna bled in the white wood,
first felt the bloody gash that brought me life.

(p. 43)

The reference to Fortuna is reminiscent of the numerous transformations described in Ovid's Metamorphos@s. Here Lowell is most likely associating Fortuna with one of her many disguises, the Ash tree.¹⁷⁰ Her image emphasises the

¹⁷⁰ See Robert Graves, The Greek Myths., 2nd rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), I, pp. 125-126 for the chapter on Nemesis (the Greek name for Fortuna). He notes that one of her disguises was the ash-tree.

paradoxical function of blood as both positive and negative. Blood's violence is brought out in the description of the sheet 'that seemed to scream,/as if Fortuna bled in the white wood' yet it is violence which^{is} also Lowell's raison d'etre, 'the bloody gash that brought me life'. In the two poems which follow 'Onion Skin', 'Through the night (1)' and (2) (pp. 44-45), the association between the human and natural world is developed further by punning leaves of paper and leaves of nature. First of all 'Through the Night (1)' shows how 'leaves' associate with writing: 'The pale green leaves cling white to the lit night:/this has been written, and eaten out on carbons' (p. 44). 'Through the Night (2)' then makes explicit the connection with blood: 'The thick-skinned leaf flickers along its veins/and shakes a little on the stiff tense twig,/dancing its weekend jig in blood--' (p. 44). The result of the association is an inseparability between Lowell's internal mental and physical state and the external world he perceives. In the above lines in particular, Lowell superimposes his own nervous system onto the natural images around him. If one goes back to 'Through the Night (1)' the connections extend further into the public domain for the poem continues: 'Like the generation of leaves, the race of man;/their long hair, beads, jeans are early uniforms' (p. 44). This last reference is illuminated by something Lowell himself said about how he perceived the image of leaves. Here he is providing an introduction to the poem 'Stalin':

I wrote this one summer in the country and I think I was rather tired. If you're rather tired you will find with your eyes open you see things that are not there; they're not hallucinations, it's a kind of waking dream. I was walking down to where I worked and I saw this enormous framework, a quite large framework of different kinds of vines, all green but with different kinds of leaves entwined in it, very much the same yet different. That stuck in my mind and sometimes you can work with

something like that. It seemed to me an image of the state.¹⁷¹

This is how his impressions were transferred to the poem:

Winds on the stems make them creak like things made by
man;
a hedge of vines and bushes--three or four
kinds, grape leaf, elephant ear and alder,
an arabesque, imperfect and alive,
a hundred hues of green, the darkest shades
short of black, the palest leaf-backs far from white.
The state, if we could see behind the walls,
is woven of perishable vegetation.

(p. 207)

The 'Leaves' image, it seems, becomes a means of merging the human and natural world. This merging is seen elsewhere where Lowell personifies the leaf: '...this leaf or that leaf twings/to the needle-heaven the heartless leaf rejects--'(p. 238). In 'Playing Ball with the Critic', which discusses the effect the critic has on the writer, Lowell superimposes his pain onto the leaf, 'sends us home kicking each bleeding leaf of the weeds' (p. 97). In 'Through the Night (5)' Lowell uses blood to show how writing is made all the more painful because of his self-appointed role as public poet, suggested here by the poet sacrificed on the guillotine:

the cleansing guillotine peeping over his shoulder;
I climb the ladder, knowing my last words,
no matter how unjust, no longer matter,
the black marks of my nights erased in blood--
wondering, 'Why was it ever worth my while?'

(p. 46)

¹⁷¹ Robert Lowell: A Reading, Caedmon, CD1 51569, 1976.

In a number of poems blood is used to heighten the emotion in the poem. Consider the unusual use of blood in the following example from 'In the Family':

Lizzie, we wake up to the blood of loneliness,
we would cry out love, love, if we had letters.
We are all here for such a short time,
we might as well be good to one another.

(p. 136)

Novelty is achieved by attaching the word blood to an abstract noun. Here, for example, blood and loneliness are connected. Since blood is the essential material of the spiritual as well as the physical self, the loneliness is made to appear absolute. Often Lowell uses blood to heighten experience, by associating it with the organic world. In 'Searchings (1)' for example: 'I return then, but not to what I wanted--/a dull invulnerability to failure,/ blood shooting through the fingertips of ivy' (p. 35). The lines heighten our sense of Lowell's pain, as his feelings are superimposed onto nature. The description of leaves bleeding suggests nature is being forced to suffer beyond normal expectations. This pain is then transferred back to the poet. At the same time the blood is there to describe the seasonal change from green to red and what that symbolises of aging. Thus Lowell's personal decline is also reinforced. The blood/leaves association is also used to describe the aging of Lowell's friend, Randall Jarrell in 'Randall Jarrell: 1914-1965 (1)': 'watch the ivy turn, a wash of blood/on the infirmary wall, the sixth age autumn' (p. 50). Similarly, 'Long Summer (14)' focuses on the aging process, with Elizabeth once again implicated. Here the merging of the natural and human world verges on what appears, at first sight, to be surreal. Lowell's comments in 'Afterthought' explain this move away from what he calls, 'the rational':

I lean heavily to the rational, but am devoted to unrealism. An unrealist must not say, 'the man entered a house,' but, 'the man entered a police-whistle,' or 'seasick with marital happiness, the wife plunges her eyes in her husband swimming like vagueness on the grass.'

(p. 262)

When one comes to examine the poem though, what one finds is not images which sound absurd such as in 'Afterthought', 'the man entered a police-whistle', but perceptions so intensely perceived that one feels they are seen through a magnifying glass. The distinction between one image and another thus becomes blurred--a further merging of the human and natural worlds:

Mischievous fish-shapes without scale or eye
swimming your leaf-green teagown, maternal, autumnal,
swirling six inches past the three-inch heel,
collapsing on us like a parachute,
in a spate of controversial spatter...then
exhaustion. We hunger for the ancient fruit,
marriage with its naked artifice;
two practised animals, close to widower
and widow, greedily bending forward
for the first handgrasp of vermilion leaves,
clinging like bloodclots to the smitten branch--
summer afield and whirling to the tropics,
to the dogdays and dustbowl--men, like ears of corn,
fibrous growths...green, sweet, golden, black.

(pp. 30-31)

The skilled use of language in this poem creates a confusion of 'rational' and 'unreal' images. The use of present participles gives the illusion of something surreal, and provides connections which contribute to the merging of the natural and human world. The poem's momentum moves from the 'unreal', with the idea of the 'fish-shapes' 'swimming' on the woman's teagown, back to the more 'rational' movement of the dress 'swirling' and then 'collapsing'. This momentum is then linked to the participles, 'clinging' and even more

important, 'whirling', towards the end of the poem. The connection between the individual 'swirling' of the dress, and the 'whirling' of summer, universalises the individual experience of Lowell and Elizabeth. Many of the impressions in the poem are gained by association rather than by direct statement. For example, the suggestion of a windy autumn day is achieved largely by way of the movement of the woman's teagown, which enables her to personify autumn. Note though, that 'whirling', which seems to be connected with the strong winds of the thirties' Dustbowl is used not to describe the Dustbowl but the 'summer days' of the preceding line. The reference to 'vermilion leaves' is rich in association, particularly when one takes into account Lowell's use of leaves in other poems. If leaves, for Lowell, are 'the race of man' then one can assume 'vermilion leaves' to be those members of the race who are aging, in this case Lowell and his wife. The end result is that the 'widow' and 'widower', who make a desperate grab for the leaves 'clinging like bloodclots', are in fact reaching out to their aging selves. The use of 'bloodclots' is a particularly emotive image suggesting both a strong red colour as well as sickness and aging.

'Blood' and 'river' are also frequently placed side by side. In association with river Lowell reinforces his own nihilistic self-perception, as he puts it in 'Bishop Berkeley', 'it was only my high blood of the decline,/ my river system saying: I am weak' (p. 168). But the river also describes occasional moments of transcendence. Generally the river acts as the universal flow, while blood is as the flow of the individual. In 'Dear Sorrow' Lowell states, 'man in the world like a whirlpool in the river' (p. 143). At times, this river is shown polluted, destroyed by city living, only freed by escape to the country, 'the big town river, once hard and dead as its highways,/rolls blackly into country river,' (pp. 66-67) or trapped completely, 'the River's ice-jammed; miserable Manhattten' (p. 126); at other times it is a creative and

transcendental force. The river may act as the source of poetic inspiration. In 'Reading Myself' for example, Lowell states, 'I memorised tricks to set the river on fire,/ somehow never wrote anything to go back to,' (p. 213) and in 'Henry and Waldo' describes Thoreau as one who 'easily heard voices on the river' (p. 91). There is also Lowell's green hunter who reminiscent of Yeats's solitary fisherman:

Climbing up to a place
Where stone is dark under froth,
And the down-turn of his wrist
When the flies drop in the stream;

(Collected Poems, pp. 166-167)

is seen 'gropping for trout in the private river/wherever it opens, wherever it happens to open' (p. 100). Above all the river provides brief ecstatic moments which appear to stop the river/blood flow in its tracks.

'Charles River (1)' provides illustration of one of these moments of transcendence:

The sycamores throw shadows on the Charles,
while the fagged insect splinters to rejoin
the infinite, now casting its loose leaf
on the short-skirted girl and long-haired escort,
and the black stream curves as if it led a lover--
not so our blood: in workaday times,
one takes cold comfort in its variations,
its endless handspring around the single I,
the thumping and pumping of overfevered zeal;
but for a week our blood has pointed elsewhere:
it brings us here tonight, and ties our hands--
if we leaned forward, and should dip a finger
into this river's momentary black flow,
the infinite small stars would break like fish.

(p. 66)

The analogy between blood and river is made quite explicit in the poem. One notes similarities with the poem 'High Blood'. There is emphasis on the blood's agitation, 'its endless handspring' round the self. Words like 'thumping', 'pumping' and 'overfevered zeal' all reinforce this agitation. However, there is also a transcendental experience suggested in, 'but for a week our blood has pointed elsewhere' and, for the brief period of the poem, blood is allowed to merge with the special qualities of the river. The river's transcendental properties are introduced in the opening where the 'fagged insect splinters to join the infinite'. The river's freedom is reinforced by the fact that it is described as 'the black stream' which 'curves as if it lead a lover'. Here, as is seen repeatedly in Notebook, the love affair is shown as liberating and marriage as restrictive. Significantly also, the poem occurs at night, so frequently shown as a time of release for Lowell. The poem concludes with a beautiful image, describing the effect of interrupting the river's flow, 'the infinite small stars would break like fish'. On a literal level this image vividly describes how breaking the river's flow affects the stars' reflection on the water. The beauty of the image also helps to reinforce our sense of a magical almost ritualistic moment taking place out of time. In 'Randall Jarrell: 1914: 1965 (2)' hands are again dipped symbolically into the river, 'Grizzling on the embers of our onetime life,/our first intoxicating disenchantments, /dipping our hands once, twice, in the same river' (p. 50). Here the ritual suggests artistic communion. In 'Another Friend' merging with the river is seen as some kind of joyful death wish, 'the happiness of the drop to die in the river?...'(p. 111).

A rather unusual association with blood is 'rock'. This connection is only used twice, in the sequence 'October and November'. It is effective in emphasising the unrelenting bloodshed which is history. Consider 'Che Guevara', the first poem of the sequence which describes his capture:

Week of Che Guevara, hunted, hurt,
held prisoner one lost day, then gangstered down
for gold, for justice--violence cracking on violence,
rock on rock, the corpse of the last armed prophet
laid out on a sink in a shed, revealed by flashlight--

(p. 53)

Layers of violence in society are seen as analogous to layers of rock. The poem then moves on to meditate on the violence which results from the evils of industrialisation, epitomised by the contemporary American city:

As the sides of the high white stone buildings over--
shadow the poor, too new in the new world,
Manhattan, where our clasped, illicit hands
pulse, stop the bloodstream as if it hit rock....

'Caracas I', which follows, continues to emphasise the negative implications of the contemporary city: 'Through another of our cities without a center, as hideous/ as Los Angeles, and with as many cars' (p. 53). Lowell suggests that blood flows to such a degree that the world on which we stand is not actually earth but solidified blood: 'This house, the pioneer, democracy, built/on foundations, not of rock, but blood as hard as rock' (p. 54).

Throughout Notebook there are poems which show the obvious relationship between blood and violence. I do not intend to discuss all of these but, by way of conclusion, will point to one particularly violent description of blood--'End of the Saga' based on events in The Nibelungenlied.¹⁷²

'Even if they will murder the whole world,
we'll hit them so hard, they'll never tell the story.'

¹⁷² See Nibelungenlied, trans. A. T. Hatto, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 261, for an account of the events in the poem.

Kriemhild was shouting, 'If they get to the air,
and cool their coats of mail, we are all lost.'
Then the great hall was fired; we saw them kneel
beside their corpses, and drink the flowing blood--
unaccustomed to such drink, they thought it good
in the great heat, it tasted cooler than wine.
They tried to lift their brothers from the fire,
they found them too hot to hold, and let them drop.
'O why are we so wet with our lifeblood?'
they asked. 'Our bones are broken not our hearts....'
The king is laughing, all his men are killed
he is shaken by the news, as well he might be.

(pp. 58-59)

Lowell's use of blood, particularly as it associates with river, suggests that which is more overtly and consistently shown in the remaining Notebook words to be discussed--an emphasis on time. Mandelstam, in his critical prose, shows that by exploiting the word's polysemy one can realise the Word, achieving unity of time and culture. Time, therefore, is a crucial factor in escaping the bounds of dualism. In 'Conversation about Dante' the coexistence of individual, causal time and transcendental time/eternity is illustrated with the image of 'a river crammed with Chinese junks moving simultaneously in various directions'; all these individual junks participate harmoniously in the river's universal flow of time. There is a suggestion of this universal flow in Lowell's description of his own blood, in the poem 'High Blood': 'the universe moves beneath me when I move'. An examination of the Notebook words which focus on time, in particular: walk, back, fall and breathe, should help to show the degree to which Lowell achieves harmony between this individual and universal flow of time. As well as reflecting Lowell's attitude to time, these words reinforce much of what has already been seen in the use of window, green and blood.

As I mentioned earlier, Mandelstam comments on Dante's tendency to 'glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm and walking' with 'a multitude of varied and charming turns

of phrase'. Lowell, by way of the 'time' words to be discussed as well as other words and phrases, also manages to suggest walking with great versatility. His method is through repetition of these words and phrases to foreground the beat of the poem. A walking pace is immediately apparent in Notebook's opening, with these lines from 'Harriet (1)': 'Half a year, then a year and a half, then/ten and a half--' (p. 21). Sometimes a phrase sets up the walking pace which is then allowed to reverberate in another poem. In 'Harriet (4)', for example, there is the line, 'bronzed by decay, by many, many suns...' (p. 22), which then echoes in the later poem 'Long Summer (12)' with, 'sun falls on so many, many other things' (p. 29). Numerous other examples of this kind of patterning will be noted in the words I have selected for discussion.

Notebook's final poem 'Obit' (p. 261), with its overt meditation on time, is frequently perceived as Lowell's final summing up of time in the volume. Lowell provides conflicting views in the poem, but the overriding impression is that he has moved from causal to transcendental time. Such expressions of transcendence are misleading, in my view, given the more consistently negative statements about time in the rest of Notebook. The poem does opens with a pessimistic view of time such as one might expect of Lowell:

In the end it gets us, though the man know what he'd
have:
old cars, old money, old undebased pre-Lyndon
silver, no copper rubbing through...old wives;
I could live such a too long time with mine.
In the end, every hypochondriac is his own prophet.

The inevitability of aging is seen in the laconic black humour of, 'in the end every hypochondriac is his own prophet' along with world weary expressions of living out one's marriage, 'I could live a too long time with mine'. Here is language and sentiment true to Lowell's poetic

voice. The poem then makes a sudden shift to a grandiloquent statement of oneness with time past, present and future:

Before the final coming to rest, comes the rest
of all transcendence in a mode of being, stopping
all becoming. I'm for and with myself in my otherness,
in the eternal return of earth's fairer children,
the lily, the rose, the sun on dusk and brick,
the loved, the lover, and their fear of life,
their unconquered flux, insensate oneness, their
painful 'it was...'

Here anxiety about the inevitable passage of time fades. Lowell experiences a transcendental merging with all that has been and has to come. This is not Lowell's natural conversational tone, but an authoritative incantation on time as he describes himself, 'with and for myself in my otherness'. Only in the last three lines of the section is one gradually drawn back to Lowell's more familiar voice of lament for the failure of life's potential, with beautiful images of 'lily, rose, sun and lover'. These images contribute to Lowell's nostalgic sense of loss, encapsulated in 'it was...'. The abrupt changes in tone may be due to the fact that Lowell is drawing on language which is, in fact, not his own. In 'Afterthought' he explains that 'ideas and expressions in "Obit" and another poem [come] from Herbert Marcuse' (p. 263). Although I haven't been able to pin down the Marcusean source precisely, the remoteness of the above incantatory lines from Lowell's poetic voice suggest to me they come from a different speaker.

Alan Williamson has interpreted 'Obit' in the following way:

In terms derived from Marcuse, Lowell describes a sense of union with his own destiny, his own natural time, involving a realization that the flow of life cannot be transcended or submitted to a single pattern, and that one never escapes from existential jeopardy.

(Pity the Monsters, p. 211)

His comments seem to me an attempt to make sense of the contradictory attitudes to time described in 'Obit'. The implication is that Lowell has come to terms with the problem of causality, what Williamson calls Lowell's 'own natural time', and accepts that one cannot step outside time into eternity. It is as if to say that Lowell is at peace with his own nihilism. For me, the two voices of 'Obit'-- Lowell's versus Marcuse's--cannot work together towards a single argument for they contradict one another totally. Lowell's voice is one of elusive statements, 'their painful it was...', and uncertain questioning, seen particularly in the poignancy of the poem's conclusion, 'After loving you so much, can I forget/you for eternity, and have no other choice?' (p. 261). By way of contrast, the Marcusian voice is one of authority, 'I'm for and with myself in my otherness,' which enables it to dominate the poem and carry the most weight. The ultimate hollowness of this voice of authority is gradually shown up when it is set beside Lowell's more natural and sincere portrayal of time such as is reflected in his selection of 'time' words: walk, back, fall and breathe.

The diverse uses of 'walk' in Notebook provide a consistent argument: the poet, apart from brief feelings of personal liberation or the relief of love affairs, is restricted to the causality of history--the momentum of evolution, religion, ancestry and marriage--, unlike women (lovers as opposed to wives) who, granted a special status as walkers, embark on a walk free from such restraints. Lowell looks to women therefore to find escape from his limited walk.

The poem 'High Blood' acted as a key poem to Lowell's use of blood; 'The Walk' provides a similar function for the use of walk:

Those days no casus belli on earth to fight,
except the familial, hidden fundamental--
walks that married us to ourselves or a girl,

tomorrow that promised courage to die content.
The willow stump puts out thin wands in leaf,
a green and fleeting taste of unmerited joy,
the first garden, each morning, the first man,
and birds were laughing in the distant trees,
the Manichaen South of wars and orchards.
I am a free man, no one serves me; earth,
the great beast, clanks its chain of vertebrae....
A true conservative hates change per se.
At the end of the long walk, your old dog dies of joy
whenever you sit down, a poor man at a fire.

(p. 40)

Many of the meanings of 'walk' come together, all merging into the overriding walk of history. The poem describes contemporary life as uneventful, with no 'cassus belli on earth to fight'. Man sets out on 'walks that married us to ourselves or a girl', and then moves through unresolved contradictions as he becomes part of the walk of history, evolution and ancestry, along with the two literary archetypes, Adam and Ulysses. The violence of history, implied by 'no casus belli on earth to fight' and the 'Manichaen South of Wars and orchards', is set against the joy of Adam's historic walk in the garden, 'the first garden, each morning, the first man'. Earlier we saw Lowell associating his ancestors with 'the trees/late-lopped, tar-boned, old prunes like stumps of martyrs' (p. 124). These ancestors were seen to participate in the destructive forces of history. The tree stump in 'The Walk' however, 'the willow stump puts out thin wands in leaf', appears more positive, suggesting the birth of history and hope for the future. The connection between the tree stump and ancestry, suggests to me the contrast between Adam's joyful walk as the first ancestor, and Lowell's reactionary ancestors, who associate readily with the 'true conservative' who 'hates change per se'. Lowell's, 'I am a free man, no one serves me', is undercut by the description of the earth in chains, 'the great beast clanks its chains of vertebrae'. In his closing lines Lowell introduces the image of Ulysses to

describe the final phase of life, the walk towards death. He equates this Ulyssean walk with his own increasingly desperate death walk as he moves through The Dolphin and Day By Day. In 'The Walk', Lowell provides us with snatches of how free and good life might be against how it actually is, imprisoned and destructive. One strains towards the transcendental walk of Adam in the garden, but is inevitably restricted to the aging, causal walk of Ulysses.

Lowell's walk of history is one of violence and repression as one race attempts to dominate another, and the walk of the contemporary city becomes the ultimate negative image of that repression. Specific historic walks are mentioned, but ultimately all the historic walks merge into one common historic walk. There is the man hunter in 'Hell' (p. 60) who walks both in Dante's Inferno and the hell of World War Two destruction. Circumstances have forced people into a disgusting cramped living space, 'I walked on,/I was afraid of stumbling on the helpless bodies/ afraid of circling.' Lowell also merges his own painful walk with those of other times. In 'Leaving' (p. 34) for example:

We leave, blood raps the leather on the ball of my
foot;
I hear the young voice of another age and habit,
walking to London or Paris, 'You little knew
I could hardly put one foot before the other.'
He went on to be Lord Mayor or guillotined,
passed many varieties of untried being....
The New York streets drink changes like a landscape.

Lowell's walk joins with 'the young voice of another age and habit/walking to London or Paris'. These are all the unknown people destined for death or power, or those who went on to be guillotined. The final line of the poem relates these historical figures to the anonymous walkers of the city. This city theme continues in 'For Norman Mailer' where 'everyman walks the clock' (p. 183) and 'The Human

Race' where Lowell universalises his own asylum walk by associating it with the lives of New Yorkers, their movements dictated to by the city taxis:

Taxi drivers always hold the floor;
born without direction, crackling a roll of bills,
buying any juice that burns--the hacks,
unerring, sentenced to live in a world of fools,
how many voyagers have they talked to death--
in forts of gunproof plastic, swift as Achilles,
they daily run their course to the edge of the void....
Green leaf, green walls. I walk from wall to wall;
taxis dissect New York...one, unable
to see he is finished, goes on into the wall.

(p. 134)

The restrictive walk of religion is seen as one of history's most powerful weapons. Take the walk of 'Helltime', for example:

Our God; he walks with us, he talks with us,
in sleep, in thunder, and in wind and weather;
he strips the wind and gravel from our words,
and speeds us naked on the single way.

(p. 134)

The poem then proceeds to describe an image of repressed labour, servants working in a Bolivian tin mine: 'if you are put/in your place enough times, you become your place...' (p. 135). In 'Ice on the Hudson (2)' the same message is apparent:

They too have had their saints and Roundhead cells
to guide them down the narrow path and true,
home to desolation and regimental terror--
policemen martyrs...theirs was something of an artist
at his vague, dreamlike trade of blood and guile--
one joke meant death--meat stuck between that tooth
and gum began to stink in half a second....
Ah the rain rains down in drops like iron balls;

the River's ice-jammed; miserable Manhattan
stands on stilts to the taunts of black ice heaven.
O when will we sleep out the storm, dear love,
say to the minute, stop for good, stop dead,
see at the end of our walk some girl's burnt-yellow
legs
glow, as if she had absorbed the sun?

(pp. 126-127)

The poem opens by showing religion and military power as a means of forcing conformity and then proceeds to describe Manhattan trapped by a similar kind of repression, 'ice-jammed' and 'miserable' beneath the 'taunts of black-ice heaven'. The religious path is associated with Lowell's own walk. He is seen, like Ulysses, reaching the end of his causal walk and requesting a brief vision of the transcendental: the girl and all she symbolises of free experience outside marriage and religious conformity. In 'Mexico (8)' Lowell makes a similar comparison between his free walk with a lover, 'we walk downhill,/love demanding we be calm not lawful' (p. 104) and the religious restrictions of the 'twenty coupled men' who are 'homicidal with morality and lust' as 'devotion hikes uphill in iron shoes' (p. 105).

Two more important themes for the walk, are evolution and ancestry. They are both shown as negative developments out of the innocence of creation. Lowell sees himself and Elizabeth inheriting the curse of evolution. In 'Bringing a Turtle Home' Lowell focuses on the evolutionary walk, 'The turtle had come a long walk,/200 millennia understudy to dinosaurs' (p. 242). This theme merges with history in 'Descendent'. The poem moves through a series of evolutionary firsts, the tyrannosaur and the Piltdown man and then onto the evolution of the tyrants, Hitler and Stalin. Finally the Eden myth merges with evolution and history: 'But was there some shining, grasping hand to guide/me when I breathed through gills and walked on

fins/through Eden, plucking the law of retribution from the tree?' (pp. 98-99). The suggestion is that the seeds of evil were present in the first steps of Adam's walk and in the newness of the world rising out of chaos. In 'Half a Century Gone' Lowell shows how he and Elizabeth have inherited this destruction: 'And here on this wavy earth we, like the others, /too thoughtful clods, may learn from those we walk on' (p. 259). There is a rare example of lovers constrained by the ancestral walk, in 'Charles River (7)':

We walk our tightrope, this embankment, jewed--
no, yankeed--by the highways down to a grassy lip....
Once--you weren't born then--an iron railing,
charmless and dignified, policed this walk;

(p. 69)

The lovers walk the restricted path along the Charles River. Elsewhere in the poem, Lowell expresses disgust for the earlier affluence of the age of his immediate ancestors, describing it as 'an evil dispensation' (p. 69), but in the above lines, the poem also reflects some ambivalence about the loss of past grandeur.

In the main, Lowell appears unable to remain free of the weighty responsibility of the walk, unlike women who are allowed free movement. In 'Through the Night (4)' we see daylight arriving, forcing him to make the responsible return, 'as achingly I awake to go the home-walk' (p. 45). On occasion Lowell does manage to break into a walk which is liberating and exhilarating--a brief return to the Adamic garden. Such walks generally take place at night, generally described as more liberating than the day in Notebook. In the following examples Lowell, through careful use of rhythm and vocabulary, creates an atmosphere which is magical, escapist, almost mystical. In 'Long Summer (2)' he states, 'this night, this night I elfin, I stonefoot, / walking the wildfire wildrose of those lawns' (p. 24). The repetition

of 'this night, this night' combined with the soft alliteration of 'walking, wildfire, wildrose' suggests a light, free walk. Words such as 'elfin', 'stonefoot', 'wildrose' and 'wildfire' provide a setting which is other worldly, almost fairytale. The isolation and haziness suggested in the following lines of 'Mexico (5)', provides a similar sense of strangeness: 'I walk the glazed moonlight:/ dew on the grass and nobody about...(p. 103).

More frequently women are the superior walkers of Notebook, able to escape time and history. Lowell either looks at their free movements with awe, or temporarily enters their experience. In 'Through the Night (2)', he looks from his window to see the loved one walking in another world with mysterious beings: 'I saw you walking with the simple ones,/in the twilight, in the evening, in the black, in the night' (p. 24). The woman's walk has a magical quality. The language suggests her movements are soft and measured. A gentle, regular rhythm is achieved by the repetition of 'in the' in line two, to imply a gradual entering into the unknown. We see her slowly moving into greater and greater darkness--from twilight into black--and a heightening of tension is suggested in the switch from the long, soft sounds of 'twilight' and 'evening' to the more clipped 'black' and 'night'. Her strangeness is also reinforced by the company she keeps--the mysterious 'simple ones'. Earlier, in 'Ice on the Hudson (2)', Lowell asked that the Ulyssean walk of history and marriage should end with an escape from time. This escape was symbolised by the transcendent image of the girl: 'see at the end of our walk, some girl's burnt-yellow legs/glow, as if she had absorbed the sun?'(p. 126). In 'Another Friend'(p. 110) admiration for the friend walking is also shown with startling images:

I didn't want you to be warmed by walking,
each drop of perspiration on your face,
an admirer's eye.... Why do I remember
your galled young fingers painted with red ink,
that scar of an unfulfilled desire to be

the happiness of the drop to die in the river?...
The wave of the wineglass trembled to see you walk.

(pp. 110-111)

The 'Mexico' sequence focuses on Lowell's love affair with a certain Mary Keelan¹⁷³ and suggests that, for Lowell, the love affair is a means of temporarily stepping outside the causal walk of history. The sequence combines a number of references to walk, but the most important is the free walk of lovers. A liberated mood is introduced in 'Mexico (5)' (p. 103) with Lowell on his personal night walk: 'I walked the glazed moonlight: dew on the grass and nobody about...'. He is still not entirely free because he cannot control his own feelings: 'drawn on by my unlimited desire,/like a bull with a ring in its nose and a chain in the ring...'. He concludes by returning to the causal/transcendental problem, though apparently resigned to the fact it cannot be solved: 'I'm learning to live in history./What is history? what you cannot touch'. 'Mexico (6)' movingly captures the climax of his search for release from the walk of history:

Midwinter in Mexico, yet the tall red flowers
Stand up on many trees, and all's in leaf;
twilight bakes the wall-brick large as loaf bread--
somewhere I must have met this feverish pink before,
and knew its message; or is it that I walk
you home twenty times, and then turn back on my tracks?
No moment comes back to hand, not twice, not once.
We've waited I think a lifetime for this walk,
and the white powder beneath our feet slides out
like the sterile white salt of purity; even
your puffed lace blouse is salt. The bricks glide; the
commonest
minute is not divided, not twice not once....
When you left, I thought of you each hour of the day,
each minute of the hour, each second of the minute.

(pp. 103-104)

Williamson discusses the 'Mexico' sequence in detail in Pity the Monsters and while emphasising the transcendental

¹⁷³ See MS. 680-681, her two letters to Lowell.

quality of the poem, provides a succinct explanation of the function of time in 'Mexico (6)':

This poem embodies the understanding that only a continuous present is real, not the abstract idea of time in which past, present and future are coevals...there is much to suggest that this walk is an eternal present, an event outside time... Paradoxically, this pure present seems to sum up all other time, to connect with it and yet to transcend it:

(p. 202)

Williamson's description of time derives from Freudian and postFreudian readings, but one can see similarities with Plotinus's view of time. Williamson's 'eternal present' has analogies with Plotinus's 'eternity', for both describe the merging of past, present and future in order to transcend time. I find the poem moving because it shows Lowell experiencing a brief transcendental experience, 'we've waited a lifetime for this walk', without losing sight of his more typical experience. This timeless love affair is interspersed with elusive, half understood sensations, 'somewhere I must have met this feverish pink before,/and knew its message'. It is as if he is close to Mandelstam's, 'all was before, all will be repeated again and only the moment of recognition brings us delight', but can't quite put his finger on it. The short-lived nature of the love affair is suggested by the poem's emphasis on causal time, reflected in the poem's walking pace: 'No moment comes back to hand, not twice, not once', to be echoed later in the poem with, 'the commonest minute is not divided, not twice, not once....'. Lowell's persona is also described as both human and vulnerable. He is uncertain about what he perceives: 'is it that I walk/you home twenty times, and then turn back on my tracks?' and concludes with a rather desperate dissection of time: 'I thought of you each hour of the day,/each minute of the hour, each second of the minute.'

As with window, Lowell continues to use the word walk in Day by Day and The Dolphin. It is worth considering these two volumes for the light they shed on Lowell's relationship with Caroline. In The Dolphin Lowell contrasts his restricted walk with Caroline's liberated one. There are also numerous references to feet, shoes and steps. Children are seen inheriting their parents' walk. Lowell's self disintegration is described in 'Shoes' where, not he, but his shoes do the walking, 'They walk/the one life offered from the many chosen' (p. 20). By way of Caroline, he continues the theme of superior women showing her, in 'Mermaid (4)', with the power to walk on water, 'free to walk the seven seas for game' (p. 36). In 'The Mermaid Children' we see Lowell and Caroline with their children, 'teasing them to walk for themselves' (p. 38). Caroline is described with all the characteristics of the 'lovers' in Notebook, while Elizabeth represents the ties of marriage. In 'The Couple' (p. 50), for example, Lowell describes Elizabeth and himself together in a dream, 'We were out walking'. It is clear that they must always be connected together although their walk of marriage is confining, 'The sidewalk was two feet wide. We, arm in arm,/walked, squelching the five-point oakleaves under heel--'.

By Day by Day Lowell describes himself on his final walk. The opening poem, 'Ulysses and Circe', continues the literary association of the earlier Walks. To show Lowell's concern with aging, the poem provides an interesting reversal, 'Age walks on our faces--' (p. 7). The poem 'Last Walk?' shows how his seven year walk with Caroline has reached its end, 'I meant to write about our last walk./We had nothing to do but gaze--/seven years, now nothing but a diverting smile' (p. 14). His closeness to death is shown in the difficulty of the walk. In 'This Golden Summer' he describes his death walk where he must leave earth with his shoes tied 'as if the walk/could cut bare feet' (p. 62) and in 'Home' he is once more walking the confined asylum walk,

'I cannot sit or stand two minutes,/ yet walk imagining a dialogue/between the devil and myself' (p. 114). His one thought is of death, 'Less that ever I expect to be alive/six months from now--' (p. 114). When therefore, in 'Notice', which describes his discharge he states, 'Then home--I can walk it blindfold' (p. 118), he may be referring to his return as Ulysses to Penelope--the United States and Elizabeth--but there is more grounds for assuming that is the now familiar walk his last return home to death.

Like walk, the words 'back', 'fall' and 'breath', are all used to reinforce Lowell's negative portrayal of time. Consider 'back' first of all. 'Ice on the Hudson (2)' provides a good introduction to its use elsewhere:

The air is snow-touched, fans our streaming backs,
blows in and in, a thousand snow-years back;
We were joined in love a thousand snow-years back.
Snow purifies the air that breathes our flesh,
waterfall white of China flays the glass;
but this is dream, no storm dare set a foot in,
blown spray nor wave can reach our stilted window.
Will the white foam-wisp soil with poison when it hits
the Hudson's prone and essence-steaming back,
the Great Arriviste in the metropolis?
Manhattan is pierced with the stiletto heel-
this too a dream; New York was never a person....
In the days of the freeze, we see a minor sun,
our winter moon bled for the solar rose.

(p. 126)

Lowell puns on the use of 'back' as adverb and noun in, what appears to be, a quite deliberate way. This suggests a very conscious attempt to exploit the polysemous qualities of the word. The poem describes temporary escape from the more usual negative drive of Notebook. As in the 'Mexico' sequence the love affair is the means of such escape. The lovers experience a dream-like sense that their union has carried them back along the evolutionary path of the first lovers' unions. Transcendence is suggested by the purifying effect of the snow and air in the poem. The immunity from

causal time is shown in the way, as in The Dolphin, the window protects the lovers from intruders, 'no storm dare set a foot in'. Set beside this journey back, are the lovers' backs, here described as liberated by the relationship, and the poisonous river back of the Hudson. It is only the negative image of the Hudson that prepares us for the use of back elsewhere in Notebook. All the transcendental images that connect with the love affair are at risk of being corrupted by the poisonous river back of the Hudson--the symbol of the industrial decay of the modern city.

Generally Notebook expresses the longing but the inability to return, to put back the clock. In 'Dear Sorrow', dedicated to Elizabeth, the loss of love is irreversible: 'Our love will not come back on fortune's wheel;/this room will dim and die as we dim and die/to the many things...are the many things' (p. 142). Similarly he refers to the circle being complete in 'Wall-Mirror' (to Caroline): 'Moonshine to say we can relive our lives,/begging nature's clean-edge Roman roads/turn back full circle...' (p. 207). For me, a particularly poignant expression of his regret for lost time is in 'Memorial Day' which describes voices of the young returning to him when he is asleep: 'And we will be, then, as they are here./But nothing will be put back right in time,/done over, thought through straight again---'(p. 196). It is the same regret in 'The Heavenly Rain' where he describes the rain 'that will not wash/the fallen leaf, turned scarlet back to green' (p. 65). This shows that we cannot turn back the seasons, nor restore society to its pre-industrial purity. There are other transient moments of reprieve such as exist in 'Ice on the Hudson (2)'. Here the lovers of 'Mexico', who were earlier described on a free walk, are also shown able to return. In 'Mexico (4)', for example, they are described as 'dust out of time, two clocks set back to the Toltec Eden' (p. 102). On the other hand, in 'Mexico (6)' Lowell accepts that the 'Mexico' affair only provides a break from life's causality: 'or is it that I

walk/you home twenty times, and then turn back on my tracks?/No moment comes back to hand, not twice, not once' (p. 103). This lament is more fully expressed in 'Eight Months Later': 'We wish we were elsewhere./ Mexico...Mexico? where is Mexico?/ Who will live this year back, cat on the ladder?' (p. 209). Lowell also crosses cultural barriers in his use of back, by way of 'Volveran', his translation of Gustavo Becquer's 'Volveran las Oscuras Golondrinas':

The dark swallow will doubtless come back here killing
the injudicious nightflies with a clack of the beak;
but these that stopped in flight to see your beauty
and my good fortune...as if they knew our names--
they'll not come back.

(p. 210)

The human and animal back is used to show vulnerability, alienation and repression. The back is the symbol of historic repression in 'Half a Century Gone (4)': 'We will remember then our tougher roots:/forerunners hooped to the broiling soil,/until their backs were branded with the coin of Alexander' (p. 259). Lowell seems to carry this weight of the world, as he states in 'The Book of Wisdom' where he is forced to carry the burden of what the gods have doled out to him, 'to strap the gross artillery to my back,/lash on destroying what I lurch against' (p. 97). Similarly in 'Mexico (1)' he seems to have to carry all the year's burdens, 'I fifty, humbled with the years' gold garbage,/dead laurel grizzling my back like spines of hay;' (p. 101) and in 'Sickness' 'the desultory commercial fall/lies like mustard plaster on our backs,/determines us to labor, crave and pay...' (p. 57).

Lowell also exploits the polysemy of the word 'fall' to the full. Its use to describe autumn, the loss of Eden, and as a verb of personal and social decline, are all played off against one another. Lowell, in using the theme of the Adamic Fall, is following a tradition which is seen by many

as distinctly American.¹⁷⁴ The interest in the world before the Fall stemmed from the belief that America, in creating the New World, could avoid the mistakes of the old and restore something of the innocence of Eden. Lowell, in his early poem 'First Sunday in Lent', refers to such an ideal:

Lord, from the lust and dust thy will destroys
Raise an unblemished Adam who will see
The limbs of the tormented chestnut tree
Tingle and hear the March-winds lift and cry:
'The Lord of Hosts will overshadow us.'

(Lord Weary's Castle, p. 21)

In Notebook, the Fall from Eden, The downfall of aging-- particularly the physical decline of the body--and the Fall as the season's aging, all merge and interrelate.

The aging process is seen repeatedly. The description of objects declining is there to suggest the same process in the individual, 'move but an inch and moldy splinters fall/in sawdust from the aluminium-paint wall,/once loud and fresh, now aged to weathered wood' (p. 22). The decline of women, and the sexual connotations of the woman's body aging are also shown, 'youth keeps the foamrubber waterfall/from falling, makes the falling flesh stand firm/marble pear-pointing to eternity' (p. 37). Wordplay is seen here in the association of fall and waterfall. There is a similar kind of wordplay in 'Mexico (10)', as a reminder that, in spite of the freedom of the love affair of the sequence, Lowell's physical decline is still at the back of his mind, 'then the falling... falling back on honest speech:/ infirmity, a food

¹⁷⁴ See R. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), and Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964).

the flesh must swallow,/feeding our minds...the mind which is also flesh' (p. 106).

Note the frequency with which Lowell repeats 'fall' and 'falling' in individual poems. Such repetition makes the walking rhythm of Notebook stand out. The word 'back' was used in this way as are many other words. Take 'down', for example, which has a similar impact to 'fall': 'we have gone down and down, gone the wrong brook--' (p. 165), 'But the downward glide/ and bias of existing wrings us dry--' (p. 175), 'with the blade of a hand, sweep, sweep and down-sweep,/running in bull-horns down the garden path' (p. 82). Such words show Lowell, as much as Mandelstam, 'in order to indicate walking', using a 'multitude of varied and charming turns of phrase'. Only in the case of Lowell it is to negative effect.

The theme of the Adamic Fall is explicitly referred to in Notebook. Lowell, in 'Ulysses and Nausicaa', makes the following observation:

In the same long hair, gay, dirty clothes--one sex,
arm on shoulders, searing the autumn summer,
Shakespeare extras by cars, the oars of the Charles--
there's a new poetry in the air, it's youth's
patent, lust coolly led on by innocence.
Gardens how far from Eden fallen, though still fair!

(p. 71)

He makes it clear that the Fall is inevitable and there is no hope that an unblemished Adam will rise. This is shown in 'Roulette' where the immediacy of the Fall is described:

The Republic! But it never was,
except in the sky-ether of Plato's thought,
steam from the ordure of his city-state,
His roulette wheel repeats; the man in the street
is mobile--never since Adam delved, such plans,
Utopia dimmed before the blueprint dries.

(p. 151)

In the 'Long Summer' sequence, which deals with personal and social decline and provides a lament for summers past, the word 'fall' is exploited to the full. 'Summer (13)', focusing on the present summer, now at its end, puns on the Fall of autumn and the Adamic Fall. Such punning within the sequence also implies a connection with the 'fall' of personal aging:

Everyone is crowding everyone
to put off leaving till the Indian summer;
and why? Because everyone will be gone--
we too, dull drops in the decamping mass,
one in a million buying solitude....
We asked to linger on past fall in Eden;

(P. 30)

These lines provide a moving lament for life's transience. A final poem, 'In Sickness' from the sequence 'Autumn in the Abstract', also treats the seasonal Fall negatively: 'The desultory, commercial fall/lies like a mustard plaster on our backs' (p. 57).

Lowell's use of another 'time' word, 'breathing', is particularly worth noting because of the consistency of its meaning: breathing is described not as automatic but as a conscious decision. As with other 'time' words, it is used to reinforce Notebook's momentum through repetition. Take, for example, 'The Dream of Fair Women': 'when hurting others was as necessary as breathing, /hurting myself more necessary than breathing' (p. 39). In 'Vigil', it is suggested that the horrors of contemporary society mean it would be easier to stop breathing:

We breathe, we live,
since our death is useless to killed or killing,
since the window shatters and the wind is blowing,
since the trees are leafless and the boughs are green,
the hunters hunted...Why do we live and breathe--
tough as the cat, nine lives to go, then none?

(pp. 132-133)

Lowell describes breathing as a conscious means of preventing oneself from dying. In 'Last Summer' he describes his 'friend, wife or child,' as dead because of 'their vanished art of breathing,' (p. 141) and then states of himself, 'knowing I must forget how to breathe through my mouth, /now I am dead and just now I was made' (p. 141). Lowell's fear of death is similarly expressed in 'Heat' where he gives himself reminders: 'I must remember /to breathe through my mouth. Breathe from your mouth, /as the mouth kept closing on the breath of morning' (p. 225). The ease with which Lowell breathes in 'Skunk Hour' of Life Studies, 'I stand on top of our back step and breathe the rich air' (p. 104), is contrasted in the almost identical setting of 'Europa' where, 'In the dark night of lust's defensive backstep /your breasts were breathing like your will to breathe' (p. 151). Other examples of the conscious decision to breathe are, 'I try to breathe, I try to keep up breathing while I hide,' (p. 193) and, 'we will each breath and make our peace with war' (p. 47). Lowell also describes how aging makes breathing more difficult, 'When I breathe now, /I hear that distant pant of gulls in my chest' (p. 48). He shows the physical effort of breathing and how much easier it was to breathe when young:

Labor to pull the raw breath through my closed nostrils
brings back breathing another, rawer air,
drawn freely enough from ice-crust football,
sunlight gliding the golden polo coats
of boys with county seats on the Dutch Hudson.

(p. 144)

Breathing is also often shown in stifling atmosphere, 'I lie here heavily breathing the soul of New York' (p. 146). At the same time, breath is one of the few valuable things left to Lowell. This is shown in 'Five-Hour Rally' with the dreadful pun, 'who can live on breath alone?' (p.228), and

in 'No Hearing' he states, 'I stand face to face with lost ages--my breath/is life, the rough, the smooth, the bright, the drear' (p. 245).

After one has examined Lowell's various uses of the 'time' words: walk, back, fall and breathe, the hollowness of the portrayal of time in 'Obit' stands out, and it difficult to see how Lowell could state, 'I am for and with myself in my otherness,/in the eternal return of earth's fairer children' (p. 261). It would, I feel, have been more appropriate to end with such lines as he uses in 'Memorial Day', 'But nothing will be put back right in time,/done over, thought through straight again---' (p. 196), for these are lines which, for me, encapsulate the more consistent perception of time in Notebook. However, dotted through Notebook, there are glimpses of transcendence, fleeting moments when 'the eternal return of earth's fairer children' seems a possibility. There are a few words which consistently contribute to such transcendence, notably 'night', 'air' and 'girl'.

Take 'night', for example. Most frequently the night is a time of peace, escape from guilt experienced in the day. The 'Through the Night' sequence shows the power of the night. In Poem (2), for example, it contributes to a magical atmosphere, 'I saw you walking with the simple ones/in the twilight, in the evening, in the night' (p. 44). In poem (3) the window is shown holding back the day as the poet attempts to put off the appearance of the dawn, 'trying to extend the dark unspent minute.' An atmospheric night is also evoked in 'Long Summer (2)' with, 'this night, this night, I elfin, I stonefoot' (p. 24). Repeatedly the night is shown as joyful, 'This bright night the heavens mackerel in my garden--' (p. 222), and in 'The Hard Way':

Under the stars, one sleeps, is freed from household,
tufts of grass and dust and tufts of grass,
night oriented to the star of youth--
heaven that held the gaze of Babylon--

(pp. 215-216)

Night is the antithesis of day which forces Lowell to accept his guilt: 'Each night I lie me down to sleep in rest;/ two or three times a week, I wake to my sin--' (p. 199).

'Night-Sweat', however, puts a different slant on the function of the night:

Work-table, litter, books and standing lamp,
plain things, my stalled equipment, the old broom--
but I am living in a tidied room,
for ten nights now I've felt the creeping damp
float over my pyjamas wilted white....
Sweet salt embalms me and my head is wet,
everything streams and tells me this is right;
my life's fever is soaking in night-sweat--
one life, one writing! But the downward glide
and bias of existing wrings us dry--
always inside me is the child who died,
always inside me is his will to die--
one universe, one body...in this urn
the animal night-sweats of the spirit burn.

(pp. 175-176)

Here is a rare statement of faith in his own writing: 'everything streams and tells me this is right'. Yet it is also Lowell taking up his cross, accepting that the personal turmoil, so consistently expressed in Notebook, is integral to his creative drive: 'the downward glide/and bias of existing wrings us dry'. 'Through the Night (5)' also describes the pain of writing at night, the writer juxtaposed with a historical figure being guillotined:

I climb the ladder, knowing my last words,
no matter how unjust, no longer matter,
the black marks of my night erased in blood--
wondering, "Why was it ever worth my while?"

(p. 46).

The open air also provides the poet with a means of inspiration. Lowell associates the air with successful creative power. In the poem to Mary McCarthy, for example, he praises her work stating, 'I slip from wonder into bluster; you align/your words more freely, ninety percent on target--/we can only meet in the bare air' (p. 33). In praise of I. A. Richards he states, 'Hob-Alpine spirit, you saved so much illusion/by changing its false coin to words...all high,/blind from bright heights, forseeing you were air' (p. 125). Lowell associates his personal release, after the completion of Notebook, with air, 'the book is finished and the air is lighter' (p. 256) and in 'Calling 1970' air is the space into which the poem must move:

Have you ever seen an inchworm crawl on a leaf,
cling to the very end, revolve in air,
feeling for something to reach something? Do
you still hang words in air, ten years imperfect,
joke-letters, glued to cardboard posters, with gaps
and empties for the unimagined phrase,
Unerring Muse who scorns a less casual friendship?

(p. 235-236)

Repeatedly Lowell describes air positively, suggesting its liberating properties: 'snow purifies the air that breathes our flesh' (p. 126), 'air never looked so beautiful before' (p. 235), 'sex indelible on the flowering air' (p. 92) and 'the good air' (p. 150).

Finally brief mention should be made of Lowell's use of 'girl(s)'. The word is used fifty one times in Notebook. Quite often it is used in an offhand, derogatory way with girls as anonymous conquests: 'Even fools can be crushed by too many girls' (p. 155), 'After their Chicago deaths with girls and gunshot' (p. 135), 'None sleeps with the same girl twice' (p. 71). Yet, set apart from such bland uses, are descriptions of the girl which makes it one of the most

significant transcendent images of Notebook. It is worth pointing out Clarence Brown's comments on examining words in a concordance at this point:

beyond the mere frequency of a word (...) there is something that might be called its 'weight'....How many times did Eliot use 'etherised'? I do not know, but most readers of this foreword will recall with me at least one occasion when its use seemed to slightly alter the course of English poetry.¹⁷⁵

In places, the girl is a startling image in Notebook to describe a release from time. In the 'Long Summer' sequence, for example, girls are a constant in the face of change. In poem (6) Lowell describes them, 'all girls then under twenty, and the boys/unearthly with the white blond hair of girls' (p. 26) and, in poem (7), although the phrase 'young girls are always here' retains the rather derogatory anonymity already seen, the startling description in the poem's conclusion saves the image from the banal with, 'were there...two fray-winged dragonflies,/ clinging to a thistle, too clean to mate.' (p. 28). In 'Heavenly Rain' girls provide a contrast to the city's decay: 'Two girls clasp hands in a clamshell courtyard to watch/the weed of the sumac again visibly;/the girls age not, are always young as last week' (p. 65). In 'Ice on the Hudson (2)' the girl's image is used to describe the desired escape from time:

O when will we sleep out the storm, dear love,
say to the minute, stop for good, stop dead,
see at the end of our walk some girl's burnt-yellow legs
glow, as if she had absorbed the sun?

(pp. 126-127)

¹⁷⁵ in the Foreword to Demetrius Koubourlis, ed., A Concordance to the Poems of Osip Mandelstam (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974), p. xii.

Finally, in 'Out of the Picture', one of the final poems of Notebook, the girl as an image of timelessness is presented with a formality which suggests it has been raised to the status of symbol: 'the flower of Eden unchanged, since spoiled,/the girl holding the sunset apple, life-class unchanged...' (p. 256).

In Notebook Lowell has pushed language to its limits exploiting the polysemous power of language. Yet this does not result in a merging of word and world because of Lowell's own repeated expressions of failure. An examination of frequently used words in Notebook provides evidence that it is not enough to find a method; one must also believe in that method. Yet if Lowell could not transcend his language because of the nihilism of his own voice, perhaps he might have more success if he were to draw on the poetic voice of Mandelstam to assist him. His absorption of Mandelstam's poetry into his own is the subject of chapter five, my concluding chapter.

Chapter Five

'Notebook' and the 'Ghost' of Mandelstam.

In 'Conversation about Dante' Mandelstam gives Dante the highest praise as a poet and argues that, 'The secret of Dante's capacity resides in the fact that he introduces not a single word of his own fabrication'; he is one who: 'writes to dictation, he is a copyist, he is a translator' (p. 436). Here he is using the term 'translation' in a much looser way than has been noted so far. It has much in common with George Steiner's definition of translation at its freest:

There is a 'private language' and an essential part of all natural language is private. This is why there will be in every complete speech-act a more or less prominent element of translation. All communication 'interprets' between privacies.

(After Babel, p. 198).

Language 'belongs' to existing culture which is, in effect, translated into the 'private language' of any new user. Seen in this light all use of language involves translation. When Mandelstam labelled Dante a 'translator' he was, I believe, primarily emphasising that Dante's poetry was built on the bedrock of previous culture, which, in a sense, is drawing on all existing 'private language' such as Steiner describes.

The next step down from this totally free translation is the use of language which is more specifically assigned, namely allusion: 'borrowings' of words, phrases or lines from the language of others. Dante, Mandelstam and Lowell are all 'translators' due to the fact that they make use of literary allusion. Thus, although one considers translation of whole

poems as far removed from literary allusion, within the framework of Steiner's and indeed, Mandelstam's definitions, there is a connection.

When Lowell told Carne-Ross that foreign poetry could provide American poets with a 'feeling of discovery of what we lack', he was primarily explaining why he believed they were drawn to translating foreign poetry. He went on to state that translation enabled him to write in a way that would seem inappropriate in his own language, thus providing him quite specifically with what he 'lacks' in his own verse: 'For instance, when I do a Victor Hugo poem: it's written in a way I wouldn't dare write in English myself, yet I admire it very much. To a certain extent that's true of everyone I've translated' (Carne-Ross, p. 174). However, Lowell's comments to Carne-Ross on this question of what is 'lacking' in one's own poetry were, I believe, meant in the deepest and widest sense: by considering both the uniqueness and cultural perspective of a poet it is possible to get a 'feeling of discovery' both of what is missing and present in one's own verse.

Lowell's further comments to Carne-Ross support this view. He describes Matthew Arnold's view of the value of reading foreign poetry:

He [Matthew Arnold] knew Leopardi very well. He knew how Leopardi differed from other Italians and how Heine differed from German Romantics, and of course he knew French well. His whole point was that you couldn't understand Wordsworth if you couldn't understand Goethe and Leopardi and Heine. They all had inspirations that Wordsworth lacked.

(p. 170)

The key statement here is 'they all had inspirations that Wordsworth lacked', suggesting that each poet has their own 'inspiration', their unique form of perception, against

which one can examine one's own. My discussion of Lowell's Notebook explored this wider question of what Mandelstam's poetry possessed which Lowell's lacked. In this final chapter, however, I am concerned once more with how translation releases Lowell from his own language, only this time my focus is translation in its freer form as literary allusion. Stanley Kunitz's comments on translation, mentioned in my Introduction, now become particularly pertinent: 'It is a means of self-renewal, of entering the skin and adventuring the body of another's imagination. In the act of translation one becomes more like that other, and is fortified by that other's power.' When Lowell used language polysemously in Notebook his nihilism prevented him from transcending language in the way Mandelstam was able to do. This chapter will consider whether absorbing the language of Mandelstam's poetry into his own, by way of literary allusion, may enable Lowell to become more like Mandelstam and, in Kunitz's words, to become 'fortified by that other's power'.

Of course, the use of allusion is yet a further means of exploiting the polysemous power of language. Omry Ronen makes this fact plain in his discussion of Mandelstam's polysemy. He describes it as the cultural absorption of language (note the affinities with Steiner's view of translation as interpretation of 'private language'), as well as the result of 'allusion':

Polysemous more often than not, Mandelstam's lexical reiterations form complex and extended strings...which link together pieces belonging to various genres and periods, poetry and prose, original compositions and translations, and create such a network of intertextual relations that the entire literary heritage of the poet emerges as an integral structure...The other device by means of which Mandelstam expands lexical meaning and activates its poetic function is based on the use of direct or veiled quotations, reminiscences, paraphrases, etc. of other writers, particularly poets of the past.

(An Approach to Mandelstam, p. x)

Lowell's use of allusion has been part of his poetry from the early days when such early criticism as H. B. Staples' Robert Lowell: The First Twenty Years (1962) and Jerome Mazzaro's The Poetic Themes of Robert Lowell (1965) attempted to document Lowell sources. The use of allusion in Notebook has variously intrigued or irritated critics, some feeling his use of the works of others justified, others less so. Stephen Yenser provides a comprehensive summary of the extent of Lowell's use of allusion:

Notebook absorbs a vast amount of Lowell's earlier work into itself, through allusion, parody, or actual repackaging into sonnets. It is equally omnivorous of other people's words: a Sources and Analogues of Robert Lowell's Notebook would have to have entries like 'Peter Taylor's mother's favourite joke,' as well as literary range from Sappho to Ginsberg.

(Pity the Monsters, pp. 157-158)

From these comments one can see the nature and extent of Lowell's free translation: he is reinterpreting his own earlier 'private' language; using literary and nonliterary allusion in his mother tongue as well as drawing on other languages. The way he absorbs foreign language poetry into Notebook ranges from the use of whole poems such as 'Volveran' (p. 210), a translation of a Becquer poem, and 'Le Cygne' (p. 133), a Mallarme translation, to the use of sections or lines of foreign language poetry mixed with Lowell's own language. Helen Vendler, in 'A Difficult Grandeur' (Part of Nature, pp. 126-136), captures what is both irritating and appealing about this allusive method in Notebook:

His sonnets throw up nearly indigestible fragments of experience, unprefaced by explanation, unexplained by cause or result; sudden soliloquies of figures from Biblical times to contemporary history; translations; diary jottings; stately imitations of known forms; the whole litter and debris and detritus of a mind absorptive for fifty years. His free association, irritating at

first, hovering always dangerously toward the point where unpleasure replaces pleasure, nonetheless becomes bearable, and even deeply satisfying on repeated rereading.

(p. 126)

The purpose of using allusion in this way is seen by the following two critics, J. F. Crick and Frances Ferguson, at least, as a means of breaking down the barriers between language and life. Crick argues that:

the book's unity has to be created in the process of reading, and hence requires a particularly alert responsiveness. Something of the same is due to the book's many 'borrowings'--from Lowell's earlier books, from conversations, and letters, and in the form of 'imitations' of poems in other literatures. The total effect of these is to establish the sense that the demarcation line between art and life is constantly fluid.¹⁷⁶

His opening comment is rather puzzling for it is only by 'the process of reading' that any impression of any text can be gained, but his suggestion that the range of Lowell's 'borrowings' breaks down the barrier between life and art seems sound. It is the inclusiveness of Lowell's allusion which suggests that all his experience should participate in his art. Frances Ferguson, here specifically discussing Notebook, reinforces allusion as a form of translation by way of Lowell's terminology--'imitation':

Imitation--seen as a repetition constituting re-vision--is not Lowell's attempt to supplant all previous literature. Rather, it represents his recognition that poetry documents the movement of consciousness--which can only be living--upon objects of consciousness--which have an observable existence but no living consciousness. In the eyes of Lowell-as-poet, all previous literature exists initially as an aggregation of enduring objects and eventually and significantly, as an index to a once-

¹⁷⁶ Robert Lowell (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1974), p. 130.

living consciousness which can be renewed by an altering re-vision.¹⁷⁷

By way of her comments, if a little verbosely, she does describe the language of Notebook going through a process of translation similar to that described by Steiner. Here, Ferguson's view of 'consciousness' can be equated with Steiner's description of 'private language'. Culture is seen to represent the amalgamation of all past consciousness and each new work of art is seen as a modification of that consciousness.

The Mandelstam translations dotted among the Notebook drafts provide the strongest evidence of Lowell's sustained interest in Mandelstam's work. All these Mandelstam drafts derive from 'Obolensky' versions of Mandelstam. They can be found in the following sections of the Lowell Papers: the Notebook drafts of the 'Long Summer sequence' (TS. 2362 and 2376), 'Notebook: Unpublished Drafts' (TS. 2733 and 2737), 'Uncollected Poems' (TS. 2759, 2760, 2771 and 2772) and 'Uncollected Translations' (TS. 2779 fols. 1-3). The Mandelstam poems which these translations consist of are 'Hagia Sophia', 'Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut Sails', 'Brothers Let us Glorify the Twilight of Freedom', 'Tristia', 'We shall meet again in Petersburg' and 'The Age'.

Notebook itself shows little overt evidence of Mandelstam's poetry. It contains a single Mandelstam echo. Consider the following Mandelstam lines followed by their use in Notebook:

Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails. I have counted the file
of ships down to half its length,
(Obolensky, p. 352)

¹⁷⁷ 'Appointments with Time: Robert Lowell's Poetry Through the Notebooks,' in American Poetry Since 1960: Some Critical Perspectives, ed. Robert B. Shaw (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet Press Pub., 1973), pp. 15-27 (p. 17).

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
Greek Islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue
of ships down half its length:

(p. 28)

There is also a direct reference to a Mandelstam image in the poem 'Walks' where Lowell states, 'the great beast, clanks its chain of vertebrae' (p. 40). This is a reference to Lowell's beast in the poem 'The Age': 'My age, my beast, who will be able to look into the pupils of your eyes and stick together the vertebrae of two centuries with his blood?' (Obolensky, p. 361). In order to get a clearer picture of the Mandelstam influence one must therefore look at the drafts of Notebook where there is a much greater Mandelstam presence. Mandelstam's comments about drafts are relevant here:

Rough drafts are never destroyed.
There are no ready-made things in poetry, in the plastic arts or in art in general...
Thus the safety of the rough draft is the statute assuring preservation of the power behind the literary work. .

('Conversation about Dante', pp. 415-416)

Mandelstam is suggesting that the draft has a validity in its own right, a means of preserving the poet's evolving perception. Since much of the Mandelstam presence has been drafted out of the final version of Notebook the drafts are invaluable in helping an understanding of Mandelstam's influence on the work in progress.

The 'Long Summer' sequence is the nucleus for much of the Mandelstam material in Notebook. The drafts of the sequence contains three Mandelstam poems redrafted into sonnets: 'St Sophia', 'Twilight' and 'Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut Sails.'

'Sleeplessness' contains the lines which are retained as an echo in the final version of Notebook. There is a Lowell draft which uses an echo from the poem 'Tristia': 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight' (Obolensky p. 358). The whole of the poem 'Tristia' is also present in the 'Long Summer' drafts, though there is no evidence of its being reshaped as a sonnet for possible use in Notebook. Variants of the material found in the 'Long Summer' drafts are also catalogued in 'Unpublished Drafts', 'Uncollected Poems' and 'Uncollected Translations'.

In the 'Long Summer' sequence Lowell is concerned not with a particular summer but with the amalgamation of all summers perceived both individually and collectively. He suggests why this might be in Notebook's 'Afterthought': 'My plot rolls with the seasons, but one year is confused with another. I have flashbacks to what I remember, and fables inspired by impulse' (p. 262). The sequence consists of fifteen sonnets united by no clear story line but connected themes and images. He laments the loss of days and years; struggles to accept the aging process and to be resigned to the negative forces of history. However, because in the sequence he is trying to amalgamate all summers, he is also, at times, close to a transcendental perception of time, as he puts it in 'Long Summer (12)', 'sun falls on so many, many other things' (p. 29). Ultimately, however, it is a perception that eludes him. The final poem of the sequence encapsulates what is found elsewhere in the sequence:

Iced over soon; its nothing; we're used to sickness
too little perspiration in the bucket--
in the beginning, polio once a summer. Not that;
each day now the cork more sweetly leaves the bottle,
except a sudden falseness in the breath,
passive participation, dogged sloth,
angrily skirting greener ice, the naught
no longer asset or advantage. Sooner
or later, and the chalk wears out the smile,
this life too long for comfort and too brief
for perfection--Cro-Magnon, dinosaur--

negative portrayal of the ongoing day. The opening poems set the scene with the personified self destructive day:

Each day more poignantly resolved to stay,
each day more brutal, oracular and rooted,
dehydrated, and smiling in the fire,
unbandaging his tender, blood-baked foot,
hurt when he kicked aside the last dead bottle.

(p. 24)

Days recalled are no more positively portrayed:

love hits like the polio of better days;
I always went too far. A day, that's summer;
whitecaps for acres strew the muddy swell.
I stand between tides; quickly bit by bit
the old crap and white plastic jugs lodge on the
shore,
the ocean draws out the river to no end:
most things worth doing are worth doing badly.

(pp. 25-26)

Here the overriding images are of decay and debris; the inescapable passage of days in an environment itself in decay. This debris is seen repeatedly in the sequence: 'the hollow foreclaw, cracked, sucked dry,/flung on the ash-heap of a soggy carton--'(p. 25); 'the fish /with missing eyes, or heel-print on the belly,/or a gash in the back from a stray hook;'(p. 28). Such images of beach debris become confused with perceptions of the fragile self protected by the shell: 'we too wore armor, strode riveted in cloth,/stiff as the broken clamshell labeled man.' (p. 27); 'is it always the same child or animal/impregnable in shell or coat of thorns,/only kept standing by a hundred scared habits--' (p. 25).

In the midst of this pessimism Lowell still appears to be trying to make sense of time and history. There are examples of Lowell trying to find a pattern to get to common

denominators in the face of change. In 'Long Summer (5)' he states:

thirty-five summers back, the brightest summer:
the Dealer's Choice, the housebound girls, the fog;
fog lifting. Then, as now, the after curfew
boom of an unknown nightbird, local hemlock
gone black as Roman cypress,....

(p. 26)

Repeatedly in the sequence there is the important, timeless image of the girls and, in his perceptions of history, he tries to establish cultural synthesis between his own experience and that of figures of the past. In poem (12), for example, the image of the sun of the Indian summer provides a constant between the past and the present:

Both my legs hinged on the foreshortened bathtub,
small enough to have been a traveler's...
sun baking a bright swath of balsam needles,
soft yellow hurts; and yet the scene confines;
sun falls on so many, many other things:
someone, Custer, leaping with his wind-gold
scalplock,
a furlong or less from the old-style battle,
Sitting Bull's, who sent our hundreds under
in the Indian Summer--Oh that wizened balsam,
this sunlit window, the sea-haze of gauze blue
distance plighting the tree-lip of land to islands--
wives split between a playboy and a drudge.
Who can help us from our nothing to the all,
we aging downstream faster than a scepter can check?

(pp. 29-30)

However, although the natural world acts as a near to satisfactory unifier of past and present for Lowell, it does not lead to affirmation as it does in Mandelstam's poetry. This is because Lowell cannot think of history without the associated destruction and repression. This is perhaps why Lowell must conclude the poem with a view of the self in

rapid decline 'aging downstream faster than a scepter can check'.

Just a quick glance at sonnet (10), which contains the Mandelstam echo, shows it to be sonnet devoid of much of the pessimism seen in the rest of the sequence:

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
Greek Islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue
of ships down half its length: the blistered canvas,
the metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Asian outworks like a wedge of geese,
the migrant yachtsmen, and the fleet in irons....
Then iron bell is rocking like a baby,
the high tide's turning on its back exhausted,
the colored, dreaming, silken spinnakers
reach through the patches in the island pine,
as if vegetating millenia of lizards fed
on fern and cropped the treetops...or nation of
gazelles,
straw-chewers in the African siesta....
I never thought scorn of things; struck fear in no
man.

(pp. 28-29)

Sonnet (10) does, admittedly, convey a restless mood in keeping with many other poems in the sequence. Repeatedly, the closeness of a long hot summer is described: 'til we sweat/and shine as if anointed with hot oil' (p. 24); 'Months of it and the inarticulate mist so thick/we turned invisible to one another/across the room' (p. 25); 'yet even on the steadiest day, dead noon,/the sun stockstill like Joshua's in midfield' (p. 25); 'The vaporish closeness of this two months fog'(p. 26); 'the ceiling fan/ wrestled the moisture' (p. 26); 'Shake of the electric fan about our village'(p. 27); 'these nights of the swallow/ clashing in heat'(p. 27) and 'Everyone now is crowding everyone' (p. 30). However, this common mood stands out against the contrast the sonnet (10) provides. Here Lowell does not express regret for time lost or for aging but simply meditates on the moment. As if inspired by Mandelstam's

frame of mind, therefore, we see him gaining a brief reprieve from his own nihilism.

However, the drafts leading up to sonnet (10) reveal that Mandelstam's language might have had an even greater impact on the final message of the sequence, had Lowell not drafted it out. The eight drafts of 'Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut Sails', from which the first echo is derived, show how Lowell begins with a near to faithful translation of the original poem and gradually transforms it into a poem of his own, leaving only traces of the Mandelstam source. Lowell's version of 'Sleeplessness' comes from the following prose version in Dimitri Obolensky's anthology:

Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails. I have counted the file of ships down to half its length: that long-extended flock, that flight of cranes which once rose up above Hellas.

It is like a wedge of cranes flying off to distant lands. The heads of the kings are covered with the foam of the gods. Where are you sailing to? Were it not for Helen, what would Troy be to you, O Achaeans?

The sea, and Homer--all is moved by love. To which of the two, then, shall I listen? And now Homer is silent, and the black sea, declaiming, roars, and draws near to my pillow with thunderous crashing.¹⁷⁸

This poem comes from the first book of Mandelstam's poems, 'Stone' (1913). Mandelstam draws on the section in Homer's Iliad where all the ships gathered before they departed for Troy. He has made direct use of lines from Homer using the following section:

Their clans came out like countless flocks of birds--the geese, the cranes, or the long-necked swans--that foregather on the Asian meadow by the streams of Caystor, and wheel about, boldly flapping their wings and filling

¹⁷⁸ No. 78, M.I, pp. 78-79, Obolensky, pp. 352-353.

the whole meadow with harsh cries as they come to ground
on an advancing front.¹⁷⁹

Thus we have a double 'theft': Mandelstam 'steals' from Homer and Lowell steals from Mandelstam and therefore from Homer. This poem provides one of the many examples of Mandelstam's love of the classical world, which would have so much attracted Lowell. The poem also illustrates Mandelstam's tendency to merge past and present. Here Mandelstam's theory of recognition is reinforced by the use of the Homer echo: the poem suggests that a cultural connection is being established between Mandelstam and Homer. The poem conveys a sleepy mood as Mandelstam counts the Greek ships as if they were sheep. His mind ponders the Homeric scene until, finally, oblivion wins as the world of Homer merges with this great ocean of darkness. The sounds of the poem in Russian reinforce the mood: 'Bessónnitsa. Gomér. Tugíe parusa./Ia spísok korabléi prochél do seredíny.' Lowell not only makes particular use of the poem's somnambulant mood in 'Long Summer (10)' but incorporates the same atmosphere into the whole 'Long Summer' sequence.

Lowell, in Version I, reshapes Obolensky's translation into a sonnet:

Restlessness. Early afternoon.
Homer. Taut sails. I have counted the file of
ships
down to half its length: that strung-out flock,
that flight of cranes, once rising up above
the rocks of Greece. It's like a wedge of cranes
making for distant lands. The heads of the kings
are covered with the hoar-foam of Olympus.
Gods. But where are you sailing? Were it not
for Helen, what would Troy mean to you, O Greeks?
The sea and Homer--all is moved by love.
To which? Which of the two then shall I listen?
Homer is silent now,

¹⁷⁹ Homer, The Iliad, trans. E. V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 52.

and the black Sea, declaiming, roars and draws
near to my pillow, thundering and crashing.

(TS. 2362, p. 11 (b))

Although this version is very close to the Obolensky source there are already some changes which show Lowell adapting the poem to his own experience. 'Restlessness. Early afternoon', for example, is Lowell's setting rather than Mandelstam's one of night-time insomnia. Lowell is also free in describing the birds rising above the 'rocks of Greece' rather than 'Hellas', for example. As a result the image is made more concrete and specific. The change from 'foam of the gods' to 'hoar-foam of Olympus' is effective, linking the sea foam with Olympus and morning frost to create a more densely associative image than the original. On the whole, though, Lowell is simply restructuring Obolensky's prose into a free verse sonnet. This version is still very much a rough draft, however, for line twelve, 'Homer is silent now', needs to be altered to fit into the sonnet form.

Version II introduces further Lowellisms:

The restlessness. The early afternoon.
Homer. Tense sails. I have counted his catalogue
of ships down half its length: those puffed out
sails,
that flight of gulls, once rising up above
the rocks of Greece. It's like a wedge of geese
migrating for the east. The heads of the kings
foam with the hoarfrost of Olympus. Gods.
Or Vikings. But where are you sailing? Were
it not for Helen, what would Troy mean to you,
O Achaens?[sic] The sea and Homer--both
are swayed by love. Which of the two then, shall
I listen to? Homer is nodding now,
and this black tide, declaiming, roars and draws
near to my pillow, to the thunder-hole.

(TS. 2362, p. 11)

Here Lowell attempts to tighten up the structure and develop the draft. He changes Mandelstam's use of birds in the original in a way that is inexplicable at first sight. The Homeric source refers both to geese and cranes from which Mandelstam has used cranes, referring to them twice with, in the first verse, 'that long-extended flock, that flight of cranes which once rose above Hellas' and in the second, 'It is like a wedge of cranes flying off to distant lands'. This repetition of cranes, retained in Lowell's Version I, reads very awkwardly. Lowell begins to solve the problem, in Version II, by experimenting with other birds: geese and gulls. His use of 'geese' suggests that he may well have referred to the Homeric source, of which he would almost certainly been aware. His use of 'gulls' is inappropriate, in my view, yet does provide a sign of Maine images being introduced. His change from 'making for distant lands' to 'migrating for the East' focuses on the birds, to the exclusion of their original purpose, which was as an image of the catalogue of ships. The change to 'migrating' also removes the positive quest implied in 'making'.

Along with the alterations to Mandelstam's bird imagery, there are more changes made to develop the sonnet. One improvement is changing the contrived cleverness of 'hoar-foam' with the more natural 'hoarfrost', while still achieving the required association. Mandelstam's 'god' is given a dramatic transformation, although the change seems slight at first. 'Gods' of the original Obolensky line, 'The heads of the kings are covered with the foam of the gods', is extracted and placed into a new sentence: 'The heads of the kings/foam with the hoarfrost of Olympus. Gods./Or Vikings.' As a result, the heavy pauses of the opening lines are repeated, providing parallel patterning which gives the sonnet cohesion. The poem concludes more neatly than the previous draft but is ruined by the word 'thunderhole', which Lowell uses to describe his own feelings of sleeplessness. The word is both weighty and contrived, marring the soporific mood of the original. One

is reminded of weaker self-conscious lines from Lowell's early poetry, such as, 'Mary, I implore/your scorched, blue thunderbreasts of love to pour/buckets of blessings on my head' (Lord Weary's Castle, p. 28). The change from Homer 'silent' to 'nodding' suggests it is Homer himself who is drifting off. Homer is thus seen going through a similar drowsiness to that of Lowell and Mandelstam. The effect is to bring the common experience of the three poets closer together, thus reinforcing the theory of recognition.

It is fascinating the way Lowell gradually writes Mandelstam out and himself in, without losing the atmosphere and mood of the original poem. In the drafts that follow, Lowell introduces more images from the Maine setting of the 'Long Summer' sequence, and then moves into free association, with an emphasis on his own New England identity. In Version III he does this almost imperceptibly:

Troy

(After Mandelstam)

Two in the afternoon. The sleeplessness.
Homer. Tense sails. I have counted the catalogue
of ships down half its length: the puffy canvas,
those metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Trojan esplanade--like a wedge of cranes,
migrant yachtsmen. The heads of the Greek kings
foam with the hoar frost of Olympus. Gods.
Or Vikings. But where are you sailing? Were
it not for Helen, what would Troy mean to you,
O Achaeans? That fleet's in irons now.
The sea and Homer--both are swayed by love.
Which of the two then? Who shall I listen to?
But Homer is nodding, and this black tide,
declaiming, roars, and draws near to my pillow.

(TS. 2370, p. 10)

The bracketed 'After Mandelstam' in this draft, suggests Lowell may have considered including 'Sleeplessness' in Notebook as a free Mandelstam translation. The final four lines of this version have been restored so that they are

much closer to the original. In this version the Maine images merge effectively with the Homeric source, unlike the earlier 'thunderhole' and 'gulls'. Lowell restores Homer's cranes and avoids the earlier problem of repeating 'cranes'. He manages this by introducing Maine images which fill the gap in the sonnet form. Again, just as with the use of 'rocks of Greece', the description of the line of ships, like a 'flight of cranes rising above Hellas', is made more concrete, technically detailed and localised, with the additions 'puffy canvas', 'metal bowsprits' and 'Trojan esplanade'. 'Migrant yachtsmen' subtly connects the Greek sailors and the yachtsmen in Maine. Likewise, 'that fleet's in irons now', merges effectively. Thus, once more, Lowell has managed to bring Mandelstam's experience closer to his own.

Version IV is close to III with just slight alterations:

Troy

Two in the afternoon. The sleeplessness.
Homer. Taut sails. I have counted the catalogue
of ships down half its length. The blistered canvas, the
metal bowsprits--once pricking up above
the Trojan esplanade, like a wedge of cranes.
The migrant yachtsmen. The heads of the Greek kings foam
with the hoarfrost of Olympus. The gods--
or Vikings. But where are you sailing? Were
if not for Helen, what would Troy mean to you,
O Achaeans?^{ts}That fleet's in irons now.
The sea and Homer--both are swayed by love.
Which of the two then? Who shall I listen to?
But Homer is silent, and this black tide, declaiming,
thundering, crashing, draws near to my pillow.

(TS. 2370, p. 2)

Note how Lowell has increased the number of images preceded by 'the', so we have: 'the metal bowsprits', 'the Trojan esplanade', 'the migrant yachtsmen', 'The gods--'. Such repetition tightens up the poem's structure. Lowell changes the adjectives used to describe the boats' sails. As a result, our perceptions of the Greeks' journey is altered. Consider the change from 'puffy' to 'blistered' canvas. For

me, 'puffy' is a fresh image of the canvas blown by the wind, while 'blistered' is less affirmative, emphasising the effects of the weather and time on the canvas. Similarly, there is a shift in emphasis in the change from 'tense' to 'taut' sails. 'Taut' is both harsher and more assertive than 'tense' suggesting, perhaps, that the Greeks may have a hard journey ahead, yet they are confident of success.

Versions V, VI and VII provide a number of unsuccessful innovations in the attempt to convey cultural recognition between Homer/Vikings/Mandelstam/Lowell. Note, in the opening line of the following draft, how Lowell now makes overt reference to Maine:

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
Greek islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue
of ships down half its length: the blistered canvas, the
metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Persian outworks like a wedge of geese.
The migrant yachtsmen. That fleet's in irons,
somewhere: in books, monsoonlands, antartica,
nature achieves ferocity or joy:
the killer whales, the hammerheaded shark
able to clench a steel harpoon in two,
cracking its spine to gulp its own red flesh--
or nations of gazelles, straw-chewers and
ostriches in the African siesta--
I never thought scorn of things, struck fear in no
man.

(TS. 2370, p. 4)

It is fortunate that Lowell left this version as a draft, I feel, for the Maine images are unsubtle in their New England, Melvillean associations--a weak attempt to achieve something of the marvel of his early poem, the 'Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket':

The bones cry for the blood of the white whale,
The fat flukes arch and whack about its ears,
The death lance churns into the sanctuary, tears
The gun blue swingle, heaving like a flail,
And hacks the coiling life out:
(Lord Weary's Castle, p. 18)

Lowell uses this draft as a springboard for free association, the randomness of which fits in easily with the original poem's sleepy tone. The changes from 'Trojan esplanade' to 'Persian outworks' broadens the setting of the poem to include Asia Minor. Throughout the draft Lowell attempts to absorb the vast geographical shifts of civilisation, and to provide a commentary on the natural and animal kingdom, reminiscent of the his earlier title poem of For the Union Dead: 'I often sigh still/for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom/of the fish and reptile' (p. 70). The geographical contrasts provide clues to the puzzling presence of gazelles in the final version. The reference to 'somewhere' suggests that he is trying to link various settings. Along with the free association Lowell also draws conclusions with grandiloquent statements: 'nature achieves ferocity or joy' and 'I never thought scorn of things, struck fear in no man'. Such lines are very characteristic of Lowell. He seemed to earn the right to preach at or speak on behalf of his audience very early in his career with lines like: 'The Lord survives the rainbow of His will' (Lord Weary's Castle, p. 20), or 'Here is the understanding not to love/Our neighbour, or tomorrow that will sieve/Our resolutions' (ibid., p. 13). I take the 'ferocity' to be the violence of the whale or shark against the 'joy' which is the beauty and delicacy of the gazelles and ostriches.

Version VI does little to improve on the previous one. Apart from restoring the Trojan reference with 'Trojan shorefront' and changing 'somewhere' to 'elsewhere' it makes the following alterations:

the killer whales, the hammerheaded shark
able to bite a steel harpoon in two,
cracking its spine to drink its wounded flesh.
And we? We are a nation of gazelles,
chewers of straw, who whisper lying:

I never thought scorn of things, struck fear in no
one.

(TS. 2370, p. 3)

A 'nation of gazelles' is puzzling. There are suggestions of human passivity in the comparison with animals chewing straw and further criticism implied in 'whisper lying', so that Lowell may be criticising human lack of commitment and/or integrity, but the unnecessary ambiguity does not enhance the poem.

Version VII shows more effective free association:

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
Greek islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue of
ships down half its length: the blistered canvas,
the metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Asian outworks like a wedge of geese,
the migrant yachtsmen, the fleet in irons,
the books, exotica, the coastal chart.
And somewhere nature is alive, the bell
is rocking like a baby, the high tide
is rolling on its back exhausted--vegetating
lizard millenia fed on ferns, giraffes
copping the tree-tops, some action of gazelles,
straw-chewers in the African siesta--
I never thought scorn of things, struck fear in no
man.

(TS. 2370, p. 5)

Lowell has removed the unsubtle whale/shark image and replaced it with that of the lizard. The earth of the lizard contrasts the sky of the giraffes and gazelles. The 'books, exotica, the coastal chart' develop the navigational theme which may result from Lowell's meditations on his New England background or on the journeying of the Trojans and Vikings. He draws back from the didacticism and moralising of Version VI and allows the images to speak for themselves. He has removed 'nature achieves ferocity or joy' and instead has the more subtle 'Somewhere nature is alive'. The two new images, 'the bell is rocking like a baby' and

'the high tide is rolling on its back exhausted' work well, developing the somnambulant mood of the original Mandelstam poem.

Although in the final version, in Notebook, there is much ambiguity there is no didacticism. A series of effective freely associating images create mood and atmosphere:

Two in the afternoon. The restlessness.
Greek islands. Maine. I have counted the catalogue of
ships down half its length: the blistered canvas,
the metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Asian outworks like a wedge of geese,
the migrant yachtsmen, and the fleet in irons....
The iron bell is rocking like a baby,
the high tide's turning on its back exhausted,
the colored, dreaming, silken spinnakers
reach through the patches in the island pine,
as if vegetating millennia of lizards fed
on fern and cropped the treetops...or nation of
gazelles,
straw-chewers in the African siesta....
I never thought scorn of things; struck fear in no
man.

(Notebook, pp. 28-29)

All the images come together to good effect. The lizards and gazelles, for example, merge with the immediate perception of the pine trees of Maine. The few new developments all contribute to the atmosphere, such as the drowsiness of 'colored, dreaming, silken spinnakers'. The brief glimpses of the spinnakers between the trees provide an odd association for Lowell, suggesting the slight movements of lizards chewing the fern in the tree tops. The spinnakers also provide a link both with the 'catalogue of ships' and the 'blistered canvas' in the opening. Our understanding of this, the finished product, is enhanced by our knowledge of the drafting which preceded it. By taking all the drafts into account one sees the complex associations the poet has worked through.

Version VIII is a polished draft which is much closer to the original. This suggests, to me, that Lowell may have intended to include the Mandelstam translation as a whole in Notebook. It shows some of the changes well into the drafting process, such as the reference to 'Vikings' and 'that fleet's in irons', but the last four lines bring the poem back to the original:

Troy

Two in the afternoon. The sleeplessness.
Homer. Tense sails. I have counted his catalogue
of ships down half its length. The puffy canvas,
those metal bowsprits, once pricking up above
the Trojan shallows--like a wedge of cranes,
migrant yachtsmen. The head of the Greek kings
foam with the hoarfrost of Olympus. Gods.
Or Vikings. But where are you sailing? Were
it not for Helen, what would Troy mean to you,
O Achaens?^{ts}The sea and Homer. Both
are swayed by love. which of the two then? Who
shall I listen to? That fleet's in irons,
Homer is nodding now, and this black hide,
declaiming, roars and draws near to my pillow.

(TS. 2376, p. 18 (b))

If Lowell had included this version in the 'Long Summer' it would have provided a dramatic contrast to the other poems in the sequence. For here thoughts of Homer fuse harmoniously with the present, providing an example of recognition between the past and present.

Next one needs to consider the implications of the other two complete drafts in the 'Long Summer' sequence. Take, first of all, the poem 'Hagia Sophia'. There are five versions of this poem in the Lowell papers. In the 'Long Summer' drafts there are four versions and there is a single draft included in 'Unpublished Drafts'. Below is the Obolensky version followed by Lowell's Version I. Note the similarity between the two:

Hagia Sophia--the Lord ordained that nations and emperors should halt here! For, in the words of an eye-witness, your dome, as on a chain, is suspended from the heavens.

And Justinian set an example for all ages, when Diana of Ephesus permitted one hundred and seven green marble columns to be stolen for alien gods.

But what was in the mind of your bountiful builder when, exalted in soul and thought, he disposed the apses and the exedrae pointing them west and east?

The church bathed in peace, is beautiful, and the forty windows are a triumph of light; finest of all are the four archangels in the pendentives beneath the dome.

And the wise, spherical building will outlive nations and centuries, and the resonant sobbing of the seraphim will not warp the dark gilded surfaces.¹⁸⁰

Hagia Sophia--the Lord ordained that nations
and emperors should halt here!
For, in the words of an eyewitness,
your dome, as on a chain,
is suspended from the heavens.

And Justinian set an example for all ages,
when Diana of Ephesus permitted
one hundred and seven
green marble columns
to be stolen for alien gods.

And the wise and spherical building
will outlive nations and centuries,
and the resonant sobbing
of the seraphim will not warp
the dark gilded surfaces.

But what was in the mind
of your bountiful builder,
when exalted in soul and thought,
he disposed the apses and exedra,
pointing them east and west?

(TS. 2376, p. 21 (b))

The version begins as a carbon copy of Obolensky's translation. Each Lowell verse corresponds to each Mandelstam verse and Obolensky prose section. The fourth

¹⁸⁰ No. 38, M.I, p. 23, Obolensky, pp. 351-352.

stanza is omitted and the third and final one are then swapped. Throughout, the language is very close to the original with only minute changes, such as the reversal of 'east' and 'west' in the concluding verse. However, the reordering of stanzas alters the poem quite dramatically. Mandelstam expresses admiration and faith that St Sophia will be a timeless symbol of culture, 'and the wise and spherical building will outlive nations and centuries', whereas Lowell concludes the poem with a question. He expresses uncertainty about how the building came to exist as it did. Such questioning provides an unsatisfactory conclusion to the poem, in my view, although Lowell retains it throughout all the drafts.

Version II is shaped into a sonnet:

Hagia Sophia--the Lord ordained that nations
and emperors should halt here. For in the words
of an eyewitness, your dome once, as on
a bronze chain, was suspended from the heavens.
And Justinian set an example for all ages,
when Diana of Ephesus allowed one hundred
and seven greenish marble columns to
be stolen for the esoteric God.
For this building, wise and spherical,
will outlive nations, centuries and faith;
the art of its resonant, sobbing seraphim
will not warp the dark and gilded surface.
But what was in the mind of your bountiful builder,
when, too exalted in his thought and soul,
he disposed his apses and exedra,
pointing them east and west?

(TS. 2376, p. 20 (b))

There are few changes between this and Version I, though one or two do indicate a subtle shift in perspective between Lowell and Mandelstam. Lowell expands the poem in places, possibly because the sonnet form gives him more room to manoeuvre. He changes 'green' to 'greenish' and 'chain' to 'bronze chain'. Note also the change in tense from 'your dome, as on a chain is suspended from the heavens' to 'your

dome, once, as on a bronze chain, was suspended from the heavens. Lowell's alteration suggests, to me, that the eyewitness actually saw the dome suspended by an iron chain, whereas Mandelstam's lines imply that the building appears to be unified with the heavens because of its stature. Another alteration is from the 'bountiful builder...exalted in soul and thought' to 'too exalted in his thought and soul'. Lowell's builder is described as egotistical in producing this immense edifice. Mandelstam's builder, on the other hand, is shown to possess a higher creative quality, comparable to the privileged poet with a special gift. Note also the switch from 'alien gods' to Lowell's 'esoteric God'. Obolensky's phrase suggests only that the gods are from a different culture, whereas Lowell's line focuses more upon the mystery and strangeness of an unknown god.

Versions III and IV¹⁸¹ do not show great variation in the way lines are altered. However, they do show Lowell 'playing' with Obolensky's prose version as though it were a jigsaw puzzle. Keeping within the discipline of the sonnet form, he swaps individual lines, presumably, to see how this alters the effect of the poem. Version V is catalogued in 'Unpublished drafts', the section of the Lowell archive which contains, what appear to be, polished poems Lowell has excluded from Notebook after all the main drafting has been done. Version V, therefore, may well have been a sonnet originally intended for inclusion in Notebook:

Hagia Sophia--the Lord ordained that man
and emperors should halt here, for this building,
wise and spherical, has outlived their empires,
centuries and belief, Justinian set
an example for all ages, when Diana of Ephesus
allowed one hundred and seven green marble columns
to be stolen for his esoteric God.
For this dome, there's an eyewitness for it, was
suspended from heaven, as on a chain;

¹⁸¹ 'Long Summer (10)', TS. 2376, p. 18 (b), and TS. 2362, p. 5 (b).

for the resonant sobbing of the seraphim
will not mar the dark and gilded surface...
But what was in the mind of the bountiful builder,
who, expansive in thought and soul, disposed
his apses and exedra east and west?

(TS. 2733)

One can see how much line order has shifted since Version II. Few actual words are altered. There is the change from 'too exalted in thought and soul' to 'expansive in thought and soul' and from 'pointing' to 'disposed'. The use of 'expansive' and the removal of 'too' makes the picture of the builder more positive. Most of the alterations are effective, though I feel there is still something unsatisfactory in the questioning at the end of the poem.

One can only speculate on whether Lowell ever seriously planned to include the sonnet in the 'Long Summer'. All that is certain is that it was a poem in Lowell's mind during the writing of the sequence. This is interesting, because the poem epitomises what is elusive in the sequence: the need to unify past and present culture. In the poem, St. Sophia stands out as a permanent image in the face of change, described as a 'building' that 'has outlived their empires, centuries and belief'. Justinian is described setting 'an example for all ages' in allowing the creation of St. Sophia. The building--which can also act as metaphor for the work of art--is transcendental in the way it is 'suspended from heaven, as on a chain.' Time has no effect on it: 'for the resonant sobbing of the seraphim/will not mar the dark /and gilded surface...'. Finally, it symbolises cultural synthesis incorporating both east and west: 'But what was in the mind of the bountiful builder,/ who, expansive in thought and soul, disposed/his apses and exedra east and west?'. Had the sonnet been included in 'Long Summer' it would certainly have worked in opposition to the nihilism of the sequence.

The next translation, which Lowell has entitled 'Twilight', is present in four drafts. Two are in the 'Long Summer' drafts and the remainder are in 'Unpublished Drafts'. Again an examination of Obolensky shows his prose version to be the source. There is very little variation in the drafts which precede what I take to be the final version, the draft from 'Unpublished drafts':

Brothers, let us glorify the twilight of freedom,
the great crepuscular year, this heavy forest
lowered like snares in the seething water--
raised from darkness, O sun--judge and people.
And praise the people's leader, tearfully
assuming the somber unbearable burden of power--
we've bound the swallows into battle legions,
and now we cannot see the sun. Yet nature
is stirring and twittering--through the snares, the
sun
unrisen, and the earth is afloat. Well, we'll try:
a vast, clumsy, creaking turn of the helm.
The earth's afloat. Take heart, men. We furrow the
ocean
with a plough, and shall remember even when buried--
for us the earth has been worth a dozen heavens.

(TS. 2737)

This is one of the few poems which Mandelstam gave a title to, 'Twilight of Freedom'. It was written in May 1918 and describes Mandelstam's disillusionment at the Revolution in Russia. Mandelstam is untypically pessimistic, but unlike Lowell's more introspective pessimism, it is a response to external events. An understanding of 'Twilight' is aided by Clarence Brown's comments about the volume Tristia, the book from which the poem comes:

The goddess of Tristia is Persephone, queen of the afterlife and wife to Hades, and Mandelstam's city, where she now presides and which, like Derzhavin, he calls Petropolis....It is a place of burial. It is the place where Pushkin....was secretly buried at night by a tyrannical government, an event to which Mandelstam repeatedly refers as the burial of the sun.

(Mandelstam, pp. 255-256)

If this sonnet had been included in the sequence it would have been oddly placed, both reinforcing and contrasting Lowell's pessimism. It could have played a part in reinforcing Lowell's destructive perceptions of history but would at the same time have contrasted Lowell's more defeatist pessimism. Mandelstam is at a low ebb, but can still express defiance in the face of terrible odds. As at the end of 'Unknown Soldier', he shows the horror of history, but still emphasises that he has, at least, lived a life. In 'Twilight' Mandelstam shows the loss of all that is valuable, epitomised in his beloved Pushkin who he ranks with Dante as a poet. Ultimately however, he shows that although his life has been difficult, he is still glad to have been on the earth and perceived it as a poet. So paradoxically Mandelstam still provides affirmation not available to Lowell.

Finally, there is evidence that Mandelstam's poem 'Tristia' was originally to play a part in the 'Long Summer' sequence. This is important when one considers that 'Tristia' contains the phrase that encapsulates much of Mandelstam's critical theory: 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight' (Obolensky, p. 358).

There are four versions of 'Tristia' in the Lowell drafts; one is in 'Long Summer (10)', and the rest are in 'Uncollected Translations'. Again a comparison with Obolensky suggests he is the source, though Lowell has changed the language more than in the previously discussed poems. Here is Lowell's version in drafts of 'Long Summer (10)':

To learn the craft of parting, when the night's
sobbing and groaning, and the girl's hair falls
loose...

The oxen chew and expectation mounts--
the last hour of the small town's vigil,
and I revere the rites of that night,
when cocks were crowing, and the eyes were red

with crying, lifting loads of itinerant sorrow,
gazing into the distance, and a woman's
weeping mingling with the muses weeping.

And when the word is said, who knows what kind
of separation is in store for us;
what the cock's crowing augurs, when the fire
burns on the cold acropolis, and why
at the dawn of some new life, the ox
chewing lazily in some shed, the cock,
life's herald flaps his wings on the town hall.

I like the craft of spinning, when the shuttle
moves to and fro, and the long spindle hums--
look, barefoot Delia flies to meet you, light
as swansdown. O how scanty are the words
for joy, that thin foundation of our life
All was before, all will be done again;
only the moment of recognition shines.

As is, as is a little figurine
lies, like a stretched out squirrel skin
on a clean clay dish; a girl is gazing
is bending down above the wax. It's not
for us to tell true fortunes of the next world.
Wax is for women what bronze is for men;
only in battle does the lot fall on man,
to women it's given to die while telling fortunes.

(TS. 2370 p. 1 (b))

There is little variation between this and most of the other
versions though the variety with which he translates
Mandelstam's 'famous' line is striking, suggesting, if
nothing else, that Lowell was intrigued by it: 'All
this/before, all this to be copied from the model--/only the
flash of recognition burns' (TS 2779, p. 3); 'all was
already in the old house. All will be repeated./Only sweet
to us, the crashing moment of recognition' (TS. 2779, p.
25); 'All this/ before, all this to copied from the model--
/only the fizzle of separation burns' (TS. 2779, p. 26).

The following version in 'Uncollected Translations' though
it has little poetic merit, is in my view worth reading to
see Lowell absorbing Mandelstam's context into his own:

Departure

I have my PhD in the science of parting-
the mussed sweater, the crushed permanent,
the stilted tip-toe with a suitcase down the
fire-escape....
All night the oxen masticated mash, and tension
increased
till the thinning hour of the town cop's last round, and
the daybreak rooster's daily denial,
when our eyes looked into the distance,
and your weeping joined the upper register of the
muses.

Who can know parting just by hearing the word?
what kind of farewell is waiting for us
what the outcry of the cock promises us,
when the fire burns down on the Acropolis,
on the vee of some new life,
when the ox chews lazily in the passage,
why the cock, the herald of new life,
beats his wing on the city wall?

I like the balance of vacancy-
the shuttle shuttles, the spindle hums-
already the ravishing Delia flees
like a chorus of swans.
How poor the language of joy,
how scarce the bans of our life-
all was already in the old house. All will be
repeated.

Only sweet to us, the crashing moment of recognition
How transient the boastful silhouette,
the gulping from a poor clay plate under candles,
the sweater clotted like a squirrel's fur,
the virgin bent over wax candles!
It's not up to us. to go on guessing about Erebus,
some way to emerge like heroes in bronze.
For us, only battles. Our life is held to them;
we are allowed to die guessing.

(TS. 2779, p. 25)

Mandelstam's 'Tristia' is about parting in a specific context, that of exile. Exile for nonconformity is nothing new for the Russian writer. Mandelstam was only being given similar treatment to that of Pushkin in the nineteenth century. The poem takes as its inspiration another famous

exiled poet, Ovid.¹⁸² Lowell gives the theme of parting a different slant. His opening suggests an illicit affair by way of the strewn clothing, 'the mussed sweater, the crushed permanent', reminiscent of numerous poems in Notebook which describe discarded clothes. Take, for example, the poem 'Leaving' (also notably about departure), 'her discards sacred, the hairpin, light hair on the blanket' (p. 34). There is also a suggestion of illicitness that a quick escape must be made through the back door, 'the stilted tip-toe with a suitcase down the fire-escape...'. For me, the only other lines of interest are towards the end of the poem. Here are Obolensky's lines followed by Lowell's:

It is not for us to tell fortunes about the Greek Erebus;
wax is for women what bronze is for men. It is only in
battle that the lot falls upon us; but to them it is
given to die while telling fortunes.

(p. 358)

It's not up to us to go on guessing about Erebus,
some way to emerge like heros in bronze.
For us only battles. Our life is held to them;
we are allowed to die guessing.

(Lowell)

Lowell's interpretation provides a definition of women which is similarly shown in Notebook. Here man is to a degree dependent on women's power; in this case the power of prediction. The suggestion in Lowell's lines, however, is that women have the key to knowledge unavailable to men. Women's superiority is seen on a number of occasions in Notebook: 'O why was I born of woman? Never to reach their eye-level,/seeing the women's mouths while my date delays in the john' (p. 36). and 'They'll keep us to the road/from chapel to graveyard' (p. 39). Although I do not feel this

¹⁸² For a detailed discussion of the connections with Ovid see both Victor Terras, 'Classical Motives in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam,' Slavonic and East European Journal, 10 (1966), 251-67, in particular pp. 255-260, and Clarence Brown, Mandelstam, pp. 270-275.

In the north here, in my own country and free;
look on it with a jaundiced eye, you'll see
the south's declining manhood, openly
deliquescent in its corn, and far from Egypt,
some couple, one in love and profit, with
its children and its slaves the size of children,
supple and gentle as giraffes or newts,
her waist still willowy; her paint still fresh,
decorum without hardness, no girdle on
the woman, no armor on the man,
their tomb protected, even purified
by burial in the desert, saying 'All this,
all this has happened, will again'. Leave
one model, dynasties of faulty copies."

(TS. 2370, p. 3 (b))

Their tomb protected even purified
this couple, one in love and profit, saying,
'all this has happened, will again.' We leave
one model, dynasties of faulty copies with
their children, and their slaves the size of children
decorum without hardness, no armor on
the man, no girdle on the woman
supple and gentle as giraffes or newts,
her waist still willowy, her paint still fresh

(TS. 2376, p. 25 (b))

The use of Mandelstam's words in these two drafts is verging on the sacrilegious: Mandelstam's encapsulation of the unification of language, culture and time becomes a means of reiterating the negative forces of history. Mandelstam, in stating, 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight', suggests that affirmation can be achieved by establishing contact between the past and the present. The use of the inclusive 'all' also implies time is not causal but transcendental-- everything has both happened and is yet to happen. Lowell's use of Mandelstam's line simply reinforces that there is no escape from the destructive process of history, for the 'master catwalking lightly through his conquests' is both part of the past and of that which is to come. Therefore, in the use of Mandelstam's language here, unlike the echo in poem (10), Lowell is reinforcing his own nihilism rather than escaping from it.

The second Notebook line inspired by Mandelstam is the single line, 'The great beast clanks its chain of vertebrae' in the poem 'The Walk' (p. 40). This is all that remains of the Mandelstam poem 'The Age' in Notebook, but, as with poem (10), drafts show that Lowell attempted various translations before reducing the poem's presence to a single reference in Notebook. Here is the Obolensky version Lowell made use of:

My age, my beast, who will be able to look into the pupils of your eyes and stick together the vertebrae of two centuries with his blood? The blood that builds gushes out of earthly things; the parasite only trembles on the threshold of the new days.

The creature, so long as it has enough life left, must carry the backbone to the end; and a wave plays upon the invisible spine. Once again life's vertex has been sacrificed like a lamb, as though it were a child's tender cartilage--the age of the earth's infancy.

In order to wrest life from captivity and start a new world the figures of knotty days must be linked together by means of a flute. It's the age rocking the wave with man's anguish; and a viper in the grass breathes the golden measure of the age.

And the buds will swell again, and the green shoots will sprout. But your spine has been smashed, my beautiful, pitiful age. And you look back, cruel and weak, with an inane smile, like a beast that has once been supple at the tracks left by your own paws.¹⁸³

This is one of Mandelstam's most moving poems, describing the fate of Russia with the advance of the Revolution. It was printed in December 1922. This is significant, for the following year, 1923, marks the beginning of Mandelstam's fall from grace. What is surprising is that it was printed at all. The poem expresses Mandelstam's anguish at the way the Revolution has put the world out of joint. There is little hope expressed. He asks how the world is to be rebuilt and even offers a solution, saying that it can only

¹⁸³ No. 135, M.I, pp. 102-103, Obolensky, pp. 361-362.

be put right through poetry, yet the poem does little to suggest that a cure is realisable, because of the poems' negative images.

The opening stanza presents the metaphor of the beast as the age. The image is moving because the beast is immense yet vulnerable, exploited and weak. There is an intensely personal note set in the opening, a tone comparable to Lowell's personal voice in Notebook. The idea of the beast with a broken backbone is here to show the way the normal passage of life has been destroyed by the Revolution. The backbone supports the spinal cord and the main nervous system. Just as we saw in 'Unknown Soldier', Mandelstam uses the image of the nervous system to reinforce the power of human intellect. The nervous system enables poetic perception. If this is severed then man's perception is destroyed. Here the image is used in a complex way. Time is represented by the backbone and various periods of history by the vertebrae. Mandelstam, in asking who will be able to join up the two vertebrae, is asking who will be able to restore continuity between the nineteenth and twentieth century. The greatest crime of the Revolution is that it has destroyed the continuity of culture. The poem continues the theme, seen in other Mandelstam poems, of a schism created between the modern age and the Age of Pushkin, so frequently portrayed as the death of the sun.

There is little hope expressed in the poem, for the vertebrae can only be joined by one prepared to express the truth, brave enough to look the beast straight in the eyes and prepared to shed blood. Mandelstam's use of the word 'blood' has analogies with Lowell's. They both use it to represent the source and means of destroying life as well as a symbol of poetic creativity. The age is described as full of parasites prepared to ride on its destructive force. The portrayal of the backbone as the undeveloped 'cartilage of a child' adds poignancy to the description. Mandelstam's survival is implicated in poetry, for it is only by means of

a flute that a cure can be carried out. Although the poem reflects almost total pessimism it illustrates the way in which such pessimism differs from Lowell's: Mandelstam's resulting from external events, Lowell's internally driven. The poem provides a fine example of Mandelstam's total lack of compromise at what the twentieth century in Russia has done to all he considers sacred, and we are left in little doubt as to who will endeavour to create the flute which can effect a cure, even while fully aware of the futility of the attempt.

There is no indication in the drafts that Lowell intended the poem to be in Notebook. There are two drafts of the poem, both in Uncollected poems (TS. 2759 and 2760, p. 4). In these two drafts Lowell experiments with putting the Obolensky prose versions in different stanza forms. We have already seen how he reshaped 'Sleeplessness' into sonnet form. In the 'Age' drafts, Lowell retains the eight-line stanzas of the original Russian poem. The eight line Marvellian stanza is one after his own heart and was used for the majority of poems in the volume which preceded Notebook in 1967, Near the Ocean:

My Age

My Age, my beast, who will look
in your blank white eyes, and stick
together two centuries
of vertebrae with his blood?
The blood that builds us flows
from earthly things; the parasite
can only wait trembling
on the threshold of the new day.

The creature, so long as enough
life's left, must carry the backbone
to the end; and a wave plays
upon the invisible spine.
Life's vertex is sacrificed
like a lamb, as if it were
a child's tender cartilage--
in the age of the earth's infancy.

To start a new world, to wrest
life from captivity,

the figures of knotty days
must be danced together by a flute.
It's the age rocking the wave
with man's anguish; the viper
in the black grass breathes
the measure of the golden age.

And the buds will swell again,
and the green shoots will sprout,
but your long spine has been smashed,
my beautiful, pitiful age.
You look back, cruel
and weak, with an inane smile,
like a beast who has once been supple,
at the spoor left by your paws.

(TS. 2759)

A comparison between Lowell's version and Obolensky's shows that Lowell's is almost totally faithful to Obolensky's prose version. One can only speculate on what Lowell was attempting here. He may have had intentions of working on the original in the way he did with 'Sleeplessness' or he may simply have wished to read Mandelstam's poem in a poetic structure.

Although I have suggested that Lowell and Mandelstam's pessimism are of very different kinds, Lowell's poetry does show common characteristics between his own and Mandelstam's perceptions of history. The major difference, in my view, is that Lowell's pessimistic view of civilisation is total, showing history as negative. Mandelstam, on the other hand, argues that it is the current period in Russian history that is destroying that which is admirable. Nevertheless, Lowell makes use of Mandelstam's pessimistic argument and incorporates it into his own perception of history when he refers to the beast image. In this way he establishes a link between Mandelstam's perception of immediate history and his own general concept of history.

Lowell refers to Mandelstam's poem 'Age' in 'The Walk', discussed in chapter four:

Those days no casus belli on earth to fight,
 except the familial, hidden, fundamental--
 walks that married us to ourselves or a girl,
 tomorrow that promised to die content.
 The willow stump puts out thin wands in leaf,
 A green and fleeting taste of unmerited joy,
 the first garden, each morning, the first man,
 the birds are laughing in the distant trees,
 the Manichaeian South of Wars and orchards.
 I am a free man, no one serves me; earth,
 the great beast clanks its chain or vertebrae....
 A true conservative hates change per se.
 At the end of the long walk, your old dog dies of
 joy
 whenever you sit down, a poor man at the fire.

(p. 40)

The walk, as discussed earlier, is Lowell's individual and public passage through history. Lowell is therefore connecting his own perception of history with the destroyed age of Mandelstam's poem. The poem is quite complex but made clearer if one accepts the consistency of Lowell's views on time, aging and history, as they appear in Notebook. The walk begins as an encounter with youthful images of hope, 'the willow stump puts out green wands in leaf', but ultimately is a chained walk of duty. The youthful description of the age provides subtle echoes of Madelstam's youthful age, 'as though it were a child's tender cartilage--the age of the earth's infancy.' This personal walk is implicated in the reactionary processes of history. By way of the Mandelstam reference, Lowell is incorporating the negative implications of Russian history, during Mandelstam's lifetime, into his own generally negative perspective on history. In the poem we also see Lowell connecting himself more intimately to the beast image than Mandelstam does in his own poem. This is suggested where he ironically describes himself as free, 'I am a free man, no one serves me' and then immediately contradicts such freedom with the image of the earth imprisoned, 'earth,/the great beast clanks its chain or vertebrae'. Note also that Lowell

'Pastime' is one of the many Notebook poems which touch on sleep and dreams. Both experiences provide a means of either stepping into the past or future, or gaining an experience of timelessness. In 'Oversleeping' for example, 'This glorious oversleeping into Sunday' leads to contemplation of 'a better world, Utopia far beyond/the bicker of abstracts, the Bomb's farsighted vigil' (p. 135). In 'Memorial Day' Lowell describes how sleep enables rapid time shifts, 'Sometimes I sink a thousand centuries,/bone tired or stone asleep, to sleep ten seconds--'(p. 195). In the above poem, 'Pastime', the description of time is similar to that described by Plotinus, when Lowell states, 'if such sleep lasts I touch eternity'. This suggests that permanent sleep would provide release from causal time. The knowledge that Lowell was aware of Mandelstam's 'all was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight', places parts of this poem in a new light, for it suggests that the lines, 'this, its pulse-stop, must have been before' and, 'this has been before/the sting of touching past time by dropping off' may well have been inspired by Mandelstam's line. Before we saw Lowell describing history as something you cannot 'touch', but here through sleep one can both 'touch eternity' and 'past time'. For me, this use of 'touch' is synonymous with Mandelstam's recognition--the point where all past, present and future experience coincide. One can see a connection between this poem and 'Memorial Day', for both poems describe young voices which are eternally present in sleep. 'Pastime' describes the 'voices of schoolboys... they are always ours' and in 'Memorial Day' there is, 'voices, their future voices, adolescents/go crowding through the chilling open windows' (p. 195). The present time of 'Pastime' is free of causality because the present itself is seen as timeless: 'voices which are always ours', the hour which is 'always optional recess'. Note also the philosophical implications of 'Pastime'. Sleep also provides access to

'Truth' unavailable when awake: 'what is true is not real: I here, this bed here, this hour here', 'when Truth says good morning, it means goodbye--'.

A second poem, 'Out of the Picture' from the sequence 'Closing', again draws on Mandelstam's 'famous' line :

Tank. A camel blotting up the water.
God with whom nothing is voulu or design.
The lay-off...the Sun-day now all seven, a trek
for the great image held behind Blue Hill,
the flower of Eden unchanged, since spoiled,
the girl holding the sunset apple, life-class
unchanged...
white as a white cake of soap in the dingy
bathlight.
Things have been felt before, before today:
the joyless stupor...Orpheus in Genesis--
he hashed words from brute sound, he taught his sons
English
plucked all the flowers, deflowered all the girls
with the exaggeration of a Negro,
with too many words. His sons killed and ate him;
we dance round the cookout with festal gaiety.

(pp. 256-257)

Much of this poem is rather obscure but again once can see a Mandelstamian presence in 'things have been felt before, before today' and all the connected images of timelessness: 'the flower of Eden unchanged, since spoiled,/the girl holding the sunset apple, life-class unchanged.' The third example is in 'Mexico (6)':

Midwinter in Mexico, yet the tall red flowers
stand up on may trees, and all's in leaf:
twilight bakes the wall-brick large as a loaf of
bread--
Somewhere I must have met this feverish pink before,
and knew its message;

(p. 103)

Here one senses Mandelstam's subtle presence--almost at the edge of Lowell's consciousness. Mandelstam, one feels, would be able to make sense of these elusive images and the 'message' they provide, whereas for Lowell they seem to hover just out of reach. This moment of possible insight is then lost as the poem moves to the opposite viewpoint: 'No moment comes back to hand, not twice, not once.'

Because of the subtle and complex web of connections in Notebook, Mandelstam's 'ghost' seems inexplicably present in certain lines, and the theme of recognition hidden behind the numerous references to 'many things' which run through the volume. This may be due simply to the reference to 'things' in the line from 'Out of the Picture': 'Things have been felt before, before today'. 'Harriet (4)' describes 'the freckled, knuckled skull, /bronzed by decay, by many, many suns...' (pp. 22-23); in 'Long summer (12)' 'sun falls on so many other things,' (pp. 29-30) and in 'Dear Sorrow' 'Our love will not come back on fortune's wheel; /this room will dim and die as we dim and die /to the many things...are the many things' (p. 143). This theme of 'many things', is then in turn made to connect more typically with Lowell's pessimism in 'In the Forties (3)': 'down the warpaths to wives and twenty children-- /many of them, too many, love, to count... /born to fill up graveyards... thick as sticks.' (p. 85) and in 'Half a Century Gone': 'how many millions gone--' (p. 260). These resonances contribute to a feeling that although Mandelstam's overt presence in the volume is slight the implications of his language are substantial.

The analogies between poetry and the earth's crust seem infinite. Mandelstam describes poetry as 'the plough that turns up time in such a way that abyssal strata of time, its black earth, appears on the surface.' ('Word and Culture', p. 113). Emerson describes language as 'fossil poetry' ('The Poet,' P. 162). Seamus Heaney, reminds us of Michael Longley's view of poetic inspiration as 'igneous' and poetic craft as 'sedimentary' ('Lowell's Command,' p. 1). I

therefore feel justified in using earth metaphors to describe Lowell's encounter with Mandelstam in Notebook. If one scours the Notebook landscape, Mandelstam's presence is hard to unearth, but dig beneath the surface and rich deposits are discovered. Lowell's drafts of Mandelstam's poems in Notebook reveal points of contact between Mandelstam and Lowell's consciousness and show the subtle ways Mandelstam's poetry has been absorbed into Lowell's. Much has been drafted out but one feels the permanent impact Mandelstam has exerted on Lowell. Lowell's feelings of a language which eludes him are all the more poignant as he catches glimpses of what might lead to the transcendence and affirmation so available to Mandelstam.

Conclusion

For Lowell, the idiosyncrasies of each foreign poet he encountered were a means of gaining new insights into his own poetry, providing what he called, 'the feeling of discovery of what we lack'. Such is certainly true of his encounter with Mandelstam. Though, at first, Lowell was drawn to Mandelstam's poetry for what it had in common with his own, ultimately Mandelstam's 'directed way' sustained Lowell's interest by making him more conscious of what he lacked: belief in the power of language to express experience. By the writing of Notebook this concern about language increased as the 'experience' he wished to describe in his poetry became more inclusive, incorporating a need for a unifying definition of all culture. Apart from brief transcendental moments, he is described trapped within language, expressing personal and poetic failure. Mandelstam's poetry and critical prose--whose theory of the word shows language able to provide cultural synthesis--epitomise the successful realisation of language which is transcendental and affirmative, thus providing Lowell with a shining example of what is elusive in his own work.

However, Lowell's interest in Mandelstam came in the aftermath of Imitations, when he was more involved in translation for its own sake than in his own poetry. Imitations in 1961 had gained him the Harriet Monroe Memorial Prize and Phaedra in 1962 the Bollingen Translation Prize. Lowell's status as a translation poet couldn't have been higher when he produced his Mandelstam translations in 1963/65. His own poetry had earned him the right to write 'Imitations' rather than 'literal' translations and his translation awards had endorsed this privilege. The resulting Mandelstam and Akhmatova translations point to

both the value and danger of such privilege. His intelligent empathy with Mandelstam's poetry produced excellent results, whereas his interpretation of Akhmatova's 'Requiem', due to his lack^{of} empathy with her plight, was less effective.

In all the translation discussed, Lowell attempts to interpret the poetry rather than just translating the words. Lowell's Mandelstam translations reflect all the poet's superior language skills: the use of natural language rather than 'dictionary' words; the use of good prose as the poem's base; and the skill to provide a new structure to replace that which is lost in translation. This last skill sets Lowell apart from the other translators. His altering of stanzaic structure, repetition of words and phrases, and introduction of various patternings of sound are all the means whereby he gives the resulting translations cohesion. In the case of Mandelstam's poetry, it is particularly important to provide a new structure, for his frequent use of free association often means that the original relies greatly on metre and sound for the poem's success. However, an examination of 'Requiem' shows that although many of Lowell's poetic skills are present, his poetic ego was unable to remain dormant to allow Akhmatova's more transparent language to come through. Indeed, his male ego, shows an equally unwelcome presence in this poem which describes the universalised predicament of Russian women during the purges with such poignancy.

As far as Lowell's involvement with Mandelstam's poetry was concerned in the 1963/65 translations, the common points of contact, or empathy with the poetry were not so much reflected in the themes, which began initially as fairly superficial points of access, but more through Lowell's treatment of the language itself. Frequently, the freer Lowell's interpretation and the more varied the drafts, the more involved he appeared to be with a particular poem.

Lowell seemed to gain the greatest pleasure from interpreting Mandelstam's difficult imagery and in working with his concrete detail. He was often able to clarify difficult imagery and, either reinterpret Mandelstam's concrete detail in the light of his own setting, or enhance it by making it even more concrete than in the original. The predominance of Mandelstam's final poetry in Lowell's selection for translation provided the roots for a more profound encounter with Mandelstam's poetry. Lowell found inspiration in the defiance in Mandelstam's voice as his external circumstances became more severe, and as Olga Carlisle described it, paradoxically this characteristic made Lowell optimistic about the survival of poetry.

From 1967 onwards we see Lowell once more absorbed in his own poetic concerns, the nature of the Notebook project making all his experience--his reading, friendships, memories, and so on--participate in this volume which aimed to be an inclusive expression of the self. Lowell's comment to Carne-Ross about translation--'a feeling of discovery of what we lack'--was, in fact, made in 1968 when Lowell was working on Notebook. Indeed, Carne-Ross points out in the interview, 'When I went to see him, he was busy with Mandelstam again' (p. 165). Mandelstam's poetry and poetics certainly had a role to play in the Notebook design. My exploration of Mandelstam's work in relation to Notebook becomes partly an account of overt influences, partly a comparative study of the two poets.

My discussion of Lowell's and Mandelstam's contrasting treatments of dualism claims to do no more initiate a discussion on the subject. The 'cerebral' nature of both their interests meant they perceived and wrote about dualism in a variety of ways, linguistic, theological and philosophical, influenced by wealth of sources. In the case of Lowell, names such as Dante, William James, the

Transcendentalists--Emerson and Thoreau, Jonathan Edwards, and Santayana, immediately spring to mind. In the case of Mandelstam one thinks of Dante, Pushkin, Bergson, German Idealists such as Schelling, along with Vissarion Belinsky, and Peter Chaadayev. There is certainly scope for further exploration of this contrast between the two poets. My aim was simply to provide a framework within which it was possible to compare them both.

The comparison between Mandelstam and Lowell was made in an attempt to make an informed guess about what attracted Lowell to Mandelstam's work. However, comparative studies are, I believe, valuable in their own right. Placing writers of different cultures side by side for comparison, may provide the critic, as much as the poet, with a 'feeling of discovery' not only of what a poet may 'lack' but also what the critic 'lacks' in the way of critical method. By way of example, subtextual analysis--whether uncovering allusions in the poetry or exploring polysemous language--is readily associated with Mandelstam's work. However, Subtextual analysis is equally revealing of Lowell's poetry. Thus the comparison between Mandelstam and Lowell led to a discussion of Lowell's use of the polysemous word, and consequently shed new light on Notebook. For this reason, a concordance, so readily seen as crucial to any study of Mandelstam's work, should be equally valued as a tool for examining Lowell's poetry.

In exploring the polysemous use of words it was necessary to be thematic. This was not so that one can, in Lowell's Notebook, 'move in his circles' as Yenser argues, but so that Lowell's language can be read with a new awareness as certain words become 'weighted' with meaning. Consider once again, by way of example, the opening to 'Through the Night (2)':

The thick-skinned leaf flickers along its veins
and shakes a little on the stiff, tense twig,

dancing its weekend jig in blood--Thank God;
for at the window of my house I looked,
I saw you walking with the simple ones,
in the twilight, in the evening, in the black, in the
night;

(p. 44)

The words 'leaf', 'blood', 'window', 'walk' and 'night' can all now be read with a greater awareness of their uses elsewhere. Thus, although not overtly stated, one cannot read the reference to 'leaves' and 'blood' without thinking of the associations they have with Lowell's creative powers and his painful sense of a divided self. Because of our knowledge of 'blood' in other poems, we know that it is used to establish a relationship between existence and writing, both of which are painful to deal with. The flow of blood further connects with Lowell's place in history; he is the individual flow participating in the universal transcendent flow of the river. One also sees Lowell looking from the 'window' of his house which is the window of divided perception, and of his public, cultural and historical self. The woman's liberated walk prepares us for the transcendental lovers' walks of other poems in Notebook. Finally we have Lowell's liberated night, his time of release from guilt. Thus, in the poem we experience the reverberations of Notebook's polysemous word. So, although Notebook is a reflection of how Lowell fails to transcend language in the way that Mandelstam was able to do, his language does possess what Steiner described as an ability to 'wake into resonance its entire previous history'. To this extent Lowell is successful in making words act in the way Mandelstam perceived: 'it turns out that the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road'. Reverberations of these 'special' Notebook words might also be valuably explored forward and backward into other Lowell volumes.

The other value of the examination of language in Notebook is to provide evidence that Lowell was attracted to Mandelstam's poetry because it epitomised much that was lacking in Lowell's own poetry. One cannot know with absolute certainty that Lowell was drawn to Mandelstam's work for this reason, but Notebook does present a startlingly consistent view of Lowell's divided self, and this self is the antithesis of Mandelstam's poetic persona. The fact that Notebook reads as a very honest book, adds weight to the argument. One is left with the impression, that Lowell has given an accurate view of his poetic concerns in the years 1967-70, describing his experience with an inclusiveness not reached elsewhere in his work. Added to this, there can be little doubt that Lowell was conscious of the striking contrast between his poetry and Mandelstam's. The difference in tone between the two writers is not subtle, and we know Lowell was familiar with at least two of Mandelstam's most famous calm, affirmative statements: 'All was before, all will be repeated again, and only the moment of recognition brings us delight', and 'We shall meet again in Petersburg, as though we had buried the sun there, and utter for the first time the blessed and meaningless word'.

Along with what can be learned from Lowell's state of mind as reflected in Notebook, much can also be discovered by examining the Mandelstam drafts in this volume. Olga Carlisle noted that, when Lowell was getting involved with Pasternak's work, he made connections between his own experience and Pasternak's, as well as connecting Pasternak's various experiences through his three-in-one translation 'Hamlet'. We also see Lowell making connections in his use of Mandelstam translations in Notebook. In 'Long Summer (10)', for example, Lowell merges Mandelstam's sleepy meditation on Homer's Iliad with his own listlessness as he gazes on the Maine coastline. Thus, just as Lowell's

polysemous use of language enabled him to make connections between his own diverse experiences, so his use of Mandelstam allusion enables him to experience recognition between his own experience, Mandelstam's and indeed Homer's.

Finally, Lowell's use of Mandelstam's poetry in Notebook is, at first sight, the most puzzling. One is struck by the large number of Mandelstam translations present in the Notebook drafts and can only speculate on why most of them were removed. Elsewhere Lowell had kept whole translations and allowed them to be absorbed into the Notebook design. So, why didn't Lowell simply 'steal' Mandelstam's language in order to gain a release from his own?

Lowell's drafting out of Mandelstam may have resulted from Lowell's acceptance of his own voice. Just as Lowell was able to gain a 'feeling of discovery' of what his poetry 'lacked', so presumably he could be made equally aware of what his poetry possessed. Likewise the reader is made more aware of what is distinctive about Lowell's poetry. To be successful, poets can only be themselves. Lowell and Mandelstam both have the power to move us, but in different ways. Lowell told Helen Vendler that he would have liked his poetry to be described as 'heartbreaking'; an epithet which captures the right note of poignancy. For me, this quality is achieved by way of Lowell's expressions of personal and poetic failure. Perhaps Lowell himself became more conscious of this quality in his work, set beside the inspirational ideal of Osip Mandelstam. In the Notebook poem, 'Obit', Lowell's voice does not ring true when he describes himself 'with and for myself in my otherness'--a tone more comparable to Mandelstam's, 'for the blessed and meaningless word I shall pray in the Soviet night'. This is not the tone we want from Lowell--this is Lowell lobotomised. Lowell's struggle with language is his voice,

his poetry. The fact that Lowell won't let us enjoy the transcendent moments of sequences such as 'Mexico', without providing reminders of his more typical experience, further develops the poetry's power to move us. His descriptions of what he can't do and can't see--his poetry of questioning--are characteristics of his poetry at its best. This is the harrowing voice of 'Epilogue', the final poem of Day By Day:

Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme--
why are they no help to me now
I want to make something imagined not recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:
The painter's vision is not a lens,
it trembles to caress the light.
But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.

(p. 127)

Why then does Lowell use any of Mandelstam's language in Notebook? Mandelstam's echo in 'Long Summer (10)' did provide Lowell escape from his own language, providing a contrast to the rest of the sequence. For the most part however, the Mandelstam resonances are not there as a release from Lowell's language but a further means of developing dualistic language that moves us. Lowell at his best presents himself on the edge of a transcendent experience. He uses Mandelstam echoes and half echoes to

reinforce this elusiveness. Mandelstam's 'ghost' weaves through the book with snippets of transcendent language which Lowell conveys to our ear in snatches, but with a sense that the language describes experiences just at the edge of his consciousness, either glimpsed in sleep or as half understood messages: 'If such sleep lasts, I touch eternity./This its pulse-stop, must have been before' (p. 144), 'Things have been felt before, before today' (p. 256), and 'Somewhere I must have met this feverish pink before, and knew its message' (p. 103).

Poetic failure is the subject matter of Lowell's poetry and the means whereby he, as much as Mandelstam, suggests the power of the word to transcend itself. This is why Heaney was right to argue that Lowell's poetry provides: 'the sensation of a whole meaning simultaneously clicking shut and breaking open...that the fulfilments experienced in the ear spelled out meanings and fulfilments available in the world.' Lowell does--as far as poetry can--effectively express his experience with a unique quality of poignancy which makes his voice unmistakable.

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