

Love and Death; As a Duality of Thought

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Abstract: The civil war and reconstruction created a climate which distorted love and brought death unmitigated by community. These two events defaced humanity and disintegrated the experience between body and soul. However the tone of poetry remains detached and elegant even when dealing with themes as perennial and dramatic love and death. It seems inappropriate and misleading to speak of John Crowe Ransom's love poems. They are poems about love that have modernist technical guards against obviousness, naive and sentimentality. None of them has passionate reckless immediacy that we expect of love poems....

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Thus the love theme in Ransom's poem is not that of the conventionally romantic kind and certainly not from within the experience. It deals exclusively from the outside with disintegration of lovers who cannot fulfill their desire. There are many examples in Ransom's verse that examine love from a number of perspectives. I have chosen "Spectral lovers", "Parting at dawn", "Parting without a sequel", "The equilibrist", "Morning", "Good ships", "Two in August" "Spectral lovers" almost a debate between mind and body, is detached and ironical portrait of two unnamed people who responds to the enticements of an April season with appropriate feelings of erotic attraction but who succumb to the restraints of honor and timidity.

"By night they haunted a thicket of April mist

Lovers they knew they were, but why unclasped, unknissed."

The opening line creates the atmosphere for phantom relationship between two lovers. The lovers appear spectral because they are walking in the mist; but they do not behave as a lovers, for "they go frozen apart in the fear." The persona brings the reader closer to the lovers and creates sympathy for them. Parting at dawn is another poem about failure in love and honor. It has paralyzing aesthetic distance and shifting irony. The lovers are referred to as "them 'night is conducive to love but instead we get a factitious stoicism. The poem has another ironic turn to take. If the lovers who have renounced emotions should discover ten years later, that their aborted emotional relationship still seems authentic and important than they may conclude that they were wrong about the idealism of love that led them to self denial. The goddess evoked in the poem is not love but philosophy, who teaches that all must die, included love. In "The Equilibrist", a similar conflict occurs between honor and passion, but first person narrator comments upon lovers in the second half of the poem. The theme in two in August is about the end of love. However it seems to have three possible level of meaning varying from the literal to the very abstract and symbolic.(A)An account of the unexpected and irrational breakup of a marriage. (B) An ironic comment upon the incapability of man in achieving the perfection or the ideal. (c) The wide gap between mind and body. The poem is also remarkable for its repressed violence and hidden chaos. The

opening line suggested this ideal life and marriage as well as emotional commitment that helped to build up this perfect union of love. Actually night is for loving or sleeping/ sweet dreams. But no explanation is offered as to why this man and wife have quarreled. The night for loving is now black and clock remarks not time present but only time past. The poem is trying to illustrate the sad limitations of man trying to achieve and live up to his best ideas. E.E.Cumming calls them endure complacently enough without passion and without despair. In "Good ship" the man and the women are the good ships who met on the "high sea" in a high society.

Beautifully timber fit for storm and sport

And who miserly merchant hulks converted.

Their society is not aristocratic in any sense, but merely a modern commercial one their goodships travel also for purpose of trade. John Crowe Ransom mostly concern to sharpen the metaphor.

DEATH

Till in one day the dream of death appears.....

In one of his conversation Ransom remarked that "the great subject of poetry, the most serious subject is death....." Death or prospect of death occupies over one third of the poems Ransom choose to reprint, ransom treatment of death is striking. He treats death, not only in dark reality; he is also concerned with proper attitude towards mortality. The nature of the subject can easily lead to disillusion, morbidity and self pity, the poet challenge is to strive for a proper sense of balance. Death is the very difficult literary topic as it can encourage emotional overstatement and lead to loss of control. This sense of overstatement may come from the readers perception of a possible disparity of relationship between the emotional treatment as such and the experience of its effect in the real life with consequent suspicion that the author has improper manipulative designs on the readers. Ransom has many poems that treat death as their main subject; I can immediately instances ten poems on the theme. "Piazza piece", "Necrological", where death is a framing context to the poem. "Janet Waking" and "Here lies a Lady", where death is explored through a set of attitude. "Emily Hardcastle", "Spinster", "Hilda", "Dead Boy", "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" and "Puncture", where death is reflected through narration, what is unusual about Ransom treatment of death in these poems is that in each of them there is a kind of fiction. According to the H.T. Parson, we may group them in three distinct groups.

(A) Atmosphere.

(B) Disillusion.

(C) Narration.

Atmosphere

"Piazza Piece" and "Necrological" can be used to illustrate Ransom's use of contextual atmosphere to create aesthetic distance. "Piazza Piece" presents death and the maiden through

the convention of a court ship dialogue. She is conventionalized and unchanging like the elderly suitor Death. Irony finds its way into the poem through witty turns of phrase like Gentleman in a Dust coat in which Death is described a protecting himself against his own element. Ransom characterized Death by using colors and sounds to vivify the scene. Grey man supports the notion of Death as an elderly gentleman and contrast with the color elements of rose and vines. The subject of “Piazza piece” is not actual death but failure death of a young romantic girl waiting for her beloved to come and kiss her. These are echoes of Romeo and Juliet. It is like couplet’s orchard, when Juliet in her balcony first becomes aware that her words have been overheard. The title of the poem invites the ironic compression to Shakespeare’s Italian setting.

But see the roses on your trellis dying

And hear the spectra singing of the moon.

Even should Juliet’s expectation be fulfilled and her true love comes that they marry and they raise a family; but death cannot wait and meanwhile Juliet, must feel his presence at every turn. “Necrological” atmosphere of the poem which is developed through harsh tone and humble sight is suffused with feeling of death. The dead man had been stripped of their clothing by their slayers, and stark dawn light showed their bodies”whitely bare”. But death is used to refine upon the chilling witness. An attitude of love in life is now an attitude of grief in death. The poem ends with quite climax, a delicate extension of deathliness, as the friar identifies himself with the corpse heavy landscape and in imagination, blends into it.

Disillusion

“Janet waking” and “Here Lies a Lady” deal with the topic of emotional control in the face of death. “Janet waking”, a poem about a child’s difficult and painful awaking to the reality of death a little girl’s and adult’s. Ransom is creating two ironies here; juxtaposition of serious and trivial.

Janet implored us, wake her from her sleep

And wouldnot be instructed in how deep

Was the forgetful kingdom of death?

“Forgetful kingdom of death” shows the common human flaw in the face of love and death.

“Here lies a lady” treats death with a good deal of puzzlement and confusion. It is difficult to know how to take the tone of the poem. The first line announces, as though we have standing before a monument in the reflective mood, that it is about to trace the outlines of the life of one of high estate.

Here lies a lady of beauty a high degree

Of chills and fever she died, of chills and fever.

Her death is irreverently described in sing sang and “fever” uncovers a Pun in the first line on “high degree”. The point of her life seems in fact to be a pointless death. The significance of her after notion between chills and fever suggests life itself as a kind of sickness. She went through six crude illnesses in her wifehood and motherhood. And she goes on in the poem

from chill to fever the poem itself goes through chills and fever. The word “lucky” either in the sense of her being fortunate in her high degree or in that of having at last escaped from long suffering but the poem induction of death a kind of maze or puzzlement, in which the lady lies in her feverish state before dying is presented in a rhythm that verges on the jaunty.

*“In love and great honor we bade God rest her soul
After six little spaces of chill, and six of burning.”*

Narration

In Emily Hard castle spinster, Ransom used a shift in pronouns to distinguish between common and personal experience initially, the poem introduces a community of mourners. Ransom uses virginity as a symbol for all human ideals, especially moral ideals that deny the dualistic nature of individual. As a part of society, the narrator can appreciate the decorum that Emily Hard castle has preserved. Hilda was printed for the first time in 1926 in Harper’s magazine as a single sonnet titled ghosts. The ghost belong to apparently to women who could never bring themselves to love, now lonely regretful, guilty, opening in the speaker’s garden to cling about quince bushes and roses, haunting the world of mortal beauty to which they have been afraid of commit themselves.

*But Hilda/ proudest lingering last alone,
Wreathing my roses with blue bitter dust.*

In sonnet 2 the situation is reversed. Hilda becomes suitor, her ghost seeking rest in the devotion of her old lover. The lover would give his love if he could. In “Two Gentleman in Bonds”, the concluding line of sonnet I read simply “I was such earth as whispered in her ear”. The word earth fits the theme but doesn’t fit the feelings of rejected lover rarely as well as “cold”. Whispering suggests the serpent’s whispering to Eve that Ransom indicates here in “Armageddon” indicates the lovers hopelessness clumsiness towards Hilda. So he describes himself as a “cold mumblings”.

Dead boy begins first person narrative. The tone is cool and distant with a touch of levity in the description of death as a transaction. The poem doesn’t set out to give us fact about death. In death the child is assimilated to his ancestors and the mourning becomes not a personal but a dynastic ritual. As T.H. Parsons notes he allows the poet to avoid direct confrontation with grief and death. “Bells for John Whiteside’s Daughter” depends on polarity between two facts – child being active, and awaiting death. The poems diction works on two levels – irony and narrative action. For example astonishes signifies sudden and abrupt death of the girl “brown study” is gentle synonym for death.

“Puncture” is one of the Ransom’s most curious Poems about death. It begins with dense but unknown narrative context. The complexities of the poem lies in the narrator misinterpretation both of the situation and emotion “set no seal of grace/ on any dead man’s face” is a way of saying that corpse are not attractive. Grimes know that he is dying and because he doesn’t want to deceive himself, he resist the offer to bandage him. It is a nice understatement of the importance and frustration of anybody who doesn’t know what to do while a person he loves and reverse is dying. Distance is brought in this poem by fusing love

and death at the same time in the same person. These poems about death revealed that Ransom's struggle between proper gentility and chivalric politeness is at war with his desire to be cruelly witty on subjects that has been current during his time.

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