



1992

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Recommended Citation

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Edwin Arlington Robinson always felt that writing poetry was the only career that he could pursue in his life, but also always worried whether it was a worthy pursuit in the eyes of the culture in which he was raised. In a small town like Gardiner, Maine, where the 1690s' Puritan ethic was nearly as strong centuries later in the 1890s, the concept of a career in poetry or any artistic pursuit was absurd but not nearly as absurd as being successful at it. His grounding in Gardiner's values left an indelible stamp on his life and his poetry.

Like many other New England communities, Gardiner was industrializing, using all its resources to become a leader in the business world; industry and monetary wealth were success, and poetry was failure.

In New England, passion [was] a disease, love a cross to bear; this one knows from the prompting of Conscience, which sits in a rocking chair, moving constantly back and forth-- constantly probing, examining, criticizing, rejecting--without ever getting any where.¹

The only change that would be made was to improve the capitalist economy through technology--a perpetuation of old beliefs. In Gardiner, the river was important for the lumber industry, which contributed to the prosperous paper mills. Ice harvesting in the winter also helped the city gain world-renown. Several resident steamboat companies took the Gardiner residents to their summer homes down the Kennebec River to

¹Paul Zietlow, "The Meaning of Tilbury Town: Robinson as a Regional Poet," (New England Quarterly, 40(1967)), p. 195.

Capitol and Squirrel Islands in Boothbay Harbor. The little city was a miniature business utopia and, because of its apparent success, its citizens expected the younger generation to follow closely in their business-oriented footsteps.

Edwin Arlington Robinson was raised in a traditional, capitalist-minded family, and his hopes to live as a professional poet were inconceivable to his parents. He rejected societal standards in order to find some success within himself--rather than in the industrial world; his rejection only came after tremendous difficulty and even greater ambivalence toward Gardiner. The obstacles of parental, sibling, and community standards overcame only with difficulty; poetry was his passion and the major interest in his life. When EAR was in his formative writing years after Harvard, Gardiner reached its peak of economic success. Gardinerites would not view any other career as prestigious as business, a narrowness that further complicated his desire to pursue poetry.

Examination of success and failure permeated EAR's work, but he believed that his poetry was not a reflection of his life; rather, his poems were influenced by the social attitudes of the era and his concerns about his life and subjects that interested him. Indirectly, his poetry exemplified his life and experiences:

The American who is also an artist has a way into success denied the American who is just that and no more. No one is quicker than the artist to note the handicaps he suffers in his attempts to be a winner.²

²Martha Banta, Failure and Success in America (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1978), p. 263.

By understanding his own handicaps and those of others, EAR knew what he had to overcome in order to earn success untraditionally in a traditional society. This knowledge and his consistent empathy for others enabled him to write poetry about the varied meanings of success through his observations of individuals and how they deal with one another within society.

The characters of EAR's Tilbury Town are representative of society's attitudes toward individuals and their success or failure as human beings; some were successes who ultimately were failures, and, most importantly, Captain Craig appeared to be a failure but was a success. As illustrated in "Richard Cory," the richest man in town, and presumed happiest because of his wealth, commits suicide, leaving the reader to question the true meaning of happiness and success. Perhaps money did not buy happiness in the 1890s; individuals, not society, should have defined their own success. EAR revealed the true aspects of supposedly successful individuals hidden beneath a facade. He recognized that the expectations of fictional Tilbury Town, like those of many real small New England towns, forced some talented people to relinquish their dreams and fantasies in favor of pursuing financial and business success.

Tilbury Town and its views are analogous to those that EAR encountered in Gardiner, Maine:

It is an illusion, but a malignant and powerful one, because it has a tangible, material reality. To be a citizen and to live by its standards means to lose sight of what really makes life meaningful. The only solution is escape from Tilbury values into a world "beyond horizons," "beyond the forest," whose

essential meaning, to the extent that it can be found, is conveyed in myths.³

Even though he recognizes the conflict between his own views of success and those of society, he continues throughout his life to struggle to make Gardiner proud of him, yet at the same time to recognize himself as a success rather than a failure in his pursuit of the light and happiness.

Throughout his life, EAR maintained a long-standing ambivalence toward Gardiner and the imposition of its values on him, values that he was unable to accept. After leaving Gardiner for New York in 1897, he never returned except for brief visits with his family. Yet his goal to make Gardiner proud was ever persistent in his mind, an obsession that surpassed his dislike for the town and its archaic values. EAR felt guilty that he was a failure in the eyes of one small town when he was a literary success in the rest of the world; he may have considered himself a success but he really wanted Gardiner to regard him as a success, too. His fear of failure in Gardiner was obsessive since many citizens probably did not even notice his deviation from the norm; if they did, it probably was not as extreme as EAR felt. Was he a success or a failure? And by whose definition?

³Zietlow, p. 210.

Gardiner and Maine in the 1890s

EAR was raised in an environment of tremendous economic success in his own small town and of the increasing economic progress in other parts of the world. Gardiner began competing in a global market, generating wealth that Gardinerites had never dreamed of previously:

Signs of industry and commerce were everywhere, from massive storage sheds lining the shores, to stevedores loading dozens of four-masted ships lining the river's edge. The business at hand? Ice. Or "frozen gold," as locals liked to call it.⁴

Gardiner, along with the rest of Maine, participated in the nation's move toward greater industrialization and materialism. The shores of the Kennebec River were lined with warehouses and lumber mills that were making the residents of the small town wealthy. This new money permitted them to emulate the State's visitors who were using Maine as a summer playground in Bar Harbor, the Poland Spring House, Appledore Island, and Squirrel Island in Boothbay Harbor.

Bar Harbor was the area created for the wealthiest of Maine's visitors. The J.P. Morgans and John D. Rockefellers of the United States frolicked there with their families. It was a world separate from their high-society conservatism in New York and Boston, a place where they could let their hair down and play as they suspected the natives may have. Among some of the nation's business magnates and their families, Bar Harbor was scandalous because the women enjoyed the outdoors and a variety of activities that were not permitted in high-society Philadelphia, for example. They may have defied the cultural standards, but these rich

⁴Down East, 1992 Annual

interacted with some of the most important people in the country and in the world. These influential out-of-staters created an atmosphere for the natives to imitate and incorporate as an important part of their own lives. The wealthy ultimately created the standard of success and failure for Mainers.

Bar Harbor was not the only place for the wealthy to go; the rich also travelled to the Poland Spring House--"Maine's Grandest Resort Hotel"--to rest, to relax, and to recuperate with the medicative water from the natural spring there. Visitors at Poland Springs were not the super-wealthy of Bar Harbor, but they had more than enough money to spend the summer playing golf and relaxing on the grand verandas of the main house. The House seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, but trains left daily. Major newspapers like the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* were available for the men to keep track of their stocks and businesses. Poland Springs did not see the fun and frolicking of Bar Harbor; the men and women were more reserved and proper--perhaps trying to emulate the wealthier tourists farther up the coast.

The Ricker family had created a self-contained resort to serve the visitors to the best of their ability. The House employed over 300 local residents from barbers to cooks to groundskeepers to preserve the grandeur of the "summer place." They also maintained one of the best golf courses in the country, which encouraged men to go there simply to play golf. The Ricker family also made it their policy to buy produce from the local residents whether they needed it or not; the relationship between the Poland Spring House and community was one of reciprocity in order to ensure that the relationship was enduring.

Another Maine summer playground--different than Poland Springs or Bar Harbor--was Appledore Island of the Isles of Shoals off the southern coast. Originally started as a summer inn by Celia Thaxter's father, the Appledore House was continued as a haven for artists; Thaxter changed the atmosphere of Appledore when she started managing the inn after her father's death. It was not a retreat for business magnates but for the greatest artists of the nineteenth-century: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Ernest Longfellow, artist son of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, artist William Morris Hunt, composer John Knowles Paine, and actor Edwin Booth. As an art colony, Appledore was exclusive; the individual artist had to have the wealth and luxury even to know about the retreat through connections with the Boston elite. Thaxter herself was a published writer and an amateur watercolorist as well as an amazing gardener whose blooms became the subject for Childe Hassam, a developing artist of the 1890s.

Hassam, a Massachusetts native, was a famed illustrator of magazines and travelled to France to perfect his skills only to return to New England. "Energized by European visions and theories, Hassam looked not to the French countryside, however, but to his native New England for inspiration. . . . The Isles of Shoals proved an ideal choice for merging French impressionism with American subject matter."⁵ He brought his art talent with him as well as his increased certainty that monetary success brings luxury and freedom from daily toil. Maine was becoming a summer haven for the wealthy and the artistic. With these influences

⁵Down East, p. 43.

present in their daily lives, some Mainers began to copy the tourists; the natives of Maine also wanted to join in the big bonanza.

For these reasons, some Gardinerites were imitators of the business magnates who summered in Maine, and often they succeeded in their endeavors. The paper mills, icehouses and factories were developing at such a rate that money and world renown influenced every facet of the community. The houses on the hill overlooking the river were segregated according to the wealth of their owners. The Robinson family lived only one street above the wealthiest area of Gardiner and were heavily influenced by the growing wealth there. The town's citizens were often highly concerned with their financial status and were always searching for a means of social mobility into the higher classes.

The preferred way to gain social mobility in an increasingly industrial, rather than agrarian society, was to join the industrial revolution and forget intellectual pursuits. The summer visitors to Maine had the luxury of relaxing and enjoying other facets of life rather than simply business. Goaded by their success, Maine and Gardiner were rapidly developing their industries and transportation systems to become competitive and attractive for a world market. In order to survive in Gardiner, one had to be in business because commercial enterprise had become the only path to a success that was equivalent to the amount of money an individual possessed.

Through imitation of Maine's summer visitors, the residents of Gardiner even began their own summer playground down the Kennebec River at Squirrel and Capitol Islands in Boothbay Harbor. Just as the world's magnates travelled to Bar Harbor, the business leaders in Gardiner built prestigious homes for their families on these islands. The people who

could not afford such homes were as rigidly excluded from this social circle as Bar Harbor's rich excluded the non-elect from their super-wealthy summer establishment. It was not merely exclusion for exclusion's sake, but the fact that their money bonded them into small insular groups away from the rest of the world.

The influence of the outside world was not all that demanded that the residents of Gardiner become successful; the residents of the small town began as well to acquire these values as their own. The demand for success through money and industry was to play an important role in EAR's poetry. It is difficult to say how much of this was real or in his imagination but excerpts from Gardiner's *Daily Reporter Journal* vividly convey competition. In the column, "Local Gleanings," the daily lives and habits of the residents were exposed on the front page. Whoever was in town or whoever was going to Portland or Boston was presented to the whole community--this news was a real concern for these people. The newspaper told about people's illness in detail. The following are excerpts from February 24, 1893: "Mrs. Goodwin of Goodwin, Cole & Preble entertained a few friends in a five o'clock tea last evening."⁶ As well as

Miss Jennie Patterson an attendant of the Gardiner High School, but who resides in Hallowell, missed the accommodation last night, and walked home. The young lady that exhibits such pluck as that, in the face of the worst travelling season is bound to succeed, not only as a G. H. S. pupil, but also in life's sterner duties.⁷

Rarely did an event of the town escape the eyes of Gardiner's citizens.

⁶Daily Kennebec Reporter-Journal, p. 1.

⁷Daily Kennebec Reporter-Journal, p. 1.

The newspaper column was not simply a listing of facts and events, but it made value judgments on what people were doing. The attitudes of the increasingly prestigious community were reflected in "Local Gleanings" rather than issues of global concern--the column itself took up the majority of the front page of the paper. The information it provided was what people wanted to hear: "*Daily Reporter-Journal* sales increasing every day. People do like to know the happenings of the day in their locality."⁸ The newspaper excluded individuals because they were not wealthy, without the wherewithal for travelling and material goods. EAR was reared in this success-oriented atmosphere, which directly conflicted with his hopes and dreams as an individual.

EAR's Youth in Gardiner

Good fortune and parental support were not to characterize EAR's life from the day he was born--1869. His parents then lived in Head Tide, Maine where his father, Edward Robinson, operated a successful lumber business and general store. His mother, Mary raised two sons, Horace Dean and Herman for whom she had great hopes, and managed her household. When the boys were 12 and four, respectively, she unexpectedly became pregnant; she hoped for a daughter, a girl child she had always wanted. Unfortunately, fate had different plans for her, and a third son, EAR, was born. The family was not prepared for another son and had not selected a name for him. Not until the summer, almost six months after

⁸Daily Kennebec Reporter-Journal, p. 1.

his birth, was he finally named. EAR's mother was sitting with a group of women and drew names out of a hat--Edwin was like the name of a female companion's uncle and Arlington was the hometown from where one of the women hailed. Starting off life without a name, without a caring mother, and in the shadow of two older brothers, caused EAR to escape the same parental expectations that his brothers were required to fulfill. Not only was EAR lost in the shuffle of the family, but perhaps his identity developed in confusing ways contributing to his lifelong ambivalence toward his family and Gardiner.

Edward Robinson, EAR's father, was a self-made businessman who eventually acquired tremendous wealth. He started his adult life as a schoolteacher in Alna where he fell in love with his future bride, Mary Palmer, a descendant of a traditional New England aristocracy in Massachusetts. He then bought a general store in Head Tide and began trading in lumber, a business from which he acquired the majority of his wealth. Upon his arrival in Gardiner, Edward bought one of the most expensive homes near the best section of the small city where he, at 50 and with assets totalling \$80,000, quickly became involved in the school board and the board of the Gardiner Savings Institution. Because of his wealth and position in the community, he had the same expectations for his three sons--to follow the traditional way to success through business.

Edward Robinson did not allow his sons to choose their own careers; he had already determined their destinies. His oldest son, Dean, who would become a success in the medical profession, was permitted to attend Bowdoin College; he was the only son to receive a college degree with his father's approval. Dean started his medical practice in Camden, Maine, where he was the town physician, constantly making visits to people's

homes. Developing neuralgia, which is an acute pain moving through the nervous system without structural change, he tried to treat himself with morphine and he also began to abuse alcohol in response to the apparent hopelessness of his condition. He ultimately developed psychiatric symptoms, secluding himself in his room, with only the family to take care of him. Even though he had become a "success" simply by becoming a doctor, he was not able to cope with the pressures and requirements for the job, thus qualifying as a cultural failure. Dean had failed his strict, opinionated father, who then directed the majority of his expectations to Herman, the golden boy.

Not only did paternal expectations rest in Herman but also the expectations of the community; he was handsome, charming, and perfect for the industrializing Gardiner. When he had completed high school, Herman worked for his father's bank, the Gardiner Savings Institution, where he was successful in gaining the trust of the community. He concentrated primarily on western investments for the bank, the community, and his father. These investments were profitable and he eventually moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to monitor them more closely. He was earning money for his family as well as for distinguished members of the community. Unfortunately for Herman, these investments became worthless during the Panic of 1893. Unable to handle this pressure and failure, he began to drink heavily. When his drinking became a problem, he left the family with little money; EAR was left as the stable and sane person to care for the family both emotionally and financially.

Since Herman once had been considered the ideal son, EAR, in his youth, had to confront his own feelings and the standards of society in deciding what was important to him. EAR was considerably younger and

much different from his brothers. He was a very quiet boy, tiring easily when he was playing with others his age. Beginning high school in the "scientific" course of study, he began to have his first serious inklings of his poetic talents even though he had thought of poetry since he was a young child. His father, however, refused EAR the choice of preparation for college to study literature: "The basis of life was economic, and the only excuse for a college education was a recognized profession, with the prestige and income it would fetch."⁹ Fortunately for EAR, his future was not mapped out for him by Edward as it had been for Dean and Herman, who had already followed their father's wishes. There, however, was pressure for EAR to pursue a business career, but he was not expected to achieve the same level of success as Herman. Because of these reduced expectations, EAR was able to pursue some of his own interests in the successful shadows of his older brothers.

Despite all his father's demands, EAR supposedly had a happy childhood. The house was filled with music and books as well as the typical antics of little boys. EAR read voraciously and would recite poetry to his father. Exposure to the literary world was part of the rearing process to smooth the rough edges of a person's character, but books were never to be taken so seriously as to cause dreams about a career in the artistic fields. Children were supposed to be literate, but not artistic. They needed to prepare for a line of work that would eventually allow them to raise and to support their own families.

When EAR was in high school, he had the tendency to daydream, rarely paying attention in class. One day a teacher struck him violently on

⁹Chard Powers Smith, Where the Light Falls (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1965), p. 79.

the ear causing severe damage. The injury was a lifelong nemesis of EAR giving him severe headaches and leading to a loss of hearing in that ear: "He was haunted by the fear that the ailment in his ear would affect his brain, and was certain that he would die young."¹⁰ His deafness, however, opened the opportunity for him to attend Harvard while being treated in Boston for his affliction. Even though the ear was incredibly painful and threatening to his life, it allowed him alternatives in life that few others had--to leave Gardiner and to become exposed to different ways of thinking, to the literary world as well as the commercial, helping him to define his own version of success.

The pressure to succeed, according to his father's middle-class, industrial values, was lessened after his graduation from high school in 1888. When his father's health began to deteriorate, Dean came home from his Camden practice addicted to morphine and alcohol; Herman was monitoring the western investments. The responsibility for the welfare of the family fell to EAR, who planted gardens, took care of the orchard, managed the household without incident, and worked as a time clerk at one of the local ice houses in the winter of 1888-1889. Finding a permanent job was not EAR's top priority after graduation:

Getting a job is not always the salvation of a man, and knowing as I do that I should never have been satisfied had I taken up with some work with the sole incentive of 'doing something' and given up the idea of a further literary knowledge, my hopes for the future are not as dark as they might be.¹¹

¹⁰Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1938), p. 117.

¹¹Untriangulated Stars (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1947), p.21.

Even though his father would not allow him to go to college, he never relinquished his dream of writing. Most importantly, EAR's necessary presence at home gave him a logical reason to put off the inevitable entry into the workforce and to concentrate on his poetry and literary development. He did not need to spend time in business because his belief in himself and the necessity of caring for his father surpassed any needs for working outside the home.

The Beginnings of EAR's Poetic Development

The decade of the 1890s, however, was devoted to more commercial than poetic pursuits, especially in rural Central Maine. The arts were looked upon as an interest to complement one's life, not as one's career. The nineties was a materialistic decade with success defined by monetary wealth symbolic of the rise of commerce and industry during the late nineteenth century. "Portraying itself as success, business thus captured the free-labor ideology, convincing the middle classes that in competitive enterprise lay the route to fulfillment, to the true America."¹² The pursuit of poetry was not realistic; EAR was not only a failure for not following the cultural goal of acquiring material wealth but for failing to accept the revised version of the American dream.

EAR's poetry was not a viable career because it did not fulfill the ideals of the people of the 1890s. Poetry was accepted only as a venture for dilettantes; it could be an accent to an individual's culture, but it could not

¹²Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America (Hill& Wang: New York, 1982), 87.

be taken seriously. Many women of the era dabbled in verse as did Mary Robinson, EAR's mother. It could have been considered effeminate for a male to admit to his desire to write poetry rather than to prove himself in business. He, however, realized that he had neither the ability nor the desire to pursue a career in business; poetry was his one skill and he did it .

Beginning a lifelong habit of forming small exclusive groups, EAR and his high school friends would gather in the belfry of the high school tower to smoke, to discuss literature, and to gossip--it was called the League of Three. His friends gave EAR a group of similar intellectuals as well as trusted comrades to whom he could read his poetry. Arthur Gledhill and EAR worked diligently on a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* as part of his development in awareness of poetry. Unfortunately, many of his other early works were burned in the furnace because he considered his work unworthy to be viewed by others; he was striving for a higher level of perfection. Hence, EAR's juvenalia is lost forever because of his obsessive desire to be considered a success in both his mind and by the community.

Besides encouragement from his childhood friends, Arthur Gledhill and Harry de Forest Smith, who were afforded the opportunity of attending college living outside the social circles of the Gardiner elite, EAR was encouraged to write poetry by a local physician, Alanson Tucker Schumann. He was more a social outcast than a respected member of the small community because of his homeopathic quackeries and his alcoholism--"a perfect Robinsonian failure."¹³ All the qualifications and signs of success with his degree in medicine were present in his life, but he did not put it to good use, as defined by society. Schumann's first love was

¹³Smith, p. 84.

poetry and he felt that he was squandering his talent in a medical career, unable to defy Gardiner's cultural standards. He struggled to recognize the difference between the self's and society's values. Schumann was better at poetry than at medicine, but he never truly succeeded at either one.

The Doctor, however, was the one saving grace that EAR had, and he in return gave Schumann's life quality and purpose. EAR became exposed to a wide range of literature and poetry through his acquaintance with Dr. Schumann, who lived across the gully from the Robinsons. Schumann also encouraged EAR to join the Gardiner Poetry Society, a small group of people who met to read their own poetry to one another as well as to read that of famous poets. The Gardiner Poetry Society provided EAR with an education in poetry, rhyme, and metrics that he would not have found in school. According to EAR:

[Schumann] was master of poetic technique. As I shall never know the extent of my indebtedness to his interest and belief in my work, or of my unconscious absorption of his technical enthusiasm. I am glad of this obvious opportunity to acknowledge a debt that I cannot even estimate.¹⁴

Dr. Schumann taught EAR the mechanics of poetic meter and versification as well as giving him the encouragement and praise necessary for the young poet to defy the cultural standards in order to pursue his childhood dreams: "I will make a clean confession and say that writing has been my dream ever since I was old enough to lay a plan for an air castle."¹⁵

Further intellectual and literary encouragement for EAR came from the Richards family who brought their Boston culture and breeding to

¹⁴Laura E. Richards, E. A. R. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1936) , p. 35.

¹⁵Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1940) , p.9.

Gardiner. They were the social equals of the summer residents of Bar Harbor and the Poland Spring House, but they chose to raise their family in this booming industrial town. The matriarch of the Richards family, Laura, was the daughter of Samuel Gridley Howe, the founder of the Perkins Institute for the Deaf, and Julia Ward Howe, the author of the lyrics of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Laura Richards was a famous children's author in her own right as well as a devoted wife and mother to her family. Her genteel lineage brought a different tone to the town, one that the Gardinerites had not seen before: the Richardses enjoyed success out of the business world.

Laura E. Richards had grown up in the luxury of a wealthy home where the pressure for success might not have been as great as in the Robinson household. Edward Robinson pushed his son to succeed because he himself had needed to work diligently to become successful whereas Richards was born into wealth. Even if EAR had been raised in luxury in Gardiner, it would not have matched the luxury of the Howe household in Boston. Richards was relieved on the necessity of becoming successful through business because of her social position and her gender.

More importantly, as a woman, Laura E. Richards did not have to be successful in the business world as EAR was culturally required to be. As a female she had only to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother, after which she was free to pursue her interests as long as they lay within her designated sphere: "Whatever else she did, she was, first of all, the wife and mother in a happy family."¹⁶ She did not shirk her household or familial duties. She turned out to be a superwoman who ran the house

¹⁶Arthur Dehon Hill, "Laura Elizabeth Richards Memorial," (Gardiner, ME: 1945), p.

without incident and entertained her children with delightful stories that she wrote especially for them. EAR, on the other hand, was culturally responsible to leave the house to earn money for the family, not to entertain them as Mrs. Richards did.

Because of the vast differences between the Richards family and the typical family in Gardiner, EAR befriended them and was encouraged to write poetry because they had a greater understanding of the artistic world. Even though he would not open his introverted personality in the presence of the Richards family, he was surrounded by open-minded and caring people:

His strength is entirely of the inner world looking out through those black eyes. Theirs includes the outer world at its best, the easy intercourse of cultivated minds, the courtesy towards all, the active generosity towards all misfits with whom EA instinctively identified himself.¹⁷

Within the isolated world of Gardiner, EAR found a family who was not part of the closed-minded Gardiner bourgeoisie on the way to success; the Richardses were financially successful and could turn their minds to other endeavors. Somehow Laura E. Richards was able successfully to blend the two worlds of business and literature, achieving both success and love from others in the community. Success occurred most probably because she was a woman and was not culturally required to become a success in the business world; she was a dilettante who became successful by talent. The only way for EAR to deviate from these narrow standards was to be exposed to a different view of life rather than solely that of small town America

¹⁷Smith, p. 168.

during the 1890s. Harvard University afforded him the chance to change the direction of his life.

The Harvard Years, 1891-1893

In 1891 with the help of his brother Herman, EAR was able to convince his father that it would be beneficial for him to go to Boston for treatment of his ear while simultaneously attending Harvard University as a special student for one year. The experience afforded him the opportunity to explore his life and himself for his deepest values and feelings, to realize that there were other people in the world like himself. He valued "the awareness of roots that Harvard gave him, the sense of belonging to something actual, strong--and incidentally respectable." He learned that it was "not a disgrace, as his father had taught him, to be an intellectual."¹⁸ His writing and his views were to be tested and tried so that he would be a stronger and healthier person when he returned to Gardiner.

Not only was EAR to leave Gardiner and its cultural views behind, but he entered the world of one of the most progressive educational institutions of the era. Harvard University was beginning to permit students to select their own classes in the true spirit of liberal education. Of course, students did have to follow a specific curriculum to fulfill requirements; essentially they had the freedom of choice that liberal arts colleges and universities have today. The system was a milestone in higher education because Harvard was the first institution of higher learning that

¹⁸Smith, p. 128.

allowed its students this freedom. Harvard also cultivated extra-curricular activities for its students through publications, sports, and club events. Perhaps one of the most influential aspects of EAR's time at Harvard was the close association between students and professors, one that provided EAR with the opportunity to express his views and to publish some of his own poems. Professor Louis E. Gates helped to open his mind, "introduc[ing him] to the great social, literary and spiritual movements of [his] time and helped [him] to relate [himself] to them."¹⁹ EAR's view of the world was changing, which in turn changed his observation of people and his poetry.

EAR's tenure at Harvard was most importantly a typical college experience for him; he met women and drank heavily. The painful effects of hangovers helped to develop attitudes incorporated into his poetry; "[EAR] also expressed loathing of the carnal spectacles he had seen in the dives,"²⁰ a sentiment clear in his poetry, especially "John Evereldown." He also was able to form friendships with people who had similar views and goals; he no longer was an oddity. In some ways, however, EAR did not immediately fit in because he was older than the typical freshman and was not there for the four-year curriculum because of his father's resistance to a liberal arts education. Still, the intelligentsia of Harvard provided the stimuli needed for EAR to flourish poetically.

Continuing his preference for small groups of friends, EAR formed the Corn Cob Club with Mowry Saben, George Burnham, Chauncey Hubbell, Shirley Johnson, George Latham, and Frank Peters. They read

¹⁹James L. Tryon, Harvard Days with Edwin Arlington Robinson (Waterville, 1940), p. 9.

²⁰Smith, p. 117.

poetry, drank port wine, and smoked their pipes. They did not belong to the clique that was the "best" of Harvard's literati: according to EAR, "I am not acquainted with [William Vaughn Moody], but as soon as I get fairly straightened out, if I ever do, I purpose to make a strong attempt to get in with the literati of Harvard."²¹ EAR did not make it into the group of the developing poets of the 1890s because of his station in life and his unwillingness to exert himself in social situations. He preferred his small circle of friends and developed his own literary tastes outside the mainstream cluster of elite Harvard poets.

Even though EAR was not included in the elite group of the Harvard poets during his undergraduate years, he did develop some of the same techniques and use the same images representative of the poetic generation as a whole: "Robinson, like the Harvard poets of his time, accepted the light-dark imagery as basic to his verse and also invested it with a quality of bleakness characteristic of the times."²² These bards of Cambridge were all searching for some escape from the real world and its hypocrisy and inequality. They wanted to believe in an American dream where all people were created equal and had the opportunity to fulfill any of their hopes and goals. Poets and businesspeople, rich and poor, young and old were being held back by the cultural views of the era. The Harvard poets, like EAR, were searching to clarify their values and in the process trying to find some light in their dark reality: "The world of their poetry in the nineties is a darkening and chilly sphere, and their search for values is a search for a light-bringer."²³ Ultimately, they had to bring their own light.

²¹Untriangulated Stars, p. 37.

²²Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s (Viking Press: New York, 1966), p. 330.

²³Ziff, p. 313.

Harvard was the vehicle for EAR's self-discovery and cultural understanding, but it also created some ambivalence in his view of poetry--was it for the self or for the public as a profit-making venture? Money was obviously the vehicle to success in America, and it allowed individuals opportunities, not afforded the poor, to explore their imaginations and develop poetry. "On the simplest and perhaps the most important level, college was teaching the educated young writer the same lesson that life was teaching the uneducated--that money is an important thing."²⁴ By means of his Harvard experience with the American aristocracy, EAR was receiving some of the same messages that were coming from his family and business people in Gardiner: money was a definition of success no matter the occupation. This status was an obvious fact because the financially successful people pursued their interests in literature and arts. EAR, however, would break down all barriers by becoming a struggling artist.

A small step toward success and admission to the circle of Harvard poets took place when he published his first poem in the *Advocate*, one of two on-campus publications devoted to student works. "[He] sprung a ballade on the *Advocate* a while ago. Much to [his] surprise, it was accepted. The *Ad.* prints some of the best amateur fiction that [he has] ever seen."²⁵ This milestone was EAR's approach to success in poetry, but his poetry was never accepted by the *Harvard Monthly*, a publication of the Laodicean Club led by W. V. Moody and George Santayana, the elite of the Harvard poets. EAR's life seemed to be a series of failings to outside observers; he eventually broke the barriers, but not without failing first.

²⁴Ziff, p. 310.

²⁵Selected Letters, p. 7.

Panic of 1893

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Americans made massive speculative investments in western land and in the transcontinental railroad. In 1893, these investments began to plummet, and many people lost the majority on their savings in the worthless investments. The Robinson family was no exception. Golden-boy Herman lost the family fortune along with the money of many other Gardiner investors who had entrusted him with their fortunes. Failure had hit the Robinsons, and Herman was not able to withstand the pressure of failure in the business world; he found his solace in a bottle of booze.

With the family fortune rapidly diminishing, EAR had to return to Gardiner to help care for his aging mother as well as his sister-in-law, Emma, and her three children, deserted by Herman because of his failure. During EAR's stay at Harvard, his father had died and there was no one else to watch after his family, now including Dean, the ghostly physician, who had fallen even further under the spell of morphine, haunting the family home. Even though EAR was not skilled at commerce or business, the responsibility for the family had fallen upon him; his only skill was writing poetry, and he had learned at Harvard that there was little potential for monetary success in it. Fortunately, the Panic did not destroy the growing industry in Gardiner, a bit of good fortune that enabled him to find temporary jobs to help supplement the dwindling family fortune.

EAR's Return to Gardiner

In order to support his family, EAR had to put his poetry in the background and worry about the future of his dependents. He took temporary jobs around the town, specifically serving as time keeper for an ice company in town and tutoring a young woman on her way to Wellesley. Rumors spread about a potential romance and engagement, but nothing serious ever came from the relationship. His return to Gardiner was a retreat into the old ways and the pressures of the cultural values of the small rural town: "Here I am in my twenty-fifth year, with absolutely no prospects, no money, and not much hope. Still, I lack the courage to upset the whole scheme of my life and face the world with buried ideals."²⁶ His ambivalence toward all aspects of life was accentuated by the necessity for business success. Somehow he found time, however, to continue writing poetry by observing people and their actions in a specific culture.

After living in the world of Cambridge and finding his own niche, EAR naturally found it difficult to return to the stringently conservative views and expectations of the small town, but, more importantly, he found it difficult to cope with the growing complexity of his family situation. Emma had moved into the house with her children, and Dean constantly paced the halls with dementia from morphine and alcohol. His mother had become lost without her husband to whom she had devoted the majority of her life. Herman disappeared to drown his failure in a bottle of booze. The family needed stability and sanity, placing the enormous responsibilities on the youngest son,.

²⁶Untriangulated Stars, p. 150.

His primary responsibility was the management of the household to ensure that there was enough food on the table. EAR enjoyed gardening, which also gave him some opportunity to continue writing his poetry:

I am raising giant harvests of cucumbers, cauliflowers, onions, and God knows what more in the prolific garden of my mind. That is the only garden in which I have succeeded in raising anything thus far during my life, but I have hopes that I may plant a seed before long that will take root and bring forth something, if no more than fifty cents a week, provided I am to some extent contented with the soil.²⁷

More important than raising vegetables to earn money, he was cultivating his mind and still had the hopes of becoming a success at it--to make Gardiner proud--so that people would not talk about him as a do-nothing failure. In many ways, Gardiner was an excellent place for him because the small town atmosphere provided him with material for his writing and gave his poetry a forboding pessimism about the mechanics of social interaction--for instance, his discovery of the meaning of happiness: "Nine tenths of the happiness in the world (if there is any) is due to man's ignorance of his own disposition. The happy people are they who never had time to think it over."²⁸

For several years after Harvard, EAR simply plodded through his daily routine dreaming great dreams of the future; with very little hope, he continued to write poetry, still occasionally depressed by having to live in Gardiner rather than in the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of Cambridge. By November 1896, he had sent away a small book of poetry to be published with funds out of his own pocket. Self-publication followed

²⁷Untriangulated Stars, p. 18.

²⁸Untriangulated Stars, p. 285.

only after numerous failed attempts to get his fiction published in national magazines and newspapers. It also coincided with the height of his despair over his mother's black diphtheria and the community's unwillingness to help them. Gardinerites feared that they would contract the contagious disease and were not the benevolent neighbors who would help each other in time of need. Dean somehow got sober enough to ease his mother's pain, and Herman also came back to assist in any way that he could. After Mary Robinson had died, the casket was left on the front porch; since the undertaker would not enter the house, the three sons had to prepare their own mother for burial and had to drive the wagon the block to the cemetery to lay her to rest beside her beloved husband. Only a week and a half later did the small blue book of poetry, *The Torrent and the Night Before*, arrive; Mary Robinson never got to see her son's poetry published.

EAR, however, continued to find solace in small groups, such as the Richards family: "When a man sets himself down to it he can generally count the friends of his native town upon the fingers of one hand, and then have digits to spare. At least, [EAR] can."²⁹ In 1897, with three of his friends from Gardiner, EAR formed the Quadruped Club in an empty room above one of the downtown stores. The club window looked out over the mill pond and some of the factories, constant reminders of the town's cultural standards, which they were defying with their "intellectual" pursuits. Club meetings were a time where they could escape the pressures of the world and discuss literature and poetry at their leisure: "The truth is that [he] never enjoyed [him]self so much as when [he was] with one or two congenial souls talking on some congenial subject, and smoking the

²⁹Untriangulated Stars, p. 103.

pipe."³⁰ EAR was able to relax and to enjoy poetry without fear of judgment by other people. In the process of understanding himself in these meetings, he found his path in life within himself rather than through social expectations.

Most of EAR's ambivalence toward Gardiner developed between 1893 and 1897, after which he left Gardiner permanently except for an occasional visit. After his earlier exposure to life and to poetry at Harvard, he had a difficult time adjusting to the narrow-mindedness of the community and the driven pursuit of individuals for monetary success. Perhaps Gardinerites did not outwardly degrade EAR for his desire to write poetry, but some undertones in their attitudes must have made him question his own dreams: "When he was praised, or was alone with his introspection, his humility made him doubt his ability to fulfill his calling. But when he was challenged by his neighbors his certitude bristled."³¹ His obsession was to make Gardiner proud of both him and his poetry which was Gardiner. Through the three to four years that he spent in Gardiner contemplating his future, he was able to observe and to understand life as he eventually revealed it through his *Tilbury Town*:

He had always cherished a few intimate companions, but now his mind was beginning to reach out to men and women beyond his personal circle, individuals here and there who in a sudden encounter, revealed to him something of character and of destiny which he dramatized under names which themselves had haunting overtones.³²

³⁰*Untriangulated Stars*, p. 58.

³¹Smith, p. 129.

³²Hagedorn, p. 87.

These small groups fostered artistic confidence in EAR, a confidence that lead to the development of his poetry and his ultimate success.

Coming of Age as a Poet

Beginning with his first effort, the self-published, little blue book called *The Torrent and the Night Before*, EAR often based his poetry on characterizations of people who could have lived in any small town in America. Tilbury Town, however, clearly reflects Gardiner and its citizens. The poems are short and embody ambiguities and conflicts in the lives of these small town citizens. They are reflective of both EAR's and society's conflicts over success and failure; EAR stated this sentiment in a letter to his childhood friend, Harry de Forest Smith: "The main purpose of the thing is to show that men and women are individuals; and there is a minor injunction running through it not to thump a man too hard when he is down."³³ The poems are not simple characterizations, but vignettes defining success and failure in America during the 1890s: how people have to help each other when they are not as successful as society expects them to be.

The Children of the Night, accepted by a publisher--not published on EAR's own volition--in 1897, set EAR on the road to a career in poetry outside the realm of Puritan thought in Gardiner. This larger volume included 11 new works as well as revisions of some poems from his first book, *The Torrent and the Night Before*, which had included "Richard

³³Untriangulated Stars, p. 162.

Cory" and "Cliff Klingenhagen." EAR had always striven for perfection yet also for acceptance of his poetry, never feeling that Gardiner could allow his deviation from cultural norms. In his later works, EAR may have been writing to please Gardiner; his second volume, however, was a confidence-builder in his own poetic worth solely for himself: "From the *Children*, I do not expect much, if anything, in the way of direct remuneration but I shall always feel, even if I starve to death someday, that the book has done a good deal for me."³⁴ His ambivalence toward Gardiner continued to grow, but winning the respect and appreciation of the town on his own terms remained one of his foremost goals.

The town's acceptance was not going to come easily, because it was an alien concept to its citizens that an individual might achieve their idea of success by writing poetry. The *Daily Kennebec Journal* reviewed this work in a neutral tone, not enthusiastically and proudly as EAR would have wished: "The typographical work is first class--although there is an evident effort to avoid conventional forms of arrangement that appears to us a trifle strained, and not altogether pleasing. Sometimes the conventional methods are best."³⁵ EAR was receiving favorable reviews from other important critics of the literary world outside Maine, but Gardiner did not feel that he was living up to their standards because he did not pursue their cherished careers in the local businesses--he was following a different way of life than that to which Gardinerites were accustomed.

An important theme that runs through EAR's poetry is the relationship between success and failure, which is further deepened by the

³⁴*Untriangulated Stars*, p. 289.

³⁵Richard Cary, *Early Reception of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (Colby College Press: Waterville, 1974), from the *Daily Kennebec Journal* (December 6, 1897), p. 73.

relationship between the psyche and the social expectations formed by the values of the culture. An individual has the ability to permit the psyche to reveal itself despite the potential ramifications in society and upon the side shown to society. Individuals can be successful in societal terms but utter failures to themselves because they do not take the time to know their souls and to realize their dreams; if they knew themselves and yet chose a path other than the norm, they might be considered cultural failures. Still, happiness would come from within themselves. EAR believes that individuals are only successful when they acknowledge their souls and are able to reveal them to their communities and to the world, coping with such potential consequences as rejection and isolation.

EAR based the majority of his characters on people he had observed in the world around him. As he wrote to Smith:

I tread a narrow path, in one sense, but I do a considerable amount of observing. In fact, I observe so much that my feet often slip and I am forever stumbling over little things that other men never notice . . . it opens one's eyes to the question of happiness and leads him to analyze that mysterious element of human nature from many points of view.³⁶

The poetic characters are not necessarily actual people who EAR knew in Gardiner, but a composite of characteristics and incidents seen through association with other people. EAR was an introspective and soft-spoken individual who felt uncomfortable in crowds; he also was extremely sensitive toward other people, enabling him to have a tremendous amount of compassion for others. Understanding human nature is a difficult task,

³⁶Untriangulated Stars, p. 135.

but EAR did it almost objectively and without judgment; he, however, did have preconceived notions about 1890s culture.

"Richard Cory"³⁷ exemplifies EAR's observation and writings about the community. It is a positive description of a wealthy, elegant gentleman who lives in a small town--most likely Tilbury Town, even though that is never stated. The speaker is one of the townspeople who admires Richard Cory and wants essentially to become the same kind of person that he is. His exterior success is conveyed through EAR's description of Cory as "imperial slim," who "glittered when he walked," and was "a gentleman from sole to crown," but most importantly, he was "richer than a king." Cory speaks kindly to the townspeople in a vernacular manner, not in a superior way. For the townspeople, the wealth that Cory possesses is the goal, the light, for which they are searching in their own diligent drive to earn money. They sacrifice the luxuries to save for the riches that a person like Cory has; they think that they will find happiness with wealth. Yet Richard Cory may be deceiving himself as well as the community of Tilbury Town with his seemingly contented and successful facade. An apparent success, he is truly a failure because he does not know his soul. On the outside, Richard Cory is the ideal of success in an increasingly industrialized and materialistic society; everyone wants to emulate him. Inside, he is void.

The turn in the poem comes in the last few lines by which time even the reader has come to admire Richard Cory. The apparently happy Cory ultimately kills himself. It seems like an incredible waste for Cory to commit suicide because he appears so successful and is so admired.

³⁷Collected Poems (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1937). All poems are quoted from Edwin Arlington Robinson's collected works.

The character of Richard Cory is a paradox because of the polarity of his monetary success and his failure to cope with life. Obviously, since he committed suicide, he was not happy with himself or his situation and the only escape that he could find was death. EAR is showing that the cultural definition of success does not always end in a happy life. The townspeople and Cory are victims of society rather than individuals who strive to find ways other than accumulating wealth to make themselves happy. The speaker suggests that the community worked diligently to become as successful as Richard Cory; success and wealth composed "the light." Yet Richard Cory had not cultivated his own inner resources. Monetary success is nothing if there is nothing inside to rely on.

Even though he was a monetary success, Cory's lack of knowledge of the soul made him a failure. The poem's speaker tells us that the townspeople are really not aware of what they were trying to emulate. The speaker's "light" is the revelation that wealth and money do not necessarily bring happiness to every individual. This light has different meanings for the speaker and the townspeople: the possible financial success of work versus self-knowledge. The "light" could also be our understanding that they have to stop idealizing a man who committed suicide, to look at cultural values and to see that perhaps their attitudes toward money and wealth are not going to bring the ideal that they had been hoping to achieve.

Interestingly, Richard Cory was not admired for his human characteristics and personality but rather for his wealth and luxury, goals that the townspeople supposedly could achieve through working in a industrialized, capitalist society, as well as the grace and ease that is associated with wealth. It is doubtful that Cory ever had one true friend in his life. The members of Tilbury Town were not interested in knowing the

person but amassing similar wealth so that they could associate with that person. The poem is reflective of the atmosphere in which EAR was raised in Maine. The importance of success and wealth divided the community according to material possessions rather than the qualities of the individual; this division plagued EAR for the majority of his life, contributing to his ambivalence toward Gardiner.

EAR further reflects his ambivalence toward cultural values and standards in his characterization of Aaron Stark, one kind of antithesis to Richard Cory. We can assume that the events occur in the same town where Stark and Cory have probably passed each other on the street many times. The tone is very cynical as it comes from an omniscient observer of Tilbury Town. Stark appears as the town's homeless beggar: "Year after year he shambled through town" who cannot pull himself up to strive for the higher echelons in this small town. Still, he is described as miserly, with dollars for eyes. Stark has chosen to be this way in order to accumulate his wealth. The poem describes this character very negatively, with a sharp turn coming in the last two lines as it did in "Richard Cory." The townspeople may have pitied and cried for him through the years, but Stark only laughed at them.

Stark has let money control him in a very different way than Cory did. He is the hoarder of money rather than the ostentatious displayer of wealth. People are not pitying him, however, because of his shabby state but because he does not use his money to find happiness. Perhaps Stark is hoarding his money because it has become his habit, or obsession, to attain wealth, but he does not know how to enjoy himself. On the other hand, the poem is a commentary on the way that money controls individuals and does

not let them find happiness. Obviously, Stark is a wealthy miser but one who does not know how to be happy with himself.

In "Aaron Stark," laughter can be a means of survival by alleviating pain. Stark may realize something that other people do not--he might have the secrets to a happy life. In the culture of the 1890s, Stark would not have been a success because he had wealth but did not use it for material display and self-gratification; he did not use it at all. Yet Stark is the survivor of the two poems; he has not let his money drive him to despair. He stays alive by obsessing over money, an ironic point illustrated is the description of him: "Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark,/Cursed and unkempt, shrewd,. . ./A miser was he, with a miser's nose." It is possible that if Stark ever decided that he did indeed have enough money, he would end up in the same place as Cory.

Through Stark and other Tilbury Town personalities, EAR is criticizing the townspeople for not realizing what real happiness is or what wealth means. They only whisper behind Stark's back for not using his wealth for material goods. His laughter, on the other hand, springs from the knowledge that he has the potential for material success but is waiting to purchase goods that no one else can. He simply does not know when enough money equals the cultural definition of success. He was pleased with the whispers that he heard about himself, an ironic fact that is reflected in his laughter over his recognition that others were pitying him for not using his money. Their pity may have been alien because it was not necessary. Stark was alone in society without any friends, obsessed with having money to the point of forsaking every other facet of living.

The reaction of Tilbury Town to Aaron Stark is quite similar to Gardiner's refusal to help during Mary Robinson's illness. The bonding of

a small community struggling to survive does not seem normative in the 1890s; the vision of "a city on the hill" with the community working toward one goal together no longer exists. Individual members of the community turn out to be working toward individual success and wealth that they are not willing share with others. EAR did not necessarily reject wealth but was opposed to the self-centeredness that inhibited the benevolence of the community. Stark was so self-centered that he could not even reveal his wealth to the community; perhaps he was afraid that they would steal it from him. People in either Tilbury Town or Gardiner do not sacrifice their wealth or reputations to help others; the characters of EAR play the game of life alone.

Money in "Cliff Klingenhagen" is put to a different use than in the previous two poems. Two close friends are having dinner together--the speaker is Klingenhagen's guest. After a huge meal, the two sit down for an after-dinner drink. Klingenhagen takes the bitter for himself and gives the better, "sweet" wine to the speaker, who comments on what Klingenhagen has done by simply stating that "it was a way of his." Klingenhagen is happy to do it and gives the reader the impression that he prefers the bitter to the sweet wine.

At this point in the poem, Klingenhagen is happy to be himself. The speaker wants to find comfort in a place where he does not have to put on airs trying to impress others and can be himself, quirks and all. Or perhaps Klingenhagen is simply trying to impress his guest. The speaker knows Cliff Klingenhagen fairly well but does not understand his happiness at drinking the bitter. It is suggested that if the speaker really knew Klingenhagen, he would understand the happiness that he felt in being himself.

In the majority of EAR's poetry, it does not appear that people truly know one another and what others are thinking and feeling. People cannot judge others because they do not truly know them. Klingenhagen seems to know his likes and dislikes and reveals them to others, careless of their opinion. If Klingenhagen knows himself, that is all that matters. He has found a friend and a confidante to share his pleasures and idiosyncrasies, but this union probably does not show outside his home to the judges of success and failure of Tilbury Town.

Cliff Klingenhagen balances Gardiner's scales of success and failure in the 1890s. His social facade is a reflection of what the community regards as successful, yet he understands his own soul. He is ironically a success in all respects. The poem is the description of a dinner between two friends without the influence of the outside community. Klingenhagen is comfortable with his friend, so he can drink the bitter, which he prefers, and give the wine to the speaker. Like EAR, Klingenhagen prefers small groups of friends with whom to socialize because they do not normally make any judgements about character. Cliff Klingenhagen did not care how odd it appeared to his guest; he simply enjoyed the bitter more than the wine, possibly considered a symbol of wealth and prosperity by the community. Wine is representative of his success and the wormwood of his potential failure. He willingly shares a little of his good fortune with a friend and is apparently happier for doing it. He stated that "it was a way of his" and left it at that with a smile. Cliff Klingenhagen knows himself and his little quirks, allowing them to show through to his exterior, proving that he is a success both in terms of his own soul and the facade revealed to society.

Oftentimes the exterior shown to society is not a facade at all but the truth, no matter how disappointing to others. In a sonnet called "The Clerks," the speaker returns to his town to find his old acquaintances following in the footsteps of their ancestors rather than reaching to actualize their childhood dreams of greatness. The description of the clerks is positive even though the poetic voice reveals a hint of disappointment in the meagre accomplishments of his friends. Since they are no longer the pink-cheeked youths with women finding them attractive, they have let their dreams fade into the idealistic past for the realistic present. They are aged beyond their years in a type of camaraderie that only clerks and businessmen share and, perhaps, understand. These men have found some type of contentment in the doldrums of business.

The transition in the tone and development of the poem starts in the sestet as the speaker points out how they have relinquished their dreams and descended into the business world in order to forget their hopes for the future. They are not doing anything to change the pattern of history, yet they are not satisfied with the lives that they have chosen for themselves. "Tiering dull webs of discontent" and "clipping the sad alnage of the years" are images of the daily toils of the clerks. The alnage is the woollen fabric that they have measured monotonously and continuously through the years. These bundles of cloth were tied together by string that evokes the image of the "dull webs." The lives of the clerks do not vary from day to day, year to year. They are figuratively tying a part of themselves into each bundle, making their departure from their traditional roles even more difficult.

The men in "The Clerks" follow the typical path to the success that society has defined for them--through a career in business. They are still

human, but their visions and dreams have been lost somewhere in time. Having rejected their own dreams to conform to cultural norms, their lives are not all they dreamed that they would be. EAR creates a paradox in this poem--the octave of the poem seems fairly positive, but the sestet contradicts what was said earlier. In the octave, the men were happy in their jobs because their dreams still have the potential of being fulfilled; they have the friendship and "brotherhood" that has been created through their common careers and experiences. As the speaker, EAR is not only talking about the clerks' position in the culture but about how he cannot find the same type of contentment in the business world that they have found. He perhaps was thinking that his dreams were unrealistic, berating himself for not finding the same satisfaction as individuals in the business world.

In the sestet, the speaker wishes to possess the clerks' blindness to the lives of kings and poets as well as to their own descent in the world, as they tie "the same dull webs of discontent." They are subject to the same dissatisfaction with their lives as any other person in a position where it is difficult to reject social expectations and do what they want with their lives. Their visions quite possibly could have been to become clerks and to be successful in societal terms; the speaker, however, has different dreams. A value judgment is being made that one is better than the other and it is obvious that the poetic voice believes that poetry and a rich soul are more valuable or worthy than a dull job and a steady paycheck. Kings and poets do not lead exciting lives all the time. They have to contend with the doldrums of life, like everyone else. They, however, are known for creating historical, momentous events rather than the daily time keeping of a simple clerk from a small town who perhaps lives only day to day.

"The Clerks" first appeared in *The Torrent and the Night Before* characterizing the ambivalence that EAR felt after his return to Gardiner from Harvard. Even though the Quadruped Club was formed in 1897, after the publication of *The Torrent*, "The Clerks" is reminiscent of the feelings that EAR had toward his boyhood friends. Even though these men had joined the ranks of society, they still were similar to the boys with great dreams of being poets and kings rather than simple store clerks. They had resigned themselves to the belief that the industry in Gardiner was all that was left for them, but their minds were still active with memories of their childhood dreams. They, however, were simply carrying out the traditions that their predecessors had mapped out for them without knowing how to accomplish their dreams: "tiering the same dull webs of discontent" and clipping away at the frayed edges of their dreams.

"Luke Havergal" is unlike EAR's other poems because the main character is no socially ambiguous character beaten down by life; he is a lost soul searching for some meaning in his life. The speaker is also not a friend or towns person but a ghostly voice from beyond the grave. His main message is that life is essentially hopeless because many goals will never be fulfilled in life. The poem is full of shattered dreams and hopes; the speaker does not believe that life is worth living, so suicide may be the best path to follow. The setting seems to be autumn, the symbolic approach to the end of life, with red vines and leaves falling from the trees. Yet, Havergal has hopes for the future but is deceived. The speaker offers a different way: "Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss/That flames upon your forehead with a glow/That blinds you to the way that you must go." While the speaker keeps telling him that it is pointless to continue, his own dreams blind him to the reality that death is the ultimate end for everyone.

One faltering image in the poem is the "she" who is mentioned throughout the ballade. "She" could be an actual person whom Havergal has loved, or she could symbolize his dreams of love or of his life; the ghostly poetic voice is taunting him by telling him to have faith and trust in "her." It seems as though the poetic voice is leading him into the darkness of death, because it is the only place where his dreams can be realized. The piece is hopeless because the speaker never fulfilled his dreams during his lifetime and does not believe that others can.

From a different point of view, the poem also could be quite hopeful: as people approach death, as everyone does daily, there still is still some hope that the dreams of that person's life will be fulfilled. The deathly poetic voice is asking Luke to trust in him to know the truth because the voice has already lived, and he is also asking for trust in the unknown "she" who could appear at any moment. If some hope is found in this poem, it is very sparse because the main theme of the poem is that death is inevitable.

In "Luke Havergal," east and west are symbols of birth and death respectively. The ghostly poetic voice is telling Luke Havergal that the light in his life, perhaps the soul, is only found in death rather than in life. The speaker really does not care when it is found because everyone eventually dies anyway. Thus, there is not any point to wait around for death to happen. The sun typically rises in the east and sheds light on people's lives, but the light that the voice wants Luke Havergal to find is only discovered as people die. As people age and "approach the western skies," they find the light--divine or self-revelation. They will ultimately face their souls in death whether their lives are successful or not.

The spirit voice from beyond the grave is revealing to Luke Havergal the secret of life that everyone would like to know. This secret, however, is quite depressing because the light that everyone searches for is only found in death, so there is not any reason to continue living. Suicide is the answer. It is part of a philosophy of the degeneration of the human race. EAR writes to Harry de Forest Smith on December 4, 1895: "I also have a piece of deliberate degeneration called "Luke Havergal," which is not funny at all."³⁸ At the time he wrote the poem, EAR may have felt that he was never going to find the light of a career in poetry. This despair is part of the depression that dominated his life in Gardiner after Harvard with the death of his mother and the lack of intellectual stimulation in the community. He could not foresee that his dream of becoming a poet would be realized.

EAR's early insecurities about his poetry did not allow him to develop fully his ideas about success and failure until 1902 when he published *Captain Craig*; in this work, EAR firmly resolves some of his ambivalence about success and failure. The poems in this book still follow the earlier themes of success and failure through the definitions of individuals and the culture. Even though it was not written in Gardiner, it is part of the Tilbury Town series with similar characterizations, especially in the poem "Captain Craig." This poem is nearly a book in itself, its scope giving EAR the ability fully to develop the Captain's qualities. It also examines many of the themes of his earlier work in greater detail as well as finding resolutions for some of those difficulties. He, however, never resolves his

³⁸Untriangulated Stars, p. 238.

ambivalence toward the real Tilbury Town and the marks that it left on his life.

At the time of the publication of *Captain Craig*, EAR had left Gardiner permanently, living with friends in Boston and New York. He was receiving more attention from literary critics, and Gardiner was starting to claim him as an esteemed citizen because of the praise that he was gathering. On December 6, 1902, the *Gardiner Daily Reporter-Journal* reported about him and *Captain Craig*: "After reading such words as these, we are tempted to ask: 'Is there any other living poet who speaks with greater power and authority than this?'"³⁹ Again on April 20, 1903:

Edward [sic] Arlington Robinson's new book of poems, *Captain Craig*, has reached a second edition, the first having been published only a few months. Mr. Robinson is a Gardiner boy, and his friends here naturally proud of his success. His work has received the highest compliments of all the critics.⁴⁰

Gardinerites may have been proud of EAR, but their newspaper could not even get his name right.

The object of the *Reporter-Journal's* pride, "Captain Craig" is a reflection on an individual's life that many would not define as successful, but which the speaker ultimately does. The poem is carefully structured into three separate sections representing the stages of life and understanding. A poet himself, the speaker discovers the wisdom and compassion of an elderly gentleman, who Gardinerites would probably consider a failure, and is not actually a failure when his soul is revealed. The knowledge of life that Captain Craig shares with the young men is that

³⁹Cary, p. 138.

⁴⁰Cary, p. 153.

if they have the will and desire to do anything in their lives, they certainly have the ability. No one should hinder them from accomplishing their goals.

Captain Craig is rapidly approaching the western gates of death, through age rather than suicide like "Luke Havergal," but he has understood life and understands what brings happiness. He is the quintessential Robinsonian character in that he has the knowledge of the inner self that is so important in all EAR's poetry. Society has considered him a failure and exiled him, but he is more of a success than anyone else, according to the poetic voice:

I doubt if ten men in all Tilbury Town
Had ever shaken hands with Captain Craig
Or called him by his name, or looked at him
So curiously, or so concernedly,
As they look at ashes.

This poem is considerably longer than the other poems and clarifies many of the points that EAR makes more briefly in his earlier works and explores more fully the meaning of success and failure according to an individual's definition. In many respects and since "Captain Craig" is a later poem, the speaker is more mature and knows his feelings well. The poem is logically structured in correspondence with the development of own views about success and failure.

At the beginning of the poem, Captain Craig is a victim of the materialism and the self-centered attitudes prevailing in 1890s American culture. When he begged the townspeople for help, they turned and went in the other direction, refusing to help him. He told himself that he would never ask for anyone's help again, because it was the most humiliating

experience of his life. He, however, does not blame people, instead placing the blame on a value system that has inculcated these values:

They found it more melodious to shout
Right on, with unmolested adoration,
To keep the tune as it had always been,
To trust in God, and let the Captain starve.

Developing into a man who understands himself, Captain Craig, in the first section, describes the simplicity of a child's life. He appreciates how children are able to see the sunshine through the clouds. Life is a growing process that helps people to understand themselves by causing them to sift through knowledge and experience so that they can eventually fulfil their dreams and live happily with themselves and others.

Tilbury Town, in which Captain Craig lived, was playing a different tune than he was in the song of life:

There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune--
A note that able-bodied men might sound
Hosannas on while Captain Craig lay quiet.

These men were simply following the same song that their forefathers had been playing for generations, but it was not what Captain Craig was destined to do with his life. He wanted to play his own tune. Captain Craig's life was a fierce battle against the tide during which he had to develop his own methods for the survival of his psyche in order to be happy with himself.

An integral part of the poem is when Captain Craig advises us about how to cope with life when everything looks bleak: lie down and take a nap, then life will look a little brighter and more hopeful after waking up

refreshed. The simplicity of a child's life is lost through maturity and adults would find life much easier if they could regain some childhood feelings:

The Captain's attitude and then my own,
 I felt at length as one who throws himself
 Down restless on a couch when clouds are dark,
 And shuts his eyes to find, when he wakes up
 And opens them again, what seems at first
 An unfamiliar sunlight in his room
 And in his life--as if the child in him
 Had laughed and let him see; and then I knew
 Some prowling superfluity of child
 In me had found the child in Captain Craig
 And let the sunlight reach him. While I slept,
 My thought reshaped itself to friendly dreams,
 And in the morning it was with me still.

This passage, to me, is one of the most hopeful in EAR's poetry. The happiness and understanding starts from within, and there is not any negative societal influence suggested. Children are seldom fully aware of the expectations that society has for them. Often they tryout their great dreams for the future through play. These innocent dreams are realized again and again through their imaginations. Adults may be able to use their childhood memories to understand their own roles in society.

The ability to laugh at oneself and others is another survival mechanism that Captain Craig develops so that he can live his life rather than the life that someone else wants him to live. Throughout the poem, humor seems to be essential for survival. Humor is also a divine revelation, like the light. Life and its experiences are God's reflection of humor to people, God's own personal joke. If life is getting too serious or depressing for an individual, laughter relieves the stress and creates a different outlook on the world much as a nap does. The laughter in "Aaron

Stark" is the opposite of what it is in "Captain Craig." Stark laughs at people because he has more than they do, and they pity him for not using his wealth to achieve prominence. Laughter is not helping him to survive in the world but only to ridicule others for what they do not understand about him. The quest for money keeps him going, not laughter and understanding of himself.

Unlike EAR, many people are not able to fulfill their childhood dreams because of the pressure that society exerts on them. The second section represents the point in everyone's life where they move out of the easiness of childhood into the questioning phase where the influences of society start to direct their lives. The speaker starts to question his own beliefs in life, which entails an analysis of society's values and influence over the decisions of an individual, because of the influence of the Captain. From mid-life--and from mid-poem--to the end, the struggle to understand oneself and to become comfortable with oneself takes place.

Captain Craig is unambivalent about what success and failure are--the aged and learned man knows that a person is a success as long as he or she is happy with himself/herself. Happiness comes from within, not from influences from society:

In ruin as in failure, the supreme
Fulfillment unexpressed, the rhythm of God
That beats unheard through songs of shattered men
Who dream but cannot sound it.

If men cannot realize their dreams, they will never be happy, nor will they fulfill God's wishes for them. It seems that individuals cannot express their dreams because of fear of defying social norms or not having the capacity to fulfill them. EAR is stating that the success that society defines

is not necessarily false, but it is not correct either. "Captain Craig" illustrates that the definition of success should not be decided by society at large but by each individual; they are the ones who have to live with their successes and failures.

The importance of wealth and status is carried over from the earlier poems into "Captain Craig." The image of cultural failure prevails, yet the Captain seems to be happier than the Richard Corys and Aaron Starks of the earlier poems. Even individuals in the lowest echelons of a society have souls and the necessary ability to laugh at themselves, to find humor in all aspects of life:

Do you think that I forget, or shall forget,
One friendless, fat, fantastic nondescript
Who knew the ways of laughter on low roads,--
A vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge,
But always a free creature with a soul?

This vagabond character does not need to worry about appearing wealthy to his neighbors or following his family into a career in business. He only has to worry about from where his next meal is coming. Materialism has been rejected in favor of the kind of knowledge and happiness represented by the Captain.

The poem is also a commentary on how people with wealth do not help others when they have the financial means to do so. Captain Craig and other vagabonds of the town are living in squalor while many in society at large are concerned only about themselves. The townspeople ignore and reject anyone less fortunate than themselves while it never seems to occur to them that they could change others' destiny in life as well as maintain their desired standard of living. Captain Craig is happy with who he is but

at the same time implies that materialism is wrong and that money can be used to help others rather than simply raising the status of an individual.

Superficially, EAR's poetry appears to be quite morose and hopeless, but, in actuality, it is the antithesis. Some of the poems, especially "Captain Craig," are clear images of hope and understanding of the soul. These themes in EAR's poetry were not fully developed in his earlier works because of their brevity and also because of the immaturity of the poet himself. He may also have been trying to disguise his criticism of society until he had more confidence in himself and his poetic ability. Dreams can be very insignificant to society but the realization of the greatest hopes of an individual: "I cannot think of anything to-day/That I would rather do than be myself,/Primevally alive, and have the sun/Shine into me."

Such images of light and dark are central EAR's poetry. The quest for the light is the ultimate goal of all the characters of Tilbury Town. Light is not representative of a higher power but an internal illumination that assists people in coping with the world, as Captain Craig himself instructs people to do:

This demon of the sunlight is a stranger;
But if you break the sunlight of yourself,
Project it, and observe the quaint shades of it,
I have a shrewd suspicion you may find
That even as a name lives unrevealed
In ink that waits an agent, so it is
The devil--or this devil--hides himself
To all the diagnoses we have made
Save one.

It is knowing one's soul that make individuals truly successful in the world, not material wealth. This theme is what EAR had attempted to convey in his earlier works, but he did not fully articulate it. The devil and

demon represent the light, dreams, of individuals who want to accomplish some type of goal in their lives. It is the devil because it can consume one's life as well as the devil in respect to the values of a culture with superficial standards.

This glimmer of light that both EAR and Captain Craig caught sight of allowed them to overcome complications in their lives as the child in "Captain Craig" did by taking a nap. In a letter to Harry de Forest Smith, EAR wrote referring to material goods: "These things are temporal necessities, but they are damned uninteresting to one who can get a glimpse of the real light through the clouds of time. It is a glimpse that makes me wish to live and see it out."⁴¹ He continued to hope that his dreams would come true,. Both Captain Craig and EAR toyed with doubt and faith but seem ultimately to come down on the side of faith.

The third, and last, section of "Captain Craig" moves toward the death of Captain Craig--the bright-eyed child turning into a gray-haired man. The secrets of his life are revealed to the speaker and his friend as the old man dies. He tells them to make the most of their lives and suggests that knowing their own minds and souls is of primary importance. Furthermore, he wants them to carry on with his tradition of telling people how to climb to their own heights rather than to descend to the expectations of society as the clerks had done. Captain Craig has maintained some of his innocence from childhood, but through his life experiences he has the ability to define his own success as well as his own failure. He is able to communicate his message to others so that they begin to understand

⁴¹Untriangulated Stars, p. 278.

themselves and can help others know their minds and souls the way he has--social facades are no longer necessary.

Some of EAR's most characteristic metaphors are marshalled in "Captain Craig" for the support of hope. Childishness and laughter, parts of an individual's character that come from the psyche and relieve some of the stress that society imposes are rejuvenating. They are also signs of hope that the soul and its deepest dreams can succeed over the stifling influences of society. East and west as symbols for birth and death offer hope in "Captain Craig":

Look east and west
And we may read the story: where the light
Shone first the shade now darkens; where the shade
Clung first, the light fights westward--though the shade
Still feeds, and there is yet the Orient.

As people age, the light typically gets brighter because through life experiences they understand themselves better and finally reach the point where they can be themselves: "Climb or fall,/One road remains and one firm guidance always;/One way that shall be taken climb or fall." One road takes us to death or salvation; it can be either a success or a failure depending upon whether the individual sees light or darkness in the ever-approaching west.

Perhaps death is the only surety in life, but it should not be feared if the individual has found success in life. Captain Craig tells us:

Death? And what is death?
Why do you look like that at me again?
Why do you shrink your brows and shut your lips?
If it be fear, then I can do no more
Than hope for all of you that you may find
Your promise of the sun.

All people have the potential to achieve some type of success for themselves, but first they have to understand their soul and to overcome the conception of success as defined by society. Death can be peaceful and a relief from the painful oppression of society. Captain Craig's philosophy is that death should not be feared if an individual knows his soul; even so, he does not want to be alone when it is time for him to die.

"Captain Craig" is the story of the life of an old man with a tremendous amount of self-knowledge. EAR, in addition, has become more of an optimist because he has succeeded with his own goals in establishing a career and gaining recognition. Captain Craig's funeral captures the spirit of self-knowledge in the midst of great difficulty:

The road was hard and long,
But we had what we knew to comfort us,
And we had the large humor of the thing
To make it advantageous; for men stopped
And eyed us on that road from time to time,
And on that road the children followed us;
And all along that road the Tilbury Band
Blared indiscreetly the Dead March in Saul.

Humor has helped him to survive in life, relieving the tedium and overcoming cultural pressures. He is also setting an example, so future generations can follow their own dreams, not the careers that society dictates. Tilbury Town is a dead end for him, but he is giving others new hope for the future.

As EAR travelled on his road to success, others from Gardiner watched what he was accomplishing. They must have been envious of his ability not to relinquish his aspirations under the pressures to enter the business world. Clerks behind the counters perhaps stared at him when he

returned, flickers of their own dreams still in their minds. The small New England town of Gardiner was not making it easy for him to break out of the mold of success in the business world, and his poetry reflected his reactions to its cultural values. Maybe there were Gardinerites who were regretful that they did not have the courage to reject their forefathers' claims and bring new meaning to the American way of life.

By the time that "Captain Craig" was written, EAR had matured and developed his own success outside Gardiner. He no longer had to direct his anger at particularly oppressive individuals or a specific society. The simple fact was that society had to change and perhaps he was the prophet to change it. He had succeeded on his own, perhaps finding a path for other generations to follow so that their childhood dreams would not be lost in the stores and factories of the isolated towns. A boy from Gardiner was a poet and a king who had escaped. Even if it was not obvious, EAR must have overcome the prejudices of the community, which eventually accepted him as a success, though they had originally doubted him.

He may have been successful in his career but he still had tremendous ambivalence toward Gardinerites and their views. His struggle to make them proud of him would last him to his death bed and even then it is not obvious whether he made Gardiner proud of him or not.

EAR's Continuing Ambivalence Toward Gardiner and Its Standards

Throughout the rest of his career as a poet, which included the receipt of three Pulitzer Prizes, EAR was dedicated to making Gardiner proud of him, even as he pursued his literary interests outside the

conservative cultural standard of success that was Gardiner's. His dedication became an obsession that almost consumed his life; he could never forget the negative identity that culture had called down upon him as a struggling artist and individual. He lived with the belief that Gardiner despised his route in life, yet we have no evidence besides EAR's letters that prove that Gardinerites thought less of him for his poetical pursuits. Still, his sense of alienation was a constant factor in much that EAR did after leaving Gardiner permanently in 1897.

From from his original departure in 1897 to his death in 1935, EAR only occasionally returned to Gardiner for the funerals of his brothers as well as to see his nieces and his sister-in-law. He was not completely self-supporting, often living with friends in Boston, New York, or at the artists' colony at Peterborough, NH where he did a considerable amount of writing. He worked in the New York subways for a while until President Theodore Roosevelt turned his life around, giving him a job at the New York Custom House as well as national recognition as a poet. Even though EAR was uncomfortable in the limelight, Roosevelt's help provided him with the resources to send money to Herman's wife and daughters back in Gardiner.

President Roosevelt not only took a special liking to EAR's poetry but for the individual who had created such unusual verse. He gave EAR a job, at which he did not really have to work, in the Custom House in New York from 1905 to 1909, much like Nathaniel Hawthorne 75 years earlier at the Salem Custom House. It was essentially a desk job at which EAR could simply write poems and draw a salary. The job did not last long when a new administrator started to make the Custom Houses more efficient. Nevertheless, Roosevelt's benevolence occurred at an opportune time, for

EAR was barely surviving and writing poetry during his tenure in the slums of New York City. The little money he was able to earn supported not only himself but also his brother Herman's wife and daughters who were having equally as difficult a time in Gardiner.

During his Presidency in 1905, Roosevelt discovered EAR's poetry through his son Kermit, who received a book of poems from his teacher, Henry Richards, Jr., son of Gardiner author and EAR friend, Laura E. Richards. Roosevelt had always been interested in poetry and found EAR intriguing. He liked the spirit of the poetry, finding that he could identify with it. The spirit that TR liked was a naturalness that he found in life, as he wrote in his appreciation: "By Jove, it's something I'd missed. It reads like the real thing."⁴² The poetry represented many of the ideals that governed Roosevelt's life, such as "simplicity and good faith." These ideals were especially evident in "The Wilderness" in *The Children of the Night* which captures the spirit of nature and the forest, dear to TR.

EAR was baffled by Roosevelt's interest in the characters of Tilbury Town, and himself, even twenty years after Roosevelt's original benevolence:

[The characters] may be interesting, and I hope they are, but I am pretty certain that their combined example would lead one sooner to the devil than to the White House. But as Colonel Roosevelt was manifestly in no danger of going to the devil, and was already in the White House, probably he felt himself to be immune from any contagion of insufficiency and general uselessness to which some of my eccentric citizens may have exposed him.⁴³

⁴²Cary, p. 66.

⁴³Frederick S. Wood, Roosevelt As We Knew Him (Philadelphia: J.C. Winston Co., 1927), p. 392.

EAR did not feel that his poems were interesting to the majority of Americans, but Roosevelt had the stature and position to think for himself, uninfluenced by the opinions of others. TR was also in a position in which others would look to him for direction and take interest in his interests. Roosevelt's patronage constituted an important step forward for EAR's poetry as well as for his financial survival.

The effects of Roosevelt's support were the culmination of EAR's lifelong progress toward success. EAR was surprised by Roosevelt's generosity and by the interest taken in him and his poetry by the President. In a tribute to Roosevelt, EAR wrote: "The best and only acknowledgment that I can make of a most unusual act on the part of a most unusual man must apparently be told only in my gratefulness and in a few inadequate words."⁴⁴ Without Roosevelt's assistance, EAR may have ended his life working in the subways and never gained enough national renown to win his Pulitzer Prizes. TR gave EAR a certain level of confidence since he did not have to worry about his finances; as well, he gained confidence in his poetic achievements as he was recognized as a successful poet by the general public.

Furthermore, Roosevelt published critiques with Kermit, which helped to produce a broader audience for EAR's poetry. From that point on, success in poetry came to EAR. With the assistance of a national figure, Gardinerites started to recognize EAR; however, they were gratified not only because of the literary success of EAR, but also because a popular poet was recognized as hailing from their small New England town.

⁴⁴Wood, p. 393.

Roosevelt was a popular public figure in the early-twentieth century as he was an ideal American that other citizens wanted to emulate. As a child, he was an invalid who was not predicted to live beyond the age of four; asthma also contributed to his chronic illness. He, however, overcame these difficulties to graduate from the country's foremost university, Harvard, and to be the esteemed outdoorsman for whom the teddy bear was named. His life was dedicated to public service in New York State and for the federal government. He began the Progressive Party in 1912, which aimed to clean up American society and to restore values and morality into the culture. He also served as governor of New York and Vice President under William McKinley beginning in 1901 and becoming President after McKinley's assassination in 1909.

It was not so much his tremendous accomplishments that brought TR national respect and admiration but his ideals and the manner in which he put them into action. He was the ideal American in that anything could be accomplished through hard work and dedication. And he was dedicated to making American society the virtuous culture that it was intended to be. This philosophy is evident in his book, *Good and Evil Tendencies*:

Spiritually and ethically we must strive to bring about clean living and right thinking. We appreciate that the things of the body are important; but we appreciate also that the things of the soul are immeasurably more important. The foundation stone of national life is, and must be, the high individual character of the average citizen.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Edward H. Cotton, *The Ideals of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923), p. 203.

This concern for merit showed itself in his reform of the Civil Service Commission. He changed the spoils system to a merit system which would allow hard working Americans to fulfill the American dream. As commissioner of CSC, he established the merit system for all citizens, not a select few. His target was to help the oppressed. The average citizen who was beaten down had his sympathy, much like EAR's sympathy for his own downtrodden characters.

With a popular public figure taking an interest in EAR, Gardinerites were more receptive to the idea of a fellow citizen making a name for himself outside the business world. On August 5, 1905, the *Daily Kennebec Journal* printed a version of Roosevelt's appreciation of EAR's work: "It is hard to account the failure to produce in America of recent years a poet who in the world of letters will rank as high as certain American sculptors and painters rank in the world of art."⁴⁶ Roosevelt was not calling EAR a failure for not following the typical path to success but criticizing society for not allowing poets and writers to develop within cultural constraints. And Teddy Roosevelt's word was law to many Americans.

EAR's Pulitzer Prizes were probably the reason for his popularity because of the stature that they conveyed on any American writer. Granted the prizes were not EAR's favorite claims to his success, but they helped him gain recognition and acceptance. In 1912, John Pulitzer, who had been involved in the journalism program at Columbia University, willed two million dollars to the Advisory Board of the Journalism School to give yearly awards in his name "for the encouragement of public service, public

⁴⁶Cary, p. 170.

morals, American literature, and the advancement of education."⁴⁷ Originally, the awards were given for a novel, a play, a history book, and a biography as well as four journalism awards exemplifying American culture. In 1921, the first Pulitzer Prize was given to EAR for *Collected Poems*, adding further to his national recognition as a poet. The prizes, through the years, were highly controversial and highly publicized, but they became an established and esteemed American institution.

Gardiner, most likely, accepted EAR's success as a poet most fully after he earned three Pulitzer Prizes in six years for *Collected Poems* in 1921, for *The Man Who Died Twice* in 1924, and for *Tristram* in 1927. Obviously, these accolades represent a kind of national success for any poet, but national recognition made only a little difference to EAR. Success in Gardiner was overwhelmingly on his mind. Gardiner did not seem to have an opinion about EAR in his later life, except for the occasions that national figures recognized his achievements and the town wanted to be recognized as well.

His views of success and failure would never have developed without the suffocating influence of Gardiner that he despised but recreated in his fictional Tilbury Town. Even the subjects of his poems reflected the cultural pressure for monetary success that plagued EAR. Richard Cory is ostentatiously wealthy, gleaming in his rich material possessions, but his failure to be happy with himself is evident through his suicide. Aaron Stark is obsessed with the idea of becoming rich and does not know when he has made enough money to be considered a success. Cliff Klingenhagen uses wealth to benefit others, contenting himself with the consumption of

⁴⁷John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 12.

wormwood. Luke Havergal is still searching to fulfill his dreams but is deterred by the ghostly speaker. The only character who seems remotely satisfied with his life is Captain Craig, who would have been considered a failure for not fulfilling Gardiner's societal expectations of wealth.

On his deathbed in the early spring of 1935, however, EAR was still concerned with the Gardinerites and how they perceived his career. He still wanted to be part of the small successful brotherhood that the clerks had found, a longing articulated best by EAR's biographer Chard Powers Smith's last moments with him:

His voice faint in sound but clear and strong in conviction. He said, 'I never could have done *anything* but write poetry.' It was the last articulate thing he said to me. . . . It had meant the only thing in EA I didn't respect, the old wistfulness to be one of the respectable boys back in Gardiner.⁴⁸

EAR's concerns about Gardiner were not necessarily worthy of the amount of time he gave them. He left Gardiner because he disliked the closed-mindedness of the small New England town, yet he carried his obsession about the town's approval to his dying days. His beliefs and poetry were based on the cultural values of the Gardiner he left behind. The values, however, remained ingrained in his mind, and he was unable to escape them after 36 years.

His ambivalent obsession with Gardiner perhaps, as Smith stated, was the one flaw in his success. He was able to overcome many obstacles in his route to achievement by defying his family and community in their conventional expectations for him. Nevertheless, his obsession with the town prohibited him from truly enjoying his accomplishments in life. By

⁴⁸Smith, p. 367.

being totally concerned with the values of Gardiner, he seems partially to have lost his own definition of success. He was able to pursue the one career that interested him and at which he could excel, and his national success at poetry was important. Yet he also felt that it was necessary for him to be a financial success in poetry as well. The materialism that he had disdained often crept back into his life.

Like most people, EAR was not, and never would be, satisfied living in the streets without knowing from where his next meal was coming. His hopes were to help his family financially, but he also never wanted to have to think about money. Fortunately, aided by the benevolence of TR, he seldom had to work in the traditional world like the people of Tilbury Town. He was able to sit at a desk in the Custom House writing poetry until he was able to support himself through its publication. Materialism and wealth affected EAR more like the artists of Appledore Island than the Gardiner residents who traveled to Boothbay Harbor every summer for prestige. He needed the comfort of money to write his poetry, his only talent. It seems that there are different degrees of materialism and EAR found one with which he was comfortable.

EAR's friends from Gardiner and Harvard viewed him as a wonderful person and a great success. Nathaniel Barstow, a fellow Gardinerite and lifelong friend, claims that EAR was the one who everyone knew would hold the family together, rather than Herman or Dean. In Barstow's tribute to EAR, he writes: "Everyone who knew him knew that it was Win who would carry them through, and he did."⁴⁹ It was not the chosen ones, Dean and Herman, who survived and were able to handle the

⁴⁹Smith, p. 153.

stress of the 1890s culture; it was the renegade of the family who made a name for himself, his family, and his town as well as supporting them emotionally and financially.

In a paraphrase of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, "Success," EAR's life and accomplishments are epitomized; if these are qualities of success versus failure, EAR must have been a success:

To laugh often and much,
To win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
To appreciate beauty;
To find the best in others;
To leave the world a bit better, whether by
a healthy child, a garden
patch or a redeemed social condition;
To know even one life has breathed
easier because you have lived;
This is to have succeeded.⁵⁰

According to this definition of success, no one can deny that Edwin Arlington Robinson was a success because of his poetry and his support for his family. He left his mark on society, giving others hope to fulfill their own dreams. By breaking down cultural barriers, he helped to change the expectations of the culture as well as the definition of success in America.

⁵⁰Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Success," as cited in The 1991 What Color is Your Parachute, Richard Nelson Bolles (Berkeley, Ten Speed Press, 1991), p. 203.

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