A Classroom In Poetry: Modern Perspective vs. Purpose

BY CARL DAW

The world which Shakespeare saw as a stage seems to have become a classroom for John Crowe Ransom. The white-haired pedagogue was in his proper element when he read his poetry to Tuesday night's heterogeneous assembly of students, faculty, and contemporaries.

Man In The News Houstonians in a well-filled Chemistry Lecture Hall.

Those who came to be entertained with a polished recitation were met with an evening of instruction. Mr. Ransom's unpertinent Tennessee drawl quickly burst the bubble of his celebrity, but the initial disconcerting vacuum was gradually replaced by a realization that he was completely in character.

Further distraction came from the frequent digressions which the lecturer injected freely; many of these seemed superficial and extraneous to an interpretation of the poems.

In attempting to evaluate Mr. Ransom's reading and his poetry there appear to be two important considerations. The primary factor to be reckoned with is perspective. Those of us who look toward him from the camp of non-metrical non-rhythmmed contemporaries initially label his style passe.

But such quick classification is dangerous. It is necessary to acknowledge that Mr. Ransom's work is polished, unified, and precise in its employment of the English language.

The narrative nature of his longer poems and the extended conceits of some of the shorter ones are disappointing to those who think that Ransom wishes to communicate cosmic truths. To hear the poet declare that he means no more than he said on the printed page is distasteful to our modern literary palates. It is difficult to accept a poet who portrays rather than projects.

From the remarks which he made concerning his poem, "Piazza Piece," one senses that Mr. Ransom has no desire to be abtruse. After acknowledging that this poem had once given trouble to readers, he announced with an obvious sense of satisfaction that "everyone is used to it now."

The second basis of evaluation must be a conception of the purpose of the man's poetry. During the evening, Mr. Ransom made several references to what he labeled "the classical sense of poetry."

He stated that he thought a poet "almost always a moralist," but he added that he thought it more important to be "sensitive to behavior." As a corollary to the latter phrase Mr. Ransom suggested that a poet must treat the events of life e.g., death, in their place, but should neither neglect nor overdo.

In the brief autobiographical sketch which Mr. Ransom volunteered, he stated that through-