DEALER's CHOICE

A presentation to the distinguished members of the Chit Chat Club. 14 February 1983.

By

Willard F. Hamilton

Emboldened by the memory of your generous response to my Chit Chat on John Donne some six or seven years ago, I repaired to my study to ponder what I might bring to this distinguished fellowship in the way of pleasing and , hopefully, thought provoking poesy. The weather having been intolerable, the winter overlong, the news depressing, the economy a disaster, and our hearts full of sadness over the troubled romance of Natalie Zashtrow and Briny Henry - - - all these things and more have caused our hearts and minds to be filled with an unremitting and ever darkening cloud of depression that fair threatens our very sanity and bodily health. The light at the end of the tunnel increasingly resembles the lamp of an onrushing freight train. O WOE O WOE O WOE!

But hold! There upon the shelf a small volume begs to be opened. Perhaps it offers relief. Let us see, the author - - why, it's Dorothy Parker.

read poem Bohemia

My favorite anecdote from the days of the table round at the Algonquin Hotel had to do with the time that my boss, Dewitt Wallace, Founder and Owner of Reader's Digest got the notion that, for a fee, Miss Parker might be persuaded to contribute some gems for use as "fillers" in the magazine. Mr. Wallace,

in his courtly manner, wrote to Miss Parker, mentioned that Alexander Wolcott and several others of the Algonquin Tribe had found it financially very pleasant to contribute to the Digest. Mr. Wallace then invited her to come to Pleasantville for luncheon to discuss the matter. Miss Parker's response to Wally's letter was short and to the point.

Dear Mr. Wallace,
Thank you for your invitation which
I must decline. I am too fucking busy - -
and vice versa.

Sincerely

(s)Dorothy Parker

Miss Parker's epigramatic descriptions of people are always humorous - - sometimes outlandish. Here's a brief sampler.

read Oscar Wilde
Thomas Carlyle
Dumas and Son
George Sand
The Very Rich Man
The Fisherwoman
The Crusader
The Actress
Sanctuary

There, I feel better already. Don't you? But who is this sitting next to Miss Parker - - thin nose pinched by rimless clip-on glasses, the faint outline of a sneer for a mouth? Why, it's

none other than jolly old T. S. Eliot (one "l", please). He of the Hollow Men. The Wasteland, Prufrock and other knee slapping, uproariously humerous lines. A favorite of mine is his epic account of the heroic but untimely end of a valiant warrior.

GROWLTIGERS LAST STAND

Where in most households the unexplained spill in the kitchen, the scratch and dent in the fender, the overdrawn checkbook is laid squarely at the feet of the miscreant "Nobody did it", in our house such dastardly deeds have always been quite properly ascribed to the activities of Macavity, the Mystery Cat.

MACAVITY, THE MYSTERY CAT

A most unconventional observer of the foolishness that is Man was Edward Estlin Cummings - - -little e little e cummings for short.

UNCLE SOL

But, gentlemen, this is the 14th day of February, St. Valentine's Day and your speaker tonight would be remiss if we were to overlook the subjet of love. Here is cummings lovely "ALL IN GREEN WENT MY LOVE RIDING"

ALL IN GREEN

T. S. Eliot (one "l" please) treated the subject of love considerably more intellectually than your average run of the mill scrivener. Forty years ago when I first encountered this next selection there was much of it that I didn't understand. Now, in my 55th year, picture of grandson in pocket, the lines seem to be disturbingly clear to me.

The first stanza of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is in Italian. My Italian comes with a very distinct Spanish accent so I shall spare you those lines.

LOVE SONG OF J ALFRED PRUFROCK

Well, gentlemen, enough of introspection. Let's return lastly to Miss Parker for that marvelous leaven of humor that makes things bearable.

LITTLE OLD LADY

Gentlemen, my thanks to you for your kind attention this evening and, may a smile be your umbrella.