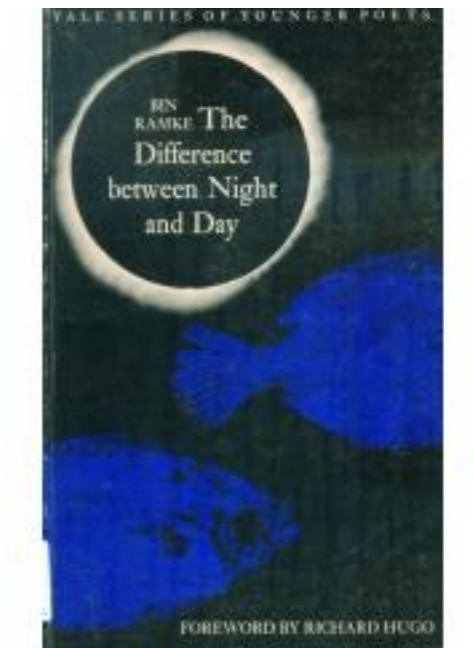


The Difference Between Night and Day Yale Series of Younger Poets



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著者:

出版者:

出版时间:

装帧:

isbn:9780300022322

An old theory, by now a cliché, has it that artists are nobodies when not practicing their art. Most often this is applied to actors. The bright star on the stage becomes a drab blob the moment the play is over, and starts to sparkle again the next evening when the curtain rises.

Reading "The Difference between Night and Day" I'm reminded of this theory, not because I suspect Ramke is a blob of any sort, but because his poems are so honestly rooted in isolation that they suggest a man with no way of reaching others except through his writing. The gains are made and the losses counted in isolation. When Ramke is writing he has no friends. Isolation is a somewhat shopworn theme in modern poetry, but when it is this deeply felt, this personal, it becomes new. New because it functions dynamically in poems that are new and unusual.

Not so unusual that no ancestors hover in the background. One of Ramke's ancestors is Wallace Stevens, and like Stevens, Ramke risks an apparent coldness. What happens around him seems to run a poor second to his fantasy life, and in the early parts of this book we often get a picture of one for whom caring does not carry high priority and to whom escape from feeling is essential to survival. Yet if I believed Ramke a cold poet I would not have picked him to be the winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets. Ramke's coldness is not a lack of passion, but the coldness of the void the imagination must inhabit to receive the disparate events, both internal and external, the gradations of response to those events, the mysteries of things those "strange birds" that "call, hidden in the sky." What we feel is the isolation he must feel to write the poems.

Paradoxically, and again like Stevens, one of Ramke's assets is his generosity. A good poem is usually generous, but there are degrees. Many poets stick to one small part of their natures be-

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