Conclusion

Is getting well ever an art,
Or art a way to get well?
Lowell (DBD 124)

The concerns of the early, middle and later phases of Lowell’s poetic career, beginning from his early religious and seemingly impersonal poetry, through the grand success of his confessional mode to the later cathartic volumes, underscore the significance of personal experience in the creation of poetry of meaningful and universal significance. In drawing upon his most intimate guilts and phobias, matters of family, failure of the Puritan tradition, politics and the contemporary world, Lowell has painted powerfully, the chaos of modern man and society. By drawing upon the painful facts of his biography he has given us an art, which transcends not only the local but the national as well, to arrive at an authentic representation of the human condition itself. An important element in Lowell’s poetry is his feeling for Puritan New England, which triggers off a deep sense of guilt over his Puritan settler ancestry and their materialistic tendencies, which had lead them to raise vast empires in Boston and Maine. This aspect of Lowell’s poetry and life finds support in Herbert Leibowitz’s contention that:

Lowell’s ambivalent attitude to the Puritans is central to an understanding of his poetry. Although he repudiates them intellectually, he is at home with their buffetings and morbidity. From them he takes or rather corroborates the habit of self-examination. (27)

Not only has Lowell been castigating his Puritan ancestors for their greed, but for their cruelty as well. Themselves victims of persecution, they had flown to America only to persecute the red Indians, who were the original inhabitants of America. The guilt of the blood of these Indians at the hands of his Puritan ancestors, thus finds mention in poem after poem only to culminate in the understated horror of ‘Skunk Hour’, the last poem of his confessional volume.
Life Studies, where he can actually visualize how: “A red fox stain covers Blue Hill” (LS 61)

Lowell’s fascination for the Puritan “predisposition for obsessive introspection” as Wallingford puts it, is something which gives them clues to the meaning of their own lives, leads him to engage in the practice of re­visioning or looking back not only into personal history but into the history of the human race itself. Because of his own intellectual propensity for introspection he was constantly “juxtaposing self and history in ways that illuminated both” (3). Lowell’s dilemma is not of moral responsibility. The guilt that weighs heavily on his head is that of a spiritually alienated Puritan heritage, overtaken by greed and rapacity. These “Mayflower screwballs”, as he refers to them, are the Puritan “dracos” who in their westward march towards civilization, had built their estates on the blood and graves of Red Indians mercilessly and brutally butchered. Ironically enough, Lowell’s forefathers who had hated war, had now made war not only on nature but on neighbors as well, for unspiritual profits. This point is amply demonstrated in the epigraph to The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket, one of his best known poems, taken from genesis which says: “Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon this earth” (LWC 8). Man however, has exploited the very power that God gave him for personal gain. New England, especially Boston, Lowell’s own experiences and his ancestry, thus provided the raw material for the disgust that his poems reflect. This long heritage, which was of immense importance to Lowell thus functions, as Burton Raffel observes: “sometimes as a foil against which to struggle, sometimes as a support upon which to lean” (4). Lowell believes his ancestors to be guilty of souring the American dream, which dates back to the discovery of America itself. Seen as the promised land, a new Jerusalem and a dreamland of opportunities that held out the promise of a utopia, the idea of the New World as the Biblical Land of Promise, has been the most enduring theme in American art and literature in one guise or the other. The Millennium theme, that is the belief in Christ’s second coming, gets transmuted enroute
into the more secular American Dream and further gets mixed up with the theological concept of Manifest Destiny (America as the chosen land and Americans as chosen people), the idea of rebirth, and the second chance. These early settlers had thus seen themselves in the role of second Adam. It is for this reason that Lowell holds his Mayflower ancestors guilty of contributing in a major way towards America’s spiritual alienation. In an interview with V.S. Naipaul, Lowell talks of his being something of a rebel. As he says:

I felt I was born in a kind of illiterate culture, a kind of decadence, and I was just very unhappy anyway. I probably wanted to go away and fish and do various things I wasn’t supposed to do. Then when it came to writing, this feeling of getting away from it continued. But I really think the place had lost its seriousness, its imagination, and if you wanted to be a writer you couldn’t be a conventional New Englander. (76)

Lowell had at the very outset of his poetic career, been writing a “hell and damnation poem against England”, entitled ‘The Protestant Dead in Boston’, which had, as Hamilton significantly observes: “revealed something of [his] predicament in 1941” Lowell already had “the subject that was to become thought as peculiarly his” (76). Parts of this poem were also incorporated later in ‘The Park Street Cemetery’ and ‘At the Indian Killer Grave’ (LWC 54). The poem was an attack on Boston “in a Boston voice: bleak, crabbed and vengeful” (Hamilton 78).

Lowell had been considerably influenced by Allen Tate’s views that “a good poem had nothing to do with exalted feelings” and that a poem “was simply a piece of craftsmanship, an intelligible or cognitive object” and that he might master these techniques (Quoted from Martin 9). Looking vainly for solace against the guilt of his ancestry, Lowell had consciously and constantly struggled towards Christian perfection and had in this process, converted to Roman Catholicism. His idea of baptism was, “a complete clearance of all your sins from birth on up” as Patrick Quinn told Hamilton in an interview
(79), and it was this idea that had probably made Lowell convert to Catholicism. In the next few years came his first volume of poems *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), which was strengthened by what Tate called “a memory of the spiritual dignity of man” (Quoted from Martin 10). In this volume, although Lowell does focus on the themes of his poetry, current events, and God, his attitude towards his ancestors is ambivalent:

In ‘Salem’ he praises the New England colonists who “fought the British lion to his knees”, yet in ‘The Park Street Cemetary’, he angrily terms those same colonists “Puritan Dracos”. Depending upon which poem one reads, the Puritans are either heroic rebels against secular authority or knavish secular authoritarians themselves; they have been betrayed by the modern debacle or they are responsible for it. (Axelrod 44)

Another important theme in the first volume is America’s role in World War II. This volume begins with ‘The Park Street Cemetary’ and ends with ‘Leviathan’: “an apocalyptic poem of the future”, as Jay Martin sees it (11). The sudden release of *Land of Unlikeness*, after a long gap between two early releases, shows Lowell’s poetic method, which constantly veers between past and present, constantly reaches into the secret recesses of his personal and national psyche to achieve greater states of affirmation:

He labours over his poems continually and plans each collection as a sequence, the opening and closing poems in each making a distinct introduction and conclusion, and the movement between them tending from past to present, from question to resolution, from ambiguous negation to hesitant affirmation. (Ehrenpreis 17)

It is this affirmation at the end of the volume, which shows Lowell’s growth as an individual and as a poet too. Through a constant change in perception the poet gradually moves towards greater insights and reassurances.
Some of Lowell’s themes, for instance his preoccupation with the second World War, are all-pervasive. When the United States joined the war, he was called up under the Selective Service Act, but had declared himself a conscientious objector. Identifying experience, education and growth with suffering he had written very early in his poetic career that: “Most wretched men/ Are cradled into poetry by wrong:/ they learn in suffering what they teach in song”. (84) Thus, suffering is all-prevasive in a land of unlikeness where spiritual decay is almost universal and the poet’s “memory of the spiritual dignity of man” (Tate 84), its only contender. Lowell viewed history, personal and universal, as a chronicle of suffering and every subsequent volume of his poetry seems to reinforce this view. In Land of Unlikeness, he had expressed his horror at the spectacle of contemporary chaos in the manner of Eliot’s The Wasteland, so that these two lines from ‘The Drunken Fisherman’, could very well serve as the volume’s epigraph:

Is there no way to cast my hook
out of this dynamited brook?

In his next volume of poems Lord Weary’s Castle (1946), Lowell’s plea in the epigraph of the book “ita nos devotio reddat innocus”, interpreted by Staples as, “so may our devotion free us of sin” (Quoted from PRL 84), too, suggests the continuation of the same theme in this volume as well. However, Lowell now tries to open himself up to his experience. This attitude distinguishes the best poems of this volume even while it connects them to his later work as well. As the poet himself explains in his interview with Seidel: “the intelligence and experience that have gone into them are bone-deep” (Quoted from Axelrod 48).

In the early stages of his poetic career, Lowell was greatly influenced by T.S. Eliot’s Theory of Impersonality, a fact that is amply evident in his first three volumes. A change in his poetic process however, began to manifest itself with the publication of his second volume, Lord Weary’s Castle, which contained poems like, ‘Rebellion’ (LWC 29), ‘In Memory of Arthur Winslow’ (LWC 19-22), ‘Winter in Dunbarton’ (LWC 23-24) and ‘Mary Winslow’ (LWC 25). These poems were almost personal, but denied Lowell the release
of his later confessional volume *Life Studies*, for they still held the poet himself at arm’s length. In a review of the volume, John Berryman had stated: “What is clear just now is that we have before us... a talent whose ceiling is invisible” (Quoted from Axelrod 49). Randall Jarrell too had lauded the volume saying:

> When I received Mr. Lowell’s first book I finished by saying, “Some of the best poems of the next years ought to be written by him.” The appearance of *Lord Weary’s Castle* makes me feel less like Adams or Leverrier than like a rain-maker who predicts rain and gets a flood which drowns everyone in the country. One or two of these poems, I think, will be read as long as men remember English. (47)

*The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket*, one of his best known poems is religious and political, yet it takes the form of an elegy for Lowell’s cousin, drowned after an accidental explosion during World War II. Hugh B. Staples places it “in the great tradition of the English elegy”, in which lament soon leads to “a larger consideration of contemporary and universal issues” (46). The same idea finds support in Axelrod’s contention, that although the poem is an elegy for a drowned sailor, “at a deeper level, it is an elegy for the poet himself”, and “at bottom an elegy for all people as they encounter the dark contradictions of their nature and fate” (55). Thus, one of the greatest achievements of Lowell’s poetry can be traced to the fact that despite being confessional, it transcends the personal to illuminate the larger disorders in the world we all inhabit.

Lowell’s dominant themes are constant concerns in all his poetry. ‘At the Indian Killer’s Grave’ (*LWC* 54-57), recalls the slaughter of Indians during king Philip’s War. This war, the bloodiest of all wars between the newcomers and native Americans which marked: “the colonists’ eventual victory over the forces of king Philip in 1676, making the end of the Indians as a national entity in New England, serves Lowell as a symbol of American violence,
idealism, and ambition" (Axelrod 69). The last poem of the volume however, in fidelity to Lowell’s method, ends in hope:

stand and live,

The dove has brought an olive branch to eat. (LWC 69)

In his essay “Robert Lowell and the Poetry of Confession”, Rosenthal states that: “Robert Lowell’s poetry has been a long struggle to remove the mask, to make his speaker unequivocally himself” (114). The publication of Lowell’s next volume, *Life Studies* (1959), which Rosenthal termed as “confessional”, thus saw the establishment of a new and significant chapter in the history of American poetry that had been initiated with Snodgrass’s well-known series *Heart’s Needle*. Expressing his views on poetry, Snodgrass had stated that his idea of measuring the worth of a poem lay in the “depth of its sincerity” reiterating that:

Our hope as artists is to continually ask ourselves, Am I writing what I really think? Not what is acceptable; not what my favorite intellectual would think in this situation; not what I wish I felt. Only what I cannot help thinking. (*Partisan Review* 283)

Confessional poetry was thus to be seen as a reflection of man’s alienation from the world he inhabited and a retreat into privatism, an effort to make significance and beauty out of the terror of our modern condition. Like Snodgrass, Lowell’s poetry too was an exercise in self-discovery. Confessional poetry gave primacy to personal experience that was marked by an undisguised exposure of painful personal events, and was thus to be seen as a dialectic between private and public in an intimate style that was to be shorn of all ornaments. Like Snodgrass, Lowell too believed that experience was the basis of all existence and could not be detached from the self, just as the self “that suffers” could not be separated from the “mind that creates”. Thus all poetry was, in a way, a confession. The man who suffers does effect the mind which creates, unlike T.S. Eliot’s view that the feelings, emotions, or vision resulting from the poem were to be different from the feeling, or emotion, or
vision in the mind of the poet. Lowell based his poetic premises on the Emersonian concept of poetry, which was founded on the doctrine of experience. Lowell’s poetry thus became his means of articulating a deep, personal and ancestral guilt. The relationship between art and experience for him was too elemental for an impersonal theory of poetry. As he had stated in his interview with Frederick Seidel: “poetry has become a craft, purely a craft and there must be some breakthrough back into life” (25). This much-desired breakthrough came then, with the publication of Life Studies, which proved to be a watermark in the history of American poetry. Lowell had however confessed, that:

These poems were just as hard to write [and were] ... not always factually true. There’s a good deal of tinkering with fact. I’ve invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of poems was something invented... if a poem is autobiographical and this is true of any kind of autobiographical writing and of historical writing— you want the reader to say. this is true... the reader was to believe he was getting the real Robert Lowell. (20-21)

The volume significantly opens with the poem ‘Beyond the Alps’ (LS 13-14), that shows Lowell leaving the City of God and ends with the “secular, puritan and agnostical” night of ‘Skunk Hour’, in which he seeks “a way of breaking through the shell of [his] old manner”, and of achieving a certain freedom in “the march and affirmation, an ambiguous one”, of the skunk’s at the end of the poem (PRL 85). The poem gains importance from the fact that it is a firm acceptance of the things of this world in all their ambiguities. Although “The season’s ill” and Lowell’s “ill-spirit sobs in each blood cell...”, the poem marks the poet’s development in that, his focus now shifts from the world of outer reality to his inner landscape. The central insight of the poem then, lies in the poet’s apocalyptic exclamation:

I myself am hell;
Nobody’s here— (LS 62)
This is a point Reed reiterates by saying: “no deity need have withdrawn; man's suffering is man-made, man-conceived, and what is most important, man-alterable" (PRL 85). The are thus transformed into a symbol of hope, for they make the “chalk-dry and spar spire/ of the Trinitarian Church” seem hollow and irrelevant. They skunks are not frightened by the vacuity of this world. The mother skunk feasts freely “and will not scare”. John R. Reed rightly suggests then, that: “the commitment to and acceptance of the meanest level of existence is in itself a liberation from an ill season and a moral world that seems unoccupied” (PRL 86). Lowell confessed that he had meant Life Studies to be an act of self-discovery, an attempt to “find himself in the process of becoming himself” (Rosenthal 25). Summing up Lowell’s personal and artistic achievement in Life Studies, Rosenthal had thus highlighted Lowell’s distinctive contribution towards the confessional mode stating that:

The way Lowell brought his private humiliations, sufferings, and psychological problems into the poems of Life Studies, the word “confessional” seemed appropriate enough. Sexual guilt, alcoholism, repeated confinement in a mental hospital...these are explicit themes of a number of poems, usually developed in the first person and intended without question to point to the author himself... Life Studies appeared, and so the term “confessional” served also to distinguish the new work from the earlier and at the same time to suggest that everything before had been largely a preparation for this development. In a larger, more impersonal context, these poems seemed to me one culmination of the Romantic and modern tendency to place the literal self more and more at the center of the poem. (26-27)

Lowell’s confessionalism, is thus engaged with the great moral issues of our age with compelling fullness. Not only it is a powerful reaction against the barbarism of great and small wars, but an indictment as well, of a spiritually alienated world which has “fallen into the hands of men” to use Rilke phrase. The last poem of the volume, ‘Skunk Hour’ is a fine example of confessional poetry, for it puts the speaker himself at the center of the poem in such a way
that his psychological problems and shame become an embodiment of his civilization. Burdened with the guilt of his ancestors and the age, the confession in all its religious and secular connotations, assisted by the restorative powers of his memory had resulted in the expiation of ancestral guilt through a better understanding not only of his inner self but of the outer world as well. For the first time he could be casual, simple and direct throughout the poem, and as Rosenthal argues: “transparently clear and gentle in his emotional realizations, as he could not have done before” (28). These changed attributes of Lowell’s poetry, can best be seen in his poem ‘Grandparents’ (LS 40-41), in which Lowell can recall his grandparents with nostalgia now:

They’re altogether other worldly now,
those adult champing for their ritual Friday spin
to pharmacist and five-and-ten in Brockton.
Back in my throw-away and shaggy span
of adolescence, Grandpa still waves his stick
like a policeman;
Grandmother, like a Mohammedan, still wears her thick lavender mourning and touring veil;
the Pierce Arrow clears its throat in a horse-stall.
Then the dry road dust rises to whiten
the fatigued elm leaves—
the nineteenth century, tired of children, is gone.
They’re all gone into a world of light; the farm’s my own.

(LS 40)

The poem moves at its own pace and terms, neither arousing nor battling with passion for the poet is now comfortable with drawing upon personal experience. The diction here is “straight forward, accurate but informal” (Rosenthal 28). Lowell is talking about the time when his grandparents were alive and still dominating but suggests through their death, the coming to end of an entire era. The retreat now is into a redeeming past that provides newer insights into the reality of his own life as well as that of an ancestry he had
hitherto found threatening. In Life Studies, Lowell’s accounts of his family and himself transcends the usual concerns of a narrow confessionalism in that: “they are a social criticism of the America they take place in and they make serious moral judgements in which all characters, including the speaker, share” (William Meredith 119). The myth that Lowell creates in Life Studies, is that of an America, his contemporary human inhabitation, “whose history and present predicament are embodied in those of his own family and epitomized in his own psychological experience” (Rosenthal 61). Poetry, as Lowell uses it, is neither a vehicle of escape from life, nor a mere exhibition of craft, but rather an opportunity for the poet to “tell us how it was with him”. By telling us how he carried around the guilt of his ancestors into his chaotic contemporary reality, Lowell has ultimately come to terms with an “oppressive past” and a “mad-ridden present” (Kramer 80). In his essay “Robert Lowell’s Early Politics of Apocalypse”, Mazzaro has amply demonstrated the complex method by which, in his role as prophet, Lowell had “to distort the experimental, temporal, operative world around him into an immediate significative, atemporal, and thematic one” (PRL 86). But, as the experience proves less and less orderly, a surrogate mythology takes place of moral archetypes, beginning with Life Studies, but continuing in For the Union Dead (1964), and Near the Ocean (1967), in which “man’s history is given meaning by associating it with all of human history” (PRL 87). Half of Life Studies, is Lowell’s public discrediting of his father’s manliness and character, his family and his childhood, even though the poet realized well, that in doing so he was perpetrating violence on himself most of all. Nevertheless, despite the confessions of this volume being termed by his detractors as narrowly personal, Lowell has skillfully crafted the painful memories of his private life into the very embodiment of local and international life. Rising above poets of lesser merit his confessionalism assumes significance beyond the personal through his ability to establish analogues with modern America and its spiritual crisis. In the same year that Life Studies was published, Lowell received the Guinness Poetry Award, the Longview Foundation Award and the National Book Award, in recognition of his poetic genius.
Lowell’s next volume of poems, *For the Union Dead* (1964), reveals the struggle of an individual to bear “the double burden of his existence, social as well as personal” (Axelrod 138). After the poems of confession, which were a great success, Lowell altered the revolutionary style of the earlier volume, by pouring a greater density into his poems. The tone of these poems is less agitated and far more controlled after the expiation of guilt, so that the speaker of *Life Studies*, who once said “my mind’s not right”, has now come to terms with himself and can easily move back and forth in the past and present. Purged off his guilt now, the poet is strong enough to re-enter the world and this change is most discernable in the love poems written for his wife, at the end of *For the Union Dead*. The volume has “compelling subject matter” and “inescapable images” as Parkinson suggests. Most important are the metaphor of animals, who when associated with men, become more than beasts. Dogs, rats, chickens, pigs are all parodies as well as a realization of our baser nature. When the poet urges us to pity the monsters, he is asserting that the human race is in some sense responsible for its own monstrosity. Thematically, the animal imagery relates to the fallen, collapsed state of the poet, “who lives again through paradise lost” (Parkinson 145). He goes further to say that: “the poems are post-Christian; even more than that, they are poems of a world that has denied its second and would deny a third chance by taking the whole matter out of the hands of any God at all” (145).

The penultimate poem of the book ‘Night Sweat’ (*FUD* 68-69), concludes Lowell’s mental torment. He starts with a picture of himself in fever, struggling with his “will to die” alone in the darkness of the heavy black urn of himself. He pleads with his wife:

Absolve me, help me Dear Heart, as you bear
this world’s dead weight and cycle on your back.

In this struggle for vision in his trapped state, Lowell looks at the world around him for an enduring and humanizing relationship, so that the dark and heavy images of the first half of the poem now give way to images of light and lightness, that mark Lowell’s spiritual recovery at his wife’s return. “My
wife... your lightness alters everything” he says. The movement of the poem is marked by a progress from night to day, darkness to vision, and from poet’s isolation to the much hoped-for connection with the world around him. This volume too, ends in optimism and affirmation of his ability to “see” himself and the world he is in, by re-establishing his connection with it. The volume’s appeal thus lies in its central insight, which Lowell articulates as: “One life, one writing!” (FUD 68). The most applauded poem in the volume ‘For the Union Dead’ (FUD 70-72), is about national history, which is literally born in time. It focuses on various historical moments, starting with, ‘Colonel Shaw and his regiment marching through Boston in 1863 and their death at Fort Wagner two months later; William James dedicating their monument in 1897; Hiroshima “boiling” in 1945; the Boston Common being torn open…” (Axelrod 171). Although Lowell talks about national history, on the subtextual level, the poem is his own inner biography. While on one level the poem contrasts America’s past with its present, on the other it also contrasts Lowell’s past with his personal present.

In the next volume of poems, Near the Ocean (1967), his faith in the power of love is restored. Through his restored sense of relatedness with the world around him, he achieves the much desired solace that he seeks. In The Dolphin (1973), Lowell talks mainly about his relationship with Caroline Blackwood, his “dolphin”, which is his symbol of self-renewal. Caroline’s love is the force that provides Lowell self-transcendence. The poems of the volume focus on the incidents of their affair, their love, and their sexual and spiritual ecstasy as well as Lowell’s spiritual rejuvenation, through Caroline’s love and the birth of their son, Robert Sheridan. In another poem ‘Artist’s Model’ (D 52-53), Lowell speaks of the relationship between art and life. He reiterates that his art has been about his “actually lived” experience. As he tells A. Alvarez in an interview, “the needle that prods into what happened may be the same needle that writes a good line” (PRL 33). Expressing his views on autobiographical poetry he believes that in “any kind of autobiographical writing or historical writing— you want the reader to say, this is true”, even though they may not be “always factually true. There is a good deal of
tinkering with fact. I've invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented” he tells Fredrick Seidel (21). This poetic concept is reinforced when Lowell declares at the end of _The Dolphin:_

> My eyes have seen what my hand did. (78)

Accepting full responsibility for his actions, his poetry and his life, Lowell finally arrives at a final sense of communion with the outside world. _The Dolphin_, which he called his “book of life”, is thus dominantly about Lowell’s existence and his poetic process, which are both interlocked and rejuvenated by Caroline Blackwood.

Lowell’s last volume _Day By Day_ (1977), was published just days before his death. In this book, Lowell neither works up his experience, nor dwells on the symbol of the dolphin, but simply tries to “say what happened” (_DBD_ 127). Abandoning the dolphin symbol, Lowell now tells the reader in the ‘Epilogue’ (127), that he aspires “to make/ something imagined not recalled”, lamenting that every time he writes about things “experienced or seen with my eye”, it seems like a photograph of facts, not things imagined. He now deliberates on a need to engage in a fictional art, but soon retracts, saying “why not say what happened.” This shows that Lowell is no longer uncomfortable or self-conscious about drawing upon personal experience and pays his homage to both, the created world around him as well as the eye of the creator, who apprehends this world creatively. Axelrod sees this as the poet’s final and “last Testament”. _Day By Day_, concludes with the poet’s faith in the human spirit, in the power of the individual to bear his life, to learn, to understand and even prize it, despite everything. By the end of his poetic career, Lowell seems to have made his peace with himself and the world around him, with his changed perception of life and his deep sense of foreboding about death, life’s final reality.

In a poetic career spanning thirty-six years Robert Lowell has successfully appeared as rhetorician, storyteller, translator, verse-novelist, autobiographer and memoirist too. Yet for all his dynamism, his poetic oeuvre
is unified. Lowell’s is the ubiquitous presence that resides at the very center of all his work. Although the style of his writing has changed radically over the years, the central character remains the same, for “the thread that strings it together, is my own autobiography” (Seidel 352) says the poet. Lowell viewed his art as a form of therapy, confessing later that poetry was the breath of life for him. “If I stop writing, I stop breathing” (History 169) he said. A chronological study of his poetry then provides us with a deep insight into the arc of the poet’s creative development and the complex movement in time past and present, through which the poet arrives at increasingly progressive stages of equanimity and psychic integration. A writer of political poems, monologues, sonnets and elegies besides confessional poetry, Lowell is one of the most significant religious poets of his age too. Powerful poems like The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket and ‘Skunk Hour’, leave no doubt about their author’s genius and artistic magnificence. The ancestral voices of his poetry are familiar, of New England and at the same time universal spirits. His poetry represents not only his identity as a New England writer but also his obligation as a member of the international poetic community. To brand him as a narrow confessional poet then, would be doing great disservice to the poetic and artistic powers of one of the greatest poets of our century.
Abbreviations used throughout the thesis to refer to works by Robert Lowell and critical works on him.

LOU = Land of Unlikeness. 1941.
LWC = Lord Weary’s Castle. 1946.
MK = The Mills of the Kavanaughs. 1951.
LS = Life Studies. 1959.
FOU = For the Union Dead. 1964.
NTO = Near the Ocean. 1967.
DBD = Day By Day. 1977.
N = Notebook. 1970.
CMS = Christian Science Monitor