

Yesterday's News

From the pages of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* and *Harvard Magazine*

1915 Professor Theodore Richards becomes the first American to receive a Nobel Prize in chemistry.

1930 All freshmen have their mouths x-rayed by clinicians from the Dental School in the wake of a general survey that indicated many students were in urgent need of dental attention.

1935 The Corporation has established a 300th Anniversary Fund to be spent not "upon physical development but entirely upon men." The new University professorships and Harvard national scholarships are viewed as ways to increase Harvard's service to the nation.

1940 President Conant, on nationwide radio, urges the country to give all-out aid to help the Allies defeat the Axis powers.... A *Crimson* editorial calls for making democracy work at home instead of fighting Germany in Europe.

1945 The Faculty of Arts and Sciences approves a general education program for the College, requiring students to take at least two courses each in the natural and social sciences and the humanities.

1950 To counter the threat posed by Russia, President Conant, writing as a private citizen in *Look* magazine, urges the adoption of universal military service, of two years in duration, for all able-bodied young men.

1965 The Great Blackout of November 27 strikes in the midst of hourlies. The *Bulletin's* "Undergraduate" columnist reports that those sympathetic professors who canceled exams scheduled for the next day were outnumbered roughly three to one by those who did not.

1975 To save fuel during the three-week winter break, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences will close almost all College facilities, including libraries, offices, and most of the housing system. Thermostats will be turned to 40 degrees.

1985 Women in Science at Harvard and Radcliffe (WISHR), an undergraduate and graduate organization focused on encouraging women in the fields of math

and science by publicizing opportunities available to them through existing channels, gains official recognition from the University.



Gore Vidal, Lost and Found

LIKE MANY STORIES, this one began at an improbable distance in space and time from where it ended. The saga of how the *Harvard Review* (see sidebar) came to publish a previously unknown short story by Gore Vidal begins with the fact that Christina Thompson, the *Review's* editor, lived in Australia for 15 years.

While earning her Ph.D. at the University of Melbourne, Thompson edited an Australian literary journal, and acquired an article by Australian sociologist Dennis Altman. Last year, Altman arrived at Harvard for an appointment to the Australian chair, an endowed faculty position that rotates annually among scholars in Australian studies. "I always have lunch with the Aussies when they come," Thompson says. Over lunch, she learned that Altman was writing a book on Vidal, his stature in American culture, and the role of celebrity in society. "I told Dennis that we might want to excerpt his book in the *Harvard Review*," Thompson recalls, "and then said, 'Let's see if we can find something like a letter in the archives that we could run along with it.'"

"The archives" are Vidal's papers, which he donated to Houghton Library in 2002. (The papers had resided since the 1950s at the University of Wisconsin, but Vidal, dissatisfied with Wisconsin's stewardship, removed them to Houghton at the recommendation of his friend David Herbert Donald, Warren professor of American history emeritus, who met Vidal when asked to review his 1984 novel *Lincoln* for historical accuracy.) Houghton project archivist Jennifer Lyons is sorting and cataloging Vidal's material, which includes manuscripts of 27 novels and eight short stories.

Vidal quit writing short stories half a century ago. "Unlike most fiction writers, I am not a master of the short story," he says. "I am a real novelist—and, of course, very few [fiction writers] are." Seven of Vidal's stories appear in *A Thirsty Evil* (1956), his only published collection of short fiction. But an eighth short story in his papers, "Clouds and Eclipses," written circa 1954, wasn't in the book. "We read it

and liked it,” says Thompson, “and we thought we’d see if it really was unpublished.”

Leslie Morris, curator of manuscripts in the Harvard College Library, phoned Vidal at his home in California. The author believed that *A Thirsty Evil* did include “Clouds and Eclipses,” and added that he had wanted to use that title for the collection, but the book’s publisher had vetoed it. “In his mind,” Thompson says, “that story was associated with the book.”

Thompson telephoned Vidal and described the story. It concerns “an Episcopalian priest, a stern man of rectitude. The narrator is his teenaged nephew, who lives with him, and at the end, the uncle is revealed to be a sinner,” she recaps. “That doesn’t sound like my kind of territory,” Vidal replied, laughing. “That sounds like Tennessee Williams.” (The two authors were close friends.) Vidal even mused, “Maybe I didn’t write it!”—begging the question of whether work by another author, possibly Williams, had accidentally ended up in his papers. Then Vidal remembered “this story that Tennessee used to tell about his grandfather, Reverend Dakin, an Episcopal clergyman in Mississippi” who was being blackmailed by two men. Thompson



Tennessee Williams (left) and Gore Vidal, Rome, 1948.

said, “Yes, that’s the story.” When Vidal asked, “Is there a bonfire at the end?” the answer again was yes.

Once Vidal saw the manuscript, all became clear. In “Clouds and Eclipses,” he had recounted a true story that Williams had told him about his grandfather, fictionalizing certain details: for example, an actual homosexual relationship became a fictional heterosexual one. (When Thompson wondered that the outspokenly gay Vidal would use this literary fig leaf, he replied, “You

don’t know what it was like then.”) But Williams had asked Vidal not to publish the tale. Reverend Dakin was still alive, if unlikely to read the story, “but there is always Edwina,” said Williams, referring to his mother. “She sees everything.” So “I pulled the story,” says Vidal. “And wish I hadn’t. It’s pretty good.” The Williams family protagonists, like Williams himself, have now gone to their reward; Vidal not only gave the *Harvard Review* permission to publish “Clouds and Eclipses,” but wrote a brief afterword summarizing its history.

Although the Vidal archive will not be open to scholars until 2006, “Clouds and Eclipses,” the author’s note, photographs of Vidal and Williams, and Altman’s sociological essay will all appear in issue number 29 of the *Harvard Review*, to be published in early November. The author’s note explains, among other things, that he took the story’s title from Shakespeare’s thirty-fifth sonnet: “No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:/Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;/Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,/And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.”

The Harvard Review

Founded in 1992, the *Harvard Review* (<http://hcl.harvard.edu/harvardreview>) is a biannual, 200-page literary journal that includes poetry, essays, plays, short fiction, and book reviews. It grew out of *Harvard Book Review* and *Erato*, literary magazines started by Stratis Haviaras, former curator of poetry in the Woodberry Poetry Room of Lamont Library. Haviaras edited the *Harvard Review* until his retirement in 2000, when Christina Thompson took over. Houghton Library and the Extension School publish the *Review*, which mixes work by emerging talents with that of established writers such as Seamus Heaney, John Updike, David Mamet, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Joyce Carol Oates. Current Woodberry curator Don Share is its poetry editor; the fiction editor is Lan Samantha Chang, incoming director of the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop. Since 2002, work published in the *Harvard Review* has appeared every year in one or more of the “Best American” anthologies, including those for poetry, essays, and short stories.



COURTESY OF HARVARD REVIEW