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Charles V. Genthe

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to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds. . .

Discussing the kiss in terms of "flames" and "glow" provides another example of red used in this pattern of imagery. Once again, the "crimson leaves" are mentioned in the last stanza, providing the final usage of the color red.

The lines quoted for illustration testify to the appropriateness of the language selected by Robinson. Here, in a poem that assuredly treats death, the poet employs only the most concrete of words. It is to his credit and to his readers' pleasure that Robinson does not slip into abstractions in discussing death. At this point, it is interesting to note that most of the words in "Luke Havergal" consist of only one or two syllables. As a rule, Robinson's successes are poems in which words of more than two syllables are kept to a minimum.

The attitude expressed by the speaker is certainly not the one held by the majority of readers as they experience "Luke Havergal." And perhaps one could argue that this is Robinson's attitude, though I think that this would be an injustice to the poet, not because of what is said, but because the dominant attitude in a poem does not necessarily have to reflect the poet's beliefs. In any event, "Luke Havergal" provides a good testing ground for the problem of belief and acceptance. It underscores the point that it is unnecessary for the reader to share the attitude of the poem in order to judge the poem as valuable.



E. A. ROBINSON'S "ANNANDALE" POEMS

By CHARLES V. GENTHE

IN their examination of the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, critics have neglected the influence of Molière on the New England poet, and have thus missed the full implications of the "Annandale" trilogy. Robinson's often anthologized sonnet, "How Annandale Went Out" is commonly interpreted as a doctor's narrative on his own act of euthanasia.¹ Robinson, in fact,

¹ See, for example, Ben Ray Redman, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York, 1926), 58; Ellsworth Barnard, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study* (New York, 1952), 177; Emery Neff, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York, 1948), 155.

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based his allusions on Molière, and intended the sonnet to be the ironic chronicle of a love triangle, murder and revenge.

Robinson read French easily, having studied it at Harvard, and was an admirer of Flaubert, Zola and Molière.² Emery Neff writes that the poet enjoyed a French language production of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* while at Harvard, and Edwin Fussell notes in his *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (Berkeley, 1954): "No more than in English and American literature, however, did he respond to the neoclassic spirit, with the one exception of Molière" (128). In light of this biographical information, there can be no doubt that Robinson read and knew Molière's plays, and the precedent for basing one of his own poems on a work of Molière was established when Robinson used the French dramatist's work as the basis for "Aaron Stark."³

Drawing on Molière for his character prototype Argan and on the Bible for the character of Damaris, Robinson skillfully locks the ironic meaning to the "Annandale" series in these characters' names, as he does, for example, in "Richard Cory" (Richard Coeur de Lion) and "Miniver Cheevy" (Chevy Chase).⁴ Using the same approach that T. S. Eliot used in "The Waste Land," Robinson may be hinting at character allusions rather than making direct substitutions for persons. These allusions, then, offer new possibilities for interpreting certain roles, such as that of the physician in "How Annandale Went Out."

Necessary background to the allusions made in "How Annandale Went Out" is found upon examining the characters Argan and Damaris. Both characters first appear in the lengthy poem, "The Book of Annandale" (*Captain Craig*, 1902), are not referred to directly in "How Annandale Went Out" (1910), and re-appear in "Annandale Again" (1929). In the first poem, George Annandale's wife, Miriam, is dead, and he has married Damaris, widow of Argan. The last poem is an expansion of the other two, with Annandale telling his physician about his

² See Neff, *passim*.

³ Neff, 56.

⁴ William C. Childers. "Edwin Arlington Robinson's Proper Names," *Names*, III (Fall 1955), 223-229. Although he does not discuss the Annandale poems, Childers clearly shows that Robinson's proper names often indicate the meaning of a poem.

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marriage to Damaris, and "How Annandale Went Out" refers to the death of Annandale. These three poems, of course, should be read in a narrative rather than a chronological sequence.

At this point it would appear that Damaris and Annandale are typical Robinson characters, for they have to experience the "darkness" stemming from their spouses' deaths before they can enjoy the "light" of their new marriage. Actually, however, they find ultimate darkness, for it will be shown that Annandale is murdered either by Argan, Damaris's "dead" husband, alive and turned physician, or by a doctor who is a symbolic representation of Argan and his point of view.

The key to this new interpretation lies in the name "Argan," for it is too unusual to constitute a random choice by Robinson. Argan, the main character in Molière's play, *Le Malade Imaginaire*,⁵ determines his wife's true opinions of himself by feigning death and listening to her vilifying comments when she is told that he is "dead." Later, Molière's Argan becomes a physician, and so Robinson's irony at once becomes obvious, for his character Argan, first husband of Damaris, or a doctor who is symbolically representative of Argan, becomes the revengeful doctor who commits euthanasia on George Annandale, second husband of Argan's unfaithful wife.

Further, "Damaris" is a rare name, not in common usage and appearing only once in the Bible. In Acts, 17:34, Paul is speaking to a group of disbelievers on the resurrection of the dead: "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagit, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Indeed, Robinson's Damaris must have believed in the resurrection of the dead, for her first husband, Argan was one of the "resurrected," or at least his vengeful spirit was "resurrected" and embodied in the doctor who kills Annandale.

With the basis for the new thesis established, the Annandale trilogy will now be examined in order to determine what really happens in the poem. In "The Book of Annandale," Annandale's first wife, Miriam, dutifully loves him, but lacks the intellectual and spiritual depth necessary to understand him. Thus, he never shows her his book, "The spiritual play-thing of his life," in which he records his observations on the depths and

⁵ The text used is Molière, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1952).

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mystery of life, much in the manner of Dr. Reefy in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. When the spiritually eviscerated Miriam dies, Annandale finds himself incapable of feeling more than a perfunctory sorrow. Damaris, however, has the spiritual depth and beauty that was foreign to Miriam, so Annandale at last can share the deeply realized outpourings contained in his book.

Damaris waited five years after the "death" of Argan before marrying Annandale, ostensibly because of a promise to be faithful to her husband; "And yet she stayed, /Leashed, as it were, and with a cobweb strand, /Close to a tombstone — maybe to starve there."⁶ She was "tied" to his grave because "She had told/ Him then that she would love no other man,/ That there was not another man on earth/ Whom she could ever love, or who could make/ So much as a love thought go through her brain; / And he smiled" (141-142). When Molière's Argan speaks of death, his wife replies, "Mon Dieu, il ne faut point vous tormenter de tout cela. S'il vient faute de vous, mon fils, je ne veux plus rester au monde" (143). The similarity between these promises is clear, as is the fact that both wives do not fulfill their promises to their respective Argans; it is obvious, therefore, that Robinson used both Molière's Argan and Argan's wife as a prototype for his own characters.

On reading the second, and most famous, poem of the trilogy, "How Annandale Went Out," Robinson's hidden irony becomes clear. The sonnet reads:

"They called it Annandale—and I was there
To flourish, to find words, and to attend:
Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend,
I watched him; and the sight was not so fair
As one or two that I have seen elsewhere:
An apparatus not for me to mend—
A wreck, with hell between him and the end,
Remained of Annandale; and I was there.
"I knew the ruin as I knew the man:
So put the two together, if you can,
Remembering the worst you know of me.
Now view yourself as I was, on the spot—
With a slight kind of engine, Do you see?
Like this. . . . You wouldn't hang me? I thought not."

⁶ Edwin Arlington Robinson, "The Book of Annandale," *Captain Craig* (New York, 1902), 137. Other texts used for the Annandale poems are: "How Annandale Went Out," *The Town Down the River: A Book of Poems* (New York, 1910), 31; "Annandale Again," *Scribner's Magazine*, LXXXVI (August 1929), 129-134.

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In this Browningsque dramatic monologue, Argan is addressing a court of law. Particularly relevant to the Molière-Robinson thesis is the juxtaposition of words in line three. The doctor is both a "liar" and a "physician," as are all physicians in Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire*, men who chanted at Argan's initiation into the physicians' ranks, "Salus, honor, et argentum,/ Atque bonum appetitum" (235). Robinson's allusion to Argan has a particular acerbity, for the French dramatist's Argan is a "quack" who quotes his standard cure for any ailment: "Clisterium donare,/Postea seignare,/ Ensuitta purgare" (238); one can assume that Robinson had about as much respect for his own Doctor Argan.

The other two words in line three add to the bitter nature of the poem, especially in light of our hypothesis that the doctor is in reality Argan, the "dead" ex-husband of Damaris, or his temporal representative. The physician, thus, would be a hypocrite, both because he professes friendship while hating his ex-wife's new husband and because he murders Annandale in a spirit of revenge, calling it a mercy killing.

The sestet of the sonnet becomes a particularly ironical realization of the poem, especially if it is understood to be the doctor's defense plea at his own murder trial. In this context, line eleven especially has the bitter, Robinson quality, for the jury does not know of the doctor's past and, thus, of this revenge. The jury's verdict of the doctor's innocence (last line) provides the final irony, an ending typical of the sudden, shocking last line revelation which has become a Robinson trademark.

Finally, in the light of these findings some puzzling lines of "Annandale Again," are clarified and help to nullify Yvor Winters' comment about Robinson's work that "this is not art, but rather is a technique of systematic exasperation."⁷ Annandale's opening remarks to the doctor, for example, now have a clear, portentous meaning: "'Do as you must,' he said, 'and God/ Will say that you have done no wrong.'" These lines show that Annandale fully anticipates the doctor's final act. Further, Annandale tells the doctor in reference to Damaris, "'I'll tell you, if you must be told, /The sort of woman that she is;'" a bitterly sarcastic comment implying that the doctor needs to be told little, since he, or the Argan whom he symbolizes, was her first husband.

⁷ Yvor Winters, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (Norfolk, Conn., 1946), 133.

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Annandale goes on to tell the doctor how his marriage to Damaris is a rare and wonderful match, and the doctor muses: "It may be they offended fate/ With harmonies too much in tune." Or, in reality, it may be that they offended him and that he is still maintaining the mask of amused innocence that he wore in "How Annandale Went Out."

Too, this new interpretation forces one to reinterpret "Annandale Again." Quoted below are the last five stanzas of the poem; the doctor (Argan) is the narrator:

No pleasure was awaiting me,
And there would have been none for you;
And mine was the one light I had
To show me the one thing to do.

Sometimes I'll ask myself, alone,
The measure of her debt to me
If some of him were still alive,
And motionless, for her to see;

Sometimes I'll ask if either of them,
Could they have been so far ahead,
Had been so sure as I am now
Of more than all he might have said.

I'll ask, and ask, and always ask,
And have no answer; or none yet.
The gain that lives in others' loss
Is one that others may forget

For a long time. A doctor knows
The nature of an accident;
And Damaris, who knows everything,
May still be asking what it meant.

Did the doctor find no "pleasure" in the murder because Annandale was already badly mauled and unaware of the final act? Must he ask himself only when "alone" about the killing and its aftermath, because he could not let society know that it was murder and not euthanasia? Does the third stanza reflect the physician's smugness because he controlled their fate? Did he "gain" from Annandale's death? And, finally, is the last stanza thoroughly ironic because he knows the "nature" of the "accident" (murder) and because Damaris, of whom he is resentful because of her marriage to Annandale, is essentially powerless?

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Edwin Arlington Robinson, as Stanley T. Williams observed, "wound his solitary horn before his dark tower." He saw the darkness in man, and as he moved such characters as Richard Cory, Miniver Cheevy and old Eben Flood across the pages of his poems, he sought to portray the bitter, the wormwood in life and to manifest it in irony. The "Annandale" trilogy fits well the Robinson pattern and must be reinterpreted in light of the knowledge that the poet drew upon Molière and the Bible for the characters Argan and Damaris, and, therefore, that there is not mercy but revenge in the killing of Annandale. Robinson's poetry is too carefully contrived for these rare names to be mere chance selections by the poet; they did, in fact, help him to portray "the black and awful chaos of the night."



THE LIBRARY OF EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON: ADDENDA

By RICHARD CARY

IN 1950 the Colby College Press published a trim sextodecimo volume entitled *The Library of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, compiled by James Humphry, III, then Librarian of the College. It contains a seven-page "Preface" and a thirty-six page "Descriptive Catalogue" of the 372 books in this category then housed in the Robinson Memorial Room of the Colby College Library.

Over the intervening years 173 additional books have accrued to that assemblage, mostly through the generosity of Mrs. Ruth Robinson Nivison, the poet's niece and literary executrix, Miss Margaret Perry, Mrs. Chester A. Baker, Miss Mabel Daniels, Mr. H. B. Collamore, and the Colby Library Associates. Because of their importance as insignia of Robinson's tastes and associations, they are presented herewith as a supplement to Humphry's meticulous listing.

It must be remembered that the books in "Robinson's Library" include those which accumulated in the Gardiner home and were accessible to him during his childhood and youth, as well as those he bought himself, received from or gave to his family and friends, and presentations from other authors (not,