

THE PROCESS OF POETIC EXPLORATION IN

E. A. ROBINSON'S "CAPTAIN CRAIG"

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

Wendy Burns Tilghman

1971

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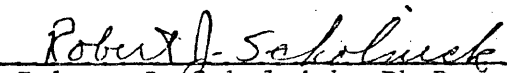
Master of Arts

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer would like to express her appreciation to Professor Robert J. Scholnick, who acted as thesis adviser, for his patient guidance and helpful criticism during the evolution of this study.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate Edwin Arlington Robinson's method in "Captain Craig" of creating a unique form of long poem in which he explores the role of the poet and the function of poetry, while at the same time evolving, through the process of the poem, his own definition of the function and purpose of poetry in a new age.

My approach involves tracing the relationship between themes concerning poetry and the method by which these themes are developed. I maintain that "Captain Craig" is a formative poem of poetic exploration, and the formative quality is mirrored in the themes and techniques of the poem. The method of "Captain Craig" is objective and dramatic, unlike various early lyrics of Robinson which explore the function of poetry and the role of the poet subjectively. The poem's inner tension is created by the development of two contrasting points of view which comprise the poem's internal dialectic.

I begin with an analysis of Robinson's objective poetic method in part one of the poem. I observe (a) how he establishes the poem's dramatic context; (b) how the Captain and the narrator function as dramatic characters; (c) as the embodiments of differing points of view; and (d) as the two contrasting sides of the dramatic dialectic.

I then discuss how Robinson treats the themes of poetry and the poet through the Captain and Killigrew. Emphasis is on how his method enables him to portray objectively and familiarize himself with two contrasting attitudes toward poetry available to him in his search for his own means of poetic expression appropriate to a new age.

I conclude that in the resolution of his dramatic dialectic and in his final portrayal of the Captain, Robinson arrives at his own definition of the function of poetry and the role of the poet. For Robinson the poet's role is to help individuals to affirm their inherent spirituality in the face of an alienating society, and thereby achieve a form of self-knowledge; the function of poetry is to bring about this self-awareness through an objective portrayal of external reality which will communicate and affirm man's inner light.

THE PROCESS OF POETIC EXPLORATION IN  
E. A. ROBINSON'S "CAPTAIN CRAIG"

Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Captain Craig" (1902) is the poet's first long work of major importance, and is the product of a period of intense creativity and experimentation.<sup>1</sup> Its significance in terms of Robinson's artistic development has been pointed out by Emery Neff who compares "Captain Craig" to Keats's "Endymion," as a poem in which "the young poet wishes to test his inventive and constructive powers by a work of considerable length."<sup>2</sup> Robinson tests his inventive and constructive powers to the fullest by arranging the diverse elements of "Captain Craig" in a form which is both narrative and dramatic, and includes a combination of character study, philosophical discussion, and literary parody. Neff's observation also recalls a comment which Robinson himself made on William Vaughn Moody's The Masque of Judgment. Like Moody's work, "Captain Craig" is also a poem which has "formative significance," and is the means by which the poet makes his "own poetical acquaintance."<sup>3</sup> The long form of "Captain Craig" not only enables Robinson to demonstrate his ability to sustain an extended poetical performance; it also enables him to explore and develop ideas on the function and purpose of poetry, and eventually arrive at his own poetic idiom.

The formative aspect in this work of "poetical acquaintance" is mirrored in the themes and poetic techniques of "Captain Craig"

which I will explore in this paper. The surface events of the poem suggest that "Captain Craig" is a conventional narrative poem which concerns the relationship between a group of young men from Tilbury Town and a dying Emersonian philosopher whom they shelter in the last year of his life. Yet implicit in Robinson's dramatic characterization and narrative framework is his exploration of the themes of the role of the poet and the function and purpose of poetry. An examination of the relationship between these themes and the poetic methods by which Robinson develops them will reveal that "Captain Craig" is more than a conventional narrative poem.

My proposed examination differs from previous studies of "Captain Craig" which focus either on its form, analysis of the Captain, or discussion of tone or narrative devices;<sup>4</sup> for I hope to show that, while retaining its traditional narrative form, the poem not only enables Robinson to evolve his own interpretation of the function and purpose of poetry, but at the same time, it also assumes the function of the modern sequence poem. M. L. Rosenthal characterizes this type of poem as one in which the poet explores and tests "the social and cultural landscape" which surrounds him.<sup>5</sup> In my reading of "Captain Craig" I plan to make use of Rosenthal's perspective in order to show how the poem's "formative" quality functions in the poem itself. By isolating specific themes and various aspects of Robinson's poetic method and showing their interrelationships, I hope to demonstrate how Robinson, in creating a unique form of long poem for a new age, explores aspects of his cultural landscape while arriving at his

own position in this landscape.

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A brief look at some of the comments Robinson made in his correspondence at the time he was writing Captain Craig will provide an appropriate point of departure for my analysis. As his letters reveal, this was a period in which Robinson was attempting to find his own place as an artist, a period he himself called a "transition stage,"<sup>6</sup> consequently the theme of the role of the poet and the function and purpose of poetry has particular significance. His letters not only offer valuable insight into the evolution of "Captain Craig" itself, but also show the poet's self-conscious awareness that he was writing a unique poem for a new age.<sup>7</sup> A self-conscious note is evident in a letter to Harry De Forest Smith (June 2, 1900) in which Robinson refers to "Captain Craig" as "a rather particular kind of twentieth century comedy."<sup>8</sup> Robinson's desire to write a poem for the twentieth century was accompanied by doubts about the experimental nature of "Captain Craig," and he was often uncertain about the effectiveness of his poem. He revealed his doubts in a letter to Josephine Preston Peabody: "'I fear I have tried to do too many things--tried to cook too many things in one dish.'"<sup>9</sup> At other times, Robinson expressed his fear that readers would object to "Captain Craig's" "prosaic" quality and its lack of unity; that its blank verse was

a little too new; and that the whole undertaking itself was too big for him.<sup>10</sup> Yet these doubts were balanced by his belief that although some would find Captain Craig an unconventional poetic subject, Robinson himself found poetry in the Captain.<sup>11</sup>

As we can see from the letters cited above, "Captain Craig," written at the turn of the century, is both historically and biographically a transitional poem. The fact that Robinson was attempting to find the means of poetic expression appropriate to a new age by departing from his usual mode of poetic expression may have contributed to his uncertainty about "Captain Craig." But both this search and his departure, mirrored in the themes and techniques of the poem, also contribute to the uniqueness of "Captain Craig." If we view "Captain Craig" as a poem which examines the function and purpose of poetry and the role of the artist,<sup>12</sup> a theme treated by Robinson in earlier poems such as "Octaves" and "L'envoi,"<sup>13</sup> we can observe a shift in Robinson's approach to this theme. In "Octaves," a poem which Wallace L. Anderson maintains is the statement of the poetic creed illustrated by "Captain Craig,"<sup>14</sup> we see that Robinson employs his own subjective viewpoint to disclose through elevated diction his ideas on the function of poetry and the role of the poet. But in "Captain Craig" these ideas are explored in conversational blank verse from different points of view through the dramatic characterizations of Captain Craig and Killigrew, and are thus given symbolic resonance as part of the larger story of the Captain in Tilbury Town. Some of the Captain's statements about poets and poetry echo the optimistic assertions

Robinson made in "Octaves." But assimilated into "Captain Craig" through the objectivity of characterization, these "self-proclaiming assertions" become the words of a dying Emersonian philosopher and are only one aspect of an objective drama; therefore they cannot be taken as the overt claims of the poet himself.<sup>15</sup>

As we look more closely at the procedure of "Captain Craig" and the way in which Robinson reexamines and restates the familiar theme of the function of poetry and the role of the poet, we can see that he has moved from the exalted image of his early poetry to one both in theory and in practice that is more objective and realistic. Poetry is no longer the vehicle for subjective assertions of faith and assurance, but rather the vehicle for objective exploration and scrutiny.<sup>16</sup> As he presents different characters for contemplation, explores their individual perceptions of experience, and dramatizes their interaction and eventual development toward self-knowledge, we see that in "Captain Craig," for Robinson, poetry has become the means by which the poet arrives at some form of spiritual affirmation, after he has acquainted himself with various, different ideas throughout the process of the poem.

In "Captain Craig" this method of poetic exploration involves a form of dialectical progression in which two opposing attitudes are developed in contradistinction and are eventually reconciled on a third level at the close of the poem.<sup>17</sup> The Captain's idealistic assertions about man's inherent spirituality and his exalted claims for poetry are poised against the narrator and his

friends' more realistic and skeptical viewpoints. In the conclusion of the poem Robinson reconciles the two sides of his dramatic dialectic and arrives at a redefinition of the role of the poet in which the Captain's idealistic claims for poetry are accommodated to a more realistic view. In the following analysis of "Captain Craig," I plan to trace the development of the theme of the role of the poet and function of poetry in terms of Robinson's objective, dramatic and dialectical method. Through this analysis, I hope to demonstrate how, in the process of making his own "poetical acquaintance" throughout the poem, Robinson achieves a counterpoint between the ideas he explores in the poem and the method he uses to present them. In the final section, I will explore how he accomplishes a redefinition of the role of the poet and the purpose of poetry through his dramatic conclusion, arriving at an interpretation of these themes which corresponds to his own image of the function of poetry in a new age.

As an introduction to Robinson's objective method in "Captain Craig," an observation made by Louis Coxe is particularly helpful. Coxe points out that Robinson often finds "witty, ironic and sometimes very particular ways to make his abstractions real, [ and ] tangible."<sup>18</sup> This tangible effect in "Captain Craig" is achieved through characterization. As the characters reveal themselves to the reader through their own thoughts, actions, and words, it is evident that not only do they have specific roles, but they also function as the embodiments of different points of view,<sup>19</sup> thereby providing Robinson with the means for exploring abstract

ideas. His most explicit treatment of ideas concerning the function of poetry and the role of the poet is achieved through his characterizations of the Captain and Killigrew in the second part. But to understand the ideas and points of view which his characters represent and how these characters function in terms of Robinson's process of "poetical acquaintance," it is first necessary to see them in the dramatic and narrative context which Robinson establishes in the first part of the poem. In this context Robinson provides us with the necessary perspective from which we are to view these ideas, and helps us to place these ideas in the larger social and cultural landscape he is exploring.

The poem begins in a first person narrative form, but as the narrator himself becomes more involved with the Captain and portrays his own thoughts and reactions, we see that Robinson has included a strong element of self-characterization, thereby moving "Captain Craig" into the realm of dramatic poetry.<sup>20</sup> The narrator's description of Tilbury Town in the first section both establishes the poem's dramatic context as well as introduces the interrelationship between the three dramatic elements of "Captain Craig": the narrator and his friends, Captain Craig, and Tilbury Town. Not only is Tilbury Town the setting for "Captain Craig," but as W. R. Robinson has suggested, it is also "firmly established as a dramatic persona"; it is an "antagonistic moral force in the drama of life"; and "Captain Craig's explicit protagonist."<sup>21</sup> Tilbury Town is more than a place; it is a state

of mind with a specific dramatic function. Although it remains in the background of the poem, all the characters' roles are partially determined by their relation to Tilbury Town. The narrator's description of Tilbury Town not only shows the town's attitude toward the Captain, but the narrator's own position is illuminated as well.

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.  
 They might have made him sing by feeding him  
 Till he should march again, but probably  
 Such yielding would have jeopardized the rhythm;  
 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. 22

The narrator describes Tilbury Town as a smug and complacent little town whose citizens are so involved in their mechanical pursuit of material gain, that they have no time to stop to aid a starving man. Moreover, if it had not been for the narrator and his friends, the "prudent" morality of Tilbury Town would have stifled the Captain forever:

. . . a few--  
 Say five or six of us--had found somehow  
 The spark in him, and we had fanned it there,  
 Choked under, like a jest in Holy Writ,  
 By Tilbury prudence (p. 113).

From his ironic portrayal of the town, it is apparent that the narrator does not share the Tilbury Town outlook. The narrator and his friends' estrangement from Tilbury Town is further amplified by the fact that they befriend a man for whom the town has no use, yet their position is somewhat ambiguous. Their reason for

sheltering the Captain is not certain, and when the Captain begins philosophizing, the narrator's friends flee "like brokers out of Arcady." The narrator, on the other hand, is drawn to the Captain, either "for the fascination of the thing, / Or may be for the larger humor of it" (p. 115). He senses there is some value in the Captain's words, but his sympathy is tempered by a healthy skepticism. After the Captain's first grandiloquent philosophical outburst, the narrator replies:

"You may be right, you may be wrong," said I;  
 "But what has this that you are saying now--  
 This nineteenth-century Nirvana-talk--  
 To do with you and me?" (p. 116).

The narrator's skepticism is not as extreme as his friends', who nickname the Captain "Prince Aeolus" and "Hoboscholiast," and tease the narrator for listening seriously to the Captain. But the narrator's viewpoint and subsequent reflections on the Captain's extravagant statements provide us with an objective perspective on the "self-proclaiming assertions" of this bizarre, derelict philosopher which is essential to the understanding of the Captain.

The narrator's comments continually remind us of the reality of the Captain's position in Tilbury Town, and thereby serve to qualify the Captain's extravagant claims:

He made me laugh  
 Sometimes, and then again he made me weep  
 Almost; for I had insufficiency  
 Enough in me to make me know the truth  
 Within the jest (p. 122).

Seen against the Captain's assertions, the narrator's cautious observations on the Captain also comprise an aspect of the poem's

dialectical process. The dynamic quality which this dialectical process contributes to "Captain Craig" becomes apparent as the narrator continues his acquaintance with the Captain. The narrator is caught between Tilbury Town and the Captain. He is puzzled by the Captain's "lettered nonchalance," and is disturbed by his own uncertain responses to the Captain's words. He struggles with himself, first wondering if the Captain is laughing at him (pp. 119-20), and then wondering whether not to believe that the Captain has found the spiritual assurance he claims he has (pp. 121-22). The narrator's realistic approach to the Captain and to himself is typified by his following comment: "with half mad minuteness [I] analyzed / The Captain's attitude and then my own" (p. 122). Although he is sympathetic to Captain Craig, he realizes the need to step back and objectively scrutinize both what the Captain says and what he himself thinks, rather than take the Captain's assertions as absolute truth. But in the process of this scrutiny, the narrator undergoes a change. As we observe the Captain and the narrator's interaction and observe the results of Robinson's own objective and minute scrutiny of his characters' contrasting attitudes, we can see in the end how he ultimately resolves the dialectical process of the poem begun in this opening section.

Our understanding of the Captain, the other side of Robinson's dramatic dialectic, like our understanding of the narrator, is determined by the dramatic context established in the first part of the poem. But unlike the narrator who reveals himself to the reader through his own thoughts, Captain Craig

reveals himself primarily through his words. His position in Tilbury Town also provides a comment on his personal situation which expands our understanding of his character. As the poem progresses, we see that Captain Craig is not only a character in his own right, but is also a mouthpiece for an idealistic philosophy which it is necessary for Robinson to examine and come to terms with in this formative poem. But if we are to understand the ideas the Captain represents and Robinson's own attitude toward them, we must view them in terms of the Captain's dramatic function, for it is in this dramatic context that Robinson gives the reader the proper perspective on the Captain's viewpoint.

In our initial introduction to the Captain, Robinson suggests to us his numerous roles. He is not only a derelict philosopher, but a poet and a teacher as well.<sup>23</sup> The narrator describes the Captain's attitude as one of "calm Socratic patronage" (p. 119). And the Captain sees himself as an "'outcast usher of the soul / For such as had good courage of the Sun / To pattern Love'" (p. 115). Unsolicited by either the narrator or his friends, the Captain announces himself to be a Socratic teacher who will reveal to his pupils their spiritual selves. As he illustrates his ideas, the Captain reveals his poetic sensibility through his use of imagery, literary allusion, and metaphorical parables. The Captain's story of the soldier illustrates his poetic inclination as he suggests his Socratic purpose through symbolic allusion. Like the soldier who saves the child from drowning (pp. 116-17), Captain Craig as poet, philosopher, and

teacher will save the child, the spiritual essence, within the narrator and his friends.

Since the Captain's views on poetry are an essential aspect of his philosophy, a brief examination of the ideas the Captain presents in this first section will provide an introduction to the theme which Robinson explores through the Captain in the second section. The Captain's first words to the narrator and his friends reveal his literary tendencies as well as suggest his philosophical outlook: "'You are the resurrection and the life,' / He said, 'and I the hymn the Brahmin sings'" (p. 114). Combined with playful irreverence, the Captain's quotation of a line from "Brahma," reveals his Emersonian persuasion. As the Captain continues his "tuneful ooze of rhetoric" we see that his Emersonian viewpoint permeates his entire philosophical outlook. Echoing Emerson's doctrine of language, in which words are signs of natural facts, which are in turn signs of spiritual facts,<sup>24</sup> the Captain tells the narrator, "'I have things / To tell you: things that are not words alone-- / Which are the ghosts of things--but something firmer'" (p. 115).

The Captain is a nature worshipper who claims to perceive the manifestation of spiritual truth in the sun. As the Captain tells the narrator of his assurance that he has also heard this word of truth, he illustrates his idea with another echo from Emerson:

"But we have had no ears to listen yet  
For more than fragments of it: we have heard  
A murmur now and then, an echo here

And there, and we have made great music of it;  
 And we have made innumerable books  
 To please the Unknown God. Time throws away  
 Dead thousands of them, but the God that knows  
 No death denies not one: the books all count,  
 The songs all count; and yet God's music has  
 No modes, his language has no adjectives" (p. 116).

With an indication of his attitude toward art, both in imagery and idea, the Captain's words directly parallel a passage from Emerson's "The Poet":

. . . whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down . . . The men of more delicate ear write down these cadences more faithfully, and these transcripts, though imperfect, become the songs of the nations (p. 322).

Not only do the Captain's words recall an Emersonian faith in man's ability to perceive and record spiritual truth, but his grand rhetoric also suggests an egocentric assurance of his own ability to perceive this truth.

If we view the Captain's philosophical egocentricism in its dramatic context, we see that this context gives symbolic import to the ideas which the Captain represents. In his exalted self-portrayal as an "usher of the soul" and the claims he makes for his own powers of spiritual perception, not only does the Captain's attitude represent one side of Robinson's dialectic, it also typifies the kind of Robinsonian character defined by Pearce: one whose egocentricism persists as the means of survival.<sup>25</sup> Just as the Captain's situation in Tilbury Town provides a comment on the town's complacent attitude, his alienation from the town reveals his own precarious position in society.<sup>26</sup> Captain Craig has

rejected the standards of Tilbury Town in choosing not to further himself by its materialistic methods and "fashion of himself . . . Whatever he was not" (p. 113). He tells the narrator and his friends that he feels "'No penitential shame for what had come, / No virtuous regret for what had been'" (p. 115). His self-assurance suggests a kind of egocentric bravado that bears out Pearce's observation. Only in the security of his restored position, under the patronage of the narrator and his friends, can he make these claims. Implicit in the Captain's remarks and in his high-flown spiritual assertions is the realization that he must convince these rational and skeptical boys of his position and his worthiness of their support. He has rejected Tilbury Town, but he was also unable to survive in this materialistic society. The Captain's egocentric philosophical outlook, as well as completing the two sides of Robinson's dialectic, also reveals the Captain's need to turn inward to assert his own spiritual awareness if he is to achieve a sense of self in a world which no longer has a place for him.

The Captain's dramatic situation is a further comment on the philosophical position he represents. His "nineteenth-century Nirvana-talk" appears outmoded and has no place in the materialistic Tilbury Town environment. The fact that Robinson portrays this Emersonian in the year preceding his death gives symbolic weight to this idea. Critics have called the Captain an "Emersonian in extremis" and the "last leaf on an Emersonian tree of life."<sup>27</sup> Although the Captain represents the tail end of a dying philosophy, by giving this philosophical point of view dramatic form in the

engaging character of Captain Craig, Robinson demonstrates that although the Captain's philosophy is dead for Tilbury Town, certain aspects of it are still valid and alive for himself as a poet.

Through this dramatic character portrayal, Robinson examines a highly subjective approach to existence in an objective way. And the centrality of the Captain's position attests to the fact that, in this poem of poetic self-acquaintance written for a new age, Robinson sees the need for examining a philosophy of the past and affirming, through his objective treatment, an idealism which speaks for man's spiritual potential.

As Robinson presents the elements of his poem in terms of their dramatic functions and the points of view which they represent, his objective and dialectical approach to poetry, the method which enables him to enact his poetic exploration, is firmly established for the reader. Through their interrelationships and initial interaction his characters help to define each other's positions. Not only does Robinson's objective, dialectical method in this first section provide the reader with the necessary perspective on the ideas which his characters represent, but his method also provides a counterpoint to the various approaches to poetry explored thematically in the following section of the poem. Because of the lack of dramatic action in the second part, as we explore the themes of the role of the poet and the function and purpose of poetry, presented in the Captain's and Killigrew's letters to the narrator during his absence from Tilbury Town, it is necessary to keep in mind the dramatic context Robinson establishes in the first part

of the poem.

The almost total suspension of dramatic action in the reflective mid-section of "Captain Craig" enables Robinson to explore the role of the poet and the function of poetry, introduced by the Captain in part one, in greater depth and amplitude. Although character development is suggested only inferentially through Killigrew and the Captain's occasional comments, we still recognize Robinson's familiar techniques of objective characterization and dialectical tension. But here these techniques are adapted in a way which suggests direct parallels to Rosenthal's definition of the sequence poem which I cited above. Not only is Robinson "testing the social and cultural landscape" in this section; he is also testing, like the poet of the sequence poem, "the lines of continuity with the past, and the prospects of possible reconciliation with the alienating real world."<sup>28</sup> By objectively portraying the two attitudes toward poetry which the Captain and Killigrew represent, Robinson's method of dramatic characterization enables him to test his cultural landscape within the dramatic context of the poem, while in the process of establishing his own position in this landscape. Robinson suggests the dialectical process in this second section by juxtaposing the Captain's exalted claims for poetry against the playful little poems of Killigrew. This juxtaposition creates an effective contrast between the two approaches to poetry which these characters represent, and also provides an interesting counterpoint to Robinson's method of poetry.

As I noted earlier, not only is the Captain a philosopher, but a poet as well, and an essential element of his philosophical attitude is his interpretation of the role of the poet and the function and purpose of poetry. Interspersed throughout the Captain's letters are his theories on poetry, presented in terms of general reflection, anecdotes, and dreams. Central to the Captain's image of the poet is his emphasis on poetic insight, that gift which enables the poet to perceive divine truth. The significance of poetic vision is conveyed in "Epistle Number Three" where the Captain describes the man who dreamed he was reborn as Aeschylus and was to give the chorus of the "new Eumenides" a triumphant American expression. But he had the vision in a dream, and was unable to give it form:

"When he awoke  
 One phrase of it remained; one verse of it  
 Went singing through the remnant of his life  
 Like a bag-pipe through a mad-house."  
 . . . . .  
 "That measure would have chased him all his days,  
 Defeated him, deposed him, wasted him,  
 And shrewdly ruined him--though in that ruin  
 There would have lived, as always it has lived,  
 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" (p. 143).

In this passage, the Captain echoes lines from Robinson's early "Sonnet," "The master and the slave," where Robinson speaks of "shapes and echoes that are never done / Will haunt the workshop" (SP, p. 8). But the more positive emphasis of the Captain's anecdote is closer to the optimism of "Octaves." Although the man

was unable to express what he had heard, he had the fulfillment of his poetic vision. His ability to hear the "rhythm of God" gave him a personal light, and although he heard God's music only in a dream, the Captain implies that "every dream / Has in it something of an ageless fact / That flouts deformity and laughs at years" (SP, p. 60).

For the optimistic Captain, the man of poetic insight, whether or not he can express his vision, does achieve a form of fulfillment in his perception of divine truth, but the price he pays for his unexpressed vision is high. For the true poet who is able to articulate his vision, the price is also high. Like Emerson, who in "The Poet" maintains that "Homer's words are costly and admirable to Homer as Agamemnon's victories are to Agamemnon" (p. 322), the Captain realizes that the rewards of poetic vision are great, but the price of poetic expression is costly:

"I can half understand what price it is  
The poet pays, at one time and another,  
For those indemnifying interludes  
That are to be the kernel in what lives  
To shrine him when the new-born men come singing" (pp. 133-34).

W. R. Robinson maintains that the Captain sees the poet as an "exceptional man with a special gift for higher truth,"<sup>29</sup> yet as the Captain suggests in a later passage, this gift is both "the curse and the salvation" (p. 136) of the poet. In his own lifetime, the poet may suffer from lack of recognition and his poetry may be unappreciated. But once the poet's vision is caught and given form there will be compensation in the power of his verse to speak

for future and wiser ages that will recognize his gift.

The true poet is one who, through his own ability to perceive the divine and give this vision form, is to become the spokesman for future ages. This exalted image of the poet is woven into the Captain's spiritual reading of existence. At the conclusion of "Epistle Number One," the Captain speaks of the "child," man's individual spiritual essence, as the "saviour of all ages, / The prophet and the poet, the crown-bearer" (p. 132). By equating the poet with the child, the crown-bearer, and the savior, the Captain reveals his esteem for the poet, suggesting that he sees the poet also as the embodiment of and spokesman for man's spiritual existence. This exalted image is reminiscent of Emerson's definition of the poet: one whose powers to perceive the spiritual forces in the natural world

. . . are in balance, the man without impediment,  
 who sees and handles that which others dream of,  
 traverses the whole scale of experience, and is  
 representative of man, in virtue of being the  
 largest power to receive and to impart.

. . . . .  
 The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents  
 beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the  
 centre (p. 321).

For Emerson and the Captain alike, the poet is the sovereign of their universe. But in equating the poet with man's spiritual essence and the savior of all ages, the Captain takes Emerson's definition of the poet even farther. To Emerson the poet is a "liberating god" (p. 334), but for the Captain, the poet, like the child "that with his laugh redeems the man" (p. 125), is the

redeemer of all mankind.

This idea is given symbolic weight in "Epistle Number Three," where the Captain describes a dream in which he is a weary and defeated carpenter who is visited by "The Man, / The Mystery, the Child" (p. 142). If we regard the symbolism of the dream itself, in his personification of the child, Robinson suggests an image of God:

"'I was a carpenter,' I said,  
'But there was nothing in the world to do.'--  
'Nothing?' said he.--'No, nothing,' I replied.--  
'But are you sure,' he asked, 'that you have skill?  
And are you sure that you have learned your trade?  
No, you are not'" (p. 142).

The Child then picks up the Captain's tools and tells him that he must learn to use what he has:

"' . . . they will earn  
What you have not. So take them as they are,  
Grind them and clean them, put new handles to them,  
And then go learn your trade in Nazareth'" (p. 142).

The parallels of this dream to the Captain's earlier statement about the poet and the child suggest the dream's symbolic meaning. The carpenter is not only the creative artist visited by a vision of the Divine, he is also Christ, the Nazarene, the savior of all ages. The mission of the artist, after he has developed his artistic skills, like that of Christ, is the redemption of man; and the artist will achieve this through the divine light of his creation.<sup>30</sup>

The Captain's final portrayal of the poet confirms the exalted image that he develops throughout his letters to the

narrator. Not only is the poet a man of superhuman abilities in touch with the divine, but his capacities to perceive spiritual truth and articulate this truth for all men wise enough to see, makes the poet both the spokesman for all mankind as well as the savior of all ages. The Captain's image of the artist and his view of poetry represent aspects of the "cultural landscape" of the past which Robinson had inherited. For the Captain, with his nineteenth-century Emersonian outlook, the poet is the ideal spokesman for an age which could affirm man's spiritual existence through his relationship to nature. Poetry provides the major mode whereby one's individual perception of the divine could be asserted for all men. The Captain's extravagant claims for the power of poetry provide a contrast to the careful, objective method Robinson himself employs to examine these ideas. As a poet who is in the process of making his own "poetical acquaintance" and is attempting to achieve a form of expression that is suitable to a new age, Robinson's objective and dramatic treatment of the Captain's ideas in this section show that he is "testing . . . the lines of continuity with the past." Before he can be certain of his own poetic role, and before he can evolve a form of poetic expression which will provide a prospect of "reconciliation with the alienating real world" of the twentieth century, it is necessary for Robinson to examine this idealistic view of the past to find his own relation to a tradition which sees its poets as their spokesmen.

Another attitude toward poetry Robinson considers in this

poem of poetical acquaintance is the one represented by the poet-aster Killigrew. Killigrew's approach to poetry is entirely different from that of the Captain. Although the Captain is himself a poet and his vision of his role as an usher of the soul corresponds to his own image of the poet, he reveals his attitude toward poetry primarily through theoretical reflections. Killigrew, on the other hand, reveals his attitude in his poems themselves and in his own commentary on these poems. The verse of Killigrew is interwoven throughout the Captain's monologue and juxtaposed against the Captain's exalted theories of poetry. In his treatment of Killigrew, Robinson exhibits both his technical virtuosity while at the same time, through his consistently objective method of characterization, expands his consideration of the theme of the role of the poet and the function of poetry.

Killigrew is the only one of the narrator's friends who is given an explicit dramatic function, and he serves as their spokesman during the narrator's absence from Tilbury Town. St. Armand characterizes the narrator's friends as a group of "literary and philosophical dilettantes" and "fin de siècle misanthropes who find existence largely meaningless and art only a game."<sup>31</sup> Although there is little support in the text of the poem to substantiate St. Armand's charge that Morgan, Killigrew, and Plunket are misanthropes who find life meaningless, he accurately summarizes the attitude toward poetry which Killigrew represents. Killigrew's two poems, as a number of critics have pointed out, are parodies of popular fin de siècle "derivative

versifying," which, although practiced by Robinson in his technical exercises, is a kind of poetry he disdained.<sup>32</sup> Killigrew's little seven-line poem about "Augustus Plunket, Ph. d.," who married the Bishop's daughter, and the following comments on the poem sent to the narrator, reveal Killigrew's frivolous approach toward poetry:

"Connotative, succinct, and erudite;  
 Three dots to boot. Now goodman Killigrew  
 May wind an epic one of these glad years,  
 And after that who knoweth but the Lord--  
 The Lord of Hosts who is the King of Glory?" (p. 139).

Killigrew's irreverence at the close of his note is reminiscent of the Captain, but as we have seen above, the Captain is never irreverent about poetry. Killigrew's playful attitude toward his own work, although a refreshing change from the Captain's ponderous claims for the spirituality of poetry, represents the opposite extreme and affirms St. Armand's observation. For Killigrew, poetry represents merely a technical game; and with his amusing lyric, he brings to mind the "little sonnet-men" of Robinson's poem "Oh for a poet," "who fashion, in a shrewd, mechanic way, / Songs without souls, that flicker for a day, / To vanish in irrevocable night?" (SP., p. 11).

Juxtaposing Killigrew's verses against the Captain's extravagant claims for poetry enables Robinson to comment indirectly on the bankruptcy of contemporary verse, while at the same time show how remote the Captain's view of poetry is from contemporary practice. After repeating Killigrew's "A Ballad of London" to the narrator, the Captain's following commentary on this imitation

of Rossetti illuminates the contrast between Killigrew's and the Captain's approaches to poetry:

"We fellows with gray hair  
 Who march with sticks to music that is gray  
 Judge not your vanguard fifing. You are one  
 To judge; and you will tell me what you think.  
 Barring the Town, the Fair Maid, and the Feather,  
 The dialogue and those parentheses,  
 You cherish it, undoubtedly. 'Pardie!'  
 You call it, with a few conservative  
 Allowances, an excellent small thing  
 For patient inexperience to do:  
 Derivative, you say,--still rather pretty.  
 But what is wrong with Mr. Killigrew?  
 Is he in love, or has he read Rossetti?" (p. 145-46).

Although the Captain claims to be no critic, his mockery is a gentle indictment of this form of empty versifying. As the Captain's commentary reveals, Killigrew's playful versifying suggests that to him poetry is an exercise in which he displays his technical virtuosity "with shrewd mechanic skill" in verses that have little meaning. In contrast to the Captain's view of art, in which poetry is regarded as a vehicle for expressing divine wisdom, Killigrew's verses appear to be hopelessly trivial.

By entertaining these two points of view simultaneously in a poem in which he is attempting to evolve his own unique expression for the twentieth century, Robinson is able to explore two approaches to poetry which were available to him at the time he was writing "Captain Craig." As is evident from the techniques we have observed to this point, neither mode is suitable to Robinson himself. The sublime prophetic verse which the Captain calls for, as we can see from Robinson's use of an objective drama, does not

correspond to Robinson's approach to poetry. But the light derivative lyricism of Killigrew is also inadequate for Robinson's statements. By objectively examining the two approaches to poetry which his characters represent, Robinson dramatizes the problem of the poet on the verge of the twentieth century. Through dramatic characterization he confronts the somewhat outmoded attitude toward poetry of the past as well as the impoverished state of contemporary poetry, and in the process of evolving his own poetic statement, he comes to terms with these two views by integrating his exploration into the larger story of Captain Craig in Tilbury Town.

With the narrator's return to Tilbury Town in the final section of "Captain Craig," Robinson abandons his explicit treatment of the theme of the role of the poet and the function of poetry to focus on the characters themselves. But if we observe the symbolic significance of the poem's dramatic conclusion and the technical methods Robinson employs, we shall see that implicit in this final section is Robinson's own definition of the role of the poet and the function and purpose of poetry. By drawing together the dramatic elements of his poem, and resolving its dialectical process by demonstrating the consequences of dramatic action, Robinson achieves his final statement. But the process is gradual and begins in his portrayal of the Captain in the last days of his life. Through the slight shift in the Captain's interpretation of his own role, Robinson suggests his own redefinition of the poet's function that he has reached through this

process of poetic exploration.

By the last section of the poem, the Captain has won the sympathy of all the narrator's friends, and he no longer needs to convince them of his position. He no longer refers to himself as the glorified "usher of the soul," "in the Palace of the Sun," but rather sees himself as a "humorist," "nothing more, nothing less." But despite the reduction in self-image, the Captain is still essentially a poet. The language of the Captain's last will and testament and the imagery Robinson uses to describe his words reveal the Captain's continued poetic sensibility: "[he] soon began to chant, / With a fitful shift at thin sonorousness / The jocund instrument" (p. 149). Even at his deathbed his words, although feeble, convey the sense of music which, in turn, suggests their poetic quality. And as the Captain bequeaths "God's universe" to the young men, there are distinct echoes of Emerson's "The Poet": "Thou shalt have the whole land for thy park and manor . . . thou shalt possess that wherein others are only tenants and boarders" (p. 340). As we see from the Captain's reading of his will, he still employs the same elevated rhetoric and demonstrates the same faith in his ability to perceive the truth. But his insistence that he be remembered merely as a humorist shows that the Captain now sees his own role as a poet and a philosopher to be less exalted than what he had first claimed.

From the beginning of the poem, the Captain's references to humor have been a corollary of his optimistic and idealistic philosophy. The Captain's concept of cosmic humor is introduced

in the first part of the poem when he tells the narrator that "God's humor is the music of the spheres" (p. 118). For man to achieve the "wiser joy" of spiritual insight, he must first perceive this music and learn to "laugh with God." God's humor is the joy He finds in His universe, and in learning to laugh with God man achieves a spiritual wisdom which enables him to partake of this joy. With the reappearance of this motif in the final section, Robinson's idea of humor takes on thematic resonance when seen both in terms of the Captain's comic funeral and the Captain's final role.

As a poet and a teacher, the Captain has attempted to "do the deed of God's humor" by conveying to the boys his spiritual insight, and by teaching them that they should be "wise-heartedly, glad-heartedly" themselves (p. 158). It is here the Captain fulfills his true role. During the evening following the Captain's death, Robinson portrays the change that has taken place in this group of young men as a result of their friendship with the Captain. The last gathering at "The Chrysalis," with the "warm restraint, the fellowship, / The friendship and the fire-light" (pp. 168-69) is in contrast to the first scene at the tavern. In this early scene the narrator is irritated with his friends as they idly tease him about his attentiveness toward the Captain. Now after all of them have come to know and understand the Captain; have endured his innumerable poetic and philosophic ramblings; and observed his bravery, humor, and composure before death, they are able to reach a peace within themselves. Not only did the Captain

help them to realize that they "were not / The least and idlest of His handiwork" (p. 168), but more significantly they have learned the Captain's wiser joy:

The ways have scattered for us, and all things  
 Have changed; and we have wisdom, I doubt not,  
 More fit for the world's work than we had then;  
 But neither parted roads nor cent per cent  
 May starve quite out the child that lives in us--  
 The Child that is the Man, the Mystery,  
 The Phoenix of the World (p. 168).

The Captain has taught them to look within themselves to affirm their own spiritual light and through this new self-knowledge achieve a form of individual rebirth.<sup>33</sup>

In his final reference to the "child," Robinson echoes the Captain's earlier lines where he describes the child as the savior, prophet, poet, and crown-bearer. In this last reference, there is a change in the imagery which suggests a shift in Robinson's emphasis. The fact that the image of the poet is omitted suggests that Robinson himself does not identify the poet with the child as the embodiment and spokesman for man's spiritual being. And by replacing the image of the savior with the image of the phoenix, Robinson moves away from the idea of redemption of mankind to the more dynamic image of rebirth. The rebirth of the narrator and his friends has been foreshadowed throughout the poem by the image of the "Chrysalis," the name of the tavern where they meet.<sup>34</sup> As we look more closely at the nature of this rebirth we can see that it further illuminates the Captain's role as well as the form of humor he foresaw in his funeral.

From his deathbed, the Captain asks that the boys will celebrate his funeral with a joyful and iconoclastic parade in which they will blare triumphantly on trombones through Tilbury Town, the Dead March in "Saul." As his request is carried out in the poem's last scene, we see that not only is the Captain a cosmic humorist, but he is also aware of the human comedy involved in the irony of his situation. A failure according to Tilbury Town, normally Captain Craig would not merit such funereal attention:

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 (p. 169).

Not only is the Captain's funeral a defiance of Tilbury Town standards of propriety, but it is also an attack on the traditional concepts of funeral sobriety.<sup>35</sup> But for the Captain, who has the assurance that he has found the truth of spiritual wisdom in his own lifetime, death is not a time for mourning. The rebirth achieved by the narrator and his friends through their friendship with Captain Craig enables them to perceive and confidently enact the final joke of this "self-reputed humorist." Captain Craig's funeral, in open defiance of Tilbury Town, shows that the boys have learned the value of man's spiritual being. Finding this light within themselves, they are reborn, and along with the Captain they have the ability to laugh at, and

defy the materialistic standards of a town which has no place for a man of spiritual vision such as Captain Craig.

At the conclusion of the poem, as we see what the Captain's philosophical and poetic reading of existence has taught these young men, we see also that symbolically Robinson has suggested his own definition of the role of the poet, one which differs from the images presented by the Captain and Killigrew. As we see from his will, to the end, the Captain remains a poet, and it is apparent from the Captain's nineteenth-century Emersonian viewpoint, that for Robinson a poet need not be the spokesman for future ages, nor need he be the savior of all ages. Rather, his purpose and his justification lie in his ability to help a few individuals confront an alienating materialistic society such as Tilbury Town, and in the face of this society help them affirm the existence of their own inner light. As Robinson suggests in this last scene, for him a true poet is not a prophet or a facile versifier, but a character like Count Pretzel Von Wurzburger the Obscene, a counterpart of the Captain's whom we met in "Epistle Number Two." The Count's artistic purpose, defined in the following lines, suggests what the Captain himself has achieved as a poet:

"The truth is I go giving--giving all  
My strength and all my personality,  
My wisdom and experience--all myself,  
To make it final--for your preservation'" (p. 137).

Robinson's poet is no less committed to his art than the Captain's but in a materialistic age which rejects its artists, the poet

cannot presume to speak for all men. But in giving of himself through his verse he can help to affirm existence for a few individuals; and exercise his "power of helping others," which Robinson, in an April 4, 1897 letter to Smith, maintains "is about the greatest thing a man, or a book, can do."<sup>36</sup>

Prior to his death the Captain himself sees that this is his purpose as well:

"I rejoice  
Always to think that any thought of mine,  
Or any word or any deed of mine,  
May grant sufficient of what fortifies  
Good feeling and the courage of calm joy  
To make the joke worth while" (p. 151).

By giving all his wisdom and experience, he has given the boys the gift of God's humor and the "courage of calm joy" to laugh in the face of Tilbury Town. He has taught them to recognize the "child" in themselves, the child that will fortify them forever against the "cent per cent" of an alienating materialistic world.

If we examine the technical methods by which Robinson achieves his final statement in the poem, we can observe that implicit in his treatment of the materials of his poem is a redefinition of the purpose of poetry and a suggestion of the approach to art that a poet must take if he is to write for a new age. As we have already seen, Robinson's method anticipates the poetic "journey" of the modern sequence poem. He tests the cultural landscape through his objective portrayal of the Captain's and Killigrew's ideas about poetry, and tests the social landscape

through his dramatic depiction of his characters' relationships to Tilbury Town. With the boys' arrival at a spiritual awareness and in the defiant funeral at the end, Robinson shows the only possible means for his characters to achieve a "reconciliation with the alienating real world." Like the modern long poem, "Captain Craig" portrays a journey toward discovery,<sup>37</sup> but unlike this modern form, the poet himself is not at the center of this journey. The "existential subjectivity in which the poet sinks his consciousness deep into his moment-by-moment daily self"<sup>38</sup> is distinctly absent. Rather than exploring and making his statements about the nature and function of poetry through the assertions of his own subjective perceptions, Robinson instead employs an objective and dramatic idiom.

Robinson's dialectical approach, a primary aspect of this idiom, is central to the process by which he arrives at his final affirmation at the close of the poem. By this method he suggests that the poet does not go to himself to affirm and assert the existence of some form of spiritual awareness, but rather observes and carefully balances the possibilities for its existence through an objective contemplation of the external world. By setting up his group of characters, the realistic and skeptical group of young men and the idealistic and optimistic Captain, in the Tilbury Town environment, Robinson creates the opposing points of view in the poem. The dialectical process by which he arrives at his final statement in the poem is observed in the conflict, development, and eventual growth in spiritual awareness of these young

men, and in the reduction of the Captain's self-image and the reinterpretation of his role. In the final scene of the poem, Robinson resolves his dialectical approach, and makes his final statement by showing the consequences of his characters' dramatic interaction. This skeptical group has come to understand and accept the Captain's spiritual outlook. In applying his philosophy to themselves, discovering their own inner light, they have gone one step beyond the Captain. The Captain had been forced to turn inward and through exalted assertions of his personal philosophy define his sense of self. But fortified with the Captain's spiritual wisdom, the narrator and his friends can confront the alienating real world of Tilbury Town and still affirm their own inner light.

In his dramatic portrayal of this group's discovery, Robinson arrives at his own tertium quid<sup>39</sup> which implicitly suggests his own approach to poetry that he has reached after making his own poetical acquaintance. Through an objective portrayal of dramatic characters, poetry affirms the existence of some form of inner light while at the same time emphasizes the importance of facing the external reality of a materialistic society. By relinquishing the subjective, self-proclaiming mode of his earlier poems concerning the function of poetry, Robinson suggests that in the increasingly uncertain world of the twentieth century, for poetry to remain viable, the poet can no longer assert, from his own subjective viewpoint, the existence of spiritual truth for all men. But through an objective contemplation of external

reality, the poet can demonstrate that there is the possibility for individual spiritual affirmation. And through this careful and objective consideration of man's potential in an alienating materialistic world, poetry can provide us with a "measuring tape with which to know ourselves for what we are."<sup>40</sup> As is apparent in both the themes and techniques of this final section of "Captain Craig," for Robinson, poetry functions as a vehicle for observation and exploration and provides the poet with the means for confronting external reality. The role of the poet, as conveyed through the Captain, is that of helping others to know themselves in terms of their relationship to society, while at the same time giving them some affirmation of the existence of a spiritual truth.

In observing the relationship between the themes and techniques in "Captain Craig," we see that Robinson has created an unusual form which enables him to explore the image of the poet of the past, comment on the state of contemporary poetry, while at the same time evolve his own interpretation of the role of the poet and the function of poetry. Both thematically and technically, "Captain Craig" is a poem of discovery. It dramatizes the young men's development toward self-awareness, while at the same time it enables Robinson himself to make his own poetical acquaintance. Particularly in his treatment of the Captain, Robinson is able to give this process of poetic self-discovery concrete form. Through the Captain, Robinson is able to explore and come to terms with the idealistic mode of nineteenth-century Emersonian thought which he had inherited. After examining this Emersonian outlook in a twentieth-century

dramatic context, in the conclusion of the poem, Robinson retains the Captain's emphasis on the need for affirming one's individual spiritual light, and ultimately accommodates this idealism to his own mode of expression which views experience objectively and faces the reality of existence.

As Gertrude White has pointed out, "Captain Craig" is a poem Robinson "had to write."<sup>41</sup> As a poet on the verge of the twentieth century, disturbed by the aridity of contemporary poetry and at the same time feeling the weight of a nineteenth-century tradition which regarded the poet as its ideal spokesman, Robinson saw the need for a significant poetic statement for a new era. "Captain Craig" is the result of his attempts to meet what he saw to be the "poetic demands of the new age."<sup>42</sup> Although the poem itself never quite achieved a stature which would match Robinson's intentions, it is the poem's formative significance which gives it its enduring quality. By mirroring his own poetic dilemma in the themes and techniques of the poem, Robinson has created a unique form of long poem that has a vitality all its own. By grappling with the problem of the poet in the twentieth century within the objective context of his dramatic poem, Robinson is able to give the story of Captain Craig a greater thematic richness, while at the same time, arrive at and convey his own definition of the function of poetry in a new age.

## NOTES

[Notes to pages 2-3]

<sup>1</sup>Wallace L. Anderson, "The Young Robinson as Critic and Self-Critic," in Edwin Arlington Robinson: Centenary Essays, ed. Ellsworth Barnard (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1969), p. 71. Hereafter I will cite this volume as Centenary Essays. Richard Cary also concurs with Anderson's observation that this early period from 1897-1902, between the publication of The Torrent and the Night Before and Captain Craig, was one of Robinson's most creative. Cary observes that during this time of "irrepressible ferment that generated his first books," Robinson also wrote the greatest number of letters; see Richard Cary, ed., Edwin Arlington Robinson's Letters to Edith Brower (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 7; hereafter referred to as Brower.

<sup>2</sup>Emery Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Moody, August 27, 1899, in Edwin S. Fussell's "Robinson to Moody: Ten Unpublished Letters," American Literature, 23 (May, 1951), p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>See for example Yvor Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Books, 1946), pp. 97-99; Ellsworth Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952); James G. Hepburn, "E. A. Robinson's System of Opposites," PMLA, 80 (June, 1965), 266-74; Barton St. Armand, "The Power of Sympathy in the Poetry of Robinson and Frost: The 'Inside' vs. the 'Outside' Narrative," American Quarterly, 19 (Fall, 1967), 564-74. For those critics who view the poem in terms of Robinson's poetic development, and therefore offer analyses which are helpful to my own study of the poem, see Gertrude M. White, "Robinson's 'Captain Craig': A Reinterpretation," English Studies, 47 (1966), 432-39; Anderson in Centenary Essays, pp. 68-87; and also Anderson's Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Introduction (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), pp. 130-35.

<sup>5</sup>M. L. Rosenthal, The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 20.

## [Notes to pages 4-5]

<sup>6</sup> Letter of February 21, 1898, in Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry De Forest Smith, 1890-1905, ed. Denham Sutcliffe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1947), p. 295.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, in Centenary Essays, points out that in "Captain Craig" Robinson was making an "effort to meet what he considered the poetic demands of the new age," p. 71. This comment is echoed by Neff, p. 113, where he says that "Captain Craig" would "announce and inaugurate the poetic manner of the new century." For Robinson's own fears about the self-consciousness of "Captain Craig" itself, see in Anderson, in Centenary Essays, p. 84, where he quotes a letter of September 1900 to Josephine Preston Peabody.

<sup>8</sup> Untriangulated Stars, p. 306.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Josephine Preston Peabody, May 9, 1900, quoted by Anderson in Centenary Essays, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> These phrases come respectively from the following: letter to Moody, May 2, 1900, Fussell, p. 177; letter to Josephine Preston Peabody, November 2, 1900, quoted by Anderson in Centenary Essays, p. 85; letter to Edith Brower, September 26, 1898 in Brower, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Josephine Preston Peabody, February 17, 1900, quoted by Anderson in Centenary Essays, p. 85.

<sup>12</sup> This view is supported by W. R. Robinson in Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poetry of the Act (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve Univ., 1967), p. 30. Here Robinson contends that "Captain Craig" is an "apology for poetry."

<sup>13</sup> See also "Dear Friends," "The master and the slave," and "Oh for a poet," in Edwin Arlington Robinson's Selected Early Poems and Letters, ed. Charles T. Davis (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 5, 8, and 11 respectively. Hereafter all references to poems other than "Captain Craig" will be from this edition, which will be referred to as SP in the text of the paper preceding the page number of the quotation.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, pp. 135 and 77. Anderson does note the shift from a subjective treatment of these ideas to an objective one in "Captain Craig," on p. 132. See also Anderson, in Centenary Essays, p. 81.

## [Notes to pages 6-9]

<sup>15</sup>I borrow a phrase from a general comment on Robinson's poetry made by William J. Free, in "The Strategy of 'Flammonde,'" in Centenary Essays, p. 19. See also Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 330, where he contends that Robinson maintains humane values "displayed in objective dramas rather than self-proclaiming assertions."

<sup>16</sup>Many critics have noted Robinson's objective style; and for my own analysis I have drawn on several of their observations. See Rosenthal, The New Poets, p. 14; Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 103; Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 260 and 266; Lawrance Thompson, ed., Tilbury Town: Selected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. xi and xvi; Winters, pp. 31 and 32; J. C. Levenson, "Robinson's Modernity," in Centenary Essays, p. 163; and W. R. Robinson, pp. 57-59.

<sup>17</sup>St. Armand, p. 569, also notes that "Captain Craig" is an "ongoing intellectual dialectic," but he does not explore this point further.

<sup>18</sup>Louis Coxe, Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Life of Poetry (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 77.

<sup>19</sup>In another context, Free, in Centenary Essays, p. 20, speaks of Robinson's characters as existing "only as embodiments of Robinson's philosophy."

<sup>20</sup>M. L. Rosenthal and A. J. M. Smith, in Exploring Poetry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955) on pp. 282 and 287 respectively, maintain that two aspects of dramatic poetry are self-characterization and the presentation of a speaker who expresses "his relation to the situation in which he has become involved." Another aspect of their definition of dramatic poetry, also applicable to "Captain Craig," is that "everything is presented as if directly from the minds and hearts of the personalities involved," (p. 372).

<sup>21</sup>W. R. Robinson, pp. 76, 75, and 76.

<sup>22</sup>Edwin Arlington Robinson, "Captain Craig," in Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 114. Hereafter all subsequent quotations from "Captain Craig" will be from this edition and the page number of the reference will be cited immediately following the quotation in the text of the paper.

## [Notes to pages 12-35]

<sup>23</sup>For those who regard the Captain as a poet, see St. Armand, p. 567; and also White, p. 438. For a discussion of the Captain's Socratic role, one which I follow, see Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 134; and also Barnard, p. 186.

<sup>24</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 14. All subsequent references to Emerson's essays are from this edition, and the essay and page number will be cited in the text of this paper.

<sup>25</sup>Pearce, p. 258.

<sup>26</sup>Similar observations concerning Craig's relation to Tilbury Town have been made by Barnard on p. 117; see also Hepburn, p. 267, n. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Pearce, p. 268 and St. Armand, p. 566. See also Winters, p. 98, for similar observations.

<sup>28</sup>Rosenthal, The New Poets, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup>W. R. Robinson, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup>White, p. 438 suggests this interpretation.

<sup>31</sup>St. Armand, p. 566.

<sup>32</sup>Neff, pp. 115-16; Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, A History of American Poetry 1900-1940, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), p. 118; and Hepburn, p. 271.

<sup>33</sup>For a somewhat similar interpretation, see W. R. Robinson, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup>Anderson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup>See Barnard, p. 187 for a similar interpretation.

<sup>36</sup>Untriangulated Stars, p. 281.

<sup>37</sup>Gregory and Zaturenska, p. 121.

<sup>38</sup>Rosenthal, The New Poets, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup>Coxe, p. 77, uses this phrase in another context when discussing Robinson's method of creating "artist-heroes."

<sup>40</sup>W. R. Robinson, p. 30.

[Notes to page 36]

<sup>41</sup>White, p. 439.

<sup>42</sup>See note 7.

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