PREFACE

Modern Poetry is often considered to be complex, unimportant, obscure unreasonably difficult, and divorced from "real life". Modern Poetry is perhaps considered difficult, only because it is fully involved with the inescapable complexities and ambiguities of existence. It is one of the few guides that show how meaning and order are possible in the labyrinthine world we live in. Just as the astronaut explores the immensities above man, the poet as an artist, explores the immensities within, bringing us new knowledge about the self, new and superior ways of feeling and more accurate ways of seeing and interpreting the phenomena surrounding him. The problems of self do not blind the poet to the problems of society. The poet here tries to transcend the individual weaknesses and the despair he shares with masses of men and speaks the truths that are man's only hope. Modern poems need not necessarily offer a lofty message. They are mainly concerned with communicating feelings and experiences rather than presenting information. The poet converts ideas and facts into feelings and a small detail becomes a powerful emotion.

It is this facet of Modern Poetry, especially American Poetry with its complications, depth and grandeur that fascinates me. American Poetry is essentially experimental. It was apparent to American poets that because of centuries of writing in Europe, there was a gravitational pull towards its seductive attraction. The American poets successfully strove to consciously resist that European inheritance and the result was a wealth of "Original Voices." Respect for the power of narrative, for
content drawn from the ordinary world we live in, strikes a dominant note in much of American Poetry, and ideas nakedly stated shape them. The complex passions of these poems reveal an obsession for clarity and an overwhelming desire for sincere expression of what one feels and knows combined with a freedom of imagination. There is also a commitment to discover durable meaning at a time of lost standards when millions of human lives are threatened with nuclear annihilation. Poems, according to Wallace Stevens, are "answering looks," given back by the poet to life. That "answering look" can take many forms.

The poet Robert Lowell in his poetry, views the events of his own personal life, the events of the society, past and present, and juxtaposing and fusing them, interweaves them in such a way that they illuminate one another. This fusion of contraries deeply impressed me when I first heard "For the Union Dead" discussed in the M.Phil class room, and the poem still remains my favourite. Here Lowell projects himself and records his personal impressions of the city and views his own childhood in the mindlessly ferocious materialistic world of the 20th century life. In this arena, the poet Lowell is present like a protagonist recording his personal impressions of the city and taking a hard look at his own childhood. The poem reveals to us a consciousness shaped both by individual experience and its continuing exposure to society's collective, social and political ills. A deeper study of his poetry revealed Lowell simultaneously as an actor involved in narrated events, and also a detached observer making an analysis. He is successfully both subjective and objective when he resolves the tensions between personal and impersonal modes and creates seamless verbal fabrics. The biographical emphasis in Lowell's poetry adheres well into his larger and more major concern for the society and complements his public viewpoint.

My growing admiration for this extraordinary poetic skill spurred me on to a greater in-depth study of his poetry and commentaries on his work. I realized that
while many Indian scholars have dealt with the confessional aspects of his poetry the fusion of the personal and the public has not received its due attention. This has motivated me in taking up this subject.

Following the chronological order in the Selected Poems, I have taken poems from Lord Weary's Castle, Life Studies, For the Union Dead and Near the Ocean for this study. All the selected poems deal with the larger concerns of society and are closely interwoven with private and public resonances. This dissertation in six chapters is an attempt to present Robert Lowell as a major poet of the 20th century whose poetic mode was 'metaphysical', in its complex and coherent inclusiveness of the personal and the public. While attempting to achieve this, I have brought in a few parallels (wherever appropriate) from the works of the Tamil poet Bharathiyar and the Irish poet W.B. Yeats. Their poems like Lowell's, are rooted in the moral-political-historical circumstances of our time and place, the past and the present and the parallels which highlight Lowell's achievement.

Reading and studying Lowell with deep interest over a period of five years, I have attempted to analyze his poetry and these years of study have lent a new dimension to my own perspective of life, the world and interpersonal relationships. It has sensitized me to the complex structure of the human mind, its reactions in a closed circle of personal problems and situations and the barely noticed effects of reactions and happenings far removed from us.
The following is the list of abbreviations which have been used to represent Robert Lowell's works cited.

\textit{LWC} Lord Weary's Castle

\textit{FUD} For the Union Dead

\textit{LS} Life Studies

\textit{NB} Notebook 1967-68

The other poems by Lowell quoted in part or full in the text are from the Revised Edition of Selected Poems.