

**SPIRAL KNOWLEDGE
A STUDY OF THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF THEODORE ROETHKE**

**BY
KAREN R. ALKALAY**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**SUPERVISED BY DR. WILLIAM RUECKERT
DR. JAROLD RAMSEY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK**

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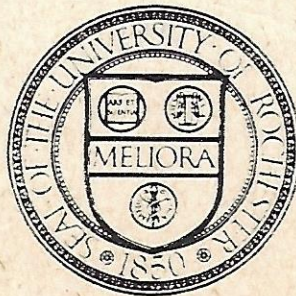
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VITAE

Born in London, England in 1945, Karen Alkalay was educated in the United States, and received her higher education at the University of Rochester. Her B.A. degree, with honors in English Literature, was awarded in 1966, and her M.A. in 1967. From 1967-1970 Mrs. Alkalay taught English at the State University College at Geneseo, New York, and in 1970 returned to the University of Rochester to complete her graduate studies. Mrs. Alkalay is presently an instructor at the University of the Negev in Beersheva, Israel.

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ABSTRACT

In all of his collected poems, Theodore Roethke concerns himself with the development of one theme, the idea of the self. From his earliest pieces, which attempt to establish a relationship between the individual and his inner self, to his later works, which orient the individual in society and finally to the eternal world, Roethke follows a spiralic path, every poem a step in the developmental sequence. The distinctive characteristic of this singular quest is his "layered" vision, which considers psychosexual development, evolutionary development, jungian individuation and objectification, poetic growth, and the "mystic way" as parallel and interchangeable journies. This unique vision necessitates a "layered" developmental critical work, and Spiral Knowledge attempts to fulfill this need, to delineate Roethke's development in his own terminology.

Open House (1941), Roethke's first volume, gropes ^{e i} albiet methodically- through the major theories of modern poetry, of freudian psychoanalysis, and various theories of socialization, and finds that these popular directives for behavior and writing limit and at times deny the self. It is only when, in The Lost Son (1948), Roethke follows the direction of his initial mentor, D.H. Lawrence, and turns inward to the self, to the very minimal bases for

life, that he finds his uniqueness as a poet. The "pre-literary" style, the curt, breathless lines, the non-sequiturs, and above all, the "vegetal radicalism", are all aspects of this inward and downward journey.

Praise to the End! (1951) is written from within the self, a point exactly opposite from the externally oriented Open House. Yet these two works are, in a sense, equal. For they are both on the verge of silence. Open House begins with the brave assumption that the emotions of the writer are so pure, they need no words to be communicated, but soon finds to what extent individuals are isolated from each other. The "silence" is the lack of real communication - communications from and with the inner self. Praise to the End! concerns itself with the opposite silence - the silence of subjectivity, of complete union with the self, which has no need of external communications. It is here that Yeats' influence on Roethke becomes salient: The cycle followed is described in A Vision.

The Waking and Words for the Wind (1953, 1958) continue Yeats' direction, from the world of subjectivity to the world outside. A measured attempt is made to orient the self in all its uniqueness to the world of man, and when this becomes successful, to the world beyond, the far field. In The Far Field (1964), Roethke delineates his own version of the mystic way, until he reaches a

post verbal silence, where words are no longer necessary for communication because there is no separation between the individual and his world.