

THEODORE ROETHKE'S BECKONING ROSES

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Theodore Roethke once wrote: "To know what is happening within us, this is the most difficult awareness. To be loyal to what happens to me."¹ All of Roethke's poetry is dedicated to an exploration of his personal development, and his most important themes reflect this pre-occupation--his fascination with the individual's quest for a sense of personal identity; his increasingly frequent confrontation of death; and finally his interest in the individual's proper relationship to the external world.²

The diversity of Roethke's style and the extent of his development as a poet can be measured by the differences between his first volume--Open House (1941)--and his last posthumously published work, The Far Field (1964).³ This development also may profitably be observed through his imaginative use of images and symbols.

His images frequently include birds, stones, trees, water, the moon, light and a variety of flowers--particularly the image and symbol of the rose. By studying the rose imagery one can explore his various thematic concerns, his stylistic development as a poet and his indebtedness to his poetic predecessors.

Images of the rose or roses occur in approximately twelve percent of The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke. There are 178 poems to consider, excluding "Lighter Pieces and Poems for Children" from Words for the Wind (1958), "Nonsense Poems" from I Am! Says the Lamb (1961) and "Previously Uncollected Poems." In all, twenty-two poems contain rose imagery. (See

Appendix) The imagery makes its first appearance in The Lost Son and Other Poems (1948), and is present also in Praise to the End! (1951), The Waking (1953), Words for the Wind (1958) and The Far Field (1964).

To date, there are four full-length studies of Roethke's poetry: Karl Malkoff's Theodore Roethke: An Introduction to the Poetry (1966); Richard Allen Blessing's study of Roethke's style, entitled Theodore Roethke's Dynamic Vision (1974); Rosemary Sullivan's Theodore Roethke: The Garden Master (1975) and Jenijoy La Belle's influence and source-study, entitled The Echoing Wood of Theodore Roethke (1976). There are also a number of articles (as indicated in my bibliography), but these fail to consider the rose imagery in Roethke's work.

The only study which notes the significance and recurrence of the rose as a traditional symbol in some of the major poems is Karl Malkoff's. He maintains that Roethke's use of the rose is dependent on "the highly charged significance of the rose, symbol of beauty and transcendent reality through the ages from Dante to Blake to Yeats."⁴ Although Malkoff asserts that all of Roethke's poetry deals with "the growth of the self, and with its confrontation of non-being,"⁵ he does not give consideration to the personal significance of the rose to Roethke.

Although Blessing, Sullivan and Jenijoy La Belle all comment on the symbol of the rose in the one poem, "The Rose," they do not consider the poem's important place in Roethke's body of work or its function as the fullest embodiment of the frequently invoked symbol of the rose.

Theodore Roethke's use of the rose as symbol is particularly interesting in that it functions in his work both as a traditional and a personal symbol. These two functions of the rose must be viewed simultaneously,

for Roethke's personal feelings about roses enrich his traditional use of them. In this paper I propose to examine the two distinct functions of the rose imagery as a backdrop to a study of Roethke's most fully developed use of this symbol in "The Rose."

This poem occupies an important place in Roethke's corpus; it appears as the last poem in the "North American Sequence" in his last volume of poetry, The Far Field. Coming as it does at the conclusion of his body of work, it provides the richest orchestration of his rose symbolism. To view "The Rose" as the culmination of Roethke's rose symbolism and to perceive the interrelationship between his personal feelings concerning roses and their traditional associations is to bring a richer interpretation to this central poem. Furthermore, it is through the symbol of the rose that Roethke moves toward an affirmation of his own separate, inviolable identity.

Roethke's use of the rose as a traditional symbol is commensurate with his knowledge of Dante, Blake, Yeats and Eliot. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Roethke's rose in part resembles Yeats's. Although Roethke denied Yeats's direct influence,⁶ there were times when his affinity with Yeats as a poetic father, or mentor, acted as a kind of muse which prompted him to write. In a letter to Peter Viereck, dated June 21, 1953, Roethke thanked Viereck for "linking [his] name with Yeats' in The Atlantic review."⁷ Roethke then commented on the writing of "Four for Sir John Davies" and "The Waking" in the light of Viereck's critical comment, saying: "Both consciously and unconsciously I set out to live

up to your high praise. And I'm sure the muse, or whatever, helped me along."⁸ (Some of Roethke's verse is perhaps more consciously modeled after Yeats's than he cared to admit, for Roethke clearly knew Yeats's work very well,⁹ and learned from it.)

It is perhaps worth summarizing Yeats's use of rose symbolism. Yeats primarily used the rose in two of his early volumes: The Rose (1893) and in The Wind Among the Reeds (1899). The rose was multifaceted for Yeats: it was Ireland; woman; sexuality; the flower of the Rosicrucians, associated with the cross of matter; ~~the flower of passion and love~~; and the flower of eternity and beauty. "By embracing nation, love, and the occult," Tindall states, "this rose, at once fleshly and ideal, contains his three central interests, the conflicts among them, and his hope of reconciliation."¹⁰ In The Symbolic Rose, Barbara Seward suggests that Yeats's "hope of reconciliation" could not be fulfilled through this symbol: "Like Dante's rose, it expressed the temporal and eternal aspects of love, politics, and divinity; like Dante's, it attempted to reconcile these matters on a spiritual plane. But the reconciliation was doomed to failure."¹¹ This failure, Seward suggests; accounts for the scarcity of the symbol's appearance in his later poems: "Rarely in the later poems does the flower appear at all, and when it does it is looked upon with a new detachment. Seldom even a symbol, it sporadically crops up to convey old meanings in simple, metaphoric fashion."¹² Yeats found other symbols (such as the dancer) to achieve his consistent desire for a reconciliation of opposites; the rose, as he drew it, could not always reconcile space and time, the temporal and

eternal and the body and soul. Roethke's rose, on the other hand, can sometimes embody a reconciliation of opposites.

In addition to exploring the traditional symbolic function of the rose, Roethke explores the relationship between his memories of roses and their present effect on him; thus the rose both redeems his past and integrates it with his present. I will consider these two symbolic functions in some of the major "rose" poems that precede "The Rose."

Roethke's rose imagery first appears in four of the poems of section one of The Lost Son and Other Poems. In "Weed Puller," "Big Wind," "Old Florist" and "Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartz," roses and other greenhouse flowers are invoked as emblems of physical perfection and beauty. One perceives that in some of Roethke's earliest memories of his father's greenhouses, flowers serve as sustaining and powerful images of life in these hothouses. It is only in the later poems such as "The Lost Son," "Meditations of an Old Woman," "His Words" from "The Dying Man", "A Walk in Late Summer," and the "North American Sequence," that the rose begins to assume a symbolic primacy over the other flowers such as the geranium and chrysanthemum.

"Weed Puller," "Big Wind," "Old Florist" and "Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartz" serve as a prelude to Roethke's first use of the rose as symbol, which occurs in what may be considered his first major poem--"The Lost Son." Appearing in Section IV of The Lost Son and Other Poems, "The Lost Son" occupies a central place in Roethke's work. It explores the relationship between his perception of his father and his own groping for personal identity; furthermore, it is his most com-

plete assessment of the powerful, and sometimes threatening, effects of the greenhouse and his father's role in it; finally, it is one of the first of his various confrontations with the thought of his own death.

"The Lost Son" stands as one of Roethke's early, but still intense, examinations of his evolution. A letter to Babette Deutsche, dated January 22, 1948, suggests that this Section, comprised of "The Lost Son," "The Long Alley," "A Field of Light," and "The Shape of the Fire," is a kind of therapeutic description of one's spiritual evolution. "You are right" Roethke wrote, "in thinking of 'The Lost Son' as an experience complete in itself. But it is only the first of four experiences, each in a sense stages in a kind of struggle out of the slime; part of a slow spiritual progress, if you will; part of an effort to be born."¹³ In "The Lost Son," the protagonist's rebirth--or moment of illumination--is the result of a psychic integration of his past with his present--an integration that is made possible, in part, through his memories of the greenhouse roses.

In section one of "The Lost Son," "The Flight," the poet confronts both his father's death and his own physical and spiritual decline. He desires to re-establish a harmony with the natural world and to attain an understanding of his father.

In section two, "The Pit," the poet continues to question his environment. Roethke points out in a letter to Babette Deutsche that "'The Pit' is a slowed-down section: a period of physical and psychic exhaustion."¹⁴ There is a kind of descent into the ground and then a journey back to the womb: "I feel the slime of a wet nest" (C.P., p. 52).

In section three, "The Gibber," the poet confronts his adolescent sexuality, and finds an outlet for his balked sexual desires through onanism. In spite of the narcissistic connotations of the poet's actions, his sexual ecstasy allows him paradoxically to transcend himself.

How cool the grass is.
Has the bird left?
The stalk still sways.
Has the worm a shadow?
What do the clouds say?
These sweeps of light undo me.
Look, look, the ditch is running white!
I've more veins than a tree!
Kiss me, ashes, I'm falling through a dark swirl.¹⁵

One notices that he achieves a new, more relaxed, relationship toward the natural world; the poet's lessening of anxiety is reflected in these melodious short lines as opposed to the more ponderous rhythms of the previous lines.

His moment of self-transcendence is only temporary. In section four, "The Return," he both returns to himself and to the greenhouse of his childhood. In this section he moves back in time in an effort to recreate that experience of his childhood when he stayed all night in the greenhouse. Here the poet integrates, or reconciles, his past identity--and relationship with his father--to his present solitary existence.

His final, though partial, illumination in section five is intricately related to his return to the greenhouse in section four. The poet's return initially involves a descent to the boiler:

The way to the boiler was dark,
Dark all the way,
Over slippery cinders
Through the long greenhouse. (C.P., p. 54)

As he makes his way to the roses, the tone is surrealistic:

The roses kept breathing in the dark.
They had many mouths to breathe with.
My knees made little winds underneath
Where the weeds slept. (C.P., p. 54)

The tomb image--"the long greenhouse"--in the first stanza is negated as the fire-pit of the boiler comes to life: Roethke moves from the "single light/ Swinging by the fire-pit," (C.P., p. 54) to his vision of the roses: "Where the fireman pulled out roses,/ The big roses, the big bloody clinkers" (C.P., p. 54).

The literal roses which breathe in the dark are symbolic of the poet's self-image at this point in the poem, for he, too, is breathing in the dark. Both the literal roses and "the big bloody clinkers" become associated in the poet's mind with the morning light--the promise of rebirth.

Once I stayed all night.
The light in the morning came slowly over the white
Snow.
There were many kinds of cool
Air.
Then came steam. (C.P., p. 54)

The alternation of the long and short lines contributes to the rhythmic excitement that ushers in Papa. The winter light and air stand in contrast to the warmth of the greenhouse steam. These images, coupled with the roses, also introduce Papa. Roethke aptly describes this moment of illumination: "Then with the coming of steam (and 'Papa'--the papa on earth and heaven are blended, of course) there is the sense of motion in the greenhouse--my symbol for the whole of life; a womb; a heaven-on-earth."¹⁶

Pipe-knock.

Scurry of warm over small plants.
Ordnung! ordnung!
Papa is coming! (C.P., p. 54)

The German words for order, used to herald Papa's entrance, act as a commentary on Roethke's view of his father. In assessing the greenhouses, and indirectly his father's role there, Roethke once said: "They were to me, I realize now, both heaven and hell, a kind of tropics created in the savage climate of Michigan, where austere German-Americans turned their love of order and their terrifying efficiency into something truly beautiful."¹⁷ Roethke's whole relationship to the natural world was colored by these Edenic (though sometimes threatening) greenhouses and by his father, the supreme creator of this world.¹⁸

Roethke's subsequent vision of the flowers "turned toward the light" is related to the coming of Papa--the bringer of order; concomitantly, his vision is related to his own burgeoning sense of personal identity and subsequent harmony with his surroundings.

A fine haze moved off the leaves;
Frost melted on far panes;
The rose, the chrysanthemum turned toward the light.
Even the hushed forms, the bent yellowy weeds
Moved in a slow up-sway. (C.P., p. 54)

The poet's description of the flowers' movement is symbolic of his own reaching out for sustenance. "Like these flowers," Mills notes, "he enjoys a precarious and fragile state of being; his scrutiny of their gradual response to the coming light of day duplicates a perception of his own slow ascent from the abyss of inner tensions."¹⁹ As Rosemary Sullivan suggests, his perception of the flowers is related to the coming

of Papa: "The conflation of child and flower is remarkable. Both respond to the father-sun in a primitive striving toward the light as the mere presence of the paternal principle brings order and assurance to the greenhouse world."²⁰ The image of the rose (and the chrysanthemum) turning toward the light is an appropriate symbol for the poet's longing for harmony; as Barbara Seward points out in another context: "[The] ancient integration of sun and flower was intended to symbolize simultaneously the sexual union of male and female creative forces, the physical fertility of all natural things, and the spiritual attainment of harmony."²¹

There is a symmetry between the poet's memory of his childhood experience of illumination in section four and his present partial illumination in section five.

A lively understandable spirit
Once entertained you.
It will come again.
Be still.
Wait. (C.P., p. 55)

His journey back to Papa's greenhouse, and his vision of the roses there, has made this partial illumination possible. In "The Lost Son" the poet comes to accept temporarily his past, his father and his present identity; it is primarily through his memories of the roses in the greenhouse that this is accomplished.

In the first four "Meditations of an Old Woman," which comprise Section V of Words for the Wind, one sees Roethke again using roses symbolically. In "First Meditation," "I'm Here," "Her Becoming," and

"Fourth Meditation," roses function as traditional symbols of physical perfection, of passion and of blossoming sexuality. However, in "I'm Here," the second meditation, Roethke enriches these associations by describing the effect roses had on the old woman in her past. Thus her present perceptions are fused with her past, and the rose acquires meaning in part through an examination of this relationship.

In "First Meditation" the rose image in section four does not assume the importance of the later images; the poem is important, however, in its definition of the old woman's present state of being. In the first section the old woman confronts her physical decline.

On love's worst ugly day,
The weeds hiss at the edge of the field,
The small winds make their chilly indictments. (C.P., p. 151)

Her alienation from the landscape is a reflection of her alienation from herself: "And the sun brings joy to some./ But the rind, often, hates the life within" (C.P., p. 151). The end of this section defines her physical decline:

How can I rest in the days of my slowness?
I've become a strange piece of flesh,
Nervous and cold, bird-furtive, whiskery,
With a cheek soft as a hound's ear. (C.P., p. 151)

In section two, her movement through life is depicted metaphorically as a perpetual journey. It is not always a journey forward: "And I seem to go backward,/ Backward in time:" (C.P., p. 152). She goes back to the greenhouse of her past:

Two song sparrows, one within a greenhouse,
Shuttling its throat while perched on a wind-vent,
And another, outside, in the bright day,
With a wind from the west and the trees all in motion.
One sang, then the other,
The songs tumbling over and under the glass, (C.P., p. 152)

The long Whitmanesque lines serve to convey the motion and energy of her world. The unity of her world is suggested by her perception of the intermingling of the two separate birds' songs. By the end of the section, however, she returns to the ongoing journey.

In section three she invokes the crab--"Grotesque, awkward, his extended eyes looking at nothing in particular," (C.P., p. 153)--and the salmon who must journey back to his own origins before he can spawn; both the crab and the salmon become metaphors for the spirit which moves unpredictably both backward and forward.

In section four the old woman assesses her journey:

I have gone into the waste lonely places
Behind the eye; the lost acres at the edge of
smoky cities.
What's beyond never crumbles like an embankment,
Explodes like a rose, or thrusts wings over the
Caribbean. (C.P., p. 153)

The old woman's psychic introspection does not sustain her as might a rose exploding into blossom, or like the sparrows in the greenhouse of her past, bring her back to an acceptance of this world. Finally the old woman comes out of herself, only to admit that "There are still times, morning and evening" (C.P., p. 153) when this world may be celebrated: "In such times, lacking a god,/ I am still happy" (C.P., 154).

The sense of a communion with her surroundings is no longer present at the beginning of the second meditation. In "I'm Here," the old woman reminisces about her blossoming adolescent sexual identity; it is through her memories of roses that she can both con-

front her past and integrate it with her present. This reconciliation finally prompts her to transcend her imminent death in section five.

In the first section, she resents the natural processes that were so comforting at the end of "First Meditation."

Outside, the same sparrows bicker in the eaves.
I'm tired of tiny noises:
The April cheeping, the vireo's insistence,
The prattle of the young no longer pleases.
Behind the child's archness
Lurks the bad animal. (C.P., p. 155)

In section two, she goes back to her adolescence and contemplates her growing sexual awareness:

I was queen of the vale--
For a short while,
Living all my heart's summer alone,
Ward of my spirit,
Running through high grasses,
My thighs brushing against flower-crowns;
Leaning, out of all breath,
Bracing my back against a sapling,
Making it quiver with my body; (C.P., p. 155)

In section three, the roses she perceives become linked to her sexual awakening. The abundance of present participles contributes to our sense of the immediacy and vibrancy of her awakening. In this Proustian, sensual moment, her being is overwhelmed.

I remember walking down a path,
Down wooden steps toward a weedy garden;
And my dress caught on rose-brier.
When I bent to untangle myself,
The scent of the half-opened buds came up over me.
I thought I was going to smother. (C.P., p. 156)

As the scent of the rose buds envelops her senses, the roses become symbols of the flesh, passion and physical perfection. The "half-opened buds" are

like the speaker; they become symbols of her budding sexuality.²² Most importantly, they seem to make her aware of her sexuality: "The body, delighting in thresholds,/ Rocks in and out of itself" (C.P., p. 157).

The memory of her youth and the roses gives her present perception of the flowers its substance. Because of her previous associations with roses she can redeem her empty present with those past associations.

My geranium is dying, for all I can do.
Still leaning toward the last place the sun was.
I've tried I don't know how many times to replant
it.
But these roses: I can wear them by looking away.
The eyes rejoice in the act of seeing and the fresh
after-image; (C.P., p. 157)

Malkoff notes that "she can wear roses by looking away, she can satisfy herself with the 'after-image,' the memory, as well as with the thing itself."²³ Roethke combines the traditional associations of roses with the woman's instinctual perception of them; thus, the symbol comes into being through the intermixing of the personal and the traditional. The rose cannot finally be understood except in this personal context. At this point, one can see clearly the progression of the rose from image to symbol, from the somewhat limited associations of the greenhouse world to the more complex and rich associations of literary tradition and personal experience.

In "Her Becoming" one cannot divorce the personal significance of roses, as exemplified in "I'm Here," from the traditional symbolic meanings. "Her Becoming" deals with the old woman's self-transcendence and consequent experience of oneness with the universe.

In the first section, the old woman initially embraces the physicality of her surroundings. The rose petal is associated with passion and sexuality.

I see a shape, lighted with love,
Light as a petal falling upon stone.
From the folds of my skin, I sing,
The air still, the ground alive,
The earth itself a tune. (C.P., p. 159)

By the end of the section, however, the old woman seems to desire an escape from the fleshly, the physical:

A ghost from the soul's house?
I'm where I always was.
The lily broods. Who knows
The way out of a rose? (C.P., p. 159)

Roethke seems to be asking how we can transcend the flesh--"the soul's house." In this context, the rose is a symbol of the body.

The epiphany in section three may provide us with "the way out of a rose," for there is the sense of a spiritual meaning underlying her physical surroundings.

The moon, a pure Islamic shape, looked down.
The light air slowed: It was not night or day
All natural shapes became symbolic. (C.P., p. 160)

There is an order and complementarity in nature that transcends the merely sensual existence of the rose.

In the last section, the old woman merges with her environment:

By swoops of birds, by leaps of fish, I live.
My shadow steadies in a shifting stream;
I live in air; the long light is my home;
I dare caress the stones, the field my friend;
A light wind rises: I become the wind. (C.P., p. 161)

She achieves an inner balance through her relationship with the external world.

At the end of "Fourth Meditation" the old woman achieves a union of body and spirit. This union involves a fresh relationship with the external world. The old woman begins in a despondent mood which takes her back to a time prior to her experience in sections three and four of "Her Becoming":

I was always one for being alone,
Seeking in my own way, eternal purpose;
At the edge of the field waiting for the pure moment; (C.P., p. 162)

As in "I'm Here" she reminisces about her awakening sexuality; and here, clearly, she identifies with the rose, merging her identity with the "pensive petal."

Was it yesterday I stretched out the thin bones
of my innocence?
O the songs we hide, singing only to ourselves!
Once I could touch my shadow, and be happy;
In the white kingdoms, I was light as a seed,
Drifting with the blossoms,
A pensive petal. (C.P., p. 162)

The identity with the rose can only be temporary; the body changes and the spirit demands a transcendence of mere physicality, or a union with the body.

But a time comes when the vague life of the
mouth no longer suffices;
The dead make more impossible demands from their
silence;
The soul stands, lonely in its choice,
Waiting, itself a slow thing,
In the changing body. (C.P., p. 162)

In section two she questions "What is it to be a woman?" and proceeds in a Whitmanesque fashion to catalogue "the self-involved," "those who submerge themselves deliberately in trivia," and the "matchmakers, arrangers of picnics--" (C.P., p. 163). Her plea for their regeneration prefigures her own rebirth at the end of the poem.

How I wish them awake!
May the high flower of the hay climb into
their hearts;

...
May they flame into being!-- (C.P., p. 163)

After her vision in section three: "This lake breathes like a rose./ Beguile me, change. What have I fallen from?" (C.P., p. 164) she flames into being, experiencing a union of body and soul: "Is my body speaking? I breathe what I am:" (C.P., p. 164). She has to return to the rose--her body-- before she can achieve a union of body and soul.

~~In some of Roethke's other poems, the poet's vision of a rose reconciles such opposites as the body and the soul and the temporal and the eternal. Two notable examples of this may be found in Words for the Wind: "His Words" from "The Dying Man" and "A Walk in Late Summer" from section three entitled "Voices and Creatures."~~

~~"The Dying Man" sequence of five poems: "His Words," "What Now?," "The Wall," "The Exulting" and "They Sing, They Sing"--is dedicated to W. B. Yeats. In considering "His Words," one can see Roethke's adoption of Yeats's concern with the reconciliation of art and life and the reconciliation of the eternal and temporal.~~

In the first section of this poem, Roethke creates a persona who confronts "Death's possibilities."

I heard a dying man
Say to his gathered kin,
"My soul's hung out to dry,
Like a fresh-salted skin;
I doubt I'll use it again. (C.P., p. 147)

The metaphorical equivalence between his soul and the fresh-salted skin is striking; the curing process of the flesh--of the skin--becomes analogous to the soul's preservation. Of course, ironically, the flesh deteriorates in the process of living, whereas the soul is preserved eternally by being "hung out to dry."

Although the dying man seems to abandon his soul, he subsequently experiences both a momentary reconciliation of the temporal and the eternal and the body and the soul. The rose signals this reconciliation in stanza two:

"What's done is yet to come;
The flesh deserts the bone,
But a kiss widens the rose;
I know as the dying know,
Eternity is Now. (C.P., p. 147)

Although there is an implicit dichotomy set up between the body and the soul as the body decays--"The flesh deserts the bone"--yet we are told that "a kiss widens the rose." Sullivan notes that "the core of the argument is that if the body is a dying animal, yet it is only through the body that the eternal rose can be widened. The rose, as Roethke drew it, rooted in stone, is the miracle of pure centrality, pure

equilibrium, balanced in perfection in the midst of time and space, neither temporal nor spatial..."²⁴ The rose as a symbol of eternal beauty also serves to reconcile the temporal and eternal. As the rose widens, the Dying man intuits that "Eternity is Now." Malkoff suggests that this assertion is "the message of the rose. This is the mystic's perception of the eternal in the temporal; and it is also Yeats's vision of the moment beyond time being perpetually re-lived..."²⁵ Thus, to perceive the rose is to perceive the "eternal in the temporal."

Art may also give a glimpse of the eternal in the temporal. The recognition that "Eternity is Now" prompts the speaker to assert: "I am that final thing,/ A man learning to sing" (C.P., p. 147). By "learning to sing," perhaps the Dying man can, like the rose, move beyond his mortality. One thinks of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" where singing becomes an image of immortality--a path to the eternal. In the final lines of "His Words," the persona achieves a union with the world:

"A man sees, as he dies,
Death's possibilities;
My heart sways with the world. (C.P., p. 147)

Paradoxically, on the verge of death he sees life's possibilities.

In "A Walk in Late Summer"--an earlier poem from section three of Words for the Wind--Roethke confronts his own imminent death and in doing so celebrates his existence. The poet's perception of the rose allows him temporarily to transcend the temporal, after which he returns to an acceptance of his own death and of process and change in the

natural world.

In the first stanza he calls for "the meek, for I would know their ways;/ I am a connoisseur of midnight eyes" (C.P., p. 143). He is comforted by "The small! The small! I hear them singing clear/ On the long banks, in the soft summer air" (C.P., p. 143). Yet their songs are not sustaining enough, for by the end of stanza two the poet confronts his approaching death: "I'm dying piecemeal, fervent in decay;/ My moments linger--that's eternity" (C.P., p. 143). Roethke can temporarily escape from his decay, however, in his vision of the rose:

A late rose ravages the casual eye,
A blaze of being on a central stem.
It lies upon us to undo the lie
Of living merely in the realm of time. (C.P., p. 143)

As in "His Words" and in "Fourth Meditation," the poet experiences a reconciliation of the temporal through his vision of the rose.

After his momentary vision of "A late rose" it is with renewed energy that he comes back to the realization that:

Existence moves toward a certain end--
A thing all earthly lovers understand.
That dove's elaborate way of coming near
Reminds me I am dying with the year. (C.P., p. 143)

In the final stanza of the poem, Roethke celebrates mortality and change very much as Wallace Stevens does in "Sunday Morning".

The long day dies; I walked the woods alone;
Beyond the ridge two wood thrush sing as one.
Being delights in being, and in time.
The evening wraps me, steady as a flame. (C.P., p. 143)

One notices that he no longer attempts to transcend the realm of time: "Being delights in being, and in time." This acceptance of mortality

colors his celebration of the world.

The rose imagery prior to The Far Field serves as a prelude to Roethke's most complex use of the symbol in "The Rose." In "The Lost Son" and "Meditations of an Old Woman" the rose functions as both a personal and a traditional symbol. The speakers of both poems redeem their present existences through their memories of roses.

~~The rose also embodies the point of intersection of the temporal and eternal in "His Words" from "The Dying Man" and "A Walk in Late Summer" from "Voices and Creatures." In all of these poems, the rose also serves to reorient the poet to his surroundings.~~

Roethke's search for a satisfactory relationship to the external world continues in his last volume The Far Field--particularly in the first sequence of that volume, "North American Sequence." Rosemary Sullivan notes that "the 'North American Sequence' is a penitential act of reintegration with nature. A poem of age and parting, its theme is the need to find a way to accommodate the fact of death within an acceptable view of life."²⁶ Malkoff aptly points out that the "North American Sequence" is "a series of six poems devoted to the problems of transcending the sensual."²⁷ The way to transcend the sensual is through a "reintegration with nature"--a heightened consciousness of the external world.

In "The Longing," the first poem of the "North American Sequence," the poet's dilemma is "How to transcend this sensual emptiness?" (C.P., p. 181). The whole sequence, then, culminating in "The Rose"

addresses this problem.

In the first section of "The Longing" the poet's despair is described:

Saliva dripping from warm microphones,
Agony of crucifixion on barstools.
 Less and less the illuminated lips,
 Hands active, eyes cherished;
 Happiness left to dogs and children-- (C.P., p. 181)

The immediate result of "this sensual emptiness" is that "the spirit fails to move forward,/ But shrinks into a half-life, less than itself." (C.P., p. 181). The poet has become "an eyeless starrer"--a particularly bleak prospect for Roethke, who always stressed the importance of perceiving one's surroundings.

In section two, he leaves the "bleak time" of section one, acknowledging a desire for a union of body and soul:

How comprehensive that felicity!...
A body with the motion of a soul.
What dream's enough to breathe in? A dark dream.
The rose exceeds, the rose exceeds us all. (C.P., p. 182)

Malkoff links this image of the rose with those in "The Lost Son" and the "Meditations of an Old Woman," noting that here "he seeks unity of flesh and spirit...And, as for the boy in 'The Lost Son' and the Old Woman of the Meditations, the way to bring these two worlds together is by means of the rose, which 'exceeds us all.'"²⁸ Although one cannot be certain that the old woman's rose at the end of "Fourth Meditation" is a symbol of her union of flesh and spirit, both the rose image in this section of "The Longing" and that in section three do seem symbolic of the poet's desire for a merging of the body and the soul and of motion and stasis.

the poet desires to move out of the self: to be both pulled out of the self by the moon and to transcend the lunar cycle: "I'd be beyond; I'd be beyond the moon,/ Bare as a bud, and naked as a worm" (C.P., p. 182). This diminution of self heralds the possibility of a rebirth: "Out of these nothings/ --All beginnings come" (C.P., p. 182).

In section three, the speaker yearns for a union with the motion of his environment: "I would with the fish, the blackening salmon, and the mad lemmings,/ The children dancing, the flowers widening" (C.P., p. 182). The poet desires not only a self-transcendence but, as Malkoff says, "by means of this motion, he would attain 'the imperishable quiet at the heart of form,' the spiritual reality behind the physical."²⁹ The image of "the eye quiet on the growing rose" (C.P., p. 182) seems to imply the intersection of motion and stasis for which the poet longs.

"The Rose" represents the climax of Roethke's rose symbolism in at least two respects: the rose comes to embody, through the movement of the poem, the poet's longed-for reconciliation of traditional opposites; and the poem fully explores the relationship between the rose as a personal symbol and as a traditional symbol.³⁰ "The Rose" is also important thematically. Coming as it does at the end of the "North American Sequence," it provides an answer to the poet's question in "The Longing": "How to transcend this sensual emptiness?" Furthermore, the poem addresses some of Roethke's persistent concerns with the process of perceiving the natural world, the power of self-transcendence

and the achievement of personal identity. The interrelationship of these themes may be perceived through the symbol of the rose.

The poem deals with the poet's temporary achievement of identity. In the course of the poem, the affirmation of identity involves two preparatory stages. Initially the poet merely observes the natural world, upholding the romantic dichotomy between the perceiver and the perceived. Gradually, through an intuitive understanding of his surroundings he is led out of the self to merge with the "otherness" of the natural world.³¹ Following this moment of self-transcendence, a sense of identity, or new awareness of self, comes into existence. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine Roethke's statement on "identity," delivered at Northwestern University approximately one year after he completed the manuscript of The Far Field:

If the dead can come to our aid in a quest for identity, so can the living--and I mean all living things, including the sub-human....It is paradoxically that a very sharp sense of the being, the identity of some other being--in some instances, even an inanimate thing--brings a corresponding heightening and awareness of one's own self, and even more mysteriously, in some instances, a feeling of the oneness of the universe.³²

In "The Rose" the poet achieves a heightened awareness of self through his "sharp sense of the being" of the rose. Roethke is concerned with the process whereby the poet, through an identification with the rose, experiences a self-transcendence. This moment in which identity is abandoned affords a lessening of anxiety and "a feeling of the oneness of the universe."

The poet's moment of self-transcendence at the very end implies a reconciliation of opposites--a synthesis of himself and the world, his past and his present, the temporal and the eternal, the sea and fresh water and sound and silence.

The entire process of the poem prepares for this final affirmation. Each of the four sections serve to define the polarities set up between the land and sea, the temporal and eternal and the sound and silence. In the first section, the poet introduces the importance of "this place, where sea and fresh water meet" (C.P., p. 196). All of the images of the first ten lines address the synthesis of contraries implicit in the image of sea and fresh water uniting in a continual process of becoming one. Although the land and sea are finally separate, they become reconciled through Roethke's birds whose domains encompass both land and sea. He presents hawks, eagles and gulls who are associated with both the land and the sea. The image of hawks swaying "out into the wind,/ Without a single wingbeat," (C.P., p. 196) suggests a reconciliation of the land and sea, for presumably hawks are able to soar "without a single wingbeat" because of the way the sea wind rises as it meets the hot air over the land. There is a further momentary meeting of the land and sea:

And the gulls cry against the crows
In the curved harbors,
And the tide rises up against the grass
Nibbled by sheep and rabbits. (C.P., p. 196)

In these lines a conflict or tension is set up as the domains of sea and

land overlap or encroach upon one another. The two sea images--the gulls and the tide--encroach on the land--the crows and the grass.

In the next eleven lines of section one, the poet observes the time before the tide recedes--a time of motion that soon diminishes. There is a progression from "the morning birds" to the heron, towhee, kingfisher and scoter whose activities seem to be associated with the tide's turning; finally there is a progression from "the last geese" to the owl and the whooper who are both associated with the moon:

A time for watching the tide,
For the heron's hieratic fishing,
For the sleepy cries of the towhee,
The morning birds gone, the twittering finches,
But still the flash of the kingfisher, the wingbeat
 of the scoter,
The sun a ball of fire coming down over the water,
The last geese crossing against the reflected after-
 light,
The moon retreating into a vague cloud-shape
To the cries of the owl, the eerie whooper. (C.P., p. 196)

Thus one perceives that the progression of birds parallels the natural cycle that is being observed by the poet. In addition there is a kind of symmetry between the "heron's hieratic fishing" and "the flash of the kingfisher": the heron's fishing is priestly in its slow solemn dignity, and the kingfisher may be a symbol of Christ.

Initially a great deal of movement accompanies these images. Roethke also brings our attention to the sounds of the environment. Thus the cessation of sound and movement as the tide turns stands in direct contrast to the preceding activity: "The old log subsides with the lessening waves,/ And there is silence" (C.P., p. 196). The motion associated

with the sun which is now "coming down over the water" diminishes as the moon appears and the tides turn.

As he imaginatively perceives "this place," the "otherness" breaks down and he moves out of himself, merging his individual life with the eternal flux of the "darkening currents."

I sway outside myself
Into the darkening currents,
Into the small spillage of driftwood, (C.P., p. 196)

The tides are controlled by the moon; consequently, just as the moon pulls the tides away from the shore so also is the poet pulled away from the land. The moon functions as a muse, drawing him out of himself. It is important that he is pulled away from the shore, for he somehow needs to merge with the sea, with the eternal flow and process of the sea.

One notices that the immersion in the sea and abandonment of self is only temporary. Nevertheless, this moment of self-transcendence ushers in the intimations of a rebirth at the end of section one. In temporarily dissolving the opposition between himself and the world, the poet has a moment of mystical illumination in which "The light heightened." There is also a sense of rebirth in the image of the first rain gathering.

Was it here I wore a crown of birds for a moment .
While on a far point of the rocks
The light heightened,
And below, in a mist out of nowhere,
The first rain gathered? (C.P., p. 196)

It is necessary in these final lines of section one for a momentary annihilation of the self to take place before a rebirth can occur. Section one, however, merely prefigures the more fully developed self-transcendence

and subsequent affirmation of identity that comes into existence in section four when the poet fully perceives and imaginatively identifies with the rose.

Sections two and three serve to exemplify how it is possible for the speaker to identify so fully with the rose. In section two, Roethke introduces the sea-rose, and sets up a tension between a person's constant motion which is likened to a ship's journey and the rose's transcendence of this motion.

As when a ship sails with a light wind--
The waves less than the ripples made by rising fish,
The lacelike wrinkles of the wake widening, thinning out,
Sliding away from the traveler's eye,
The prow pitching easily up and down,
The whole ship rolling slightly sideways,
The stern high, dipping like a child's boat in a pond--
Our motion continues. (C.P., p. 197)

The next twelve lines introduce the image of the rose and invest it with qualities that become fully significant in section four. Immediately, one notices the contrast between "Our motion continues" and "this rose, this rose in the sea-wind,/ Stays,/ Stays in its true place," (C.P., p. 197)

There are certain similarities between the poet's perception of the rose and our perception of his unresolved struggle out of himself in section one. When he wears his "crown of birds for a moment," "The light heightened." Similarly, the rose emerges into the light: "Flowering out of the dark,/ Widening at high noon, face upward," (C.P., p. 197). As a result of his journey out of himself, the poet is pulled away from the land into the sea. The rose also is pulled away from the land: "Beyond

the clover, the ragged hay,/ Beyond the sea pine, the oak, the wind-tipped madrona," (C.P., p. 197).

At this point in the poem the wild rose becomes symbolic of the poet's identity and his quest for a union of opposites.

A single wild rose, struggling out of the white embrace
of the morning-glory,
Out of the briary hedge, the tangle of matted underbrush,
Beyond the clover, the ragged hay,
Beyond the sea pine, the oak, the wind-tipped madrona,
Moving with the waves, the undulating driftwood,
Where the slow creek winds down to the black sand of the
shore
With its thick grassy scum and crabs scuttling back into
their glistening craters. (C.P., p. 197)

Roethke's wild rose must struggle for its existence; rooted in stone, it is perpetually blasted by the sea-wind. It is almost stifled by "the white embrace of the morning-glory," "the briary hedge" and "tangle of matted underbrush." Since the rose evidently grows "where the slow creek winds down to the black sand of the shore," it stands at the point where sea and fresh water meet--where the eternal and temporal intersect. The rose's persistence and tenacity is suggested, on the one hand, by its motion and its stability on the other: described as "flowering," "widening," "struggling" and "moving," it nevertheless "Stays in its true place."

Looking at this rose, in this place, prompts the poet to go back in time to his childhood in the greenhouse. We see that his present vision of the wild rose is in part linked to the roses of his past and their effect on him then. Of course the hybrid, cultivated roses of

the greenhouse are distinctly different from this small wild rose that he perceives and identifies with years later. As so often, Roethke's thoughts of the greenhouse encompass his father. His feeling for the roses becomes linked to his father--the tender of them:

And I think of roses, roses,
White and red, in the wide six-hundred-foot greenhouses,
And my father standing astride the cement benches,
Lifting me high over the four-foot stems, the Mrs. Russells,
 and his own elaborate hybrids,
And how those flowerheads seemed to flow toward me, to
 beckon me, only a child, out of myself.

What need for heaven, then,
With that man, and those roses?

He returns in his imagination to his father's greenhouses and we perceive that at an early age Roethke associated the possibility of self-transcendence with the beckoning roses: "And how those flowerheads seemed to flow toward me, to beckon me, only a child, out of myself." Thus his feeling about roses in his past makes his self-transcendence, through an identification with the sea-rose in section four, understandable.

Yet the wild sea-rose is his own rose. The memory of the cultivated hybrid roses alone is not sufficiently sustaining to him. They were his father's "own elaborate hybrids." He needs to go beyond his childhood and his father in order to achieve a mature, separate identity. As a child, "those roses" and "that man" were his world--his paradise on earth and his hell; and like "those roses," he was his father's "own elaborate hybrid." In his celebration of his father and the roses, Roethke is able to accept and transcend that lost world of childhood; he is reconciled to

his father and he triumphs over him. He can now, in section four, move beyond "that man, and those roses" to "this rose, in this grove..." (C.P., p. 199).

If section two marries motion and stasis, creating in the rose a synthesis of the two antithetical states of being, it also succeeds in allowing Roethke to integrate his past with his present and consequently to move beyond his past. Roethke's final vision of the sea-rose in section four is certainly related to his past associations with roses, yet his present vision transcends these associations.

Section three attempts to reconcile "sound and silence" (as well as various types of sounds): "What do they tell us, sound and silence?/ I think of American sounds in this silence:" (C.P., p. 198). The poet announces that he will "think" of American sounds. He moves from the sounds that the birds make to the man-made machines. Both types of sounds define the American environment. He makes a nice transition to the harsh "human" sounds by drawing our attention to a "natural" sound that is quite unpleasant to contemplate: "And that thin cry, like a needle piercing the ear, the insistent cicada," (C.P., p. 198).

Eventually Roethke retreats from the "chorus of horns coming up from the streets in early morning" to "the twittering of swallows above water."

I return to the twittering of swallows above water,
And that sound, that single sound,
When the mind remembers all,
And gently the light enters the sleeping soul,
A sound so thin it could not woo a bird, (C.P., p. 198)

Once again he must go back in time--"When the mind remembers all"--in order to go forward. In the memory of sound there is a merging of sound and silence; as the light enters his soul, the memory of sound is all he has--thus the "sound [is] so thin it could not woo a bird." The meeting of sound and silence--brings us back to this place "where sea and fresh water meet": "Beautiful my desire, and the place of my desire" (C.P., p. 198). His desire is for a merging with the natural world.

In the final lines of section three, Roethke merges sound and silence through the curious and paradoxical assertion that "a rock sings, and light makes its own silence." The initial images of these lines are associated with the time before morning. These are contrasted with the final ones which betoken the possibility of change and rebirth. We are told that the moon is "lolling in the close elm;" it is a "lonely time before the breaking of morning;" "the slow freight winds along the edge of the ravaged hillside;" even the tree's existence is asserted in terms of a trial or test: "And the wind tries the shape of a tree,/ While the moon lingers" (C.P., p. 198). The "drop of rain," however, functions as the "first rain" did in section one, by betokening rebirth and regeneration. The "wakening sunlight" also reminds us of section one where "The light heightened" at the time of the poet's mystical experience and of section two where the rose flowers at "high noon," drinking the sunlight "face upward." Roethke's analogy between the amorphous drop of rain and the shifting "eye of a new-caught fish" is

striking. This metaphor is not only unique, but it also serves to take the reader back to the shore of sections one and two. These last ten lines of section three, with their suggestion of a rebirth, or change, prepare the way for the poet's transformation and heightened experience of self-transcendence in section four.

In the first nine lines of section four the poet is on the shore. He turns from the land to a consideration of the sea:

The oily, tar-laden walls
Of the toppling waves,
Where the salmon ease their way into the kelp beds,
And the sea rearranges itself among the small islands.
(C.P., p. 199)

One thinks of the poet's identification with the sea and need to merge with the "darkening currents" in section one. The salmon, which must journey back to their own origins before they can spawn, become analogous to the poet who must go back in time (to his father, the greenhouses and the roses) before he can be reborn and transcend his childhood world.

In the final lines of the poem, Roethke is again at the place where the wild rose grows:

Near this rose, in this grove of sun-parched, wind-
warped madronas,
Among the half-dead trees, I came upon the true ease
of myself,
As if another man appeared out of the depths of my being,
And I stood outside of myself, (C.P., p. 199)

"Near this rose," the poet achieves a new identity--a new awareness of self: "I came upon the true ease of myself" (C.P., p. 199). His experience here complements the description of the rose in section two-- becomes analogous to the rose's existence:

And I stood outside myself,
Beyond becoming and perishing,
A something wholly other,
As if I swayed out on the wildest wave alive,
And yet was still. (C.P., p. 199)

The rose is also "Beyond becoming and perishing." In section two, the rose is described as "Moving with the waves, the undulating driftwood," and yet it "Stays/ Stays in its true place." The poet also moves out to sea--"on the wildest wave alive"--"And yet was still." As motion and stasis intersect through his vision of the rose, the poet has a glimpse of "the imperishable quiet at the heart of form."

In section four he experiences a momentary union of his being and the world. Due to the symmetry between his experience here and our perception of the rose in section two; the rose comes to embody this unity. Thus, in this section, the rose is a fully developed symbol, arrived at through careful accretion of detail in the course of the poem.

Whereas the poet's synthesis of contraries is only temporary, the rose's very existence, in the context of the poem, embodies this unity permanently. His experience of moving out of the self is temporary; after this moment, he returns to an affirmation of his own separate identity, renewed and rejuvenated: "And I rejoiced in being what I was" (C.P., p. 199). His vision of the wild rose--as distinct from his father's roses--has allowed him to achieve a new and heightened sense of self. Roethke can finally celebrate his separate existence. The sequence, as Malkoff so aptly points out, "ends not with mystic union,

the selflessness that threatened earlier, but rather with a heightened awareness of one's own self obtained by a special relationship with the external world...³³

In the final four lines all the polarities of the poem are reconciled in the rose.

And in this rose, this rose in the sea-wind,
Rooted in stone, keeping the whole of light,
Gathering to itself sound and silence--
Mine and the sea-wind's. (C.P., 199)

The rose is free--"this rose in the sea-wind"--and yet fixed--"Rooted in stone." The rose also reconciles sound and silence. As Blessing says: "In the image of the rose all opposites are harmoniously reconciled. Sound and silence, motion and stillness, sea and land, wind and light, are folded in the petals of the rose, which keeps and gathers all until everything comes to one..."³⁴ Sullivan also addresses the function of the rose, specifically the relationship between the poet's quest and the rose's embodiment of that desire: "Free in the wind, the sea-rose represents the reconciliation between rootedness and fluidity, between earth and water, stasis and motion that he was seeking...For Roethke, the symbol embodies the energetics of the life process itself."³⁵

Clearly, Roethke's symbol of the rose is used here as his literary predecessors used it. Malkoff has pointed out that "this vision of the rose, [is the] embodiment of unity of being for Dante and Yeats..."³⁶ Linking Roethke's rose with D. H. Lawrence's description of the symbol, Sullivan states:

What is celebrated in the poem through the symbol of the rose is the mystery of incarnate, carnal being. D. H. Lawrence's description of the symbol is, in this respect, closest to Roethke's meaning: "We are like a rose, which is a miracle of pure centrality, pure absolved equilibrium. Balanced in perfection in the midst of time and space, the rose is perfect in the realm of perfection, neither temporal nor spatial, but absolved by the quality of perfection, pure immanence of absolution."³⁷

Sullivan also states emphatically that Roethke's rose "is not Eliot's heavily acculturated symbol, but a single solitary bloom, growing toward clarity out of confusion."³⁸ Without claiming direct influence, I would disagree with Sullivan and contend that Roethke's rose is at least consonant with Eliot's reconciliation of opposites at the end of The Four Quartets, when he says: "And the fire and the rose are one."³⁹ Indeed, as F. O. Matthiessen points out in The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: "The reconciliation of opposites is as fundamental to Eliot as it was to Heraclitus. Only thus can he envisage a resolution of man's whole being."⁴⁰

That the rose is one of the richest literary symbols in Western literature going back to Dante needs no documentation. It is unique as a symbol, however, in that its connotations have almost always been affirmative. "Not only do its roots extend at least to the beginnings of recorded time," as Seward points out, "but its petals embrace the deepest positive values ever held by man."⁴¹ Furthermore, she notes that "just as the wasteland can be said to be a prime symbol of our era, so the rose can be said to be its prime antithesis. Since by the twentieth century the

rose had become the accepted flower of almost every positive value, it is not surprising that in modern literature it blossoms in abundance where despair has been rooted or defied."⁴²

Roethke's use of the symbol in "The Rose" certainly reflected a knowledge of the literary tradition that preceded him; yet the lyric intensity and beauty of Roethke's most complex rose poem is evidence of his having made the symbol his own as it becomes a personal means of integrating past and present. The images associated with Roethke's rose--such as the wind, water and light--are invoked to create a framework in which the traditional symbol may be perceived.

Roethke makes the symbol his own, however, when he takes us back to the greenhouses of his past and links his previous reactions to them with his present feelings: "What need for heaven, then,/ With that man, and those roses?" (C.P., p. 197). Of course his present feelings about "this rose" eclipse his feelings for "that man and those roses," allowing him both to celebrate and transcend his past. For Roethke, roses more than all the other flowers of the greenhouse world embody, as Sullivan says, "the energetics of the life process itself." Finally, Roethke's personal feelings inform the traditional connotations of the symbol, rendering these two elements virtually indistinguishable in some of his best poems--"The Lost Son," "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "The Rose."

Appendix

Theodore Roethke's Poems in Which Rose Imagery Appears

1. "Weed Puller" (C.P., p. 37)
2. "Big Wind" (C.P., p. 39)
3. "Old Florist" (C.P., p. 40)
4. "Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartz" (C.P., p. 42)
5. "The Lost Son" (C.P., p. 50)
6. "The Long Alley" (C.P., p. 56)
7. "The Shape of the Fire" (C.P., p. 61)
8. "Where Knock is Open Wide" (C.P., p. 67)
9. "Bring the Day!" (C.P., p. 73)
10. "Elegy for Jane" (C.P., p. 98)
11. "Words for the Wind" (C.P., p. 118)
12. "The Sententious Man" (C.P., p. 126)
13. "Love's Progress" (C.P., p. 132)
14. "A Walk in Late Summer" (C.P., p. 143)
15. "His Words" from "The Dying Man" (C.P., p. 147)
16. "First Meditation" from "Meditations of an Old Woman" (C.P., p. 151)
17. "I'm Here" from "Meditations of an Old Woman" (C.P., p. 155)
18. "Her Becoming" from "Meditations of an Old Woman" (C.P., p. 159)
19. "Fourth Meditation" from "Meditations of an Old Woman" (C.P., p. 162)
20. "The Longing" from the "North American Sequence" (C.P., p. 181)
21. "The Rose" from the "North American Sequence" (C.P., p. 196)
22. "In Evening Air" from "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical" (C.P., p. 232)

Endnotes

¹Quoted in Rosemary Sullivan, Theodore Roethke: The Garden Master (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1975), p. 123.

²Roethke's concern with environment makes him akin to the 19th century romantic sensibility of Wordsworth and Emerson and Whitman in America. Hyatt H. Waggoner's American Poets From the Puritans to the Present documents some of the resemblances between Roethke's romanticism and the Emerson-Whitman tradition.

³In the interim Roethke charted his predominant thematic concerns in The Lost Son and Other Poems (1948), Praise to the End! (1951), The Waking Poems: 1933-1953 (1953), Words for the Wind (1958) and I Am! Says the Lamb (1961).

⁴Karl Malkoff, Theodore Roethke: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 152. See also William York Tindall's The Literary Symbol (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 42. Tindall describes Yeats's varying use of the rose as symbol.

⁵Malkoff, p. 224.

⁶Theodore Roethke, Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke, ed. by Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1968), pp. 230-31. On p. 230, Roethke declared: "...I came to some of Eliot's and Yeats's ancestors long before I came to them..."

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 106-08, pp. 254-55.

¹⁰Tindall, p. 42.

¹¹Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 93. She also notes on p. 92 that if there is a reconciliation of contraries it comes about when the rose is coupled with the cross in "The Rose Upon the Rood of Time."

¹²ibid., p. 115.

¹³Roethke, Selected Letters, p. 140.

¹⁴ibid.

¹⁵All subsequent citations from Roethke in the text are to the paperback edition of The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1975), pp. 53-54.

¹⁶Roethke, Selected Letters, p. 141.

¹⁷Roethke, "An American Poet Introduces Himself," On the Poet and His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke, ed. by Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 8-9.

¹⁸The greenhouse was not always an Eden. In "Old Florist," the florist's dedication to the care of the roses produces physical discomfort and pain. Notice, also in "Big Wind" how fragile the artificial order of the greenhouse is.

¹⁹Ralph J. Mills, Jr., Theodore Roethke, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 27.

²⁰Sullivan, p. 46.

²¹Seward, p. 10.

²²In "Words for the Wind" and "Love's Progress"--both from Words for the Wind--Roethke's rose is associated with the beloved. The rose becomes a symbol of the flesh, of beauty and passion or sexuality.

²³Malkoff, p. 163.

²⁴Sullivan, p. 115.

²⁵Malkoff, p. 152.

²⁶Sullivan, p. 148.

²⁷Malkoff, p. 174.

²⁸ibid., p. 177.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ It should be noted that the rose only appears once after this--in "In Evening Air" from Part IV of The Far Field: "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical." Yet the symbolic function of the rose in this poem is by no means as complex as in "The Rose."

³¹ For a discussion of Roethke's "journey out of the self" see James McMichael's "The Poetry of Theodore Roethke," in Profile of Theodore Roethke, ed. by William Heyen (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971). He provides an excellent overview of this impulse in Roethke's work.

³² Roethke, "On Identity," On the Poet and His Craft, pp. 24-25.

³³ Malkoff, p. 188.

³⁴ Richard Allen Blessing, Theodore Roethke's Dynamic Vision (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 156.

³⁵ Sullivan, pp. 162-63.

³⁶ Malkoff, p. 188.

³⁷ Sullivan, p. 164.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 162-63.

³⁹ T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), p. 59.

⁴⁰ F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 195.

⁴¹ Seward, p. 1.

⁴² Ibid., p. 122.

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