

Colby



Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Digital Edition

6-6-1894

To George W. Latham - June 6, 1894

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 George W. Latham - June 6, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 139.

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/139

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 GEORGE W. LATHAM

Gardiner, Maine,
June 6 -1894.

My dear Latham,

I knew your letter would come if I waited long enough, so I did not worry much about it; though of course it is pleasant to hear from one's friends as often as they see fit to write. Six or eight weeks is a rather long time, but then, you are a busy man and I am quite willing to pardon you.

When I have not been reading much of anything I do not seem to have much to write about—especially when I am out of the mood. This morning, however, I feel in the mood^a—that is, my will is good, but I cannot vouch for the value of my thoughts. The only book of any consequence, excepting the first two parts of Herbert Spencer's "Education", that I have lately read is "Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard" by Anatole France. A queer thing wonderfully well done and full of

-2-

wise sayings and the real humanity that sleeps in the soul of a dusty savant. Old Bonnard is one of the most interesting people I have met for a long time, and his book (we forget all about M. France) is a masterpiece. I suppose it goes for a novel, but it breaks away from all the canons of fiction and the slight story is repeatedly lost in the fanciful ruminations of the old fellow who writes his "journal intime", never, he tells us, to be seen by men. We are not told how it found the light. The absolute purity of the book is another refreshing feature. In an age of French rot it stands like "Jean Têterol's"^b—forgive me. Have you ever read Obermann?¹ Arnol{d}s^c poems have made me interested in the book for a long time, but somehow I have never read it. If it is all that Matthew makes it out to be, isn't [it] a little strange that the world has not ~~reg~~ recognized it befor{e}^d this. I fancy that there is something in it

^a WA omits from "This morning" until "mood", inclusive.

^b The original title, and WA, has an *accent circonflex* on the first "e" (Têterol), but the holograph appears to have an *accent grave* (è), and this is what I have transcribed here.

^c WA has "Arnold's".

that struck a sympathetic chord in our poets^e individuality, and so magnified its general worth. But something makes me think that a book that

-3-

so deeply impressed a man of Arnold's temperament would impress me. (I do[n't] mean to make any ridiculous comparisons.)^f—As for Spencer's "Education" you have doubtles{s}^g read it, and somehow I think it is a book that would perhaps please you more than it does me. I shall not attempt to attack it in any way, more than to say that the ousting of the the {sic} languages in favor of the sciences would make school life a hell for fellows of my make-up. The general system, which is not his, is of course something that must come sooner or later—in fact, it has already come to a certain extent. Spencer comes down upon the parents with a scholarly indignation—far more scholarly than his English.—Yes, I have read something else—Molière's "Misanthrope". I have read it once before, but this second reading first revealed to me to [=the] greatness of the thing. But for all that I cannot consider him a dangerous rival to Shakespeare. In Molière, spite of what the great critics say, everything seems to me to be treated from a distinctly (B.W^h) French point of view. Sha{k}espeareⁱ is the world; Molière is French society—and not very imposing society at that. Of all the plays I have yet read by him I infinitely

-4-

prefer "L'Avare". There the world comes more to the front. "Le Misanthrope" written as you know in verse is a tremendous piece of technique, and even to so shabby a French reader as myself the easy flow of his alexandrines is often astonishing.—I read Tennyson's "Pelleas and Et[t]arre".^j It shows great labor to a questionably great end. It serves its place [?] well, however, as a foreshadowing

^d WA transcribes the "e".

^e WA has "poet's".

^f WA omits the first parenthesis.

^g WA transcribes the second "s".

^h WA adds a period here.

ⁱ WA transcribes the "k".

^j WA omits both underlines.

of the grand swash in "Guinevere^k—to me, and I suppose to everybody, the greatest of all the Idyls.

You may be interested to know that three of my prose sketches have passed into the Atlantic office and safely out again—after being pleasantly damned by Mr^l Scudder,² the editor, and bewilderingly prased by Mr^m Whittier, the venerable proof-reader of the place. My uncle placed them in Scudder's hands and now tells me that I ought to be satisfied with the result. I am. In fact, they were received much better than I expected they would be and I have no inclination to do "the Chatterton act."³ⁿ Someday I may possibly get something printed, but the prospect is a little murky. My business now is to work and not worry about the outcome. I give myself this easy advice and then have a two hours grouch.^o—which is very human, if not beneficial.

-5-

The new Cambridge publishers, Stone & Kimball, seem to be making a slight stir in the country. They publish the works of Eugene Field, Santayana (pp. 90) Hugh McCulloch, Jr., Hamlin Garland, Tom Hall, Bliss Carman and others—to say nothing of "The Chap-Book" "a dainty little semi monthly" which is generally praised. I am greatly interested in this publishing house and hope that they publish books which they may succeed if for no other reason than that ^ are a pleasure to the eye as well as to the intellect. They may be overdoing it a little in printing so much by unknown authors, but they probably have looked into all that. Besides, they are not all unknown, as the above names show. I was pleased yesterday to read in the Dial (of all papers) of "Western Literature—Hamlin Garland's impending phenomenon"—not precisely the words perhaps, but near enough to give the idea.—Speaking of the "Chap-Book" I take it to be something after the style of the unsuccessful "Mahogany Tree", only much better. It seems to me that there is room in New England for such a paper, and

^k WA omits the underline.

^l WA adds a period here.

^m WA adds a period here. The "r" is written over a "y".

ⁿ WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^o WA omits this period, which may have been intended as a comma, if as anything.

with contributors like R.H. Stoddard, Mrs. Moulton, Carman etc^p, the thing ought to succeed. I am glad that it's home is in Cambridge, which practically means Harvard.

-6-

I am glad that you think of studying the Greek Drama, and more than that I wish that you and my friend Smith, who is to do the prose version of my, or our, "Antigone", could get your heads together for a year somewhere. I think he is just the kind of a fellow you have been hunting for all your life and certainly did not find in me. He is far stronger and less visionary (I was going to say superficial) than I, and has a far more active in{s}tinct in practical things: he^q is a man who would read, and probably has read, Goldwin Smith's^r new book, while I would sooner think of reading Hobbes' Leviathan for the fun of it.—He is tremendously interested in Greek literature, however, and is now working for his A.M. from Bowdoin. The one great fault with him is that he is going to be married. He is a mild lunatic over Matthew Arnolds^s poems, and reads Andrew Lang because he cannot help it. In a recent letter, he tells me that W.E. Henley's Views and Reviews is a shamefully neglected book—better in many ways than anything that Andrew has done. At least, that is his opinion. To return to Greece^t, let me say that if my opinion of the Greek theatre is worth anything, I think^u that

-7-

the decay of religious, or superstitious formalities (if they are decayed) has made it so hopelessly a thing of the past—I mean as far as appreciation goes. What little I know of the subject I have culled from Donaldson,⁴ and, by the way, his "History of the Greek Theatre" (Bohn) will be one of the first books for you to "acquire". The schem[e] of their per-
 depended
 formances was so hopeless artificial and ~~depended~~ {?} so much

^p WA adds a period here.

^q WA omits from "and has a" to "things: he", inclusive.

^r WA has "Smith's".

^s WA has "Arnold's".

^t This is my reading of the word. WA could not make it out, and has, instead, "_____ [?]".

^u WA has "thank".

upon scenic pantomimic effects that I cannot conceive of the mechanical part of the Greek dramatic performance as anything more than a somewhat interesting and uncertain antiquity. DeQuinceys^v rather humorous—perhaps I had better say "popular" essay on "The Antigone of Sophocles as represented on the Edinburgh Stage" (Masson's Edition, Vol^w X, p. 360) cannot fail to be of great interest to you and must be easily available. As for the Greek Drama, as literature,--well I am able to take pleasure from that barbarous translation called the "Oxford" in Baker's library. Is there any need of my saying any more. But whatever you do, read Miltons^x "Samson" before you begin your work. I think (and I am not original now) that you will have a clearer idea of what a Greek tragedy is than you can possibly have now—that is if you have never read Miltons^y great poem. The mechanical structure of the play is made so unobtrusively plain that one never forgets it.

-8-

I have received an invitation to the big spread in Lower Massachusetts. Ford sent it and is one of [the] engineers of the thing. I now think of going to Cambridge for a week, out of self-defense. I must have a change. If I go,^z I shall leave Gardiner about Jun^{aa} 20. I tell you this thinking that there may the [=be] the ghost of a possibility of your being somewhere near there at that time.—Did you know that Saben is in England? He sailed about three weeks ago, sending me before he went, a long farewell letter and a poem. I hope he has found his Mecca in Oxford and sincerely wish that he may come out all right. Butler writes me that he [Saben] has improved wonderfully in his manner of living and seems to have some idea of the word economy. By the way, Butler always asks most pleasantly for you in his letters to me. There is no reason for my saying this, but I know it is pleasant to be sure that we are remembered by old friends we cannot see. Do not fail

^v WA has "DeQuincey's".

^w WA adds a period here.

^x WA has "Milton's".

^y WA has "Milton's".

^z WA omits the comma.

^{aa} WA adds a period here.

to give him a call whenever you are in Boston. You will find him in his father's office.—I do not know whether this is an egotistical letter or not,—I am afraid not; but it is as it is and must speak for itself. I shall be very lonely this summer and a letter from you will be an event—as I have said before.

Most sincerely,

Try to pardon my horrible
penmanship.^{bb}

Robinson

HCL

NOTES^{cc}

1. A psychological romance by Étienne Pivert de Senancour (1770-1846).
2. Horace Scudder (1838-1902), editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. He was later appreciative of TNB. See EAR's letter to Smith, January 17, 1897.
3. Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) {English poet who} poisoned himself.
- 4.^{dd} John William Donaldson (1811-1861), an English scholar known primarily for his philological studies. His *The Theatre of the Greeks: A Treatise on the History and Exhibition of the Greek Drama*, was published in 1836 and (an index to its popularity) had gone through eight editions by 1875. (SL)

^{bb} WA places this note after the signature. I have not reproduced the graphic from the holograph, which is a small vertical squiggly line in black ink to the left of the note.

^{cc} In addition to his notes below, WA numbered a space for a note 5, but left it blank, with the exception of three ellipses. Since he did not indicate what he wished to gloss with a superscriptive numeral in the text, I have deleted the space here.

^{dd} WA numbered this note but left it blank.