

Notes on A Certain Lady by Dorothy Parker:

The poem opens with the speaker (i.e. the poetess) talking about how she is can smile for him while tilting for him. She can listen attentively to what he says, all the time trying to attract him with her body language. She talks about he can laugh and marvel at the list of the man's conquests with women, yet the man cannot see the pain she hides behind her laughter. He cannot see that behind her laughter she isn't happy and light hearted but actually nursing her broken heart.

The lady/speaker talks of how the man always brings her tales of gossip and indiscretions along with his conquests and revels in sharing these with her. But the man is unable to see beyond this fun, towards the love the lady harbors for him. Despite his inability to see her love and unwillingness to stay with any one woman, the lady is still in love with him. This can be seen from the last few lines where she wishes she could kiss him goodbye, even as he goes in search for other women.

The woman comes across as helpless as she tries to convey her feelings towards the man she loves. She flirts with him, touches him and gives him her full attention, hoping that he would see her love and reciprocate. But alas, the man is unable to see it, or maybe he refuses to see it. He is content to move from one woman to another, and regale the poetess with their stories as though they were conquests. He has failed in finding true love because he cannot recognize love even if it literally stares him in the eyes.

The poem is split into two stanzas of 12 lines each with the rhyme scheme of abab. The poem is written in simple English with good diction and is easy to understand.

Title

A Certain Lady as the title refers to the speaker. This certain lady is in love with the man and yet the man is unable to see this, even as he goes around romancing other women.

Setting

The poem as set as a monologue or a reflection on the Lady's conversations with the man, as we can see from the repeated references to their conversations.

Tone

The tone in this poem is one of regret and sadness. The woman regrets the fact that the man is unable to see the love the woman holds for him and is therefore filled with sadness. There is also an element of irony here as the man goes about romancing women and yet he is unable to see the love right in front of his eyes.

Theme

The theme of the poem is one of emotional turmoil one can experience in love. The lady is in love with the man, but the man is unable to see it. And thus she endures the heartbreak she receives every time the man tells her of his new conquest.

Symbolism

The poem uses symbols like “eager lips” and “rapturous eyed” to depict the attraction the speaker felt even when the man spoke, underlining the affection and love she felt for him. The reference to her heart dying “a thousand deaths” shows us how every tale of his romantic adventures added as a fresh heartbreak to the speaker’s heart. And yet we see that she is still in love with him. She wishes to kiss him even as he goes off for more conquests.