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Aspects of Ransom's Poetry

by Mark Bricklin

If I had to live in a world of poetry, one of my first choices would be the world created by John Crowe Ransom. It is a mystical and yet a very real world, and the people who inhabit it range from saints and children to lovers and old soldiers. But the most appealing thing of all is that it is a human world; all his characters are not warped by disease or their problems are as universal as their possibilities. He could possibly be — ignorance, unkindness, terror, and death — good examples.

In order to handle such time-worn themes as effectively, his poetry must be quick, vital, and convincing. Such is Ransom's poetry as represented in his forthrightly titled Selected Poems and Essays. Add to these already renowned requirements a strong sense of rhythm, alert but keen irony, and the magnetic personality that will charm you and have you an even truer picture of his work. But instead of dealing with these abstract terms, let us open the hook and take a look at his pages.

METER AND DICTION

Ransom, as a poet, has avoided the too-repeated example of Ransom's use of meter and his unusual diction, or choice of words. It is the story of Gimes, "the old campaigner," who is about to join the counterattack. Consider the second stanza:

Which the flames roared, when the sparks darted
And quaked, as in that blackness that closed us round.
I looked at Grimes, my old comrade
Whose look — bright — and his whooping cough,
Which bled upon the ground.
The end of the first line is executed with perfect effect: the spark goes flying up in the blackness and then works slowly and faintly out in the second. The variation is repeated in the third line with equal success, when the syllables parallel the upward movement of the spark. The narrator offers his advice to Grimes: "Green, my boy, they say his heart is nearly an "old grocer." Grimes is a useful sort of man anywhere. The eight stanzas form the narrator's reaction to Grimes' death. He

Kicked on the carcasses of our enemies.
To leave them in the darkness,
But my bravo,

Quelled in the war of Grimes,

For even those

Who were our enemies.

The first thing that strikes us in the strain is the use of such words as "grocer," "quelled," and "counterattack." The second line at the end of the first line gives the rhythm and creates the effect. In this case, it is not just aesthetic, but the actual diction between the narrator and the work itself. This is the whole thing that makes Ransom's work strange emotion; for it is a strange and often touching.

The best moment comes in the last line, which describes the crack that blows the pipe and makes Grimes' mouth. The fourth line sets up the rhythm as a whole for the strain, except for an initial inversion, and equally, in the story is blown black. The meter changes to strophic and the rhythm is sharply
to say we are vexed at her

For EMOTIONAL POWER

Blue Girls, another of Ransom's popular pieces, shows how he can take a theme as common as any and charge it with something power. In the first two stanzas he describes young girls: "so clear, so happy, and to think no more of what will come to pass than blossoms blooming on the grass . . . Then:

Practise your beauty, fine girls,
And I will cry with your lute lips,
Beauty which all our power,

You at 15.

But now go the bells, and we are ready,

To know a lady with a terrible

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Mr. Ransom Ends Classes

New York Times critic Harvey Brent in a 1955 review of the Visions Ransom collection, remarked, "a selection of the work of a man of integrity, sensibility and humanism." Characteristics exhibited behind the lectern as well as in print. This Mr. Ransom will discontinue his teaching assignments at Kenyon. Happily, because of Gattenburg, etc., Mr. Ransom will never stop teaching. The following is a short summary:

A Rhodes Scholar at Oxford from 1910-1913, Mr. Ransom began teaching at the college level at Vanderbilt in 1914, coming to Kenyon in 1917. From 1901 through 1912 he held a Guggenheim Fellowship. During his stay at Vanderbilt he was one of those instrumental in helping to found the "fugitive" group, who were later known, with some modification of membership as the "Agriculture" or "Young Candidates." The Fugitives consisted of teachers at Vanderbilt and of some men from the business and professional world of Nashville who were interested in poetry and philosophy. As their talk progressed, the idea of publishing a magazine of poetry developed: The Fugitive. And, although the literary stream was already flooded with the little magazines, this venture caught immediate attention, so that, when the magazine appeared, an anthology of ten of the "Fugitives" was published.

Mr. Ransom teaching class, Mr. Ransom has been at Kenyon since as his last book always been appealing.

Mr. Ransom teaching class, Mr. Ransom has been at Kenyon since 1937.

Professor John Crowe Ransom in academic regalia, (both of the pictures of Mr. Ransom on this page appear in publication). This photograph was taken at a previous Commencement.

Mr. Ransom in collaboration with the late Philip Blair Rine of the philosophy department at Kenyon, published the first issue of The Kenyon Review. The magazine is distributed internationally.

RECOGNITION GROWS

In 1957, Mr. Ransom was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1961 he received the annual Bollingen Prize in Poetry given by Yale University. This award is made on the basis of a poet's entire work. Again in 1951 the National Institute of Arts and Letters presented Mr. Ransom with the Russell Lynes Memorial Award Fund Award. This memorial was established in 1924, and is given periodically to some American or English poet, not as a prize, but in recognition of value. Mr. Ransom was its sixth recipient. Previous recipients included Robert Frost (1913), Horace Gregory (1920) and William Carlos Williams (1949). In 1953 Mr. Ranson was a member of the National Academy of Arts and Science. At Kenyon he has held the Carnegie Foundation's chair in Poetry.
Ransom

(Continued from page one)

Dear Kleinheideck:

Among faculty members and students alike, the class of 1986 is an object of distinct and growing popular interest. Many of the more gifted students are transferring to other institutions. The administration is in a difficult position. More than a few students are seriously considering looking elsewhere. I sincerely hope that we are unable to retain an increasingly evangelistic atmosphere (manifested recently in some haphazard destruction of the normal balance) that all concur with the traditional and liberal attitude of Kenyon College.

administration, faculty, students—all those that have had a part in our success. This note is not by way of offering the one and only way of stemming the downward trend. "name" teachers, teachers ofknown and genuine ability, at whatever price and bright but really bright steers through the difficulties of the enterprise. There is nothing more, no future. Nothing but the presents the college with the opportunity for a second chapter. Even the most impotent is wanted here. Right now. To the students—only that they can retain to Kenyon the golden days: only that they may show that the only way to halt the holocaust Bayer's will is to choose to remain at Kenyon.

There is no other solution to Kenyon's plight, and the student's need is the subject of a study of the missions Office, with its roll of the "well-rounded" student, to which $120,000 if the proposal is accepted. This money would be directed toward athletic and handicapped students.

Name withheld on Request

Editor's note: Unfortunately, the theme of this article is not sufficient to "press this paper's sentiments. We cannot hide behind a "not necessarily representing the opinion of the paper" phrase. Instead of an editor's note, I would write this: the writer's own request, leave its authorship to anonymity.

Transfer Reasons Clearly Stated

Many Kenyon students are considering transferring this year. I am writing this note following a review of the results of a recent poll of students. The poll showed that 45 percent of those interviewed do not necessarily represent those of the paper, its editors or the staff.

Two years at Kenyon have not only been very profitable but quite disillusioning. Though in some areas Kenyon remains a top-notch school, there are several factors, which for me, outweigh these considerations:

1. The moribund depopulation of the English Dept. Also, the drabness of the literary and social life to literature, which is still possible, and instead of reading and writing, I find this approach unsatisfactory.

2. The inadequate size of the Psychology and Education Dept. These fields should be well-developed in "liberal" and "liberal"

3. The great lack of "cultural" courses. In both the on-campus and the off-campus life, there are still unsatisfactory courses and administrations. Anyone who reads anything about it, Ohio College officials, who according to the "official rank" are below Kenyon, realize that New York has more courses, and have orchestra, jazz groups, theatre companies and excellent speakers paying their respects. Apparently, Kleinheideck thinks that any activity which will not be written up in the Sports Page of the Mount Vernon News is a waste of money. As an inherent disadvantage to some, that in view of the new-

Kleinheideck's reception in the Kenyon College faculty, then we have to be taught English literature by Graudick and subjected to the expertness of Faulkner's Jersey, the thirty-three year old editor, which is at an alarming pace.

I have no doubts of Kenyon's potential success. In ten years, Kenyon will have provided an enormous amount of money for enough athletic scholarships, and we should lead the Ohio Conference. A similar opportunity at the department will be the best in the area. The modern dormitories and school buildings will be provided with the most reliable and attractive chairs that can be bought. And the college publications with their current needs to create the successful twentieth century man.