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### Life Studies

\_\_\_\_\_Robert Lowell was a guy of many but few words. He has written many books, over 25 to be exact. His most known book is called *Life Studies*, in this book he talks about his childhood experiences, his thoughts on war and religion, and his adult experiences as well. In the 1940's, he wrote poems that were "tightly patterned" and incorporated traditional ideas. In the late 1950's, he began writing more personal poems that were "loosely patterned"<sup>1</sup>. In between the 1960's and the 1970's, he changed his poem format quite frankly.

Robert Lowell was born into the Boston Brahmin Family, sources say it could be traced back to the Mayflower. He focused on family, his past and present in his writings. He was born on March 1st, 1917 and lived until September 12th, 1977. Since most of his childhood into his teenage life was mainly in the Boston and New England area, this is where most of his poems are set. Lowell describes himself as "thuggish, thick-witted, and narcissistic" in his poem "91 Revere Street". As a teenager, he was influenced by Richard Eberhart, who is a poet. Because of Eberhart, Lowell decided to become a poet. Lowell majored in Classics in college, and then he had a Master's degree in English. In the late 1940's, he left the Catholic Church because he wanted to be rebellious towards his parents. He taught English courses for one year before WWII. He was put in prison because he chose not to serve his country. He didn't serve because he knew the U.S. government would give permanent damage to Germany and Japan<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Robert Lowell : The Poetry Foundation." Poetry Foundation: Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Robert Lowell." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 11 Mar. 2017. Web. 15 Mar. 2017.

In Lowell's poem "91 Revere Street", he talks about his experiences with his education from when he was a young boy to a college student. When he was at Harvard, he had a fight with his father which Lowell then decided to leave and transfer to another school. You could say this is another rebellious act towards his parents since I mentioned that he left the Catholic Church to be a rebel as well. He talks about the time he went down south and stayed at poet Allan Tate's home. In a 1960's interview, Frederick Seidel said that Lowell went to the home with a positive attitude willing to change his life, when he got there Mrs. Tate was cooking while writing a book and she had company over at her house when Lowell arrived and suggested to stay there. I'm surprised they didn't think was rude because usually when you just invite yourself to stay at someone's house it's just an act of unkindness. The Tates said, apparently in a joking matter, that they didn't have room and that he would have to get a tent and live on their lawn. Lowell being an eager learner, went and got a tent. Lowell was, in a way, unpredictable and surprising because no one would do such a bold move like that. He gained a degree in Classics, as I said in the beginning. He seemed to gain a lot during this time. Lowell gained two friends, a wife, got imprisoned, and he worked on two books to add to his collection, they were *Land of Unlikeness* and *Lord Weary's Castle*<sup>3</sup>. It's amazing how one memory can be pressed down and be put into one poem. With a memory like that, you could make a book.

The books *Land of Unlikeness* and *Lord Weary's Castle* was written during the time Lowell was in prison. It's ironic that his book is called *Land of Unlikeness* because he gained a lot just by taking the chance of going to Tate's household and by getting away from his family. In this book, Lowell was horrified by the performance of the disorganization of religion. He quotes "Cut off from the sight of God, the modern man wanders about in his Land of Unlikeness, driven by greed and cruelty." from that quote it seems like a man stopped believing in God and religion and wandered off into a land filled with greedy and cruelty. *Lord Weary's Castle* has discussed almost the same things that *Land of Unlikeness* talks about. Randall James, one of Lowell's long lifetime friends he gained, wrote an essay in *Poetry and the Age* that Lowell's poems understand

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<sup>3</sup> "Robert Lowell : The Poetry Foundation." Poetry Foundation: Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017.

that the world is just a conflict altogether because of all the war, government, and negativity the world has<sup>4</sup>. It also talks about how the rich say they want to help the poor and all these empty promises but they won't do anything about it. He says the liberator of this is the poet Christ, which means if people took the time to go to church the world would be a better place, there would be not that much negativity.

*Lord Weary's Castle* was about opposing war, materialism, and greed. It seemed like Lowell wanted to spread the word that war is not everything. Materialistic things are not everything, and greed is not everything. He wanted to say that life is short and you should take time in concentrating on life memories and relationships. Lowell earned the Pulitzer Prize in 1947 for this volume. He met Elizabeth Bishop after this was published, they exchanged letters of them flirting, gossiping, and offered advice for the piece one another worked on. These writers were more genuine and discussed their feelings more than other writers. They were more "human".

In my opinion, Lowell had a good message. He talked about how war is bad and that people should spend more time with one another and not go against one another because life is short and life is meant to take risks. He took a lot of risks like going against his parents to do something he wants to do because every parent pushes their kids at some point in their life to do sometimes they want them to do like going to a certain college, getting a certain job, getting certain connections. I think Lowell had that mindset as it's your life, don't allow someone to tell you what to do with it.

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<sup>4</sup> "Robert Lowell : The Poetry Foundation." Poetry Foundation: Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2017.