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HOW TO DEFINE THEODORE ROETHKE'S POETRY: CONFESSIONAL, ROMANTIC AND METAPHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THEODORE ROETHKE'S POETRY

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne sunduğum **How to Define Theodore Roethke's Poetry: Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical Aspects of Theodore Roethke's Poetry** adlı yüksek lisans tezinin tarafımdan bilimsel, ahlak ve normlara uygun bir şekilde hazırlandığını, tezimde yararlandığım kaynakları bibliyografyada ve dipnotlarda gösterdiğimi onurumla doğrularım.

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Tezin İngilizce Başlığı: How to Define Theodore Roethke's Poetry: Romantic, Confessional and Metaphysical Aspects of Theodore Roethke's Poetry

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1. INTRODUCTION

"During the five decades in which he wrote have made him difficult to categorize," remarks Peter Balakian. Theodore Roethke, one of the most outstanding poets of postwar American poetry, is exceptionally difficult to name, to define and to classify. The poet started his poetic career during the years when the western myths became hollow, the haunting figures of modernist poets wandered restlessly, and no one was able to tell what made the best poetry. Although James E. B. Breslin compartmentalizes the postwar American poetry by dividing the period into five categories as the Beat generation, Confessional Poetry, Deep Imagists, Black Mountain Poets, and New York Schools, he does not associate Roethke with any of these labels due to the fact that his poetic style evolved dramatically throughout his career. Due to substantial disagreement among Roethke's critics as how to place his works appropriately in a literary tradition, some of them comment on his Confessional aspects, some on the Romantic while a great number of them focus on the Metaphysical features of his poetry. For instance, Eugene Goodheart considers Roethke as an absolutely confessional poet arguing that the artist uses metaphysical and romantic poetry as a mask: "He is, no matter the guise (whether metaphysical or romantic or surreal), a confessional poet (516). According to Borja Obrador, however, Roethke is a Romantic: ". . . Roethke, however, is considered to be a problematic figure . . . his verse is closer to the English late Romanticism . . ." (168), while according to Karl Malkoff, he is a mystic whose poetry ". . . begins, as it ends, with the metaphysical" (18). As one can see, the critics view Roethke's poetry from different perspectives in their attempt to categorize his art accurately in a literary tradition. Considering the fact that it is not possible to place Theodore Roethke's art precisely within the limits of a single literary tradition, it is in the contention of this study to elucidate Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical characteristics of his poetry in a selected body of poems.

There are two major reasons that make Roethke an ambiguous poet and his art problematic to define. The first one is the dramatic evolution of his poetry throughout

his career; the second one is the parallelism between Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical poetry. Although it is unachievable to place Roethke precisely within the limits of a single literary tradition, one can note that his poetry is marked by growth, evolution and a striking shift in style, theme and technique. In style and wording, Roethke is notably creative for he tries a huge variety of genres such as traditional lyrics, dramatic monologues, surrealistic poems as well as nonsense rhymes for children. The poetic language of Roethke is rhythmic as the poet applies different patterns of rhythm, words of onomatopoeia, words derived from Germanic and Anglo-Saxon languages and monosyllabic words, repeated words, Whitmanian catalogues, long free verse poems as well as conventional rhymes and stanzas. It is strikingly problematic to categorize Roethke's poetic style and techniques as they vary between poems written in strict meter and free verse.

The second reason that makes Roethke and his art difficult to categorize is the interfusion of Confessional, Romantic, and Metaphysical elements in his poetry. Charles Molesworth asserts that "[i]n a sense confessional poetry can be seen as one degraded branch of Romanticism, placing the sensitivity of the poet at the center of concern" (163). In "Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic," Steven K. Hoffman traces the origins of confessional poetry to the early Romantics: "... the roots of the confessional mode are in the great romantic lyrics and personal epics-Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and 'The Prelude,' Coleridge's 'Dejection Ode,' Whitman's 'Song of Myself' . . ." (688). As the origins of Confessional Poetry hark back to Romanticism, the voice of the first person singular is central to both romantic and confessional works. Nevertheless, some sharp differences exist between Confessional and Romantic poetry: Romantics do not employ extremely autobiographical elements of family conflict, childhood neglect, sexual infidelity, and mental disorders. While the protagonist is mostly a complex dropout in confessional poems, in romantic works the central character is universal due to his or her heroic qualities. As George Wright mentions in *The Poet in the Poem* ". . . the romantic becomes a hero as well as a protagonist. He addresses the reader from a height that the reader can only dream of attaining" (48). This quality of the romantic, writes Wright, is

what makes him different from the modern man as he ". . . has become a representative rather than an ideal man" (53).

Beginning from this premise, the main argument which runs through this study is to demonstrate that Theodore Roethke belongs to the poetic traditions of Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical poetry, analyzing the poet's poems through the lens of formalism. Owing to the difficulty to cover all of Roethke's poems, the most critical ones are analyzed within the scope of this study. The poems that show characteristics of Confessional poetry, "Open House," "My Papa's Waltz" and "The Premonition" are from the book *Open House* (1941). "Root Cellar" and "The Lost Son" poems representing Romantic aspects of Roethke's art are taken from *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948). The metaphysical poem "Words for the Wind" is from *Words for the Wind* (1958) while the poem "In a Dark Time" is placed in the poet's last book *The Far Field* (1964). To discuss and elaborate on the poems and literary movements mentioned so far, this study aims in the first place to draw the outlines of the historical background central to postwar American poetry.

Basically, the historical background of this study aims to provide the reader with a skeleton of dominant poetic movements in the postwar decade and an understanding of second generation poets who were overshadowed by their predecessors like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Therefore, the historical background is intended to demonstrate James E. Breslin's categorization of postwar American poetry as the Black Mountain Poets, the New York School, Deep Image Poets, the Beat Generation and the Confessionals. The texts and western myths which inspired groundbreaking works like "The Waste Land," and "The Cantos," or "The Bridge" faded away from attention, signaling the end of modernism. Postwar American poets like Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Theodore Roethke, Frank O'Hara, John Berryman, John Ashbery, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich and James Wright, who all had to prove themselves against their great modernist predecessors, fell into different literary and artistic movements.

The chapter "Confessional Aspects" aims to explore Roethke's confessional voice by defining and describing the historical development of Confessional poetry since the first autobiographical work written in the Western world, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Even though confessional poetry was recognized as a literary genre only in the 1950s, confessional literature was not considered to be something new as its origins go back to tradition of Christianity. The memoir and confession writers of the nineteenth century aspired to disclose their true self by defining their ethical status in a system of values. Nevertheless, in twentieth century confessional writing, selfhood was no more defined in terms of moral norms since the main concern became reinvention of personal subjects and the poets began to expose frankly the intimacies of their personal lives. Through the voice of the first person, contemporary confessional poets have exposed extremely personal issues such as the psychic wounds of early life, scandalous secrets, and traumatic worlds of their childhood. Theodore Roethke is known to be a confessional poet for he barely reveals emotions like pain, grief, and guilt, and exposes his obsession with his father as well as detailed descriptions of his painful memories. Due to the fact that the first book *Open House* (1941) is recognized as a work marked with Confessional themes and issues, the poems "Open House," "My Papa's Waltz" and "The Premonition" are chosen for an analysis of confessional aspects in Roethke's art.

The following chapter is primarily concerned with Romantic aspects of Roethke's poetics since he is recognized as the twentieth-century representative of American Romanticism as the poet uses Romantic aspects of Emerson's and Wordsworth's art. He follows Emersonian tradition by employing the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites, and the Wordsworthian theme of odyssey towards home. Roethke, who had notable knowledge of plant and animal life, used nature symbolism to depict his search for organic unity and his lifelong search for identity. Romantic concept of imagination is central to a reconciliation of opposing ideas into unity. Depending upon three major principles of Emerson's concept of unity, I analyze the greenhouse poems and the theme of regressive journey towards home in "The Lost Son" sequence. Thus, in the second chapter, the most prominent poems of the twentieth century

American poetry, the “Greenhouse Poems” and “The Lost Son Sequence,” which left their mark on Roethke’s career, are studied. While in the greenhouse poems the poet turns to particular childhood memories, the Lost Son poems deal with the unconscious mind lying beneath these early memories. Don Bogen explains the difference between these two sets of early memories as follows: “If the greenhouse poems are like separate photographs of memories carefully arranged in an album, the ‘Lost Son’ sequence is like a movie” (55).

As the title of the chapter indicates, the purpose of the fifth chapter is to reveal the Metaphysical features of Theodore Roethke’s art, especially in his last book *The Far Field* and in *Words for the Wind*. First of all, I aim to mention the significance of T.S. Eliot’s essay “The Metaphysical Poets,” which led to “metaphysical revival” soon after it was published. Two important elements that outline Roethke’s metaphysical aspects are the spiritual illumination of the mystic and the love poems. Through the I-You relationship, Roethke explores the merits of mystical union and spiritual illumination. In the metaphysical poem “In a Dark Time,” Roethke mainly uses paradoxes to illustrate his mystical experience and the illumination he had by referring to Evelyn Underhill’s classic 1911 book *Mysticism*: *A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. In the love poems, the poet praises love of God which he recognizes and admits after his spiritual journey in *The Far Field,* concluding that body and spirit are one: “God bless the roots! - Body and soul are one!” (Roethke 242).

This study also contends to demonstrate that Roethke derived the most distinctive images and themes from the incidents of his personal life. Therefore, the life story of the poet falls under the focus of this study. Theodore Huebner Roethke was born as the son of a German florist Otto Roethke and Helen Huebner in 1908, in Saginaw, Michigan. Otto and his brother Charlie owned the biggest greenhouse in Michigan where Roethke spent a considerably happy childhood. The greenhouse was not only an amazing playground for a child, but also a place of work where he took care of the plants and had a chance to observe nature. As a result of time he spent there, the poet had a great knowledge of the plant world as also noted by his biographer Allan

Seager ". . . Ted learned the yearly seasons of the greenhouse, which flowers were planted from seeds, which from slips, which from bulbs; the various manures and fertilizers in extravagant detail" (21). The natural world, thus, is at the heart of his works and poetic imagination. Mainly the images of his works are taken from the greenhouse world. Roethke jotted down in his notebooks "When I get alone under an open sky where man isn't too evident-then I'm tremendously exalted and a thousand vivid ideas and sweet visions flood my consciousness (Seager 55). As James G. Southworth writes in the essay "Theodore Roethke: The Far Field:," Roethke is neither an urban poet like Eliot or Pound who grasp images from city life nor a rural one like Frost who derives symbols from nature:

> He is the poet of the virgin scene: woods, forests, ponds, rivers, lakes, and the sea; and these provide his images. His milieu is the remembered locale of his youth in the thumb-district of Michigan where virgin stands of timber still exist and the Northwest with its great forests, mountains, Lake Washington, Puget Sound, and the Pacific and the still raw quality of this region in spite of cities like Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland. (418)

Nevertheless, when he was only 14, Roethke lost both his father and the greenhouse. His uncle shot himself, his father died of cancer and the greenhouse was sold. Shortly after his father's death in a paper written in Rhetoric class, Theodore Roethke wrote ". . . my father became very ill. Doctors couldn't understand the nature of his disease. They pronounced his constitution perfect. Then Uncle Charlie shot himself. Three months later my father died-of a 'kink in the bowels,' the doctors said" (Seagar 41). The early death of his father had a catastrophic effect on Roethke's life, and the image of his dead father remained in the center of Roethke's verse as the memory of "[a]ll his life . . . loomed over him" (Seager 26). His father's death came to be the heart of his art.

Roethke received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Michigan as a *magna cum laude* in 1929. Although the poet enrolled Harvard University to take

graduate courses, due to the Great Depression, he had to leave school and start his teaching career. The poet started teaching at Lafayette College and had different teaching positions at several universities during his career. In 1947, he started teaching at Washington University, where he worked until his death in 1963. The poet who was hospitalized periodically owing to his mental illness, suffered his first mental breakdown in 1935, while he was teaching at Michigan State University. Allan Seager wrote of the signs of his illness stating that "[h]e indulged in eccentricities of dress like wearing three pairs of trousers at once, rubbers when it was not raining, sandals in the snow, and he had an old Borsalino hat with a wide brim he wore at such times" (105). In 1952, Roethke married a former student Beatrice O'Connel and they travelled across Europe. Theodore Roethke had a heart attack while he was swimming in his friend's swimming pool one summer afternoon in 1963 at the age of 55. The swimming pool, after the poet's death, was turned into a Zen rock garden. As reported by Allen Seager, Roethke's last years were blazed with great happiness and poetic confidence. The impulse for harmony and resolution is clearly apparent in his last poems which were written in a new sense of tranquility. John Berryman writes of his art as follows:

> There is no poetry anywhere, that is so valuably conscious of the human body . . . no poetry that can place the body in an environment-wind, seascape, greenhouse, forest, desert, mountainside, among animals or insects or stones-so vividly and evocatively, waking unheard of exchanges between the place and human responsiveness at its most creative. He more than any other is a poet of pure being. (qtd. in Sullivan ix)

Theodore Roethke's first collection of poems, *Open House* was published in 1941, after twelve years of hard work. Despite some shortcomings, the book received applause of poets and critics as in *Saturday Review of Literature* W. H. Auden wrote Roethke's first book *Open House* "was completely successful." According to some critics, the poems in the book can be classified into three groups: the first group of poems deals with poetic imagination; the poems in the second group are concerned with

past and childhood visions; and the third group of poems questions the limits of natural world so that the book is considered to be an arrangement of poems with a lack of unity. The metaphor in the title "open house" signifies and celebrates birth of a poet who opens the doors of his heart to the reader and invites them to listen to his naked truth. Although the book is traditional in its techniques and considered by many critics to be the imitations of a learner, *Open House* foreshadows the dynamism of his later works with vivid impressions of personal life and skillfully written lyrics.

Theodore Roethke's breakthrough book *The Lost Son and Other Poems* appeared in 1948. *The Lost Son and Other Poems* is considered to be the most successful work of his career as William Martz remarks, "Roethke never surpassed the achievement of *The Lost Son*" (35). In this second book, the poet went through a vital change, which enabled him to express a more contradictory identity by using a more visionary and symbolic language. Roethke recited his poetic breakthrough as follows: "My first book was much too wary, much too gingerly in its approach to experience; rather dry in tone and constricted in rhythm. I am trying to loosen up, to write poems of greater intensity and symbolical depth" (qtd. in Mills 114).

The next volume *Praise to the End!* was published in 1951. The title which is an allusion to William Wordsworth's *Prelude,* magnifies romantic unity. In a BBC talk *An American Poet Introduces Himself* in 1953, Roethke revealed that the purpose of that sequence was to "trace the spiritual history of a protagonist" (qtd. in Kalaidjan 77). In this book, Roethke goes on the odyssey he started in *The Lost Son and Other Poems.* The poet explores the *subconscious* world of the child in the nonsense lyrics and nursery rhymes. *The Waking,* his next book published in 1953, won the Pulitzer Prize for its most celebrated poem "The Waking," which was written in the form of a villanelle. This volume is especially notable for its change in style as the poet moves from the formalist poems of the earlier volumes. *Words for the Wind,* which was published in 1957, won the National Book Award, the Edna St. Vincent Millay Prize and the Pacific Northwest Writer's Award. The most famous piece of this volume is one of his longest works "Meditations of an Old Woman."

The Far Field, which was published posthumously, consists of four sections "North American Sequence," "Love Poems," "Mixed Sequence," and "Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical." Six poems in the "North American Sequence" are written in the long, unmetered tradition of Walt Whitman and T.S. Eliot, while the poems in "Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical" are metered and rhymed. In the "North American Sequence" Roethke hunts for the meaning of life and death as he did with the Lost Son narratives. In fact, these poems were a personal record of Roethke's emotional stream. Nevertheless, during his last years Roethke also wrote poems of deep-seated depression for he was still suffering from mental breakdowns. Peter Balakian describes these poems as the poems of "the final man" (129). The last poems of *The Far Field* can be read as his last words on fear of death as they are clear manifestations of his acceptance of death. Allen Seager writes, ". . . last years of Ted's life, as we look back on them knowing they were the last, seem to have a strange air of unconscious preparation" (251). Commenting upon *The Far Field*, Frederick Philip Lenz holds out that "Roethke explicates his reconciliation between the forces of matter and spirit . . . *The Far Field* is *tour de force* for Roethke, and he weaves together all of the major themes that he has dealt with throughout his poetry into a final unifying vision of the eternality of man's spirit, the essential joyousness of existence" (88). *The Far Field* is a retrospection of "the long journey out of the self" as the poet explains his outlooks of life from the view of an aged and dying man.

To many critics, Theodore Roethke is a professed imitator of his poetic ancestors. Jenijoy La Belle named Roethke as a "conscious imitator" since he drew his inspiration from various poets including W. H. Auden, William Carlos Williams, William Wordsworth, John Donne, Walt Whitman, as well as T.S. Eliot and William Blake. Also, he had literary friendships with famous poets like Auden, Louise Bogan, Stanley Kunitz and William Carlos Williams. In his poem "Feud," Roethke exposes his relation with his literary fathers, conceiving of the relationship between contemporary and past poets as an "ancient feud:" "The spirit starves/Until the dead have been subdued" (4). While Roethke was trying to create his unique style in his poems, he

knew he had to completely overcome his literary ancestors. As noted by Walter Kalaidjian, “[i]mitation served as a testing ground for measuring his talent against powerful precursors” (32). However, he eventually defeated the challenge and influence of ancient poets, and melted what he borrowed from them in his own crucible and made it his own.

2. POSTWAR AMERICAN POETRY

During the postwar period which was marked by a world of global politics and art, no one could tell what the best poetry was. Therefore, the period witnessed a multiplicity of innovations. After the World War II western myths and texts which had set the background for "The Waste Land," "The Cantos," or "The Bridge" lost their influence. Roethke's *The Lost Son*, Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, and Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* appeared with the groundbreaking theme of family cycle as they used inherited familial history to shape their works. This put an end to the modernist idea of the past which found its expression in Randall Jarrell's manifesto which announced the end of modernism in 1941: "Modernism As We Know It-the most successful and influential body of poetry of this century-is dead" (81). Due to famous British poet W. H. Auden's immigration to the USA in 1939 and his invaluable influence on a great number of American poets, including John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, Karl Shapiro, Richard Wilbur, Richard Howard and James Merill, the 1940s and the early 1950s were called the "Age of Auden." During the years following the World War II the poets focused on technique and formal method rather than novelty of ideas or concepts. The social and political conservatism of the period could be clearly seen in the poems of the era as many of the poets preferred to write in the form of traditional sonnets or rhymed quatrains.

"American poetry in the middle fifties" during the period of economic boom "resembled a peaceful public park on a pleasant summer Sunday afternoon" remarks James E. Breslin (53). As Robert Lowell noticed, the fifties were tranquilized years for many Americans during which many poets moved back from active involvement in the social and political concerns of the time to formalism, abstraction and mythmaking. In 1952 W.H. Auden commented on this inclination towards legends and archetypes, stating that ". . . it is impossible not to recognize . . . the increase of interest shown today, both by poets and critics, in myth, and a corresponding turning away, on the part

of poets at least, from occasional subjects whether political or private" (qtd. in Gray 221).

Although by the late 1940s, the modernist movement seemed to come to an end, new generation poets didn't blossom to construct a dominant poetic thought powerful enough to displace modernism. In his book *From Modern to Contemporary*, James E. Breslin states that "[t]he period, skeptical of theory, produced no new ambitious theoretical formulations but instead devoted itself to a practical criticism and the cult of poetic craftsmanship, activities their proponents claimed were free of theoretical 'bias'" (24). Richard Howard defined the first generation poets T.S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams as ". . . certain enormous creatures like dinosaurs that crawl around on the earth's surface . . ." and warned that it is better "to keep out of their way" (qtd. in Breslin 2). The haunting figures of the modernists created a threatening, disheartening poetic environment for the post war generation. As Robert Lowell once asked "Were we the uncomfortable epigoni of Frost, Pound, and Eliot, Marianne Moore, etc?" (qtd. in Nelson 36). In the foreword to his anthology *The Voice That is Great within Us*, Hayden Carruth writes:

> When I was a young poet in the 1940s I felt chronologically deprived, and so did my friends. We had been born too late that was our trouble. The great epoch of 'modern poetry' was in the past; its works, which we desperately admired, *The Waste Land*, *Lustra*, *Harmonium*, *Spring and All* and so many others, had been written long ago and had exhausted the poetic impetus. Nothing was left for us to do. (qtd. in Turco 133)

By the 1940s, poets who were overshadowed by the first generation poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were flourishing to provide new blood to American poetry. A brilliant critic of the time asserted that "[d]uring the past generation we have seen our two chief poets make their escape from America one to become an English subject and the other a partisan of Mussolini and, ultimately, a prisoner of our government." Early poets had no ties with the American public: Eliot and Pound lived in Europe, Wallace Stevens was a businessman in Hartford, and William Carlos Williams was a doctor in a

small-town. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, New York appeared to displace Paris as the cultural capital of the Western world. Second generation poets of the twentieth-century were called “the children of Midas” by Richard Howard as they underwent an unprecedented transformation. Allen Ginsberg, who started writing quatrains, became the leading figure of beat poetry after writing *Howl*; Slyvia Plath, who started as an imitator of Eliot and Dylan Thomas, turned out to be the voice of suicidal Poetry in *Ariel*; John Berryman, who started as a bookish poet imitating Auden and Yeats, wrote the wildest poems of his generation, *The Dream Songs*.

Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956) and Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* (1959) became hallmarks of the final phase of modernism, disaffirming symbolist and impersonal poetry of late modernism. Ginsberg and Lowell headed to find a representative identity that was more subjective and personal than that of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens. By the late fifties, Ginsberg, Lowell John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Denise Levertov, James Dickey, James Wright, and Robert Bly were wending their way through new rotates. Their poems which were more emotional and autobiographical reflected a more colloquial poetic language. Poets’ personal background and family were central to this newly emerging poetry. While Western cultural myths, symbols, and history were essential to the modernist poets, post-moderns put the emphasis on personal history.

Among the second generation poets of the twentieth century who came into prominence after World War II were Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Theodore Roethke, Frank O’Hara, John Berryman, John Ashbery, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich and James Wright, who all had to prove themselves against their great modernist predecessors. First generation poets, namely T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, were educated men; their poems demanded knowledge of history and a quite intellectual audience. In the postwar era, the poets seemed more American, and less European as the United States turned out to be the super power after the war. At that time, American poets exalted American poetry, rejecting the superiority of the European art. The main European impact on the second generation poets was a Viennese doctor who was

working on human psychology. Sigmund Freud's emphasis on dark lives and madness appealed to this generation of poets who had just come out of the World War II. In order to draw a picture of the postwar American poetry, James E. B. Breslin divides the period into five circles: the Black Mountain, New York Schools, Deep Image Poets, the Beat Generation, and Confessional Poets.

The Black Mountain group of new American poetry consisted of poets like Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, and Robert Duncan. The Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 during the worst years of Great Depression. Located in rural North Carolina, the Black Mountain College was founded upon John Dewey's principles of progressive education. The college supplied the students with a purely experimental spirit, and became a training spot for musicians, writers, visual artists, and performers. The Black Mountain poetry celebrates Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse" as a gospel. Olson advocated a new idea of "composition by field," which was inspired by the ideas of Ezra Pound. Olson's idea of "composition by field" contradicted traditional ways of writing poetry based on measure and rhyming. Olson believed that poets' main concern should be breath rather than rhyme, meter, and sense. Moreover, he propounded that syntax should be shaped by sound rather than sense. The Black Mountain poets replaced straight left-hand margins, inherited traditional lines, stanzas, and meters with lines and phrases saturated with the rhythm of poet's breath, mental and physical energy. Shortly, they emphasized improvisation, ebb and flow strain of inspiration, instinctive constellation of form and meaning.

The New York School originally referred to a group of abstract expressionist painters in the 1950s including Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. In the early 1960s, the term was applied to a group of contemporary poets writing their poems in New York. The leading poets of New York School were Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler. One of the distinguishing features of this group was their involvement in the world of visual arts and painting. As a distinctive group, they dealt with popular American cultural pieces of music and cinema to cut literary ties with their predecessors T.S. Eliot and Robert Lowell. John Ashbery defines the New

York School by its “absence of any program,” its way of “… not planning the poem in advance but letting it take its own way” (32). Rather, the New York School is not an avant-garde movement which demands manifestos or organized meetings as remarked by Kenneth Koch. New York School poets chose neutrality as a more suitable way of protest. Instead of expressing activism in manifesto-like texts like *Howl*, they wrote mock- manifestoes like O’Hara’s ‘Personism’ and ‘Koch’s Fresh Air’ to ridicule the idea of action for the action’s sake. Inspired by Stevens rather than Pound, they were neither engaged in disguising traditional forms of art nor in political activism, what mattered to them was the use of fragments of past in a postmodern way. New York School poets interested in motion picture and who, tried to create an impression of actions in their poems, reflected the vibrant urban world.

The term deep image was first used by Robert Kelly in his essay “Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image” in 1961. Although Deep Image poets borrowed some certain characteristics of Spanish Surrealist poetry, they did not use bizarre and shocking images. Deep Imagist poetry used visual images taken from rural life and natural world to mirror unexplored levels of consciousness. They sought to use imagery to drift the reader to the depths of consciousness. Owing to their use of imagery to foster what Robert Bly called “psychic leaps,” the Deep Image poems are “distinguished” from the Imagism of the 1910s and 1920s. Robert Bly and other deep imagist poets, also known as “American Surrealists,” were primarily influenced by the more passionate and irrational style of the Spanish poets like Pablo Neruda, Garcia Lorca, Cesar Vallejo and Antonio Machado; the German poets like Rainer Maria Rilke, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; and in France, Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. In an important essay entitled “A Wrong Turning in American Poetry,” Bly claimed that Latin American and European poets offered an alternative to the American imagination, “which had allowed it to be constrained by the Modernist tradition’s myopic fixation on the outer world, the objective world” (qtd. in Myers 206). Using Yeatsian symbols and dreamlike scenes, the Deep Image poets treated poetry as an experience rather than a statement.

First generation Beats originated in San Francisco in the 1950s as New York School poets. Beat poetry evolved during the 1940s in both New York City and along the West Coast, although San Francisco became the heart of the movement in the early 1950s. Jack Kerouac coined the term “beat” to refer to people who were beaten and defeated by the mainstream culture. The end of the World War II bred poets like Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso, who challenged mainstream culture and its values. In their pursuit of individuality, both New York School and Beat generation poets used spontaneity and improvisation for self-expression. Inspired by Whitmanian poetry, Beat generation adopted colloquial and slangy language in their works and celebrated sexual and spiritual liberation from the shackles of American conformism and capitalism.

3. CONFESSIONAL ASPECTS

The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune. For, the experience of each new age requires a new confession.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet"

Alas, I can only tell my own story-

Robert Lowell, "Unwanted"

The significance of personal experience as the essence of art and poetry has long been debated. As noted above by Emerson, each new era demands and creates new thoughts, experiences and confessions. In the aftermath of the World War II, Western history and the celebrated texts of Western culture like "The Waste Land," and "Cantos" became hollow myths for the mid-century American poets. Steven Hoffman writes in his essay "Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic" that confessional writing "is very much a product of its own age." The horrors of the World War II, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the nuclear age and the Cold War led to distrust in American social history. In the post-war era, the poets' perception of past was, in Balakian's words "personally inherited history-blood history." Sylvia Plath, considering all human beings and personal experience as historical said "… my poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. They are not about the terrors of mass extinction, but about the bleakness of the moon over a yew tree in a neighborhood graveyard" (qtd. in Gray 238). Kate Sontag, in her book *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, writes:

> For good or ill, we live in the age of the memoir. As autobiographies, memoirs, fictionalized biographies, and works of creative nonfiction fill bookstores with ever-growing frequency, discussion of the nature and boundaries of autobiographical writing has grown both common and heated. (3)

Although confessional poetry became a literary genre in the post-Eisenhower years, it is not possible to claim that confessional literature is an innovation due to the fact that it derives its origins from the tradition of Christianity. The poet reveals all his secrets to the reader just like a Christian uncovers his feelings to Father Confessor. As the poet embodies both roles of the sufferer and the creator, the distinction between these two roles disappears, turning the poet into a perpetual victim. Thus poetry turns out to be a documentation of victimization, which in M. L. Rosenthal's words becomes poetry of "suffering." The ambiance of the poetic environment during the period was emphasized in Delmore Schwartz's essay "The Isolation of Modern Poetry." In his essay Schwartz elaborates upon the background of confessional movement:

> It became increasingly impossible for the poet to write about the lives of other men; for not only was he removed from their lives, but above all, the culture and the sensibility which made him a poet could not be employed when the proposed subject was the lives of human beings in whom culture and sensibility had no organic function. (217)

Produced by middle class post-war WASP writers, confessional poetry adopted self-exploration and self-expression as its fundamental principle. In a self-revelatory manner, the confessional poets give scandalous secrets and intimate details from their personal experiences. According to Northrop Frye, confessional poetry is a form of autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography. Poetic materials are chosen directly from poets' experiences to dramatize their lives. Elizabeth Gregory in her 2006 essay "Confessing the Body: Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Lowell, Ginsberg and the Gendered Poetics of the Real'" explains that confessional poetry ". . . foregoes personae and

represents an account of the poet's own feelings and circumstances, often by reference to names and scenarios linked to the poet" (34). These highly subjective works of art give personal accounts of feelings, beliefs, and experiences by using the first-person singular persona. In her essay "On Confession" Rita Felski comments that she uses "confession" simply to specify a type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" (qtd. in Smith 83).

Historically, the origins of confessional writing go back to Augustinian tradition, to the nineteenth century Romantics, to Wordsworth's *Prelude* and to Whitman's *Song of Myself. The Confessions of St. Augustine* is considered to be the first autobiographical work written in the Western world. Despite the fact that Augustine saw writing as a manifestation of his reverence and devotedness to God, he re-created himself and embraced his life in such a novel way that *The Confessions* of St. Augustine turned out to be a piece of art. During the nineteenth century, a great number of literary confessions proliferated: Charles Lamb's 1983 "Confessions of a Drunkard," Thomas De Quincey's 1822 "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater," James Hogg's 1824 "The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner," Alfred de Musset's 1836 "The Confession of a Child of the Century," George Sand's 1865 "The Confession of a Young Girl." Therefore, confessional literature has existed ever since the man had the instinctual desire to speak out his personal feelings. Even the drawings of the cavemen can be considered as confessions. However, in the literary tradition confessional poetry remained undefined until the word "confessional" was first used for poetry by M. L. Rosenthal in his review of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*:

> The term 'confessional poetry' came naturally to my mind … Because of the way Lowell brought his private humiliations, sufferings, and psychological problems into the poems of *Life Studies*, the word 'confessional' seemed appropriate enough. (qtd. in Harris 25-26)

As the mid-century poets were burdened by the pains of past incidents and the difficulties of their present life, it became impossible for them to be objective by all means. The subjective truths were praised over the natural and cultural truths. Robert Phillips writes in the introduction to his book *The Confessional Poets* that ". . . we are living in a great Age of Autobiography. We no longer believe in the general truths about human nature, only the subjective ones. *Let me tell you about my wound . . . Let me tell you about my scars and deformities* . . . our writers cry out" (xi). As it is clear from Phillips' words, the confessional poets deal with the self as the principal subject of their art. Confessional poems are written in opposition to the Eliotic aesthetic, which defined poetry as an escape from personality and emotion. Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," which was published in 1956, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies and* W.D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle,* both published in 1959, became hallmarks of confessional poetry in their revolt against symbolist and impersonal poetry of High Modernism.

Confessional works primarily center on unconventional and taboo subjects and extreme autobiographical elements such as mental disorders, childhood neglect, sexual infidelity, divorce, familial problems, alcoholism, suicide, drug abuse and abortion. In *Life Studies*, Robert Lowell delved into the confusions of his familial history; Anne Sexton, in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) and *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), explored the themes of abortion, sexual desires of a woman and mental instability; W.D. Snodgrass in *Heart's Needle* (1959) reflected upon the subject of divorce from the vantage point of a husband living away from his wife and child; John Berryman's *Dream Songs* (1969) uncovered his alcoholism and his struggle against trauma; Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) glorified homosexuality; Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* (1965) discovered uncontrolled feelings of a woman on the edge of suicide. Christopher Beach noted that ". . . it was often the biographies of the confessional generation as much as their poetry that attracted the attention of scholars, critics and readers" (155). To mention some of them, Plath, Berryman, and Sexton committed suicide, Lowell, Berryman, Bishop, Plath and Roethke suffered from mental disorders, Lowell, Bishop and Berryman were addicted to alcohol. Likewise, Edward Byrne in his article "Examining the Poetry of

Confession and Autobiography: After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography" draws our attention to the biographical aspect of confessional writing:

> In fact, poets' records of marital infidelities, painful personal failures, mental health breakdowns, and incidents of psychological anguish were displayed on the pages for the scrutiny of readers as easily as innocent family photographs might be shared with friends following travels on a vacation trip. Consequently, confessional poetry was defined by its content the intimate, sometimes sordid, autobiography of the poet revealed in explicit first-person narration rather than any novel technical development or formal advancement (Byrne).

As for style and technique, the confessional poets collect images, symbols and metaphors from their personal experiences. The repeated image of the bee in Sylvia Plath's poetry, for example, symbolizes her beekeeper father. Likewise, the recurring greenhouse image in Roethke's poetry indicates the place where he spent his early childhood with his florist father. In a confessional poem the tone is generally emotional, themes are autobiographical and they are handled directly, and the structure is narrative. The style is casual and language is colloquial. The persona in a confessional poem is the "I," the first person speaker, generally referring to the poet himself or herself whose deep wounds of early life are documented explicitly. Instead of constructing or creating imaginary characters, confessional poets make themselves the persona of their works. In his essay "Confessional Poetry and the Artifice of Honesty," David Yezzi emphasizes:

> What set [Confessional poems] apart from other poems that incorporate details from life, is their sense of worn-on-the-sleeve self-revelation and their artful simulation of sincerity. By relying on facts, on 'real' situations and relationships, for a poem's emotional authenticity, the poet makes an artifice of honesty. Confessional poems, in other words, lie like truth. (qtd. in Runkel 5)

True, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies and* W.D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle,* both published in 1959, are milestones of confessional poetry. However, the confessional aesthetic of Roethke's poetry flourishes in his first book *Open House* as early as 1941. Reflection of his personal mythology as the primary source of his work makes Roethke a confessional poet. As Rosemary Sullivan comments, "Roethke was to find the themes of his work in the fluctuations and intensities of his own psyche: in the situations and processes of consciousness and the problems of identity in pursuit of personal fulfillment" (4). In his works Roethke discusses personal issues with considerable frankness. Bare exposures of emotions, disclosure of his love-hate relationship with his father, and depictions of painful memories from his early life are considerably distinctive features of Roethke's confessional poetry. As his biographer Allan Seagar notes in *The Glass House,* Theodore Roethke's life was the ultimate source for his art:

> The excitement of life lay within himself, not outside, nor in anyone's past but his own. What struck him through his senses he transformed at once into signs of his own states of being, well or ill. It was himself he had to sing, not the circumambient world. (123)

The urge to confess stems from the poet's strong belief that his story is worth telling. The poet creates a personal myth in his poems and his personal history or mythology becomes a true story for humanity. The ideal behind confessional writing is to discover the personal truth. Therefore, Roethke's works illustrate his lifelong pursuit for spiritual identity. Roethke once wrote in his *Selected Letters*:

> In this kind of poem, to be most true to himself and to that which is universal in him, the poet should not rely on illusion. In this kind of poem, the poet should not 'comment' or use many judgment-words; instead he should render the experience, however condensed or elliptical that experience may be. (142)

Avoiding allusions is the most prominent characteristic of confessional poetry. The poet, as mentioned above, puts himself in the forefront of the poem, and opens his inner life to the close examination of his readers, turning the poem into a means of communication. Creating a personal mythology, confessional poets use "self" as their chief symbol and metaphor. The main purpose of recording personal history in a piece of art is in fact to know the true self. Bare exposures of emotions, obsession with father love and hate as well as the depiction of painful memories of early life are the most prominent confessional characteristics of Roethke's art, which are going to be explored in his poems "Open House," "My Papa's Waltz" and "The Premonition" in the following sections.

3.1. "My Secrets Cry Aloud:" Nakedness of Emotions

When *Open House* was published in 1941, ". . . it was by no means a major event in American poetry . . ." (Stiffler 4) for it broke away from the impersonal poetry of T.S. Eliot. It took Theodore Roethke ten years to publish his first book *Open House,* in which the poet exposes his intimate emotional experience. In this book, the poet, defeated by doubts, and feelings of guilt, explores his family roots in a confessional manner. As Richard Allen Blessing comments in *Dynamic Vision of Theodore Roethke,* the title of the first book suggests ". . . an openness, that now at last the raw, brutal, naked truth will be told" (40). The poet very honestly announces that he is going to use his own life as the source of his art. It is evident that the poem "Open House" is centered mainly on the self of the poet:

My secrets cry aloud.
I have no need for tongue.
My heart keeps open house,
My doors are widely swung.
An epic of the eyes
My love, with no disguise.

My truths are all foreknown,
This anguish self-revealed.
I'm naked to the bone,
With nakedness my shield.
Myself is what I wear:
I keep the spirit spare.

The anger will endure,
The deed will speak the truth
In language strict and pure.
I stop the lying mouth:
Rage warps my clearest cry
To witless agony. (3)

At the beginning of his work, Roethke signifies personal honesty, revealing that he is without cover, and to reveal his secrets he does not need a "tongue" as his emotions "cry aloud." Rolfe Humphries in his review of *Open House* comments that in the very first lines of the poem Roethke signals that much of the poem will primarily involve autobiographical elements since he mentions that his house is broadly open, "from attic to basement." The poet exposes that there will be no invention, no fiction or no lies as he declares, "I stop the lying mouth." In "Open House," written as three sextains with the meter of *ababcc*, Roethke breaks away from highly emotional images by exposing the truth of himself and embracing nakedness of emotions as his guiding spirit. Since confessional art is self-revelatory, it departs from doctrines of personality. As stated by Walter Kalaidjian, with this poem "Roethke featured the confessional program of sharing the self's most intimate and unsettling moments with the reader" (33).

In Roethke's poetry the mood varies and feelings of doubt, joy, loneliness and guilt as well as isolation are reflected. The poem "The Flight" in the "Lost Son Sequence" is a cry out of loneliness: "Sat in an empty house/ There was one fly/ Voice,

come out of the silence/ Say something" (Roethke 50). In this poem, the poet is in an abandoned house sitting alone and longing for companion. The central symbol of this poem is an empty house in which the speaker seeks for shelter. Walter Kalaidjian writes in *Understanding Theodore Roethke* that "[a]bandonment, lifelessness, monotony and despair all characterize Roethke's melancholic moods in the absence of the imagination's redemptive presence" (53). Nevertheless, the most prominent feeling explored with frankness and revealed sincerely in Roethke's works is guilt. Roethke's father's early death had a profound effect on his life. As stated by Allan Seager, owing to his sense of inferiority and pathological fear of inadequacy Roethke's adult life was messed up by feelings of panic and guilt. Later in his poems he exposed what he felt as a child with the sudden death of his father. Feeling abandoned the child accused himself of his father's death. Rosemary Sullivan, in *Theodore Roethke: The Garden Master,* elaborates upon Roethke's traumatic state of mind:

> For the death of a parent to create such a profound psychological shock, it must occur when the child's sense of identity is still vulnerable. In such a case, before the child is objectively able to understand his dilemma, fear and guilt have become a part of his sensibility, his way of seeing and his way of life. (6)

"Child on Top of a Greenhouse" is one such poem dealing with the theme of guilt. Written in free verse and from the vantage point of a child, this poem is about a small child climbing up a high place which is seemingly the roof of a greenhouse. The act of climbing or reaching a high point symbolizes growing up and attaining recognition or a kind of self-awareness, with "everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!" It is clear that the poem examines the sense of guilt in growing up as the "half-grown chrysanthemums" look at the child "like accusers."

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,
My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,

Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,
A few white clouds all rushing eastward,
A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,
And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting. (41)

Sexual guilt is another theme explored in Roethke's poetry. In the poem "Moss Gathering" the poet narrates a boyhood experience. The poet, as a child, used to work for his florist father and go to the woods to pick out moss that was used in marking the cemetery baskets. On his way back from moss gathering, the poet feels constantly guilty now that he remembers moss gathering in the woods as a sensuous and guilt-ridden experience. To confess his guilt, the poet reveals that on his way back home he felt as if he had destroyed the design of the earth by pulling the moss off the nature's face. Jay Parini comments that "[o]nly a poet plagued by guilt feelings could have reacted in this way to an apparently innocent task" (75).

To loosen with all ten fingers held wide and limber
And lift up a patch, dark-green, the kind for lining cemetery baskets,
Thick and cushiony, like an old-fashioned doormat,
The crumbling small hollow sticks on the underside mixed with roots,
And wintergreen berries and leaves still stuck to the top,-
That was moss-gathering.
But something always went out of me when I dug loose those carpets
Of green, or plunged to my elbows in the spongy yellowish moss of the marshes:
And afterwards I always felt mean, jogging back over the logging road,
As if I had broken the natural order of things in that swampland;
Disturbed some rhythm, old and of vast importance,
By pulling off flesh from the living planet;
As if I had committed, against the whole scheme of life, a desecration. (38)

Karl Malkoff argues that the sense of guilt after moss gathering is caused by poet's masturbation in the woods: "The 'gathering' itself takes place in a landscape with

clearly sexual overtones; it is followed by a feeling of guilt at the onanistic action" (53). According to Peter Balakian, the poet feels guilty because he thinks he corrupted the nature: ". . . there is a suggestion of rape, of violating the womb stuff from which the poet came" (56). The persona or the child feels that moss gathering is a sensuous experience. While the nature symbolizes innocence, the persona is a fallen man owing to his onanistic action in the woods. Balakian writes, "The pun on 'pulling off flesh' suggests an adolescent's guilt ridden experience of unfulfilled sex or masturbation" (57). Breaking the order of nature results in self-awareness, and the protagonist realizes that planet lives in unity and that removing plant from earth destructs that unity and causes the feeling of guilt.

3.2. "My Papa's Waltz:" Complex Vision of Father

The father complex or obsession with feelings for the father is another theme that is widely dwelled upon by confessional poets. Both Sylvia Plath's and Theodore Roethke's fathers were named Otto, and both of their fathers died when they were children. Although Sylvia Plath deemed her dead father as a God-like figure and extremely loved him, she also hated her father, comparing him to devil, vampires, and Nazis in her poems. Likewise, Theodore Roethke had a conflicted view of his father. Even though Theodore Roethke portrayed a father whom he admired, his father was still a cause of terror, violence and hatred. Karl Malkoff emphasizes that Otto Roethke's strength was ". . . a source of both admiration and fear, of comfort and restriction" for his son (3). Descending from a Prussian family, Otto Roethke was the embodiment of authority, order and discipline, symbolizing the father principle as manifested in the lines "Ordnung! Ordnung! /Papa is coming!" (Roethke 54). "Ordnung" is the German word for "order," and "attention" so it is obvious that Roethke chooses this word deliberately to symbolize his father's love of discipline. In his poem titled "Otto," named after his father, the poet, alluding to his father's Prussian roots, describes him as an awfully rough man with a gun:

He was the youngest son of a strange brood,
A Prussian who learned early to be rude
. . . . . .
Once when he saw two poachers on his land,
He drew his rifle over with one hand;
Dry bark flew in their faces from his shot,
He always knew what he was aiming at.
. . . . . (216)

In the glasshouse, however, Otto becomes a symbol of supernatural and mysterious power. To Roethke, Otto, the rough Prussian man, is at the same time a source of life and love as he unyieldingly waters the flowers all night: “Or stand all night watering roses” (Roethke 40). Karl Malkoff argues that the poem “Old Florist” is Roethke’s first poem to represent his father “as a type of God” (54). The poem depicts a florist who is proud of his work and dedicated to his job as he “stand all night watering roses.” The florist embodies divine powers and celestial capability. Obviously, the child is amazed by his father’s ability when he says, “How he could.” The father full of supernatural power could do all the daily jobs such as removing rotten leaves and digging up weeds in the greenhouse without a hint of exhaustion.

That hump of a man bunching chrysanthemums
Or pinching back asters, or planting azaleas,
Tamping and stamping dirt into pots,--
How he could flick and pick
Rotten leaves or yellowy petals,
Or scoop out a weed close to flourishing roots,
Or make the dust buzz with a light spray,
Or drown a bug in one spit of tobacco juice,
Or fan life into wilted sweet-peas with his hat,
Or stand all night watering roses, his feet blue in rubber boots. (40)

The florist is the master of the greenhouse, and he is able to do miraculous things such as giving life to dead creatures: “Or fan life into wilted sweet-peas with his hat.” The father depicted in this poem also has the right of a god to decide the lifespan of a bug: “Or drown a bug in one spit of tobacco juice.” So, the father is the absolute god of the greenhouse with his undeniable power to determine the fate of all the living creatures within the boundaries of his world. In this poem, Roethke portrays his father as a God like figure with an enduring courage and heroism, who is also endowed with extraordinary supernatural powers. Karl Malkoff writes:

> Roethke’s references to his father, no matter what emotional coloring they are given, have one thing in common: they always convey a sense of awesome, godlike power. This is the man who made the flowers grow, a rainbow at his thumb as he held the watering can; this is the man who established law and enforced it. In Roethke’s case, the use of the father as a symbol of God is more than an artificially conceived literary image: it is charged with experience. (3)

Since his father is a complex figure to Roethke, in his poems, he presents his father both as a godlike powerful man and as a domineering person with a dictatorial manner. In the poem “The Gibber,” Roethke reveals that with his father with his bad-tempered and barbarian manners fosters as much fear as to frighten the rocks with his look: “Fear was my father, Father Fear/His look dried even the stones” (Roethke 52). In “My Papa’s Waltz,” Roethke depicts a boy’s relationship with his father through the extended metaphor of waltzing. The poem is written from the point of view of a child, and composed of childhood memories. In the first stanza, the speaker introduces a drunkard father whose breath makes the small boy giddy. The father urges the son to waltz with him. The child is obedient rather than delighted:

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:

Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt. (43)

Describing his hanging "like death," Roethke here introduces a feeling of fear. The dance image symbolizes the relationship between the son and the father. The son explains that dancing was difficult for him, implying that following his father's steps was not easy. Assuming that the dance stands for the boy's relationship with his father, one can easily conclude that living with such a brutal man was not so easy. Since their dancing is clownish and clumsy it causes kitchen utensils fall off the shelf, the mother disapproves the dancing and her frowning face implies that she is dissatisfied with what is going on in the house. On the other hand the word "romp" suggests "fun" "enjoyment" "play" and "sport."

The father and the son seem closer to each other in the third stanza where images of pain are introduced. The father's knuckle is hurt and the son's ear is scratched by his belt's buckle. The child's injury during his dance with his father also implies that the child dances unwillingly. The father's belt buckle bears the implication of violence

since in the past beating children with belts was a common punishment. Dad messes up the kitchen and misses the steps. In the last stanza, the father uses the boy's head as a drum and taps his head with his dirty hands most probably to tell the boy how to step. At the end of the poem, the father image becomes clearer. He is a tough and a rough man who drinks whiskey to an excessive amount and forces his little son to dance with him. In his book *How Does a Poem Mean?* John Ciardi comments:

> Despite its seeming lightness, "My Papa's Waltz" is a poem of terror, all the more terrible because the boy is frightened and hurt by the father, even in play. 'We romped,' the poet says, but the romp is a dizzying succession of painful glimpses; the house is shaking, the mother is frowning, the father's hand is scarred by violence, every misstep in the dance scrapes the father's belt buckle painfully across the boy's ear, and the boy's head is being pounded by that huge, hard palm. It is a romp, but the boy must cling like death until he is finally dumped into bed. (369)

The choice of words in the poem implies an act of violence as the first lines introduce a heavily drunk father, foreshadowing the possibility of violence. In the following lines, the son hangs on his father's shirt because he is afraid of falling. The words 'breath' and 'death' are rhymed to imply a relation between father and fear. Battered knuckle and scraped ear are images of injuries caused by dancing. In spite of the injuries, they go on dancing, or the father goes on dancing and beats the boy's head with his hardened, dirty hands. E. V. Ramakrishnan suggests that "[o]ften in Roethke an image of violence reinforces an act of confession" (55).

As it is obvious in descriptions of the father figure in "Old Florist" and "My Papa's Waltz," Roethke conceived his father both as a violent and a gentle man. E. V. Ramakrishnan states that ". . . these two pictures of his father refuse to merge with each other. His admiration for the efficient florist and his hostility and fear of the domineering father occasion a split in the greenhouse world which always remained for him a bifurcated universe" (35). Rosemary Sullivan argues that Roethke, throughout his

career, had been in search for reconciliation of ". . . his father's harshness and his underlying sensitivity, the violence and the deeper gentleness of the man" (7). In order to reconcile with the father figure, Roethke fancies his father "… as a type of the artist, capable only through violence and the sternest self-discipline of wrenching the chaotic into beauteous form" (7). Therefore, Otto Roethke was portrayed as a violent man who was able to create a charmingly peaceful place and govern it with god-like talents.

3.3. "The Premonition:" Painful Memories

The third characteristic of Theodore Roethke's confessional poetry is revelation of painful recollections of his childhood. Theodore Roethke is a poet of memories, who explored the painful events of his early life using images of concealment. Deep emotional wounds are well-documented in confessional poems. Jay Parini writes in *The Columbia History of American Poetry* that "[a] confessional poem contains a first-person speaker, 'I,' and always seems to refer to a real person in whose actual life real episodes have occurred that cause actual pain, all represented in the poem" (636). "The Premonition" is one such confessional poem, in which Roethke depicts his insurmountably painful remembrance of his father's death and the greenhouse world.

Walking this field I remember
Days of another summer.
Oh that was long ago! I kept
Close to the heels of my father,
Matching his stride with half-steps
Until we came to a river.
He dipped his hand in the shallow:
Water ran over and under
Hair on a narrow wrist bone;
His image kept following after, -
Flashed with the sun in the ripple.

But when he stood up, that face
Was lost in a maze of water. (6)

The poem is a childhood recollection of the poet's early life for he remembers walking by the riverbank with his father. The speaker of the poem turns back to a place where he had been with his father years ago. Using the flashback technique, the poet constructs a poem out of the memories of his father's death. "The Premonition" is written in irregular rhyme scheme based on slant and feminine rhymes due to the fact that Roethke intended a simplification of narration and rhythmic techniques in order to achieve frankness and exposure of emotions. When his father died of cancer in the Spring of 1923, Roethke was not even 15. This led him to write over and over again about his father's death throughout his poetic career. Don Bogen, in the introduction to his book *Theodore Roethke and the Writing Process,* states that

> . . . these 'events of life' do not illuminate Roethke's work or even appear much in the poems. Rather, Roethke's poetry reveals certain focal points in his past, most importantly his father, the greenhouse the father owned and managed, and the father's death in 1923 when Roethke was fourteen. (3)

Shortly after his father's death, in a paper written for the Rhetoric class Theodore Roethke wrote of his father's death as follows: ". . . my father became very ill. Doctors couldn't understand the nature of his disease. They pronounced his constitution perfect. Then Uncle Charlie shot himself. Three months later my father died-of a 'kink in the bowels,' the doctors said" (Seagar 41). The face "lost in a maze of water" symbolizes father's death and as Sullivan notes the poem centers on that single image. Allan Seager contends that "The Premonition" is one of the most outstanding poems of the book because Roethke used a few adjectives to express himself:

> . . . the frank reminiscence, the utter naturalness and simplicity of the language, the subtle use of terminal assonance (especially of the 'er'

> sound), in place of formal rhyme; the shimmer of implication in place of the hard conceit; the evocation of a mystery instead of the sharp precision of idea. (129)

To sum up, Theodore Roethke's poems analyzed in this chapter are confessional in theme with regard to their focus on bare exposure of emotions like pain, grief, and guilt, to their extreme preoccupation with the feelings of love and hate for the father as well as detailed descriptions of early memories. In the first poem, "Open House," the poet proclaims sincerely that he is prepared to uncover his deep seated feelings and secrets since his house is wide open. "Child on Top of a Greenhouse" reveals a child's sense of guilt in growing, while "Moss Gathering" is a confession of sexual guilt as moss gathering implies an onanistic action. The poet discloses his perplexed feelings towards his father in the poems of "My Papa's Waltz" and "Old Florist." Through the extended metaphor of waltzing, the poet portrays his father as a violent and drunkard man, and confesses his feelings of fear, while in the poem "Old Florist" the father is characterized as a god-like figure that amazes the little child with his ability to master the greenhouse. In "The Premonition" painful memories of early life are depicted; the face "lost in a maze of water" refers to Roethke's loss of his father when he was only 14. Shortly, Theodore Roethke, as a confessional poet uses self as the primary source of his creativity and art by starting a journey out of the self into his interior world.

4. ROMANTIC ASPECTS

> *Roethke rarely ventured into abstraction . . .*
> *He remained an introspective voyager, questing after personal salvation. In this sense, too, he is consummately Romantic.*
>
> Jay Parini, *Theodore Roethke: An American Romantic*

Roethke's work is replete with distinctive traits of the Romantic tradition. Although the word "Romantic" is derived from the old French word *romanz,* and the medieval *romance* or *romaunt* connoted chivalric stories of quest, during the romantic period between 1790 and 1830, the poets centered their works on the beauty of nature, imagination, creativity and individual experience. Nonetheless, in the age of postmodernism the question is: Is Romanticism dead or alive? The critics agree that the influence of Romanticism on the movements of the twentieth century such as abstract expressionism and surrealism is still evident. Duncan Heath states that "Romanticism may have expired on the barricades of the 1848 revolution, but its spirit continues to haunt us . . . Romanticism is still an unfinished chapter in America (171-2) and Theodore Roethke is considered to be one of the Romantic poets in the "unfinished chapter" of Romanticism.

Theodore Roethke's poetry manifests aspects of the Romantic tradition of Waldo Emerson and William Wordsworth. Jay Parini and Jenijoy La Belle delineate two different perspectives for the Romantic features of Roethke's poetry: Parini in *Theodore Roethke: an American Romantic* traces Roethke's Romantic sources back to the tradition of Emerson and declares Roethke to be the twentieth-century representative of American Romanticism. On the other hand, La Belle phrases that the Romantic poet William Wordsworth had the greatest impact on Roethke's Romantic poems. La Belle points out various similarities between the works of William Wordsworth and those of Theodore Roethke claiming that deep examination of their art reveals that Roethke

derives titles, symbols and images from Wordsworth's Book I of *The Prelude*. According to Parini:

> Roethke must be seen as the central American Romantic poet of the generation that includes Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Karl Shapiro, Richard Eberhart, and John Crowe Ransom. He is the celebrant of a uniquely American nature, a Romantic descended from Blake, Wordsworth, and Yeats, but one whose language is idiomatically American and whose meaning derives from the Emersonian tradition. (15)

According to La Belle, however; "One of the most ignored yet most important components of the tradition that Roethke in effect created for himself is the poetry of William Wordsworth" (24). The most striking parallelism appears in the greenhouse poems and "The Lost Son" sequence. La Belle mentions the correspondences between Roethke's greenhouse world and Wordsworth's Lake District. Likewise, John Wain argues that "The greenhouse occupies the same place in Roethke's poetic evolution as the hills and dales of the Lake District do in Wordsworth's" (qtd. in La Belle 24). As Wordsworth took images of hills and daffodils from Lake District, similarly, the greenhouse functioned as an eminent source of natural imagery for Roethke ". . . in their childhoods both poets had profoundly intense and memorable experiences in nature . . ." writes La Belle (43) and further explains:

> . . . close attention to underlying parallels between Roethke and Wordsworth can reveal that Wordsworth's poems written about the hills and dales of the Lake District helped Roethke to develop the appropriate language for his own poems on man's response to nature. (24)

The doctrine of reconciliations manifested in the greenhouse poems and the theme of odyssey towards home as a regressive journey in the "Lost Son" sequence are the main Romantic aspects of Theodore Roethke's poetry. Although many critics point

out that Roethke's poetry is loaded with references to works of Walt Whitman, William Blake and W. B. Yeats, Theodore Roethke belongs to the Romantic tradition of Wordsworth and Emerson. Roethke adopted the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites from Emerson, while he took over the heroic pattern of quest from William Wordsworth.

4.1. "Root Cellar:" Reconciliation of Opposites

> *I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.*
>
> Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

Reconciliation of opposites is an aesthetic principle fundamental to the Romantic tradition of poetry. The principle states that differences or contrary ideas are reconciled into a higher synthesis. The poet, using the power of imagination, reconciles differences raising them to a greater and larger concept. This formula creates unity out of diversity. According to Samuel Coleridge, beauty springs from this dualism. In doing so, the artist reconstitutes reality and the physical appearance of images. Quoting from William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* Roethke wrote in his notebooks, "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence" (17). He also jotted in his notebooks that "[a] great deal of art arises out of opposition" (Roethke 24). The greenhouse poems of Roethke comprise opposing ideas, images, and symbols derived from observations of the natural world. Roethke calls the greenhouse a "hell and heaven at once, this womb of cypress and double glass."(qtd. in Balakian 51)

Frank Kermode in *Romantic Image* declares that romantic poetry is based on romantic imagery, and describes the image as a "radiant truth out of space and time" (4). Theodore Roethke's poetry applies to this theory and manifests the importance of imagination. In his teaching notes Roethke advocates that "[t]he Romantic image often

attempted to approximate or suggest the quality of the thing itself" and adds that the image is "a unification of disparate ideas and emotions, a complex presented spatially in time" (qtd. in Parini 35). Nevertheless, as Ralph Waldo Emerson acknowledges in his essay "The Poet," the image created by the Romantic poet should not be inert or passive. Emerson argues that ". . . the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze" (136). Romantic thought of imagination is developed on the unity of polar opposites. As Jay Parini notes:

> . . . this leads us naturally to the mysterious Romantic concept of imagination, the faculty that resolves disparate ideas and emotions into the magical unity of an image . . . art involves a 'reconciliation of opposites' is central to Romantic theory; contrary elements must be passed through the crucible of imagination for the image to become a unifying agent. (35)

Platonic Idealism or Hegelian rationalism, fundamentally the search for oneness, is converted into Emersonian Romanticism in America. American transcendentalism deduced the unifying apprehension in the self of the individual. According to Emerson, the most important knowledge is that of self and being. Contrary to one-sided prospects of Lockean rationalism, Emerson fostered the philosophy of "double consciousness," "axial line," "golden mean" and "higher synthesis" (qtd. in Quayum 13). In his article "Fate," Emerson defined himself precisely as a "believer in Unity, a seer in Unity:"

> One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom, and knowledge, exists, the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one, and the other foot on the back of the other. … Let us build altars to the Blessed Unity which holds nature and

> souls in perfect solution, and compels every atom to serve a universal end. (49)

Emerson's philosophy of unity could be summarized with its three major principles. Firstly, nature and human beings are a combination of two polar opposites of the universe. The individual has to discover "the middle region," "the temperate zone," and "the mid-world" for the purpose of restraining unity between body and soul (24). Secondly, the man has to search for alliance of other features of life such as reason and emotion, intellect and love, self and the society. Lastly, the individual shall be able to reconcile opposite laws of finitude and infinitude, mortality and immortality, particularity and universality.

Theodore Roethke's *The Lost Son and Other Poems* represents Emerson's concept of reconciliation of opposites and unity. The first section of the book consists of thirteen flower poems called the "Greenhouse Poems" since they are built on the same metaphor, the greenhouse. As argued by the critics, the most prominent poetic change in the "Greenhouse Poems" is the release from consciousness. In *Theodore Roethke's Far Fields: The Evolution of His Poetry*, Balakian remarks, "[g]reenhouse poems can be seen as spiritual autobiography, for Roethke weaves together aspects of his childhood, family life, and sexuality with the progress of his soul" (47). Therefore, Roethke's achievement becomes something more than personal and differs from the personal expressions of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, or Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. The pre-Freudian idea of monophonic self is dismantled as the self is constructed as an experience between the conscious and unconscious. In this sense, Borja Aguilo Obrador comments:

> [t]he poem grows and acquires an organic shape that is not framed by any external formalization but by an internal rendering of the disintegrated and scattered memories of past. The dynamic and mysterious world of plants, flowers, growth and decay, which spring from the poet's childhood recollections of his father's greenhouse, is distilled into a

> concise poetic discourse that explores the depths of a self that has been deprived of its individual and rational limitations and plunged into the realms of the unconscious. (168)

These poems are based upon the poet's childhood experiences spent in his father's greenhouse in Saginaw, Michigan. According to Sullivan, greenhouse poems can be divided into three different parts: "(1) the eye close on the struggle into growth; (2) the world outside the greenhouse; (3) the desire for change, transplantation, transcendence of the greenhouse world" (26). Karl Malkoff phrases that Roethke decided to create a sequence of poems about this green land because

> . . . as the scene of his childhood, it was a world highly charged with experience and significance. It was, as we have seen, both fertile womb and rigid principle of order imposed upon chaos, both heaven and hell; it was nature and society, mother and father. It was all of life. (50)

The Greenhouse Poems epitomize childhood experiences of the poet: first five are about birth, the following three are about awareness of sexuality, the next three deal with the felicity of the greenhouse while the last three poems handle the terrors of childhood and growing up. These poems reveal a specialized knowledge of plant world. Otto Roethke's gardens were the biggest and the most famous floricultural places in Michigan. The greenhouse was both a work and play area for Roethke. As a child, Roethke would do some work in the greenhouse like gathering moss, pulling weed and playing in the world of worms, roses, and moles. Kenneth Burke in his article "The Vegetal Radicalism of Theodore Roethke" keenly asks:

> [i]n particular, what is a greenhouse? What might we expect it to stand for? It is not sheer nature, like a jungle; nor even regulated nature, like a formal garden. What, roughly, then is the range of meaning in Roethke's flowers? In part they are a kind of psychology, an empathic vocabulary

> for expressing rudimentary motives felt, rightly or wrongly, to transcend particular periods of time. (19)

The Greenhouse Sequence of the second book narrates the observations from the plant life. To arouse the rhythm of the organic life, the poet utilizes the techniques of ". . . assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, and spondaic stress patterns . . . , disruption of the iambic line with strong stress and sprung rhythms" (Kalaidjian 41). Kalaidjian also adds that Roethke's main purpose in applying a variety of techniques is to "invoke and mime the spontaneous, organic life he finds in nature" (42). Realizing the significance of Greenhouse poems for the American poetry, Randall Stiffler mentions that these poems go beyond the limits of American poetry as the Greenhouse poems ". . . open new territory for poetry for no one before him had entered the life of the minimal world with such authenticity . . ." (39).

While John Ciardi indicates the importance of the greenhouse in Roethke's life as a "symbol for the whole of life, a womb, a heaven-on-earth" (69), Jay Parini in *Theodore Roethke: An American Romantic* calls attention to the "jungle aspect of Roethke's paradise" as he explicitly mentions that it "cannot be avoided" (9). In a 1953 BBC broadcast *An American Poet Introduces Himself and His Poems*, Roethke asserted that "[t]hey 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." Obviously, this sacred place of his childhood was neither a place of distress nor pure enjoyment; it was a unique fusion of both. Randall Stiffler notes "The poems alternate between emphasis on the two aspects of Roethke's Greenhouse world, its heaven and its hell" (40). In *The Garden and the Map* John Vernon writes:

> [t]he garden is not total mergence and confusion, a scrambling of all things and all objects together, but unites mergence and separation, unity and multiplicity. This is why the garden in Roethke's world is often a

> greenhouse, the meeting place of the human and nonhuman, the organic and the rational, the natural and the artificial. (160)

In "Texture and Form in Theodore Roethke's Greenhouse Poems," John D. Boyd sums up the binary oppositions underlying Greenhouse poems as "static versus the dynamic, active versus passive, stillness versus movement, struggle versus surrender, and life versus death" (44). Also E. V. Ramakrishnan in *Crisis and Confession* draws attention to the structure of Roethke's greenhouse poems: ". . . Roethke's poetry is born out of inherent contrast between the images of closed space like cave, pit, mouth, wound, jug, shelves, etc. and those of open space such as field, light, waters, sea" (80). Jay Parini elucidates the idea behind these contending opposites arguing that:

> [t]ension-the vital element in all art-arises out of conflict, and in Romantic theory the function of imagination is to affect a proper balance or reconciliation of opposites. The greenhouse literally provides just the right contrarieties: light against darkness, order against chaos, life against death. (70)

The underground world of plant life provides the artist with opposing images which he uses in the poem "Root Cellar" to depict the plant life of the greenhouse by arranging them in a conflict of opposites. These oppositions evince the dynamism of plant life. In the symbolism of greenhouse poems two contradictory images, through the endowment of imagination, are fused into a third one to accomplish unity. The significance of the third image lies in its continuum or energy can be acquired in botanical organism by the poet. Parini writes that "contrary elements must be passed through the crucible of imagination for the image to become a unifying agent" (35) and Roethke was lucky to inherit this potent symbol from his childhood in Michigan. In the poem "Root Cellar," Roethke reconciles images of life and death. The poem starts with the lines "Nothing would sleep," but ends with "Nothing would give up life." In this

dark cellar, which is an unpleasant somber place, bulbs break their boxes, shoots dangle, and snakes hang down showing their stubbornness and desire to survive.

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath. (36)

From the very beginning to the end of the poem, Roethke uses the alliteration of the letter “d” to strengthen upon the “dark” and “dank” atmosphere of the cellar in the minds of the readers. The focal point of attention is centered on the words starting with the letter “d” due to their high frequency in the poem. In addition to the use of alliteration, Roethke compares the cellar to other dark and gloomy images using various metaphors and similes. He says that this place is “dank as a ditch.” Conversely, by using the alliteration of the letter “b” the poet illustrates the life flourishing in the cellar. The poet presents that “bulbs broke out of boxes and hunting for chinks in the dark.” In order to survive, the bulbs hunt for a ray of light through a hole in deep darkness. They strive for life. In the last line Roethke writes, “dirt kept breathing,” affirming the victory of life and light over death and darkness.

In “Root Cellar” the tone, figurative language and imagery are all mobilized to evoke feelings of horror. The choice of words with negative connotations such as “dank,” “mildewed” “evil” “snake” create the tone of the poem. Dynamic descriptions carry the reader down into the root cellar. Since the root cellar is the darkest, dampest

part of the greenhouse, going down into the cellar is like falling into a bottomless black hole. However, this violent pit is at the same time a place of endurance and survival: "Nothing would give up life/Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath." The roots, crops, bulbs and shoots struggle to survive and give birth to new generations of plants. The unyielding itch for life is frightening for Roethke because this is a "severed, disjointed, voracious growth, a chaos of aimless and bewildering multiplicity" (Sullivan 27). The most striking point of this poem written without meter and rhyme scheme is the excessive use of visual and sensuous imagery.

4.2. "The Lost Son:" Regressive Journey

The theme of regressive journey towards home is central to Theodore Roethke's Romantic poetry. Jay Parini mentions that ". . . the journey toward home, the hero's necessary pilgrimage . . . the odyssey . . ." is ". . . the prototype of this genre, and one thing that never changes is the bereft condition of the traveler" (10). In *Symbolic Regression Psychology,* Paul D. Fairweather contends that "[t]o regress" means "to walk back" or "to retrace one's step." Therefore, regression indicates a process of "backsliding to the earliest state of human nature . . ." (41). In Theodore Roethke's poetry, introspective voyage symbolizes the quest for childhood paradise. In other words, regression is a struggle to be reborn. The theme of regressive journey towards home is evident in the book *The Lost Son and Other Poems,* published in 1948. The "Lost Son" poems were written after Roethke's second mental breakdown and hospitalization in December 1945. In order to relieve his inner conflicts, the poet starts a journey through the depths of his past. Returning to the greenhouse world of his childhood, the poet goes through a vital change which enables him to express a more contradictory identity by means of a more visionary and symbolic language. The sequence includes elements of subjective history reflecting the poet's search for personal fulfillment. The lost son's journey is meant to explore his past, and hence it is a spiritual autobiography. The protagonist in the "Lost Son" sequence travels to the unconscious mind, and recalls past events to restore unity in his present life. Ralph J Mills states that the "Lost Son" poems are a "sequence of interior monologues which

record the poet's odyssey through subterranean regions of psyche, a spiritual journey that remains one of the boldest experiments in modern American poetry" (11).

Borja Aguilo Obrador states that in the "Lost Son" sequence, "Roethke goes back to the traumatic world of his childhood, and thus undergoes a process of regression that has often been identified with the Romantic quest for the past and for that reason it has been related to psychoanalytic techniques, which are also directed to the recovery of the individual's past (171). John Vernon asserts in *The Garden and the Map* that Roethke's poetry comprises three kinds of regressions that are integrated: "In Roethke's sequence the human body often regresses to its polymorphous wholeness, its being as a blob, to the womb, just as the world often regresses into a confusion of all its objects together, into slime, and just as language often regresses into nonsense and playing with sounds" (162). Influenced by Kierkegaard's philosophy of life, Roethke, in 1944 jotted in his notebook: "Life can only be understood backwards; but it can only be lived forwards" (qtd. in Parini 60). Roethke also quoted "I go back because I want to go forward" because "[t]he introspective voyager to be reborn must descent into past." In his essay "Open Letter" Roethke reviews the "The Lost Son" by giving an overall description of his method:

> [t]his crude account tells very little about what actually happens in the poem; but at least you can see that the method is cyclic. I believe that to go forward as a spiritual man it is necessary first to go back. Any history of the psyche (or allegorical journey) is bound to be a succession of experiences, similar yet dissimilar. There is a perpetual slipping-back, then a going-forward; but there is some 'progress.' (qtd. in Ciardi 69)

In these poems, Roethke manifests his struggle between his desires and spiritual inclinations, and hence denominates these poems as "records of miseries." Roethke sent an earlier version of the "Lost Son" to William Carlos Williams, and noted that "It's written, as you'll see right away for the ear and not the eye. It's written to be heard. And if you don't think it's got the accent of Native American speech, your name ain't W.C.

Williams, I say belligerently" (*Selected Letters*). In "Open Letter," Roethke guides the reader how to read his "Lost Son" poems:

> [b]ut believe me: you will have no trouble if you approach these poems as a child would, naively, with your whole being awake, your faculties loose and alert. *Listen* to them, for they are written to be heard, with the themes often coming alternately, as in music, and usually a partial resolution at the end. Each poem . . . is in a sense is a stage in a kind of struggle out of the slime; part of a spiritual progress; an effort to be born, and later, to become something more. (qtd. in Ciardi 68)

Each poem in the sequence, Richard Allen Blessing writes, "… is complete in itself in that in each of them the lost son grows, changes, or develops in some way. But the changing is never completed, and each poem ends with an implied beginning, with the sense that one is forever on the edge of something more" (106). Referring to the five pieces in "The Lost Son" sequence, Robert E. Doud interprets the work in five phases. According to Doud, the first one is the flight phase and it is "a phase of chaos and risk" (46). The second one, the recovery phase, is a stage of order presented by the affectionate love of parents. The third phase is "a moment of recognition" after an experience of regression during a spiritual journey. The journey brings him to the "original placid place, the point of departure" (Doud 47).

The structure of the "Lost Son" poems resembles to William Wordsworth*'s The Prelude.* Both Theodore Roethke's *The Lost Son and Other Poems* and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* are recollections of childhood memories. Both poets' quest for self start in their boyhood; they delve into their memories about nature: Roethke in the greenhouse of his father in Michigan, Wordsworth in the English countryside. La Belle specifies dramatic similarities between Roethke's "Moss Gathering" and Wordsworth's "Nutting" explaining that "[b]oth poets, writing in the first person, describe a distinct, private event in their boyhoods. The arrangement of the episodes is the same: the child goes alone into the woods to gather some plant, destroys 'the natural

order of things,' and suffers for his act of destruction" (25). The first section, "The Flight," opens with an autobiographical remark: "[A]t Woodlawn I heard the dead cry." Woodlawn is a remembered place, where Otto Roethke is buried. In his essay "Open Letter," Roethke resembles this section to a "terrified running away" (qtd. in Ciardi 68).

At Woodlawn I heard the dead cry:
I was lulled by the slamming of iron,
A slow drip over stones,
Toads brooding wells.
All the leaves stuck out their tongues;
I shook the softening chalk of my bones,
Saying,
Snail, snail, glister me forward,
Bird, soft-sigh me home,
Worm, be with me.
This is my hard time.

Fished in an old wound,
The soft pond of repose;
Nothing nibbled my line,
Not even the minnows came.

Sat in an empty house
Watching shadows crawl,
Scratching.
There was one fly.

Voice, come out of the silence.
Say something.
Appear in the form of a spider
Or a moth beating the curtain. (50)

In the first section of the sequence, feelings of lifelessness, boredom, and abandonment prevail. Roethke sets the central symbol of the house in this section. Alone and longing for companion, the speaker is in the abandoned house watching the shadows of a fly. Lynn Ross Bryant comments that "there is an attempt to forget the quest for self" (47); however, an unexpected voice breaks the silence and the speaker eventually receives a reply from the small creatures of nature. He is miserable because he feels the chaos of this room. Apparently, the room is dirty and messy as a metaphor for the blurred and disorderly mind of the poet. The persona feeling lost and desperate asks for guidance: "Tell me: Which is the way I take."

. . . . . .

Tell me:
Which is the way I take;
Out of what door do I go,
Where and to whom?

Dark hollows said, lee to the wind,
The moon said, back of an eel,
The salt said, look by the sea,
Your tears are not enough praise,
You will find no comfort here,
In the kingdom of bang and blab.

. . . . . (51)

"The Pit" is the second section of the "Lost Son" sequence, and according to Roethke, it is a "slowed down section; a period of physical and psychic exhaustion" (68). With this poem the mood of the sequence gets much darker as the roots, the stones, the moss and the mole delve deeply into the dark pit which is a terrifying and fearful place. The poet seeks for the origins of life asking; "Where do the roots go?" He finds the answer to his question in the imprisoning womb of nature: "I feel the slime of a wet nest." However, the womb of Mother Nature is not a safe place for the womb is a

pit, a large hole in the ground. The search for roots brings the persona to a more dangerous place, into a large hole, and if he fails to drag himself out of this place, he may not recoil from danger. In “The Lost Son” sequence, Roethke frequently uses words such as “sleek,” “slime,” “slither,” “slept,” “slippery,” images denoting moisture and wetness. The regressive journey to infancy is represented by imagery of womb as the poet uses symbols of holes such as “wells,” “pond,” “bog holes,” “lake,” and “pit.”

Where do the roots go?
Look down under the leaves.
Who put the moss there?
These stones have been here too long.
Who stunned the dirt into noise?
Ask the mole, he knows.
I feel the slime of a wet nest.
Beware Mother Mildew.
Nibble again, fish nerves. (52)

The third section of the sequence is “The Gibber.” The womblike surrounding is still prevalent in this section. Harry Williams calls attention to one meaning of gibber and explains that it means “bulb or swelling at the bottom of the calyx, corolla, and the like” (qtd. in Lyn Ross 50). This time the persona stands in front of a cave and faces the danger of being swallowed. All nature denies him: “The sun was against me/The moon would not have me/The cows and briars/Said to me: Die.”

At the wood's mouth,
By the cave's door,
I listened to something
I had heard before.

Dogs of the groin
Barked and howled,

The sun was against me,
The moon would not have me.

The weeds whined,
The snakes cried,
The cows and briars
Said to me: Die.
. . . . . (52)

In the fourth section, "The Return," Roethke uses the image of homecoming as the child harks back to the world of greenhouse, where he can enjoy security and unity. The protagonist has recovered from the chaotic nature of the womb; rebirth is achieved as the poet comes out of the pit to the greenhouse, in other words, the author has journeyed from the unconscious to the conscious. The words connoting insanity, hysteria and mania also disappear as the language rises to a level of rationality and a state of consciousness. After prolonged darkness, the roses now show signs of life and turn to light. Lynn Ross Bryant contends that ". . . the roses are the flowers he focuses on here-roses which in his poetry are a symbol for the fulfillment of nature . . ." (54).

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

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. (54)

The title of the sequence, “The Lost Son,” has a dual meaning for it refers both to a child and an adult. The child leaving behind his parents wanders staggering in the world and strives to construct his own identity. Meanwhile, the adult feeling lost searches for personal fulfillment and recovery. In his article “The Long Poem: Praise to the End” Peter Balakian writes:

> [i]n creating the persona of the lost son; Roethke taps one of the most poignant archetypes in Western literature. For his lost son, as for those other lost sons of our literature, from Oedipus to Hamlet . . . the life journey in search of a father becomes a quest for selfhood and ultimate truth . . . the lost son’s journey is a kind of pilgrimage involving passage through the traumas of various stages of the life cycle . . . (66).

As for the stylistics of the sequence, Richard Allen Blessing writes that “[t]he characteristic rhetorical devices of the sequence-the command, the question, the aphorism, the proverb or adage-serve to achieve heighten intensity, to quicken the pulse rate of the poem and to achieve something like that ‘madman’s hidden insight and … child’s spiritual dignity that Roethke was after” (101). Although the language of the sequence is simple and direct, shifts in mood and rhythm are recurrently used to describe the flow of ideas in the unconscious mind. As Roethke uses open-ended symbols in this sequence, it gets more difficult to interpret the poems. Roethke likened decoding the difficult language of the “Lost Son” sequence to fishing “in that dark pond, the unconscious or diving into it with or without pants on, to come up festooned with dead cats, weeds, tin cans and other fascinating debris (qtd. in Bowers 95). Delving into his personal memories and the unconscious, Roethke dips out symbols and words with twofold meanings, providing no guidance for the interpretation of these challenging poems. As he states in his essay “Open Letter” he explains “. . . the clues will be scattered richly-as life scatters them; the symbols will mean what they usually mean-and sometimes something more” (qtd. in Ciardi 32). As a poet, Roethke chooses his words cautiously and arranges them skillfully, leaving the analysis to the reader.

Richard Blessing writes of Roethke's world as "totally metaphorical" where "all the words hum with many meanings" (96).

In conclusion, Theodore Roethke is noted as the twentieth-century representative of American Romanticism for his works include Emerson' and Wordsworth's romantic aspects. Roethke follows Emersonian tradition by employing the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites, and that of Wordsworth by utilizing the theme of odyssey towards home. Both themes are clearly manifested in the second book *The Lost Son and Other Poems:* reconciliation of opposites surfaces in the greenhouse poems, and the theme of quest in the "Lost Son" sequence. Greenhouse poems carry a dual meaning as they signify both a dreamland and infernal regions, representing unity of opposites. The poem "Root Cellar" is an illustration of the theme of unity in its combined images of life and death. The theme of regressive journey also marks Roethke as a Romantic poet. In the "Lost Son" poems, Roethke presents himself as a lost son, who starts his journey towards past. In the first poem, the poet delves into his childhood memories, regresses to his home, infancy and finally to the womb. At the end, recovering from the turbulent nature of the poem, the poet achieves rebirth and reconstructs his identity.

5. METAPHYSICAL ASPECTS

And everything comes to One,
As we dance on, dance on, dance on.

Roethke, “Once More, The Round”

Metaphysical poetry, which is characterized by the use of complicated conceits, wit, irony and wordplay, is involved with life, love, death, and man’s relationship to God. Colloquial language, irregular rhyme schemes and meter are the distinctive characteristics of metaphysical poems. Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Cowley* particularizes the prominent features of metaphysical poetry as “. . . violent combinations of dissimilar images, obscure allusions and comparisons, hyperbole, and far-fetched conceits” (qtd. in Bernard 5). In his essay “What Is Metaphysical Poetry?” W. Bradford Smith explains that “[m]etaphysical poetry now, as in the past, is amply discussed and only vaguely defined. From Drummond to Dryden, and from Johnson to T. S. Eliot it has been variously mentioned, but never distinguished clearly from the rest of our poetical literature” (261). Samuel Johnson coined the term “metaphysical poets” in his 1781 book *The Lives of the Poets*, attributing it to a group of British poets who employed far-fetched images and embellished conceits. Amar Nath Dwivedi defines metaphysical poetry as (1) expression of novel thought through the use of analogy and anomaly, (2) unification of sensibility, (3) affectation and hyperbole, (4) obscurity, (5) profound learning and (6) farfetched comparisons and the use of ‘conceit’ (60). However, in 1926 Eliot reused the term, including a diverse group of poets from Dante to Laforgue. In his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” T.S. Eliot argues that:

> . . . not only it is extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry, but difficult to decide what poets practice it and in which of their verses . . . It is difficult to use any precise use of metaphor, simile, or other conceit, which is common to all the poets and at the same time important enough as an element of style to isolate these poets as a group. (24)

Although written as a review of J. G. Grierson's book, T. S. Eliot's influential essay "The Metaphysical Poets" became after its publication one of the most important documents of the modern age as it inspired the reexamination of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets and aroused an interest in metaphysical poems that had been ignored and disregarded for a long time. Roethke was one of those modern poets who wrote ". . . in the tradition of witty, strong-lined poetry established by John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and other seventeenth century English poets" (Malkoff 18). In his review of *Open House*, John Holmes commented that the book had remarkable metaphysical aspects and added that the poems were marked by ". . . the purest of metaphysical wit, something very rare in our time . . ." (qtd. in Malkoff 23). So, after the publication of his first book Roethke was soon recognized as one of those poets inspired by the rebirth of metaphysical poetry.

It is quite difficult to determine the distinctions between metaphysical and non-metaphysical poems of Roethke because of the fact that some are metaphysical in theme and some are in style and technique. In spite of this confusion, it can be clearly stated that Roethke employs metaphysical elements and themes like the tension between the soul and the body, the nature of God and being in his early work *Open Ho*use. Nevertheless, the poet wrote his most remarkable metaphysical poems in his last book *The Far Fi*eld. "The poetry of Theodore Roethke begins, as it ends, with the metaphysical" comments Karl Malkoff in his book *Theodore Roethke* (18). Roethke's interest in metaphysical poetry starts with his early work *Open House* as his first poems are marked by use of the traditional techniques of metaphysical poetry, namely the conceit, wit, paradox, and irony. The metaphysical aspects of Theodore Roethke's poetry are also apparent in his last book *The Far Field*, which was published posthumously. Neal Bowers mentions that *The Far Field* "… represents the last stage of Roethke's mystic quest, the culmination of all his previous struggles" (149). In his last book, being in the awakening phase of his mystic quest preceding his death, the poet is primarily concerned with metaphysical themes.

The Far Field consists of four sections: “North American Sequence,” “Love Poems,” “Mixed Sequence,” and “Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical.” The metered and rhymed poems of “Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical” reflect the nature of relationship with God. Randall Stiffler says that Roethke “… explores the journey of the soul toward God” (158). As reported by Allen Seager, Roethke’s last years were blazed with great happiness and poetic confidence. The impulse for harmony and resolution is clearly apparent in his last poems that are written in a new sense of tranquility. Peter Balakian, in *Theodore Roethke’s Far Fields,* writes that “[i]n these poems Roethke’s persona assumes an affinity with the saint and the mystic. When he is confined in an anonymous, white-walled chamber he becomes monklike, and when he is wandering through the stony paths of an arid wilderness he resembles an ascetic abasing himself before God” (152).

Of the four sections in *The Far Field,* “Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical” is the most important one due to its inclusion of Roethke’s greatest metaphysical poems such as “In a Dark Time” and “In Evening Air.” William Heyen in his article “The Divine Abyss: Theodore Roethke’s Mysticism” writes that Roethke leaned on Evelyn Underhill’s book while writing the poems in the section “Sequence Sometimes Metaphysical.” La Belle points out that the poems in this sequence are the products of the twentieth century metaphysical revival:

> [T]he title Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical directs us toward both a mode of philosophical speculation and a school of seventeenth-century poetry. The content of the poems in this group follows the tradition of philosophy that investigates the essential reality beyond physical appearances; the structure of the poems follows that tradition of poetry which in the twentieth century has been most often characterized as ‘metaphysical.’ (159)

Karl Malkoff explains Roethke’s inclination to write metaphysical poems arguing that “. . . as for his seventeenth century predecessors, poetry was born of the

paradoxical nature of human existence. Like Donne, he was torn by the split between flesh and spirit; like [George] Herbert, he was tormented by the near impossibility of faith; like Vaughan, he sought the eternal in the temporal" (19). John Donne's main concern in his poetry was love, physical love developed into a symbol of spiritual love. In his poetry Herbert wrote about struggle between God and the world. Vaughan went beyond tranquility of the soul and delved for sovereignty. Shortly, the ultimate concern of these poets was the connection of man to the spiritual world.

5.1. "In a Dark Time:" The Illumination

The primary metaphysical theme in Theodore Roethke's poetry is the relationship of man to God. Metaphysicians aspire to examine the existence of God and the free will of man. They believe that there is a higher reality so the mystic's sole desire is to attain the level of a higher truth. As Neal Bowers comments, Roethke aims to reach the ultimate reality believing that ". . . there is something more than the reality that is normally perceived" (23). In *Theodore Roethke the Journey from I to Otherwise,* Neal Bowers denotes that ". . . the mystic's final goal is knowledge of and union with God, ultimate reality, or the One" (21). According to some critics, particularly to William Heyen and Jay Parini, Roethke used Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism,* which he read several times, as the backbone of his poems in *The Far Field*, thereupon Underhill's work stands out as a guide to understand Roethke's poetry better. Underhill writes that mysticism advances from two basic presumptions: "(1) that there is a higher truth or reality and (2) that one can know that truth or reality by bringing himself into a proper relation with it" (qtd. in Bowers 24). Underhill entitles the process of accomplishing reality as the Mystic Way and formalizes it in five stages: "(1) awakening, (2) purgation, (3) illumination, (4) dark night of the soul, and (5) union" (qtd. in Bowers 24).

The awakening is the first discernment that helps the individual to become conscious of a grand truth. In purgation, the individual experiences a process of "pain and effort." The man conceives that there is a higher truth and longs for reaching that

truth; however, he recognizes his own faults and weaknesses. During this period, the man struggles to reduce the strength of the body and heighten the spirit. The illumination is a time of light, and the reality which was experienced in the awakening discloses itself entirely. As the hidden meaning of the universe is uncovered, illumination becomes a period of great happiness, but he still has a pretty long way to travel. After experiencing illumination and perceiving the truth of the universe, the mystic is thrown into darkness in the dark night of the soul. In the final phase, the mystic reaches the final destination of his journey. As Neal Bowers says in this final stage "[the mystic] and the transcendent reality are one" (29), so the unity is achieved. Underhill's five stages of the mystic way are crucially important to understand Roethke's later poetry.

The poem "In a Dark Time" from the "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical" illustrates a mystical experience in parallel with Underhill's five-stage mystic way. Roethke wrote about the poem that it is a wish ". . . to break bondage of self, from the barriers of the 'real' world, to come as close to God as possible" (qtd. in Malkoff 152). Neal Bowers also mentions that ". . . all five of Underhill's stages of the Mystic Way are contained within this one dark night" (182). Each stanza represents a different phase of the spiritual progress of the mystic. The poem opens in a time of darkness, in the second stanza the misery deepens, in the third one light comes with the storm and "A man goes far to find out what he is," in the last stanza the persona reaching the higher truth approaches unity. Therefore, in this single poem the narrator firstly encounters the anguish of the dark night and then the delight of union. Thus, the poet inspects the dilemma of self and soul by playing with the words "darkness" and "light" throughout the poem.

The mystical evolution starts in the first stanza: the narrator is in the physical world where he is able to see his shadow and hear his voice. In the second stanza, the road takes the narrator to the cave where his shadow and body are split. The shadow remains "pinned against a sweating wall," while the body approaches the edge. The body or the self dies in the third stanza: "Death of the self in a long, tearless night." In

the end, the persona reaches the state of unity, and affirms that "one is One." The first stanza represents the awakening stage as it opens with the line "In a dark time, the eye begins to see," introducing the dramatic paradox of "seeing in darkness." In the first line, the poet, using the technique of personification, highlights a moment of epiphany. This moment of revelation can be interpreted in terms of Underhill's first stage of the mystic way, namely awakening. As Lynn Ross Bryant comments "[s]eeing in the dark is a common metaphor in mystical expression . . . darkness is also a necessary preparation for putting aside the light of reason in order to be able to see with other eyes" (167).

The personification technique is also used in the second line: "I meet my shadow," writes the poet, which is but a personification of his shadow. However, everything seems fragmented in the second and the third lines when the poet meets not his whole self but its shadow, and hears not his voice but its echo. Although the persona calls himself "a lord of nature," he cries in front of a tree. Use of puns, especially the wordplay of *eye* and *I* in the first stanza is crucial in this poem. While the poet says "the eye begins to see" in the first line, in the second line he writes "I meet my shadow." According to Richard Allen Blessing "[s]uch a linkage is valid thematically, for it asserts subtly the relationship between identity and vision. In the world of the poem, a man is what he begins to see" (201).

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood--
A lord of nature weeping to a tree,
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.
. . . . . (231)

The second stanza represents the stage of purgation, the clarification stage. The speaker comprehends that he must get rid of his imperfections to reach a state of purity

before he reaches the Absolute. In that sense, the “shadow pinned against a sweating wall” symbolizes a kind of crucifixion. The journey of the soul from the self starts up; however, the self still wanders because “. . . it is the shadow that is pinned to the wall,” says Neal Bowers (184). Moreover, in this stanza, the poet proposes the paradox between “madness” and “nobility.” The poet justifies madness by writing about his mad experience:

. . . . . .

What's madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall,
That place among the rocks--is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

. . . . . (231)

The third stanza represents the illumination stage. Lynn Ross Bryant writes that “. . . the mystical correspondences between the world of nature and the divine invade him like a storm” (169). The birds and the ragged moon always represent the spiritual in Roethke’s poetry. Anthony Libby writes in his article “Roethke, Water Father” that “[u]nlike the traditional transcendent mystic, the contemporary visionary often locates himself not in an imagined area of cosmic peace but at the center of a storm. This is Roethke’s “steady storm of correspondences” but also the storm of irreducible particulars” (276). Dichotomy of the self and the soul ends here with the “Death of the self in a long, tearless night.”

. . . . . .

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!

A man goes far to find out what he is--
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

. . . . . (231)

In the last stanza, Roethke continues using paradoxes as in “dark my light.” The persona attains a resolution of conflicts, and achieves mystic union with God: “one is One.” It is clear that the poet presents Underhill’s stages of dark night of the soul and of union. In the end, the persona reaches spiritual wholeness by recovering from his fears and the dilemma of “Which I is *I*?” In the symposium *The Contemporary Poet as Artist and Critic* Roethke said of this poem “. . . the intensity of identification with the fly: Am I this many-eyed, mad, filthy thing, or am I human? Which I is *I* . . . My soul itself is ‘like’ a disease-laden, heat-maddened fly-to me a thing more intolerable than a rat” (Ostroff 186). The poet feels sinful and as worthless as a rat since he is defeated by the purity of God. Nevertheless, the speaker, overcoming his fears and coming out of the pit, enjoys mystic union with the Absolute: “And one is One, free in the tearing wind.” Evelyn Underhill, in her book *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays*, writes that “[b]eing, not doing is the first aim of the mystic” (qtd. in Bowers 23). Recalling Underhill, Roethke wrote in his notebooks “[b]eing, not doing, is my first joy” (qtd. in Balakian 155).

. . . . . .

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is *I*?
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

. . . . . (231)

In this poem, Theodore Roethke uses six-line stanzas with regular iambic pentameter rhyme scheme of *abcadd*. At first, the poem seems to be lacking order; however, the first and the fourth lines and the last two lines are rhymed in an attempt to create a sense of order. It should also be noted that the strongly rhymed lines are in the first stanza, "see" and "three," while the lines in the following stanzas are nearly rhymed, "soul" and "wall," "correspondences" and "what he is," "desire" and "fear." Commenting upon the stylistic characteristics of the poem, Stanley Kunitz writes:

> . . . marked by a style of oracular abstraction. The vocabulary is plain, predominantly monosyllabic; the pentameters are strictly measured and often balanced; the stanzaic units, with their formalized combination of true and off-rhyme, adhere to a tight pattern. If these fiercely won controls were to break down at any point, the whole poem would collapse in a cry, a tremendous outpouring of wordless agitation. (41)

The poem "In a Dark Time" illustrates a mystical progression, an attempt to disclose the secrets of the soul and delve for spiritual illumination. In his speech *The Poet as Artist and Critic*, Roethke pointed out the mystical aspects of this poem saying that "[t]his was a dictated poem, something given, scarcely mine at all. For about three days before its writing I felt disembodied, out of time; then the poem virtually wrote itself, on a day in summer, 1958 . . ." (qtd. in Ross 166).

5.2. "Words for the Wind:" Love Poems

Theodore Roethke wrote two sequences of love poems in his books *Words for the Wind* and *The Far Filed*. The main difference between these two sequences of "Love Poems," is that the first sequence in the book *Words for the Wind* proved to be unsuccessful in personalizing women as characters since the women in love poems are portrayed as spiritual or mythological creatures rather than whole individuals. However, in the sequence of "Love Poems," which appeared in his last book *The Far Filed,* the women are portrayed in a more personalized manner. In her essay "Poetic Empathy:

Theodore Roethke's Conception of Woman in the Love Poems," Mary Floyd Wilson mentions that Roethke's early poetry rarely involves human beings or relations with other people as it deals with the greenhouse and vegetal lives of small creatures. However, in the second sequence of love poems in *The Far Field,* woman is not any more portrayed as a beast or a creature, and the poems in this sequence ". . . have simplicity . . . openness," and ". . . personal quality not often found . . ." in Roethke's verse (Bryant 158). Those poems depict pure lovingness and strong affection which make the woman more personalized and more individualized. Mary Floyd Wilson adds that:

> [t]he sensations of individual human love overwhelm Roethke, and in a defensive effort not to 'drown in fire' (Roethke 138), he writes his first love poems for 'a woman with an empty face' (Roethke 133). The final love poems, therefore, mark a personal achievement in emotional maturity and wholeness in terms of Roethke's approach to the female. While in *Words for the Wind* Roethke's love poems explore the self, portraying woman as an abstraction, in *The Far Field* the poet recognizes woman as another 'I,' equal, actual, and particularized. (63)

Roethke comes across his loved one in his poem "The Dream" in *Words for the Wind*: "I met her as a blossom on a stern" (Roethke 114) and in the same poem he expresses that "[l]ove is not love until love's vulnerable" (115). In these lines the poet discloses his feelings of fear and his realization of passion of love. Mary Floyd Wilson mentions that Roethke in his love poems represents women as "powerful, unknowable-sometimes encompassing eternity and sometimes, nothingness, depending on the stability of his own identity" (64). In the "Love Poems" sequence of *Words for the Wind,* Roethke minimizes the woman to the level of a lower creature portraying her as "easy as a beast." (Roethke 116). Writing "she frolics like a beast" in "Words for the Wind" (121), he ascribes animalistic features to woman. In this way, Roethke creates an ". . . intensely sexual, partly animal, wholly overpowering . . . one dimensional, a creature only . . ." (Stiffer 134). Randall Stiffler explains that "[b]y making her less human and more animal, Roethke's desire for her grows. He assimilates her to the

intimacies of his Greenhouse worldview, and he can therefore more easily approach her" (134).

I met her as a blossom on a stem
Before she ever breathed, and in that dream
The mind remembers from a deeper sleep:
Eye learned from eye, cold lip from sensual lip.
My dream divided on a point of fire;
Light hardened on the water where we were;
A bird sang low; the moonlight sifted in;
The water rippled, and she rippled on.

She came toward me in the flowing air,
A shape of change, encircled by its fire.
I watched her there, between me and the moon;
The bushes and the stones danced on and on;
I touched her shadow when the light delayed;
I turned my face away, and yet she stayed.
A bird sang from the center of a tree;
She loved the wind because the wind loved me. (114)

In 1953, Roethke married his former student Beatrice O Heath O'Connell. According to Neal Bowers, the poet's relation with Beatrice provided him with poetic material hence the sequence of "Love Poems" in *The Far Field* ". . . represent a new development in Roethke's poetry and reflect how closely his art was tied to events in his own life. It was not until after his marriage to Beatrice in January 1953 that Roethke began writing what must stand as some of the finest love poems of our time" (121). In Roethke's search for identity Beatrice or the love for a woman represents the personification of the Absolute, therefore the love poems of his last book are full of mystical symbols.

Elaborating upon Roethke's love poems, Neal Bowers writes "[i]t seems Roethke found in love another avenue to the Absolute, an opportunity to see and suffer himself in another being, thereby transcending himself" (141). Bowers also states that "[i]n recognizing the relationship between sexual and spiritual love, Roethke is operating not only in the tradition of the medieval Mariolatry poets and such Elizabethans as Donne and Herbert, but in accordance with a considerable number of mystics as well." (120). Likewise, Balakian illuminates Roethke's concept of love as his belief ". . . in love as an active, driving force, the passion of human life that joins not only man and woman but man and nature, body, soul, human self with deity" (96). Suggesting that love flourishes from mysticism, Evelyn Underhill emphasizes the significance of the interrelation between love and mysticism. Mysticism, she confirms, is ". . . essentially a movement of the hearth, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate reality; for no personal gain . . . but purely for an instinct of love" (qtd. in Balakian 97). Underhill elucidates in her book *Mysticism* that "[i]t was natural and inevitable that the imagery of human love and marriage should have seemed to the mystic the best of all images of his own 'fulfillment of life'; his soul's surrender, first to the call, finally to the embrace of Perfect Love" (136-37).

Roethke, through the I-You relationship, explores the merits of mystical union in his "Love Poems." In one of his notebooks, he quoted, "[I] can't claim that the soul, my soul, was absorbed in God. No, God for me still remains someone to be confronted, to be dueled with" (qtd. in Balakian 153). Separateness of self and God, body and soul, Balakian writes ". . . constitute much of the poetic tension and human drama in these last poems" (153). Of the relation between love and mysticism, Neal Bowers writes that ". . . the symbol of the lovers is employed by all mystics generally, as all mystics think in terms of love and are actively involved in the process of loving God," (30). In one of his notebooks Roethke wrote: "[i] am sick of women. I want God" which indicates that love for Roethke always has a spiritual essence. In that sense, it could be noted that Roethke's love concept is akin to Donne's as observed by Louis Martz in *The Wit of*

Love; "[t]he lover of women and the lover of God are not separable" in John Donne's poetry (31).

The sequence of "Love Poems" in *The Far Field* opens with the poem titled "The Young Girl," unlike the love poems of *Words for the Wind* which examines the tension between body and soul. These love poems have a melodic quality, which is not typical of Roethke's earlier works. Instead of employing intellectual and philosophical complexity, Roethke sets a single image, around which he weaves his verse. The speaker of the sequence is a young girl as mentioned in the title of the first poem. In this poem, Roethke illustrates the conflict of flesh and spirit by choosing the word "blood" to represent flesh and the "bird" for spirit. The young girl according to Karl Malkoff ". . . approaches the contradictions of body and soul from a point of view opposite to that of the old poet, but although she starts from flesh and he from spirit, they converge on the same paradoxes" (191).

What can the spirit believe? ---
It takes in the whole body;
I, on coming to love,
Make that my study.

We are one, and yet we are more,
I am told by those who know,---
At times content to be two.
Today I skipped on the shore,
My eyes neither here nor there,
My thin arms to and fro,
A bird my body,
My bird-blood ready. (200)

Another love poem “Words for the Wind” is composed of four different sections. In the first section, the poet depicts the beloved woman as his opposite who enables him transcend himself. The poet celebrates existence of something beyond the self. In the third section, the poet reveals his metaphysical understanding of love. In the first stanza the poet surpasses the physical world while in the second stanza the lovers come back to the physical world and walk on “the ferny ground.”At the end of the poem, Roethke reveals that he is able to see himself in another being, which helps him to escape from boundaries of his own self and “participate in a larger self” (Bowers 126). Biological attraction to women represents the journey out of the self. Kalaidjian writes “Roethke was aware of the imagery of love and marriage as symbols in mystical literature for the soul’s attunement to God” (101). Representing endlessness of love this poem unfolds spiritual and psychic dimensions of love.

……

Motion can keep me still:
She kissed me out of thought
As a lovely substance will;
She wandered; I did not:
I stayed, and light fell
Across her pulsing throat;
I stared, and a garden stone
Slowly became the moon.

The shallow stream runs slack;
The wind creaks slowly by;
Out of a nestling's beak
Comes a tremulous cry
I cannot answer back;
A shape from deep in the eye
That woman I saw in a stone
Keeps pace when I walk alone.

……

What time's my heart? I care.
I cherish what I have
Had of the temporal:
I am no longer young
But the winds and waters are;
What falls away will fall;
All things bring me to love. (120)

In the last section, the poet realizes that the woman he loves represents the feminine face of nature. Sexual intercourse and physical union represent that love results in illumination and leads to the metaphysical. When the poet kisses “her moving mouth,” he enjoys fascination with the beloved. Therefore, sexuality in this poem stands for unity. “For Roethke,” remarks Balakian, “sexual union and mystical illumination are inseparable ways of knowing. His lover is more than a dazzling lover, she is a lover in the flesh and in the spirit - a kind of houri who embodies nature and supernature . . .” (107). The beloved woman procreates a magical spot where the union of body and soul is attained through the union of the lovers’ bodies. While the lovers copulate through their temporal flesh, as the mystics do, they transcend the body and attain the eternal.

……

Being myself, I sing
The soul's immediate joy.
Light, light, where's my repose?
A wind wreathes round a tree.
A thing is done: a thing
Body and spirit know
When I do what she does:
Creaturely creature, she!

I kiss her moving mouth,
Her swart hilarious skin;
She breaks my breath in half;
She frolics like a beast;
And I dance round and round,
A fond and foolish man,
And see and suffer myself
In another being, at last. (121)

As for the style and technique of the poem Roethke, in the first section, employs half rhymes and the Italian stanza form *ottava rima* with the rhyming scheme of *abababcc*. However, in the second section, the poet abandons the traditional rhyme meters and makes up the rhyme of *abcbdbc*, in the third *abcdacb*, and finally in the last section, he turns to the regular rhyme scheme of *abcdabcd*. Using rhythmic meters, the poet aims to signify the content with the form. The flowing images and rhymes in the poem underlie Roethke's understanding of love since for the poet love is dynamic, and motion epitomizes love for Roethke. As Richard Blessing remarked ". . . that motion of the soul he gives the name "Love" (173). Roethke experiences love as a departure from the self to spiritual oneness with the other living organisms. "Roethke believes in love as an active, driving force, the passion of human life that joins not only man and woman" as Balakian asserts "but man and nature, body and soul, human self with deity" (96).

To conclude, with T. S. Eliot's 1921 groundbreaking essay "The Metaphysical Poets," seventeenth-century metaphysical works became popular again. The metaphysical revival gave rise to a new interest in these poems in the 1920s. Although Roethke's concern in metaphysical poetry already started in his first book *Open House*, he deeply dealt with metaphysical themes in his last book *The Far Field*. The "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical" and "Love Poems" represent the mystical experience of the poet. The paradoxical poem "In a Dark Time" demonstrates the spiritual illumination of the mystic after overcoming his fears. Full of paradoxes, the poem illustrates the mystical progression of the poet. In the two poems from the

sequences of “Love Poems,” the poet, using the I-You relationship and the image of sexual union, explores the merits of mystical union.

6. AND OTHER POEMS

Throughout this study, Theodore Roethke's poems have been categorized into one group. However, trying to put him into a particular category will underestimate the value of his art as he wrote poems that can be arranged into two or more categories or cannot be classified into any of the literary traditions mentioned in this study. The two poems "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "The Waking" demonstrate how the style and technique of the poet have evolved throughout his poetic career. Although "[t]he greenhouse memory is particularly characteristic of Roethke's confessional moments" (Ramakhrishnan 71) in "Meditations of an Old Woman" the poet puts on a mask and speaks in the borrowed voice of an old woman unlike the unmasked confessional voice in the "Lost Son." In his confessional poems, the poet in an excessively self-revelatory manner discloses his secrets and emotions without veiling himself. "Why would he not have used the mask in the early sequence when he was consciously ashamed of his fears and guilts?," asks Harry Williams (76). "The fact that Roethke chose a figure different from himself in age, sex, and experience," remarks Don Bogen, "… shows the depth of his interest in going beyond the bounds of his own identity" (138). "Meditations of an Old Woman" is a significant poem due to the romantic theme of regressive journey and the veiled voice of the poet.

A multi-sectioned poem written in free verse, "Meditations of an Old Woman" shows a radical change in the style of the poet as it employs an extended dramatic monologue. Roethke started to write this poem soon after his mother's death. In the poem, which is a contemplation of death, an aged woman meditates on questions of life, death and the terror of nonbeing. The poet lays out sense of isolation, estrangement, the woman's strivings for answer and mental distress over death. As the poem is a psychological experience to attain spiritual consciousness, the images are collected from dreams, daydreams, hallucinations, and moments of memory to signify the spirit's journey to the inner world. The objects mentioned in the poem symbolize "motion" and "mobility" of the soul: " a tree tilts from its roots," "stones loosen," "wheelbarrows creaking and swaying," "salmon moves up a shallow stream" as "the spirit tries for

another life/Another way and place in which to continue" (Roethke 153). The poem reflects introspections of a wise old crone trying to find out the meaning of life while approaching death each day. The poem emphasizes Roethkean mode of journey by forward and backward motion. Feeling cold, nervous and alienated to her body: "I have become a strange piece of flesh" the old lady in the realm of imagination delves into memories of past moving backward and ruminates on the devastating power of time on her body. The idea of travelling captivates the old crone and she imagines herself traveling on a bus:

Often I think of myself as riding
Alone, on a bus through western country.
I sit above the back wheels, where the jolts are hardest,
And we bounce and sway along toward the midnight,
The lights tilting up, skyward, as we come over a little rise,
Then down, as we roll like a boat from a wave-crest.

All journeys, I think, are the same:
The movement is forward, after a few wavers,
And for a while we are all alone,
Busy, obvious with ourselves,
The drunken soldier, the old lady with her peppermints;
And we ride, we ride, taking the curves
Somewhat closer, the trucks coming
Down from behind the last ranges,
Their black shapes breaking past;
And the air claps between us,
Blasting the frosted windows,
And I seem to go backward,
Backward in time.
. . . . . (152)

The old woman thinks of her life as an unpleasant trip since she travels alone at midnight, sits "above the back wheels, where the jolts are hardest," the windows are frosted and prevent her from sightseeing, one of the passengers is drunkard and there is smell of peppermints. Travelling on the bus, she starts a regressive journey to her childhood in the greenhouse. This is a journey between past and present, conscious and unconscious, life and death. In that sense, the poem is reminiscent of Roethkean concept of journey or odyssey. Balakian puts, "Her sense of oscillation is similar to the lost son's" (117). Like the lost son, the woman moves backward in time through the depths of her past. In the end, she declares herself to be "a perpetual beginner" and cries out that she is an unstoppable voyager.

. . . . . .
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,
And the men beneath them wheeling in dirt to the cement benches,
The laden wheelbarrows creaking and swaying,
And the up-spring of the plank when a foot left the runway.
. . . . . (152)

Another poem that belongs to two literary traditions at the same time is "The Waking," which is a contemplation over death, mortality and the meaning of life is written in the form of a villanelle, consisting of nineteen-lines with a specific rhyme scheme of five tercets and a quatrain. Tercets are three line stanzas rhyming aba aba aba aba aba and quatrain is a four line stanza at the end of the poem with the rhyme scheme of abaa. In a villanelle, the first and second lines of the first stanza are repeated alternately, and the poem finishes repeating these two lines marking repetition as the most important feature of vilanelles. Roethke uses repetition to indicate circularity. The

word villanelle is a French word derived from Italian words *villanella* and *villancico,* which mean peasant as these were dance songs connected with pastoral and country life. Imitating the French models, English poets started to write villanelles in the early 1800s. Among the contemporary poets who wrote villanelles are Oscar Wilde, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop and Theodore Roethke. Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Night" is one of the most famous villanelles ever written.

"The Waking" can be interpreted in terms of metaphysical and romantic poetry. Like his Romantic predecessors, Roethke abandons rationality for the sake of intuitive action when he says, "We think by feeling." Also, the poem can be interpreted in terms of metaphysical poetry. "Waking to sleep" is a paradox in this poem. If waking symbolizes birth, and sleeping symbolizes death, the poet here implies that we are born to die to question mortality and immortality.

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

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. (104)

This is a poem about learned experiences, and the word “waking” in the title stands for illumination and enlightenment. In the first stanza, the speaker reveals that he is not in a hurry as he wakes up slowly. When he mentions about fate and says “I cannot fear,” it becomes obvious that the speaker is trying to relieve his fears of death. In the lines “Great Nature has another thing to do/To you and me, so take the lively air,” the poet awakens to the fact that life is pretty short and death is coming closer each day so life must be enjoyed tremendously. Repetition of some words and lines as in “I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow” and “I learn by going where I have to go” make the mood of the poem flow easily. By repeating these lines the poet urges the reader to grasp the fact that the life span of a human being is too short and death is the only thing that makes life precious and helps us realize the value of it.

7. CONCLUSION

Theodore Roethke, the poet of snails, birds, beetles, and creeping things is marked as one of the greatest American poets with a distinct voice. Although Roethke belongs to postwar generation of poets, his art neither certainly fits postwar traditions of poetry nor depicts historical events of his time. Noted by most of the critics, Theodore Roethke's art is considerably difficult to categorize as he wrote during the period of poetic uncertainties. Despite his wide range of styles such as traditional lyrics, dramatic monologues, surrealistic poems and nonsense rhymes for children, Confessional, Romantic, and Metaphysical qualities are apparent in Theodore Roethke's poetry particularly in *Open House*, *The Lost Son and Other Poems*, and *The Far Field*. This study has aimed to show to what extend Theodore Roethke's poetry carries characteristics of these specific types of poetry. My study has been divided into five main sections each of which has directly contributed to substantiate my argument.

The first main section, historical background, was intended to chart post-war American poetry, giving an outline of the dominant poetic movements of the period. By the late 1940s, even though the modernist movement seemed to come to an end, the postwar generation poets were overshadowed by their predecessors like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The second generation poets, who had to prove themselves against the first generation, produced different types of poetry which was categorized by James E. B. Breslin into Black Mountain Poets, New York School, Deep Image Poets, the Beat Generation, and Confessional Poets. The Black Mountain poets based their principles on Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" in which Olson praised improvisation and inspiration over traditional rhymed lines. Unlike the Black Mountain poets, New York School was not interested in challenging traditional forms or publishing manifestos, as abstract expressionist painters they were interested in motion picture, impressions of actions and depicting the vibrant city life. Another group, Deep Imagists, also known as "American Surrealists," were inspired by Spanish Surrealist poetry, using visual images taken from rural life and natural world, they explored levels of consciousness. Beat

generation adopted colloquial and slangy language in their works and celebrated sexual and spiritual liberation from the shackles of American conformism and capitalism.

Giving a definition and historical background, the following section "Confessional Aspects" aimed to prove that Theodore Roethke's art carried aspects of confessional poetry for the poet reveals deep wounds of his early life, intimate details of his personal experience, and his mixed feelings for his dead father. The poems analyzed in this chapter are "Open House," "My Papa's Waltz" and "The Premonition." The title poem of *Open House* signifies personal honesty, the poet reveals that he is without cover, and to reveal his secrets he does not need a "tongue" as his "secrets cry aloud." Owing to its theme, "Open House," was labeled a confessional poem. "I stop the lying mouth" says the poet, confirming that fictionalized elements will be omitted from his work as he is a volunteer to expose himself. While the poem "Child on Top of a Greenhouse" bears upon the sense of guilt in growing up and reaching self-awareness, in "Moss Gathering," the poet confesses his sexual guilt caused by masturbation in the woods. Additionally, like other confessional poets, Theodore Roethke recounts his troubled relationship with his father and how ambivalent he was for him. Otto Roethke was a figure of both love and hate for his son. The father in the poem "Old Florist" is depicted like a godlike figure with unnatural powers and ability to do miraculous things although in "My Papa's Waltz," he becomes a drunken violent man who forces his little son to waltz with him. Using images of pain and violence, the poet confesses his fear to the readers. The third discernible confessional feature of Roethke's art was documentation of painful memories from his childhood past, and agonizing remembrance of his father's death analyzed in "The Premonition."

A second aim of this study has been to prove that Roethke can be labeled as a Romantic poet due to the presence of the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites in his greenhouse poems, and of the theme of odyssey towards home as a regressive journey prevalent in the "Lost Son" sequence. It has been also noted in this study that Roethke's poetry is viewed from two different perspectives: Jay Parini assumes Roethke as a follower of Emersonian Romanticism, propounding him as the twentieth-century

representative of American Romanticism; however, while pointing to some obvious similarities between works of William Wordsworth and those of Theodore Roethke, Jenijoy La Belle claims that Roethke belongs to the Romantic tradition of William Wordsworth. Expounding Romantic concept of imagination and Emerson's philosophy of unity, the Greenhouse poems have been discussed within the scope of this study. Of the Greenhouse Poems, "Root Cellar" has been chosen to analyze how Roethke reconciles opposing images in order to accomplish unity. The tone and figurative language of the poem has been mentioned at the same time. Moreover, the concept of regression to the pre-natal world and the mission of self-discovery have been illustrated in the poems of "Lost Son" sequence. One of the longest poems of the poet, "The Lost Son" poems narrate a young man's regression into his gloomy past and personal memory as a quest for self-discovery. This sequence is composed of five different longish poems: "The Flight," "The Pit," "The Gibber," "The Return" and "It was beginning winter." The first section, "The Flight," opens with an autobiographical remark arousing the feelings of lifelessness, boredom, and abandonment. In the second section, "The Pit" the poet finds himself in a large hole, in the womb of Mother Nature while in the third part the poet is in front of a cave, another womblike image. Finally returning to the childhood world of the greenhouse, the poet reaches a safer place. Running away from the chaotic nature of the womb and slaying his old self, the lost son attains rebirth and personal fulfillment.

In the section titled "Metaphysical Aspects," it was aimed to demonstrate that apart from being a Confessional and Romantic, Roethke was a Metaphysical poet. Referring to T.S. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," the metaphysical revival has been mentioned, and Roethke has been notified as one of the poets inspired by the rebirth of metaphysical poetry. It has been noted that Roethke's metaphysical poems can be interpreted in the light of Evelyn Underhill's classic 1911 book *Mysticism*: *A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness,* in which she formalizes the mystic way in five stages as awakening, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul, and union. The poem "In a Dark Time" from the "Sequence, Sometimes Metaphysical" demonstrates different phases of the mystic's illumination.

Additionally, in the second part, commenting upon the poems in the sequence of “Love Poems,” Roethke’s concept of love and the relation between love and metaphysical imagery have been analyzed. In “Words for the Wind,” Roethke uses the image of erotic involvement with the beloved to represent spirit’s harmony with God.

The main argument of this study has been to prove that Theodore Roethke’s poetry, which does not fall into a single literary tradition, obviously bears characteristics of Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical poetry. Within the scope of this study, the poet’s art has been marked as confessional since he includes autobiographical elements, nakedly exposes his emotions like pain, grief, and guilt, and reveals his painful memories of early life as well as love-hate relationship with his father. It has been also noted in this study that in addition to his confessional aspects, Roethke’s works are labeled as Romantic due to the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites and the theme of odyssey towards home. The spiritual illumination of the mystic and tension between body and soul are typical Metaphysical features of Roethke’s poetry. I hope that this study will serve as a guide for those concerned with post-war American poetry and second generation American poets. I believe that this study will be useful in interpreting and understanding a post-war poet whose art has remained difficult to categorize according to approved theoretical categories. It will also be a guide how to closely scrutinize an artist from three different aspects and will be a source of information concerning different literary traditions. From its very beginning, I have seen this study as a collection of poetry analysis which exemplifies a wide range of poetry terms and rhetorical devices. I hope that this study will be valuable as a guide to remember a stunning post-war poet but has faded away from attention in the last decades.

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RESUME

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ABSTRACT

Second generation poets who bloomed after World War II had all to prove themselves against their great modernist predecessors. Due to the lack of an arch of poetic theory, the poetic movements of the period fell into five different categories as the Black Mountain Poetry, New York Schools, Deep Image Poetry, the Beat Generation, and Confessional Poets. The Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 during the worst years of the Great Depression. Confessionals emerged in the 1950s, the Beats originated in the 1940s, while New York School poets and Deep Imagists wrote in the early 1960s. Hence, it became problematic to place Roethke precisely within the limits of a single literary tradition since his poetry is marked by striking changes of style, theme and technique. This study, through the analysis of selected poems, has aimed to point at Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical characteristics of Theodore Roethke's poetry and to show to what extends Theodore Roethke's poetry carries characteristics of these specific types of poetry. Confessional aspects of Roethke's art is the exposure of emotions like pain, grief, and guilt, revelation of painful memories of early life and depiction of love-hate relationship with his father. Also, Theodore Roethke is recognized as the twentieth-century representative of American Romanticism for his works include Emerson' and Wordsworth's Romantic aspects. Roethke follows Emersonian tradition by employing the doctrine of reconciliation of opposites, and that of Wordsworth by utilizing the theme of odyssey towards home. The spiritual illumination of the mystic and tension between body and soul are typical Metaphysical features of Roethke's poetry. The main argument of this study has been to prove that Theodore Roethke's poetry, which does not fall into a single literary tradition, obviously bears characteristics of Confessional, Romantic and Metaphysical poetry.

ÖZET

Bir İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası şairi olan Theodore Roethke şiir serüveni boyunca lirik, sürreal ve çocuk şiirleri gibi birçok türü denemiş ve şiirlerinde birçok farklı tema işlemiştir. Ayrıca, ilk şiirleri ile son dönem şiirleri arasında göze çarpan önemli ayrılıklar vardır. Dolayısıyla birçok eleştirmenin de belirttiği gibi Roethke'nin şiir sanatını tanımlamak ve sınıflandırmak oldukça zordur. Bu tezin öncelikli amacı Theodore Roethke'nin şiir sanatını İtirafçı, Romantik ve Metafizik açılardan ele alarak tanımlamak ve adlandırmaya çalışmaktır. Şairin ilk kitabı olan *Açık Ev* İtirafçı, İkinci kitabı *Kayıp Çocuk ve Diğer Şiirler* Romantik, iki ayrı kitap içinde yer alan "Aşk Şiirleri" bölümü ise Metafizik öğeler içermektedir. İlk şiirlerinde duygularını tüm açıklığıyla yansıtması, babasıyla olan karmaşık ilişkisini dile getirmesi ve otobiyografik öğelere yer vermesi Roethke şiirlerin İtirafçı yönlerini gösterir. Romantik yönlerini gösteren öğeler ise şiirlerinde Amerikalı şair Ralph Waldo Emerson'ın zıtların bütünlüğü doktrinini yansıtması ve eve dönüş temasını işlemesidir. Bu öğeler *Kayıp Çocuk ve Diğer Şiirler* kitabında yer alan şiirlere yer verilerek incelenmiştir. Üçüncü olarak, *Uzak Arazi* kitabında ve "Aşk Şiirleri" bölümlerinde göze çarpan belirgin Metafizik öğeler barındırmaktadır. Bu şiirlerinde şair yaşadığı mistik aydınlanmayı metaforik bir dille yansıtmaktadır. Bu tezde şairin eserleri Biçimselcilik eleştiri metodu ile incelenmiş ve şiirler teknik ve tematik olmak üzere iki farklı açıdan ele alınmıştır. Şiirlerin biçemsel incelemesi dilin kullanımı, ölçü ve uyak türleri, kelime tekrarlarının yanı sıra metafor, sembol ve imgelerin bir çözümlemesine yer verilmiştir. Bu çözümlemeler doğrultusunda şairin hangi şiir akımına daha yakın durduğu incelenmiş ve Romantik, İtirafçı ve Metafizik şiir sanatlarından hangisi doğrultusunda ilerlediği belirlenmeye çalışılmış, şairin bu şiir sanatlarına yakınlık derecesi tartışılarak, örneklerle şairin bu üç şiir akımından belirli özellikler taşıdığı ispatlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, Theodore Roethke şiirlerini sınıflandırmanın ve tanımlamanın zorluğu üzerinde durulmuş, Roethke şiirlerinin birçok farklı özelliği aynı anda taşıdığı gösterilmiştir.