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Beyond Morse Peckham: Love and Pain in the Art of Antoine Watteau

One of the most intriguing books of the late 20th century on experiencing art is *Man's Rage for Chaos* by Morse Peckham (1965). As opposed to common belief that art represents a drive for clarity and order, Peckham has proposed that it is a record of a 'rage for chaos', a yearning for darkness and disorder. Peckham has supported his stance by brilliant analyses including that of Antoine Watteau's, *Embarkation for Cythera* identifying a series of "discontinuities" of form which ultimately leads to a new understanding of content, i.e., that the famous painting represents an *Embarkation from Cythera*, fraught with pain of separation rather than happiness of union. It is stunning how, by blind assumption and prejudice, one could confuse such contradictory emotional states as union and separation when presented in visual form. Of course, acts of joy imply their painful opposite, as the pain and anxiety of imperfection of joy are inherent in the human condition. This is most delicately stated in the wonderfully complex and ambiguous art of Antoine Watteau, as the *Embarkation*, analyzed by and beyond Morse Peckham, abundantly demonstrates.