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On Edwin Arlington Robinson

Conrad Aiken

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provincial and metropolitan, the elements which Miss Jewett foresaw would "bind together men who had once lived far apart." However, the epithet which best epitomizes this vision is Kenneth Roberts'. He called Tarkington "A Gentleman from Maine and Indiana." That's what Tarkington was *wherever* he went. Essentially, that's what Miss Jewett meant. And, everything considered, that's what made the difference.*



"TORRENT" NO. 27 LOCATED

AT the time of compiling our Jubilee Census of Edwin Arlington Robinson's *The Torrent and The Night Before* (see our issue for February 1947, page 9), we were able to list as Copy No. 27 one which Robinson had given to John W. Marr in January 1897; but we were forced to add: "This copy . . . is now in the hands of an owner whom we have been unable to trace." Well, after the passage of nearly ten years, the long-lost copy has turned up. It is now in Philadelphia, in the Library of the University of Pennsylvania. We are indebted to Mrs. Neda M. Westlake, the Assistant Curator of the university's Rare Book Collection, for this information.



ON EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

By CONRAD AIKEN

IT is refreshing to see at least a modicum of justice done to the American poet EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON, and especially in England, where, during his lifetime, he got precious little; but the statement of an English re-

* Acknowledgment is made of use of the following sources: Sarah Orne Jewett, *Deephaven* (Boston, 1893); James Woodress, *Booth Tarkington* (Philadelphia, 1955); Dorothy R. Russo and Thelma L. Sullivan, *A Bibliography of Booth Tarkington* (Indianapolis, 1949); Carl J. Weber, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Waterville, 1947); Kenneth Roberts, "A Gentleman from Maine and Indiana," *Saturday Evening Post* (August 8, 1931).

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viewer¹ that Robinson "showed his greatness by rejecting much of the folly of his contemporaries," and that "he was in turn rejected by his contemporaries because of his dependence on the past," is, I am afraid, not borne out by the facts. Robinson was already being whispered about, and Miniver Cheevy being quoted, when Eliot and myself were undergraduates at Harvard, and as if he might be the first breath of a possible renaissance.

When, a few years later, Frost, Masters, Pound, and the Imagists, all made their appearance, he was not only not in the least rejected but accepted as very much one of them. It is no accident that Amy Lowell, writing, in 1917, her *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, makes him one of her six heroes, even if she seriously misunderstood and underestimated him, as was inevitable.

Three years later, we find Louis Untermeyer writing of him (in *The New Era in American Poetry*): "No living writer has achieved a more personal and a more indigenous idiom; his ironic studies of character are as sharp as Masters', his background as faithfully native as Frost's. . . . When most of the preceding generation were poeticizing in ornate and artificial numbers, he was the first to express himself in that hard and clear utterance which became part of our present technique, and, later on, was adopted as one of the chief articles in the creed of the Imagists."

But these are only two examples out of many which make it abundantly clear that Robinson was not only very much a part of the poetic "revolution" of that period but widely regarded as one of its leaders. It was no accident, either, that he three times received the Pulitzer Prize—in 1922 [for *Collected Poems*], in 1924 [for *The Man Who Died Twice*], and in 1928 [for *Tristram*]. Does this sound very much like "rejection"?

As for his own rejection of the "follies" of the rest of us,

¹ writing in the London *Times Literary Supplement*. The present comment on Robinson was written to correct that reviewer; it originally appeared among "Letters to the Editor" in the *Times Literary Supplement* for October 14, 1955 (page 605), and is here reprinted by special permission of Mr. Aiken.—*Editor*.

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I can speak from experience when I say that he was kindness, sympathy, and patience itself.²



A CENTENNIAL REMINDER OF MACAULAY

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY's *History of England* was planned on so elaborate a scale as to require twelve years for the publication of the five volumes in which the work first appeared. Volumes I and II were published in 1849, Volumes III and IV in 1855; Macaulay himself died in 1859, and Volume V, "edited by his sister, Lady Trevelyan," was not published until 1861.

When the last volume which Macaulay himself saw through the press appeared (i.e., Vol. IV in 1855), it contained an account of an episode that took place in 1695 at Royston—near Barnsley in the West Riding of Yorkshire. An infantry regiment quartered there levied "contributions" on the people of that town. Macaulay describes how "a petition was sent up to the Commons . . . and . . . a representation . . . [by] the Commons [was subsequently] laid before William [the Third with the result that he] promised ample redress . . . and established a military board for . . . detecting and punishing such malpractices as had taken place at Royston."

After the publication of this volume of Macaulay's work, he received from an unknown reader of the book an inquiry regarding Royston as a publication center; could the author tell him anything about that? Macaulay replied as follows:

Albany London
November 23, 1855

Sir,

I am in possession of no particular information about Royston. It is very probable that there may have been a press there in the days of

² In 1919 Robinson acquired a copy of Conrad Aiken's *Scepticisms: Notes on Contemporary Poetry* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1919), in which Mr. Aiken's comments on Amy Lowell and Louis Untermeyer are elaborated. This book stands at the head of James Humphry's alphabetically-arranged check-list of Robinson's library (see page 17 in *The Library of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, compiled by James Humphry, III: Waterville, Colby College Press, 1950). The book is now in the Robinson Room of the Colby College Library.—Editor.