

The Spiritual Experiences in Theodore Roethke's "The Far Field"

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper deals with one of the most prominent poems by a modern American poet Theodore Huebner Roethke (1908-1963) and the title of the poem is *The Far Field* (1964). The paper examines the underlining mystical significance of the images used in Roethke's *The Far Field*. In this poem, the poet figuratively expresses his spiritual journey to realize God within himself through deep contemplation in nature which is very much similar to the mystic experience of realizing the divine within himself while living in solitude. The discussion in this paper explores particular Jungian archetypes in this poem inspecting their referentiality both on the aesthetic figurative level of the poem and on the spiritual dimension. For example, Roethke dexterously employs the image of the field to refer to death but interestingly this far field with which dead animals are strewn about is also a symbol of rebirth where new life is destined to emerge like a garden that decays in September only to flourish back in spring. Thereby, throughout such images drawn from nature, the poet portrays the different stages of spiritual growth he passes through. These stages are: fear of mortality, transcending this fear through realizing the cycle of birth and death which is the reincarnation, and finally the detachment from the physical realism into a union with the divine.

Keywords: Cycle of birth and death, God, Jungian archetypes, Mysticism, reincarnation, Roethke, *The Far Field*.

Introduction

The poetry of Theodore Roethke is a distinct verse composition that is characterized by its mystical connotations and deep philosophical referentiality. For the poet, his poems are the sole means through which he dexterously and eloquently expresses his own arduous mystical journey in life. This piece of research paper deals with Theodore Roethke's mystical journey which is his search for God as expressed in *The Far Field*. The poet aspires to be united with God and he illustrates his longing for union through the use of Jungian archetypal imageries that he eloquently draws from nature.

The poet's mysticism might be owing to two main factors: first, the kind of books the poet has read and was thoroughly influenced by, and second, the periods of sever austerity and fasting he submitted himself to. Fasting was intended first to acquire poetic creativity, and ultimately lead him to the path of mysticism. Over the years, the poet nurtures a realization that there is a force in nature; he often refers to it as the self, that shapes people's destiny while its might and beauty are explicitly manifested and experienced in nature. Such an understanding is dexterously expressed in verse form by the poet and is clearly caught in his last volume *The Far Field*, posthumously published.

The poems in this volume represent Roethke's most mature spiritual experiences as James Dougherty in "Theodore Roethke's "North American Sequence" Religious Awakening in the West" (2001) regards the collection of poems in the volume *The Far Field* as the best representation of the poet's "search for a spiritual meaning" (p. 177). This volume opens with a sequence entitled "North American Sequence" that consists of six poems including *The Far Field*, *The Rose*, *Meditation at Oyster River*, and *Journey to the Interior*.

Many scholars researching in Theodore Roethke; the poet and the man, emphasize a significant point which is the poet's firm conviction about the existence of a divine power, an inner force that is intuitively felt and profoundly experienced in certain

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moments of solitude with nature. Such conviction is aesthetically and figuratively expressed in the poetry of Roethke. This kind of poetic expression might be confused and labeled as metaphysical or transcendental.

However, reading closely the life details of Theodore Roethke and the thematic references of his poetic outputs: they all illustrate a profound spiritual experience which is mystic in essence and nature. William Heyen in "The Divine Abyss: Theodore Roethke's Mysticism" (1969) defines Roethke's realization of an inner divine essence that connects him to God and to nature as the mystic's realization of God in himself and in nature (p. 11). In his book *Poetry and Craft* (2001), Roethke asserts that he believes that all living beings are holy therefore, for example, when the poet alludes to a snail, he is calling to God on some level and he further stresses on his belief by making a reference to St. Thomas who suggests that God is found in all that lives causing them to exist even though in His holy nature. He is higher than everything (P.37).

From his first volumes of poems *Open House* (1941) and *The Lost Son* (1948), Roethke revealed a profound contemplation over the disparity between outer world of physical reality and an inner world of the spiritual realm.

Further, in his later volumes *Words for the Wind* (1958), the poet employs philosophical terms and spiritual ideas in his poems. Thus, Roethke's poetic outputs are considered a spiritual journey where he explores the divine essence within himself and the poems in his volume *The Far Field* "represent the final stage in [Roethke's] mythic journey." (Parini, 1979: p. 19)

To portray his mystical journey in *The Far Field*, Roethke largely relies on Jungian archetypal imageries, thus it is necessary to give a definition of these archetypes: according to Carl Gustav Jung in his book entitled *Symbols of Transformation An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* (1912), archetypes are universal and inherited patterns which constitute the structure of the unconscious mind

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not just of a single individual, rather of the collective memory of the human race (p. 337).

In literature, these archetypes are employed as symbols, themes and types of actions that are passed from one generation to another since ancient times, they constitute the collective memory of the human race. These shared connotations to cultural, religious, and mythological symbols and icons are the attributes of Jung's theory of archetypes (Bressler, 2012: p. 130).

However, Jungian archetypes have been long associated with mysticism and the relationship between man and God. Thus, Roethke dexterously utilizes these archetypes to depict his mystical journey as Roethke agrees with Jung's theory that the self represents the inner voice or "the voice of God." Like Jung, Roethke in his poem *The Far Field* does not specify any religious dogma when speaking about God but the archetypal imageries that he draws reference to is the self-realization, the awakening, and the understanding of universal unity with a greater force that can be witnessed in nature (Dourley, 2014: p. 33).

For example, Carl Jung in *Man and His Symbols* (1964) asserts that "The stone symbolizes what is perhaps the simplest and deepest experience...the experience of something eternal that man can have in those moments when he feels immortal and unalterable." (p. 206). Much like Jung, Roethke draws the image of a stone in *The Far Field* to portray his individual experience of immortality.

Consequently, this paper deals with the spiritual experiences of Theodore Roethke in his poem *The Far Field* through analyzing the poet's eloquent use of Jung's archetypal imageries and seeks to answer questions like: (1) How does the poet utilize Jungian archetypal images in his poem? (2) How can the poet's journey in the field be regarded as meditations on God, life and death? (3) And what kind of mystical experiences the poet is communicating through the poem *The Far Field*?

The methodological approach of this paper is an eclectic method of analysis combining theory of archetypes as stated by Carl Jung (1964) with close reading techniques and in-depth literary analysis to dexterously probe through the three layers of the poem (1) exploring the aesthetic literary elements of the poem, (2) pointing out the archetypal images in the poem, and finally (3) examining the implicit references of these images in terms of the poet's understanding of religious and spiritual ideas and the mystical experiences he expresses it in a poetic means.

2. The Spiritual Experiences in Theodore Roethke's "The Far Field"

The poem "The Far Field" is of four parts, the first part opens with a detailed description of a wish or a dream to be far and alone:

1
I dream of journeys repeatedly:
Of flying like a bat deep into a narrowing tunnel
Of driving alone, without luggage, out a long peninsula,
The road lined with snow-laden second growth,
A fine dry snow ticking the windshield,
Alternate snow and sleet, no on-coming traffic,
And no lights behind, in the blurred side-mirror,
The road changing from glazed tarface to a rubble of stone,
Ending at last in a hopeless sand-rut,
Where the car stalls,
Churning in a snowdrift
Until the headlights darken (1. 1-12)

While employing the literary trope "simile," the poet indicates his wish to fly as a bat that flies in a narrow tunnel to reach the light at the end. Obviously, the poet hopes to be free from the burdens of life which he pictures as "deep" and "narrow" "tunnel." Solitude is what the poet longs for as he repeatedly emphasizes it using words like "driving alone," "no-on-coming

traffic;" and "no lights behind." Roethke is eager to embark on a journey to a far isolated place 'long peninsula' where no one is there and no lights of the city are visible (Panthi, 2017: p. 155). The image of the traveler taking a journey "without luggage" is a reference to the poet's desire to free himself from all the cares and commitments of life.

One of the important Jungian archetypes that is explicitly endowed with a spiritual connotation is the image of *the journey*. This archetype often symbolizes an inner journey an individual may embark on to recognize the divine essence in himself and in nature (Zhang, 2008: pp. 3-4).

Therefore, in the stanza above, the image of a journey to an isolated place bears a deeper referentiality pointing to the poet's endeavor to take a spiritual journey to find God within himself through secluding oneself in nature (Balakian, 1989: p. 49). Leaving the city life and the family commitments and choosing a far field is very much similar to the mystic who chooses an isolated place in nature to be in a union with God. In "Existential Elements in the Poetry of Theodore Roethke" (1992), Leigh-Ann Duke emphasizes that it is Roethke's absolute belief that the duty of each human being is to discover his/her identity and for this very purpose Roethke decides to fully focus on his spiritual journey throughout his poems (p. 51).

As a painter who is meticulous in drawing details of a landscape (Pietrzak, 2019: p. 230), Roethke skillfully describes the land that stretches ahead which is rocky with rubbles of stones and patches of sand-rut. There, the car comes suddenly to a halt as the battery dies and the headlights are darkened. Roethke reaching the far edge of a field may stand to represent his approach to the final stage of his spiritual quest.

But, the description of the landscape as "hopeless" and "sand-rut" indicates that Roethke's spiritual journey is endangered with many obstacles. The meaning the poet intends to convey is of the spiritual emptiness during which he suffered from estrangement from God. (Loreto, 2017, p. 36). During these phases of darkness, Evelyn Underhill's, *In Mysticism: A Study of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1930), describes Roethke's pains expressed in his poems as "an overwhelming sense of darkness and deprivation [which] plunges the self into a state of negation and misery called the Dark Night" (p. 382).

This phase of spiritual crisis is metaphorically depicted in the image where the lights of the car were "darken." Hence, the poet is expressing moments of spiritual crisis as before being able to enjoy the long awaited happiness, Roethke experiences hell (Loreto, 2017: p. 143). Roethke continues describing the far end of the field where his car suddenly stops, the scenery is dreary, bleak and dismal:

2
At the field's end, in the corner missed by the mower,
Where the turf drops off into a grass-hidden culvert,
Haunt of the cat-bird, nesting-place of the field-mouse,
Not too far away from the ever-changing flower-dump,
Among the tin cans, tires, rusted pipes, broken machinery,—
One learned of the eternal; (2. 1-6)

Here, the place described reminds the reader of a neglected backyard of a house where the poet discovers a hidden drainage as grass is growing around, a nest for cat-bird and holes for the field mice. There are also dead plants and waste materials "the flower-dump, tin cans, tires, rusted pipes, and the broken machinery." The last line in this description comes unexpected when the poet, while observing all diverse things around him, states that here he comes to "learn of the eternal" (Steinbeigle, 1969: p. 33).

The image of the "flower-dump" provides a suggested illustration of Roethke's realization of eternity. The flower-dump is a place where the dead flowers are thrown away forming small heaps. Simultaneously, this is the same place where all these new generations of flowers grow again as the seeds of the dead ones give lives to new growth. Thus, Roethke

aims to portray the cycle of life and death in nature. The image captured in “ever changing” represents this cycle because while the flowers in the dump look dead now, they spring back to life in spring.

Molesworth (1990) explains that Roethke’s poetry is like those of Whitman’s and Emerson’s as they draw images from nature to evoke deeper philosophical connotations (p. 183). These Transcendentalists emphasize the point that God can be felt and realized while contemplating in nature. Thus, the presence of God is not restricted to the religious places like churches nor one can learn about Him in the scriptures only, but nature can be the eloquent teacher. Samuel Coleridge exquisitely formed this idea in his poem “Frost at Midnight” when he says “[nature is] that eternal language which God utters” (Omar, 2012: p.36). Likewise, Roethke speaks about birds, a mouse, nesting place, and finally a flower dump. Through these images, he communes with God through nature, thus gaining knowledge “of the eternal” (p. 180).

The premises of the poet’s realization of eternity can go back to his childhood. As a young boy working in the greenhouses of the family in Saginaw, Roethke used to observe the new growth of flowers from the thrown away seeds of the dead ones. These childhood observations at the greenhouses are invoked in the poetry of his later years with much depth in the realization of the cycle of life and death. Dougherty (2001) asserts that the poet’s inner journeys are directly connected to the greenhouse from his childhood as it was the source for Roethke’s poetic inspiration for incorporating the universal themes of life and death in his verse writing (p. 178).

Thus, death is a recurrent theme in Roethke’s poems which is depicted through various images and symbols. The reason might go back to his childhood trauma where he lost his father at an early age or later as an adult with the expectation of his own mortality. However, his portrayal of dead animals or plants, though horrific sometimes, is meant to exemplify death as a phase of the eternal cycle of life and death. This is shown in the stanza where Roethke gives details to the things he sees in the field he is passing through:

2

And in the shrunken face of a dead rat, eaten by rain and ground-beetles

(I found it lying among the rubble of an old coal bin)

And the tom-cat, caught near the pheasant-run,

Its entrails strewn over the half-grown flowers,

Blasted to death by the night watchman. (2. 7-11)

A dead rat whose corpse is consumed by the rain and ground beetles over time and there is a dead tom-cat who has been shot by a watchman. Roethke purposely uses the conjunction “and” repeatedly in this part to indicate the uninterrupted flow of description as he scans through the landscape and portrays it (Suwarso, 2013: p. 5).

Though Roethke expresses his feeling of sympathy seeing the dead animals in the field, he is able to overcome his grief with the realization of the life and death cycle:

2

I suffered for birds, for young rabbits caught in the mower,
My grief was not excessive.

For to come upon warblers in early May

Was to forget time and death:

How they filled the oriole’s elm, a twittering restless cloud, all one morning, (2. 8-12)

The beauty of the warbler birds singing in May gives hope to the poet despite his earlier suffering for the birds and the rabbits caught in the mower. Therefore, his “grief was not excessive” realizing there will be more warbler birds and more newly born rabbits when spring comes Rosemary Sullivan (1975), a critic, describes the poet’s acceptance of the law of nature, birth and death, as the mystic who surrenders to the will of God, thus, she says that Roethke is a true mystic because of his full dedication to nature (p.781).

In this stanza, Roethke’s tone is a cheerful one while employing positive vocabularies such as “filled,” “twittering,” “cloud,” and “morning”. Unlike the sort of verbs employed in the stanza before this such as “shrunken face,” “entrails,” “blasted,” “night,” and at last “death” which were to create a depressing atmosphere tinged with fear. Obviously, there is a contradiction between two different tones, images and moods. This leads the argument to the spiritual connotation of such contradiction. Barbara Bubon Steinbeigle in *An Approach to Imagery in the Poetry of Theodore Roethke* (1969), asserts that “Roethke’s dialectical opposition of images...represents the conflict within the poet between being and becoming, life and death.” (pp. 21-22). Steinbeigle explains that the poet’s intention behind his use of opposite images is to echo his inner conflict as he feels torn between life and death (p. 22).

The bird is a distinct Jungian archetype image which refers to freedom and the need to be unchained, unbounded by any rules and restrictions. The Jungian archetype of the bird symbolizes freedom as the bird has the ability to fly around freely (Kang, 2013: p. 37). The image, in this stanza, refers to Roethke himself, it expresses his need for freedom from fears and anxiety while undertaking this spiritual journey toward God. It is relevant to note that “The mystics often use bird imagery to describe their feelings of transcending during union.” (Heyen, 1969: p. 1067)

After unveiling his feeling of sorrow to the birds caught in the mowing tools, Roethke recalls some memories from his childhood. In this stanza, he recalls watching with fondness the variety of birds fluttering from one branch to another in the garden.

2

And I watched and watched till my eyes blurred from the bird shapes,—

Cape May, Blackburnian, Cerulean,—

Moving, elusive as fish, fearless,

Hanging, bunched like young fruit, bending the end branches,

Still for a moment,

Then pitching away in half-flight,

Lighter than finches,

While the wrens bickered and sang in the half-green hedgerows,

And the flicker drummed from his dead tree in the chicken-yard. (2.13-21)

Roethke’s use of the language creates images with underlying meanings (Curto, 2013: p. 138). The poet’s repetition of the word “watched” assists to emphasize the idea that he is extremely interested in observing those birds flying from one branch into another with different types: Cape May, Blackburnians, wrens and finches. As Roethke recalls watching the birds, he is careful with the use of vocabularies. He compares the birds to “elusive fish” in their movement to indicate their power in being able to survive death by not being caught. As for their short life span, it is expressed in the selection of verbs like “moving,” “hanging,” “bunching,” and “bending the end.”

A significant belief expressed in this stanza, which the poet has communicated in more than one poem, is his belief in the reincarnation. Reincarnation refers to the soul transmigrates into a new form after death (Barua, 2017: p. 9). In the above stanza and in his reference to “fish,” Roethke expresses the notion of reincarnation as the poet hints that he was probably a “fish” in his previous life. Jay Parini in his book entitled *Theodore Roethke: An American Romantic* (1979), argues that Roethke, in his poem entitled “Where Knock is Open Wide,” says “What’s the time, papa-seed? Everything has been twice. My father is a fish.” (1. 21-23). Parini (1979) explains that Roethke refers to reincarnation through which he takes a new birth and a different form just like the plants and animals in nature (p. 270). The cycle of life is not to be broken by the death of the

flower and fish as new flowers are to blossom and new fish are to be born. Then, the ultimate conclusion the poet highlights is that man is eternal (Hurst, 1997, p. 33).

Another memory from childhood, the poet cherishes and recollects is of a day in the beach as a child where he was lying naked on the sand. Leigh-Ann Duke (1992) explains that the young poet is mesmerized by creatures in nature that spark in him thoughts about his own existence (p. 129):

2

—Or to lie naked in sand,
In the silted shallows of a slow river,
Fingering a shell,
Thinking:
Once I was something like this, mindless,
Or perhaps with another mind, less peculiar;
Or to sink down to the hips in a mossy quagmire;
Or, with skinny knees, to sit astride a wet log,
Believing:
I'll return again,
As a snake or a raucous bird,
Or, with luck, as a lion. (2. 22-33)

The above verse lines portray Roethke as a child in the seashore "fingering a shell" as children usually do during beach trips. Now, the poet is an adult recalling childhood memories and speculating on them. He views what he was doing as a child, searching for the dead snail in a shell, is similar now to the grown-up Roethke predicting in the dead bodies of animals and plants new life to come. Parini (1979) says that "A believer in reincarnation, the boy [Roethke] straddles a wet log with his skinny knees and thinks" he is to "return" to life as "a snake or a raucous bird. Or, with luck, as a lion." (p. 225) Thus, the poet asserts that his spiritual journey does not end with death but rather continues through his rebirth. The poet seems to be more inclined to return to life taking plant or animal form, rather than human as Sullivan (1975) suggests:

This is an act of absolute commitment to life; to man "returning life after life like an insect in the roots of grass" Roethke's inclusion of the transmigration of the soul in animal form in his scheme is characteristic. He once wrote: "I can project myself more easily into a flower than into a person (Sullivan, 1975, p. 776).

Thus, Roethke believes that he is a part of nature. "He seems to recognize that he will continue to live a purer state in nature after his death" (Hurst, 1997, p. 30). The poet lucidly states that he is not afraid of death as he will be reincarnated again, he is, in this sense, reaching infinity:

2

I learned not to fear infinity,
The far field, the windy cliffs of forever,
The dying of time in the white light of tomorrow,
The wheel turning away from itself,
The sprawl of the wave,
The on-coming water. (2. 34-39)

The image of the far field is used here as a metaphor to represent "infinity" so is the image of the "windy cliffs of forever." As for the poetic picture of the wheel turns away from itself it denotes changing direction on both literal and figurative levels. This indicates that the poet changes his understanding of death leaving behind the fears of the past, the fear of death which described as "wave" and "water," and embracing what is coming, the infinity "the white light of tomorrow." On reaching this infinity, time loses its significance, it actually disappears "the dying of time" (Steinbeigle, 1969, p. 21).

Roethke alludes to the idea that he has finally won over his inner conflict with time. At this stage, Roethke is in harmony with nature as he "learned not fear infinity" which leads to transcend beyond the physical world and out of the self and be united with God (Steinbeigle, 1969, p. 67). Rebecca E. Hurst, *Spiritual Quest as Poetic Sequence: Theodore Roethke's "North Spiritual Quest as Poetic Sequence: Theodore*

Roethke's "North American Sequence" and its relation to T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" (1997), suggests that the use of the word "wave" shows that Roethke's unity with nature and the divine leads him to the realization that he is a part of the eternal (p. 30).

The third part portrays a different image for the river as it turns and joins another current. The landscape as well as the poet's thoughts change now:

3

The river turns on itself,
The tree retreats into its own shadow.
I feel a weightless change, a moving forward
As of water quickening before a narrowing channel
When banks converge, and the wide river whitens;
Or when two rivers combine, the blue glacial torrent
And the yellowish-green from the mountain upland,—
At first a swift rippling between rocks,
Then a long running over flat stones
Before descending to the alluvial plain,
To the clay banks, and the wild grapes hanging from the elmtrees. (3. 1-11)

Through the metaphor of the journey of the river, the poet depicts his own spiritual journey with all its upheaval, doubts and certainty. The river which is joined with another current to become "two rivers combine" flows through mountain and rocky terrain then descend to a plain land. There the scene becomes alluring as the banks of the rivers were dotted by "the wild grapes" of the elm trees.

Two significant archetypal images are accentuated to delineate the poet's journey inward, his spiritual journey. The first is of the river which continues to flow through various terrain. This image symbolizes the poet's spiritual quest that proceeds despite inner and outer difficulties. While the second is of the trees with grapes hanging over the banks of the river, this image represents growth and flourishing; it alludes to an image of the poet himself, his ever-green will to fulfill his goal, a union with the divine.

In this stanza, the poet describes the river when it "turns on itself" since the river is a picture of the poet's spiritual journey, the turning on itself indicates turning within, the search for God within the self. Similarly, the verb "retreat" in the image of the tree "retreat[ing] into its shadow" points to the poet's endeavor to retreat [...] into an inward quest (Parini, 1979, p. 225). Here, Roethke reflects his mystical experience of abandoning his ego in favor of reaching a spiritual satisfaction that is best exemplified in his search for the divine within him. Thus, through letting go of his ego, the poet aims to transcend from this world into another world existing within him where he unites with God (Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 1915, p. 63). The picture of the narrowing channel in the line "the water quickening before the narrowing channel" then gushes forward into the wide river is a metaphoric expression of the feeling of the poet. The scene here is of the water being squeezed narrow, then let run wide and free. It symbolizes the poet's freedom from the "weights" of life and from his dark fears of death as he comes to understand his eternity. Such eternity is portrayed exquisitely in the image of the endless, timeless, and "long running" river (Hurst, 1997, p. 33).

In early verse lines of this poem, Roethke describes the river's banks as "the silted shallows of the river" which strongly symbolizes the shallowness of his understanding and experience of the divine within him. However, as he progresses in his spiritual journey, he acquires an in-depth understanding of himself, time, death and God.

William Heyen in his article "The Divine Abyss: Theodore Roethke's Mysticism" (1969) suggests that Roethke is a mystic, his verse writing is a record of his mystical progress as he "journeys out of the superficial self to the interior self, to the true self that when once awakened has the ability to commune with God" (p. 1051). Hence, through solitude with nature and

through deep mediation within himself, the poet is able to feel and experience the divine essence within him, as much as the mystic in the seclusion experiences God within him. Sullivan (1975) explains that it becomes obvious that the poet utilizes his trip in the far field and his walk along the river as a metaphor to describe his journey through the interior psychic landscape to the center of the self (p. 768).

In the following stanza, a quite different scene and an equally different state of the poet's spiritual state are drawn:

3
The slightly trembling water
Dropping a fine yellow silt where the sun stays;
And the crabs bask near the edge,
The weedy edge, alive with small snakes and bloodsuckers,—
I have come to a still, but not a deep center,
A point outside the glittering current;
My eyes stare at the bottom of a river,
At the irregular stones, iridescent sand grains,
My mind moves in more than one place,
In a country half-land, half-water. (3. 12-21)

The river is more stable now and is only "slightly trembling" which signifies Roethke's calm mind. The poet further explains that he has "come to a still, but not a deep center, A point outside the glittering current." This reference to a "still point" might echo T.S. Eliot's reference to a "still point" in his poem "Burnt Norton" (1936). Eliot says "At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless... at the still point, there the dance is, \ But neither arrest nor movement." (II. 16-18) Like Eliot, Roethke's reference to the "still point" is a timeless eternal place where the past and the future meet (Hurst, 1997, p. 20).

In this sense, Roethke is expressing the feeling of ecstasy as he experienced the sensation of "stillness," which is a phase of illumination through which he feels eternal after communing with God. Achieving oneness with the divine means oneness with all forms and feeling that all is one. This idea is highlighted in the image of the poet's eyes stare at the stones in the bottom of the river. Staring at the stillness of the stone indicates a state of stillness as one feels himself eternal and unalterable.

These mystic experiences of being united with God through moments of illumination render the one "half-life" and "half dead" as expressed in the images of "half -land" and "half-water."

Consequently, the poet feels himself an inseparable part of the divine essence within him, and death cannot annihilate him, he is eternal. The notion of eternity, which is connected to the cycle of life and death, is repeatedly accentuated in the stanza:

3
I am renewed by death, thought of my death,
The dry scent of a dying garden in September,
The wind fanning the ash of a low fire.
What I love is near at hand,
Always, in earth and air. (3. 22-26)

Reasoning with the belief of reincarnation, Roethke explicitly embraces the idea of death. Thus, he says that he is "renewed by death" by which he implies that death is only a step before one is born again. Dexterously, the poet uses the image of the garden dying in September to emphasize his belief that everything is destined to die, then to be reborn including himself. Jay Parini comments on Roethke's realization of death as a passage to a new life:

[For Roethke] There is paradoxically a sense of renewal in mortality...The sense of death as a passage provokes this optimism. Roethke savors that taste of the eternal that he finds in the temporal dimension, those little clues which go everywhere around us largely undetected (Parini, 1979, p. 226). It is relevant to assert that the poet's choice of the possessive pronoun "my" to refer to his death emphasizes his subjectivity, his individual experience and understanding of death in a

constructive way. It is a loving phase "What I love is near at hand" through which he is reincarnated into a new form (Hurst, 1997, p. 14). This renewal is enhanced through the image of the wind "fanning the ash of a low fire." Roethke's use of the wind echoes his other poem "What Can I Tell My Bones?" (1961) when he says "My spirit rises with the rising wind." (p. 64). The poet associates the wind with spirit, in this way, fanning the "low fire" indicates giving new life to the dead body "the ash" (Parini, 1979, p. 123).

In the final part of the poem "The Far Field," Theodore Roethke is a changed man, an old wise man. The self which begins the journey as a "lost" one, now is different as it is endowed with wisdom and spiritual insight:

4
The lost self changes,
Turning toward the sea,
A sea-shape turning around,—
An old man with his feet before the fire,
In robes of green, in garments of adieu.
A man faced with his own immensity
Wakes all the waves, all their loose wandering fire.
The murmur of the absolute, the why
Of being born fails on his naked ears.
His spirit moves like monumental wind
That gentles on a sunny blue plateau.
He is the end of things, the final man. (4. 1-12)

The images here bear resemblance to other images from the poem "The Long Waters" by the poet. In this poem, Roethke declares "I lose and find myself in the long water." (Hurst, 1997, pp. 30-31) Since the wide sea is an archetypal image of "death," the meaning denoted is of the reincarnation as dying and being born again is made parallel to losing the self then finding it (Parini, 1979: p. 226). Roethke is "Faced with his own immensity," as he comes to embrace death and accepting it as the final step in the direction of rebirth (Hurst, 1997: p. 32).

Finally, the river is running and merging into the sea. Literally, this is the end of its journey. While figuratively, it points to the poet approaching death and getting to the end of his spiritual quest. In this respect, the journey the river takes from its source into the sea is a representation of the poet's inner journey from the shallowness of understanding the meaning of life and death into the mighty mystic vision of timelessness and union with the divine.

Analyzing the images in the above verse lines and their preferentiality, Sullivan suggests that "[Roethke] is returning to water, the sea of origin, encumbered with age and memory, the cycle of which he is the returning unit having almost completed its round." (p. 777) The poet is now an "old man" waiting for death "with his feet before the fire." Feeling a sense of renewal as suggested by the green color of his robes after embracing death, Roethke is bedding this life goodbye "in garments of adieu" as he becomes eternal (Parini, 1979, p. 227). In this closing part of the poem, the poet reveals a strong conviction that he is more than just a man, he is part of nature that "Wakes all the waves". The image of the poet hearing "the murmurs of the absolute" refers to the idea of reaching his destination, as reaching the "absolute" in mysticism refers to the union with God (Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. 24). It is every mystic's greatest achievement, which Roethke here declares achieving it. There and then, the poet says that the questions about his existence have no significance to him anymore as these questions "fall on naked ears." The wind is another image with significant implication, the poet compares himself to a wind that freely blows on the sea surface "blue plateau" joyful as it attains its spiritual goals.

It is of importance to explain here the shift from the pronoun "I" which the poet uses in the previous parts of the poem into "He" which he employs here in the final part. In his final spiritual experience and as he approaches a union with God

hearing “the murmurs of the absolute”, the poet’s individuality is dissolved and vanished while he becomes part of the whole universe. As a consequence, there is no “I”, but only God referred to as “He”. Evelyn Underhill in her book entitled *Practical Mysticism*, summarizes this phase of the mystical experience:

[The] dying to your own will, waiting for what is given, infused, you will presently find that a change in your apprehension has indeed taken place: and that those who said self-loss was the only way to realization taught no pious fiction but the truth. (P. 65)

In the closing verse lines of this poem and through images dexterously selected from nature, the poet emphasizes that the “infinite,” or “the eternal,” is revealed through the “finite things” in nature:

4
All finite things reveal infinitude:
The mountain with its singular bright shade
Like the blue shine on freshly frozen snow,
The after-light upon ice-burdened pines;
Odor of basswood on a mountain-slope,
A scent beloved of bees;
Silence of water above a sunken tree:
The pure serene of memory in one man,—
A ripple widening from a single stone
Winding around the waters of the world. (4. 13-22)

The reader is reminded of details of the landscape, snowy land, surrounding mountains, high pines and sunken trees. The images flow smoothly and are skillfully chosen with musical elements obviously caught through the use of alliteration “freshly frozen snow,” “memory of a one man” and “waters of the world.” The poet describes an enormous mountain that provides “bright shade,” then he makes it similar to the blue shining color as it is reflected on the snow while the pine trees are loaded with “ice burden.”

However, the ice is soon to melt away and with it the burden which reflects the poet’s freedom from the concerns of life. Then, Roethke portrays the “bees” which are attracted by the smell of the basswood expressing his love to them “beloved of bees.” Being a mystic, the poet considers every nature element, animate and inanimate things as holy. The poet perceives in all beings around him a holy essence. This indicates that the poet finds God in the “bees,” “pines,” “basswood,” “trees” and even in the “single stone” that makes ripples in the water.

3. Conclusion:

The current research paper finds out that the poet Roethke in his poem “The Far Field” utilizes certain Jungian imageries, those that have common connotations among varying cultures and people, as the withered flowers, the carcass of a cat-bird, the logo of a dead tree, the light of tomorrow, the blossoms of buds and the fresh running water of the river. He adroitly employs these images in his poem to emphasize the core idea of the poem which is the cycles of birth, death and re-birth that is the system that governs all the livings including human beings.

Another concluding point that the analysis of the poem has come out with, is in connection with the poet’s profound mystical experiences. Through deep contemplation in nature scenes, Roethke unveils his longing to be united with God, to be one with Him believing that in such union the endless cycles of birth, death and re-birth can be broken.

It has also been concluded that the analysis of this poem highlights the various spiritual stages of growth the poet has passed through; from ignorance and shallowness, to doubts and uncertainly, then to his breakthrough realization that he can conquer death through seeking a union with God. In this manner, the poet’s long walking in nature and his deep contemplations in the river, flowers, the birds and the dead

corps of the animals become like a representation of his inner spiritual journey which he takes “Toward union with the Divine.” (Hurst, 1997: p. 32)

Endnotes

¹ -For more details on the life of the poet, please read: Allan Seager. *The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke*.1968, P. 132.

² -Definition of “the self” is given in the chapter entitled The Preparation of the Mystic in Evelyn Underhill’s book, *Practical Mysticism*. 1915, p. 24.

³ - The word “divine” is used by Theodore Roethke as a synonym to God. For more details read Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 1915, p. 69.

⁴ -Metaphysical poetry is a kind of poetry that emerged during the seventeenth century. Among the famous poets of this kind of poetry was John Donne (1572-1631). Poetry of this kind is characterized by witty conceit and identified with the ability to create startling, far-fetched figures of speech. For more details, see: Edward Hirsch. *A Poet’s Glossary*. 2014, p. 939.

⁵ - Transcendentalism is an intellectual and literary movement that appeared in the United States of America during the nineteenth century whose main poet is Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). This movement holds the conviction that the basic truths of the universe lie beyond the knowledge we obtained by our mere senses. Further, the movement affirms the individual’s ability to experience an inner spiritual life while contemplating in nature. For more details, read Holt, Rinehart, & Winston. *Adventures in American Literature*. 1996, p. 208.

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ثيودور روتكا "الحقل البعيد" : التجارب الروحانية من خلال النماذج النمطية ليونغ

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث واحدة من أبرز قصائد الشاعر الأمريكي الحديث ثيودور هوبنر روتكا (1908-1963) وعنوان القصيدة هو "الحقل البعيد" (1964). يدرس البحث الحالي الأهمية الصوفية للصور المستخدمة في شعر روتكا "الحقل البعيد". في هذه القصيدة ، يعبر الشاعر مجازياً عن رحلته الروحية لإدراك الإله في داخله من خلال التأمل العميق في الطبيعة. هذه التجربة تشبه إلى حد كبير التجربة الصوفية لإدراك الألوهية داخل نفسه أثناء العيش في عزلة. تستكشف المناقشة النماذج النمطية ليونغ في هذه القصيدة وتفحص مرجعية كل من المستوى التصويري الجمالي للقصيدة والبعد الروحي. على سبيل المثال ، يستخدم روتكا بمهارة صورة الحقل البعيد للإشارة إلى الموت ، ولكن المؤثر للاهتمام أن هذا الحقل البعيد الذي تتناثر فيه الحيوانات الميتة هو أيضاً رمز للولادة الجديدة حيث تنبثق الحياة الجديدة إلى الظهور مثل حديقة تذبذب في الخريف فقط لتزدهر مرة أخرى في الربيع. وبالتالي ، عبر هذه الصور المستمدة من الطبيعة ، يصور الشاعر المراحل المختلفة للنمو الروحي الذي يمر به. هذه المراحل هي: الخوف من الموت ، وتجاوز هذا الخوف من خلال إدراك دورة الولادة والموت التي هي التناسخ ، وأخيراً الانفصال عن الواقعية الجسدية إلى اتحاد مع الإله.

الكلمات الدالة : روتكا، التصوف ، "الحقل البعيد" ، النماذج النمطية ليونغ ، دورة الولادة والموت ، التناسخ ، والإله.

ميركا دور "يا تيودور روتكا: سهربورين ثاييني د نموونهين سهرهتايي بين يونكي

پڤخته:

هغه فكهولينه ب ناه و دهنگترين هوزانا هوزانقاني ته مريكي بي سهردهم تيودور هوبنر روتكا (١٩٠٨ - ١٩٦٣) هوال ل ژير ناقى اميركا دورا يا سالا (١٩٤٧) ب خوفه دگريت. هغه فكهولينه خواندنهكي ددهت هوان وينين سوفيهگهري تهويت هاتينه بكارئينان د هوزانا اميركا دورا ده. دقي هوزاني دا، روتكا ب شتوازهكي خوازهبي دهربريني ژ سهربوروا خوه يا ثاييني دا ب ريكا هزرکن و ليندبرينه کا کووير د سروشتي دا دا کو خوداوهندي د ناخي خوه دا ناس بکت. هب ريکه وهکيهفي شتوازي دهربريني به هه و وينين ثاييني کرين ده ما د تنببونوي دا ژيايي ژ بو ديتنا خوداوهندي د ناخي خوه دا. د بهشي گهنگهشي دا، نمونين سهرهتايي بين تاييهت بين يونكي دقي هوزاني دا و ههروهسا ديتينين تاماژهبي د سهر ناستي وينين جوانيي بين هوزاني و دوويراتيبيا گياني هاتنه گهنگهشهکن. وهک ميناک، روتکايي ب شتوازهكي گهله بليمه تانه وينين اميرکا دووير ب کارئينا دا تاماژي ب مرني بدت، بهلي تشتي سهرنجراکيش هه هه هه اميرکا دووير ههوا گياندار تندا دووباره دزفرن ژيانن تامرازه که کو دووباره ژيانن پي ويننه دکت وهک وي اميرکا ههوا ژيان تندا سهرهدت وهکي اميرگهکي و زهر دبت د پاييزي دا و دووباره رهنگ و رهنگ لي دهيت د بهاري دا. ژ بهرقي چهندي، هه وينين وهرگرتي ژ سروشتي ک هوزانقاني ب کارئينان تامران بو وينهکرنا قوناغين ثاييني و گياني بين هوزانقان تيرا بوويرن. هغه قوناغه بيک دهين ژ: ترس ژ مرني، دهريازبون ژ قي ترسي بريکا زانينا بازنا ژيان و مرني دووباره رابوون، و يا دوماهي، دوويرکه تن ژ دوورهيلا راستي و گه هاندن دگهل خوداوهندي.

په يقين سهرهکي: روتکا، سوفيهگهري، اميرکا دووير، نمونين سهرهتايي بين يونكي، بازنا ژيان و مرني، دووباره رابوون، خوداوهند.