

Reading Myself (1973)
Robert Lowell

Like thousands, I took just pride and more than just,
struck matches that brought my blood to a boil;
I memorized the tricks to set the river on fire—
somehow never wrote something to go back to.
Can I suppose I am finished with wax flowers
and have earned my grass on the minor slopes of Parnassus . . .¹
No honeycomb is built without a bee
adding circle to circle, cell to cell,
the wax and honey of a mausoleum— .
this round dome proves its maker is alive;
the corpse of the insect lives embalmed in honey,
prays that its perishable work live long
enough for the sweet-tooth bear to desecrate—
this open book . . . my open coffin.

¹ A mountain in Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses, traditionally symbolic of high poetic achievement.