

## John Crowe Ransom: On 465 ("I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--")

And since this was a strange poet, I shall begin with two of the stranger poems; they deal with Death, but they are not from the elegiac poems about suffering the death of others, they are provisions of her own death. In neither does Death present himself as absolute in some brutal majesty, nor in the role of God's dreadful minister. The transaction is homely and easy, for the poet has complete sophistication in these matters, having attended upon deathbeds, and knowing that the terror of the event is mostly for the observers. In the first poem (# 465) a sort of comic or Gothic relief interposes, by one of those homely inconsequences which may be observed in fact to attend even upon desperate human occasions.

The other poem (#712) is a more imaginative creation. It is a single sustained metaphor, all of it analogue or "vehicle" as we call it nowadays, though the character called Death in the vehicle would have borne the same name in the real situation or "tenor." Death's victim now is the shy spinster, so he presents himself as a decent civil functionary making a call upon a lady to take her for a drive.

From "Emily Dickinson: A Poet Restored," in *Perspectives USA* (1956) Copyright © 1956 by John Crowe Ransom.

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