

MAKING MEANINGS

First Thoughts

How does the speaker feel about the little girl who died? How did the poet make you feel about the Whitesides' daughter and about death itself?

Shaping Interpretations

- What characteristics of the girl make the speaker astonished at her "brown study"?
- What action of the little girl caused the geese to cry "Alas"? What additional overtones does this cry take on, given the poem's subject?
- What details in the last stanza make it clear what the speaker is looking at?
- What do you associate with the verb *vexed* in the next to last line of the poem? What verb would you expect the speaker to use to describe his reaction to the dead child?

Challenging the Text

The critic Babette Deutsch once said of Ransom:



[W]hatever his subject . . . his tone is right. The glint of irony is there, deepened as well as softened by a sensitiveness without a grain of sentimentality.

—Babette Deutsch

Do you think Ransom's **tone** is appropriate, given the highly emotional nature of the subject? Do you think he should also have covered other aspects of the girl's life? Explain.

CHOICES: Building Your Portfolio

Writer's Notebook

1. Collecting Ideas for an Analysis of Causes and Effects

If you are interested in literature and in the ways it is studied in school, you might find a topic for investigation in the work of John Crowe Ransom. Do some preliminary research on one of these topics: New Criticism (or New Critics) or the Fugitives. What effect did the New Criticism have on the way literature was (and still is) studied in schools and colleges? What effect did the Fugitives have on Southern writing? Save your notes for possible use in the *Writer's Workshop* on page 685.



Interpreting a Poem

2. The Human Condition

A critic wrote that Ransom's poems emphasize **themes** like the following:

mortality and the fleetingness of youthful vigor and grace . . . [and] the disparity between the world as man would have it and as it actually is, between what [people] want and need emotionally and what is available for them. . . .

—Thomas Daniel Young

In a brief essay, explain whether or not you believe this comment is supported by the poem. Use specific references to the poem.

Comparing Poems

3. Remembrances

Write a brief essay comparing "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Cross of Snow" (page 178). Compare the poems' **tone, imagery, and views of death**. Support your comparison with lines from the poems.