Essay

Puritan Genealogies: Robert Lowell, Perry Miller, and the Postwar Jonathan Edwards

ANTHONY CORDINGLEY

ANTHONY CORDINGLEY is Robinson Fellow at the University of Sydney, on secondment from Université Paris 8, where he is associate professor in English and translation. He is the author of *Samuel Beckett's* How It Is*: Philosophy in Translation* (Edinburgh UP, 2018), and is a coeditor of *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* and the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (www.beckettarchive.org). His work in translation studies includes numerous articles and the volumes *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2013) and *Collaborative Translation: From the Renaissance to the Digital Age* (Bloomsbury, 2016). He recently completed a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship project, "Genetic Translation Studies," at KU Leuven's Centre for Translation Studies.

In a letter of 24 February 1955 to the poet Babette Deutsch, Robert Lowell describes the great Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards as "really a modest, rational, mystical sort of man—not all the terror and brimstone one I picture." The transformation of Edwards, from the bloodcurdling evangelist of the "sinner's last retreat" ("Mr. Edwards" 59), in Lowell's 1946 *Lord Weary's Castle*, to the spiritual shepherd of his 1962 "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts" (353–56),[1] has encouraged a tradition of reading Lowell's attitude toward Edwards as an index of his mental state. Yet if in 1955 Lowell acknowledges that he had previously distorted the historical Edwards for rhetorical ends, his speaker's attempt in 1962 to clear the sulfury vapors from the Puritan's true image is no more transparent. He visits the ghostly site of Edwards's congregation in western Massachusetts and recalls the heady days of spiritual conversions, the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s, and the Enfield sermon, before elegizing the outcast:

> I love you faded,
> old, exiled and afraid
> to leave your last flock, a dozen
> Houssatonic Indian children. (355)

These sentiments are commonly believed to track Lowell's shift to an intimate poetics of venial autography, which he maps onto the topoi of Puritan rhetoric and the disappointment of American millennialism.[2] Typically, Lowell's motivations have been read through the filter of Perry Miller's captivating postwar thesis of the Puritans' "errand into the Wilderness" (*Errand* 1–15).

PMLA 138.2 (2023), doi:10.1632/S0030812923000135

Miller's account of the Puritan origins of American exceptionalism had a powerful influence on postwar historiography and US culture more broadly. Its well-known formulation portrayed the first-generation Pilgrims who set out from England as an "organized task force of Christians" on a mission to "execut[e] a flank attack on the corruptions of Christendom" (*Errand* 11). They bore their torch to the New Jerusalem to complete the Reformation and lead the way to Christ's millennial reign on earth before the end of time. Alive still in the popular imagination, this thesis has nonetheless been progressively refuted since the 1980s, just as its celebration of Winthrop's 1630 sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," delivered aboard the *Arbella* to his fellow emigrants—"we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us" (295)—has been shown to decontextualize Winthrop's terms and occlude the Pilgrims' anxiety that New England would become synonymous not with errand but with error, not with freedom but with failure; for with visibility came vulnerability.[3] Scholarship on Lowell has yet to register these critiques; rather, it regularly enlists Lowell as a servant of the "errand."[4]

In a recent article in *PMLA*, Kamran Javadizadeh argues that Lowell's "confessional poetry" is underwritten by a "construction of whiteness, an identity that assumes its universality even as it anxiously apprehends its sovereignty to be under threat"; Lowell's lyrical "I" is a "singular self, discovered in established lines of American genealogy" within which Lowell "worked to erase . . . a living knowledge of what Saidiya Hartman has called 'the afterlife of slavery'" (477). Here, I find evidence to the contrary, that Lowell's "I" is a dialogic subject satirized within a poem that delivers a searing critique, first, of a Lowell family patriarchy that commodifies the suffering of slave and Indian and, second, of mid-century mythmakers, like Miller, who appropriate Edwards to perpetuate the logic of American expansionism and conjure visions of Cold War domination. If, indeed, Lowell is the "unofficial laureate for an age that cared little for poetry" (Rasula 252), one must understand the force of the laureate's protest at the emergent ideologies of his age.

In "Jonathan Edwards," Lowell brings Edwards into discourse with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophers Francis Bacon and Blaise Pascal to ironize his speaker's nostalgic Anglo-Puritan tropism; by doing so, Lowell affirms an alternative, cosmopolitan genealogy for his postwar American lyric.[5] But one cannot ignore the poet's evident sympathies for Edwards, and his mature exploration of the contradictions between his affective states and moral convictions, between his present and past selves, requires Lowell to enact a poetics of constant self-interrogation and moral renewal—one that challenges us, living in the information age, where ethically correct behavior or thinking is regularly assumed to be rapidly knowable within and enforceable by the public domain, to be wary of our evolving, contingent sense of rectitude.

Lowell and Miller: Biographers of Jonathan Edwards

In the 1940s both Lowell and Miller shared an intense interest in Edwards at a time when he was known for little more than the hellfire sermons of the Great Awakening. Separately, each embarked on a project to write Edwards's biography. Lowell spent the winter of 1942–43 with his wife, Jean Stafford, at the house of the Catholic New Critic and poet Allen Tate in Monteagle, Tennessee, where Lowell set to work, in his own words, "heaping up books on Jonathan Edwards and taking notes . . . looking at old leather-bound volumes on freedom of the will and so on" (qtd. in Seidel 52). For many months, he worked assiduously; yet the poet was never a historian, and he eventually abandoned the project.

The resurgence of interest in Edwards after World War II is a direct result of the work of Edwards's greatest champion: Miller argued consistently, from his 1949 intellectual biography, *Jonathan Edwards*, to the two chapters on Edwards in his widely read *Errand into the Wilderness* (three, if one counts "From Edwards to Emerson"), that Edwards had been unjustly portrayed and "was handicapped in debating against

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

minds of lesser compass, with the ironic result that he comes down to the generations as one opposed to scientific progress" (*Jonathan Edwards* 269). For Miller, Edwards is America's first true Calvinist, a defender of authentic Puritan values, whose theology was even more consistent than that of those who set out from Plymouth bound for their New Jerusalem (*Errand* 98). Persecuted, like his forebears, he revealed his moral valency: "He was striving, against immense handicaps, to express a new vision of the world in which the conflict of the spirit and the flesh, of the divine and the rational, which has shattered *and still shatters European culture*, could be resolved into a single perception of beauty" (Miller, Introduction 40; my emphasis). This vision of Edwards as the heroic artist engaged in a mythical struggle of enduring relevance in times of war is a recurrent trope in Miller's writing. In the introduction to his 1948 edition of Edwards's *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Miller presents Edwards as "the most sensitive stylist in American Puritanism," "an original, a creative spirit, a man of passion, of vision, of Miltonic grandeur" (5, 40). Published the following year, Miller's intellectual biography proclaims Edwards "one of those pure artists through whom the deepest urgencies of their age and their country become articulate"; Miller sustains the analogy with the greatest of all Puritan rhetoricians, claiming that "theology was Edwards' medium, as blank verse was Milton's" and canonizing Edwards as "one of America's five or six major artists," albeit one "who happened to work with ideas instead of with poems or novels" (*Jonathan Edwards* xi–xii). America's heroic Puritan poet was also its foremost mind, and by 1957 Miller would declare unequivocally that Edwards was "the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene" (General Editor's Note viii). Promoting Edwards as a homegrown philosopher of international importance went hand in hand with Miller's efforts to root the discourse of American exceptionalism in the founding of the nation. Miller's scholarship, though still influential, is now appreciated as historically contingent, the product of his support for US nationalism, wartime policy, and Cold War politics and of his respect for Calvinism, born from his frustration with the incapacity of liberalism to fight the rise of fascism in the 1930s.[6]

If Lowell achieved a degree of public notoriety as a contrarian Boston Brahmin when he declared himself a conscientious objector during World War II, sentenced to jail in October 1943 to serve for a year and a day, Miller, conversely, joined the military campaign with enthusiasm and a deep sense of national allegiance. He was recruited into the Office of Strategic Services—like many historians and academics—and completed his training at the new Psychological Warfare School in Washington in 1942. He was sent to Europe that year, returned the following, and left for a second tour of duty spanning 1943–45. After the war, Miller extended his wartime intelligence work by traveling to Europe and Asia for State Department diplomatic tours and placements (Guyatt 116–17). By the 1950s the Harvard historian was a prominent public intellectual; his books were widely read, and he was a regular contributor to *The Nation* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. In sharp contrast, Lowell's wartime poetry, published in the 1946 *Lord Weary's Castle*, is vehemently critical of the US military campaign in Europe and of US capitalism and its spiritual poverty. With unequivocal moral objectivism, he condemns the indiscriminate US bombing of thousands of innocent civilians in Europe as the final phase in the corruption of true Puritan ideals, which began as soon as the first Pilgrims set foot in the New World. When Jonathan Edwards appears first in these poems Satan-like, with a fanatical streak of Puritan violence, Lowell betrays his paradoxical fascination with and repulsion for Edwards, whose powerful rhetoric inspires Lowell's prophesies of cataclysmic, divine reprisal.

I have not discovered evidence of contact between Lowell and Miller before the 1950s, although the Pulitzer Prize–winning poems devoted to the subject of Miller's current book project in the late 1940s were not likely to have gone unnoticed by a member of the English department at Harvard University, an institution with a long and visible connection to the Lowell family. After his 1949 biography, Miller begins to associate

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Edwards with the Cold War, discovering a prophet of nuclear annihilation. In 1957, as general editor of the first volume of Edwards's *Works*, Miller relays old stereotypes about Edwards the firebrand orator, then digresses, "Recent events in world history have no doubt stimulated drastic re-examination of such complacent assumptions" (General Editor's Note viii). He immediately ponders whether the heightened relevance of Edwards is spurred by history or by the natural progression of ideas, concluding that in any case "we find today a new urgency to confront and reinterpret the historical philosophical and theological cruxes with which Edwards grappled so courageously" (viii). Miller offers up his own scholarship as a means both to explain and to legitimatize the revival of Puritan millennialism, connecting it with Edwards's concerns for the freedom of the will, divine wrath, and the threat of annihilation—an admission that supports Sacvan Bercovitch's view that Miller's own body of work constitutes "a twenty-year-long jeremiad" (*American Jeremiad* xxxviii).

Whether Lowell's anti-American jeremiads fueled Miller's imagination at a time when the United States felt itself to be threatened remains unknown. Certainly, the orbits of both men converged in 1954 when Lowell moved back to Boston to teach in the neighboring English department at Boston University. He was invited to read at Harvard in February 1955 (*Letters* 244), and the two began to move in common circles of intellectuals. In that year, Lowell's longtime friend and mentor Allen Tate began to teach literature at the Harvard summer school, as he did for the rest of the decade. In 1957 Tate wrote to Perry Miller expressing his concern about Lowell's mental health after reading the manuscript of Lowell's *Life Studies* poems (Von Hallberg 261n8). On 7 December 1957, Miller writes to Tate, "Since I am on the 'Personal Committee' of the Department, I knew all about your coming, and rejoiced" (Letter to Allen Tate). The Robert Lowell Papers in Harvard's Houghton Library show that, only three days before, Lowell had sent Miller copies of nineteen letters he received from George Santayana between 1947 and 1952. Lowell addresses Miller informally, "Dear Perry," and seeks the historian's advice on how the letters could be published. Whatever the nature of their personal acquaintance, Miller would have been intrigued by the young poet, who descended not only from America's first Puritan migrants—about whom Miller had just published a five-hundred-page tour de force—but also, separately, from Jonathan Edwards, "the greatest artist of the apocalypse" (Miller, *Errand* 233). It is difficult to imagine that Lowell could have resisted Miller's *Jonathan Edwards*, which had rapidly gained a reputation as the most serious and profound work on the subject of his ancestor. And there seems to be little reason for Lowell to have hidden his filiation from Edwards's foremost advocate when he offered it readily in the first letter he ever wrote to Santayana, on 12 January 1948: "Long long ago Jonathan Edwards was one of my ancestors" (*Letters* 79). This claim has solicited remarkably little comment and has generally been treated with suspicion. Lowell's biographers do not address the connection, and it has even been suggested that it was fabricated during a bout of mania (e.g., Wallingford 4; Hart 122). Genealogical records at the New England Historic Genealogical Society nonetheless confirm that, through his maternal grandmother, Mary Devereux, Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV was the fifth great-grandson of Jonathan Edwards.[7] In his work, Lowell drew extensively on the lives of his Puritan ancestors: his maternal grandfather, Arthur Winslow, descended from the Pilgrims Mary Chilton and Edward Winslow (the former arrived at Plymouth on the *Mayflower* in 1620, the latter on the *Fortune* in 1621), and Lowell's paternal line extended to another Massachusetts "first family," the Somerset Lowles. Edwards should therefore be understood as a distinct and powerful figure in Lowell's lifelong project to fabricate his genealogy into the drama of the nation.

Edwards's Conversion Narratives; or, The Psychiatric "Fix"

Allusions to Edwards's spiritual conversions in "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts" are crucial to understanding Lowell's ironic characterization of his poem's speaker. They align Edwards (and the speaker's sympathies) with, first, a wider

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tradition of disturbed mystic philosophers represented by Blaise Pascal and, second, modes of confessional discourse and biographical witnessing that are untrustworthy or insincere. In the process, Lowell evinces his debt to Miller's scholarship, which helped develop his acute awareness of the potential manipulation of Puritan rhetoric but whose imperialist topoi Lowell rejects. The postwar poetics of self-reckoning that Lowell substitutes for Miller's grand narrative of American exceptionalism occupies the rest of this essay; that is, I demonstrate how Lowell's poetic "I" consistently challenges the poet to evaluate his present ethical response to events or narratives Lowell once held dear, but whose ethical consequences render them untenable in the context of the poet's mature understanding.

The poem's portrait of the young Edwards harkens back to the arachnid imagery of the fire-and-brimstone Edwards that Lowell deployed in his *Lord Weary's Castle* poems "Mr. Edwards and the Spider" and "After the Surprising Conversions":

> As a boy, you built a booth
> in a swamp for prayer;
> lying on your back,
> you saw the spiders fly,
>
> basking at their ease,
> swimming from tree to tree—
> so high, they seemed tacked to the sky.
> You knew they would die.
>
> ("Jonathan Edwards" 354)

Lowell homes in on the child scientist in Edwards's "Of Insects" and his 1723 "Spider Letter,"[8] a figure well known today but who was new to a great many of Lowell's readers. Critics have noted that the source for Lowell's image is Edwards's later text "Personal Narrative." The "booth" in Lowell's poem confirms his close reading of "Personal Narrative," in which Edwards recounts his building "a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot, for a place of prayer" (57). In this short memoir Edwards's true "conversion" reveals to him "God's absolute sovereignty and justice" (59), an experience preceded by two "personal gracious awakening[s]" (DeProspo 193), which Edwards subsequently understands to be false impressions derived from the external, natural world (193–204).

Spiders, or their significance, are absent from "Personal Narrative"; Lowell's imagination has conflated two sources: he maps Edwards's dissection of his own faith in "Personal Narrative" over the early empirical observations on spiders documented in "Of Insects" and the 1723 "Spider Letter." In these texts Edwards deduces the ingenious means by which spiders cast threads to the air, flying in summer winds that nonetheless transport them out to sea, where they perish. "Mr. Edwards and the Spider" stages the scene:

> I saw the spiders marching through the air
> Swimming from tree to tree that mildewed day
> In latter August when the hay
> Came creaking to the barn. But where
> The wind is westerly,
> Where gnarled November makes the spiders fly
> Into the apparitions of the sky;
> They purpose nothing but their ease and die
> Urgently beating east to sunrise and the sea;
>
> What are we in the hands of the great God? (59)

In Edwards's spider texts, this natural phenomenon confirms the scientific beauty of God's divine plan: his engineering the death of the spiders ensures comfortable life on earth for humans, who would otherwise be overwhelmed, drowning in millions and millions of spiders. Lowell connects this theme with the spider of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked" (164)—and thus Edwards's anthropocentric view of God's regulation of the spider population comes to represent human vulnerability. By linking the spider of the early letter with that of the Enfield sermon, Lowell generates a meaning unarticulated by Edwards: God regulates the natural cycle of the spider to augur his terrible apocalypse, when the preterite will be cast into the pit of hell, as spiders are lost to sea.

Yet in 1962 Lowell frames the spider in a different light. No longer a metaphor for human

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

impotence in the face of God's wrath, the spider of "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts," observed by the boy in his "booth," is integrated into the scene of the adolescent's "self-righteous pleasure" in "Personal Narrative" (57). Instead of evoking the spider papers as testimony of Edwards's prodigious genius, Lowell aligns them with false conversions, misreadings of sense impressions, mistaken interpretations of the natural world. At the metatextual level, there is an evident self-critique of his former penchant for drawing metaphysical conclusions from images of arachnid Armageddon and, like the young Edwards, to "mistake it for grace" (57). Yet the tonality of the speaker's reminiscence does not at this point convey the sense that he is criticizing retrospectively Edwards's spider rhetoric.

The disjunction between the impression the speaker gives and the relational logic of Lowell's images imperils the transparency of the speaker's discourse. Lowell's dialogue with Miller's *Jonathan Edwards* becomes crucial for understanding how the poem proceeds:

> Poor country Berkeley at Yale,
> you saw the world was soul,
> the soul of God! The soul
> of Sarah Pierrepont!
>
> So filled with delight in the Great Being,
> she hardly cared for anything—
> walking the fields, sweetly singing,
> conversing with someone invisible.
>
> Then God's love shone in sun, moon and stars,
> on earth, in the waters,
> in the air, in the loose wind,
> which used to greatly fix your mind
>
> Often she saw you come home from a ride
> or a walk, your coat dotted with thoughts
> you had pinned there
> on slips of paper.
>
> ("Jonathan Edwards" 354)

In his biography, Miller argues stridently against a number of writers on Edwards who suggest or argue that certain of the young Puritan's idealist notions were owed to the influence of Berkeley. Miller charges them with the incapacity "to believe that anyone in primitive America could make such a leap unaided" and with "a reluctance to credit a mere boy with achieving such maturity" (*Jonathan Edwards* 61, 62). The way Miller interrogates assumptions about the influence of Berkeley, together with his diction—"primitive America" and "mere boy"—offers a strong link with Lowell's otherwise enigmatic designation of Edwards as a "Poor country Berkeley." The influence is evident in a typescript draft of the poem, in which Lowell underscores Edwards's independent genius. Miller argues that Edwards used Locke's own reasoning to conclude, as Berkeley did, that all qualities of objects are mental images, that Locke's primary qualities (extension and number, body and mobility) were not immune to his critique of the secondary (qualities like color or taste, dependent on the mental impressions of the receiver). Lowell's typescript draft reads: "Then at Yale, anticipating Berkeley / on Locke, I drove the senses in / and gave God all"; Lowell then reinforces the notion of Edwards's prodigious originality with an autograph revision, changing "anticipating" to"outdoing" ("Jonathan Edwards" [Robert Lowell Papers]). Lowell therefore echoes Miller in reversing the conventional belief in Edwards's debt to Berkeley.

Furthermore, Lowell's progression of ideas parallels the connections Miller forges between "Personal Narrative" and "Sarah Pierrepont," Edwards's apostrophe to his wife. Lowell's portrait of Pierrepont "filled with delight in the Great Being" (354) comes straight from "Sarah Pierrepont," as many have noted. His description of Edwards's state of enrapture is cobbled together from "Personal Narrative," as registered by Steven Gould Axelrod (265–66) but since overlooked: "The appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in *the sun, moon, and stars*; in the water, and all nature; which used *greatly to fix my mind*" (Edwards, "Personal Narrative" 60–61; my emphasis). Edwards achieves this state of quasi-mystical perception only after he has come to understand profoundly the meaning of God's sovereignty; this allows him

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to be comforted by the sound of thunderclaps, hearing in them the voice of God speaking to him, which in turn provokes his own chanting, alone in the wilderness. In their introduction to the 1935 *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, the most widely available selection of Edwards's writings in the 1940s, Clarence Henry Faust and Thomas Herbert Johnson affirm that Edwards's "Personal Narrative" "is more pantheistic than its author was perhaps consciously aware and points ahead to the Wordsworth who wrote 'Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower'" (cv), as well as to Emerson and Thoreau (420n5). Their sentiments are echoed by Ola Winslow, whose 1940 biography presents Edwards as a quasi-mystic (77–78). Miller, on the contrary, states categorically that it is "utterly incorrect . . . to call him, as he is often called, a 'mystic'" or to attribute to Edwards "the much-abused word mysticism" (*Jonathan Edwards* 193, 206). For Miller, "Personal Narrative" is neither a mystical text, nor is it, he argues, an autobiographical one; rather, it is a rhetorical incursion into a scientific debate, a "psychological investigation . . . not to the defence of emotion against reason, but to a winnowing out of the one pure spiritual emotion from the horde of imitations" (206). This analysis would resonate with the author of *Life Studies*, whose own mode of fictionalizing his self was, to his dismay, termed "confessional." Lowell's use of Edwards's "autobiographical" writing enters into dialogue with his own poetic explorations of self, belying any transparent autobiographical representation. Faust and Johnson's 110-page introduction is another of Lowell's sources, and the poet very likely also read Winslow's biography—to which he was perhaps even antagonistic—given that it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1941 and Lowell embarked on his own biography of Edwards in 1942. These sources offer contradictory interpretations of Edwards's autobiographical writing, no doubt contributing to Lowell's questioning the "mystical" nature of Edwards's experiences and also to the fact that the imagery of Edwards's conversion narratives had become *figurae* for an author fictionalizing his self.

In fact, Lowell connects this vision of a "pantheistic" communion with divine nature to another episode in the Edwardsian mythology: Edwards, his commentators repeat, would leave his home after the midday meal to meditate in the countryside; traveling on foot or on horseback, he would pin his thoughts to his coat so that, upon his return, these fragmented aide-mémoire would help him train his mind to remember and order his thoughts or rehearse his sermons. Lowell implies that from the precocious student of idealism and the scholar who enters nature to investigate the processes of his own thoughts emerges an apprentice "mystic" whose textbook approach (with its echoes of scholastic mnemonics) contrasts with Pierrepont's pure experience of the Great Being. Miller may have guided Lowell in this comparison, for he contrasts in detail the conversion narratives of Pierrepont and Edwards to underscore their profound difference. Miller not only relays Edwards's opinion —"He [Edwards] could not say that he was converted, but he could say that Sarah was" (*Jonathan Edwards* 208)—he also stresses why Edwards believed that his own awakening was corrupted: "Slowly he realized that he had gone about it by the book, trying to force himself through the stages marked out by seventeenth-century scholasticism, a method he now could see was 'miserable,' while Sarah Pierrepont, unlearned in technologia, simply possessed herself of a universal benevolence" (207). By 1725, in Miller's account, Edwards had formed the opinion that whether or not he had been actually converted, his fate would not now change; Edwards's "Personal Narrative" testifies to the false summits of his own awakening, his great anguish in coming to the conclusion that after scrutinizing the evidence he could be sure only of the corruption of his own heart. Miller poses the question that haunts Edwards's text: "Had he [Edwards] permanently disabled himself from encountering pure experience?" (*Jonathan Edwards* 207). Lowell evokes this anxiety with his reprisal of Edwards's affirmation that God's excellency "used greatly to fix my mind," a citation transported into the mid-century in its slangy punning on the psychological "fix," a further irony because this *fix* of nature is evidently inauthentic: the absence of will or ego in Pierrepont's awakening ("she hardly cared for

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

anything") contrasts acutely with the brooding Edwards, who longs for his spiritual hit.

Pierrepont has never been thought to figure among the panoply of Lowell's ancestors or to play a role in his mythologizing of his genealogy and nation. Yet Lowell descends as much from her as from Jonathan Edwards. In *Lord Weary's Castle*, Lowell challenges the diachronic mythology of the United States' Puritan origins when he lambastes his first-generation Pilgrim ancestors; he also leverages Edwards to castigate the "sins" of their erring offspring, all the while showing Edwards to fall victim to his own fanatical version of piety and moral rigidity. By contrast, Pierrepont occupies an Edwardsian ideal of sublime religious experience grounded in pure sensation. Her mind has not been corrupted by the Puritan technologia, the fusion of natural sciences, logic, cosmology, and theology, the "exercise in organizing the universe which every New England graduate, trained in logic, offered the faculty as proof of his literacy" (Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* 419). Yet Lowell is careful to frame this vision of Pierrepont as a female mystic from Edwards's perspective, as relayed by the speaker; Edwards equates the soul of the world with her soul, and her carefree bliss, "walking the fields, sweetly singing, / conversing with someone invisible," becomes a visible parody of a later Romantic cliché.

Edwards's naive idealization of his wife contrasts with her touching ministrations in the next stanza, when she welcomes him home by unpicking the notes he has sown into his coat. The speaker is framed ironically when affirming Edwards's egotism:

> You gave
> her Pompey, a negro slave,
> and eleven children.
> Yet people were spiders. . . .
> (Lowell, "Jonathan Edwards" 354)

Miller makes no mention of Pompey, and I have discovered this detail in only one other source by or about Edwards. Faust and Johnson's "Introduction" to the popular 1935 edition of Edwards's texts contrasts the haughty Edwards "[l]ost in contemplation" (xiii) with the endearing eccentric draped in his coat, notes attached. They flesh out the "affectionate husband and father, and devoted friend" of the letters and recorded conversations, whom they observe "now buying two pounds worth of jewelry for his wife, together with a negro slave, Pompey, and tobacco and pipes for himself" (xiii–xiv). Lowell subverts the significance that Faust and Johnson attribute to this ornamental "Pompey" by implying that for Edwards the purchase of a slave was as unremarkable as picking up a trinket for his wife or a lump of tobacco. The poet underscores, furthermore, the absurd New England practice of giving slaves classical names, and the charm of Edwards's aloof eccentricity cannot mask the gaudy racist caricature with which he is complicit. His speaker's quip, "Yet people were spiders," bites even deeper for Edwards's apparent ignorance of these meanings, and when the preacher appropriates for himself Pierrepont's painful delivery of his eleven children, Edwards is presented as barely distinguishing slave and spider from this new generation of Lowell's ancestors.

Remarkably, however, the tone of these stanzas betrays the recognizable voice of the poet of *Life Studies*, and the speaker's delicate arrangement of poignant moments from Edwards's life betokens Lowell's sympathy for his subject and a certain nostalgia for his earlier forays into Edwards's biography. Yet Edwards's fictionalized "mysticism" is equated with his idealistic as much as his egotistical projections, and the speaker's winsome portrait is undercut by its more sinister implications. The poet ventriloquizes himself, lacing his speaker's poetic naïveté with a critique that is at once self-satirizing and of wider ideological import. Edwards's patriarchal egotism and callous dehumanization of his black slave reframe the mid-century memorializing of the Puritan theologian and the way he has been instrumentalized within a thesis of Puritan origins that serves the logic of American expansionism.

Pascal's Coat; or, "The Bat-Wing of Insanity!"

Lowell's link between Edwards's experience and the hermeneutics of his coat evokes the life of another philosopher and mystic, Blaise Pascal, who

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

participated in the heretical Jansenist movement at Port-Royal in seventeenth-century France. Pascal is a key interlocutor here for three reasons: he strengthens Lowell's critique by drawing Edwards into a wider category of the deranged mystic, he aligns the speaker with a number of famous tropes of mystical conversion associated with unreliable biography, and, more broadly, he reveals alternative genealogies for Lowell's poetry itself, rendering Lowell's imaginative universe more cosmopolitan than his self-reflexive caricature of the "Pilgrim's blues" would suggest ("Jonathan Edwards" 353).

The colorful apocrypha of Pascal's life, known also to many eighteenth-century theologians, includes the story of Pascal's (second) conversion, the sublime *nuit de feu* ("night of fire") when God spoke to him. Pascal recorded this experience in a text of ecstatic fragments, the manuscript of which he then sewed into the lining of his coat. The "Mémorial," known apocryphally as "Pascal's amulet," opens, "'Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob,' / non des philosophes et des savants" ("'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob' / not of the philosophers or the scholars"; "Mémorial" 618; "Memorial" 333). Pascal's early biographers emphasize that in later life Pascal is said to have fallen into an extreme, absurd form of devotion that verged on madness. (His sister's "Vie de Pascal," which prefaced many editions of the *Pensées*, recounts, for instance, that Pascal came to wear a belt lined with nails over his bare skin and that whenever he suspected himself of an unholy thought, he would drive his elbows into his sides to punish himself.) In 1962 details of the mythology of Pascal's life were fresh in Lowell's mind, for his translation of Charles Baudelaire's "Le gouffre" ("The Abyss") was published in *Imitations* the year before publication of "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts." Lowell's version freely adapts Baudelaire's poem, within which Pascal is haunted by the sensation that he will tumble into an abyss that opens up beside him:

> Pascal's abyss went with him at his side,
> closer than blood—alas, activity,
> dreams, words, desire: all holes! On every side,
> spaces, the bat-wing of insanity!

This story derives from Pascal's "first conversion" in 1648: while crossing a bridge at Neuilly just outside Paris, Pascal's horses bolted, nearly launching his carriage into the Seine and leaving him hanging over the precipice. Pascal is said to have interpreted his survival as a miracle, although he was afterward haunted by the sensation that an abyss would open up by his bed or a chair. Lowell was evidently aware of the meaning of the verse that he chose to "imitate," and so it is fair to assume that he understood the details of both Pascal's first and second conversions. Indeed, Lowell's creative departure, "On every side, / spaces, the bat-wing of insanity!" for Baudelaire's "Et sur mon poil qui tout droit se relève / Mainte fois de la Peur je sens passer le vent" ("and many a time I feel / My hair stand up, brushed by the wind of Fear"; "Gouffre"; "Gulf" 343) reinforces the image of Pascal as a batty cave-dwelling anchorite. Lowell's focus in "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts" on the mystical hermeneutics of Edwards's coat forges a typological connection with this figure of the mad ascetic: Lowell interweaves the imagery shared by Pascal and Edwards in their conversion narratives into a common vestiture; each is wrapped in his mystical text, hanging, like a spider from a bridge over the pit of hell, each an absurdity.

Indeed, in "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts," the preacher becomes this spidery figure, rising above his congregation soon after mention of his coat: "You stood on stilts in the air, / but you fell from your parish. / 'All rising is by a winding stair.'" The optical magnifications and inversions (from spider to man to spider) visualize fate's "winding stair" (with echoes of Francis Bacon and William Butler Yeats), just as Edwards suffers the ironic reversal of his righteous exercises of spiritual mnemonics. He asks: "'Alas, how many / in this very meeting house are more than likely / to remember my discourse in hell!'" Yet by transforming Edwards into the spider of his own rhetoric, Lowell delivers him the cruel justice that Edwards deduced from his meditations on insects to be God's will. His appeal to the congregation's memory appears symptomatic of his unhealthy obsession, of which the mnemonics of his coat

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are symptomatic. This bespoke line of Edwardsian tailoring contrasts with the "green" Edwards, the dogmatic firebrand remembered a few stanzas later:

> White wig and black coat,
> all cut from one cloth,
> and designed
> like your mind! (355)

Unlike his author, Lowell's speaker does not, however, appear to be aware that he is repeating the mistake of offering, or falling for, a literal reading of mystical mythologies.

Bacon's Feathers and the "Art of Ostentation"; or, A Model of Poetic Rectitude

If one acknowledges that in "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts" Lowell has framed his speaker ironically, then it is no longer possible to affirm that Lowell has recourse to a transparent rhetoric of "confession." The critical cliché favors the assumption of a direct correspondence between not only the poet and his lyric "I" but also objective reality and its representation. This cliché persists despite recent and more sophisticated historicizing of confessionalism, which assumes no simple correlation between poet and "I."[9] Indeed, Lowell himself emphasized the paradox of textualizing memory when he commented that with *Life Studies* he had "caught real memories" but the volume was "artificially composed" ("A Conversation" 286). On 11 April 1955, he told Peter Taylor that he was writing "scenes from [his] childhood," though he needed "to invent and forget a lot, but at the same time have the historian's wonderful advantage—the reader must always be forced to say, 'This is tops, but even if it weren't it's true.'" Lowell echoed these words in his 1961 *Paris Review* interview with Frederick Seidel, and in his afterword to the *Collected Poems*, Frank Bidart attests to Lowell's desire to simulate the "aesthetic effect" (1000) of truth telling: "Lowell's candor is an illusion created by art" (997).

Yet one need not play devil's advocate to discover that all is not quite as it seems with Lowell's speaker in "Jonathan Edwards," for the author has left numerous clues that reveal his "I" to be less than reliable. The speaker describes his journey to Edwards's community as his "pilgrimage to North Hampton" (355). On the lookout for relics, he finds but a "slice of an oak" from the tree Edwards planted. The reader is encouraged to smile at the modern pilgrim's gentle self-ironizing, his hint that he is repeating the idolatry of collectors of splinters from Christ's crucifix. Yet the irony belongs more to the voice of the author than to his speaker when the "I" reveals a streak of Edwardsian fanaticism, imagining the splinter to be "flesh-colored" and a "common piece of kindling" that is "only fit for burning" (355).[10] He has just described Edwards as a giant spider rising above his congregation; now he wants to feel the heat of Edwards's furnace of hellfire, to combust this "new" stick that has become a metonym of Edwards himself: "You too must have been green once" (355).

When Lowell recasts Edwards's letter of 19 October 1757—a response to the invitation to become president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University—critics agree that Edwards emerges, finally, as a character of great empathy and pathos, concerned more with protecting his small congregation of Indians than with pursuing his own interests:

> I love you faded,
> old, exiled and afraid
> to leave your last flock, a dozen
> Housatonic Indian children;
>
> afraid to leave
> all your writing, writing, writing,
> denying the Freedom of the Will.
>
> You were afraid to be president
> of Princeton, and wrote:
> "My defects are well known;
> I have a constitution
> peculiarly unhappy:
>
> flaccid solids,
> vapid, sizzy, scarse fluids,
> causing a childish weakness,
> a low tide of spirits.
>
> I am contemptible,
> stiff and dull." (355–56)

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The speaker's admission of his "love" for this enfeebled, temperamental Edwards has led commentators to believe that Lowell identifies personally with his Puritan brother afflicted with "a low tide of spirits." In this reading, the trajectory of Edwards's life, from Puritan firebrand to humble outcast, presents Lowell with a model for his own poetic apology, a subject on which to project his journey from frenzied religious enthusiast (as the author of *Lord Weary's Castle*) to the hospitalized manic depressive and fragile, existentially troubled adult (as "confessed" in *Life Studies* and beyond). Like Edwards, he, too, can say that writing has "swallowed up my mind" (356).[11] Yet, just as different documentary sources can yield a common alliterative signature between Edwards's youth ("boy . . . built . . . booth") and adult ("pinned . . . slips . . . paper"), when Lowell falsifies his citation of Edwards's letter so that it scans like lines from Lowell's "Skunk Hour," he invites further inquiry into his manipulation of sources and the poem's rhetorical silences.

Indeed, if Lowell is engaging with Miller's Edwards in this poem, the biographical reading becomes even stranger, for when Miller discusses the section of the 1757 letter from which Lowell has quoted, he stresses that Edwards's biographical pronouncements are untrustworthy: Edwards "was supremely uninterested in personality, his own or anybody else's"; the claims are "estimate" not "description," and Edwards was "a character capable simultaneously both of complete self-distrust and of absolute confidence" who bore an "inner conflict" that, even by Yankee standards, was "frightening" (*Jonathan Edwards* 46–47). His claims to being enfeebled are thus part of a rhetorical valorization of experience, and Miller emphasizes that in distorting his own "defects" Edwards's "point was that a person's peculiar eccentricities are not of interest except in so far as they are part of the judgment that life passes upon him. . . . A man achieved significance by becoming a focus of experience, not by indulging in eccentricity" (47). The evidence suggests that Lowell had read Miller's biography attentively and used it as a source when writing this poem. In contrast to his other sources, which offered the more conventional picture of Edwards, such as Faust and Johnson's introduction to *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, Lowell learned from Miller to observe in Edwards the rhetorical manipulation of autobiographical writing, a technique Lowell uses to implicate his poem's speaker in the perpetuation of outdated tropes of Puritan mythology, of whose ideological implications the speaker remains ignorant. Lowell's critics, however, follow George Lensing and assume that "Lowell himself is the ostensible speaker in this poem" (Lensing 13). Blinkered by their understanding of the poet's "confessional" mode, none have noticed this caricature of the self that practices a naive aesthetics of confession, or of a reader who fails to see it.

When the speaker "could almost feel the frontier / crack and disappear" (353), he entertains his own longing for a vision of apocalyptic Edwardsian millenarianism, yet he must endure a distasteful alternative:

> We know how the world will end,
> But where is paradise, each day farther
> From the Pilgrim's blues for England
> and the Promised Land. (353)

He and Edwards know the world will end in apocalypse, but in 1962, at the height of the Cold War, the cataclysm will come by way of an atomic blast. This echoes Perry Miller's intuition of Edwards's relevance in the nuclear age. (The poem was first published in the October–November 1962 issue of *Poetry*, at the very climax of the Cuban missile crisis.) When the speaker claims he would be "afraid" to meet Edwards as a "shade" in paradise, his Dantean allusion underscores the fact that they would arrive at their common telos by different routes ("we move in different circles" [354]). Yet the Puritan paradise is unavailable to Lowell's modern, lower-case pilgrim, and in the following lines he is revisited by the voice of Edwards, with images drawn from "Personal Narrative" as well as from Sir Francis Bacon's "Of Gardens" and "Of Vain-Glory" (Mazarro 132). "Edwards" meditates lyrically on Bacon's final years, after the trial for bribery, and finds comfort in the image of the great English empiricist and author of *New*

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Atlantis now fallen from grace and power, dedicating himself to writing in an Edenic garden of sublime natural harmony. Lowell's Bacon quips, "'Why should I give up my feathers?'" (353) Crucial to the understanding of Lowell's poem is recognition that in Bacon's "Of Vain-Glory" one's *feathers* are the fame gained by one's rhetorical skill with the plume: "In fame of learning, the flight will be slow without some feathers of ostentation" (585). Bacon considers that one's view of one's self-worth or degree of ostentation is relative to that of those around one. Ostentation can be justified, for "excusations, cessions, modesty itself well governed, are but arts of ostentation" (586). A modicum of modesty denotes a graceful character, but if the art of ostentation is not well governed, it soon becomes vainglorious. Lowell thus alludes to the criterion with which to judge Edwards's apparently excessive self-modesty at the end of the poem.

However, the many echoes between Edwards's discourse and the imagery of the poem's speaker render suspect the latter's ventriloquizing of the former: Bacon's "oak grove" (353) is an offshoot of the tree that Edwards planted, just as Bacon's refusal to sell his "feathers" anticipates the speaker's portrayal of Edwards's defense of both his Indians and his "writing, writing, writing." This analogy between Bacon's standard in the "arts of ostentation" and Edwards's instrumentalizing his own plumes is in bad taste, a deliberate snare that Lowell has set for his speaker—Edwards's erstwhile biographer was only too well aware that despite his florid self-remonstration, Edwards quickly overcame his scruples concerning the fate of his Indian "flock" and, unlike Bacon, who retired to his garden, a few months later set off to take up the position of president of the College of New Jersey. By Baconian standards, his excessive modesty and paternalistic claims on the native population may be judged vainglorious; they are at the very least, and as Miller suggests, far from disinterested confession.

Furthermore, Lowell's speaker overlooks an important last chapter. Princeton was in the grip of a serious outbreak of smallpox when Edwards arrived in 1758, and the incoming president—a provaxxer of his time—determined to lead by example, inoculated himself with the virus, but the dose proved fatal, and he died just weeks later (Faust and Johnson xi; Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* 308; Winslow 317–18). Edwards's undoing could be said to be his compulsion to incarnate absolute moral values—his egoism—a bitter irony suppressed by the poem's speaker. Alternatively, one might insist that Edwards died because he was committed to scientific progress and modernity, traits Miller labored to bring to public attention. Lowell underscores his speaker's selective account of Edwards's final image—"I love [read: prefer] you faded"—his denial of such moral complexity when privileging a voluntarily anachronistic, idealized portrait. The fact that Bacon also died, notoriously, while performing his last experiment—he contracted pneumonia while stuffing a bird with snow to preserve its meat—reinforces the speaker's deafness to the philosophers' shared, fatal commitment to experimental method. Lowell implies that such willful ignorance is necessary to maintain a belief in Puritan eschatology or the illusion of Edwards as a humble, Christian shepherd.

Lowell's Poetics of Moral Renewal

In his 1975 *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, Bercovitch writes that of all Puritan preachers, Edwards was the first "to turn personal experience in diary, autobiography, spiritual biography, case histories of conversions into a vehicle of prophetic fulfillment" (154). Lowell's appreciation of Edwards's manipulation of the *aesthetic effect* of simulated autobiography, and the poet's knowledge of the mythology and apocrypha surrounding the life of the great preacher, belies not only the alignment of his art with the venial Augustinian-Edwardsian confession but also the assumption of a narcissistic metapoetics that involves projecting his own life onto that of Edwards. Reading Lowell's sources in the light of Miller's scholarship, to which Lowell is evidently indebted, reveals the gulf between his own knowledge of his speaker's subject and that revealed by his lyric "I." Lowell's portrait of Edwards's mysticism and eccentricity is lined, like Pascal's coat, with a countertext, one that parodies a naive belief in the folkloric

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Edwards. When the speaker happily reproduces Edwards's own fabrication of a narrative of conversions or a vision of Pierrepont in idealized, ostensibly proto-transcendentalist terms, he perpetuates a tradition of Christian hagiography (vide Pascal's early biographers, who peddled the mythology of his conversions and acts of extreme asceticism) that undermines his speaker's declaration of "love" for the "faded, old, exiled" preacher.

The speaker is consistently ironized, not only in his self-deprecating fashion but also in his lack of the author's understanding of the sources he evokes; this frames his ventriloquizing of them as naive. His portrayal of Edwards fantasizing about a Baconian paradise recasts the kind of sentiments Lowell expressed to his parents in a letter of 1943, when as a young man enthusiastic about Edwards's devotion he quoted from William Blake's hymn "Jerusalem" and alluded privately to the struggle of revolutionary Romanticism that ends only when, in Blake's words, "we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant land" (qtd. in Letter to Charlotte Winslow Lowell 37). In 1962 his public reflection on this erstwhile religious and aesthetic enthusiasm satirizes "pilgrims" like his speaker, whose "blues" for that lost thesis of origins or purity of experience blinds them to the rhetoric of their own sources. The speaker's mode of biographical research (following the traces of Edwards, indulging in the mythology of his mysticism, relaying ambiguously his racism) generates a sentimental hagiography and perpetuates the clichéd topology of the Puritan "origins thesis," even when he continues to lament its disappointment (a typical Puritan topos). Bercovitch identified that in the 1950s Miller deployed his thesis of the "errand into the wilderness" to condemn the "national declension" of the United States (*American Jeremiad* xvii). In the 1940s, Lowell's research into Edwards, combined with the perspective afforded by his contact with the Southern Agrarian poets, provoked a prototypical inversion of Puritan ideology: *Lord Weary's Castle* harnesses Puritanism's tropes and rhetoric to underscore its service of immoral ends in American imperial expansion and twentieth-century warfare. Yet by the 1960s, having read Miller's *Jonathan Edwards*, Lowell evinces a heightened awareness of the manipulations of Puritan rhetoric, which he in turn deploys to interrogate those, like Miller, who continue to mobilize it for imperialist ends. This anti-exceptionalist critique of the mythology of America's Puritan origins evolved, with "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts," into what may be read as a "postexceptionalist" poetics, which engages with the mechanisms that perpetuate that mythology.[12]

Despite his evident debt to Miller's scholarship, Lowell's decades-long poetic exploration of Puritan history and his implication in its mythmaking rendered him highly critical of the narrative of heroic conquest promulgated by Miller. Uncomfortable truths—like the oppressed African American soldiers in "For the Union Dead" whose "monument sticks like a fishbone / in the city's throat" (377)—and those marginalized by the nation's Weberian quest—like Edwards's Indians—are brought to bear upon the mid-century and its newly anointed moral patriarchs, such as Colonel Shaw or Jonathan Edwards. Confronting Edwards's legacy, Lowell follows the preacher to the margins of Puritan communities, where, despite his affection for his ancestor and regardless of Edwards's best intentions and advocacy for his "flock," Lowell observes, first, the abandonment of indigenous people by one who professes—vainglorously—their protection and, second, a naive lyrical subject (the speaker), who remains complicit in the Puritan's contradictions and who is, like Miller himself, eager to conscript Edwards as a scout in the next flank attack of the "errand," a lone voice and child of the wilderness.

Yet to align Lowell's poetry so neatly with contemporary moral standards risks stripping it of its most powerful ability to disturb our own criteria in the arts of ostentation. One cannot discern Lowell's ideological critique and ignore the real sympathy for Edwards that he generates in his speaker, which evidently draws from the biography of the poet. As the tones of irony and affection ebb and flow throughout the poem, the poetic medium accommodates a plurality of emotions with respect to the subject it scrutinizes. Only with this recognition can one admit that the poet's critique is conducted within his critical self-

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

examination, where metapoetic aspects are registered not as confession but as part of a dialectic—as in the poem's concluding words, quoted above, when an almost verbatim borrowing from Edwards's letter provokes a self-reflection on the transformation of both history and one's past, from the ostentatiously alliterative "flaccid solids" stanza to the next, summary and prosaic self-evaluation, "I am contemptible, / stiff and dull."

Lowell acknowledges the affective states that once animated his own desires, his projects, and his ambitions, and he refuses to suppress these affects because they are now enmeshed with a political or religious ethos that has become insufferable to him. Indeed, his mature poetics upholds contradictory interpretations of its statements in a way that surpasses any New Critical recipe for "ambiguity"; more than just showing him to be complicit in his own critiques, as critics regularly argue, his renovation of Puritan rhetoric in "Jonathan Edwards" offers a model not of confession but of constant self-awareness conducted through the medium of poetry. While the satirical framing of the poem's speaker clearly delineates the poet's moral position, Lowell practices a form of metaethical moral relativism that generates a poetics of toleration by acknowledging the emotional investments of the poem's interlocutors. The payoff from Lowell's strategy is its ability to make us aware that, despite how we think we have improved or elevated ourselves, our forms of language are prone—if only fleetingly—to throw us back on our past beliefs and emotional attachments. As a model of moral judgment in constant renewal, it forces us to consider the contingency of our words and our beliefs; it refuses to endorse any condemnation of the other that has not passed through a process of self-scrutiny, of recognizing one's own contradictions, moral uncertainties, or vicissitudes of enthusiasm—our feeble and intermittent rectitude.

Notes

I would like to thank Paul Giles and Sarah Gleeson-White for their insightful comments on an early draft of this article and Melissa Hardie and Kate Lilley for inducting me into the arts of American Puritan rhetoric.

1. First published in *Poetry*, vol. 101, nos. 1–2, Oct.-Nov. 1962, pp. 68–71.

2. This view is exemplified by Hart's affirmation that Lowell's "judicious appraisal" of Edwards "elegizes the Puritan's vehement ambition to establish a Promised Land in America and simultaneously elegizes Lowell's early enthusiasms for such doomed projects" (43).

3. For early objections, see Bozeman, "Puritans' 'Errand'"; Delbanco, "Puritan Errand" and *Puritan Ordeal*; and Weber. For a recent overview, see Bozeman, *To Live*. Stievermann challenges the reading of Cotton Mather as a fervent promotor of American exceptionalism.

4. Two recent studies of Lowell's "Puritan" rhetoric absorb Miller's ideology of the *errand* without registering its novelty or subsequent critiques. Sarwar effectively restates Miller's Puritan origins thesis and reads the apocalyptic strain in Lowell's poetry as an indictment of this "long-running tradition" (117). This is anachronistic because, as Bozeman demonstrates, "[b]efore Miller's exposition, the idea of an exemplary Puritan mission was unknown" ("Puritans' 'Errand'" 231). Analyzing Puritan tropes in the 1964 *For the Union Dead*, Schneiderman similarly positions Lowell with respect to "the pietists who founded America [and who] saw themselves as members of a 'new Israel' on an 'errand' to found a 'city on a hill'" (68–69). He compares Lowell's condemnations of "America's self-inflicted preterition" (60) against contested definitions of the Puritan jeremiad as either lament (Miller) or celebration (Bercovitch). Bercovitch's revision of Miller's account of the Puritan jeremiad is outlined in *The American Jeremiad*. For a contemporary assessment of Bercovitch's work, see the five articles of the "Symposium on *The Puritan Origins of The American Self*" in *Early American Literature*.

5. For transatlantic influences on postwar American poetry, see Blaustein; Quinn. For comparable internationalist rehistoricizing of early American literature, see Bremer, "To Live" and Introduction; Burnham; Foster; and Gregerson and Juster.

6. For Miller and the 1930s, see Hall (330); on his military career and ideological prejudice, see Guyatt; Kaplan.

7. The Lowell family genealogy is delineated in the December 1995 issue of *NEXUS* (Roberts 214), former periodical of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and can also be viewed at www.wikitree.com/wiki/Lowell-354.

8. Recent scholarship dates more accurately the composition and revision of the "Spider" letter, dispelling myths about the child scientist prodigy. See Anderson's "Note on the 'Spider' Papers."

9. See, e.g., Gelpi (16–58); Grobe (45–80); LeMahieu (92–120); or Nelson (42–73).

10. Lowell heightened his speaker's charnel turn of mind, revising "skin-coloured," in the first version, published in *Poetry*, to "flesh-coloured" in the 1964 *For the Union Dead*.

11. Cf. Edwards's 1757 Letter to the Trustees (410).

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

12. Rivett and Van Engen argue that, rather than perpetuate the mythology of the Puritans' spiritual mission, "postexceptional" approaches interrupt, challenge, or circumvent the teleological arc of the American origins thesis "to construct new intellectual histories and literary genealogies that plot fragmentation, epistemic rupture, and discontinuity as integral facets of American literary beginnings" (676).

Works Cited

Anderson, Wallace E. "Note on the 'Spider' Papers." Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, pp. 147–53.

Axelrod, Steven Gould. *Robert Lowell and American Literary Tradition*. 1972. U of California, Los Angeles, PhD dissertation.

Bacon, Francis. "Of Vain-Glory." *Literary and Professional Works 1*, edited by James Spedding et al., Cambridge UP, 2011, pp. 503–05. Vol. 6 of *The Works of Francis Bacon*.

Baudelaire, Charles. "Le gouffre." Fleurs du mal, *textes des éditions originales*, edited by Felix Gautier. Éditions de la *Nouvelle revue française*, 1918, p. 303. Vol. 1 of *Œuvres complètes*.

———. "The Gulf." *The Flowers of Evil*, translated by James McGowan, Oxford UP, 1998, pp. 343–45.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. 1978. 2nd ed., U of Wisconsin P, 2011.

———. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. Yale UP, 1975.

Bidart, Frank. "On 'Confessional' Poetry." Afterword. *Collected Poems*, by Robert Lowell, edited by Bidart and David Gewanter, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, pp. 995–1001.

Blaustein, George. *Nightmare Envy and Other Stories: American Culture and European Reconstruction*. Oxford UP, 2018.

Bozeman, Theodore Dwight. "The Puritans' 'Errand into the Wilderness' Reconsidered." *New England Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 2, 1986, pp. 231–51.

———. *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*. U of North Carolina P, 2011.

Bremer, Francis J. "Introduction: Puritan Studies: The Case for an Atlantic Approach." *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, edited by Bremer, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1992, pp. xi–xvii.

———. "To Live Exemplary Lives: Puritans and Puritan Communities as Lofty Lights." *Seventeenth Century*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1992, pp. 27–39.

Burnham, Michele. *Folded Selves: Colonial New England Writing in the World System*. Dartmouth College P, 1997.

Delbanco, Andrew. "The Puritan Errand Re-viewed." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1984, pp. 343–60.

———. *The Puritan Ordeal*. Harvard UP, 1989.

DeProspo, Richard C. "The 'New Simple Idea' of Edwards' Personal Narrative." *Early American Literature*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1979, pp. 193–204.

Edwards, Jonathan. *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes*. Edited by Clarence Henry Faust and Thomas Herbert Johnson, American Book Company, 1935.

———. Letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey at Princeton. 19 Oct. 1757. Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 409–14.

———. "Personal Narrative." Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 57–72.

———. *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Wallace E. Anderson, Yale UP, 1980. Vol. 6 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

———. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 155–72.

Faust, Clarence Henry, and Thomas Herbert Johnson. Introduction. Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. xi–cxv.

Foster, Stephen. *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700*. U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Gelpi, Albert. *American Poetry after Modernism: The Power of the Word*. Cambridge UP, 2015.

Gregerson, Linda, and Susan Juster, editors. *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2013.

Grobe, Christopher. *The Art of Confession: The Performance of Self from Robert Lowell to Reality TV*. New York UP, 2017.

Guyatt, Nicholas. "'An Instrument of National Policy': Perry Miller and the Cold War." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, pp. 107–49.

Hall, David. "Understanding the Puritans." *The State of American History*, edited by Herbert J. Bass, Quadrangle Books, 1970, pp. 330–49.

Hart, Henry. *Robert Lowell and the Sublime*. Syracuse UP, 1995.

Javadizadeh, Kamran. "The Atlantic Ocean Breaking on Our Heads: Claudia Rankine, Robert Lowell, and the Whiteness of the Lyric Subject." *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 3, May 2019, pp. 475–90.

Kaplan, Amy. "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, Duke UP, 1993, pp. 3–21.

LeMahieu, Michael. "Robert Lowell, Perpetual War, and the Legacy of Civil War Elegy." *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2016, pp. 92–120.

Lensing, George. "Robert Lowell and Jonathan Edwards: Poetry in the Hands of an Angry God." *South Carolina Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1974, pp. 7–17.

Lowell, Robert. "The Abyss." Lowell, *Collected Poems*, p. 242.

———. *Collected Poems*. Edited by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

———. *Collected Prose*. Edited by Robert Giroux. Faber, 1987.

———. "A Conversation with Ian Hamilton." Lowell, *Collected Prose*, pp. 267–90.

———. "For the Union Dead." Lowell, *Collected Poems*, pp. 376–78.

———. "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts." Lowell, *Collected Poems*, pp. 353–56.

———. "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts." Robert Lowell Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard U, box 16, MS Am 1905 [2287].

———. Letter to Babette Deutsch. 24 Feb. 1955. Lowell, *Letters*, p. 244.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press

———. Letter to Charlotte Winslow Lowell and Robert T. S. Lowell. Aug. 1943. Lowell, *Letters*, pp. 36–37.

———. Letter to George Santayana. 12 Jan. 1948. Lowell, *Letters*, p. 79.

———. Letter to Perry Miller. 4 Dec. 1957. Robert Lowell Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard U, MS Am 1905/1595.

———. Letter to Peter Taylor. 11 Apr. 1955. Lowell, *Letters*, p. 245.

———. *The Letters of Robert Lowell*. Edited by Saskia Hamilton, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

———. *Lord Weary's Castle*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946.

———. "Mr. Edwards and the Spider." Lowell, *Collected Poems*, pp. 59–60.

Mazzaro, Jerome. *The Poetic Themes of Robert Lowell*. U of Michigan P, 1965.

Miller, Perry. *Errand into the Wilderness*. Harvard UP, 1956.

———. "General Editor's Note." *Freedom of the Will*, by Jonathan Edwards, edited by Paul Ramsey, Yale UP / Oxford UP, 1957, pp. vii–viii. Vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

———. "Introduction." *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, by Jonathan Edwards, edited by Miller, Yale UP, 1948, pp. 1–41.

———. *Jonathan Edwards*. William Sloane Associates, 1949.

———. Letter to Allen Tate. 7 Dec. 1957. Allen Tate Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton U Library, General Correspondence, subseries 2C, C0106.

Nelson, Deborah. *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. Columbia UP, 2002.

Pascal, Blaise. "Mémorial." *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Louis Lafuma, Seuil, 1963, p. 618.

———. "Memorial." *Pensées*, translated by Martin Turnell, Harvill, 1962, p. 333.

Quinn, Justin. *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry*. Oxford UP, 2015.

Rasula, Jed. *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940–1990*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.

Rivett, Sarah, and Abram Van Engen. "Postexceptionalist Puritanism." *American Literature*, vol. 90, no. 4, 2018, pp. 675–92.

Roberts, Gary Boyd. "Notable Kin." *NEXUS*, vol. 12, no. 6, 1995, pp. 210–16.

Sarwar, Selim. "Robert Lowell: Scripting the Mid-Century Eschatology." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2002, pp. 114–30.

Schneiderman, Josh. "'Pilgrim's Blues': Puritan Anxiety in Robert Lowell's *For the Union Dead*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2008, pp. 58–80.

Seidel, Frederick. "The Art of Poetry: Robert Lowell." *Robert Lowell: Interviews and Memoirs*, edited by Jeffery Meyers, U of Michigan P, 1998, pp. 48–73.

Stievermann, Jan. *Prophecy, Piety, and the Problem of Historicity: Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures in Cotton Mather's* Biblia Americana. Mohr-Siebeck, 2016.

"Symposium on *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*." *Early American Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2012, pp. 377–441.

Von Hallberg, Robert. *American Poetry and Culture, 1945–1980*. Harvard UP, 1985.

Wallingford, Katharine. *Robert Lowell's Language of the Self*. U of North Carolina P, 1998.

Weber, Donald. "Historicizing the Errand." *American Literary History*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1990, pp. 101–18.

Winslow, Ola Elizabeth. *Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758: A Biography*. Macmillan, 1940.

Abstract: Robert Lowell challenged the mid-century canonization of the eighteenth-century Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards. He objected to the way the influential historian Perry Miller instrumentalized Edwards to buttress support for US imperialism, exceptionalism, and Cold War politics. Challenging received views about the Puritan rhetoric of the most recognizable of postwar poets, this article contrasts Miller's captivating thesis of the Puritans' "errand into the wilderness" with Lowell's implication of Edwards in acts of colonial expansion and slavery. Lowell's Edwards emerges as a contradictory figure who, in Lowell's 1962 poem "Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts," is brought into discourse with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosopher-scientists Francis Bacon and Blaise Pascal. Lowell fashions a Puritan genealogy within which Edwards is a cosmopolitan interlocutor and forebear of confessionalism; however, the theologian's flawed moral self-scrutiny occasions the poet's self-reflexive satire, as well as his model for a faltering, self-correcting rectitude.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000135 Published online by Cambridge University Press