

**A STUDY OF HISTORICAL ASPECTS
OF THE CONFESSIONAL POETRY IN ROBERT LOWELL'S
LIFE STUDIES**

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Abstract

Robert Lowell, the iconic American Poet, moves with his Confessional poetry, notably the poetic volume *Life Studies* (1959) from the “raw” to the “cooked”. Confessional poetry is similar to the art of confession. Moreover, the historical poetic pieces implied more than the mere gathering of fact and figures. For Lowell history manifested itself in the affairs of men and it is a persistent and violent force. Such a view is not entirely optimistic, springing directly from this view is Lowell's deep sense of loss, failure, alienation, helplessness and a feeling of entrapment in a world not of his making. In the light of the New Historicism approach, Lowell managed to perceive the literary text as a communal product which sought to reconnect itself to its cultural context. He did not think only of the past but took history forward into the present with all its discourse on culture, and its components, religious and political tradition of the place itself. Hence, in order to study the confessional poetry, historical aspects and the consequences of their psychoanalytic literary approach objectively play a significant role.

Key Words: Confessional poetry, Robert Lowell, Poetic Volume Life Studies, New Historicism, Historical Aspects.

Abstrak:

Robert Lowell, Penyair Amerika yang ikonik, bergerak dengan puisi Confessional-nya, terutama volume puisi *Life Studies* (1959) dari "mentah" ke "dimasak". Puisi pengakuan mirip dengan seni pengakuan. Lagipula, potongan puisi sejarah menyiratkan lebih dari sekedar pengumpulan fakta dan angka. Bagi Lowell, sejarah memanifestasikan dirinya dalam urusan manusia dan merupakan kekuatan yang gigih dan kejam. Pandangan seperti itu tidak sepenuhnya optimis, yang muncul langsung dari pandangan ini adalah perasaan kehilangan, kegagalan, keterasingan, ketidakberdayaan, dan perasaan terperangkap di dunia yang bukan buatannya. Dalam terang pendekatan Historisisme Baru, Lowell berhasil mempersepsikan teks sastra sebagai produk komunal yang berusaha menghubungkan dirinya kembali dengan konteks budayanya. Dia tidak hanya memikirkan masa lalu tetapi membawa sejarah maju ke masa kini dengan segala wacana tentang budaya, dan komponennya, tradisi agama dan politik tempat itu sendiri. Oleh karena itu, untuk mempelajari puisi pengakuan, aspek historis dan

konsekuensi dari pendekatan sastra psikoanalitik secara obyektif memainkan peran penting.

Kata Kunci: *Puisi pengakuan, Robert Lowell, Studi Volume Puisi Kehidupan, Historisisme Baru, Aspek Sejarah.*

INTRODUCTION

Robert Lowell's Life, Art and Achievements

Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV (March 1, 1917 – September 12, 1977) was born in Boston, Massachusetts descendant of a prominent family. His father, Robert Traill Spence Lowell, worked as an officer in the Navy, while his mother, Charlotte Winslow Lowell, was a member of an old New England family that of William Samuel John, a signer of the United States Constitution.

Since the end of the Second World War, Robert Lowell became an important American poet. He is one of the most influential poets of the 1950s and 60s. Lowell was educated at private schools in Boston where he decided upon a career as a poet. He spent summers reading and studying the English literary tradition even imposing his reading lists on school friends.

At Harvard, Lowell met with Allen Tate, a poet of the Fugitive group. He travelled to Tate's Tennessee home during the summer of 1937; writing poetry and studying at the feet of the older poet. He transferred to Ohio to study with John Crowe Ransom who was Tate's mentor in Kenyon College. At Kenyon, he then befriended Randall Jarrell and Peter Taylor, both of whom went on to their successful careers as writers. Lowell then studied with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren at Louisiana State University.

In 1940, Lowell's conversion to Roman Catholicism was a denial of his ancestors' New England Protestantism. He had volunteered for military service when the Second World War began in 1941. However, it was in 1943 when he received a conscription notice from the United States military, shocked and disappointed by the bombing of

civilians in German cities, he declared himself at this time a conscientious objector. He served for several months in jail and finished his sentence performing community service in Connecticut.

During these months, Lowell finished and published his first book, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944) and revised it in the next year. He published the new version as *Lord Weary's Castle* in 1946 which received a warm reception within critical circles in *The Nation* magazine, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1947. These works strengthened Lowell's reputation as a leading poet of the new generation. He published his next book, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, in 1951. The book was criticized as inferior to *Lord Weary's Castle*, and even Lowell recognized the firmness of the new book's dramatic monologues.

These years saw Lowell suffering from a number of manic-depressive experiences, foreshadowing the disease that plagued him when he was eventually hospitalized at McLean's, a mental

hospital after his mother's death in 1954. The years of suffering, sickness and despair of the middle 1950s were characterized by a political atmosphere because of the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower. Meanwhile, Lowell's psychiatrists drove him to write about his childhood manifested in the prose memoir at the heart of Lowell's 1959 book, *Life Studies*, which is a free verse poetic piece that took consideration of Lowell's self, his psyche, and his surroundings. The publication of *Life Studies* in 1959 renewed Lowell's reputation; the book received the National Book Award in 1960. Many readers saw in the book nothing less than a change in the American poetic landscape while the new book actually inaugurated the poetry that was coined by M.L. Rosenthal as, "Confessional."

The early sixties found Lowell also publishing his collection of *Imitations 1961*, loose translations of poems (the book won the Bollingen Poetry Translation Prize in 1962). The historical interest evident in Lowell's poetry and plays alike are

revealed where Lowell returned to a consideration of the individual's relation to history with the publication of *The Old Glory* (1964) and *For the Union Dead* (1964). Lowell publicly refused Lyndon Johnson's invitation when invited to a White House Arts Festival in 1965 as a stance against the American escalation of the war in Vietnam. In 1967, Lowell participated along with thousands of others in the March on the Pentagon. In 1967, Lowell published *Near the Ocean*, a collection which is the work Lowell was most deeply absorbed in during the year when the verse journal *Notebook, 1967-68* was published.

In 1973, Lowell published his book *History and For Lizzie and Harriet*, which includes some of the poems about his wife and daughter from *Notebook 1967-68*, and many new poems which document the break-up of his marriage with Hardwick. Later, *The Dolphin* (1973) includes a number of poems about his marriage with Caroline Blackwood which won in 1974, the Pulitzer Prize. Lowell died in New York of a heart attack on 12

September 1977. His last book, *Day By Day*, was published a year after his death.

The literary merit of Robert Lowell's poetry has been in question for the past fifty years. Critics focused on Lowell in the context of Confessionalism. They offer readings of his poetry which emphasize the need for confessional detail in order to understand the context and the true meaning of his poems. The questions raised in this study depict the historical aspects that characterized the type of confessional poetry throughout the analysis of the poems of Robert Lowell's Volume *Life Studies*. The focus of the study will also draw attention to the stylistic development that accompanied these aspects.

Literary critical studies such as New Historicism will be discussed in context. The paper will cover significant features in Lowell's poetry by analysis and citation from his correspondences with Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Tate, Randall Jarrell and Elizabeth Hardwick.

This paper discusses in detail confessional poetry as related to the

analysis of the poems of Lowell's volume *Life Studies* in context with the New Historicism approach. The chapter deals with the historical background of the United States that poets like Lowell continued to explore from his own perspective. In order to deal with history, prominent figures, time and place are tackled as well in this section.

Finally, this research paper is a concentration on the innovation of confessional poetry and the evolution of Robert Lowell's psyche and ideas with regard to confessional American free verse and themes and stylistic tools. It aims at proving the development of his vision and attempts to open up further possibilities for understanding and interpreting his poems.

Historical Aspects the Poet as a Conscientious Objector

Robert Lowell's distinguished family members in American history are linked to his past. This link appears to be an important element in his poetry. However, Lowell always appears to be rebel with his family, to be what they appear to be

in their political stance and their religion. During World War Two, Robert Lowell himself is viewed as a conscientious objector, especially, protesting the allied bombing of civilians. The conscientious objector (CO) is defined as an individual who refuses to perform military service based on his feeling of freedom of thought, conscience, and/or religion in the context of military service. (Wikipedia) He took his decision not to serve in World War Two and he objected to the service in the Armed Force as a result, he spent a year in federal prison in Connecticut. This was a firm political stance which appeared in some public letters. Lowell wrote to President Roosevelt and President Johnson about this issue.

During Lowell's mental breakdown and poetry-writing and breakthroughs and his interest in his own ancestors' past was obvious. It seems that while he was writing, he was deeply absorbed in the experience of uncovering his roots. Part of the family history was a familial section on which *Life Studies* was constructed; thus his

family history was American history to Lowell and vice versa. It is the part which highlights Lowell's biography by telling not only his life-story but also hinting something about the social or the geographical domain or more broadly spread out through historical time.

Perhaps Robert Lowell was related to all the prominent figures that link the past of Lowell/Winslow family as documented by Frank Bidart in Lowell's *Collected Poems* as well as those by Saskia Hamilton in her book of Lowell's *Letters* and by Hamilton and Thomas Travisano in their collection of Lowell's and Elizabeth Bishop's correspondence, *Words in Air* (2008) and biographer Paul Mariani. As Ian Hamilton hints, Robert Lowell on both his father and his mother's side was related to a number of important figures in the colonial and the revolutionary period in American history. It was a fact that Lowell was quite apparently aware of. For example, he told Bishop in 1947 that he had "won Ezra Pound's heart by telling him that he was collateral descendant of Aaron Burr" (*Words in Air* 15);

Aaron Burr was the vice-president of the United States, Lowell's first cousin five times.

Lowell's consciousness of his family history was brought into his conduct in the present. He had to live up to tradition and accordingly he had to deal with certain attitudes of his own. Consequently, his poetry at the time showed his refusal to be drafted in 1943. Lowell wrote ironically that he was from prominent American family on both sides whose "traditions, have always found their fulfilment in maintaining, through responsible participation in the civil and the military services, our country's freedom and honor." (*Letters of Robert Lowell* 37-40).

History is as important as the study of the psychoanalytical approach. Both help one to understand the process of growth and development of a poet and a man in the society. The study does not only tackle domestic aspects specific to confessional poetry but also historical aspects at large such as war, double standards, and materialism, and the poet's stance against all dominant orders, and the

hegemonic authority in society. Lowell himself chose to write about the family in the 1950s as the story of the ruin of his family which is the story of post-war America, in general, from his stand-point.

It is the story of the self but this time it is depersonalized by Lowell to reach a wider approach. M. L. Rosenthal describes this in his book *The New Poets*, he says "The Myth that Lowell creates is that of... America," (61) Lowell focuses on the upper-class world writing about the exact contemporary ironies of American history and the debilitation of the New England tradition. Lowell plans a general view of civilization, of history and of the recurrent quest for salvation; his anguish is concerned to register a sick world. Lowell takes us, particularly, to the age of America and New England with their high cultures down to the modern age with its horrors of world wars. He opens the volume of *Life Studies* with a journey in the stream of history from the classical past to the present which develops a personal view of a process of deepening cultural decay. He

mentions an American industrial city providing power in the same manner for its industries as M.L. Rosenthal goes on to describe: "history and predicament are embodied in those of its own family and epitomized in his own psychological experience." (61)

John Fuller's brief interview (1960) in his "Trade Winds" column appeared just after Lowell had won the National Book Award for *Life Studies*, he states that his poems were cited for their "fierce and immediate compassion... which strike through the private dimension to document the pressures of an age." (Jeffrey Meyers 2) "Elizabeth Bishop in one of the letters addressed to Lowell, writes: "... He also sent me from LIFE. And some of the photographs aren't so bad! I rather like the one with both hands up, as if you were being held up (by LIFE)." (*Words in Air* 317)

The *Life Studies* (1959) as a whole contains three verse parts and a prose part: The first section of *Life Studies* which consists of four poems sum up the cultural and historical context of the poet's life and times

are listed as: "Beyond the Alps," (1952) "The Banker's Daughter," (Iowa 1953), "Inauguration Day" (1953), and "The Mad Negro Soldier Confined in Munich," (1953) that culminates in the tragedy of an individual, which is the outcome of social, cultural and political degradation. The first section is not directly confessional and is reminiscent of Lowell's first phase of poetry writing which deal with issues concerning history. The quartets of poems which open the section were published earlier in 1952-54 and present the background for Lowell's later confessional poems. The poems make up an opening movement that is not personal in the sense of the rest of the book; they are poems of violent contradiction, a historical scheme to define the disintegration of the world.

The second section is the prose part which states Lowell's childhood and links up with confessional free verse. The third section of the book has four poems about four poets with whom the poet identifies himself in some way. These four writers are placed in this

way "Ford Madox Ford" (April, 1954), "For George Santayana" (1959), "Delmore Schwartz" (1958), and "Hart Crane" (1953). Section One and Three can be seen as a grouping of 'historical' poems, historical in that they reveal the nature and course of history as perceived by the poet. Without being directly critical of the society, he presents a picture of a civilization as a communal product that has lost its dignity. We may view the first section as a bridge between the impersonal and objective poetry of the earlier phase and the personal and subjective poetry of the later phase.

Such historical pieces imply more than the mere gathering of facts and figures. For Lowell history manifests itself in the affairs of men and it is a persistent and violent force. Such a view is not entirely optimistic, springing directly from this view is Lowell's deep sense of loss, failure, alienation, helplessness and feelings of entrapment in a world not of his making. In this chapter, historical aspects in confessional poems by Robert Lowell will be

discussed; aspects, such as setting (places and time), wars, public figures, will occupy the bulk of this chapter with examples from the poems. This section forms the background against which the poet's personal history unfolds. In context, humanistic perspective should be discussed in relation to Lowell's earlier indirect confessional poems in *Life Studies*. However, Rollo May's (1909-1994) theory of the humanistic psychology, tension and existence appears to have a direct relation with the historical aspects in this volume. In addition, dealing with *Life Studies* like writing of history is giving a hint of New-Historicism as an approach clear in tackling the historical aspects in these poems.

Lowell appears to be true to himself as a civil right activist and a defendant of his nation but he could not abide unnecessary violence. Therefore, he participated in protest against the Vietnam War as a principle. Lowell makes it clear that he is not a pacifist that was opposed to all war on principle. After Pearl Harbor, he explains, he felt the country was threatened, and he was

willing to come to its aid by twice attempting to enlist, he was even willing to tolerate what would be considered as atrocities in his view the war was no longer defensive.

However, in 1967, the stance he took was a political act of protest and opposition to the Vietnam War and he denounced American air raids in Vietnam in 1965, stating that he and the society were in danger of becoming an explosive and suddenly violently aggressive nation, drifting on the way to the last nuclear destruction. Finally he was asked to be a petition signer against the war and a supporter of the peace movement. In October 1967, he joined a march to the Pentagon in Washington, DC against the war and was one of the prominent speakers at the event.

In addition, Lowell considered war caused destruction to any forthcoming plans for the future. The normal individual accepts death, as Rollo May in his psychoanalytical approach states, however war causes destructive death. Lowell believed that death is inevitable but as a human being, he also had thoughts of

a possible future and behaved towards achieving it. According to May, the human being sets plans in the hope of fulfilling them in future times with certain responsibilities. Lowell as a responsible poet and citizen could face obstacles and delays that upset his projects, he even considered how he could cope with the new situations and saw how to get around the problem and encompass the new situation. He never ignores the problem, but seeks to grasp and solve it. Lowell is an example of the right and the responsibility of the individual citizen to follow the dictates of conscience.

This is what Lowell does when he confronts his anxiety about his family's position with regard to war: such constructive and courageous confrontation is not without anxiety for it does not forget the individual's awareness of the limits and imperfections of one's existence. This position does not deny the significance of the historical knowledge of Lowell's past legacy. As for the new historicist, critics argue that the pastness of the work is

part of its present meaning and must inform any reading. As an example when discussing *Hamlet* by Robert Weimann who says that there is the Elizabethan context and the other modern understanding and interpretation of it. A work is not simply a monument of the past, but it cannot have real meaning without knowing its context. What seems applicable to this part of the research is the approach that came in the 1980s where there were new ways of thinking about this relation between the past and the present of a text and the culture resulted in a critical movement known as the new historicism.

The term was first used by Wesley Morris in his book *Toward a New Historicism* in 1972, however, adopted by Stephen Greenblatt who applied it to a series of historical Renaissance studies. Anton Kaes speaks of it as a "communal product rather than the expression of an author's intention; which reconnects it to its culture context and examines the work of art as social intervention that crosses disciplinary boundaries seeking historical and textual

specificity." (210) Kaes perceives the literary text as a communal product which seeks to reconnect itself to its cultural context. Relevant to this issue is Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988) and the approach used by Shakespeare which embodies the subject of anxiety and conflict as used by a dramatist. Suspense and anxiety are actually investigated today by humanistic psychologists to explain disturbed behaviour or thought.

The communal product as term can be applied to what was experienced by Lowell's fellow prisoners who included all types, some were for political and ethical reasons. Lowell also met, in the poem "Memories of West Street Lepke", a Jehovah's Witness, a "J.W.," though he admitted of things which he had "never heard / of the Jehovah's Witnesses." (37-39) While the Jehovah's Witnesses refused to recognize the sovereignty of the state or to support state war. They made up the largest percentage of prisoners of conscience. A fellow CO recalled

Lowell's meeting one such prisoner, Louis Lepke a Murderer when introduced to Lowell, Lepke said, "I'm in for killing. What are you in for?" to which Lowell replied, "Oh, I'm in for refusing to kill."

(Mariani 109)

New Historicism is not preoccupied only with the past but it takes history forward into the present with all its discourse on culture, and its components and religious and political traditions of the place itself. Greenblatt demonstrates that a literary work participates in a larger context and how it shares in shaping of meaning within a culture. According to Kaes, historical background is no longer confined to the world of ideas but is defined with complex social and cultural processes of everyday life with some history. (212) The new historicism understanding of the interconnectedness of culture and values reinforces a recognition of norms as culture productions reflecting time-bound values.

The New Historicism approach appears in the first section of the volume *Life Studies* in the

socio-political atmosphere leading up to this period which includes Eisenhower's inauguration. The theme of the baby boom in families is discussed in the poem about the decaying family institution, women's rights and civil rights. It is a reaction against controlling institutions which were never discussed in open conversation or even in poetry. M. H. Abrams in "On Political Readings of *Lyrical Ballads*" (1989) distinguishes between traditional historical study and the new historicism: the view of new historicists is: "that history, not the author, shapes a literary work and forges its meaning." (365) As for Lowell's family members, they had served in all the wars since the Declaration of Independence.... He also wrote his mother to assure her that he has "taken the only course that was honorable for me."

(*The Letters of Robert Lowell* 38)

As mentioned in New Historicism, the past is brought into the present. Thus Rollo May's existential theory has somewhat a similar view of communal products with his theory of "communion of consciousness." (Richter 505) that

stresses the importance of the being and his ability to participate. Yet, these ethics are still submitted to the individual's choice of what should be. Lowell, thus, seeks to be faithful and to accomplish true-to-life understanding of existence by emphasizing the actual being of the person, his situation, and the degree of his responsibility to and for himself and his world. The term "communion of consciousness" by May can be viewed in the same light by Lowell when he included a statement he sent to the president in the Declaration of Personal Responsibility, explaining his reasons for opposing the war and justifying his refusal to participate in it through the exercise of moral responsibility. He was not alone in this struggle. While his views may have differed from those of other conscientious objectors, he shared their struggle to preserve liberty. It is not only Lowell who seems to have taken a harsh stance against war, but also the interaction between poets and war goes back to some time ago as raised in the question of one of his own most famous lyrics, "Dedicatory

Stanzas": The Georgics of Virgil translated by Cecil Day-Lewis (1940) "Where are the war poets?"

Where are the war poets? The
fools inquire.
We were the prophets of a
changeable morning
Who hoped for much but saw
the clouds forewarning
We were at war, while they still
played with fire
And rigged the market for the
ruin of man:
Spain was a death to us, Munich
a mourning. (1-6)

Cecil Day-Lewis shows the predicament of the time with a poet's view on political poetry down to aesthetic questions of gentleness and appropriateness amidst a historical trauma. The unheroic and psychic distress in this life could be felt in the tone of irony more than the devastating nature of the horror of war. Hospitals became sites of writing as well. War poets turned to be like historians who have to record the mutilation and impending death or mutilation of man.

Lowell describes himself which clearly underlies his position as a poet and his views as a conscientious objector during the war years. In his discontent, Lowell

searched throughout the mid-twenties for personal order and artistic direction. Lowell gained the strength to reject the values imposed upon him by his background and his literary peers. Similarly, he struggled to find a poetic cause appropriate to his talents, but his disillusionment with the modern world caused him to turn inward for inspiration and positive cultural values that were lacking in the modern world outside. In his individual searches for creative inspiration, Robert Lowell severed relations with contemporary American society and chose to escape into the brave new world of the then innovative realm of confessional verse. The roads chosen at this juncture were to determine the direction and tone of the writer's future works and allow a much clearer understanding of the poet's work throughout the war years which reflected the exorcising of the war from their personal lives and artistic endeavors.

For the poet, war had an effect on his life and on the direction of his poetry. Documented psychological patterns of the Great

War and the depression caused by the failure to achieve easy victory, followed by the frustrating destructive nature of trench warfare and the sense of hopelessness while waiting to be the next casualty were of immediate concern. Lowell became a famous public figure and felt called upon to utter striking pronouncements such as: “We’re decaying... the old morality doesn’t hold... Genocide has stunned us; we have a curious dread it will be repeated.” (Meyers 93) is clearly read in the ironic statement: “I believe we should rather die than drop our own bombs.” (Meyers 5) Lowell chose a humanistic stand rather than a political one and this took place shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, Alvarez again claims that Lowell’s manner is “almost saintly.” (Meyers 5) Lowell subtly perceives that America had the ideal of always trying to save the world or perhaps ironically destroying the world.

His imprisonment was a year and a day in Connecticut jail. In February 25, 1965, he wrote to Elizabeth Bishop, saying:

The wonderful lithograph is hanging to the left of our fireplace in the big morn... we bought in Brazil and have set in the middle of the dining room rabble-amulets against the evils of New York. (Words in Air 570)

Confronted by his own ancestors' disreputable history and the relation of his family with his society, Lowell felt embarrassed and dishonored when he discovered that hypocrisy and shame were in his ancestors' blood when they acted against civilians and fostered war and its atrocities. The psychological struggles are created because of the battle between traditional and modern values. In addition, the indications of the power and influence of money are reflected in an unshakeable belief in the world which is found to be an emotionless void that the modern man cannot accept and thus chose to escape into the brave new world and the "raw" self. The Victorians, with their fiscal and philosophical beliefs and values are no longer possible here. The year is 1950 and people in general attempt to formulate a unified world-view

and the world is now the subject of harsh examination.

When discussing evil in Lowell's confessional poems, one should tackle Rollo May's theory about the subject: for May is the key figure of existential psychology. For him, evil is a controversial issue but still an issue truly within humanistic psychology which in spite of everything tends to see people as being inherently good. There was always the historical dialogue between Rollo May and Carl Rogers in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* which was concerned with this optimistic approach and yet calls for the importance of considering evil. May stresses on paying more attention to the darker side of the human-being including the presence of evil. The key concept of understanding evil is the "daimonic" (May 1969). According to him, the "daimonic" is a key concept for understanding evil. It is "any natural function with power to take over the whole person but it is not necessarily seen entirely as a destructive force for it serves to fuel creativity, vitality and health." (May

1969) It is either healthy or destructive, good or evil. For some, it is important to know how the individual interacts with what is evil. May says that individuals as well as cultures and societies must deal with the "daimonic". May also elaborates that personal responsibility provides an important expression to the external social and cultural influences in the expression of evil and the tension between freedom and destiny.

For May, existential psychotherapy sets the person free in order to grow and develop in his world. Man must discover the surroundings, judge the possibilities and have the free choice in a loving, willing, happy, responsible, strongly responsive atmosphere and yet be aware of the various challenges before him and be able to face them. The psychology of anxiety as perceived by Rollo May suggests that anxiety or guilt is the problem of the individual and the community helps to shape the context of the individual's creative will and choice. Lowell describes his younger self as a "fire-breathing Catholic C.O.

[conscientious objector]" who "made my manic statement / telling off the state." (14) about the challenge of preserving freedom of conscience in a time of national crisis.

However, the desire for freedom from the existing social system eventually led to a conflict in the mind of the poet. Lowell is confronting the norms which suppresses his inner desires and does not even hesitate to express it openly in his poetry. May views the whole issue of when an individual moves towards an attitude towards being in the world, toward being influenced by it, yet not being fully self-aware, then forming and reshaping oneself and one's world by his own creative response or decisive self-world relationship. (223) May goes on to let the person explore his self-world relationship or in his terms "world design" (223) his sense of being and orientation. It is all about the concept of becoming and developing one's self in the moment towards the future. Such an aim is accomplished when one sets oneself free, from individual, social, religious tension. This is done through self-affirmation,

participation, awareness, and consciousness. According to humanistic psychotherapy, this has to be accomplished without doing violence to humanity.

The above mentioned point of view is clearly reflected in Lowell's poem "Beyond the Alps", Lowell adopts psychoanalysis when he focuses upon the very part of his self, "the bear-eyed ego" (31) The speaker shows deep anger of the part of his self which is blind to visions. The poem tries to justify the failure of modernism in which the speaker becomes a stranger. The poem introduces the predicament of the intellectuals in an age that aborts even creative ideas, as in: "pure mind and murder at the scything prow-/ Minerva, the miscarriage of the brain"(39-40). It gives account of the failure of a man and a poet to escape violence and deceit, and in contrast, Lowell, therefore, is a conscious poet who covers the whole scale of history of the 1950s. Yet, the poet's struggle and awareness continues throughout the night of his train journey. But in the twentieth century

there is “no ticket for that altitude / once held by Hellas,” (36-37)

Specific Historical Aspects

Political powers, religious features and money are always intertwined and worth mentioning. To start with features concerning political aspects, one has to trace Robert Lowell's family history in order to discover that he came from a Massachusetts family, with roots which go back to William Samuel Johnson 1727-1819, a signer of the Declaration of Independence on his mother's part, Philip Livingston, signatory of the Declaration and Lowell's great uncle and Robert R. Livingston a member of the Committee of Five which drafted the wording of the Declaration, and many other family members such as: negotiators with France of the Louisiana Purchase, for example namely, Lowell's second cousin six times. Gov. William Livingston, 1723-1790, signatory of the United States Constitution, first post-Revolutionary governor of New Jersey, Lowell's six times great uncle. President George Washington

1732-1799, first President of the United States, Lowell's eighth cousin. Rev. Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758, Lowell's five times great-grandfather.

He came from a Puritanical Calvinism branch which he rejected and for a good eight years was a Roman Catholic convert. Still he took his Christianity seriously but he never accepted his parent's Calvinism. He is a descendant of the Mayflower passengers James Chilton and his daughter Mary, Lowell's eight times great-grandfather on his father's side. It is known that anyone who arrived as a passenger on the Mayflower is considered a Pilgrim without any distinction on the basis of their original purpose for making the voyage. Lowell's proven ancestry from a passenger qualifies him to be a member of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants. He himself mentions this in his poem "Waking in the Blue", as in the lines:

In between the limits of day,
hours and hours go by under the
crew haircuts
and slightly too little
nonsensical bachelor twinkle

of the Roman Catholic attendants.
(There are no Mayflower screwballs in the Catholic Church.) (34-39)

Lowell compared Robert Kennedy with Louis XVI, it was because Louis XVI was more real to him than the world of contemporary politics, in his poem "Waking in the Blue", he says:

This is the way day breaks in
Bowditch Hall at McLean's;
the hooded night lights bring
out "Bobbie,"
Porcellian '29,
a replica of Louis XVI
without the wig--
redolent and roly-poly as a
sperm whale,
as he swashbuckles about in his
birthday suit
and horses at chairs (25-32)

Lowell mentions his great-grandfather; Francis Winslow and his Aunt Lottie, in the poem "Dunbarton", he says:

At the graveyard, a suave
Venetian Christ
gave a sheepdog's nursing
patience
to Grandfather's Aunt Lottie,
his Mother, the stone but not the
bones
of his Father, Francis.
Failing as when Francis
Winslow could count

them on his fingers, (21-27)

Edward Winslow who is also Lowell's great-grandfather, high sheriff of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, was mentioned by Lowell in "Dunbarton", the poet says:

like the ever-blackening wine-
dark coat
in our portrait of Edward
Winslow
once sheriff for George the
Second,
the sire of bankrupt Tories. (31-34)

Robert Lowell does not end Section Four in his volume without writing about his one-year experience in jail. In his poem "Memories of West Street and Lepke" a confessional poem (1958), Lowell mentions Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd President, and a close member to his family as a fifth cousin. In the poem, the 26-year-old poet Robert Lowell has been sentenced to jail for a year Oct 13, 1943 for rejecting in a letter, sent to President Roosevelt, to be drafted and objecting to bombing civilians during wartime. Franklin D. Roosevelt 1882-1945, was shown in

the poem "Memories of West Street and Lepke," Lowell says:

These are the tranquilized
Fifties,
and I am forty. Ought I to regret
my seedtime?
I was a fire-breathing C.O.,
and made my manic statement,
Telling off the state and
president, and then
sat waiting sentence in the bull
pen (12-17)

Lowell was living in Boston in the 1950s and he recalls the year he spent in a New York jail as a conscientious objector. He talks about himself in an implied ironic quotation marks, you imagine them around "fire-breathing" and "manic" in the lines "I was a fire-breathing Catholic C.O., / and made my manic statement." (14-15) This is the language of a man on trial, who suggests failed principles and the fall into domesticity of the 1950s and middle age. It is what caused him to become later a defender of civil rights and a protester against Vietnam. Line endings have a similar dry effect, he says:

Given a year,
I walked on the roof of the West
Street Jail, a short
enclosure like my school soccer

court,
and saw the Hudson River once
a day
through sooty clothesline
entanglements
and bleaching khaki tenements.
Strolling, I yammered
metaphysics with Abramowitz,
a jaundice-yellow ("it's really
tan")
and fly-weight pacifist,
so vegetarian,
he wore rope shoes and
preferred fallen fruit. (20-30)

The situation is reflected when Lepke, the speaker, is isolated from other men. The concentration on death and the "air / of lost connections" (52-53), are applicable to the poetry of this volume. The same relationship is obtained between Lepke and Lowell as the two looked from the roof of the West Street Jail. The technique of the poem itself exemplifies the "air of lost connections." There is a connection at some level between the poet and the speaker who is a criminal and is guilty for Lepke is a murderer. The matter is said too frankly, perhaps, but what Lowell seems to suspect in these poems is that any man's murder spoils other men.

The syntactic structures of "Memories of West Street Lepke" thus imply that only by viewing the self in terms of its surroundings, companions, and routine prison actions can the poet associate with the world he inhabits: the participial phrases and adjective strings guarantees the openness and truthfulness of the poet's vision. Indeed, the historic reference to the Negro boy with "curlicues / of marijuana in his hair" (18-19) has a looser structure that is closer to everyday speech than is the rest of the poem: "I . . . then sat waiting . . ." (17)

If one traces over Robert Lowell's ancestry, it raises the American Navy as an institution in the families of both Lowell's father and mother even though Lowell believed, his mother Charlotte Winslow Lowell in reality hated the Navy. In the prose part "91 Revere Street", Lowell writes about class-awareness of his mother and father who were unable to accept decisively if the commander should retire from the navy or not. Lowell's mother practiced her pressure on his father

to retire so that the family could start collecting from his trust fund. He himself was not successful in his work at all and took it as a matter of appearance. In Lowell's poem "Commander Lowell" 1887- 1950," he says:

he was soon fired. Years after
year,
he still hummed "Anchors
aweigh" in the tub-
whenever he left a job,
he bought a smarter car. (45-48)

The poem contains the lines "Smiling on all, Father was once successful enough to be lost / in the mob of ruling-class Bostonians." (62-64) This is clearly revealed in a poem "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms", he states:

Father and mother moved to
Beverly Farms
to be a two-minute walk from
the station,
half an hour by train from the
Boston doctors.
They had no sea-view,
but sky-blue tracks of the
commuters' railroad shone
like a double-barreled shotgun
through the scarlet late August
sumac,
multiplying like cancer
at their garden's border.
Father had had two coronaries.
He still treasured underhand
economies, (14-24)

Materialism is shown when Lowell's family already sold their properties and had nothing else left, he says in his poem "For Sale" a confessional poem (1958-1959):

Poor sheepish plaything,
organized with prodigal
animosity,
lived in just a year—
my Father's cottage at Beverly
Farms
was on the market the month he
died.
Empty, open, intimate,
its town-house furniture
had an on tiptoe air
of waiting for the mover
on the heels of the undertaker.
Ready, afraid
of living alone till eighty,
Mother mooned in a window,
as if she had stayed on a train
one stop past her destination.
(1-15)

They reveal traces of showiness even in death. What shocks one here is that the flowers on shore and the scene in the harbor mirror the son's inner celebration of his mother's death. The imperial casket had, of course, been Lowell's own choice. The lines that follow deliver the unnaturally high spirit of this social class in "Sailing Home from Rapallo" (1959), he says:

While the passengers were
tanning
on the Mediterranean in deck-
chairs,
our family cemetery in
Dunbarton
lay under the White Mountains
in the sub-zero weather.
The graveyard's soil was
changing to stone—
so many of its deaths had been
midwinter.
Dour and dark against the
blinding snowdrifts,
its black brook and fir trunks
were as smooth as masts.
A fence of iron spear-hafts
black-bordered its mostly
Colonial grave-slates. (14-24)

Same ideas about being a conscientious objector was mentioned in Lowell's first section; his views against war, his confrontation with a fragmented reality and his experience with disappointment. The earlier part of the poem "Beyond the Alps" is filled with various ideas about war as Rome is identified with political leaders as it is with religious leaders, and their ancestries. From Caesar to Mussolini and to the Pope, one sees the apparent disparity between reality and appearance, in other words, appearance versus reality. The classical political heritage is

weakened with this latter-day Caesar, this "skirt-mad" Mussolini. (9)

The notion of emptiness, of the obstinate uncultivated world of forced infertility, is carried onward in another poem by Lowell "The Banker's Daughter" which breaks all taboos of dishonorable history and the impact of the materialistic society. Lowell began to feel shame, contempt, guilt and a deep moral burden while discussing openly marriage and the question and response concerned with gender and sex in a funny implication where woman gives in return by draining her husband's treasury, as in the line of Lowell's poem: "...wardrobes that dragged the Exchequer to its knees." (7) Lowell reflects the influence of money, and how it is used to forge and destroy human relationships.

The royal marriage, the religious and political corruption is a combination presented in this poem which opening with the birth of the modern age of pure materialism which found its presence in the picture of French politics, where relationships are reduced to mere greed and calculation. More than

twenty-years difference in age is shown in the marriage of this unfaithful couple to each other which reflect in reality the mismatch between the monarchy and "pillaging" democracies. (23) Both manipulate their relationship to their advantage: the queen fabricates lies to rob the king of his purse spending on clothes and jewelry. The queen also justifies her conduct by reminding us that the King had committed adultery during his lifetime culminating with the king's illegitimate son or "nightmare son" (36) growing older day by day.

The third poem of this section, "Inauguration Day: January 1953" is a grim and satiric commemoration of the inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower. It is terse poem with a harsh view of contemporary America in 1953. Again, there is a journey through frozen Washington in the center of the poem. The ice image presents the death of the spirit and the degradation of the American heritage, according to Lowell, Stuyvesant and Grant were military heroes whose leadership had led

American history into violence and bloodshed.

The grim realities of the military rule are figuratively conveyed in the poem by the death-like stillness of the predominant imagery. General Eisenhower, who supervised the invasion of Normandy and the defeat of Nazi Germany; 34th President of the United States (1890-1961) as an example who is coming to power reminded Lowell of these two military heroes as he fears for the future of America; as Lowell cannot see him as a leader. This is not stated until the last two lines of the poem.

Moving forward in time, Lowell believes that historical eras bear an outstanding likeness to each other for human life is the same. This poem rejoices the setting up of Eisenhower, the United States general, but the tempo and cadence of this era are dying as announced in "the subways drummed the vaults" (2) a suggestion of the quiet burial beats. Under the auspices of Eisenhower, America enters into a period of unsettled clashes and

disputes which is unlike the "tranquillized fifties."

In the fourth poem entitled: "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" is another example that reflects the atrocities of war. In such a poem one cannot rule out the idea of Lowell's commenting on his ancestor's crimes towards the Indians. The poem relates the story of a black soldier in confinement at the end of the Second World War. He acts as a typical alienated, violent modern man blown apart by the tormenting distortion of cultural values, political deceit and fear of insanity. It seemed opportune to Lowell that while relating his own and his family's decline, he would seize the opportunity to comment sarcastically, on the negative aspects of America's past and present, as if they are personifications of his own psychological predicament.

The poem is a comment on the politics of the Thirties, the Second World War and the Atomic Age. Lowell believed that Robert Kennedy could at one time get the Americans out of the Vietnam War. Lowell's speech reminded the

audience that the poet's refusal to attend the White Festival of the Arts "was one of the first dramatic acts of protest against the war in Vietnam." (Meyers 9) The negro soldier seems to suit Lowell's purposes precisely. The soldier is twice victimized. He is black, something that is beyond his control; he is wounded by the war, something equally beyond his control. The world depicted here is however, inverted for A "Kraut D.P." (2) looks after him.

In the poem, Munich is ablaze: it fumes with cats, with smoke and fire. Paradoxically, the predatory cats are free while men are confined. In the Negro's mind, the predatory imitate the soldiers by cruelly killing the pigeons, death continues and the war goes on.

In the last poem of the section, "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined in Munich" the disintegration of the world is shown through the window of the psychological breakdown of an individual, a black soldier. There is a return of blacks in Lowell's works in the monologue of the black soldier behind a mask for Lowell's personal

utterance. There is also a feeling in this monologue of the void of isolation experienced by the speaker.

The poem may be based, as mentioned before, on one of Lowell's fellow inmates in the Munich Military hospital where the poet was confined in August 1952. Thus, Lowell begins the hopeless words and an awareness of his world. The humiliated, destructive anger of the Negro soldier throws its shadow over the society, in this way, it prepares us for the personal horrors with which the book closes and Lowell's vision, on the other hand, becomes darker as it developed.

The poem draws upon a trend followed in 1950s and 1960s that treated those who suffered in war. What is called in humanistic psychology group therapy or World War two which created practical pressures on military psychologists, they had more patients to see and care for than time or resources permitted. As for Lowell, he was well-aware of his madness when he wrote about his experience with his group therapy when he said that one morning in July 1954, he sat in his

bedroom on the third floor of New York Hospital, trying as usual to get his picture of himself straight. He recalled a violent manic seizure. He heard the elevator shut and the last group of sixteen of his fellow patients going to Occupational Therapy. His mind literary and somewhat hazy, sought for the key to the right picture of itself. In his confusion, the walls of the hospital seemed to change to white clouds. He thought he saw a hard enameled wedding cake, and beside it, holding the blunt silver knife of the ritual, stood the tall white stone bride—his mother. He was as if building this hospital like a child, brick by brick or block by block. He wrote to Peter Taylor:

It's not much fun writing about these breakdowns after they themselves have broken and one stands stickily splattered with patches of the momentary bubble. Health; but not of a kind which encourages the backward look. (Hamilton 14)

Group psychotherapy or group therapy is psychotherapy form in which one or more therapists treat a small group of clients together as a group. The term can legitimately

refer to any form of psychotherapy when delivered in a group format utilised as a means of change by developing, exploring and examining interpersonal relationships within the group. Group therapy can form part of the therapeutic milieu of a psychiatric in-patient also known as Day Hospital treatment. There is clear evidence for the effectiveness of group psychotherapy for depression of group psychotherapy for adult sexual abuse survivors and there is also good evidence for effectiveness with chronic traumatic stress in war veterans. There is less robust evidence of good outcomes for patients with borderline personality disorders, with some studies showing only small to moderate effect cures.

Lowell believes just as Carl Rogers that people have inherent therapeutic skills but not that they should be necessarily involved in encounter groups. Apart from group therapy, the encounter group has a history in 1950s and 1960s that coincides with Lowell's period which shows people's attitudes

toward themselves and how they could change when they interact with other. Honesty and disclosure may create a warm and supportive atmosphere.

Lowell felt strongly that an individual should not accept the opinions of those in positions of power, he resented those who would place their own desires above compassion and empathy. Lowell derived from Catholicism his sense that spiritual rewards would be granted upon sufferers of external misfortunes. Lowell, hereafter, promises that liberation will come, yet it will not come without imagination and without individual strength. Lowell's verse from the beginning to the end, shows the presence of the past or history in the present.

As for the Historical Aspects in the study, they offered portraits of Lowell's ancestral background and its traditions discussing in the process the United States' past and present that Lowell as a confessional poet continued to explore. Lowell's poem "Memories of West Street and Lepke", "Dunbarton", "Terminal

Days at Beverly Farms" "Beyond the Alps", "Inauguration Day: January 1953" and "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" were discussed in that section.

Robert Lowell's distinguished family members in American history link him to his past and appear to be an important element in his poetry. He took his decision not to serve in World War Two and objected to the service in the Armed Force as a result, he spent a year in federal prison in Connecticut. The study reflects Lowell's interest in his own seemingly radiant ancestors' past for he was writing absorbed in the experience of uncovering the truth in his roots. Part of his biography and the family history was a familial section on which *Life Studies* are constructed; thus family history was American history and vice versa, as well as biography in Lowell's viewpoint. Lowell's awareness of his family history was brought into his behaviour in the present. He had to live up to the tradition and yet at the same time he had to deal with his own present personal attitudes. Therefore, he focused on the upper-

class world writing about the exact contemporary ironies of American history and planned a general view of civilization, of history and of the recurrent quest for salvation; his anguish is concerned with registering a sick world and horrors of world wars.

The historical poetic pieces implied more than the mere gathering of fact and figures. For Lowell history manifested itself in the affairs of men and it is a persistent and violent force. Such a view is not entirely optimistic, springing directly from this view is Lowell's deep sense of loss, failure, alienation, helplessness and a feeling of entrapment in a world not of his making.

However, Rollo May's (1909-1994) theory of humanistic psychology concerning tension and existence appeared to have a direct relation with the historical aspects in this volume. In addition, dealing with *Life Studies* like writing about history is giving a hint of New-Historicism as an approach clear in tackling the historical aspects in these poems. Lowell appeared to be

true to himself as a civil right activist and a defendant of his nation. Therefore, he participated in protest against the Vietnam War as a principle. To him, war led to the destruction of any forthcoming plans for the future. According to May, plans are set in the hope of fulfilling them sometime in the future times with certain responsibilities. Lowell as a responsible poet and citizen considered how he could cope with obstacles that delayed his plans and saw how to get around the problem, and encompass the new situation. He never ignored the problem, but sought to grasp and solve it. Accordingly, constructive and courageous confrontation with anxiety was crucial for an individual not forgetting his/her awareness of the limits and imperfections of his existence.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the New Historicism approach, Lowell managed to perceive the literary text as a communal product which sought to reconnect itself to its cultural context. He did not think only of the

past but took history forward into the present with all its discourse on culture, and its components, religious and political tradition of the place itself. This coincided with what Rollo May had in mind with his idea of the communal product referred to as "communion of consciousness." May, however, stressed paying more attention to the darker side of the human being including the presence of evil which was revealed in the study with regard to Lowell's discussion of the evil of his family's stance and double standards towards war and the bombing of innocent civilians which was so important to Lowell. Poetic pieces such as "Memories of West Street and Lepke" continued to move back and forth between the comfortable Lowell living in Boston in the 1950s and his recall of the year he spent in a New York jail as a conscientious objector. It took place in jail, as could be seen by references to 'pajamas' and cells (and also from more obvious occurrences like 'jailbird'). The study showed that the poetic self is capable of growing, changing and personally developing,

according to the humanistic psychology approach. This depended on the person's genuine understanding of himself and of his past, present and future experience.

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