

REGINA SCHOBER

Unexpected Chords

Musico-Poetic
Intermediality
in Amy Lowell's
Poetry
and Poetics

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

Volume 200



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ALFRED HORNUNG



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Introduction

the job of poetry is to make a music of language
– Carper and Attridge, *Meter and Meaning* 10

*if one can ever be said to have learnt to write poetry,
certainly my masters had been the musicians rather than the poets*
– Amy Lowell, “Some Musical Analogies in Modern Poetry” 127

In October 1925, five months after Amy Lowell’s death, critic John Livingstone Lowes honored the late poet in *The Saturday Review of Literature*:

No poet writing today, I think, save Thomas Hardy, saw and heard with more acute perception, or saw and heard and felt so many shades and tones and shapes of things – brilliant and subtle and fugitive and firm. And joined with this quick sensitiveness to physical impressions was an intellectual honesty as sensitive – a passion for truth which never knowingly falsified the report of what was seen. And that alert and vivid sense of beauty, restless with a poet’s craving for expression, yet in expression lucidly exact, has schooled us, skeptical and reluctant scholars, to a quickened vision of strange loveliness in familiar things. (170)

Clarity, originality, and ‘honest’ expression are the core principles of the Imagist movement of which American poet Amy Lowell was a keen advocate. In this comment, Lowes points to her remarkable sensory recognition, with which she both captured and poetically portrayed her individual environment and the images that were shaped by her imagination. Lowell was extremely receptive and amenable to other sensory channels and other media. That her poems display a high degree of sensory imagery is due only in part to the sensory proclivity of the poetic medium itself. In reading Lowell’s works we witness a unique and exceptional fondness for colors, sounds, movements, forms, and shapes, all of which help to (re-)create the vividness of the atmospheres and images that inspired Lowell’s poems. In line with her Imagist aesthetics, many of her poems aim at creating immediate effects rather than address-

sing deep psychological states of mind. “Art,” Lowell says, “is the arousing of an emotion through the presentation of an effect” (letter to Oscar Sonneck, July 7, 1919). These “effects,” as Lowell calls them, establish a direct connection between the multiple impressions of the sensory world and the reader/listener who, through the poem, (re-)experiences a snapshot of the poet’s individual view of reality.

Lowell not only kept her senses open to mundane impressions which she transformed into aesthetic experiences, but she was also drawn to artistic media other than literature. Her devoted interest in dance, theater, music, fine arts, and even film served to advance and develop her own poetic creational processes. Through manifold engagements with the medial ‘other’,¹ Lowell’s poetry thus constantly seeks to enhance its own expressive and aesthetic potentials, while at the same time negotiating its medial boundaries.

This is a study about Amy Lowell’s poetry which lays a special emphasis on its relationship with the musical medium. Among all media, I claim, music has a particular significance for Lowell. Figuring on a great variety of different levels that range from theme, metaphor, structural model, cultural signifier, and poetic material, music forms the most considerable part of Lowell’s intermedial aesthetics. “Poetry and music have both grown in recent years,” Lowell writes to her friend David Herbert Lawrence in 1918, maintaining that in these two media Modernism has most significantly progressed. A study on Lowell’s Modernist aesthetics must therefore examine her poetry in relation and interaction with the musical medium and focus on their inherently intermedial nature.²

The title of this book, *Unexpected Chords*, is taken from Lowell’s poem “Music” (*Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*) which portrays the circulating sounds of a flute:

¹ The concept of alterity (music as the text’s ‘other’) plays an important role in recent debates on intermediality, which show an increased interest in the functionality of intermedial references. In this context, see Lagerroth, and Wolf, “Towards a Functional Analysis of Intermediality.”

² The term ‘intermediality’, as employed in this book, refers to any processes and phenomena which involve more than one medium. Both the development of the terms ‘intermediality’ and ‘Intermedial Studies’, as well as their specific implications for this book are extensively discussed in chapter one.

[...] the round notes flutter and tap about the room
 And hit against each other,
 Blurring to unexpected chords. (3-5)³

This passage is typical of many other descriptions of music in Lowell's poems, as it evokes a visual image to depict sounds. In filling out the space of the room, the musical notes are like beams of light, different colors that mingle and clash together. The auditory and the visual are always deeply intertwined in Lowell's aesthetics. Together, they form a multi-sensorial and -medial impression of words, sounds, and images which merge into an "unexpected chord." The adjective "unexpected" exemplifies the innovative quality and appeal of Lowell's multi-sensorial and intermedial poems. Like many of her contemporaries, Lowell attempted to extend and transgress conventionally delimited boundaries of the literary medium by turning to and borrowing from other media. The intermedial "chords" she created display a substantial element of experimental originality, as they often deliberately abandon traditional ways of representing reality in order to seek entirely new means of literary expression. By turning to music, in particular, Lowell acquired methods and materials that were still uncommon in poetry, such as expressing effects of spatio-temporal simultaneity, free-(flowing) rhythms, and self-referential sounds detached from semantic meaning. Lowell was particularly drawn to music, as it offered her seemingly unlimited potential for experimenting with and transforming poetic language.

Daniel Albright invokes the metaphor of the chord in proposing a vertical approach to the examination of the arts as opposed to one that regards different media separately. His main assumption regarding (inter-)medial expression in Modernism involves the notion of an interdependence and interaction of the arts commonly identified as detached from each other: "Perhaps there are chords in which one element is a musical note," he supposes, "another element is a word, and a third element is a picture – chords that compose themselves out of different layers of sensuous reality" (*Untwisting the Serpent* 5). The metaphor of the

³ In quoting Lowell's poems, I mention the single volumes or magazines in which they were originally published, while I refer to the line/page numbers as they appear in *The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell* (1955).

chord is an effective one for the study of sensorial and especially musical influences in Lowell's poetic work. It exemplifies the simultaneity and multiplicity of sensory impressions, as well as the multilayered nature of reverberating sounds, images, and meanings captured in her poems. Despite the sonic focus of this book, this overall sense of complexity is often portrayed in terms of visual attributes such as light or color. In considering the manifold manifestations of sounds and music in Lowell's poems, the visual and spatial are never truly absent. Although this book is first and foremost concerned with the role of music in Lowell's poetry and poetics, it concurrently addresses issues that deal with a more general and wide-ranging sense of intermediality in her work.

"The earth is a coloured thing," Lowell begins her poem "The Congressional Library" (*What's O'Clock* 1). Describing the intricate appearances of the earth in almost Whitmanesque fashion, she paints a multi-colored picture of a diverse, yet unified world. "Our colour is the vari-coloured world," the poem states (27), commenting not only on America's geographical, but also ethnic and social diversity, epitomized in the "patchwork" of America (22). The concept of multi-coloredness, as representing various sensory impressions as well as the myriad of worldly appearances, is one of the core principles of Lowell's poetics. Accordingly, she considers intermediality, or intersensoriality, a fundamentally American trait. The interplay of different senses and media exemplifies the genuinely American spirit of diversity, in which the metaphor of the chord points to the transcendental aspiration to overcome these differences in an ultimate quest for unity. Lowell's concept of intersensoriality is reminiscent of Horace Kallen's idea of cultural pluralism, which was put forward in 1915 and which expressed the idea that ethnic diversity is not opposed to the idea of a unified 'national' identity:

a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind. As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization. (305)

Kallen's vision of an 'orchestrated' America is more than a metaphor for Lowell. Her poems present a resonating image of America's multifaceted nature by invoking the idea of an overall 'harmony' that ultimately unifies disparate elements, both on the content and on the formal level. Lowell strongly believed in America and for her, the 'New Poetry' movement,⁴ to which she committed herself, perfectly represented America's cultural progress and emancipation from its European roots. Contrary to such expatriate poets as Eliot or Pound, she belonged to a group of poets who decided to stay in America, like, for instance, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore. Lowell repeatedly asserted her patriotism and the importance of the 'national' character of her poetics. America, she claimed, was undergoing the most rapid changes, or, in evolutionary terms, had "taken the last, most advanced step" (*Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* v-vi). After long years of cultural dependency on Europe, America was now "having an artistic upheaval; it [had] grown up enough to develop a sincere artistic life" ("Is there a National Spirit in 'The New Poetry' of America?" 341). For Lowell, America provided a particularly beneficial environment for modern poetry because the country was still in the process of finding its 'true' language and was thus open to change and innovation. Furthermore, she argued that Americans possessed a strong sense of energy, impatience, and courage – qualities that furthered new literary developments. Lowell made it her mission to support this newly emerging American poetic identity, and did so also in Europe.⁵ Although she saw the potentials of a 'genuinely' American art, she also recognized and lamented the lack of

⁴ Among Lowell and her circle of Modernist writers, the 'New Poetry' became an established term indicating the conscious break with traditional, 'old' poetic conventions. Although the term itself was never clearly demarcated and rather loosely associated with different poetic movements such as Imagism, it functioned as an umbrella term for Modernist poetry and as a dissociation from what was considered an outdated and superfluous poetic tradition.

⁵ Lowell was about to go on an extensive lecture-trip to England in 1925, shortly before her sudden death. Her main goal of this trip was promotional, as she wanted to "dispel the prejudice against American poetry" (letter to A. J. Armstrong, December 9, 1924) and advertise American poets in England.

such realizations. In an effort to promote the advance of American poetry, she exerted the Emersonian call to find a 'true' American identity from which a 'national voice' could arise:⁶ "The American artist must first of all be encouraged to be himself, and by being himself openly and fearlessly he will also be entirely American," Lowell claimed ("Nationalism in Art" 35). She believed that only when "America [had] the great artists for which she clamor[ed]" (38) could her idea of a prosperous American poetic tradition be realized. Lowell believed that the time was right for America to affirm its cultural identity and she overtly considered the progress of modern poetry intricately connected to the progress of America and the formation of a national American identity.

Yet, Lowell's attitude towards national identity was ambivalent. Although she subscribed to Kallen's vision of a "symphony of civilization," she had reservations about the issue of immigration. A proud member of New England's elite, she frequently asserted her belief in an Anglo-Saxon supremacy. In line with other Americans at the time, Lowell now and then put forward nativist ideas which "converse[d] the idea of national identity to racial identity" (Michaels 40). Through her home town Brookline, Lowell was loosely acquainted with Lothrop Stoddard, American nativist and fanatic proponent of eugenic and racial theories. She owned his book *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the UnderMan* (1922) in which Stoddard declared that the civilization, which to him meant the 'white' race, was acutely threatened by "barbarism, [...] savagery, [...] bestiality" (1), represented by the assumedly 'inferior' races of immigrants to America. Although Lowell's rhetoric is by far less radical, she never openly distanced herself from such nativist ideas as suggested by Stoddard. In one of Lowell's few nativist remarks, which are all the more problematic since they are addressed to African American writer William Stanley Braithwaite, she commented upon immigration and its influence on a supposedly 'American race':

Of course immigration is changing the American race; it cannot fail to do so, as, long ago, it changed England more times than one. We must, I

⁶ Emerson most explicitly expressed the demand for a cultural independence of America in an essay titled "The American Scholar," an address delivered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1837.

think, admit that we have become modified, and out of that modification will undoubtedly spring something which is none of us, but all of us together. Good Anglo-Saxon that I am, I sincerely deplore our changed outlooks and ideals, and I deplore them for more reasons than one. Not only am I true to my inheritance, but from what I know of other literatures, I am prepared to say that English literature is the finest of them all. It has a greater variety than any other, and rises to magnificence more often, while, at the same time, keeping a higher level in the lesser grades than any other literature I know [...]. (September 14, 1921)

Lowell's comment is clearly influenced by nativist ideas. However, in accord with prevalent primitivist notions of her time, she regarded immigration not only, or not mainly, as a 'threat' to what she considered American civilization, but rather praised its fascinating and exotic allure. As I will discuss in chapter six, Lowell fully engaged in the primitivist discourse she became acquainted with through friend and anthropologist Mary Austin as well as writer Carl van Vechten, patron of the Harlem Renaissance and leading figure of American primitivism. While Lowell upheld the widely shared belief in the superiority of America's Anglo-Saxon heritage and explicitly connected American identity with an allegedly racial identity, she fostered a primitivist attraction for the 'primal' which, for her, was manifest in the idea of musical rhythm. For Lowell, a turn to music also meant a turn to the 'beginning of mankind', "the starting place of all" ("Some Musical Analogies in Modern Poetry" 130). To incorporate musical rhythm into modern poetry was thus a means to (re-)connect with one's past and to restore hidden, unconscious energies that had been lost through the process of civilization.

Lowell's perspective on American national identity oscillates between a praise of ethnic diversity on the one hand and a patronizing primitivism on the other hand. The figure of music metaphorically represents both the idea of cultural pluralism and the fascinating, yet intimidating allure of the 'primal'. This is only one example of how the intermedial perspective taken in this book elicits questions regarding Lowell's position within a larger framework of Modernist discourse. Throughout this book, the representation and treatment of the musical medium will serve as the backdrop to a chronological examination of Lowell's poetic work and a discussion of how it is shaped by the particular cultural and aesthetic context of an (early) American Modernism.

The concept of music which I choose to take as a basis for my considerations is rather broad, comprising not only what is commonly understood as music, namely a composed or improvised piece of instrumental or vocal expression, but any kind of tone, sound, or noise, whether natural or cultivated, whether designed and produced for artistic purpose or as a constitutive element of human communication and civilization. This broad definition of 'music' is effective in connection with Lowell's poetry for several reasons. Like for most poets, her portrayal of the sensory world was not confined to a conventional understanding of music or painting as an art form, but took into account the very sonic and visual material of which her individual environment was composed and which was then utilized for poetic purposes. At the same time, Modernism was a period in which the arts themselves increasingly began to concentrate on and highlight their compositional material in a self-referential move. This prevalence of poetic material is at once characteristic of Lowell's Modernist aesthetics as well as of her attitude towards intermediality. In an eclectic and experimental manner, Lowell drew on a variety of sources and materials for her poetry, while recurrently availing herself of the auditory impulses surrounding her. By exploring novel ways of poetic expression, Lowell made considerable discoveries about her own medium and advanced to its very fundamentals as it overlaps with music, including such elements as rhythm, sound, structure, conceptual superimposition, and movement. Lowell's interest in these transmedial, i.e. media-comprehensive, intersections between poetry and music is accounted for in the theoretical framework of this study, which presents the concept of modality as a supplement to the concept of mediality. In foregrounding modal constituents such as rhythm or sound, which are prominent in both music and poetry, Lowell's poems build a bridge between these two distinct media and re-connect them on a fundamental level.

Musico-poetic intermediality, as I propose it, thus comprises any form of interaction between sound and text, between music and words, between the auditory and the verbal. Lowell's engagement with the musical medium is manifold. Her poems deal with music as a theme, incorporate musical titles, and employ musical terminology in order to make poetological statements. As a poetic theme, music is conceptualized in various different ways. At times, it has symbolic and philosophical implications in that it represents an aesthetic model towards

which the poetic medium strives. In this respect, Lowell's work aligns itself with late 19th and early 20th century idealizations of music as the most sublime of all arts. Still, music is not only an abstract concept for Lowell. In many of her poems, music is portrayed as a concrete form of social practice, a culturally and historically embedded artifact which mirrors and is influenced by the society from which it emanates.

Apart from musical references and thematization, music also serves as a structural and formal model in Lowell's poems. Sound and rhythm, two main transmedial elements, are at the basis of Lowell's most profound poetological experiments and innovations in the context of her (Imagist) aesthetics: her concept of free verse, which she relates to the free-flowing nature of musical rhythm, and what she calls "polyphonic prose," a poetic form which has the effect of simultaneity in sound and imagery, similar to that of polyphonic music. Consider, for example, the following passage from "Before the Storm" (*Legends*):

Something races along the road. Sharp whip-cracks staccato upon the double basses and flutes. Who lashes a poor brute up a hill like that? On the two-yard level, something passes in a smear of yellow wheels and bright steel shoes. Who goes there? 'Boston! Boston!...' But the stones of the down grade are already clattering and rolling as the horse goes over them. A spatter of rain slaps the barberry-leaves; patter – patter – rain, and a grieving, tearing wind. A flare of lightning! There is no one on the road. A long peal of thunder, and then beating rain. (295)

Written in polyphonic prose, this passage combines the technique of free verse with a use of language that foregrounds poetic material, especially sounds, in a concentrated accumulation of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration. The frequent repetitions and parallelisms, not only of sound, but also of words and structures, compares to the recurrence of different 'themes' in musical polyphony. The use of musical imagery at the beginning of the passage is typical of Lowell's sound descriptions in this poetic form and adds to the 'polyphonic', resonating, and multi-sensorial image created.

In taking up the musical medium, Lowell is in line with many other Modernist writers, among them, for instance, Pound, Wallace Stevens, Eliot, and Conrad Aiken. The variety and range of approaches and involvements with music, however, makes her unique. Lowell does not reduce her treatment of the 'other' medium to one single facet, but rather

seeks to regard music in its multiplicity and inexhaustibility. As much as this tells us about the appreciation Lowell must have had for music, it also reflects her elaborate concept of art, of which poetry was only one manifestation, her chosen medium of expression.

Although sensorial and intermedial aspects play a significant part in Lowell's poems and theoretical writings, they have largely been neglected by criticism to date. This is partly due to a general marginalization of the author. Lowell received relatively little critical attention after her death, compared to other (female) Modernist writers (Lauter 2). In fact, apart from a handful of biographies, of which Samuel Foster Damon's *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle* (1935) is the most comprehensive and insightful,⁷ there have, until recently, only been occasional articles and books devoted to Lowell, and most anthologies of Modern American poetry do not or only briefly mention the poet who, in her life time, was one of the best known poets in America. The rediscovery of Amy Lowell by feminist scholarship has led to a generally renewed interest in her work.⁸ One of the most significant contributions to the inclusion of her poems into the canon of American Modern poetry in recent years has been Munich's and Bradshaw's volume *Amy Lowell, American Modern* (2004). The various articles in this volume clearly attest to the legacy of Feminist Studies, as most of them concentrate almost exclusively on issues related to gender and sexuality. This strong focus on a central, yet single aspect of Lowell's work and life also becomes apparent in other investigations of Lowell, in which aspects of her persona and the expression of sexuality, femininity, or physicality are prevalent.⁹ That the Lowell research to date has prioritized these aspects probably owes to the aspiration to retrieve exactly those motives which have led to the neglect of the poet and make these issues a central research object. Aspects of gender and sexuality also form a constituent part of Lowell's intermedial aesthetics. In many of her 'musical' poems, Lowell addresses the struggles of liberating herself from a largely patrimonial literary tradition. As a theme, music relates to issues which reflect

⁷ For biographical accounts of Lowell's life and work, apart from Damon's, see Wood; Gregory; Cudworth; F. C. Flint; Gould; Ruihley; and Benvenuto.

⁸ See, in particular, Gilbert and Gubar.

⁹ See, for example, McCabe; Hamer; and Bradshaw, *Modernizing Excess*.

Lowell's position as a woman writer, such as female sexuality and the assertion of a female literary voice.

With regard to intermedial, and particularly musical influences and effects, critical investigations of Lowell's poetry have so far largely been confined to footnotes concerning the ubiquitous use of rhythm and sound as well as Lowell's theoretical remarks in connection with the poetic concepts of 'vers libre' and 'polyphonic prose'.¹⁰ The only scholarly investigation which links Lowell's poetical work with music to date is Jane Ambrose's article "Amy Lowell and the Music of her Poetry" (1989), which thoroughly traces musical influences on Lowell's poetry, the use of musical imagery and terminology, and explicit references to musical works, composers, and instruments. Moreover, Ambrose alludes to Lowell's critical essays and their involvement in musicological and literary debates. In its illuminating findings and original perspective, Ambrose's article has been the most important inspiration for my study and has provided a valid framework and starting point to engage in a more comprehensive investigation of musical influences in Lowell's poetry. My aim is to take up Ambrose's mainly musicologist observations concerning various musical implications in the poems and theoretical texts, develop them and connect them with concepts and insights of recent American and Intermedial Studies. I thus seek to position the musical traces in Lowell's life and work within a general literary and intermedial framework, with a strong focus on their literary and cultural context.

The purpose of this book is twofold: On the one hand, I intend to investigate Lowell's poetic work and theoretical writings in their particular relationship to music. On the other hand, I propose to ask why and with what effect these musical references, analogies, images, and suggestions appear in these texts, relating them not only to Lowell's general intermedial and intersensorial aesthetics, but also to the historical and cultural context from which they emanate, by placing them against the backdrop of general Modernist debates on literary and intermedial aes-

¹⁰ Interestingly, even these sound experiments have been discussed primarily with reference to gender aspects, particularly in terms of a general association of 'musical' writing with femininity, as Sonja Samberger has pointed out (209).

thetics. It is my aim to demonstrate that, in its different implications and repercussions, the musical medium displays an integral and constitutive element in Lowell's poetic and theoretical work, one that has hitherto not been paid enough critical attention to. To illustrate the relevance the musical medium had for Lowell, I will subsequently sketch aspects of Lowell's musical socialization to provide a biographical and socio-cultural framework for the discussion of music in her poetry.

Amy Lowell as Recipient and Patron of Music

Throughout her life, Amy Lowell showed a considerable interest in the arts, facilitated by the flourishing cultural scene of Boston and her home town of Brookline. From an early age, she frequently attended theater, opera, and dance performances as well as lectures, talks, and literary readings.¹¹ It is not surprising, then, that Lowell's first accounts of music, the medium that most profoundly shaped her creative and theoretical work, relate to opera performances, as exemplified by the following diary entry, written at the age of fifteen:

Went to the German opera this pm. I liked it very much. The music had no theme. Mamma calls it declamatory music. The famous Prima Donna did not sing. The famous tenor, Ahary, did though. Bessie thinks him handsome but I do not think so. She has seen him before, I do not think that his snake-top, he was the fire-god, and had a bright-red wig, was conducive to beauty. (Lowell's journal, April 6, 1889)

Lowell's remark concerning the (un-)attractiveness of the tenor is more than what one might read as a teenage fancy for movie actors. It demonstrates that, with regard to music, the young girl was least as much inter-

¹¹ As a teenager, Lowell was particularly fond of the theater. In an entry of January 2, 1889 the then fifteen-year-old girl wrote: "I could go to the theater every night, the lights, the people, the play, everything. It is delightful." In fact, the theater had a substantial influence on the launch of Lowell's poetical career. According to her biographer Samuel Foster Damon, it was after she saw actress Leonora Duse in 1902 that she decided to dedicate her life to the arts and become a poet. According to Damon, Lowell called Duse her "artistic ideal ever since I was eighteen" (111-12).

ested in the performative context as in the music itself. The fact that the opera “had no theme” seems to have been just as significant to her as the visual appearance of the singers. This statement is indicative of Lowell’s attitude towards music and the arts in general. For her, music, literature, or the fine arts, are hardly ever detached from their performative conventions and socio-cultural circumstances. This shows in those poems I will discuss in chapters six and seven, in which music is displayed as representing a part of and being constituted by cultural practices and conventions. Music, in these poems, is considered an integral element of (cultural) reality in that it serves to reflect and negotiate cultural evaluation and criticism.

Despite Lowell’s sincere interest in music, she was not a musician herself. She was always on the receiving, not on the performing side of the musical medium, even though her intensive literary engagements with music would suggest otherwise. In consideration of her gender and social background, it is surprising that she never learned to sing or to play an instrument. Instead, her childhood and teenage activities included horse-riding, dancing, and, remarkably, playing baseball (Lowell’s journals 1889; 1890). Although Lowell’s mother, who was a musician, frequently took her daughter to concerts and the opera in Boston, there seems to be no indication as to a musical involvement in Lowell’s childhood and adolescence years, as would have been considered appropriate by many 19th century families of considerable wealth in the education of their daughters. In fact, after Lowell started writing poetry at the age of twenty-eight, she repeatedly maintained that she had no musical competence and that her interest in music was purely that of an amateur. In a letter to poet and singer Jean S. Untermyer, she asserted:

I am no musician; I can do nothing, neither sing nor play on any instrument; but I love it with an undying affection, and many years of association with composers and musicians has taught me a little, if only a very little. (December 23, 1915)

Lowell's strong denial of musical skill and expertise, which was especially fervent when corresponding with musicians,¹² may be interpreted as a sign of respect and admiration for those who, in her opinion, mastered the art of music. In turn, her comment also aims at emphasizing the professionalism with which she wanted to be associated as a poet, the occupation she had chosen according to her particular talents. That her repudiations concerning any musical knowledge on her part were to a large extent unjustified has been proven by Ambrose, who shows that Lowell possessed not only a substantial interest in music, but that she was also well-informed with regard to music history and theory. Ambrose rightly holds that Lowell's 'musical' poems "treat the original with care and respect that can only issue from knowledge and understanding" (62). At the same time, Lowell's 'non-professional' approach to music allowed her to form a more holistic image of the medium than she would have had as an actual performer of music.

Apart from Lowell's low opinion of herself with regard to musical knowledge, her remark to Jean Untermeyer also hints at the aesthetic impact of her various personal encounters with artists of all kinds: musicians, but also actors, painters, and of course, other writers. Lowell's interest in music became particularly substantial and serious through her close friendship with musicians, musicologists, or composers, including, for instance, Damon, who should become her biographer, composer George Antheil, as well as singer Eva Gauthier. As a member of several cultural societies and clubs in Brookline and Boston, Lowell was acquainted with members of New England's cultural elite, many of

¹² Whenever Lowell wrote to composers, performers, or musicologists, her tone was slightly friendlier and more appreciative than in her other letters, which were composed in a rather direct, business-like style. She appears to have truly enjoyed the company of musicians, being almost in awe of people such as Edward Burlingame Hill, music professor at Harvard Music Department. When Hill asked Lowell to give her lecture on musical influences on modern poetry, she first declined. Although admitting that "the subject intrigued me immensely" she confessed that "the difficulty is that I know so little about music, and not being able to play a note makes it almost impossible for me to study it as I should like to do to prepare the article that you mention." Finally, however, she agreed to write the article with Hill's assistance (letter to Hill, September 11, 1918).

whom were either artists themselves or affiliated with the Boston art scene. Through these connections and through her prominent family associates, Lowell was introduced to authors, painters, but also musicians (or their wives), such as Edward Burlingame Hill, composer and professor at Harvard's Music Department, composer Frederick G. Hall, violinist Charles Martin Loeffler, and composer Edward MacDowell, founder of the MacDowell Colony. Her friendship with poet Louis Untermeyer and his wife Jean, especially, nurtured her interest in music. Their exhaustive correspondence not only contains discussions of literary trends and their own writings, but also reveals that they frequently visited musical performances together during their respective visits to New York or Boston. These performances include the legendary concert of the Flonzaley Quartet in Boston's Jordan Hall on December 2, 1915, after which Lowell decided to write her poem "Stravinsky's Three Pieces 'Grotesques,' for String Quartet" (*Men, Women and Ghosts*) which I will discuss in detail in chapter six. Most likely, Louis and Jean Untermeyer also introduced Lowell to some respectable musical circles in New York, as they were not only frequent concert-goers, but also had contacts to prominent composers and musicians of their time.¹³

No doubt, Lowell's friendship with musicologist and composer Carl Engel had the most profound effect on her musical knowledge, taste, and her contact with the musical world. Engel was Lowell's first musical adviser, or, as William Bedford calls him, "mentor." A German-born musician, Engel immigrated to the United States in 1905 and soon became music editor for the Boston Music Company, before being appointed head of the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1922 and later, in 1929, president of the music publishing firm of G. Schirmer. Although most renowned for his role as music editor, Engel also wrote music criticism and composed songs, piano pieces and works for chamber music.¹⁴ Ever since Lowell made Engel's acquaint-

¹³ In a letter to Amy Lowell, Jean Untermeyer reports that she and her husband went to a concert conducted by Richard Strauss and were afterwards invited to a reception for the composer (November 9, 1921).

¹⁴ William Bedford gives a thorough account of the relationship between the poet and the musician by presenting and commenting on what remains of their correspondence. As Bedford informs us, Engel demanded in his will that the vast majority of his correspondence be destroyed, among them

tance at a party she gave for actress Lina Abarbanell at her home 'Sevenels' in August 1908, her relationship with the musician began to develop into an intimate friendship. Damon reports:

This young composer, then associated with the Boston Music Company, became one of her most valued friends. He would always come at her call, to fill in at a dinner, or accompany her to a concert or a play, or simply talk when she was in the dumps. He was very fond of the modern French composers, whom he played brilliantly; he also put her on the track of French poetry, which hitherto had eluded her. Until he became Chief of the Music Division in the Library of Congress, he was a regular member of her circle. (159)

Through his European training in musicology and composition, Engel was familiar with modern trends in music, to which he introduced Lowell and which we can assume to have shaped her musical interests to a great extent. In a letter to Engel in November 1909, Lowell wrote: "I do not feel that I told you at all adequately how beautiful I thought your songs were," after having heard some of his own compositions. She confessed: "I have rarely heard any modern music which appeals to me so strongly as do your songs" (qtd. in Bedford 522/524). Engel's influence on Lowell's fascination for and knowledge of contemporary music both in Europe and America, which has been repeatedly pointed out (Bedford 520; Ambrose 45), probably accounts for Lowell's musical taste which was far more progressive and unconventional than that of many other Bostonians at the time.¹⁵ In a letter to Gauthier, Lowell once

numerous letters to Lowell, which Amy Lowell's companion Ada Dwyer-Russel burnt after her death in 1925 (521). Those few of Lowell's letters to Engel that have been preserved are now stored in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

¹⁵ In a letter to Helen Kizer, Lowell described New England's artists and audiences as being "naturally conservative" (August 14, 1917), considering the circumstances in which she wrote progressive literature as extremely difficult. Regarding herself as the "ugly duckling" she wondered: "how should such an arch radical have sprung from so conservative an environment." In terms of music, however, Nicholas Tawa has recently challenged this view of New England being overly conservative at the turn of the 20th century. Although Boston's musical scene has traditionally often been considered

expressed her unreserved admiration of modern music, claiming “‘tis there that my heart lies” (March 26, 1924).

Among other things, Engel made Lowell familiar with French music and poetry. He introduced her to the works of French Symbolist poets (Damon 319), which eventually inspired her to write a book of critical essays on French Modernist poetry entitled *Six French Poets* (1915). In this book she set out to introduce an American audience to the works of Émile Verhaeren, Albert Samain, Remy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Francis Jammes, and Paul Fort. French literature, according to Lowell, “has just been passing through one of the great poetical epochs of her career” (vi). Lowell was convinced that from these contemporary French poets Modernist poetry in English could learn substantially. Apart from poetry, Engel also presented to Lowell recent trends in French Modernist music, in particular that of French Impressionists such as Claude Debussy or Maurice Ravel. Lowell’s interest in these composers is reflected in her aesthetic theories concerning *verse libre* as based on the rhythms of Impressionist music, which will be examined in chapter four.

In their correspondence, Lowell and Engel discussed the contemporary art scene, recent artistic developments, performances, and trends both in Europe and America. When Lowell traveled to England in 1913, she wrote to Engel:

rather conservative and genteel, owing partly to the Puritan roots of New England’s culture and partly to the academic background and rather traditional style of many Boston composers around 1900 (such as Hill, John Knowles Paine, or MacDowell), there were much more progressive composers, the most prominent example of whom is Charles Ives. Accordingly, Tawa argues that in the early years of the 20th century, New England composers “were as progressive as most composers in America, including New Yorkers” (230). In fact, Lowell herself differentiated between the literary and musical environment, asserting that Boston was much more progressive in terms of music than with regard to literature (letter to Henry Parker, February 16, 1916). That New England was considered more conservative than other regions in the United States or Europe at the time therefore rather applies to contexts of musical reception than production.

I heard 'Boris Goudenow' the other night. Sung in Russian, with a Russian Company, & with Chaliapine in the title role. It was awfully interesting, as you said, & you cannot really have heard it, sung in French, & without Chaliapine, who seems to me the greatest tragic *singer* I ever heard, bar none. I have also seen the Russian Ballet twice. 'Le Sacre du Printemps' was insanity, to my mind. Wait until I tell you about it. (Qtd. in Bedford, 530)

Lowell's fascination for Igor Stravinsky's revolutionary ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps*, which had caused great shock and irritation among the Parisian audience at its premiere in May the same year, shows her bold preference for experimental musical aesthetics. Of course, Lowell also listened to non-contemporary music, such as the above mentioned performance of Mattheson's *Boris Goudenow* (1710),¹⁶ and works of the established 19th century repertoire. Lowell's profound interest in the theater and stage productions remained solid throughout her life, drawing her to a great variety of opera and operetta productions in Boston's various theaters.¹⁷

Yet, Lowell did not contend herself with being a mere visitor of stage productions. Having been recommended to the Boston Music Company by Engel, she was commissioned to translate Edmond Rostand's musical comedy *Pierrot Qui Pleure et Pierrot Qui Rit* with music by Jean Hubert, into English in 1913. However, Lowell's involvement in this project by far exceeded the mere process of translation, as it was

¹⁶ As Ambrose notes, Lowell had some knowledge of early music, i.e. music from the medieval, renaissance and baroque period (54). In the early decades of the 20th century, first attempts of reviving early music were initiated by early music-scholar, pianist and harpsichord-maker Arnold Dolmetsch (Tawa 231). Lowell's interest in early music is probably rooted in her general efforts to collect and archive old materials. Although she did not own any early music manuscripts herself, her collector's spirit shows in her collection of historical manuscripts and editions.

¹⁷ Lowell frequently visited opera performances in her home town Boston, including, for instance, the premiere of *La Gioconda* on November 9, 1909, the first performance in the newly opened Opera House (Damon 160). Although Boston's opera scene was never as celebrated as that of New York, the Opera House hosted a considerable number of stage productions with local and traveling opera troupes between 1909 and its closing in the 1930s.

one of the first opportunities for her to consider the relationship between words and music. "In writing words to music already composed," she stated in a letter to George P. Brett of the MacMillan Press, "it is necessary to follow the musical accent. In some cases, therefore, the poems, when printed without the music in the beginning, will not scan and appear hopelessly uneven" (April 23, 1915). This first contemplation on rhythm in music and speech reflects Lowell's interest in new poetic rhythms which she later actively pursued in her free verse experiments. Lowell also supervised and organized the production of the operetta, which was performed for charity in the New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, Boston, on three nights in February 1915. Being not only translator of the libretto, but also financial manager and chairperson of the Artistic Committee, Lowell was intensely involved in the rehearsals of the operetta, overseeing and organizing the stage productions with the greatest attention to detail. She maintained that "in operatic productions, it is absolutely necessary to have them properly rehearsed" (letter to John H. Campbell, December 28, 1914), indicating the professional approach she took to the realization of (musical) performances.¹⁸

Although Lowell upheld a keen interest in musical theater throughout her life, she became increasingly fond of the smaller and more intimate forms of chamber music, song, and instrumental solo music. Apart from public chamber music performances, private house concerts also played an important role in Lowell's life. The Untermeyers, for instance, regularly organized dinner parties in combination with recitals in their home. At one of such musical 'soirées' in 1922, Lowell heard the author Alfred Kreymborg play a mandolite while chanting some of his poems. Soon afterwards, she congratulated him on this performance:

Now let me tell you what a very great pleasure you gave me the other night at the Untermeyers. The combination of the poems with your mandolite music to them was a revelation. I have heard people speak to music before, but you have made it an art. You have my heartiest

¹⁸ In addition to Rostand's *Pierrot* operetta, Lowell was involved in a number of other musical productions, including the translation of the operetta *The Milkmaid of Trianon* and a collaboration with an unspecified composer to turn her "Yucca" poems into a ballet (letter to Linscott, July 8, 1921), neither of which were, however, fully realized.

congratulations, and I hope I shall have the opportunity of hearing you again many times. I have been talking to people about it constantly since that evening. (Letter to Kreymborg, March 22, 1921)

Although this is the only record of Lowell talking about a direct fusion of poetry and music in the form of a poetry recital accompanied by music, an intermedial practice that became more popular in the 1950s and 60s,¹⁹ it shows that innovative and experimental performances were common and probably encouraged at the musical soirées held by the Untermeyers. The Untermeyers were not the only ones in late 19th and early 20th century Boston who organized private house concerts, often combined with poetry readings, for a circle of friends. For centuries, wealthy members of the intellectual elite had figured as important patrons of the contemporary musical and literary scene in promoting young composers and performers. These soirées became fashionable for wealthy individuals in America, imitating a trend in Europe, where artistic and intellectual gatherings functioned as cultural and creative centers and consequently had a big impact on the dissemination of Modernist ideas and movements.²⁰

As Ralph Locke and Cyrilla Barr illustrate, musical patronage reached its peak in turn of the century America for reasons of economic growth and increasing financial possibilities among private benefactors. “Since the marketplace did not support orchestras, opera houses, and

¹⁹ Performances of poetry to the accompaniment of music, especially jazz, were popular among poetry movements of the 1950s and 60s such as Sound Poetry, Beat Poetry, or Language Poetry. These performances included the recitation of poems to live or recorded music and often also of visual effects as well as spontaneous dramatic presentations. At Lowell’s time, however, instances of such performances were still rare. They include experiments as carried out by William B. Yeats, Arnold Dolmetsch, and Florence Farr who, around 1900, revived the Bardic tradition of speaking poetry to musical accompaniment in terms of pinning down exact musical pitches for the speaking voice. For Yeats’ concept of oral poetry see Schuchard, who presents the historical circumstances for Yeats’ lifelong attempt to restore an oral tradition of chanting and musical speech and his influence on many other Modernist poets such as Amy Lowell.

²⁰ For American and European soirées around the turn of the century see Crunden.

professional [...] music schools, and since government money was rarely forthcoming, the gap was filled, as it was in other areas such as social work, by patronage” (30). A substantial amount of sponsoring and support came from affluent individuals, and, as their study shows, to a great extent from women. That women’s patronage of the arts, and especially of music, has largely been denied the critical attention it deserves, is explained by the editors primarily by two factors: First, an “idealist” conception of art has long turned the attention exclusively on the artwork itself and the ‘genius’ of its creator, while neglecting the financial and institutional circumstances of its creation (3/4), and second, the fact that many patrons were woman has led to an undervaluation of the importance of patronage (3). Locke and Barr aim to show that

all these individuals play essential roles in the musical life of a given place and time, enabling as they do the creation – and the continued, meaningful existence, in performance and interpretation – of those great musical works that we are taught to admire and love. Indeed, they could be said to ‘make music’, in the sense that they make music possible, whether or not they actually set notes on paper, or strike bow against string. (3)

Lowell did not play an instrument herself nor did she compose music, but she was indeed all the more active and eager to “make music possible” and thus contributed significantly to the promotion of contemporary music, as well as that of contemporary literature. It may be that Lowell picked up the idea of holding musical soirées from cultural patron Isabella Stewart Gardner, who frequently invited her to her ‘musical’ dinners at Fenway Court. From 1913 to 1915, in particular, Lowell hosted a number of concerts at Sevenels which she called “musicals.” It seems that she had carried around with her the idea to launch an intellectual salon for a while, in the vein of the legendary 19th century ‘Schubertiaden’.²¹ During her visit to England in 1913, she enthusiastically

²¹ Between 1815 and 1824, soirées took place in a private house in Vienna, at which composer Franz Schubert and other artists and intellectuals met to play music, recite literature, or perform dramatic scenes. The idea of such musico-literary salons had its pendants in other countries, of which the Bloomsbury group in England is perhaps the most famous. Consisting of writers,

cally recalled to Engel a literary gathering she had attended with the Imagist circle in London and which she wanted to set up herself after her return to America:

Ezra Pound has undertaken to make me have as good a time as the empty state of London permits, & every night or two he appears, with some aspiring poet, & we talk & talk, until after midnight. Just the sort of talk which you like, & I couldn't help thinking that if only we could have you, & Adler, & Gebhard, & a piano, the salon we have so often talked about, would be complete. (Qtd. in Bedford 531)

Although Lowell presented the idea mainly as a literary circle, she did intend to include musical performances on such occasions, as pianist Heinrich Gebhard was to be of the party. Soon after her return to America, Lowell put her plan into action and invited the "Devils," the above-mentioned group of friends as well as her companion Ada Russel, to the first of many such meetings, held at Sevenels on December 21, 1913 (Damon 220).²² Lowell's musicals, combined with poetry readings and literary discussions, consisted mainly of solo piano and song recitals, performed by pianist Gebhard and tenor Clément. The programs were predominantly modern, including pieces by French composers such as Debussy, Ravel, Gabriel Fauré, César Franck and Vincent d'Indy, contemporary American compositions by the composers in attendance, such as Engel or Loeffler, European Modernists such as Béla Bartók or Isaac Albeniz, but also the 'classical' piano repertoire of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Frédéric Chopin, and Franz Liszt.²³

The programs of these concerts were relatively extensive and Lowell did her best to create a concert atmosphere which allowed for 'serious'

philosophers and artists such as Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, or Roger Fry, the Bloomsbury group was a group of friends who frequently met between 1907 and 1930 in a house near London to discuss art, philosophy and which had a strong influence on current aesthetic debates.

²² As can be concluded from her letters, Lowell had already organized concerts at Sevenels before that date. However, only after December 1913 did her soirées turn into a more regular concert series.

²³ See handwritten program notes which Gebhard included in his letters to Lowell.

listening. “My dearest Miss Lowell,” Gebhard writes after one of the concerts, “it is very lovely of you the way you are concerned about having absolutely the right atmosphere on our wonderful evenings” (April 27, 1915). Like Gardner, Lowell had high aesthetic standards with regard to her musicals. Locke refers to Gebhard’s recollection of one of these evenings, based on his unpublished manuscript, *Reminiscences of a Boston Musician*:

At the home of the wealthy poet Amy Lowell, some highly gratifying, rather Bloomsburyesque evenings in which a hand-chosen seven or eight guests, including Gebhard, partook of a ‘luscious’ dinner, engaged in ‘intense conversation’ about modern poetry (‘I said very little but listened enthralled’), and at ten moved to the music room for Gebhard’s performances, which (at Lowell’s insistence) were interspersed with long pauses for silent reflection or pensive discussion of the piece just played. (Locke, “Living with Music” 98)

As becomes apparent from Gebhard’s description of this concert, Lowell demanded her audiences to be highly committed. This atmosphere reflects a concept of art which, according to Lowell, was to be not only of ‘highest’ quality (whatever this normative category implied for her), but which also required an almost devout response. Art was a serious matter for Lowell, and irrespective of the medium through which it was expressed, she put a substantial amount of energy into fostering the ‘quality’ of art on a variety of different levels, be it poetry, music, or theater.

Lowell’s role as a musical patron, in particular, has hitherto been largely ignored. Her patronage was not only restricted to hosting musical soirées at her house, but also included the sponsoring of concerts²⁴ as

²⁴ Lowell’s financial support for concerts in Boston was mainly related to charity concerts during WWI, including a concert at Harvard University for the *American Friends of Musicians in France* in 1918 and 1919 as well as a concert played by Loeffler in 1917. Lowell also organized a concert/poetry reading for war charity in Boston’s Steinert Hall in December 1914 with poet Josephine Preston Peabody.

well as the collection of rare musical manuscripts.²⁵ Therefore it is all the more important to note that with the influence, connections, and money she had, Lowell made a significant contribution to the musical life in Boston at the time while supporting and increasing the recognition of contemporary musicians and their works alike.

Lowell's Modernist Musical Aesthetics

Amy Lowell was not only a recipient and patron of music, she also actively engaged in writing about music. This part of her involvement with the 'other' medium is what interests me most in this study: the absorption, inclusion and projection of music in Lowell's poems and poetics. While in her poetry, as will be shown, music takes on all kinds of different functions, from transcendent symbol to formal model or cultural signifier, her theoretical writings display the meta-level of her reflections upon this musico-poetic involvement. These theoretical works include her writings on *vers libre*, her essays "Poetry as a Spoken Art" (1917), "A Consideration of Modern Poetry" (1917), and, above all, "Some Musical Analogies in Modern Poetry" (1920), an essay based on a lecture she gave at the Music Department of Harvard University in 1919. In September 1918, Hill asked Lowell if she wanted to give a speech about the relationship between music and poetry (letter to Lowell, September 5, 1918). With Hill's professional support, Lowell prepared the lecture which was held on March 3, 1919 at Harvard's Paine Hall, for the benefit of the French Musicians Fund. Lowell's essay "Some Musical Analogies" contemplates the correspondences between the New Poetry and its 'sister art' music.²⁶ It is also one of Lowell's most important poetological statements, emphasizing the benefits of a musical viewpoint on the writing and understanding of poetry. In this essay, Lowell recounts her own discovery of such an intermedial perspective and critical awareness, which was first triggered by her considerations concerning poetic rhythm.

²⁵ The musical manuscripts in Lowell's collection at Harvard Houghton Library include two autographs by Beethoven as well as several letters by Clara Schumann.

²⁶ See chapter one for the concept of poetry and music as 'sister arts'.

As an active promoter of free verse, Lowell partook in revolutionizing poetic rhythm, following the model of modern music. Yet, rhythm was not the only element which Lowell felt music could teach modern poetry: “the more I studied the matter,” Lowell argues, “the more I became convinced that it was not only in rhythms that this modern poetry resembled music, the whole attitude of approach was the same” (128). Although musical rhythm comprises a substantial part of her poetological reflections, this common “approach” which she describes to be innate to both modern music and poetry also includes rather elusive analogies such as texture, movement, effect, structure, and sound. Furthermore, it touches upon anthropological considerations in relation to a supposedly ‘primal’ rhythmic origin of mankind. In this essay, Lowell raises some of the issues which were discussed much later in the field of Intermedial Studies and which form the basis of the theoretical foundation of this study. However imprecise and at times ill-conceived, Lowell’s investigations hint at some crucial forms of intermedial relationships such as transmediality (elements which are inherent in both/all media), intermedial transformation (conversion of a text from one medium into another), or intermedial imitation (the borrowing of intermedial elements), all of which will be further discussed and systematized in chapter one. Comprising many of Lowell’s musico-poetic statements, this essay, based on Lowell’s only public speech explicitly addressing music,²⁷ is one of the central sources for my study, functioning both as a primary text in the examination of Lowell’s musical aesthetics as well as a secondary text with regard to the analyses of her poems.

In what follows, I will not only investigate the use and function of the musical medium in Lowell’s poetry, but at the same time trace the general literary and aesthetic development that can be identified in the author’s work and which, at a decisive moment in literary history, per-

²⁷ Lowell’s Harvard lecture was not the only request made to the poet to talk about a musical topic. As Lowell remarks in a letter to Gauthier, she was asked by the *League of American Composers* to give a lecture about jazz on February 10, 1924. She declined the offer, however, because a trip to New York would not have fit into her busy schedule at that time (letter to Gauthier, January 12, 1924).

forms and mirrors the transition from (late) Romanticism to Modernism. By means of discussing the transformation which the concept of music undergoes in Lowell's poems, it will be possible to illuminate part of the literary revolution which took place in the years following the turn of the 20th century. In Lowell's early poems, the figure of music is still mainly used along the lines of a Romantic search for and elation of sublimity, symbolizing an aesthetic ideal. In the course of Lowell's poetic development, however, music is less often used as a metaphysical metaphor, but instead increasingly approached with regard to its specific medial qualities. Still, it does not lose its function as a paradigmatic art form. Walter Pater's famous dictum of 1910, that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (135) certainly holds true for as many Modernist writers and artists as it does for those of the (late) 19th century, as Brad Bucknell argues. Bucknell claims that, for these authors, music "refers obliquely to an art which transcends referential or lexical meaning, and which has the power of some kind of excessive, yet essential, element to which the literary may point, but which it can never fully encompass" (*Literary Modernism* 1). This idea of music as an alternative 'language', one that is not prone to lexical semantics and which is built on more self-referential principles, appealed to many Modernists who, in their general distrust in the capacity of language and cognition, were dissatisfied with the representative potentials of language itself. So, music, in its defiance of semantic representation and its preponderance of compositional material seemed like a perfect model towards which Modernist literature could and should strive. Werner Wolf describes Modernism as a period

in which the emphasis shifted from a referential focus on the outer world to a preoccupation with the inner world of the psyche and a self-reflexive exploration of the artistic medium, its possibilities and limits. An attempt to transgress the conventional boundaries of given media by experimenting with intermedial adoptions of (elements of) other media is an obvious way of achieving especially this latter goal. (*The Musicalization of Fiction* 125)

Eric Prieto argues similarly, also pointing to the Modernist crisis of literature's mimetic function, its quest for new techniques, and the growing representation of psychological states and processes. He concludes that music thus "acts as a guide for reconfiguring the [narrative]

text in such a way that it can better represent those elements of thought that had theretofore been considered to be ineffable, unrepresentable, or otherwise inaccessible to language" (x).

Like many other Modernist writers, Lowell increasingly set out to explore the formal entities of the musical medium and to incorporate them into her work, as for instance via sound imitations, structural models, or rhythmic patterns. Her poems increasingly employ music in an experimental manner and as a source of material. Yet, as a subject, music at times represents a (late) Romantic metaphysical symbol. Thus, Lowell represents one of those American poets that Edward Hirsch would call to have "reconciled the demands of being both Modernist and Romantic poets" (271). Although Lowell is usually considered a proponent of the New Poetry, several of her poems display a transcendent inwardness, an elevation of the sublime, and a veneration of the imagination generally associated with late 19th century writers. That she was first and foremost remembered as a Modernist poet is probably due to the outspokenness and vigor with which she promoted new trends in literature. Lowell, whom John Morris called "A Militant Crusader for the Cause of Modern Poetry" on the book cover of her *Complete Poetical Works*, took to the pronouncement of the poetic revolution in a rather radical way, passing on its ideas in numerous essays, articles, and lectures like a preacher with a missionary cause. Her 'propaganda'²⁸ for a change in poetic style was especially strong during her Imagist phase succeeding the years after her visits to England in 1913 and 1914, where she had encountered Pound, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Richard Aldington. From 1914 to 1917, Lowell wrote a great number of Imagist poems, edited and published the three volume poetry collection *Some Imagist Poets* (1915-17), and gave numerous public talks about the movement.

Although Lowell's poetic vision was connected to the national idea of creating and advancing an American poetic tradition, she put a sub-

²⁸ Lowell frequently used the term 'propaganda' to refer to the dissemination and publicization of her poetic ideas. It did not yet have the negative connotation of biased or misleading and thus highly manipulative information, although a political impetus is also discernible in Lowell's use of the term.

stantial amount of energy into the transatlantic project of Imagism in which she collaborated with English poets.²⁹ The immense scope and determination of the Imagists' enterprise to revolutionize poetry becomes apparent in a letter addressed to Aldington:

I think the Anthology has done its work: we have made a good position for ourselves, we are taken seriously, and I think we have done that almost impossible thing – come very near to changing the whole taste for poetry, certainly in this country. There are a number of conservative poets still writing, and a few people who like them, but they have nothing like the vogue they had, and the interest is all turning our way, I think simply because we are so absolutely sincere and have believed so absolutely in the things we have tried to embody in our work; and to my mind it is one of the most hopeful things about the whole movement that the sincerity which is in us has sprung an answering echo in the interest which we have been accorded. (September 5, 1916)

Making the New Poetry public was one of the main tasks Lowell set herself in these years. For “the cause,” as she often called this project in an almost spiritual way consistent with her concept of art as ‘religion’, she did not miss an opportunity to defend the principles of modern poetry in her publications and public lectures. In this venture, she was at once poet, critic,³⁰ editor, patroness, agent, and business-woman,

²⁹ This association between American and English poets was not, however, unproblematic. The often-cited quarrel between Lowell and expatriate poet Pound over the Imagist movement occurred exactly in response to Lowell's decision to ‘import’ the movement to America and her issuing an Imagist anthology with an American publisher. Notwithstanding this personal dispute, Lowell continued to collaborate very beneficially with her other English colleagues of the Imagist movement. See chapter four for Lowell's role in the Imagist movement.

³⁰ Like many other Modernist writers, Lowell largely engaged in critical writing and many of her poems are commented on and ‘explained’ in her essays, prefaces, and letters. In her correspondence with editors, she often emphasized the importance of explanatory remarks for the understanding of her poetry, which shows that they were an integral part of her poetics.