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4-14-1895

## To Harry de Forest Smith - April 14, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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### Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - April 14, 1895" (1895). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 171.

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

My dear Smith,

Your letter and the Book Buyer came last evening and paid me well for paddling down town<sup>a</sup> through the mud and rain for whatever I might find. I like the Book Buyer for what it is, but it seems to me that one might naturally look for a little more serious criticism of Ibsen ~~that~~ than that of Little Eyolf in the spring number. Ibsen has proved himself beyond all questioning to be one of the greatest men of the time (or any other time) and it becomes rather nauseating nowadays to read the same brainless twaddle that we read five years ago. The criticism of Vistas, on the other hand, was peculiarly fair and generous,--coming from the same pen, or apparently so.

I have finished L'Impérieuse Bonté, and do not hesitate to call it a great book; but, as I wrote to Ford. I am not so sure that it is a great novel. It deals with the dark puzzles of life in a way that must make a man think, but it is never fanatical or illogical. The ruling motive of the book, as you already know, is the salvation of mankind, or the elevation, which is the same thing, through man's

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charity for his brothers. The author, in his honest enthusiasm, brings out man's brotherhood with all things that are—earth, air, sky, trees and every thing else. The universality of the book is astonishing, and we feel and see the hand that moves the world "la main que pousse le monde" as we read it. I wish it were obtainable in translation, but I am afraid that that will remain an impossibility. To reproduce any thing like the author's style which is figurative and impressionistic to the last extreme (whatever that is!) without ever becoming any thing like "decadent," would involve more labor and patience than the average translator can possibly afford. And more than that there are many pas-

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<sup>a</sup> WA omits "town".

sages which are not of the kind we call "pure and unobjectionable" although every word has its moral purpose and the book as a whole is a magnificent plea for a clean life in a clean world. If you take it into your head to learn French again ~~been~~ be sure and read this novel.

I have not read much more—in fact nothing but scattered pieces here and there in papers and things. Some day when I partly get ove{r} my antipathy toward translations I may read Faust, but that time will not come soon. I hav{e} been looking

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at "Sintram" and "Auslagas Knight"<sup>1</sup> but neither of them seem to attract me. My love for romance, pure & simple, is almost gone from me and I hardly know whether to be glad or sorry There is someth{in}g in "Undine" and "Picciola" that stays with me and there may be ~~the same~~ the same quality in Sintram. Some day I shall find out—some day when I feel like it more than I do just at present.

I hav{e} got pretty well through the "creative" part of the book I shall try to publish in the fall (or as soon as it is ready); the rest will be revising and rewriting—a long and hard summer's work and all, perhaps, for nothing. But there is one grand consolation: if it is for nothing, another may be for someth{in}g else. I have made  
and

up my mind that I am going to do this thing, if that is all there is to it. Some day you will see ~~an~~ a printed edition of "Scattered Lives"<sup>2</sup> and though it be printed on toilet paper with a one-hand printing press. That is, of course, if I live and am well for a certain length of time.—Last week I sent "Thom{as} Hardy" to the Critic people but hav{e} not yet heard from it.<sup>3</sup>

-4<sup>c</sup>-

I have known of Freytags Technique of the Drama for a long time but did not know that it had been translated (By "a long time" I mean since my first year at Harvard).  
I  
am glad that you are going to have it, because I can borrow it of you sometime. ---I hav{e} just found it in "5000 Books" (Curtis Publishing Co)--\$1.15—

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<sup>b</sup> Written vertically.

<sup>c</sup> Written vertically.

McEwan's translation.  
 5000 Book{s} is well worth ha{vin}g for a reference, but it contains some crazy  
 selections and  
 more than crazy omissions. That, howev{er}, is only to be expected. My  
 catalogue contains  
 272 pages is finely printed and ha{s} ma{n}y good portraits—one in particular of  
 Emerson  
 which is refreshingly human and, I hope, authentic. Our old friend Dr Doyle is  
 there, along with Brander Matthews and nearly two hundred others The  
 general appearance  
 of the thing strongly suggests Houghton-Mifflin's catalogue. The print is some  
 finer, but quite  
 as clear. You can get it for a postal card.—Don't forget the Bookman—when  
 you hav{e} squeezed it to your own satisfaction. Any thing like that com{in}g  
 through the mail  
 tickles me more than a little.      You speak of the speak of the stone game<sup>4</sup> as  
 if it were my  
 work. I would not rob Joe of his laurels.

Yours most sincerely,  
E.A.R.

Gardiner,  
 14 April - 1895

HCL US, 217-219.

#### NOTES<sup>d</sup>

1. Both romantic tales by Friedrich Fouque, Baron de La Motte.
2. US reads "Scattered Lines."
3. EAR's sonnet "For a Book by Thomas Hardy" appeared in *The Critic*, XXIV (November 23, 1895), 348.
4. US reads "stans game [?]." {WA reads "sten's [?] game".}

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<sup>d</sup> Notes 1-4 are WA's notes 2-5. WA was unable to complete his original note 1, on *The Book Buyer* review, and I could not locate the reference either.