PREFACE

John Crowe Ransom is a poet who has to be studied closely. Apart from the writings of Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and others who were associated with him and some perceptive studies by Karl F. Knight, T. D. Young and J. M. Bradbury to name some, Ransom the poet, has not been given especially in India the kind of attention he has received in his capacity as one of the influential critics of this century. It is in such a context that the need was felt to put in perspective a poet who could effectively voice the ironies of life which strip man of his individuality.

Ransom's view of life was so mature that he did not wish away the dark realities of life but encompassed within his rich imagination the sad predicament of man. Creative insight is the hallmark of his poetry. Poems like "Miriam Tazewell," "Spectral Lovers," and "The Equilibrists" are concerned with people who live in a perilous world and are incapable of attaining a sense of respectability. Ransom does not curse them. He only attempts to make them realize that they have been indiscreet and whenever he shows a tendency to sympathize with them, he never allows sentimentality to
dominate him. His Southernism and his classical background have to a large extent helped him in staving off puerile effusions of namby-pambiness. It is this impartial and realistic attitude towards the characters and the problems they face that lends to the poems a persistent charm.

Ransom does not expatiate on the stories of kings and dukes and trace their passage from a height to a decline, but pre-occupies himself with humble, unsophisticated characters in the manner of Thomas Hardy, whom he admired. He concentrates on their fun and frolicking, their whims and fancies, their foibles and other mundane diurnal activities. People like Miriam Tazewell ("Miriam Tazewell") Margaret ("Of Margaret") and Janet ("Janet Waking") narrate their own stories of their inability to comprehend the mysteries of the universe in which they live. They are the victims of the twin evils of modern times, namely Science and Materialism. Through witty, yet subtle turns of phrase, Ransom detaches himself from the characters he caricatures, thereby extenuating the pain one is likely to experience while witnessing the plight of these miserable people.

A sharp intellect and a fertile imagination enabled Ransom to sense the inexhaustible ambiguities of life.
There are occasions when his self-imposed discipline of detachment seems to be annoying and once in a while one gets the impression that the people and the incidents he invents are not subordinate "to an illuminating perception or a powerful feeling," as Thornton Parsons has rightly observed in his book *John Crowe Ransom* (New York: Twayne Publ., 1969, 164). Whatever may be his failings, he is certainly a poet who could best understand man as he is, without resorting to means which only assist in glamourizing him. The themes upon which he has concentrated tend to overlap forcing one to say with a fair amount of justification that they are complementary to one another.

The proposed dissertation is broadly divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 outlines some of the main themes and concerns which persistently engaged Ransom's attention. An attempt is also made to link some of his forgettable early pieces with his much known later ones in order to establish a line of continuity necessary to substantiate that his interests remained largely unchanged during the brief period of his poetic career (1919-1925).

In Chapter 2, the failure of the characters to cope with the pressing realities of life is treated by drawing a number of examples from the poems. Their
inability to integrate into a totality of being has resulted in the torturousness of their predicament which is further exacerbated by their unresponsiveness to the warmth of love. Like the lovers in the poem "Eclogue," they become 'marchers unto night,' the reality of which they fail to comprehend and it is this uncertainty about the inevitability of death and change that forms the subject matter of Chapter 3. Death and change are the only certainties in an otherwise ambiguous world and though man tries to protect himself from it through foolish postures of self-preservation, the relentlessness of its furious pursuit finally leads him to his extinction. Ransom's treatment of the subject of death and change is so original that a need was felt to throw some light on an area where man fears to tread. Ransom wanted his characters to be aware of it, but unfortunately their fragmentation precludes a positive response to it. It was he, who for the first time realized that the subject of death and change is a pertinent one for poetry and it is precisely his composed attitude towards it that invests the poems on this topic with a rare delectability.

Chapter 4 shows how Ransom exploited the resources of the language to bring out the irony of man's situation arising from the discrepancy between his normal desires and what he ultimately experiences.
Ransom wanted this irony to be sustained thereby manifesting the perilous nature of this universe. Though revisions whittle down the irony in a poem, the insistence on a conventional rhyme-scheme has succeeded in maintaining the desire-despair continuum present in life.

Chapter 5 deals with the failure of a once acclaimed South to honour its myths and beliefs. These valid monuments of faith constitute the rich tradition of the region. By capitulating to the pressures of modernity, the South has forever forfeited her glorious heritage. According to Ransom, faith is professed through a perpetuation of myths and rituals, but man in an effort to benefit himself commercially, has deviated from these repositories of faith. Deprived of a tradition which is the only sure safeguard against a possible disintegration, man ultimately sinks into the annihilating whirlpool of death, without being able to realize his dreams of resurrection.

A summarization of the findings is given in the final chapter and this is followed by a bibliography.

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