CONCLUSION

Robert Lowell's poem "Sick" from *The Dolphin* is an indirect comment on the poet and the poet in America. *The Dolphin* was written when Lowell was in England. He transformed the painful break-up of the long marriage into intimations of age and death. The speaker of the poem suffers great loneliness. The images of the struggling son and the two elephants suggest that awareness of oneself might not always lead to a positive response. So he says, "It might have been redemptive not to have lived." In sickness mind and body might make a marriage but would it lead to a perspective to evaluate life? "None of us can or wants to tell the truth" because sometimes even in sickness we are weak enough to enter heaven. This suggests that humans do not have the strength of will to live by what they believe in. This seems to be the opinion of a catholic who, like Graham Greene, could see a struggle between the church and the human condition. It is in this
context that Stephen Spender compares Roethke and Lowell:

Notably some American poets—Lowell and Roethke—having absorbed the new criticism—have broken away from it. Essentially they both write a poetry which consists of the passionate and dogged pursuit of obsessive images attached to their most personal feelings. Their poetry breaks the bounds of a new academicism just as that of the early imagists broke those of the old ones.

What strikes one as an element of ‘greatness’ in this poetry—particularly in the writing of Robert Lowell—is that these realized images of his personal life and attachments established a deep connection with a world in which there are sensual delights and private obsession, and also atomic bombs and concentration camps.3

Roethke, as we have noticed in this study, focusses his creative attention on the wounded, the distorted, the redemptive self in search of its own
identity, metaphorically signified as journey. Lowell's Life Studies are the memory portraits of the Lowell family. But some of these poems convey that they are unreal in terms of the present day society. The speaker of "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" tells us that

...The doctor calls our roll -
no knives, no forks. We file before the clock
and fancy minnows, slaves of habit, shoot
like starlight through their air-conditioned
bowl.
It's time for feeding. Each subnormal boot-
black heart is pulsing to its ant egg dole. 4

The speaker seems to talk from an intense sense of isolation and an equally intense and acute rhetoric. For the mad negro solider the outside world ceases to exist because as prisoners they are like fish in a tank. As Jonathan Raban points out, "The Tragic predicament of
the negro soldier and the tragic force of his writing are opposites in kind, though mutually complementary. The world is there to be reckoned with, not moved away like a stone in front of a cave, or a tomb. The major themes of Lowell are life's anguish, faith, and temporality. These themes are also found in Roethke dramatized in terms of different enunciative modalities. Roethke is more psychological than Lowell and more inclined towards an unorthodox faith. This faith sometimes takes the shape of a mystic's vision of the self and reality as we have it in Saint John of the Cross and Dante. Very catholic and liberal, he accepts concepts like being and becoming, being and nothing, and the Yeatsian view of the unity of all being. This streak in his evolution as a poet made him use the seventeenth century form of meditative poem. But his childhood experiences receive the response of a typical lyric poet as we have noticed in the Greenhouse poems. Roethke in The Lost Son combines biography, memory, reminiscence, and structures the poem profusely using fairy-tale imagery.
Detractors of Roethke's poetry like Geoffrey Thurley think that Roethke's poetry is saturated with Freudianism, which presents the father as a villain. We notice this in O'Neill, in Tennessee Williams and to some extent in Arthur Miller. Thurley says

...the peculiar kind of success represented in these poems is related in certain crucial ways to the sympathy-begging rhetoric characteristic of so much of Roethke's less successful work. To get any very clear picture of his achievement, in fact, it seems impossible to avoid looking at the strictly non-poetic elements of his failures; we can't always avoid making extrapolations seemingly irrelevant to critical judgment. We have to deal with the shadowy sub-Freudian specters in
order to come to full acquaintance with the poetic personality.6

Although the preceding critical observation is unfair it makes us realize a point that has always been ignored. Confessional poetry of Berryman, Lowell, Plath, and sexton is not a discovery but a new genre. It is a rehashing of an old thing. We are not far wrong when we say that The Prelude is a long confessional poem and so is Alastor. But this doesn't mean that the confessional tone of the romantics is the result of their cosmic quarrel. The American confessional poets of the 50s are not biased or distorted but socially dislocated and live in the milieu where everything exists and nothing has value. As Lowell says, "None of us can or wants to tell the truth." From this we can infer that Freud, Jung, and their followers have given us a theory with which one can negotiate with the disorders, dislocations, and distortions of the self.

As we noticed earlier, with the knowledge of Freud and Jung Roethke responded to his own predicament not
with the self of a child but with the self of an adult. In other words, modern psychology has placed in the hands of man a heuristic method. Roger Sharrock in The Figure in the Landscape says that the poet is "not a camera, but a consciousness".\(^7\) Roethke’s heuristic method doesn’t photograph the self. In any way the self cannot be photographed. The poet, while responding to his significant and insignificant experiences, consciously turns them into verbal structures. He is also aware that in the final analysis, it is not the imagination but language that is at work. This doesn’t mean that on all occasions poets achieve success. But when they achieve it, it is very effective and powerful.

Let us consider the following lines.

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We did not fly the flesh. Who does, when young?
A fire leaps on itself: I know that flame.
Some rages save us. Did I rage too long?
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The spirit knows the flesh it must consume.

The dream's an instant that calls up her face.

She changed me ice to fire, and fire to ice.

(C.P. 126)

The duality of the flesh and the spirit is a major theme in Roethke. In the above lines the flesh and the spirit are symbolized by ice and fire respectively. But in ice there seems to be a built-in irony that sex is a bodily activity and just temporal. Discussing the poetry of A.D. Hope, Geoffrey H. Hartman says,

"The power to respond to and suffer the condition of sexual love is the ever-recurring last judgment, the only truly martial test of man. Those like Plotinus or Plato who sought to avoid it are forced to return via the sea
of generation to where nymph and
satyr/copulate in the foam'g.

We feel that Roethke never avoided this complex
theme and its formalization.

III

In Knowledge and the Image of Man Warren says,
Only by knowledge does man achieve his
identity. I do not mean that the mere
implements of knowledge—books, libraries,
laboratories, seminars—distinguish man from
the brute. No, knowledge gives him his
identity because it gives him the image of
himself. And the image of himself necessarily
has foreground and a background, for man is in
the world not as a billiard ball placed on a
table, not even as a ship on the ocean with
location determinable by latitude and
longitude. He is, rather, in the world with
continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms his identity. It affirms it, for out of progressive understanding of this interpretation, this texture of relations, man creates new values—that is, a new self—and so the identity is a continually emerging, an unfolding, a self-affirming and, we hope, a self-corrective creation.

Warren's "Osmosis of being" suggests that it is a continuous process and the result is "self-corrective creation." Self-corrective creation in Roethke takes the form of meditative lyric. "Infirmity" demonstrates the point. If we analyze the evolution of thought in the poem, we notice that there is a slow growth in the knowledge of the self from purely mundane and anatomical point of view. At this stage the speaker gets a sensual apprehension of the self and a spiritual stasis. The speaker says early in the poem,
I stare and stare into a deepening pool
And tell myself my image cannot die.
I love myself: that's my one constancy.
Oh, to be something else, yet still to be.

(C.P.236)

The lines orchestrate the initial narcissistic preoccupation. This is the first step towards knowledge of one's own anatomical desire, as the following lines suggest.

Sweet Christ, rejoice in my infirmity;
There's little left I care to call my own.
Today they drained the fluid from a knee
And pumped a shoulder full of cortisone;
Thus I conform to my divinity
By dying inward, like an aging tree.

(C.P.236)

The narcissistic preoccupation still continues but with a subtle irony. The fluid-drained knee and the
shoulder full of cortisone ironically conform the speaker's divinity by his dying inward like an aging tree. Later the speaker talks about the process of aging. Thinking that too much cerebral activity is not good for the mind, he feels that "The eternal seeks, and finds, the temporal" (C.P.236). Feeling that he is dead to himself the speaker goes beyond the elemental grip. But it is poetry that seems to act as a mediator between the predicament of death and the deeper roots of knowledge. The speaker says that

My ears still hear the bird when all is still;
My soul is still my soul, and still the Son,
And knowing this, I am not yet undone.

(C.P.236)

The preceding lines imply the significance of the senses, which seem to equate him with the "Son" earlier referred to as "Sweet Christ". The redemptive
act of Christ doesn't exclude Roethke's redemption from the haunting image of his father. The concluding lines of the poem signify that any kind of spiritual evolution is possible when "opposites come suddenly in place" (C.P.236). At this point there is transposition of auditory imagination into visual imagination and vice versa. The separation of the body from the spirit is possible not as a willed act but as a heuristic progression. Suzanne Nalbantian, in The symbol of the Soul observes,

The soul has set, and unlike the soul in Wordsworth's Ode, it fails to give hope of a future revival or rebirth. It is this spiritual problem of modern man which triggers the philosophical - psychologist Jung's search for the soul. As if the soul were a superstition, the new psychology steers clear of it, and finds substitution in the vast multifaceted territory of the self. The way has been paved for the phenomenology of the
self. And in the distance, now foresaken, his the transcendental soul.  

Although the word soul occurs in the poems of Roethke, it is transformed into the self with a vast multi-faceted territory.  

The modern writer’s preoccupation with the self starts with the classical moderns like Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and Ricke. The reason as diagnosed by Stephen Spender is as follows;  

Poetry is...not a co-operative effort leading to collective results, like science, in which the personal contribution becomes absorbed into the body of collected impersonal knowledge, and the personal quality of the scientist disappears. There is, of course, in each country, a ‘sum’ of poetry which consists of all the poems written in that language; and they add up to more than any poem or poems. But, supposing that the total of the poems in the language could be
signified by the figure 100, then it is a total in which each figure remains, as it were, separate, a sum of 1 and 1 and 1, each retaining its uniqueness though a fraction of, and contributing to, the whole. Through the fusion of the imagination of the writer with that of the reader, the reader is able to hear with the ear, see through the eyes, feel with the feelings of the writer, the world which becomes that of both. This is possible because outward forms and techniques of art imitate — as the leaf the seed — the inner mode of perception of the poet, a person, experiencing through his unique mind and body the world outside himself. The poet is writing as one person for the reader reading as one person.11

Spender's diagnostic commentary is valuable as a clue to understand the classical moderns; it is equally valuable in making sense of post-modern poetry.
Spender's argument is reinforced by Rosemary Sullivan when she says, "The major premise of his work is the conviction that only when the self is fully in control of its inner world can it turn outward." In spite of absorbing and admiring Yeats, Roethke doesn't have a scaffolding poetic theory or a system of signifiers like Yeats' The Vision. It is not a poetic weakness but a poetic strength. There is every possibility that a self-signifying system may not always help in making sense of poems.

IV

A few remarks on Eliot would throw light on Roethke's poetic organization. As S. Musgrove rightly says,

"The legend of Eliot the European is powerfully established, and those who seek for sources and models are referred to Dante, Bandelaire, Laforge, Corbiere, Gautier and Lancelot Andrewes, while the prophets of his
own country linger unhonoured. Yet common sense insists that Edmund Wilson is right in saying that Eliot's spiritual and intellectual roots are still more firmly fixed in New England than is, I believe, ordinarily understood. 13

Basing argument on Musgrove's thesis, Jenijoy La Balle draws several stylistic parallels between Eliot, Whitman, and Roethke:

The strongest single influence on Roethke's concept of his tradition, and one of the most important poets in that tradition, is T.S. Eliot. The few explicit critical statements that Roethke makes in his essays are based on Eliot's own; and his community of poets, living and dead, grows out of Eliot's "Conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written". In fact, most of the poets in Roethke's sodality, with major exception of Wordsworth, are those
same figures to whom Eliot was most attracted
and whom he was most responsible for drawing
attention to this century. Those two
influential English poets, Milton and Shelley,
excluded from Eliot’s tradition, are also
notably absent from Roethke’s. Regardless of
the value for the critic of Eliot’s concept of
tradition, Roethke proves its value for the
creator. The one major difference between the
attitude of these two twentieth-century
poets towards their literary forebears is that
Eliot felt the need for a body of criticism to
structure rigorously that tradition of poetry
to which the modern poet should attempt to
make his own contribution; whereas Roethke
connected himself with a less carefully
defined and hierarchical association of
poets14.

In the post-structuralist context we often feel
uneasy when we talk of influences. A better term than
influence seems to be the term used by Harold Bloom, "the anxiety of influence." A poet's success and his mastery in the medium consists in freeing himself from the haunting image of his mentor. From this point of view, Roethke always appears to get rid of his admiration for his predecessors. "Prayer" a very early poem, gives us certain linguistic surprises in terms of his mastery over the tropes which we come across throughout the poems. The following lines illustrate the point:

And some have held the Eye to be
The instrument of lechery,
More furtive than the Hand in low
And vicious venery - Not so!
Its rape is gentle, never more
Violent than a metaphor.

(C.P.8)

Jay Parini calls Roethke an American romantic and argues that, "his world view was deeply Romantic, following from Blake and Wordsworth on one side, from
Emerson and Whitman on the other. Like his great contemporary, Wallace Stevens, he was writing the poem of the mind in the act of finding what will suffice. But unlike Stevens, he was willing to settle for nothing less than mystical union with the Divine Presence.\textsuperscript{15}.

We have noted earlier the reservations Roethke had against Stevens. Stevens' view of reality is the result of an ironic mind and he dramatizes it in terms of the French Symbolist aesthetic as is illustrated in "The Emperor of Ice-cream" and other poems with a similar structure. It may also be said that Stevens makes poetry needlessly obscure. He seems to agree with I.A. Richards that poems which yield their meaning on first reading are not successful poems. Although there are cruxes in Roethke's poetry, we can make sense of these poems unlike symbolist poems. Roethke's poems are a fusion of symbol and statement as we see in his metaphysical and meditative lyrics which remind us of Yeats' "Among the School Children." Both in his poems
and in his non-poetical writings references to Emerson are very few. In spite of the prestige Emerson holds in the historical context and also in the history of literature, his poetic theory was not exclusively conducive to the development of American literature. As David Porter says,

The CULTURAL moment that supported Emerson's break from self-limiting forms seems to have had a single dominant theme that was partly rooted in the libertarian and egalitarian politics of the American Revolution. Emerson was the translator of that history into a long-lived aesthetic ferment. Derived also from latent necessities in his philosophy and from the culture about him, this descendentism reached toward a wider common audience, a wider sweep of experience, a new candor, and new specifics of existence. In the end it produced a sort of anti-literature$^{16}$
Moreover, Roethke did not involve himself in any kind of quest for faith, nor did he make any criticism of the controversy between I.A. Richards and Eliot about belief in poetry. But as has been pointed out several times in this study, he is not an orthodox Christian like Eliot or Lowell. This doesn’t mean that he is without a faith, as the following lines suggest:

A man faced with his own immensity
Wakes all the waves, all their loose
wandering fire
The murmur of the absolute, the why
Of being born fails on his naked ears.
His spirit moves like monumental wind
That gentles on a sunny blue plateau
He is the end of thing, the final man.

(C.P.195)

In the ultimate analysis it is not easy to say whether we value The Lost Son and Other Poems and Praise to the End! or the longer poems included in Words for the Wind and The Far Field because there have been
separate studies on the longer poems. The most celebrated poets of modernism and post-modernism have gathered separate lyrics with common theme and gave them a title. Examples are The Four Quartets, Paterson and Notes towards the Supreme Fiction. But these common place facts may not go a long way to bring about unity in the corpus of the poet's work. What is significant is whether the entire corpus is unified with a figure in the landscape.

Denis Donoghue observes,

...Roethke and many of the poets of his generation took their food wherever they could find it. Yeats could well be more useful to them than, say, Hawthorne because - they saw their problems as being human, Universal, in the first instance, and American problems only by application and inference. Roethke committed himself to his own life, such as it was. He thought of it as a human event of some representative interest. And he set
himself to work toward lucidity and order without turning himself into a case study entitled "The Still Complex Fate of Being an American." This is one aspect of Roethke's delicacy. Contemporary American poets, for the most part, are not going his way; they insist upon their complex fate and would not live without it. But Roethke's way of being an American is an eminently respectable way, and part of his achievement is that he makes it available to others.18

In spite of the truth embodied in the citation, Frank Kermode has taken the opposite view. In The Romantic Image Kermode argues that "any artist who is committed to his art earns his vision and constructs his image only in isolation. It is from this perspective that Kermode interprets Yeats' major poetry. Although Roethke doesn't belong to either the New England or the Southern traditions, his love of the Michigan landscape recurs in his poetry. There are poems which in an oblique way dramatize the short comings in American
life. To talk of a tradition in order to evaluate a poet's work when tradition means many things, may not be an adequate perspective. From remarks of Donoghue cited earlier, it may be possible to say that a reasonable perspective to analyze Roethke's poetry is the poetics of response. Poetry seems to emerge from within as a response to poet's problems which may be unrelated to other human beings. The poem "The Waking" from *The Waking* explores man and nature in terms of man, God and Nature. The mystery of the universe is unknowable. Hence all visionary statements are sometimes suspect, as the following lines illustrate:

Great nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.

What falls away is always. And is near
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow
I learn by going where I have to go

(C.P.104)

The above lines imply that a poet's authentic voice is located and relocated in the response and the enunciative modalities that response dictates. The entire discussion can be summed up from the point of view of the poetics of response. Neither Aristotle nor Coleridge settled the controversy about the poetic creation. Austin Warren talked about the rage for order. Man's rage for order is often rooted in his fear of disorder. But a poet writing in the 50s has more experience of disorder than order. Hence reality cannot be seen as one. It is more fragmented than we accept. The poet responds to disorder not to create order but to give it a structure in which the language is very nebulous. By applying the poetics of response. I have tried to analyze Roethke not in isolation but in relation to his contemporary milieu and his personal landscape.