

Robert Lowell

Poet Description:

Robert Lowell grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of a family with a distinguished literary heritage. Poets James Russell Lowell and Amy Lowell were among his ancestors. This heritage no doubt made his own father's limitations—he was a business failure after his retirement from the U.S. Navy—seem more severe. Lowell enrolled at Harvard, much as the family expected, but after the first of his lifelong series of emotional breakdowns and periods of manic behavior, he transferred to Kenyon College in 1937. There he met poet and critic John Crowe Ransom, one of the leaders of American New Criticism, who introduced Lowell to preferences for rhetorically intricate and ironic poems. Lowell also broke with his Protestant family history by converting to Catholicism in 1940. Opposed to some of America's World War II policies, he served a year in prison as a conscientious objector.

Lowell's first books, biblical and apocalyptic in tone, gave way in *Life Studies* (1959) to a new style that would guarantee his reputation. Accompanied by an autobiographical essay and written in a far more open and personal style, the poems came to herald what would be called the "confessional" school of poetry. Yet from the outset of his career, Lowell had actually been drawn to a more complex subject—the intersection of public history and autobiographical experience. Though later work like *The Dolphin* (1973) would sometimes mine his personal experience remorselessly, his poems overall are a remarkable testament to how a reflective person lives and internalizes both the historical record and the public life of his time. The "confessional" label, which was more comfortable for critics who preferred poetry to be apolitical, has thus obscured the degree to which Lowell is a powerful critic of American culture and history. "Epilogue" is the final authored poem in his last book.

Race/Ethnicity:

European ^[1]

Picture:



Gender:

Male ^[2]

Sexuality:

Straight ^[3]

First Name:

Robert

Last Name:

Lowell

Birth & Death Dates:

Thursday, March 1, 1917 to Monday, September 12, 1977

School of Poetry:

Confessional ^[4]

Birth Place:

Boston , Massachusetts

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[5]

Massachusetts US

Death Place:

New York City , New York

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[6]

New York US

Group visibility:

Private - accessible only to group members

Tags:

Boston ^[7]

Boston University ^[8]

Anne Sexton ^[9]

Elizabeth Bishop ^[10]

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