LIVING WITH & IN A RUIN

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If a man lives long enough with a woman, I am told, sooner or later he is living with a ruin. ("I am told," I say, for I wouldn't want to claim an experience I haven't had.) At that stage of the relationship, the ruin will be to him either repulsive or dear, depending on how he's treated the relationship (ie, her) in his heart & life.

Thus said I last night to my dear Loree, who is not yet a ruin, though she is living with one, one who is to her a dear ruin, as she will some day be to him. I was speaking of Bessie Dyke, who in 1811 went & got herself married to Tom Moore, who lived with her gratefully-joyfully-faithfully-devotedly decade after decade through the births & deaths of five children till finally she became to him a "dear ruin."

When I wasn't a third of my present age, I heard an old ruin of a preacher say, "If you manage to live till age fifty, you'll be living in a ruin. And before then, you will have decided whether to let that fact depress you--you will have decided how important to your soul is the condition of your body." That joyful, humorous old codger delivered me, by the grace of God, from the fear of aging, which may be the theme of this Thinksheet, though I think it's about grateful-joyful-faithful-devoted love.

You must understand that Tom was helped by the fact that he was Irish. Besides leaning toward laughter, the Irish love green, verdancy. They'd better: Eire is not called the Emerald Isle idly. If you swim east by north off our Cape Cod beach, first thing you come to will be this huge green mass sticking up out of the Atlantic. Or even more impressive, you look down from your plane & suddenly the solid blue turns to solid green!

What about all those old ruins scattered over St. Paddy's island, you say? The green crawls up & around & over them. Their gray gradually loses to a hundred kinds of vine.

In those vines' determination to cover the gray, Tom saw the power of his love to green over the graying of aging Bessie: "around the dear ruin each wish of my heart / Would entwine itself verdantly still." Not abolish the gray: the power of resurrection is in the hands of God alone. Rather, his was a **realistic romanticism**, not aging-&-death-denying but life-affirming in the power of timeless love, the only timelessness available to us on this earth.

Nor was Tom a self-victim of his contemporary romantics' bathetic-Byronic melancholy--his good friend Byron being so typical of it as to provide posthumously and unknowingly a personal adjective to describe it. (B. gave M. his autobiography to get published, then at 36 suicided by jumping ship in mid-ocean. B's life was so seamy-steamy that his family persuaded M. to burn the book. B. tried to bury his melancholy underneath what the KJV calls, in the case of the Prodigal Son, "riotous living," which began with--if not before--his failed marriage.)

A melancholy fact: sooner or later, gravity gets everything presumptuous & powerful enough to stand up. If it doesn't suddenly drop dead young, everything sags before it collapses. Gray romantics wallow in that fact. Green romantics accept it as fact & with song defy its power, with beauty defy its ugliness, with love defy its loneliness, & so with truth defy its lie.

Tom's evergreen love was for Bessie &--in sacred songs & hymns--for God. The Thinksheet just before this one was on one of the latter ("Come, ye disconsolate"--contexting melancholy within overwhelming divine grace), & it quotes the first stanza of the lovesong on which this present Thinksheet is based:

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms / Which I gaze on so fondly today,
Were to change by tomorrow and fleet in my arms / Like fairy gifts fading away,
Thou would'st still be ador'd, as this moment thou art, / Let thy loveliness fade as it will;
And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart / Would entwine itself verdantly still.