P R E F A C E

THEODORE ROETHKE AND THE WHITMAN TRADITION

This study attempts to examine what is distinctive about Theodore Roethke's poetic genius and the nature of its relationship to a major American poetic tradition. Some critics have maintained that his poetry is not of the mainstream of the native American poetic tradition; others have suggested that, while there are 'echoes' in his poetry of a 'community of writers', it does not form part of any recognizable tradition. In dealing with Roethke the poet, however, the emphasis has inevitably to fall on his quest of the 'self'. For him, the search for his personal identity was an inseparable aspect of the search for his poetic identity. At the same time, note is taken of the view that the main thrust of his creative inspiration was his desire to match his poetic talent with those of other poets. While giving adequate attention to the question of Roethke's poetic affiliations to other poets, especially to W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, the thesis argues that both in achievement and basic polarity Roethke belongs in the main to the native poetic tradition of Whitman. The thesis is divided into three parts.

Part I considers the background of the poetic modes which were in vogue when Roethke began his poetic career.

Part II studies the major poetic sequences of Roethke, noting his poetic affiliations to other poets and emphasizes the implicit movement of his poetic style.

Part III places Roethke within the Whitman tradition.