

Colby



Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Digital Edition

2-8-1891

To Harry de Forest Smith - February 8, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - February 8, 1891" (1891). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 24.

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/24

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Digital Edition at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

I have enclosed "heard" with a frame^a; I cannot tell just how the "a" worked in {the}r{e}^b, so I mention it that you may not consider me altoget{h}er a damned fool.¹

EAR

Gardiner, Feb 8--1891--

My Dear Smith:--

It has just occurred to me that it would be no more than common decency to answer your last letter. Upon going to my desk I find that my stationery has given out, and consequently I am obliged to resurrect this somewhat ancient foolscap. You will doubtless discern a certain fringe of ante-diluvian saffron upon the same, but I trust the discovery will awake no other emotion than that of reverence. I have read that this is the kind of paper that most of the famous English novels and histories have been written upon. Doesn't it wake strange thoughts within your dreamful to think

bosom that a man should be gifted with the stamina to cover ten or twelve hundred of these pages in carrying out a single narrative? Think of this, and take down one of Dicken's or Thackeray's novels. Think of the "ink and the anguish", and the golden gallons of midnight oil! I tell you what it is, old man, we poor

ungifted devils of the common heard know little of the bulldog persistency and enthusiasm required to bring forth a thing like "The Newcomes" or "Our Mutual Friend." Dickens would cover more paper in calling a cat² than I have covered thus far; and Thackeray would slap the whole human race while I stop to swear at my pen. You will probably swear also when you attempt to read this, but I shan't hear you and so will feel no remorse

Speaking of novels makes me think of one I have just read. For some time I have been intending to try something of Thomas Hardy's but never came to until a few days ago, when I borrowed "The Mayor of Casterbridge"³ It was a revelation to me: I never would suppose that a writer of

^a See below, in the second paragraph after the salutation.

^b WA has "there", but although it is obvious from the context what EAR intended, in the holograph most of the "t" and all of the "h" and "e" are covered by a hole in the paper, while the "e" is not written.

such power could achieve so little popularity (in the general sense of the word) as he has done. The book in question is a novel of something less than three hundred pages, but when you come to "finis" you have the impression of having read a

-2-

whole history—the history of a quiet pastoral neighborhood which leaves in your mind the odor of an enviable rusticity. (Perhaps "odor" is hardly the word to use here, but you may supply what you will.) In the main, the book is loaded with a certain drowsy elegance which tends to make the reader a little sleepy; but it is never tedious, as there is enough incident to keep one well on the lookout for the story as well as the wonderful style in which it is written. At times it is disastrously pathetic; and I am perfectly willing to confess that my fons lachrymarum was tapped once or twice to a troublesome extent during my perusal of it. I do not mean that the brine took the stiffening out of my collar, but that a certain unpleasant haze clouded my sight,—I guess you understand me—if you do not, read Bret Hartr's "Outcasts of Poker Flat." I think I have mentioned it before.

I have also skimmed over Wilkie Collins'⁴ Heart & Science. In this volume the author evidently attempted to add one more to his list of wonderful male characters (Sergeant Cuff (M in the "Moonstone", Bishopriggs in "Man & Wife", Count Fosco in "Woman in White," etc.) but in my opinion has hardly made a success of it. This time the eccentricity is a doctor, to whom he assigns the somewhat startling appellation of Benjulia. His hobby is vivisection, together with an unconquerable propensity for tickling a little girl named Zoe. Almost his last words (before he committed suicide in his disappointment) were, "I wish I could tickle her once more." There is a sort of a diabolical humor about the story that is in a way attractive {2} but after you have read it you cannot but feel that your time has been wasted. This is not the case with the 'Mayor of Casterbridge'. I would write out the main ideas of the plot, which is rather unique, but I am afraid that I have already given you enough to decipher as it is. I think I shall have to purchase a typewriter. Write when you get a chance and let me know what you are doing & reading.

Very truly yours

E.A. Robinson

HCL Previously published in *US*, pp. 10-12

^c WA has "Flats."

NOTES

1. {This postscript is} Omitted in US.
2. US reads "cab."
3. Published in 1886. EAR borrowed it from Dr. A.T. Schumann.
4. William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) established his reputation as a writer of crime fiction with *The Woman in White* (1860) and secured it with *The Moonstone* (1868). *Man and Wife* was published in 1870, *Heart and Science, A Story of the Present Time* in 1883.