Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

An effort was made in this dissertation to define and illustrate the Roethkean version of symbolism which is a symbolism of an intuitive sort. Two features of this intuitive symbolism have been highlighted in the course of the present investigation: the first is the recurrence of the same image in different contexts with different connotations; the other is the appearance of other images in similar contexts with the same implications. The result is a continual process of transformation, and in consequence of this, the creation of an endless range of associations. The opening chapter connects this artifice with the thematic content of his work and accounts for the elasticity and fluidity of his images which can stretch infinitely under the pressure of the contexts to produce an intricate web of meanings.

Another feature of Roethke's symbolism highlighted in this study is its essentially kinetic quality. In the first place this symbolism is born of the ceaseless interplay of the images. In addition this rhetorical technique creates the impression of undergoing an evolution. An attempt has been made to trace this evolution through the body of Roethke's published work and to demonstrate that the development of Roethke's method parallels the progress of his quest for a genuine selfhood.

At the beginning of his career Roethke evinces a reluctance to seriously engage the urgent questions of immediate personal relevance. In the first volume, Open House, he sometimes addresses them in a cursory, hasty manner as in "The Premonition." The poem deals with the death of his
father. But Roethke seems to take considerable pains to distance himself from the theme of the poem. In general, the poet is loath to concern himself with the painful events of his life. It surprises us, then, to hear him announce in the title poem that he will be at the centre of his work. A close analysis of the poems shows that instead of unmasking himself he is wearing a façade all the time. He takes care not to expose the true self hidden behind the iron curtain.

The structure of these lyrics is, therefore, shaped by the antithesis between openness and concealment. Corresponding to this fundamental opposition there is a conflict between two kinds of discourses—the assertive voice of the rational self which is meant to delude both the poet and the reader and the unconscious voice which finds expression through the suggestive potential of certain key images. The poems’ symbolism contradicts the conscious utterance of the poet. In “The Adamant,” for example, the speaker boasts that the rock-crusher cannot, beyond a certain stage, make any dent on the irreducible, invulnerable piece of the rock fortifying the peaceful inhabitant of its interior. There is quiet at the core. When we turn to another poem “Reply Against Censure” we see what the rock-crusher and the inmate of the interior signify. Evidently the speaker is guarding his self from the mad onslaught of critics. The confident assertion of the speaker regarding the quiet at the core is sometimes undercut by the smothered cry of the spirit from within the dungeon where it is imprisoned. In “The Adamant” the attitude of the speaker is characterized by a desire to protect the true self. The tone of bravado we hear in “The Adamant” contrasts with the condition of the “protected” self behind the screen of the assumed self. The preponderance of the auditory images in “Silence” effectively captures the desperate, frantic
struggle of the inner self to communicate its agony. Read together with “Silence.” “The Adamant” reveals two characteristics of Roethke’s early poems: the clash between the outer and inner selves, between simulation and genuineness, and the use of images which suggest deliberate concealment and suppression. The rock in “The Adamant” becomes identical with cage and mask. The examination of Roethke’s early poems also shows that “rock,” “cage” and “mask” link up with the alien self which the poet puts on, and with the various items of the clothing he wears from time to time.

An important result of the scrutiny of Roethke’s first book of poems is the light it has shed on a major aspect of his technique. The metrical rigidity of these lyrics—the rigorous subordination of theme to form—mirrors the complete subjugation of the true self by the rational self. Obviously the construction of these elaborate artefacts involved painstaking labour, not merely for squeezing into a preconceived mould the experiences chosen for treatment, but for sundering the mind from its own creations. Roethke’s vigilant watch over himself is reflected in the inflexible formal structure of the verses. In other words the central images like clothing, cave and cage get condensed into the metrical pattern of the poems. The similarity observed between Roethke’s control over himself and the brittleness of his verse extends itself to his attitude towards his voice. It is found that Roethke gags himself, and speaks in the voices of other people. This appropriation of alien voices bespeaks an attempt to suppress the true self. Roethke’s imitative tactic is of a piece with his deliberate projection of a false self in the poems. In addition Roethke has so arranged the poems as to draw attention not to their
underlying symbolism, but to their superficial generalized and declarative tone. The inevitable inference that the consideration of Roethke’s craftsmanship leads up to is that the poet exploits all his resources to camouflage his real self.

The investigation has probed into the causes of Roethke’s adoption of the impenetrable mask. One of the findings of this exploration is that the poet’s relationship with the outside world of social life is anything but smooth and harmonious. His prejudice (it is clearly expressed in “Reply Against Censure”) that society is maliciously bent upon undoing him makes him buttress his vulnerable self behind the façade of pretended bravery. There is also a psychological reason for his assumption of a ruthlessly oppressive self. This latter cause cannot be wholly divorced from the former. The poet seems to be aware of his atavistic, regressive tendencies, and on the ground of psychic integrity and security considers it necessary to curb such retrogressive drives of the mind. The rational self finds the backward movement of the inner self to be hazardous because in the course of its regression the self senses affinities with the subhuman forms of life and acknowledges as its own certain impulses which reason has banished from the conscious mind. The two poems, “The Bat” and “The Heron” deal respectively with these consequences of the inward journey of the self into the unconscious. The former of these is a description of the antics of a bat. But the detached observation fades away into a disturbing perception of a kinship with the odious creature. Moreover, in this primal state of oneness with the subhuman, the distinctively human form appears an artificial mask worn by the self. The
dissertation emphasizes Roethke's adroit handling of the complex image of clothing in the first volume. "The Heron" is an imagistic expression of a dangerously non-human, and aggressive desire. Such shocking propensities are unacceptable to the conscious mind. For these reasons, the rational self strives to check the regressive adventurism of the inner self.

Another image that figures prominently in *Open House* is that of house. However, in certain instances, home blends with the mask-clothing-dungeon cluster. It has been found necessary to examine the house-symbolism separately, owing to its pervasiveness in the book and to its potential, prophetic value. In this volume Roethke's quest for a true selfhood is indistinguishable from his search for his home. A close reading of the title poem "Open House" has shown that the speaker's present residence is far from being satisfactory. Poems like "The Adamant" reiterate its oppressive, claustrophobic atmosphere. He changes the direction of his hunt in a few poems towards his ancestors. The attempt here is to create symbolically the ancestral home and initiate a dialogue with the dead. The quester feels ill at ease in this imaginary abode where, instead of a wholesome inheritance, what awaits him is the spectre of blood-thirsty ghosts. The home-image takes on metaphysical overtones, when, later in the volume, Roethke, frustrated by the first two attempts, describes the mind as a home. But he has to get rid of a lot of trifles from it before he can dwell in it. This mystical venture is more satisfying although no beatitude is experienced. But new problems arise which make the occupation of the new house unpleasant. The body-mind dichotomy worries him. Roethke takes a radical step when he strikes out on
the inward highway leading to the unconscious. Here also he arrives at a house of sorts. While the inward self delights in the new discovery, the rational self frowns in disapproval. The analysis of the home-symbolism thus illuminates the nature of Roethke's quest.

Roethke's quest enters a new phase with the poems which constitute *The Lost Son and Other Poems*. The third chapter of the dissertation focuses on the polarization of images in what are now called the Greenhouse poems. Of the various strategies tried in *Open House* (mentioned in the previous paragraph) Roethke finally opts for the regressive one. This tactic determines the character of the other with whom he seeks to align himself. The whole vegetal world becomes a home to the poet, and its inhabitants (in general, exclusive of the adult supervisors) his playmates, or better, relatives. A certain degree of regression takes place before he reaches this state in which the vast floral enclosure literally appears a home. The investigation of the poems has revealed that the occupant of the sylvan abode does not experience any tranquillity or comfort. Instead he seems to swing between moods of extreme joy and painful self-loathing. These vacillations are mirrored in the poems' images. Roethke's emotional fluctuations set in motion a dialectic which progresses to a peaceful resolution in the final poem of the sequence. Several pairs of opposites activate the lyrics through their ceaseless interplay: life and death, stasis and motion, love and hatred, womb and grave, and growth and decay. What is baffling to the garden-resident is the interconnection he observes between each of these pairs of contraries. The mature understanding occurs only at the end of the sequence. Initially, the sprouting
of life, the tenacity of the plants to survive fascinates him. He reaches out in empathy and identifies himself with the plants. Further regression shows him another facet of the floral home which disgusts him. Also, the inmates who occupy that part of the house repel him. Submerged beneath the beautiful exterior of plants and flowers, that is, symbolically, beneath the layer of civilized accretions, Roethke glimpses a chaotic realm where a welter of things lie odiously piled up. Decaying and rotting organic matter, frail shoots struggling from amid the muck to reach out toward light, and a multitude of creeping things wriggling around and over this heap of filth, nauseate him. At this stage Roethke fails to perceive the inseparability of life and death. His mind only fastens on the dirt and the innumerable vile forms of life. What is more horrifying to him is the discovery of the affinity he has with them. In the penultimate poem, “Flower Dump,” the poet notices a frail tulip trembling up over a pile of rotting flowers. The sight of the decaying flowers does not produce any revulsion as it did earlier. He has learnt to accept even death and decay as part of life.

One of the poems which illustrate this inference is “Cuttings (Later).” It represents one extreme of Roethke’s shifting emotional states. The speaker marvels at the miracle of growth. He is full of admiration for the green heroes who have succeeded in affirming their life after a fierce battle against death. But death is implicit in this very assertion of life which is viewed as a resurrection in the poem. Later, the speaker becomes one with the struggling plants. He feels reanimated and rejuvenated. However, Roethke’s identification with the vegetal martyrs is incomplete. Another poem “Root
Cellar," which represents the other end of the spectrum, shows the reasons for this partial mergence. Here Roethke comes face to face with the subterranean world of origins. The earlier ecstasy gives way to abhorrence. He associates the damp interior only with death and decay just as in the previous poem he concentrates only on the stirrings of life. But there are unmistakable suggestions of fecundity. Read alongside "Weed Puller" the present poem reveals Roethke's attitude to be one of sheer hatred. It is in the final poem that the womb-grave antithesis is resolved, and the protagonist attains an equanimity of mind.

It has been observed that the progress of Roethke's symbolism parallels the vicissitudes of his quest. In the Greenhouse poems the evocation of his father's garden is not an act of nostalgic self-indulgence. Roethke recreates the floral universe in such a manner as to figure the dynamics of the self. Thus the plants, flowers, and the littles externalize the states of the poet's mind. It has already been indicated that the images undergo a polarization. Nowhere is this polarity more apparent than in the juxtaposition of the subterranean world swarming with multitudinous reptiles with the familiar world of plants and flowers. Roethke, then, connects these respective spaces and their inhabitants with the Jungian archetype of ascent and descent. However, by overlaying this developing symbolism with all the ramifications of the theme of submergence (the womb-grave motif, for instance) he sometimes blurs the distinctions between the two realms. The whole sequence is informed by the waves of tension created by Roethke's changing attitudes to this polarized microcosm of the universe.
In a sense, Roethke’s vegetal symbolism reaches its climax in the sequence of long poems which form his third volume *Praise to the End!* The fourth chapter of the present study concentrates on a few of these poems to illustrate the operation of the Roethkean version of symbolism. Stated crudely, the problem of the protagonist in these poems appears simple. He finds himself in the midst of a profound crisis which is, in part, familial and in part, sexual, and has religious and existential implications. Hence, Roethke invents a poetics of his own to embody the unique experience of his hero. Roethke ultimately hits upon a rhetoric which is elastic and flexible enough to contain immense pressures of meaning. In the opening poem “The Lost Son” (this, along with three others, was included in *The Lost Son and Other Poems*) the son’s agony is apparently caused by the death of his father. The whole poem becomes an epic of the boy’s search for his father. But the close analysis of the poem’s texture which, by and large, forms its bulk, has shown that the theme is so embedded in and interlocked with, the clusters of images that any attempt at paraphrasing or abstracting the meaning is bound to fail.

In “The Lost Son,” perplexed by a sense of anonymity and fascinated by the seductive appeal of death, the hero turns to the littles of the universe for guidance. The bird, the snail and the worm ignore his supplication. Instinctively the son starts fishing in a pond. The fish, in this context, suggests simultaneously the son’s desire for the affirmation of sexuality (as it is symbolic of the male phallus) and his quest for his father (as it represents Christ and, by extension, his father). Another pair of antithetical images appears here. He wants some oral guidance to come in the guise of a spider
or moth. Roethke associates the spider with sexuality (this point is confirmed by references to other contexts in which the image appears) and the moth with his father or spirituality. The son, now, receives oracular answers to his query for hints. These are spynx-like riddles. The cosmic voice directs him to water, wind and fish, all the three of which have regenerative potential. While wind carries obvious spiritual connotations, the water symbolism is more complex. Here, water images the subconscious; sometimes it suggests process. It is Roethke’s intense vision that unites these vastly dissimilar images. In short the protagonist’s mysterious guide wants him to undergo a purgative baptism in the primordial waters. The plunge into these abysmal waters is identical with an elevation into mystical transcendence suggested by the image of wind. The fish-image links both these with the need for the assertion of sexuality. On learning the meaning of these puzzling injunctions, the son flees in search of water, wind and fish. Now Roethke introduces a new cluster of images which suggest submergence, the dark interior of the mind: water, swamp, pit, grave, and womb. The creature he is hunting in these places partakes of the qualities of the rat, the mouse, the fish, the cat, and the otter. The descent into the subconscious is described in terms of a sexual impregnation. Here we view these burrowing creatures as entering the deep. But if they are seen as emerging from the water as a result of the hunt, they indicate the protagonist’s father who blends with the father in heaven. The quester descends into the deep pit. Inside the abyss two impulses vie with each other for mastery: the desire to remain at the bottom which is destructive and the desire to be quickened into life which is positive. In the first case the pit becomes a grave imprisoning him in its enclosure. Otherwise it resembles a womb. The womb
aspect dominates as the quester feels a sudden inflow of vitality from his contact with “fish-nerves.” This incipience of life does not lead to unobstructed progress. The pit now gets transformed into caves of ice, indicating a relapse into fear and guilt. In this frustration he becomes aware of an upsurge of sexual passion. Consequently the ice-pit changes into a heap of cinders. The metamorphosis of this image points to the son’s immersion in rank carnality. The crisis goes on mounting till the son loses his stability. The cinders turn into white light and ashes.

After this symbolic death occurs the father-son reunion. The son’s emergence from the pit into the familiar greenhouse assumes the complexion of a rebirth or resurrection. However, the pit does not wholly vanish. The transformation of the ice-cave-pit into the fire-pit underscores the success of the quest. Water, frozen so far, turns into steam, and the flowers, with the appearance of the father in the garden and the advent of dawn, stretch toward light which, in contrast with the light of the previous passage, is not white. The quester has a transient experience of mystical illumination.

The symbolism operates more or less in the same way in the other poems of the sequence. “The Long Alley,” for instance, begins with the image of a filthy river which looks like a serpent. Stagnation and imprisonment in physicality is accentuated by the image of the dead fish floating on the river. There is an accumulation of such images in the first section: slag, cinders, smoke and sulphurous water. This catalogue ends with the hero’s awareness that his gates are “all caves.” Soon he expresses a desire to escape from this rampant sensualism. With the growth of the desire for regeneration the body
appears as contemptible as a horse-barn, a trough or even soft bones the last of which hints at death and decay. However, he falls back into the sty of vile physical pleasure. A narcissistic image underlines the retrogression. Neither the silt nor the wind renews him. The wind only covers him with scales. Despairing of spiritual re-animation he wallows in the dirt with a vengeance. He goes to the extent of asserting that he is “happy with his paws.” Later, more explicitly, Roethke describes the cat as the murderer of the fish. This losing of himself in wanton pleasures amounts to a death. The renewal begins with his identification with the plants and the flowers. At the end, he wants the dogs to be called off. Dogs in Roethke’s poetry are associated with guilty sexuality. He also says that he has abandoned his paws: what is remarkable in the conclusion is the fusion of the images of the sea, the fish and the wind.

The scrutiny of these poems has illuminated Roethke’s poetics of intuition which underlies the sequence. He seems to load his key images with an amazing burden of suggestive potential. Then he patterns them into a mosaic of meanings by means of the associative technique. For example, it has been seen how, through the miracle of intuitive vision, the wind and the fish are clubbed together to suggest spiritual renewal. It becomes possible because Roethke has already established the connection between the fish and his father or Christ and invested the wind with spiritual overtones. It does not surprise us when Roethke uses the same combination to indicate indulgence in sensuality in a different poem.

The examination of Roethke’s love poems in *Words for the Wind* has corroborated the initial assumption that the woman in these poems performs a
dual function. As a symbol she resembles the minimals. Like them she reveals or concretizes the quester's internal struggles in his arduous journey towards emergence with the infinite. Like Dante's Beatrice (Roethke's wife's name was Beatrice), she also leads him through love to mystical transcendence of the mundane. Such an approach to the love poems does not wholly neglect the frank celebration of sexual love which informs some of them. But the position adopted in the dissertation is justified by certain features of the poems. First of all, in his portrayal of the woman Roethke makes no attempt to individualize her. She lacks the distinct contours of an independent other. Secondly, she shifts between an entrancing, incorporeal wraith-like figure and a purely physical partner in the love-game. Thirdly, her continual metamorphosis makes it difficult to treat her as a woman in her own right. Finally, the burden of the love poems is, for the most part, a consideration of fundamental riddles like death, the integrity of the self and the possibilities of transcendence.

If we follow the development of the poem "The Dream" with which the sequence opens, we cannot fail to observe the ambivalent character of the woman. Roethke conjures her up from within the dark recesses of his own mind. There is a fiery ring around her. Yet she lies with him in the water. As she is born of water, she moves in unison with the movement of water. In the second section she comes to him in the flowing air. Roethke's symbolism does not differentiate air from water. She is as much at home in the air as in the water. It is motion that unifies the woman and the elements. The water "ripples," she "ripples," and the air "flows." A bird sings; and
bushes and stones dance. Here is an amassing of images which suggest spiritual joy in Roethke's poetry. The union of the speaker with his beloved is described in the final section. The result is striking. The field gets metamorphosed into "a glittering sea." The poet plays in water and flame simultaneously. His experience is one of epiphany.

This poem highlights the dualism mentioned above. She does not have a distinct form. She merges with water, air and fire. In fact she becomes one with the whole creation. Through union with her the poet experiences beatitude. It is then reasonable to conclude that she is a medium through which to articulate the results of his mystical quest. The poem could also be read in its literal sense in which case she must be seen as a woman with a physical body, leading the poet through sexual ecstasy to union with the divine.

In "All the Earth, All the Air" Roethke muses over the sacrifice required on his part for the fulfilment of love. From his viewpoint the loss is enormous; it is nothing short of the surrender of his selfhood. As we have seen, love makes ample recompense for the self-abnegation. Love as an inheritance places a burden of responsibility on the inheritor. But Roethke is reluctant to barter his selfhood for all the riches of love's legacy. Towards the end of the poem awareness dawns upon him that persistent withdrawal into himself results in stagnation and that the fear of being stung does not keep the bee off the blossom. With this knowledge he turns to his beloved and enjoys the rapture of illumination. A close reading shows that Roethke's scepticism regarding participation in love has its roots in his doubts about the desirability
of union with the infinite. He fears that in the experience of union his unique identity is jeopardized. Such an interpretation is validated by the unambiguous statement of this problem in “North American Sequence.”

“The Pure Fury” is not a love-poem in the conventional sense. It is concerned with the existential predicament of man. The attack of anxiety arises from a rage for purity. The violent search for innocence becomes urgent in the context of the speaker’s confrontation with emptiness or vacuity and non-being or death. The problem is intensified by the fear of the fragmentation of the self. The significance of the woman in this poem is that she symbolizes nothingness. The poem shares with a few others characteristics like the onslaught of tension and the image of the deep shade. The comparison throws light on another dimension of the poem. Roethke’s convulsive dread is similar to the mystic’s dark night of the soul. Nothing can mitigate his fierce hunger for substance which is equated with purity and integrity of the self, at the psychological level, and with union with the Absolute at the mystical level. Some signs of redemption lie scattered in the concluding section. His breath is taken away, for example, not by this image of death (that is, the woman), but by “the light air.” Later the light air links up with her transforming her into a wraith. The analysis of this poem demonstrates the fact that Roethke is preoccupied in this sequence with ultimate questions, and that love, at one level occasions them, and at another helps communicate Roethke’s musings over these questions.

The sixth chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of “North American Sequence” which forms the first section of Roethke’s posthumous volume The
Far Field. Roethke's consummate craftsmanship is evident in the elaborate structural design of this poetic edifice. The most striking feature of the sequence is the conjunction of the protected, enclosed space of the greenhouse and the vast, illimitable space outside symbolized by the field and the sea. In this convergence of the self with the other in its infinite form, of the poet with the landscape of America, of land and water, Roethke's quest reaches its logical culmination. Besides this, the poet portrays his Protean ultimate man whose memory reaches back over millennia into the past and stretches forward infinitely into the future. He remains unaffected despite the myriad metamorphoses that he undergoes. His prodigious mind for ever remembers the countless shapes he has already had and prophetically foresees the countless forms he has yet to become.

The investigation has demonstrated that the sequence enacts the slow process that leads up to Roethke's radical vision. Initially, the poet knows that the exposure of the fortified garden to the outer world can be perilous. But he has come to a stage at which confinement within the fortress is no less disastrous because there is an inner longing to discover "the imperishable order" which lies at the heart of the shift and flow of things. Despite this awareness, he is reluctant to plunge into the inviting waters because immersion may result in the dissolution or extinction of his distinctive self. The perception of this transcendent order is necessary for delightful participation in the world of process. The sea or the field represents flux in its infinite form. Or it is the formlessness of the sea that threatens him. Gradually, he learns that he is not faced with antithetical options. Identification with the sea does
not involve the relinquishment of the greenhouse or, in other words, mergence with the other does not require the rejection of his selfhood. In fact, one of the prerequisites for the coveted union is a firm anchorage in the protective values of the greenhouse. Thus there are two movements: one in the direction of the sea; the other in the direction of the Edenic garden of his childhood. At the end of the twin movements the quester finds himself simultaneously in the floral world and the limitless expanse of water. In the very act of leaping into the water, there is a retreat into himself for refuge. The whole sequence is structured on this principle. The first poem introduces the themes. The remaining poems alternately deal with the movements. The final poem celebrates their intersection in the image of the rose floating freely in the sea-wind, yet rooted firmly in the rocks.

It has also been noticed that a complex dialectic energizes the poems. The polarity, already discussed, between the greenhouse and the open field provides a paradigm for the aesthetic of dialectical progression that underlies the sequence. The constriction of confinement is condensed in the image of the stone, and the infiniteness of expansion in that of the field. The other images in the sequence drift toward and cluster around these poles. This polar opposition is reiterated by the leitmotif of motion. Sometimes it rises to an incredible speed. On occasions it diminishes to a stillness. The direction of the movement, as has already been seen, also emphasizes the dichotomy. The elasticity of Roethke’s verse (its expansion and contraction) and his changing attitude to the American landscape reflect the central conflict.

In the first poem entitled “The Longing” which is a kind of overture Roethke steps out of the floral haven. He is nauseated by the sight of the
landscape debauched by a decadent civilization. The vast vista of dirt and rubbish bears testimony to the moral decay of the country. The devastated land becomes an emblem of the “sensual emptiness” which characterizes modern life. The moral degeneracy is captured in the image of a loose worm “ready for any crevice.” The vision of a flame and a rose helps him to progress from this state of helplessness to one of confidence. A consistent sexual symbolism underscores the movement. The worm is linked with a bud and, then, with the vertical stalk that he has become. In the last section of the poem Roethke states his goal as the discovery of “the imperishable quiet at the heart of form.” He also provides a catalogue of the creatures with which he wants to identify himself. What Roethke emphasizes is a mindless absorption in nature. But to throw himself into the world of process, he would first need to perceive the transcendent order hidden in the stream of flux. At the end of the poem there is even a desire to return to the primitivism of the aboriginal Indians, as Roethke thinks that civilization proves a hindrance in his quest for the radiant centre of form.

The second poem “Meditation at Oyster River” begins with an evocation of a quiet dusk over the Pacific coast. Despite the prevailing serenity and the seductiveness of the water Roethke does not desire immersion. A small wave even advances towards him. But Roethke retreats to a higher rock, symbolically refusing the water’s embrace. The tranquillity that pervades the scene is deceptive. The motion of the wind indicates that the external calm does not represent spiritual peace. In Roethke’s descriptions of the state of transcendental joy, the wind never slows down, as it does here, to a stillness. At the end of the poem he undergoes mergence with the water.
There is a paradox here. There is the suggestion of a regressive movement in terms like "half-sleep" "lull" and "cradle." Yet, the spirit is described as running in and out of water. Thus in this experience of beatitude there is a symbolic conjunction of the past (infancy and the greenhouse) and the present.

The third poem highlights the reverse movement. The journey through the mid-continent ravaged by America's industrial culture symbolizes Roethke's regression. Even the backslide down the path of phylogeny encounters obstructions. This reveals Roethke's unwillingness to shed the vestiges of civilization. He undertakes a second ride in the automobile. This time the drive through the dangerous territory is rash. But as the speed accelerates to a thrilling pitch, Roethke experiences a stillness. The plain becomes transformed into a sea. He even glimpses the familiar greenhouse in the midst of the rubbish secreted by civilized life. The convergence of the machine and the garden, of the poet and the cultural commercialism of the country, and finally, of the greenhouse and the sea bespeaks an epiphany. The last section is a celebration of this experience. The sleep-wakefulness dichotomy is found here also. Being reassured thus he can boldly confront the spectre of death.

The fourth poem is entitled "The Long Waters." At the beginning Roethke is nagged by doubts. He reconsiders the various options before him. Obviously he cannot have the insouciance of the animals. What is surprising is his rejection of the dog along with futile religiosity. In Roethke's poetry the dog is associated with the child which represents the deep principle of life.
He also considers for a time the reliability of the transforming power of the imagination. At last he comes to a bay where salt water is freshened by small streams which, however, flow under fallen fir trees. In the previous poem Roethke's automobile is blocked by the fir trees. Thus the fallen fir trees symbolize the clogging sense of a false selfhood. At the end of the poem the reminiscence of a stone submerged in a running stream revitalizes him. The stone embedded in the stream connotes a condition of spiritual joy. The sea-wind, now, kindles his desire for immersion in water. Moreover, the eternal child rising from the waves emboldens him. In retrospect, Roethke's rejection of the dog at the beginning of the poem appears ironic. The poem ends with an experience of illumination.

"The Far Field" also focuses on the journey to the interior. Here also the car-ride is blocked mid-way. But the remembrance of an experience prepares him, to some extent, for the acceptance of death. It occurs in a place littered with refuse and debris. He comes upon the mutilated, rotting corpse of a tom-cat. His grief was offset by the knowledge that the decaying corpse feeds other organisms. To reconcile himself with the sombre spectre of death Roethke considers the theory of evolution and the doctrine of re-incarnation. But it is not this contemplation that resurrects him. He comes to a place where land and water meet. It is here that intuitively Roethke perceives the still centre. At the end of the poem Roethke describes the ultimate man who appears as a sea-shape.

The dialectical interplay of the images reaches its culmination in the final poem of the sequence, "The Rose." Roethke's rose carries an air of
personal intimacy over and above the traditional implications. The bloom conjures up the whole floral universe of his childhood, and symbolically makes possible Roethke's reunion with his father. This inner synthesis is as significant as that of the warring contraries. Thus the blossom has its roots in the mind of the poet and amidst the crags on the shore. The floating of the flower in the sea-wind implies release into infinity while its rootedness in the stone signifies stasis, solidity and anchorage. The slime which envelops the rocks is suggestive of the primitive, primeval kind of life which permits easy and instinctive participation in process. Finally, the rose absorbs "the whole of light" to become one with it. As has already been seen, light, wind and sea are associated with infinity. The rose's absorption of light and its rootedness in stone, that is, the amalgamation of light and stone, underscore paradigmatically, the resolution of the strife caused by the contending opposites.

The investigation of Roethke's work reveals discernible phases in the evolution of his symbolism. At the beginning of his career he is reluctant to expose his self. Hence, an unconscious symbolism emanates from his recurrent use of images of concealment and suppression. In the second stage, Roethke's minimal symbolism throws light on the results of his regressive excursions. Although Roethke's symbolism, from the beginning, is of an intuitive kind, it is in the third phase of its development that it attains perfection. The protagonist's complex experiences necessitated the fullest exploitation of the technique. In the love poems Roethke invests the woman with symbolic significance. His intention here is to communicate through the
medium of sexual love the experiences of the hero in the course of his
metaphysical quest. In "North American Sequence" a complex symbolism
originates from Roethke's exposure of the greenhouse to the American
landscape. Its operation is founded on this polarity between two antithetical
spaces.

The study, it is hoped, has corroborated the initial assumption that
there is a correlation between Roethke's craft and his thematic concerns, and
that a knowledge of his unique handling of symbolism is indispensable to a
proper understanding of his verse.