

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Eliot

University Archives

12-1933

Washington University Eliot

Washington University Eliot, St. Louis, Missouri

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/eliot>

Recommended Citation

Washington University Eliot, St. Louis, Missouri, "Washington University Eliot" (December 1933). *Eliot*. 60.
<https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/eliot/60>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eliot by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

The Old Lady Returns . . .

By Josephine W. Johnson

For fifty years the iron rockers of her chair had tapped. Up and down, monotonous as rain. And for fifty years the damned old men and women gathered around her with their pipes and knitting needles and listened to her talk. They would not work. They would not suffer. They would not do any of those things for which they'd come to Hell.

"It was a beautiful place," she'd say,—“beyond all dreaming. I went out in the mist one morning—Dear Lord! Such a cobweb covered world! More spiders there seemed than anything else alive in all the fields. Their webs blew back and forth on every wire, trembled like parachutes in grass. So heavy the dew it looked like frost, and I heard it fall down from the apple twigs,—the lovely apple twigs! A wide orchard we had,—two acres more or less,—like a great wedding in the spring, like a great ocean in the summer.—And the fruit!—All day the bushels came up and went by. Some hundred jars I made one year,—green apple sauce of early apples, and whole pears stuck about with cloves. . . And that year I was lost on David. He was a kindly fellow,—good as a tree to look at, but a poor little pea pod soul.—Dave saw my hundred jars and his ears pricked up. He thought to pluck me soon and easy, because that was his way.—And I was ready to plunk in his arms as if no man but blind old Crane with his mule-kicked mouth had come my way before. And I remember how every night I'd rush to the window thinking his feet were what I heard and it would be only wind in the poplar leaves, or rain on gravel. I'd see his lantern a thousand times a night in lightning bugs, and his shape in every shadow, till my mind was all astrew, and I half barmy-brained.—And then one day Dave points out a field of yarrow, says—'I'd plough that field if I were you. No good in yarrow.' And the scum of love went off my eyes and I saw what I knew but never had wanted to know.—That we were stars apart, and he with a poor

(Continued on Page 5)

**E
L
L
O
T**

STORIES · ARTICLES
REVIEWS · POEMS

Contributors

W. Johnson

Winifred Duncan

Mark Mills

Berenice Purcell

Edon Sager

THE ELIOT

Published Monthly by Students at
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Saint Louis, Mo.

Editor: Clark Mills McBurney.

Associates: Sophia Fox, Joseph Crocker, Gordon Sager, Dorothy Weiner.

Managing Editor: William Edgar.

Staff: Robert Campbell, Virginia Price, William Swindler, Berenice Purcell, James Leigh White, Selwyn Pepper.

Price 10 cents; the year, 75 cents.

E. A. ROBINSON'S LATEST BOOK*

Those readers of Mr. Robinson who are familiar with his early lyrics and with *Tristram*—and these seem to be in majority—are bewildered when they meet with his later work, *The Glory of the Nightingales*, and *Matthias at the Door*. The author of such clear, revealing portraits as *Flammonde*, *Richard Cory* and *Bewick Finzer* appears to be wandering as far as possible from poetry, as we have come to use the word; instead of a lucid and passionate comment on life and character, he gives us queer, uncertain broodings, so involved and removed from everyday experience that the reader is never sure as to their direction.

Mr. Robinson's interest has always been with the way of the human mind, and in the clash between its functioning and reality. But this interest is in no sense a romantic one; the characters portrayed are solitary and usually unconcerned with actuality as something necessarily to be dealt with, but *they never surpass that actuality*. They are, for the most part, the derelicts, the wrecks, the wasted ones, who have managed to wrest from life one valuable lesson: that of the virtue of patience. *Miniver Cheevy*, so splendidly out of tune with his age, "called it fate, and kept on drinking"; *Richard Cory*, beloved, envied and wondered at

* By Clark Mills. Permission of *Voices*.

by all who knew him, "one calm summer night, went home and put a bullet through his head." These are swift flashes of psychological insight and sympathy with matters not always thought of as poetic. The dissatisfactions of the man we happen to pass in the street, the disappointments that grow huge and distorted in silence, the bleak recurrence of day and night, day and night, and the strange way we have of tempering these things and arranging them into a semblance of order, if only in the imagination—such is the dark landscape of Mr. Robinson's poetry, which he peoples with beings whose conversation echoes in the mind long after the poems are put away. His collected work might appropriately be sub-titled "The Anatomy of Failure," for failure has been, with few exceptions, the subject into which he has continuously probed. The complacent man is always the shallow man, and it may be that is the reason Mr. Robinson dislikes him.

In *Talifer* we find a strange disintegration, a wilderness of abstract terms and theorisings that evidently lead nowhere. It is built on the triangular-plot; two women of almost opposite temperaments, Althea and Karen, love Talifer. Quick, a doctor, and a friend of these three, furnishes dialogue whereby we are shown each of their personalities in relation to the entire group. The poem opens with Talifer's deciding to marry Karen. But at the end of a year, he finds himself no more a part of her spiritual life than he ever was, and on meeting Althea accidentally, decides to return to her. As the poem ends, Talifer and Althea are together with Quick, talking over their earlier difficulties. This is a perfunctory *résumé*, but the dramatic possibilities of the plot are obvious. Characters placed in such a situation should react, if not violently, at least spontaneously. But they never do. They are people who, for some reason, never make a simple

(Continued on Page 4)

THE UNINVITED GUEST

by Gordon Sager

I am writing this in search of advice. I am hoping that those who may inadvertently read it will tell me what they do in a case similar to the one I shall outline, for I have no solution to the problem. Although it is more important by far to the peoples of the world than the question of who the next president of the United States will be, or whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays or no, or who Jack the Ripper was, it is the one most consistently ignored. At least, I have read nothing about it, and so I am asking for advice.

It is the question of the Uninvited Guest. The reader may say, that's old stuff; everybody knows about that. And yet, does everybody know about that? I know what I always intend to do about it. I shall absolutely ignore him, I say; but . . . something always happens. He sees the light on in my room or in the living room and refuses to go away, or he notices me looking out of the window to see who it is and he waves, or someone else lets him in. It is at the crucial moment that my courage always fails. Do I say, "Go away. How did it you get in?" or something equally welcoming? Of course, I don't. I say, "Why, come in. How have you been?" and I smile. And he smiles. And we shake hands. And he says, "What do you know?" And I want to answer, "Only that I don't want to see your mug," but I don't, saying instead, "Not a thing. What do you know?" And I am all set for anywhere from one to three hours of the dull conversation the Uninvited Guest is full of.

All right, now, reader, what does one do? Everyone knows what to do. Everyone, that is, except me. And whatever I do will be the wrong thing. I will, for instance, be very cold and distant. Then the U. G. will think, "It's a good thing I came. He's feel-

ing blue." And he will proceed to cheer me up. He will tell me the latest story he has heard. Possibly it will be one I was telling five years ago. Or maybe it will be about someone I don't know, and it will be one of those stories which are moderately funny only if you know the person about whom they are being told. So, I will sit there as glum as before. And yet, I still will not let him to go away. I somehow have a vague feeling that only geniuses can do that; and I, reader, whatever else I may be, am not a genius.

Well, then he will tell me what his dog did that morning, or what the boss's baby said last Friday afternoon. I'm the sort of person who usually gets into the spirit of the thing about that time. It does no good to look glum, so I make a game of it. See who can tell the tallest tale. A poor game, true, but better than brooding unappreciated. The time before last that one of my especially Uninvited Guests was over we talked for over an hour and a half about dogs—dogs he had known, dogs I had known, dogs we had read about, dog diseases; Albert Payson Terhune; Rin Tin Tin; hydrophobia; and on, and on. At first it was fun. He would tell about the dog he had known who would carry a bundle of meat in his mouth without once taking even a little bite of it. And I would counter with a story of mine. But his acquaintanceship with dogs was wider than mine and he was still going strong while my feeble stock of dog stories was exhausted. So I relied on my rather fertile imagination. I told about the dog who used to go for his master's evening paper. Once the storekeeper gave Rover (I always call dogs "Rover") two cents change instead of three. The dog looked at the change and then turned around

(Continued on Page 7)

E. A. ROBINSON'S LATEST BOOK

(Continued from Page 2)

declaration of truth, or an unrestrained gesture. They are self-torturers, ascetics, Puritans without faith in the good will of their universe. Talifer and Althea meet unexpectedly; he tells her he will never again attempt to see her. Althea:

*"If I believed you never would," she said,
"I should have many reasons to be sorry,
And a few rights. You have not taken them
Away; you cannot have them. They are
mine."*

We wonder if a woman, having spent a year thinking over her disappointment, can greet its cause with this degree of calm. There is an improbability about her talk, all the more troublesome because of the long analytical passages alternating with the dialogue. In describing comparatively permanent states of mind, this leisurely method is all to the good, but the speed of the narrative remains constant, instead of quickening as the tempo of emotion grows swifter. Mr. Robinson's attention is fastened to the outer fringe of reality, rather than to the naked fact itself. And this attitude seems to have crept into his characters, slowing the pace of their responses to one another. They elaborate and define until we doubt the importance of the events falling upon them. Theirs is the paradoxical ability to view their passions with the wisdom of middle or old-age. *Talifer* is not a story that flows, changes and widens, growing inevitably complete with the conclusion; it is a series of pictured situations, analysed and qualified one by one. Spring, summer and autumn appear, but they are only the back-drops for a succession of tableaux. One imagines Mr. Robinson as cautiously searching along the thread of his narrative, afraid he might pass without noticing some implication in the action of his characters. He is recording the *nuances* behind his story, and apparently forgets that they can be more effectively sug-

gested by inadvertent words and gestures.

D. H. Lawrence once criticised the poetry of *being* as contrasted with that of *becoming*; Mr. Robinson's is the poetry of a force not in motion but resting, not dynamic but static. He has come far from the color and sound moving quietly in his earlier verse. His is the document of an untiring effort to find meaning in a colorless world of sound and light.

SEA CINQUAINS

The Sea

*Blue bend
And frosty foam,
Slow swell and quick cat's paw;
A creature of a thousand humors is
The sea.*

The Waves

*Like ferns,
The waves uncurl
And shoot their spindrift fronds
From green translucent depths of
jungle sea,
To shore.*

The Sand

*Midas
Touched long ago
The dull sea sand and flecked
Its myriad flakes with glittering gold
to match
The sun.*

—WINIFRED DUNCAN.

The Eliot solicits manuscripts of from five hundred to one thousand words in length on subjects of general interest to students on the campus. Manuscripts may be given to Professor Buchan, Cupples I, 202, or to the editors.

THE OLD LADY RETURNS. . .

(Continued from Page 1)

little shrunk up soul that was neither good nor bad enough for one place or the other. Lost like a bean in all the mists that mark off Hell and Heaven. So that was the end and I thought to myself he was a nice chap but too much shrunk of life, and there was perhaps greater pleasure in the sight of fat and fleshy tadpoles digging into mud than in listening to a man say aimless things, only because he was a man.—I filled up the hole of his going with various things,—small sized but large of meaning—brown fungus and the pulpit flowers, sight of the sycamore leaves new dusted green. . . But he had none of these things and took it hard. . .” Then she rocks and sighs and the devil goes by fast on his morning round for fear she will start all her importuning and old requests. But she sees him always with her great accipitral eyes and after him she goes. Up and down through all the corridors of Hell. . . “If you had ever seen it,” she says, trudging up and down behind him,—“If you had ever seen it you would understand.—There were fields of the alfalfa flowers, high thin purple flowers, and wild hard plums up in the north field by the fence that Charley had to mend every year because the moonseeds dragged it down,—moonseed vines with great dark leaves—and ground nut grew there, too, and. . .”

“In the name of Heaven!” shouts the poor tormented devil,—“Was ever a man on earth so afflicted as I?—You can’t go back—You’ve sinned and died and come to Hell. Now do be quiet!” And off he runs with the poor old lady left behind in tears. . .

And so it went on for fifty years till the devil and all of Hell knew every inch and bladed grass on that lost farm. They knew where the road came up past the sagging barn and the beam where the phoebe nested. They knew how she’d come to the cave one day,

and a thing flew up that she didn’t know what it was,—like a white bat or a mushroom flying, and how the frogs made a sound at night like old women in the water, and the young pigs galloped in the spring.—“And the peace of it!” she says,—“the blessed fields at evening with red light, and haycocks making shadows to the east.—The silence and the round fields with their new green hair—and the mulleins flowering—if you could only see the mulleins flowering!”. . .

“You’re a sentimental fool!” shouts the devil.—“What have I to do with mullein stalks or they with me?—Get down on your groined old knees and pray to the Lord Almighty for forgiveness on your soul!”

“You want to get rid of me,” says the old lady patiently,—“you want to get out of here and into Heaven,—but it’s earth I’m asking for.” And she set her iron rocker into tapping. Up and down, monotonous as rain.—“Back of the chicken yard I planted gourds and they grew up big and swollen out with the sun. And the squash—you should have seen my squash! Ah, there was a thing for weary eyes to see!”—And on she went, and the damned old people drew up close around her with their pipes and knitting needles, and they listened to the old lady with homesickness growing up enormous in their hearts.

They rocked and listened until the devil was exasperated beyond all reason.—“She makes no effort!” he shouted.—“No effort in the least! If she’d only pray one single prayer we’d have her out of here by noon.” And he rolled his eyes toward Heaven invisible. “We might petition for her,” says the secretary,—“the times, I’ve heard, have changed.”—

“She wouldn’t sign it,” says the gloomy devil,—“She says it was no sin.—And it’s earth, not Heaven that she’s



THE WATCHERS

*Regard the children speaking small words, wait
crouching behind a tree, listen to the voices
grown solemn, naming stones houses, leaves tables—
regard the children inhabiting this fine morning,
engineering domes of sand out by the back gate
that hangs where brick walk crumbles into grass—
conceal yourself, draw close your collar, stare,
stare at their clear minds focused in the sun
content with flower pots, a match, bits of paper,
sticks, dogs, broken glass—and queer words
'This is the kitchen I am building here,
this box the stove'—ah comprehend the children!—
With winter mind imprisoned, with hands slow
as wax, turn asking 'What have we lost, what have
we lost?'—but let their voices play upon you,
and in that wisdom find your disinheritance.*

—CLARK MILLS.

thinking of,—her cursed old forty acres that she can't forget.—Pumpkins, pumpkins, beardtongue and daisies, yellow chats—spinach—mulberry trees!" His voice rose up into a shriek and he jumped up in the air.—"Let her go!" he howls, "let her stay as long as she wants!" And he collapsed in tears.

Thus it came about that they opened Hell's door and the old lady went out to start on her upward path toward earth.—"Goodbye," she said and wiped her eyes. She patted old Cerberus on several of his heads and stroked his paws.—"I had a dog like one of these," she starts to say,—"but a very gentle soul. I can recall—"

"Never mind," says the devil nervously, "you'd best be getting on."

"It's not been bad—for Hell," the old lady says with kindly meaning,—"But I shan't be back, of course." And her eyes take on a mystic glow. "You've been most kind," she says, and walks off fast in the smoky veils.

It was a long dark way, a lonely way, with caverned mists on every side. Dark, but no mistaking it—even come down as she had, some fifty years ago, half blind with tears. "Things will be changed," she says to herself, and talks on to cover the time of darkness. "Things will be changed. More trees perhaps. The buckbrush spread, and the young hardmaples grown enor-

mous. Eld was a good boy in his way. He loved a high outfield and a honey-suckle. He liked a rail fence, but cut no saplings down, and John was not a bad son either. There was the quiet of the fields in John—the dignity of quiet fields—” Then the old lady thinks of her husband Mather—a good kind man and a handsome youth. Yes a handsome youth with a way of love—ah, yes, a way of love that had ended her up in this dark place all for a night too flooded up with stars, and wild grape coming on the air—

It was a long way and no one passed her on the road, and she recalled to how none had come to Hell in all the past few years, which seems a strange thing, but she thinks perhaps the ghosts all go up to Heaven now, and marvels how much man must have changed. And she goes on up the long path, thinking how the apple trees may have grown, and the ivy must be three feet deep along the stones. She wonders what time of year it might be now, and whether she will walk up to spring or fall, but it matters little, just so there is green earth again. And now she is near the air which globes the earth, and her hands get cold and full of prickles and her old knees tremble to and fro. She thought to die perhaps of too much happiness and her feet were hard to move. Then the light comes pouring down through a great hole, and she has forgotten how blinding bright it was so that at first her eyes can see nothing at all and then she finds herself come out on the great mountain top of death, looking down on all the world.

“It is so bright,” says the old lady, “I can hardly see. And there is some mistake. Some horrible mistake!” She looked down on earth and saw the strange thing it had come to be. There was no spear of grass, no rib of leaf, no sign nor shadow of a tree. Not even wraith or ghost of any green thing growing. And earth was thonged and plastered, crossed and counter-crossed

with great white roads that led into each other until not even the thickness of a spider web could come between. And the ocean was crossed and counter-crossed with great white bridges so that no drop of water could be seen should a person stop to peer. But no one did and instead they went on rushing back and forth, around and around the earth like whirling beetles on the endless surface of a pond. And there was no green spot on earth. Not one.

BOOK NOTE

After Such Pleasures, by Dorothy Parker. Viking Press.

Dorothy Parker, in her new book, directs her wit against everything flimsy in modern society. Her ability to destroy all illusion and take none of the uncovered facts seriously accounts for her originality and for her astounding success, since she gives us the opportunity to laugh at our acquaintances and at ourselves. This latest collection of short stories shows her prose style to advantage, but lacks variety of subject matter and humor. It strikes a false note in being unnecessarily satirical, in producing the effect of exaggeration and of superficiality. For the uninitiated, however, *After Such Pleasures* will afford the amusement only Dorothy Parker can produce.

The Uninvited Guest

(Continued from Page 3)

and bit the storekeeper on the leg. After a few stories like that he looked at me with a rather disappointed eye (as if he expected better of me) and changed the subject. But neither of us suggested his going. No, no.

Then, as more or less a last resort, I tried insulting him. Since paying no attention to him didn't help I tried paying all kinds of attention to him. I told him that his brain was no bigger than a fly's; that his suit was horrible; that he looked as if he had been

sick for a year; that he needed a haircut. After a while he looked at me suspiciously and said, "Say, are you trying to be sourcrastic?" No, I replied wearily, I must have been thinking of something else. And I lapsed back into that cold, distant, lethargic state. I usually find that this may have one of two effects. It may start the conversation up all over again or it may make it occur to the U. G. that this isn't any fun. If, through the grace of God, it has the latter effect, he remarks that he wants to get to sleep early tonight. This particular time it worked. "Good-bye," he said. "Good-bye," I echoed hollowly. "Drop around again some time." "I sure will," he said.

It was just such an evening, terminating but about five minutes ago, that made me write this request for advice. I wonder now what I can do. Put a sign on my door, "Doctor is out. He will return at four o'clock"? Or "Quiet is requested for the benefit of those who have retired"? Or "Hospital

zone"? Or "Cave Canem"? Or read in the dark so he won't be able to see the light? Or disconnect the bell and pay no attention at all to the knocking? Or not look out of the window, taking a chance on it's not being someone I want to see? Or concoct some scheme on the spur of the moment, which must, of course, be untinged with violence, for I am a peace-loving, law-abiding citizen?

No, I think the next time it happens, I will say, "Why, come in. How have you been?" And I will smile. . . .

The Faculty Speaks Department

Differences in the quality of tones are often caused by differences in the size of the hollow spaces that the tone passes through. The thing that makes a person's voice pleasing may be large hollow spaces in the head.

—Vernon W. Lemmon.

CALENDAR

- December 17-23.—"Dangerous Corner," play with Herbert Rawlinson and Beverley Baines, *Shubert*.
- Dec. 1-31.—Paintings by Albert T. Ryder; Paintings and Small Bronzes by Arthur B. Davies, *City Art Museum*.
- December 23-January 14.—Watercolor and Craftwork Exhibition, *Artist's Guild*.
- December 24-30.—"Design for Living," play by Noel Coward, with Corinne Griffith, *Shubert*.
- December 24-January 6.—"Forgotten Men," war movie, *American*.
- December 27.—"Alaska," illustrated lecture by Msgr. Hubbard, *Odeon*.
- December 31.—"Ten Minute Alibi," play with Bert Lytell, *Shubert*.
- January 1.—First Symphony Pop. Concert, *Odeon*.
- January 3.—Vienna Choir Boys Concert, *Odeon*.
- January 6.—"Her Master's Voice," play with Mary Anglin and Queenie Smith, *Shubert*.
- January 10.—"Why We Dig," lecture by Rhys Carpenter, *City Art Museum*.
- January 15.—Rachmaninoff, piano recital, *Odeon*.
- January 16.—"Astronomy Through the Camera," W. U. Association Lecture by D. W. Morehouse, *Soldan Auditorium*.