PART III

PLACEMENT OF ROETHKE WITHIN THE WHITMAN TRADITION
CHAPTER 8

THE ROETHKEAN MODE

I

How far is it legitimate to speak of the Roethkean mode? For there are very few modern poets whose list of "significant indebtedness" would be as long as Roethke's, and "significant indebtedness" in his case means mainly the various poetic modes he practised. Like many others of his era he was striving to write poetry expressing subjectively the emotion of the poet or those whom he represents. Since it was not easy for him to be concerned with the emotions of other people his work reflects the bitter struggle of his self to come to terms with the objective world, and the estrangement of the self from the outer world was not as painful a dilemma as its estrangement from itself.

The self in Roethke has many faces and even if every poem is spoken by a persona, we cannot forget that it is also in some sense spoken by the poet. As George T. Wright observes: "The poet not only contrives a speaker for his poems; he also contrives for himself a personality that the reader can abstract from the poem." Roethke has used personae in several of his poems; — the personae of other poets like W. Yeats or Sir John Davies, the personae of the "old woman" and the "lost son". The first volume, Open House and later sequences like North American Sequence and Sequence,
Sometimes Metaphysical do not employ the persona. They speak to the reader "with no disguise." (CP. p. 3). Since the problem of Roethke's poetic personality is linked with the presentation of the self, it will help us to understand his use of the personae in his poems.

The self in Roethke manifests itself in many roles. The opening poem of *Open House* disclaims any mask or role for the speaker; nevertheless, by implication, the speaker leaves an impression of being an heir to the Romantic heritage. Roethke's speaker represents him as a singer, a composer, whose style will be direct and austere. "The lyric persona," remarks Wright, "is man singing, man as composer or singer of songs." It is the image of a poet who would meet his readers on equal and intimate terms as human beings that the speaker of Roethke's *Open House* presents. Another aspect of his speaker that is reflected in *Open House* is that of his struggle for adequate poetic expression. Indirectly, throughout the first volume, the image of the speaker that emerges is that of a Romantic poet who is thwarted in his poetic fertility. The centre of interest in this volume is the growth of the speaker as poet. It is "an elemental persona", who claims no superiority to his audience, and "his point of view, his attitude toward life, ... are all available to his listeners - are, perhaps, theirs before they are his." The self functions in its Adamic role, of the archetypal situation of man rather than as a representative of any social or cultural group. Because the self is committed to this archetypal role,
of the various kinds of illumination a human life needs, this poetry pursues only one kind." The self in Roethke explores its real nature in its very roots — biological, psychological and religious. Social reality has admittedly shrunk in his poems. Notwithstanding this, it is not fair to say, as John Wain does, that "it seeks for wisdom from one source and one source only." Yeats and Eliot, his elder contemporaries, searched through many sources for wisdom in a way Roethke did not. Yeats went to the ancient thinkers, Western and Oriental, and even to magic; Eliot made all contemporary knowledge his province. Roethke is more limited than either in intellectual range. But this is deliberate. He believed that all roads lead to the self and it was better to explore the self itself than to go to other sources. In his "genesis" (CP. p.18) we have an attempt to answer the charge of limited range often levelled against his poetry:

Around a central grain
New meaning grows immense.

The self was thus "the central grain" for Roethke and he explored "its new meaning" in his sequences.

The "greenhouse" poems that introduce The Lost Son (1948) present the speaker seeking to understand the self in the spirit of a naturalist. It is the evolutionary basis—Darwinian principle of the self that the speaker explores. It is this growth of the self explored in its phases of development that
distinguishes Roethke's treatment of the self and the speaker in his poems. Neither in Yeats nor in Eliot do we find the biological basis of the self so closely observed. These poems of Roethke belong to the world of the child and present reality through the eyes of a child, through direct sensuous apprehension rather than through intellectual analysis. The poem, "Child on Top of a Greenhouse", presents a child's point of view which is the dominant attitude of the narrator in the "greenhouse" poems.

Besides the Darwinian principle, there is a Freudian note. The growth of the persona as poet is linked with the knowledge of the self in its "invincible Becoming." The aesthetics of the "greenhouse" poems may be summarised as: "the rooting of poetry in sensuous experience, the search for naive, even pre-rational, modes of expression, and a more dynamic concept of the correspondence between the vegetable and the human." The search for the pre-rational and the primordial mode of expression makes Roethke's speaker a distinct figure. The "I" of the Open House and the "greenhouse" poems may be regarded as personae in the sense that the speakers of these poems are created poetic voices by Roethke. The poet and the speaker of these poems cannot be the same persons because "what he has created exists on different metaphysical levels," the obvious distinction being that the speaker is a fictitious figure, and the poet is his begetter.

When he comes to write The Lost Son Roethke projects the speaker through the persona of the "lost son." In this he also
crystallises the persona of the speakers of Open House and "the greenhouse" poems. The persona of "lost son" unites in him the biological, psychological, religious and even the aesthetic bases of the speaker's self. The mask of the "lost son" demonstrates the self's alienation from its roots—parental, natural, social and metaphysical. The movement of these poems is from darkness to light, but the spiritual and the psychological aspects of the quest unite in the persona. The Jungian process of individuation is reflected in the search of the self here. Job's alienation from God is also implied in the archetypal figure of the lost son. However, the sequence deals with the persona's relentless struggle for the biological and psychological identity. In fact, this conflict within himself and with "others" is something the persona has accepted as a principle of growth, as an inevitable price the self has to pay for achieving its own identity.

The self has reached the stage of adolescence in its growth so far, and in Four for Sir John Davies, the speaker plays the role of a lover-dancer. He assumes the voice of the seventeenth century poet, John Davies, to embody the harmony, not of divine love, but of sexual union. Yeats's voice is another mask the speaker—dancer employs. Important though the mask of the lover is, it is the literary mask of other poets that is at the centre of the quest. The literary context of his persona is never lost sight of. Roethke extends the context of his persona after projecting the persona that was a legacy from the Romantic Poets of the nineteenth century. That Roethke was concerned with
the question of the poetic tradition and that his identity as man and as poet was a part of the larger question of the poetic tradition could be discerned from the way in which he manipulated his personae as *Four for Sir John Davies*. The speaker mediates between the seventeenth century poet who sang of divine love and universal harmony and a modern poet who regards erotic love as a form of divine union. Davies's religious sense would have disapproved of Yeats's view of love, and the juxtaposition of these two poets serves as Roethke's point of view of the theme.

Yeats had remarked: "I was about to learn that if a man is to write lyric poetry he must be shaped by nature and art to some one out of a dozen traditional poses, and be lover or saint, sage or sensualist, or mere mocker of all life." 11 Roethke's "Love Poems" in *Words for the Wind* (1958) and *The Far Field* (1964) present the speaker as lover. The mask the speaker wears is that of a Petrarchan or courtly lover who is an adept at paying compliments to his beloved and his "love" poems bring to mind the Elizabethan lyrics. Here, again, the persona's link with the poetic tradition is noticeable. What one appreciates is Roethke's skill in rendering the persona of a Petrarchan lover and echoing the rhythms of Elizabethan songs.

The literary context of the personae in Roethke's poetry persists in his next sequence: *The Dying Man : In Memoriam : W.B. Yeats* (CP. p.153). As in Yeats, the growth of the self has been inextricably tied up with the realisation of its
poetic potentialities. This was the point of Roethke's evocation of Yeatsian rhythms in *Four for Sir John Davies*. As Yeats would have said, to compose a poem was to compose the self for Roethke. Of course, the persona in *Four for Sir John Davies* is a passive participant in the action. In *The Dying Man* he is an active agent. "The 'I' of Yeats is usually at the centre of the stage, passionate, choosing, involved in the action; just as the hero of nineteenth-century English poetry is usually the poet and is dramatised." 12 The Yeatsian persona in *Four for Sir John Davies* is "passionate and involved in the action" but not "at the centre of the stage." However, it enables Roethke to achieve aesthetic distance in the presentation of his personal emotions. What he wished to embody in his sequences was the point of view of the Yeatsian persona: erotic love as a dance of the body and the spirit, and heroic defiance in the face of death. His affinity with the Yeatsian persona is established through the images and rhetoric of Yeats.

It is possible the persona in *Four for Sir John Davies* is passive because love there is explored from the feminine point of view which is what Roethke also adopted in *Meditations of an Old Woman* (CP. p.157). Once again the literary mask of the persona is apparent. One is reminded of T.S. Eliot's *Gerontion* and Walt Whitman. If the Yeatsian persona in *The Dying Man* was used to project the growth of the self through dramatic conflict, the Whitmanesque persona provides here a
happy ending to the tragic conflict. The poetic context and the other aspect of the persona, appropriate to the stage of its growth, reinforce each other. The Eliotean and the Whitemanesque associations of the persona in the "old woman" sequence reflect the meditative and mystical character respectively of the self in the face of death.

In North American Sequence, persona is unmistakenably literary; Whitman pervades it and the Yeatsian conflict which looks upon the universe as a dramatic construct comes to be absorbed in the Whitmanesque vision of cosmic empathy. The persona is that of the poet-seeker-visionary who finally attains unity of being.

This literary lineage of the personae in Roethke's poems suggests that he was not a poet committed to poetic technique alone. It is merely an attempt to indicate how Roethke also saw the question of the growth of self as a kind of dramatic interaction between different poetic traditions.

II

How can one reach to the poet through his persona? How far does the point of view of a persona represent that of the poet? Perhaps if we examine how Roethke builds up his personae in his poems, such as The Lost Son and North American Sequence, we might get some clue to our questions.

In The Lost Son, the persona creates the dramatic situation to convey his inner life by direct address to his surroundings
and by their description. The persona has adopted a double point of view of actor and of narrator. The persona's interest is in the self but this is presented through his dramatic relationship with the surroundings.

A striking instance of the persona acting his role can be seen in "The Pit" (CP. p.55 ) section of the sequence. But equally revealing are the following two stanzas from "The Flight" (CP. p.54 )

Voice, come out of the silence.
Say something.
Appear in the form of a spider-
Or a moth beating the curtain.
Tell me:
Which is the way I take;
Out of what door do I go,
Where and to whom?

It is the situation of a trapped protagonist desperately seeking his freedom. The speaker is too emotionally disturbed to be aware of the audience's presence. He is cut off from both the human and the divine and longs for primordial existence. As George T. Wright puts it: "The point of view in the poem is that of the persona; the point of view of the poem is that of the poet to whom the self and its situation comprise all reality." 13 The persona of "Lost Son" cannot isolate himself from the fictitious universe of the "woodland"; his point of view is of "the hunted and harried." At the same time, the point of view of the poet here is not different from that of his persona. He shares his persona's disaffiliation from the world which is reflected in the persona's lack of awareness of
the reader's presence. By implication, for this persona, the reader is a part of the environment with which the persona seeks some relationship.

On the other hand, the "I" also functions as a reporter in some sections of the sequence. "The Return" for example (CP. p.57) relates an episode from the early boyhood of the protagonist when he stayed "all night" in the greenhouse. The persona represents alienation from the world where it was born as well as from the world to which he addresses himself.

The double point of view of the persona — of actor and of reporter — focuses the dramatic conflict of the fragmented self. The point of view of the poet is of one who is withdrawn from human society, and the quest he is engaged in is for wholeness of being. The poem's dramatic structure is worked out through the conflict that the persona embodies in himself and acts out through the sequence.

Roethke's North American Sequence projects the central conflict of the self and also embodies its resolution. The persona of "lost son" which is a recurring image in his poetry appears here as a protagonist as in earlier sequences, but with the focus on the religious dimension of the quest. In spite of the note of estrangement from the environment, the persona has achieved a greater degree of empathy and spontaneity. He has discovered the secret of transcendence symbolised in "the rose in the sea-wind." The tone of the narrator blends two voices of the persona — the apocalyptic and the dramatic, the former expressing the persona's urge towards transcendence, while the
latter conveying the ambiguous relationship of the self with others. To this, the conversational manner and colloquial diction lend a touch of familiarity. Even the transcendent vision is contained in naturalistic terms. "The Rose" section (CP. p. 202) illustrates the speaker's point of view as in:

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

Here the persona is that of a man who re-lives in memory his early childhood. His tone, intimate and informal, and the details act as connecting links between the child and the man. The persona has come to an adequate understanding of things, to a condition of peace with himself and with the past.

One may compare Roethke's use of the persona in "The Return" (CP. p. 57) with that in "The Rose" section, particularly in the lines quoted above. Though both sections relate to memories of the childhood world of the greenhouses, the reactions of the narrators are not identical. In "The Return", the protagonist's curiosity, his adventurous spirit, fear of the father, and his perception of the world reflected in the
"greenhouse" present a child's point of view. It is experience as assimilated by the child, and what matters is the physical immediacy of the experience itself and its psychological effect on the boy-protagonist's mind. Words like "Roses" and "Snow" that generally carry some symbolic associations are used here only in their literal sense. The persona is absorbed in the physical reality of his world. On the other hand, in "The Rose" section of North American Sequence the roses and the father have taken on symbolic implication for the persona. The "greenhouse" world which represented the social structure to the young boy has now become another heaven for him, where the religious dimension discovered by the narrator is something new. The persona's point of view here is also the poet's point of view, the distance between the poet and his persona being marginal.

III

The distinctive trait of the self that Roethke projects is its obsessive concern with its real identity. The persona is not an embodiment of the total self of the poet. Thus the persona of the "lost son" embodies the perplexities, anxieties, fears and isolation of the poet as child. In The Dying Man the Yeatsian persona offers a heroic point of view; the old lady's stance in facing death is Whitmanesque. One might say then that Roethke's mode is expressed not in any one particular stage or persona but in his poetry as a whole.
The Roethkean mode is better understood by comparing his way of projecting personae with those of Pound, Eliot and Yeats. The persona for Pound was the most effective channel of self-expression. In Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, we can see how he manipulates his persona and tone. He was, in this poem, representing an image of a poet who is something of a "lost son" in an age that no longer cares for "the sublime" in the classical sense. It is a portrait of an alienated artist which, by implication, is an indictment of the culture that cares only for the cheap and the vulgar in art. What is interesting, from the first line to the last the speaker does not forget the presence of his audience which is the victim of his invective. The ironic contrast between the glorious past and degenerate contemporary society regulates the narrator's tone. But the method of presenting the persona is that of narrating an important phase of ancient culture. What distinguishes him is his sophisticated intelligence. Even though the poem is written under the pressure of personal experience and has in it "quintessential autobiography, ... it has the impersonality of great poetry." 14 The "impersonality of great poetry" is achieved through the persona of Mauberley.

Pound's use of the persona and of the dramatic monologue cannot be appreciated without a proper understanding of the dramatic structure of the poem. With no consecutive action to present and no logical argument to develop, one may suggest that the poem's structure is "basically textural rather than temporal." 15 It juxtaposes the rich cultural traditions of
the past with the sterility of the modern situation. The structure is spatial in the sense that the classical past and the contemporary milieu are imagined as having a simultaneous existence.

As there is no action in the sequence the structure it constructs rests upon the associations in the memory of the persona. One may say the self in Pound's poem is bound up with history and the contemporary moment.

As against this, Roethke's narrator in *The Lost Son* is devoid of the historical sense and sophistication. This historical sense is the very stuff of the self in Pound as also in Eliot; Roethke's persona regards time as an aspect of personal and cosmic destiny. The self in his poetry is concerned with its evolutionary growth as a part of nature's scheme, because it would rediscover its Adamic identity. The persona in Pound seeks his identity through the historical roles though it is the image of a "lost" artist. F.R. Leavis's comment, pointing out the distinction between Eliot and Pound, seems pertinent here: "But in essentials, Mr. Pound's poetry is very different from Mr. Eliot's. There are in it none of Mr. Eliot's complex intensities of concern about soul and body: ... Mr. Pound's main concern has always been art; he is, in the most serious sense of the word, an aesthete." 16 This is substantially true in the sense that Pound's approach to the contemporary dilemmas was not religious. This near-religious sense of the personae in Roethke sets them apart from Pound's. Roethke, though as dedicated as Pound as a poet, was not an aesthete.
Pound's method of projecting his persona in Mauberley is that of a novelist who evaluates his fictitious character even when he writes about him. Mauberley is not presented in action; he is talked about. He represents the artist's consciousness in "a botched civilization." The Lost Son presents the flow of consciousness, the self as becoming more conscious of itself. Pound's persona is static whereas Roethke's "the lost son" enacts the struggle for dynamic growth.

Pound's method in Mauberley is narrative whereas Roethke projects his persona dramatically. Not that Pound has not succeeded in achieving technical perfection, a complete detachment and control. It only implies that he sees his persona as a fixed character and his use of the past tense is significant in this context. Mauberley is meant to expose the thinness and morbidity of the Romantic self. Roethke's presentation of the self in the Lost Son with its flow of consciousness, is essentially romantic.

Pound influenced Roethke through Eliot, and this influence, as remarked in the earlier chapters (vide chapters 2 and 3), is seen in the latter's concern for concrete images. Roethke's poetic affiliation with Eliot was, as Harold Bloom would put it, "antithetical." As would become a beginner, Roethke assimilated what he deemed to be the important traits of the Pound—Eliot poetics — insistence upon the concrete, and objective manner of presentation of details through the images. Like them, he would build his poetic structures not logically but through the stream of consciousness of his speakers.
There is also a clear difference in Roethke's handling of time. The self in Pound and Eliot is bound up by sense of time; the self, in Roethke, seems to be discovering time for the first time. As the protagonist in "Where Knock is Open Wide" puts it:

Once upon a tree
I came across a time,
It wasn't even as
A ghoulie in a dream.

( CP. p.71 ).

The context here refers to the child's prenatal awareness of time. The nature of the self is linked up with the nature of the consciousness of time which the protagonist reflects. The "old lady" has marked the effect of time on her body reduced to "a strange piece of flesh" (CP. p.157). The sense of time is, thus, one could say, an extended aspect of the self in Roethke.

Eliot's concepts of time and the self, as is wellknown, are profoundly influenced by his religious faith. For him Christ's birth is a turning point in human history and the incarnation of Christ as God's son a significant event in the human consciousness of time. Eliot had remarked in his dissertation: "Experience is certainly more real than anything else, but any experience demands reference to something real which lies outside of that experience." 17 The cultural situation provides this referential matrix to the self in his early poetry but its suffering is born out of its awareness of moral inadequacy. Prufrock and Gerontion are lost souls
not only in the sense of their being victims of their cultural predicament but also in the religious sense of the term. Their crisis reflects their inability to relate themselves to a reference "outside" their experience. In Ash-Wednesday we find that the self has found this reference through the power of faith. "It is a primary purpose of Ash-Wednesday", remarks Lynen "to dramatise the process by which God creates life by creating time." 18 The main action of the poem centres around the speaker's new understanding of time, rather the new relationship he establishes with time through his understanding of the Incarnation:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the word unheared,
The word without a word, the word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the World the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent word.

(Eliot: p.88).

The self realises that God's presence in the world redeems it and justifies life in time, and this presence, the Incarnation for Eliot is an undeniable proof.

As against this, Roethke's poems depict the self as coming to terms with time more from psychological and evolutionary points of view. He views time as a personal experience of the self at the stage of its growth, and there is no fixed centre or order of reference to which the time-consciousness must be related. It is all centred in the self. Its redeemer did not
exist in any historical epoch.

_The Dying Man_ (CP. p.153) describes the time-consciousness of "one who moves in the time between sleep and waking." The speaker, who wears the mask of Yeats, doubts whether he will return to this scene after death. Death, this is to say, destroys the time-consciousness of the self. "I shall undo all dying by my death," declares the protagonist. To be born is to come into the time-bound world. Unlike in _Ash-Wednesday_, the protagonist does not seek and struggle to redeem time; there is no implication in Roethke's poem that the wages of sin is death. Death is thought of as an organic process of life. The tree is an organic culmination of the seed. The speaker cannot think of an eternal life apart from this existence. If one could think of eternal life, it is here and now. The self in Roethke's sequence, if it has to seek any reference outside itself, goes to the world of the dead:

Places great with their dead,
The mire, the sodden wood,
Remind me to stay alive.
I am the clumsy man
The instant ages on.

To the protagonist, his old age represents the ceaseless flow of time from one moment to another. Here again, time is regarded as an organic process experienced in one's life.

That time is felt self as a psychological and organic experience of the process of growing can be noticed even in the "old lady" sequence. The "old lady" marks the passage of time from the changes it has wrought on her body. She registers
the change in her time-consciousness. Now, she is no longer the "queen" of the vale; on the other hand, she feels that "much of adolescence is an ill-defined dying". She reads her fate in the geranium that is dying. This is seeing death as an organic process of life. Being a part of it, she must also accept it.

It is because of the intense personal awareness of time, as a psychological and organic experience, that Roethke's personae "go backward in order to move forward" and convey a sense of inner growth. This is an important distinction between Roethke's personae and Eliot's. One may compare Eliot's and Roethke's ways of representing poetic action in their poems. Roethke's "The Lost Son" may be said to embody the archetypal figure of the lost man in search of his roots but his growth towards the end of the sequence is inward in the sense that his perception is altered. More than in any other of his poems, in Four Quartets Eliot tried to represent a poetic action. While Ash-Wednesday depicts the self during a brief hour of a religious ceremony, the Quartets represent a sequence of experiences in the course of a decade—1930 to 1940. The temporal range provides an opportunity to the poet to place the self in a specific historical epoch. The action centres round "the communication between the imaginary people", while the quest for the meaning of life leads the poet back to East Coker, Dry Salvages and Little Gidding, suggesting that the private life would not exist at all except in the
communal world. Nowhere in Roethke do his personae evince the communal sense of time. In *North American Sequence*, the speaker, as an old explorer, would like to be one of the Iroquois. However, there is no awareness of the historical and communal point of view. Roethke's persona views reality from subjective sense of time, and his time sense of the speaker extends far back to pre-human history. Even when he narrates many detours, the human is kept at a distance:

Once I was something like this, mindless,
Or perhaps with another mind, less peculiar,
Believing;
I'll return again,
As a snake or a raucous bird,
Or, with luck, as a lion.

(CP. p. 200).

Historical phases and places, then, have no distinct meaning in Roethke's sequence. The action of Eliot's poem presents the realisation of God as the end; Roethke's sequence sees God in the self. Its realisation comes through "the pure serene of memory in one man," and the progression of time in Roethke's poem is circular — "What's done is yet to come."

It is because relationships in Eliot are influenced by considerations of social affiliations or the allegiance to the church that the personae in Eliot cannot mould their own destiny. Perhaps the view that Eliot took of time and history is responsible for this. In their view of time and
history, Eliot and Roethke stand at opposite poles. Both regard this life as incomplete, but while Eliot put his faith in spiritual salvation through the church, Roethke takes it to be heaven when sense and spirit are fully and harmoniously united. He seems to have shared the faith of Yeats who remarked: "poetry concerns itself with the creation of Paradises. I use the word in the plural for there are as many paradises as there are individual men-nay-as many as there are separate feelings." The heaven that Roethke could believe in was his personal creation; "the rose" of heaven in his poetry, despite its Christian association, was a personal memory rather than a historical symbol.

Eliot's heaven could not have been Roethke's, nor could it have been Yeats's. Yeats's understanding of the history of human civilisations was profounder than Roethke's. "Meru" and "The Second Coming" help us to understand how he interpreted the course of human civilisations. In "Meru", he implied that civilisations are destined to disintegrate and collapse as they are "hooped together" by forces that have "the semblance of peace." These forces can be political and/or religious. They contend for man's mind that wants to probe the bottom of reality:

And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Ravening through century after century,
Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality.

The destruction of civilisations results from this man's strange
curiosity — to experience the reality of destruction itself.
Paradoxically, it is man's nature to destroy what he has created. The conclusion of the poem would perhaps have been attributed by Eliot to man's fallen nature as a proof of evil; Yeats offers it as a comment on human nature. And this vision of nothingness — of "the desolation or reality" — comes through the Eastern ascetics on Mount Meru or Everest. However, the final impression of the poem is not negative. It impresses upon us man's courage to face the terror of nothingness with which he will be left. Richard Ellmann rightly observes: "Its principal emphasis is not on the illusory character of life." In its emphasis on the restlessness of man's mind and his courage to see through all illusions, the Eastern vision is given a new meaning.

Yeats is deeply concerned with human history; and his sense of it, despite the personal interpretation he puts on it, is not completely conditioned by the psychological pressures of the self as in Roethke. It does take into account the events that shaped the life of the community. "The Second Coming" illustrates the view that his understanding of history embraced the love of the community, the cyclic motion of historical phases and his independent interpretation of historical events. The image of "turning gyres" is a principal symbol of his cyclic view of history and "the Second Coming" of Christ reinforces this view. As the conclusion of his poem, "The Gyres", runs:

..., and all things run
On that unfashionable gyre again.
The earlier part of "The Second Coming" registers, as does "Meru", man's ravenous nature. The great disaster of times has been man's isolation, his inability to relate himself to the ceremony of innocence." Yeats, Eliot, and Roethke continued their struggles to find their individual ways to see that somehow the centre held together. In fact, the first part of Yeats's poem embodies the central conflict of the age. The extremity of the crisis reminds the narrator of the "Second Coming" of Christ. But the image of Christ that appears is not that of a saviour and healer, but of a ferocious beast. The conviction implied in "Meru" that a new creation cannot take place without some violence and destruction is reiterated here. The title of the poem is more startling in that it blends the vision of Christ's second coming with the wild beast of the Apocalypse or Antichrist.

Yeats's understanding of history is at once personal, communal and philosophical. Though this interpretation is not influenced by a Christian view of life as Eliot's in the Quartets, it is not irreligious in spirit. It implies a dialectic between the human will and the external world, a dramatic conflict between the self and non-self that links it with Roethke's. The phenomenal world is not to be rejected as a "manifold illusion", its presence is necessary both in life and art, and "the crisis joins the temporal and eternal." 22

If the dialectic of the temporal and eternal in Roethke's poetry reminds the reader of Yeats, the way in which he unites them brings him near to Whitman. Roethke came to realise, as
Whitman did, that the secret of cosmic identification was some kind of spontaneous empathy with the whole of creation. As he puts it in one of the Whitmanesque songs, "The Right Thing" (CP. p. 250):

Child of the dark, he can outleap the sun,
His being single, and that being all;
The right thing happens to the happy man.

He learnt from Whitman how to appreciate and rejoice in the flux of the phenomenal world, to reconcile his personal will with the cosmic will to the extent that the mystery is no longer felt as a distinct experience. The experience of living in the present is transformed into that of a mystical harmony and fullness of being.

IV

What is the status of ideas in the poetry of Yeats, Whitman and Roethke? As poets, they were not constructing systems of beliefs but it can be reasonably argued that their beliefs, religious and philosophical, could not but have affected their poetry. Whitman and Roethke did not have the same interest in the history of ideas as Yeats and Eliot and treated conceptualisation in poetry in a different manner.

As an instance of Whitman's mode of conceptualisation in his poetry, one may consider section 48 of Song of Myself (Whitman: p. 72-73).
I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy
walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud,
And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase
the pick of the earth,
And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod,
confounds the learning of all times,
...
And there is no object so oft but it makes a hub
for the wheel'd universe,
And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul
stand cool and composed before a million universes.

Section 48 of Song of Myself consists of a series of such
certain assertions, a manifesto of the speaker's faith. Its
oracular tone with biblical manner conveys a finality of its
own. Here, we have a series of statements regarding the
importance of soul and body, its value of human sympathy, the
importance of the self and material objects of the world. Its
prophetic tone is not intended to confirm the biblical truth
about the soul and the body. In fact, some of these assertions
are rather heretical. However, the truth the lines convey has
a different validity than scriptural or historical. Their
universality is confirmed in the speaker's personal experience;
the source of the validity of these pronouncements is implied —
direct perception and experience of concrete material reality.
"And to glance an eye or show with a bean in its pod confounds
the learning of all times." To experience concrete reality is
to experience universals. This truth is offered not as a
sudden revelation of the poem. The poet had been working it
into the structure of Song of Myself so far. It has grown

"..."
as a dramatic realisation of the experiences embodied in the earlier sections. For the universal validation of his personal truth, the speaker offers this justification:

Why should I wish to see God better than this day? I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then; In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass; I find letters from God dropt in the street, and everyone is sign'd by God's name, And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go, Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

"The meaning of Whitman's poetry", a critic remarks, "is not a digest of his opinions but the state of consciousness he depicts." 23 The section is important not because it epitomises the ideas of Song of Myself or expresses the beliefs of Whitman but because it renders the consciousness that has achieved transcendence. The truth of these statements is that comes to the poet's mind as the truth of the experience he is now having. For Whitman, the discovery of truth is a matter not of relating ideas to each other but of tracing the process by which they occur to the mind.

Thoreau noted that Whitman's broad generalities were interspersed with many bricks. In fact, one who is fond of broad generalities might complain there are in Roethke bricks only and no ideas. Though his poetry is not devoid of metaphysical interest, it is more fortified with bricks than Whitman's. Both these poets who valued immediate experience
more than abstract ideas preferred to embody the idea as implicit in the experience of the moment. In Roethke's "Root Cellar" (CP. p.38), for instance, the governing idea comes as a climactic perception of the natural phenomenon. The truth that "nothing would give up life" which comes as an oracular statement comes home as a result of personal experience of the workings of nature. Its universality is hidden in the experience of particular details in the poem. Roethke and Whitman seek validation of their ideas in personal experience. Roethke remarked that poetry conveys a sense of the doubleness in life, a constant awareness of the concrete, physical world and a realm of abstract notions. His "Root Cellar" expresses the persistence of life even in uncongenial circumstances. But that is not the principal thing about the poem, which is the personal experience of the moment that does not require any other kind of proof for support. The basis of truth in this poem is the sensation. Roethke always fought shy of abstractions. Even more than Whitman, Roethke's "Big Wind" (CP. p.41) again embodies the same truth that "Nothing would give up life." The whole poem is a sustained illustration of this idea.

"Root Cellar" and "Big Wind" are short lyrics that convey abstract ideas through the concrete images of the moment. The secret of arriving at universal truth is intense observation of the particulars before you — this is the lesson of Whitman. Close perception leads to identification with things and people, and this identification opens up new visions of life around.
perception, identification and insight are the stages through which one discovers truth in Whitman and Roethke, and perception is the key to transcendence.

Whitman's *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* is remarkable for his unique gift of "indirectly" suggesting universals. What is offered as a transcendental vision is, in fact, the experience of a definite moment in a definite place. The poem describes the process that transforms the physical act of perception into a transcendental vision.

Section I of the poem evokes the landscape in all its physical detail — the poet looking at the vast expanse of water, the clouds in the west, the early-rising sun, the ferry-boats and hundreds of men and women crossing the river. The scene is presented as a projection of reality perceived at a specific moment by the speaker. But the time-consciousness of the narrator is not confined to the moment of perception; he represents "the similitudes of the past and those of the future."

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and West, and the heights of Brooklyn to the South and East,
Others will see the islands large and small.

The perception of the landscape at that particular hour fills him with the idea of the future. The wheel of time, past, present and future, returns to the same point. The scene represents how time is an aspect of the consciousness of the
narrator and how the temporal unites the eternal, the particular the universal. The act of transcendence is a miracle of the intense perception of the present moment which is not a fixed point, but a flux of things. Once this transcendence is achieved, neither time nor place can be a barrier. The narrator's observation could not have been different from that of men of other ages or times to come. Even as a poet, he shares humanity with other people:

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or even so many generations hence, Just as you feel when you look on the river, So I felt, Just as any of you is one of a living crowd,

The act of transcendence and that of identification with other human beings are simultaneous. The poet explains the secret:

What is it then between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us? Whatever it is, it avails not - distance avails not, and place avails not, I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine, I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around it, ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... I too had received identity by my body, That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my body.

It is the common bond of being human that explains the secret of identification and cosmic consciousness. The lines also explain why we do not have the personae of the kind that we find in Eliot. A persona is a dramatic device implying some distance between the poet and his character. To Whitman, "distance avails not, and place avails not"; and he is "one of
a living crowd." For him it was not possible to think of a persona that would be a representation of 'other' self. Even the divisions of time — past, present and future — don't matter to him when the perspective is of "cosmic consciousness." As a critic rightly points out: "The poem as an act of communication no less than a record of experience requires that an idea's truth be grounded in its existence as a now-transpiring thought." The idea governing the whole poem is expressed towards the conclusion of the poem in the poet-narrator's apostrophe to "dumb, beautiful ministers."

You furnish your parts toward eternity, Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry not only describes Whitman's way of representing an idea in a poem but also realising it, which consists in vivid perceptions of concrete reality, identification of the self with men on the ground of humanity and recognition of "the impalpable substance of me from all things at all hours of the day." Charles Feidelson, Jr. remarked that "what seems at first a penetration of nature by the mind is actually a process in which the known world comes into being." It is this "process in which the known world comes into being" that links Roethke's poetic mode with Whitman's.

We may recall at this stage Roethke's counsel to the practitioners of free forms to concentrate "on the object"
before their eyes—the secret Whitman's poem exemplifies so eloquently. Whitman's poem is concerned with the transcendence of the self and the attainment of cosmic consciousness. Its theme is the birth of a cosmic vision. Roethke's *North American Sequence* (CP. p.187) deals with transcendence of the self and the cosmic vision, and as in Whitman's poem, it is the process that brings the vision of cosmic consciousness with this difference that for Roethke "the mouth of the night is still wide". He cannot claim confidently, as Whitman could, that distance and place did not matter to him; he admits that his spirit shrank frequently "into a half-life." It is difficult for Roethke to achieve the sense of oneness with his surroundings and people. Whitman's poem too refers to the crisis of the self before the transcendental vision. He too was as much a victim of despair and frustration as the narrator in Roethke's poem.

> It is not upon you alone that dark patches fall,
> The dark threw its patches down upon me also.

Both Whitman and Roethke recognised that transcendence of the self would not come easily. Whitman's poem records the calm of the spirit achieved after the fierce struggle for cosmic harmony; Roethke's poem depicts this struggle. One may compare Whitman's poem with "Meditation at Oyster River" (CP. p.190). In both these poems, close seeing is a prelude to intuitive insight. As in Whitman's poem, the speaker is sitting on a rock and watching intently "the waves coming forward, without cessation." Even though the presence of the vast crowd is missing in Roethke's poem, the self is engaged in the same effort of
transcending the place and time. The narrator in Roethke's poem longs for identification with the objects around him—the ideal that Whitman claims as his own.

I would be a stream, winding between great straited rocks in late summer; A leaf, I would love the leaves, delighting in the redolent disorder of this mortal life.

This is "first heaven of knowing" when "the flesh takes on the pure poise of the spirit" — the spirit incarnated in Whitman's poem. The poet has fixed his gaze on the phenomenal world before him, struggles for identification with it and achieves transcendental vision through seeing and identifying himself with the material objects. He sums up Whitman's faith that the temporal objects, great and small, contribute toward eternity and the soul. The temporal and phenomenal world is part of the cosmic reality which the self strives to attain. This whitmanseque vision is expressed in the lines:

Near this rose, in this grove of sun-parched, wind-warped madronas, Among the half-dead trees, I came up on the true ease of myself, As if another man appeared out of the depths of my being, And I stood outside myself, Beyond becoming and perishing, A something wholly other, ....

This was the self's experience of the transcendence in the midst of the world of flux. Crossing Brooklyn Ferry embodies a similar vision of cosmic consciousness. Roethke's poem seeks its validation in the experience of the moment itself—
not in any ideas held to be universally true. His poem does not register "a completed act of perception" but renders the process itself. "Instead of describing reality, a poem is a realisation." The notions of transcendence and correspondence are presented as experiential realities, not as philosophical categories as in Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.

V

Roethke was not the only twentieth century poet to look to Whitman for his poetic and spiritual identity. Two important American poets before him, who recognised the value of the Eliot poetic tradition but went to school to Whitman, were Hart Crane (1899-1932) and William Carlos Williams (1883-1963). Crane could fault with "the complete renunciation" of The Waste Land, which in his opinion was predominantly negative in its attitude to modern civilisation. Now, the most important distinction between Eliot and Crane is in their attitude to science; Crane, like Whitman, in the nineteenth century, welcomed the achievements of contemporary science and technology and saw the Brooklyn Bridge as a symbol of cosmic unity. What mattered most to him was the "organic effect" of experiences that contemporary life offered. As the expressed in the "Cape Hatteras" section of The Bridge:

Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact,
From which we wake into the dream of act;
Seeing himself an atom in a shroud-
Man hears himself an engine in a cloud.
The birth of the New World was first conceived in the dream of the Founding Fathers; the establishment of the New World translated that dream into "fact"; now the life of action itself has become a dream. Modern technology is man's dream to conquer his mortality. It is probably in some such way that Crane found modern science and technology congenial to his poetic genius. So long as the Brooklyn Bridge was a creation of poetic imagination as an organic metaphor to unite the visible and the invisible, it could lend "curveship to the myth of God."

Was it possible for the poets writing in the third decade of the twentieth century to view science as Whidman did? Crane himself was aware of the gulf of time that divided him and Whitman:

Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
Be still the same as when you walked the beach
Near Paumanok-your lone patrol-and
heard the wraith
Through surf, its bird note there a long time
falling.........

(Hart Crane: Op. Cit., p. 35)

The national landscape had changed since Whitman; Crane could not ignore these changes. What Crane seems to have valued most in Whitman was his (i.e. Whitman's) use of science and its achievements for poetic metaphors. He tried to define the Whitman tradition in the following lines:

...! O, upward from the dead
Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound,
Of living brotherhood!


Whitman's secret was his talent for tallying the fact with the symbol, creating a "new bond" of blood relationship with the creation.

Crane's "Proem : To Brooklyn Bridge" (Hart Crane: Op. cit., p. 3) sets the poetic terms in which the "Bridge" is to be viewed. It begins with an image of the seagull that has achieved the miracle of balance and flight, freedom and restraint, an image that might remind one of Gerard Manley Hopkin's "The Windhover". Crane thinks of the two landscapes, of "the inviolate curve" and "multitudes bent toward some flashing scene" simultaneously, the landscape of prelapsarian nature and of the man-made world. The bridge is presented as a uniter of two worlds, "of harp and altar, of the fury fused, ..., Prayer of parish, and the lover's cry." One also notes that Crane pays attention to the concrete, physical details of the landscape -- a mad fellow climbing the parapets to commit suicide -- the traffic lights moving with swiftness -- but what strikes us is not the particularity of the landscape but the brilliance of metaphors for the arch of the bridge. In "Cape Hatteras", the curve of the bridge is spoken of as "the starglistered salver of infinity", as "the circle, blind crucible of endless space." The reader notes that the bridge is preconceived by the poet as a symbol. His prime interest is not in the physical landscape but its symbolic significance.
If we compare Crane's treatment of Brooklyn Bridge with Whitman's, we may note that its status as a metaphor is not allowed to grow organically out of the poem itself. It is more of an eloquent statement of faith rather than an expression of personal realisation of the experience as we find in Whitman's poem. This is not to imply that Crane was insincere in his poem but only to suggest that he failed (or should one say that he could not succeed completely?) as a Whitmanesque poet, not because he could not digest Emerson's and Whitman's ideas, but because he could not use language in the way Whitman did. Whitman's poetic vision could be Crane's; but Whitman's poetic idiom eluded him.

The difference between Whitman and Crane can be stated simply by saying that the reality of the human and the material world is never lost sight of in *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. The address in Whitman's poem has a familiarity of tone and colloquial idiom missing in Crane's poem. Whitman's involvement in the landscape is instantaneous and whole-hearted.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

(Whitman: p.128)

He does see more than the reality of appearances, but the symbolic meaning grows out of his personal relationship with
the reality of the world presented in the poem. There is the speaker's certainty that his personal experience would transcend the barriers of time and place. Crane's homage to Whitman and the declaration of poetic discipleship, which has something of the epic invocation to a god, sums up the value of Whitman to him and times to come:

Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;  
And it was thou who on the boldest heel  
Stood up and flung the span on even wing  
Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing!

(Hart Crane: Op. cit., p. 4)

Whitman projected in his poem the myth of America as a vast heroic poem. But one's dissatisfaction with Crane's poem springs from the poet's failure to transform the scientific object into an organic metaphor. The reason for this failure probably lies in Crane's inability to relate his image to the language. What he discovered in Whitman's poem was the dignity of an epic theme in the bridge but in his own poem the symbolic meaning, I feel, seems tagged on. He has missed the secret of Emerson's and Whitman's faith that the poetic act was a mode of naming things. Whitman's secret was to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things: to elevate, as it were words into things and living things too, as is borne out by the concluding part of Whitman's poem.

Whitman, as in the earlier sections of the poem, rejoices in surveying and affectionately recalling things around him.
It is a bird's eye-view of the landscape. He addresses "crested and scallop-edg'd waves", "gorgeous clouds of the sunset", "tall masts of Mannahatta", "sea-birds" with such heartiness and gusto as to suggest that his words did not have any other function but to embody the reality of objects mentioned. His language cannot be severed from the reality of objects observed by him. It is after the oneness of things with words has been established through his habitual device of catalogue that he makes an appeal:

Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,
Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,
Keep your places, objects than which none else is more tasting.

Whitman's words partake of the reality of objects—the point the earlier part of the concluding section conveys to us. His language does not at any time employ words or represent material objects as only symbolic counters. On the contrary, he asserts that nothing "is perhaps more spiritual or more lasting" than the solid reality he is encountering.

Whitman's language hardly calls attention to itself. Crane's language functions in a singular way; it thrusts itself upon the reader's attention with an exclusive claim to itself. In The Bridge he seems to be more intoxicated with his medium than the Myth of America, as in:
From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
Tall Vision-of-the Voyage, tensely spare-
Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
of deepest day, - O choir, translating time
Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
In myriad syllables, - Psalm of Cathay !
O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm... !

The contrast between Whitman's passage and Crane's is significant. It is a distinction of rhetoric: Crane is writing with full consciousness of the visual and auditory effects of words. As R.P. Blackmur said: "The language remains in the condition of that which it was intended to express: in the flux of intoxicated sense"; whereas the language of Whitman's passage is "disintoxicated and candid." 28 Crane was intoxicated with a kind of "seventh heaven of consciousness", a mystic consummation he once experienced but which he has not succeeded, in spite of his brilliant metaphors, to formally integrate. Allen Tate rightly complained that "because it (i.e. The Bridge ) is not structurally clarified it is emotionally confused." 29

The truth is that Crane could not become a true heir of Whitman, not because Emerson's and Whitman's visions betrayed him into his grave but mainly because he failed to understand their poetics. Crane was critical of Eliot's pessimism and his negative attitudes; he was demonstrating his affirmation of the contemporary life - of science and technology - by projecting the Brooklyn Bridge as its symbol. But neither Whitman nor Eliot could have brought salvation to him as his sensibility
was not expansive enough like Whitman's nor was it disciplined like Eliot's. One can see what Blackmur meant when he remarked that Crane misunderstood himself when he tried to write The Bridge as if it could be another Song of Myself. Crane, one can see, embodies the predicament of a post-Eliotian American poet; he is torn between Eliot's poetics influenced by the French Symbolists and his native American poetic tradition. Inspite of his deep aversion to Eliot's vision of the contemporary age as in The Waste Land, Crane was perhaps more deeply involved with Eliot's poetics and technique than he admitted. His elucidation of "the dynamics of metaphor" and "the logic of metaphor" to Harriet Monroe testifies to his interest in the "so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness;" 30 an interest which suggests his affiliations with the French Symbolists and Eliot. Crane's fascination for Rimbaud is also an important point to remember. It is not easy to determine how carefully and thoroughly he studied the French Symbolists: one may say that he imbibed their influence more through Eliot. Crane's problem seems to have been that he would inherit Whitman's spiritual vision without forsaking Eliot's poetics.

Crane's debt to The Waste Land can be seen in The Bridge. Both poems present the myths of their respective ages and civilizations and the quest informs the structures of both. Though Eliot's poem is sustained by the myth of the Holy Grail and Crane's by that of America, The Bridge represents
this more as a quest of religious ideal or spiritual vision rather than of the past national identity. Crane was as acutely aware as Eliot of his age being "a period that is loose at all ends, without apparent direction of any sort." His myth was intended to embody the vision of a mystic unity with the cosmos, to "span consciousness thou' st named / The open Road-thy vision is reclaimed! What heritage thou' st signalled to our hands!" (Hart Crane: Op. cit., p. 41) the vision Whitman enshrined in Song of Myself, Passage to India and Crossing Brooklyn Ferry. For all their disparities of vision and modes of realising it, Eliot's technique of representation has many echoes in Crane's poem.

The most striking parallel between Eliot's and Crane's poems is the use of persona and voices. Crane uses Columbus in "Ave Maria" not only as a national hero but chiefly as an archetypal seeker-visionary, a fisher-king in search of the Holy Grail. Columbus, the narrator of "Ave Maria" declares:

For here between two worlds, another, harsh,
This third, of water, tests the word;
and
Inquisitor! incognizable word
Of Eden and the enchained sepulchre,
Into thy steep savannahs, burning blue,
Utter to loneliness the sail is true.

(Hart Crane: Op. cit., p. 8)

One recalls here Crane's remark "I would like to establish it as free from my personality as from any chance evaluation on the reader's part." Crane refers here to Eliot's ideal of
impersonal poetry and to his theory of "objective-correlative"; Ave Maria presents the "objective-correlative" of the quest myth in Crane's poem. Columbus is certainly a cultural hero to the poet but he is more an embodiment of the national and religious myth. However, as a poetic strategy to free the poem from the poet's personality, it does not have the same dramatic objectivity as Eliot's personae. Ave Maria begins in a tone of direct address, in the way many of Eliot's poems do, but takes on the hymnal chant toward its end. Again, Crane, like Eliot, quotes from the classical writers. There are inscriptions from Seneca, Plato, Whitman, Blake and Melville. This is an attempt to give a unity of a literary tradition to his poem as Eliot did in his poem. Besides some of these Eliotian devices, Crane also renders a scene in familiar or colloquial language, as in

... I heard a road-gang chanting so.
And afterwards, who had a colt's eyes—one said
"Jesus! oh I remember watermelon days!" And sped

High in a cloud of merriment, recalled
"- And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled", he drawled-

"It was almost Louisiana, long ago."
"There is no place like Boonerille Though, Buddy", One said, excising a last burl from his vest,
"- For early trouting." Then peering in the can,
"- But I kept on the tracks."

(Hart Crane: Op.cit., p.17)

There are other echoes from Eliot's poem that reverberate in the last stanza of "Indiana".
Good-bye... Good-bye... Oh, I shall always
wait you, Larry, traveller, -
Stranger,
Son,
- my friend -


One may recall here how in "A game of chess" Lil's friend takes leave of her:

"Goodnight Bill. Goodnight Lou. Goodnight
May. Goodnight."

Crane, like Eliot, abandons the method of continuous narrative and adopts the anecdotal technique so successfully practised by Eliot in The Waste Land. "Powhatan's Daughter" is a series of anecdotes presented in this way. Crane's was a case of conflicting loyalties—to Whitman for his myth of America, vision of spiritual harmony, authenticity of the personal experience as evidence of truth; and to Eliot, for his method of poetic presentation. Tate's observation is pertinent here: "Far from 'refuting' Eliot, his whole career is a vindication of Eliot's major premise—that the integrity of the individual consciousness has broken down." 33

Roethke and Crane, whose poetic careers were separated by more than a decade, had many things in common. Roethke was as intense, extreme, anti-rational and uncompromising as Crane; he suffered from the emotional insecurity and mental disorders as acutely as Crane. Both were products of middle-class
upbringing: Crane worked, as a young boy, in the candy factories of his father and Roethke in the pickle factories and greenhouses of his family. The lives of both were deeply affected by experiences of childhood. Crane was a victim of a broken home and his father was a villain of the family tragedy. If Crane was exposed to the tragic war of sexes in his family, Roethke was a victim of a broken home and his father was a villain of the family tragedy. If Crane was exposed to the tragic war of sexes in his family, Roethke was a victim of his father's authoritarian nature. Roethke was as much "a lost son" in his family as Crane.

The one commitment that linked Crane and Roethke was their commitment to poetry and mystic vision. They felt that they were born to fulfill their destiny as poets, and that poetry was the only way to achieve wholeness in life. Crane declared emphatically: "I put no particular value on the simple objective of 'modernity'... It seems to me that a poet will accidentally define his time well enough simply by reaching honestly and to the full extent of his sensibilities to the status of passion, experience and rumination that fate forces on him first hand." 34 Crane responded fully and enthusiastically to the achievements of modern science and technology. Roethke, on the contrary, was more "selective" or insular in his reactions to the modern spirit. There are, of course, a few poems like "Lover" and "Sale" which imply the poet's comment on the world of business. The modern spirit is more conspicuous in Roethke's poetry by the nature of his concern - the alienated
and bruised self – rather than in his crusade against it. Roethke, however, is more modern in the way he explores the question of identity, his determined probing into the layers of consciousness and the way he explores the world of nature. Crane, despite his celebration of the city life and of the bridge as a symbol of cosmic unity, remained to the end of his life "out of joint" with his age and himself.

As poets, both Roethke and Crane encountered the same problem viz. the problem of relating himself to the central poetic tradition. Roethke, like Crane, had to reckon with his great contemporary poets; Yeats, Pound and Eliot. For good or evil, Eliot in particular drove Crane and Roethke back to their native poetic roots. Like Crane Roethke perceived that Whitman alone could breathe the air of freedom into their lives; his vision was the promise of redemption. The recognition of spiritual kinship with Whitman by poets of the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century is testimony to the continuing vitality of the Whitman poetic tradition. Crane could embrace Whitman’s poetic vision without much inner strife but Roethke found it much hardner to reach Whitman’s vision: his poetry depicts his wrestling with the problems of his personality to attain the spontaneity, lucidity and integrity of Whitman’s spirit. Only after a prolonged struggle, Roethke could reclaim Whitman’s vision and his poetic idiom.

The American poets writing after the first decade of this century faced a critical problem of making a choice: to opt for a symbolist technique after the French poets or to adopt Whitman’s technique of symbolisation.
In Crane, the materiality of objects tends to be obscured in the symbolistic atmosphere. One feels he wished to use the real world as a spring-board. One remembers Yvor Winter's comment: "Nothing save confusion can result from mistaking the Mississippi Valley for God." 35 Now, Roethke avoids such pitfalls; his language breathes the robust air of solid reality. More than Crane he understood the secret of naming as a poetic act. As a matter of fact, his earlier poems like "Root Cellar", "Weed Puller" and "Orchids" can be regarded as classic examples of "tallying words with things" that Whitman did in his poems. In "Big Wind", his language unites seeing and saying of things. It is synoptic of the struggle for existence in the world of nature.

A more striking instance of his use of language can be seen in the "old Woman's" description of her journey. It is in fact a metaphorical journey of the self's progress, but Roethke's poetic language never suffers from the kind of deliberate straining for symbolic meaning as Crane's sometimes does in The Bridge, one may take the following lines:

Two song sparrows, one within a greenhouse,  
Shuttling its throat while perched on a windvent,  
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 run away.

(CP. p.158)
The "old woman" wants to describe the forward and backward course of the journey of her self, and the bird she talks about here is the self. The metaphor conveys here the condition of the self — the self that is imprisoned in a glasshouse and the self that is free. There is nothing new in the analogy; what is remarkable is the poet's way of conveying the struggle of the self to establish contact with the outside world. The metaphor is reinforced by its strong emphasis on the concrete details. This was Whitman's legacy to Roethke. To reclaim Whitman's vision, it was necessary to reclaim his poetic idiom.

Crane and Roethke were concerned with the same dilemma: the quest of the self, the realisation of identity. Crane, like Whitman, sought it through identification with the myth of America. This myth of America, in its cultural aspects, was not Roethke's prime interest: his was a more private myth of America. His North American Sequence relates the saga of his personal self in its quest for unity of being, his heaven being the childhood world of the greenhouses. If Whitman played the role of a prophet for his new nation to know its soul and destiny, Crane aspired to be a singer of America whose glory was its mechanical triumph. There was, however, one bond that bound Whitman, Crane and Roethke. It was the bond of their vision: the three were at their best poets of mystic experience. Crane and Roethke, like Whitman, were dedicated to a high kind of seeing, ultimately to illumination or mystic vision, a realisation in experience, not in theory, of what Emerson referred to as the seer becoming what he sees.
William Carlos Williams succeeded where Crane had failed. He, too, had to reckon with the Pound-Eliot poetic tradition. He wanted to write poetry of immediate contact, while Pound's poetry was freighted with European culture and a cosmopolitan spirit. Williams's poetry was to be "direct, simple and sensuous," not in the least "academic." Like Whitman, Williams and Roethke were anxious not to make their poetry "literary". The "minority" ideal of poetry would have sounded meaningless to them. They had grasped the important truth that poetry flourished most in the local roots.

Whitman began "from fish-shape Paumanok" and it was his aim to incarnate the local spirit in his poems. In his elegy on Lincoln, he asks:

And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

(Whitman: p.262).

The list he furnishes contains homely objects — pictures of spring and farms and homes, the fresh sweet herbage underfoot, all the scenes of life of which his hero and the poet formed a part. His Crossing Brooklyn Ferry and Passage to India are steeped in the local spirit. As he had remarked in his 1855 preface "the poet's spirit responds to his country's spirit... he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes."
Williams learned this profound truth from Whitman. His announcement to Paterson declares "a local pride" to be his prime source of inspiration. He makes a start,

Out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum, by defective means.

(William Carlos Williams: from The New Oxford Book

However, "defective the means", the particulars like "the
trees", "dogs", "rabbits", "floating mists", are "to be rained
down and regathered into a river that flows and encircled":

Shells and animalcules
generally and so to man,
to Paterson.


Williams shares with Whitman this interest in minute and precise
details and the habit of enumerating concrete objects. His object
is to "say it, no ideas but in things"

nothing but the blank faces of the houses
and cylindrical trees
bent, forked by Preconception and accident-
split, furrowed, creased, mottled, strained-
secret-into the body of the light!

To Williams, the return to one's native roots is the secret of
poetic and psychic well-being. As a modern, he knew very well
that

Divorce is
the sign of knowledge in our time,
divorce! divorce!
Paterson is an attempt to write the American poem, in the way Whitman's was in Song of Myself. They depend upon the American myth which was fostered by Emerson, Whitman and Hart Crane. Paterson, in fact, as Robert Lowell points out, is "Whitman's America, grown pathetic and tragic, brutalised by inequality, disorganised by industrial chaos, and faced with annihilation." 36

Roethke, like Whitman and Williams, was attached to his locale. His earlier poems like "Root-Cellar" and "The Weed-Puller" and the poems dealing with the three women workers testify to the importance of immediate surroundings in his poetic growth. Like Whitman and Williams, he registers the concrete details of his environment with precision. His North American Sequence attempts to seek and establish fresh relationships with the place; it is the locale that gives meaning to his life and becomes a symbol of heaven to him. To quote again,

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

(CP. p. 203).

Private, personal locale that has become in his later age synonymous with heaven. That the self is to be wedded to the place, to the native soil for its realisation is the important truth emphasised in their several ways by Whitman, Williams and Roethke.

Roethke's realisation of the locale includes its sounds as well. For example,
What do they tell us, sound and silence?
I think of American sounds in this silence.

(CP. p.204).

He then lists the sounds of different birds and

The thin whine of telephone wires in the wind of a Michigan winter,

... ... ... ... ... ...

The bull dozer backing away, the hiss of the Sendblaster,

And the deep chorus of horns coming up from the streets in the early morning.

(CP. p.204).

Roethke was not perhaps as deeply committed as Whitman and Williams to the myth of America, but his interest in his locale and his realisation of its value were as strong as theirs.

Like Whitman and Williams, Roethke also attempts to roll "up the sum" by "defective means." He struggled to reach the universal through the particular. This is one of the important reasons why he recalls the memory of Whitman, "maker of catalogues". As his letters testify, he admired William Carlos Williams's use of the American idiom, colloquial rhythms, concrete particulars and local colour. He himself succeeds, at least to a large extent, in achieving "an interpenetration, both ways" in North American Sequence, though that "interpenetration" between the man and the place is a hard-won victory for Roethke.

Besides the local interest and universality of particulars, there is a common urge shared by Whitman, Williams and Roethke.
Their poetry makes two great affirmations: connection and creation, and these squarely in the face of man's increasing terror at the loss of humanity and his bewilderment at the absence of God. The sense of humanity is best realised by connection, when man knows his own identity within the circle of the cosmos. Whitman possessed the unique gift of spontaneous and immediate empathy and identification with persons and places—this is the distinctive trait of his poetic tradition. Williams was painfully aware that the minds of modern men were

like beds always made up,
(more stony than a shore)
Unwilling or unable.

It is this "stoniness" of the modern man's mind that comes in the way of connections. He writes of girls from families that have decayed and taken to the hills; no words. They may look at the torrent in their minds and it is foreign to them.

He was too much a child of the modern era to forget "the divorce of things" and men, and this awareness of failure of things to connect with one another makes him more akin to Roethke than to Whitman. In spite of this note of "incommunicado" in Paterson, as Marianne Moore was shrewd enough to observe, an "inner security" was the basis of his work. He attained quite early the position that Wallace Stevens and Roethke could attain only after a prolonged painful struggle, viz., ability to
harmonise imagination and reality. Like Whitman, Williams gave himself to the world and gave up "the coordinates and goals which had polarized earlier literature." Williams, like Whitman and unlike Roethke, could easily overcome the opposition between the inner world of the subject and the outer world of things.

Roethke's poetic universe lacks this "inner security" of Whitman and Williams, and it is the tension between the coordinates of the subjective world and the "outer world of things" that forms the focus of his poetry. Nevertheless, Roethke perpetually yearned to "embrace the world" and attain "the imperishable quiet at the heart of form", "to reach the still centre". It is this movement in Roethke's poetry toward: unlearning "the lingo of exasperation", and "delighting in the redolent disorder of this mortal life" - that links him with Whitman and Williams.

Like them, Roethke believed that the naming of things was an act of creative imagination and this was, according to him, the secret and significance of Whitman's catalogues. Williams remarked: "The only means (man) has to give value to life is to recognise it with the imagination and name it." This was perhaps the reason why he repeatedly reminded himself: "No ideas but in things" in Paterson. The famous poem "Red Wheel barrow" exemplifies that he accepted what Emerson and Whitman had said about the poet's role as a namer of things. Naming things, one might say, was a form of revelation to these
poets, of the Whitman tradition. Roethke's *North American Sequence* enlists sounds and sights, and *The Lost Son* provides the details of his childhood world. Naming as a poetic act links words and objects and functions as part of organic form. As Williams observes, it gives "expression to the environment." The poet must feel himself into the things of the world, as he depends on them as occasions to be himself as poet.

Williams had remarked: "I said what I had to say, using the American idiom; ... The rhythmical construction of a poem was determined for me by the language as it is spoken. Word of mouth language, not classical English." 39 Roethke also composed his poems by "word of mouth language." In writing *The Lost Son*, he was guided by the rhythms of the "Mother Goose" verses and the breath-unit became the chief rhythmical principle. "Where knock is open wide" (CP. p.71) is again written throughout by "word of mouth language".

Williams' and Roethke's ideal of the poetic language differed from that of Pound and Eliot in that it emphatically eschewed classical and foreign allusions. Roethke would have agreed with what Williams had to say against Eliot: "Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself rooted in the locality which should give it fruit. I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated." 40 Both Williams and Roethke, like Whitman, held that the poetic idiom must flower out of the
local soil and the "academics" of the Eliot-Pound tradition must go. Roethke, however, unlike Williams, did not feel himself defeated; he accepted the challenge and worked out in his own poetry the dialectics between the Eliot and Whitman traditions in his own poetry.

VII

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), unlike William Carlos Williams, might at first sight seem to stand apart from the central line of American poets. In his use of language distinguished for its precision, finesse and its creation of brilliant surfaces, Stevens was perhaps something of a prodigal son of the French Symbolists committed to the cultivation of delicate sensations and a life of imagination. His central concern, the relationship between imagination and reality, was the prime burden of the Symbolists' legacy, and he shared their faith in the imagination as the supreme value in life, as the redemptive faculty in human life. His plea that we must suspend our disbelief in fiction and willingly accept the fictions of poetic imagination aligns him with the inheritors of the Romantic tradition that reached its culmination in the French Symbolist movement. Not to have been influenced by the French Symbolists would have been unusual for a poet in that era. As Frank Kermode quotes the remark of Rene Tanpin: "It is not only that Stevens employs French vocabulary, the movement of his sentences is French. It makes more use of exclamation and questions than is usual in English poetry... his desire for elegance, his dandyism, relates him to Baudelaire, his nonchalant irony... to Laforgue... Finally, he
is Symbolist by reason of his evocatory art, his search for correspondances, for words which constitute images, and words which reverberate with associations." 41 Taupin is not the only one to mark the alien element in Stevens' use of language. Alvarez remarks, "throughout his work, and particularly in Harmonium, Stevens seems to me to be writing in a language that does not quite belong to him." 42

What could be the reason that Stevens, in spite of his metaphysical concerns, came to be misunderstood as a poet of brilliant surfaces who cultivated an alien style? There are many of his poems which tend to reinforce the impression that he will always be the great Dandy of American letters." 43 "Peter Quince at the Clavier", one of his early poems, deals with the conflict between sensual beauty and puritan austerity. The conclusion of the poem, describing the rape of Susanna by the reedy elders, celebrates "a constant sacrament" of such union because

Beauty is momentary in the mind—
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal.


The poem has a design to glorify "the body's beauty" that might seem to link Stevens with the aesthetes and the hedonists. There is an anti-Platonic thrust in these lines that sum up the musician's ideal in life. But for Stevens' kinship with the aestheticist's faith, what is alien in his style? The first and the last lines
read like adages from his collection of Adagia, epigrammatic assertions to emphasise the contrast between the truth of experience (as revealed in the poem) and that of the tradition. The choice of words and the rhythms of the lines in fact suggest Stevens' affinity with the Elizabethans.

"Anecdote of the Jar" embodies the aestheticist's point of view that it is the work of art that gives order and meaning to wilderness. It represents the triumph of art over chaos, as art is a wilfully contrived and accomplished order in chaos. The theme of this poem was to haunt Stevens for his life, the theme he treated with graver music in "Idea of Order at Key West." With the help of the jar that was "gray and bare", the speaker could fill in the vacuum "the slovenly wilderness". Stevens was perhaps not speaking for himself alone; he was voicing the faith of all poets. In fact, he was rendering Coleridge's theory of "Imagination" in a concrete form. The simple act of putting a jar on a hill is elevated to a heroic level as the wilderness itself began to surround the jar. The concluding lines of the poem reinforce the implication of the autonomy of art:

It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

And the implication is quite frightening. The jar - a work of art - did not reflect anything. One begins to suspect that there was nothing to reflect except the vacuum. This could very well be Heaven and Hell for an aesthete who finds
the meaning of life in the creation of his art. Stevens shows a tragic insight into the ultimate fate of an aesthete facing emptiness without in the concluding part of the poem. He began as an aesthete but ended as what? The answer could be as controversial as his being only an aesthete. What is important and more pertinent is to note that he was aware that art could be a fatal Cleopatra even for a poet. "The Snow Man" treats of the plight of such a lover of art - may be an artist himself or a lover of art - who regards only "the frost and the boughs of the pine trees crusted with snow" without thinking of any misery in the sound of the wind. The snow-man may be a symbol for such an alienated artist whose fate is "nothing himself" to behold, "Nothing that is not there and the nothing there is." He is doomed to a blankness of vision.

To regard Stevens' poetry as the poetry of a mere aesthete is to miss the point of his poetic career. Alvarez's charge that the language of Stevens' early poetry has the quality of "the latinised English of the seventeenth century Scholars" can be best answered in the words of George Santayana: "I have never been able to see why what is called Anglo-Saxon should have the right to higgle and haggle 'all over the page, contesting the right of other words. If a poem seems to require a hierophantic phrase, the phrase should pass." Santayana's way of defending Stevens' use of his poetic medium has a force of oracular assertion but no conviction. More convincing is the classic statement made by R.P. Blackmur in
his essay, "Examples of Wallace Stevens." Explaining the difference between E.E. Cummings's use of words and Stevens', he pointed out that the former used words as if they were "empty shells", whereas Stevens' use of words has a "precision" that "clings closely to the stuff of the poem." 45

If Alvarez and Blackmur emphasized the peculiarities of Stevens' use of language, S.F. Morse stresses something that is more relevant to our inquiry. He notes the "native element" in the poems of Stevens and claims his (i.e. Stevens') poetic affinity with Whitman. He remarks that some critics "have made too much of certain aspects of Stevens... and too little of the native element. I do not mean any sort of facilitious Americanism; but I do mean a quality of the mind, a sense of the world and of the character of the poet," 46 and feels, in fact, that Stevens' use of poetic language most resembles Whitman's.

This can best be tested by examining some of his poems to find out at what points he touches Whitman's quality of the mind and his sense of the world. Stevens' (like Whitman and Roethke) was exploring consciousness and strove to understand the archetypes of experience, "the liaison" between the self and reality, "the liaison, the blissful liaison, /Between himself and his environment. (Wallance Stevens: Op. cit., p.34). This union of the self with reality, the surroundings, was the chief end and delight of Stevens as it was for Whitman and Roethke. The theme of "The Comedian as the Letter C" (Wallace Stevens: Op. cit., p.27) is the quest of identity undertaken by an
artist — a theme also explored by Whitman, and Roethke in their poetry. Part I of Stevens' poem, "The World Without Imagination," takes as its premise the Renaissance assertion that man is "the sovereign ghost" controlling his environment with his mind, his reason, and it ends ironically by depicting the fall of Crispin under the pressure of chaos that is represented by the sea in the poem. It initiates Crispin, "this nincompoop pedagogue," lost in seeing "gelatines," "jupes," "apricots," "berries of villages," to "A starker, barer world" where "the lost distortion of romance/Forsook the insatiable egotist." The section relates the metamorphosis of the self of Crispin.

The Sea
Severs not only lands but also selves.

Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new.

The section seems to propose the theme of education of a realist into a new way of seeing. There is, besides, an attempt at punning on the sound "C" — reverberating the echoes of "see" in the reader's mind. Crispin, as a comic actor, is occupied with reality — rather with the surface of things. What would he know of the depth of things? Could he ever be "a preceptor to the sea"? Some kind of contrast is certainly evoked between the surface of things and the subterranean depth of objects when Crispin's eyes begin to hang "on porpoises, instead of apricots." He, however, at the end of the section, "became an introspective voyager," confronting "the strict austerity of
one vast, subjugating, final tone." Section II traces the course of Crispin's "vicissitudes" that "had much enlarged" his vision. His emotions had become more disciplined and subdued; he had developed into an artist hungering for "the mint of dirt" and "green barbarism turning to paradigm." That is, he came in contact with harsher manifestations of his surroundings. With such sections in his poem, how could one hold that Stevens was a hedonist? Crispin was being exposed to "elemental potencies and pangs", "the quintessential fact, the note of vulcan." One important difference between the two sections is that Crispin, in Section II, was exploring modes of relating his self to his environment whereas in Section I, he was an extrovert relishing and rejoicing in the exterior of things. How could one find the meaning of things and one's self? This quest assumes a threefold aspect: the nature of the self, the nature of reality and the nature of the creative imagination. Crispin is being educated into the mystery of the imagination and reality.

Section III deals with this theme of two ways of seeing—

"It made him see how much/of what he saw he never saw at all."

Crispin, who has grown more meditative, emerges out of "moonlight" that "was an evasion, or, if not,/ A minor meeting, facile, delicate." Instead of a dilettante of the imagination that he was in his early period, he grew into a poet who ravished "rankness like a sensualist", and "gripped more closely the essential prose" of human situation. True imagination confronts reality,
Crispin learnt to recognise that "man's intelligence" was not the sole creator of his soil; the environment and imagination are two independent realities to be reckoned with. It is this recognition that aligns Stevens with Whitman's poetic tradition that regarded America as a vast poem, that insisted upon accepting and absorbing "the essential prose of life" and the self's identification with it. This is the Whitmanesque lesson he learns in his life. If this, as some critics feel, is a romantic error, one may say that Whitman rectified the error by healing the breach between man's intelligence and his soil. Crispin's journey now takes a different direction to realise "the blissful liaison between himself and his environment", from the path of self-absorption to self-transcendence.

Section IV depicts Crispin building his colony after the Whitmanesque idea and this is how defines the Whitman tradition:

What was the purpose of his pilgrimage,
Whatever shape it took in Crispin's mind,
If not, when all is said, to drive away
The shadow of all his fellows from the skies,
And, from their stale intelligence released,
To make a new intelligence prevail?
Hence the reverberations in the words
of his first central hymns, he celebrates
of rankest trivias tests of the strength
Of his aesthetic, his Philosophy.....

( Wallace Stevens: p.37 ).
The Comedian as the letter C, one may say, traces the evolution of Crispin from a Coleridgian poet who fed himself on honey-dew into a Whitmanesque poet who "could not be content with counterfeit", and translates and lives the Whitmanesque ideal of poetry. Crispin, like Whitman, was bent upon driving "away the shadow of all his fellows from the skies" implying thereby that he would be self-reliant as man and as poet. As man, he would not depend upon any gods of the skies and would not worship ghosts. Whitman's *Song of Myself* is the finest flower of such "new intelligence." Crispin's story has reached the point where he has achieved "a new intelligence", a new insight into "the essential prose of life." He would not remain contented with this new intelligence, he would make it "prevail". He would translate it into action. The guiding principle that he would adopt was to be that

The man in Georgia waking among pines
Should be pine-spokesman.

As Blackmur explains: "Everything should be understood for what is and should follow the urge of its given character." Then follow "all images of freedom and the satisfaction of instinct." These images embody what is central in the Whitman poetic tradition—the organic theory of life and poetry. As Stevens puts it,

He made a singular collation. Thus
The natives of the rain are rainy men.

Another Whitmanesque characteristic is that Crispin's prolegomena occur not as an abstract utopia but in a long catalogue describing the man in Georgia, the responsive man in Florida, the dark Brazilians. His dream is:

But let the rabbit run, the cock declaim.

This is a very Whitmanesque line, and catches the very tone of Whitman.

Section V depicts a crisis in the career of Crispin as hermit. Had he realised, then, as a hermit, the ideal that "soil is man's intelligence"? How far had he been a representative man? If he stood for himself alone as a dilettante of the imagination, as a hermit he came to see that

The words of things entangle and confuse.
The plum survives its poems.


His education, it seems, had been incomplete; he began to question whether he alone could embody the meaning of life. His experiment in living as a hermit in the colony of things was something of an anticlimax in his life: "It seemed haphazard denouement." (Wallace Stevens: p.40). It was not enough for the American Adam to continue as "the pricking realist, choosing his element from droll confect /of was and is and shall or ought to be" - this would have been a romanticists' return to nature. Here, once again, is an important distinction between the Romantic tradition represented by
Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats and the Whitman tradition. Stevens indicates his affinity with the latter when he makes Crispin accept the quotidian, and the poet's comment is,

the quotidian
Like this, saps like the sun, true fortuner.
For all it takes it gives a humped return
Exchequering from piebald fises unkeyed.

One is inclined to think that Crispin becomes Whitmanesque figure when he married and begot daughters. Ostensibly, the end of Crispin's career strikes as a parody of the poet's career as he dwindled into a householder. But this is on the surface only. Stevens' poem ends with a rejoinder to the reader who takes Crispin as "a false philosopher." Crispin's pilgrimage has not been futile: his quest was the quest of "a new intelligence." What he was seeking was a mode of reconciliation, a oneness between himself and his environment. He achieved this in Whitmanesque terms by accepting reality unconditionally. Crispin would have said with the poet-narrator of *Song of Myself*:

I accept Reality and dare not question it,
Materialism first and last imbuing.

*(Whitman, p.42)*.

All this is not to prove that "The Comedian as the letter C" could have been written by Whitman. First of all, the dialectical conflict between the different levels of reality or existence in Crispin would have been inconceivable for any
of Whitman's protagonists. Even if Whitman could have imagined such a theme, his poem would have a different tone and its rhythm more relaxed and free. Its diction would have been more closely and tightly woven and its architechtone design would have been more compact and deliberate.

The comedian as the letter C, however, deals with the dilemma of a poet who feels lost in his era. Crispin, as represented by Stevens, was an heir to the "decadents", "the French Symbolists" who aspired to squeeze and distil reality in a highly refined verbal image and who would leave the business of living to their servants. Crispin's problem was Stevens', as well as Roethke's. Roethke was not quite as susceptible to the influence of the French Symbolists as Stevens, but both responded to the Eliot tradition in their individual ways. In some of the unWhitman--esque qualities of "The Comedian as the Letter C", its tone and rhythm, its wit and irony, its compactness of structure and its "syllable/To blessed syllable affined", Stevens proves himself an eminent heir to Eliot. Roethke's affiliations with the Eliot tradition have been dwelt upon in the earlier chapters. What links Stevens and Roethke is their quest of a new intelligence, and their longing to reach the Whitmanesque position. One should add, however, that Roethke's quest was carried on in more personal or private terms than Stevens'.

In North American Sequence, the poet-seeker, like Crispin, feels alienated from the world of vulgar, commonplace
things, the world of reality being described as "a kingdom of stinks and sighs". Crispin's quest is more aesthetic whereas the quest of Roethke's protagonist is more religious. Both crave for intimate union with the world of nature. To Crispin,

That earth was like a jostling festival
of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent,
Expanding in the gold's maternal warmth.

Roethke describes "the jostling festival" of the earth when he speaks of "the blackening salmon", "the mad lemmings", "the children dancing", "the flowers widening", that represent for him "the redolent disorder of this mortal life." It is in their sense of nature, nature as a feminine principle of fecundity, that Whitman, Stevens, and Roethke may be said to belong to the same poetic tradition. Crispin and the seeker in Roethke's poem come to see the importance of the land in the realisation of their true selves. One notices that Roethke's description of American sounds and silence is not very different from Stevens' description of Crispin's colony. Finally, the protagonists of these poems accept quotidian reality: Roethke's protagonist accepts gladly the childhood world of the glass-house while Crispin welcomes the life of a householder. Of course, these similarities must not be stretched too far. What is important to mark is how two great contemporary poets tried to achieve each in his own way the Whitmanesque position.

The fundamental question for Stevens and Roethke is the same: throughout his poetic career Roethke, like Stevens, relentlessly struggled for a principle of order in life and
in the universe. Both were the "lost sons" of the age which had destroyed its gods, and the quest for order became the persistent compulsion of their creative urge. That Roethke and Stevens, as poets share the same concern (for different reasons, of course) for the principle of order and resolve the dialectics of the chaos and the order in Whitmanesque terms can be discerned in "The Idea of Order at Keywest", which may be looked upon as Stevens' Crossing Brooklyn Ferry. Stevens' technique, though, is different. He presents the theme of his quest in a series of brilliant images: a woman singing "beyond the genius of the sea" and "measuring to the hour its solitude", "the ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea", and "we", the on-lookers of the scene. The question explored would appear to be whether there is any cosmic kinship linking these three together. The narrator represents the modern consciousness that fails to observe any principle of inter-relatedness of things. As he puts it,

> The water never formed to mind or voice,  
> Like a body wholly body, fluttering  
> Its empty sleeves; ......

And the protagonist's cry is the anguish of the "lost son", the question of finding the basis of a harmonious relationship between nature and the self. Stevens' persona is painfully aware that the music he heard was the music of the singer and that "she was the maker of the song she sang." What is the meaning of the scenes and sights he saw?

> Whose spirit is this? We said, because we knew  
> It was the spirit that we sought and knew  
> That we should ask this often as she sang.
The quest begins with the narrator's perception of the separation of things, and one may recall that this was also Crispin's problem: "It made him see how much/of what he saw he never saw at all." This is the quest for the "spirit" of things and it links Stevens, Roethke and Whitman together.

In Roethke's "In a Dark Time" (CP. p. 239), "a man goes far to find out what he is" and "in a dark time, the eye begins to see." The earlier part of "The Idea of Order at Key West" that projects the disjunction of the singer, the sea and the narrator embodies the paradox of seeing which is the theme of Roethke's poem. Even the narrator in Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, after describing the varied landscape of men and nature on the shores of the bay, asks "What is it then between us?" (Whitman. p. 130). The point is that Roethke, Stevens and Whitman made "true seeing" the central theme of their quests.

The middle of Stevens' poem beginning with "If it was only the dark voice of the sea" is analogous to the rhetorical structure of Roethke's poem. It paves the way for the narrator's initiation to a new intelligence; in nobler accents, he declares:

"...But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
on high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea."

She has the orphens touch. She could establish a community of spirit between her and nature but transcendence is denied to her. The poem ends with the narrator's suggestion that he owed
his insight to the woman's art which he compares to "the glassy
lights" and which is "a blessed" passion for order. He has
been vouchsafed a sense of order and a vague sense of something
other than terrestrial.

In *Four for Sir John Davies* Roethke explored, almost in
identical terms, a similar concern. The personae of Roethke's
sequence and Stevens' poem undertake the quest of order in the
midst of chaos and resolve the conflict between the self and
reality in terms of harmony between nature and art. The trinity
that presides over the universe of both is the same: viz. nature,
art and man. The protagonist in either is afflicted with the
loss of contact between man and his surroundings and seeks a
mode of achieving harmony with them. Where Stevens employs
the figure of a lonely singer, Roethke uses a dancer. It is
woman who keeps vigil on the purgatorial hill to the narrators
of Roethke's and Stevens' poems. Roethke's speaker, like
Stevens', journeys from the anguish of scepticism to the
threshold of "a new intelligence." "The Idea of Order at Key
West," it may be remarked, is Stevens' "Purgatory". His
narrator, like Roethke's, has attained the stage where "the
visible obscures," and "the word outleaps the world, and
light is all." His rhetoric also comes very close to that of
the protagonist in Roethke's sequence.

There are, of course, differences as well between these
poems. The speaker of *Four for Sir John Davies*, unlike the
narrator of "The Idea of Order at Key West," fully participates
in the action of the poem and unites himself with his beloved.
He is more warm-blooded; his anguish has its roots in his personal and psychological origins. Stevens' persona is more of a philosophical observer who interprets for himself the music of the sea and the woman's song. His interest in the singer of the song is intellectual, savouring of Platonic love. Stevens' protagonist ends as an aesthete-sceptic; Roethke's persona moves to a point where, for him, the distinction between sensuality and spirituality vanishes. There is a note of confidence, almost passionate assertion, in his declaration:

Who rise from flesh to spirit know the fall:
The word outleaps the world, and light is all.

Stevens' protagonist ends on a more tentative and cautious note. Nevertheless, the final impression of "The Idea of Order at Key West" is that the speaker has come to some understanding of his surroundings and has made his peace with them.

"The Idea of Order at Key West", as remarked earlier, resembles Whitman's *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. The theme of Whitman's poem is also concerned with its narrator's spiritual journey towards cosmic consciousness, the sense of harmony with the surroundings. Whitman, like Stevens, has presented the speaker facing the landscape of the bay carrying "the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross". This landscape is a part of the simple, compact, well-join'd scheme and everyone (is) disintegrated yet part of the scheme. The problem of the narrator of "The Idea of Order at
Key West is the disjunction between nature and man; the speaker of Crossing Brooklyn Ferry observes the disintegration but regards it as a part of the "compact" scene. The premises of "The Idea of Order at Key West", are different from those of Whitman's poem. The note of "obstinate questionings" that we find in Stevens and Roethke is alien to Whitman's poetic temperament. They are sceptics who look to Whitman to resolve their conflicts in terms of empathy with nature and poetic imagination. Roy Harvey Pearce's comment is pertinent at this stage: "Stevens is treating of our problem of belief. Unlike Eliot, he has refused... to seek a solution for the problem in the discovery of a "usable" form of belief. Rather, he has relied entirely on his own sensibility; he has tried to create the object of belief rather than discover it." 48 This is equally true of Roethke. Stevens and Roethke refused the Eliotian kind of way out of their problems, and like Whitman, "created the object of belief rather than discover it." Stevens has indicated in "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" what Whitman means to him:

In the far South the sun of autumn is passing.
Like Walt Whitman walking along a ruddy shore.
He is singing and chanting the things that are part of him,
The worlds that were and will be, death and day.
Nothing is final, he chants. No man shall see the end.
His beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame.

It is the image of Whitman as a beckoning prophet — "his beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame" — that claims Stevens' and Roethke's fealty. They could see that the only way for them to an affirmation of life was Whitman's.
They look to Whitman for the mode of affirmation which he embodied in his life and poetry—the way of empathy and identification with the cosmos, the full acceptance of the flux and transience of life with hearty participation and joy in it, the mode of poetic imagination that reveals "nothing is final, ... No man shall see the end." Roethke implied this aspect of Whitman when he hails him as a maker of catalogues.

Stevens' affinity with Whitman may also be seen in "Sunday Morning." One could argue that Crispin's affinity with the Whitmanesque ideal is not to be construed as the narrator's or even Stevens' point of view, that the singer in "The Idea of Key West" may be a Whitmanesque figure but its narrator ends on a tentative note that lacks Whitman's certainty of faith and conviction; to such a one, Stevens' narrative representation in "Sunday Morning" should dispel his misgivings about Stevens' kinship with Whitman. The lady in the poem is represented as a spiritual child of Whitman in the way she prepares herself for her final end, in her attitude towards death and paradise. The speaker, as her spokesman, asks:

What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

Stevens' irony appears in the first stanza which depicts the matronly lady, who fully satisfied with her breakfast, begins to dream a little of "ancient sacrifice." To our surprise we find that Stevens' irony is meant to cut the other way: its target is not the old lady, but traditional Christianity.
What the narrator has to report is:

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.

This irony seems to be directed at what Louis Martz designated as the Christian mode of meditation. Her dream reveals to her, ironically enough, "the pungent oranges and bright, green wings... in some procession of the dead." Lest one might think ill of such a woman, the narrator offers an eloquent and spirited defence for her in a series of questions that are summed up in the question: "Why should she give her bounty to the dead?" He rejects the religion of the worship of the dead; the traditional offerings to Christ and other gods do not make any sense to him. His exhortation is for the worship of the living and of "the divinity... within herself". The implication is that self-denial, ascetic retreat from the world and suppression of senses, faith in rituals, do not form the spirit of religion: Stevens, like Roethke, rejects Eliot's position in *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. She is ordained for another way: "The way of unsubdued/Slations when the forest blooms;
gusty/Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights". She is a pagan, not a church-bound Christian. The narrator works out the contrast between the pagan way of worship and ascetic Christianity. It is impossible not to remember Whitman (and even D.H. Lawrence) when one reads such lines as,

What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Whitman described his (or the poet-speaker's) experience of divinity on "a transparent summer morning".

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-striped heart,
And reach'd till you left my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.
Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own.

(Whitman: p.27).

Stevens joins Whitman in his celebration of a pantheist's joy in the beauty of nature. He presents the old lady in "Sunday Morning" celebrating "the marriage of flesh and air"; and of such union Whitman is the high-priest. No "haunt of prophecy" or "old chimera of the grave" has endured as "April's green endures" - this is the summing up of the narrator on her behalf.

It is not only in the pantheistic joy in nature and a pagan's surrender to it that Stevens and Whitman are kindred souls but also in their attitude to death. The narrator of "Sunday Morning" points out to the lady that decay is the law of nature and so is the cycle of regeneration. His question to her is: "Does ripe fruit never fall?" The point of his argument is that even paradise is a projection of our dreams on this imperfect earth. He declares:
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, 
Within whose burning bosom we devise 
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

Whitman, like the narrator of "Sunday Morning", looked upon death as a law of nature and Stevens' lines carry echoes of the new intelligence the young boy received into the mystery of death in Whitman's poem *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*. The young listener who heard with rapt attention the dirge of the bereaved partner is awakened to a new understanding of himself:

Now in a moment I know what I am for...I awake, 
And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, 
clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

(Whitman. p.202)

Death is a challenge to our creative potentiality, and one way of meeting that challenge is "setting the pile of new plums and pears/on disregarded plate." Nature perpetually regenerates itself. Man regenerates himself by creating forms of beauty that embody our earthly dreams, Stevens and Whitman, thus, consider death as a powerful urge to our creative instinct. The concluding stanzas of "Sunday Morning" celebrate "the heavenly fellowship/of men that perish and of summer morn" and the worship of the savage sun which embodies the Dionysian ideal.

"Sunday Morning", then, opens with the image of an earth-bound old woman who, as an act of poetry, tries to dream of "the ancient sacrifice." What she sees in her dream is not the Christian paradise but the imperfect paradise of this green
earth. She tries to meditate on the profound mystery of Christ's birth and death in order to deepen her religious experience. But the saint who appears in her dream is an evangelist who preaches the gospel of "devotion to the sun," Not as a god, but as a god might be." He is an evangelist of Whitman's gospel.

Stevens' old woman in "Sunday Morning" was poised for the passing of her dreaming feet over the seas, to silent Palestine, Dominion of the blood and sepulchre." Her "dreaming" was an attempt to make sense of her life in terms that the traditional Christianity provided to her. But the god her vision revealed was Dionysus who taught her to worship nature and her blood. Roethke's "old lady" in Meditations of an old Woman is apparently no counterpart of Stevens' old lady; she is spiritually more restless and dynamic than Stevens' matronly figure. She discovers things for herself while to Stevens' persona, things are revealed. The distinction between these two poems is that Roethke's sequence presents its persona in action whereas Stevens' poem conducts an argument. Roethke's "old woman" is more inquisitive; Stevens' more receptive. However, both use meditation as a literary device. Both poems resolve the conflict between the imagined reality and the real world, the self and reality, in Whitmanesque terms. At the end of Stevens' poem, the reader cannot say whether the old woman is converted to a new religion of nature and blood. It is a plea for it. Roethke's old woman resolves her crisis by following the boisterous sun, the worship of nature. She says:
There are times when reality comes closer;  
In a field, in the actual air,  
I stepped carefully, like a new-shod horse,  
A raw tumultuous girl 
Making my way over wet stones.  

(CP. p.166).

One may say Roethke's old woman has realised the spirit of the narrator of "Sunday Morning." One recalls that Roethke, in his poem on Stevens, hails him as "our father." There is, of course, a formal difference between the two poems but at the same time they do point to their spiritual kinship with Whitman. Pearce finds an affinity between Stevens and Emerson - Whitman poetic tradition when he says "Stevens is to other twentieth-century poets of his kind as Emerson is to Whitman- the work of both being marked by a self-imposed demand to think things through, all the while calling the processes of thought itself into doubt." 49 Roethke too accepted the same kind of self-imposition that, as Pearce remarks, was the burden of Stevens' poetry. This burden, for both Stevens and Roethke, was to find a poem "that was the act of mind to find what will suffice." Pearce's observation also explains the sense in which Roethke claimed Stevens as "our father." His sensibility, as Stevens', was divorced from any ideological or theological system. The structure of things must be derived from the dynamic relationship between the imagination and things-as-reality. And this lesson they both learned from Whitman.
Roethke, like Crane, Williams and Stevens, had to reckon with the Pound-Eliot tradition, but he seems to be the only one among them who explored the relation of his self to that tradition as an integral part of his quest of the meaning of life. Being an heir to the age when "the death of one god was the death of all", he undertook the burden of discovering things for himself, "all the while calling the processes of thought itself into doubt". Crane's private life was as deeply entangled and confused as Roethke's but the belief, even the belief in the poetic myths of Whitman, came somewhat easily to Crane. Roethke's was a more sceptical temperament. He succeeded in capturing the rhythmic echoes of Whitman's poetry, while Crane's poetic idiom remained close to that of the Pound-Eliot tradition. Williams, while responding to Pound's poetic mode, thought Eliot heralded the doomsday of the American poetry. His was a more absorbing and assimilative spirit; his sense of the land and his identity with it reflect a bard's involvement into his locale. His spirit was more kindred to Whitman's. In his technique and element of spontaneous empathy with things, Williams embodied the spirit of Whitman more successfully than Crane. Naturally Roethke's kind of scepticism has no place in Williams's poetry.

Roethke's poetic mode is born out of his desire "to make something in language, a poem that was all of a piece, a poem that could stand for what I was at the time, that seemed to be
the most miraculous thing in the world. Certain writers called out to me: I believed them implicitly. I still do. This remark points the direction of his poetic beginnings—the Pound-Eliot tradition which upheld the theory of "objective-correlative" and "dissociation of sensibility." There was another way of composing a poem, "that was all of a piece, a poem that could stand for what he was at the time," a poem "as an act of mind," as "a shape of psyche," in the process of discovering itself. The poem may spring from the poet's sense that

We live in a place
That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.

These lines recall the Robinson Crusoe motif in most modernist poets. To repeat the words of Stevens again,

After the final no there came a yes
And on that yes the future world depends.

These lines from Stevens sum up the Roethkean predicament of finding the mode of alignment with the self and "the place that is not our own." Roethke earns the affirmation by an encounter with the poetics of the Pound-Eliot tradition, and a reaching-out towards the Whitman tradition.


3. Ibid., p.28.

4. Ibid., p.30.

5. Ibid., p.34.


7. Ibid., p.74.


13. Ibid., p.117.


24. Ibid., p.279.


26. Ibid., p.18.


49. Ibid., p. 404.