

Colby



Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Digital Edition

4-4-1894

To Joseph S. Ford - April 20, 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 Joseph S. Ford - April 20, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 188.

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/188

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 JOSEPH S. FORD

Gardiner, Maine,,
April 20, 1894.

My dear Ford,

"All brain and no heart" is striking, but do you think it is wholly just? Your exclusion of Daudet was fortunate and pleasant, but is he alone? Have you read the master of all French humanitarians, François Coppée, for nothing, - or haven't you read him at all? - My friends are getting pretty tired of my eternal praise of the author of *Vingt Contes Nouveaux* and *Les Vices du Capitaine*, but I have become so thoroughly "soaked" with his writings that it is just as impossible for me to keep from praising him as it is for me to keep from reading him. I have on my shelves six volumes of his prose (I gave *Henriette* to Latham, and he was compelled to praise it) thus being the fortunate owner of all his tales and sketches, with the exception of two thin volumes - the one just mentioned and *Les Vrais Riches*, which I have never read. To me, he is, with the possible exception of Daudet, the greatest writer of "human documents" in the world;^a - mind you, I am not speaking of long-novel writers. If my opinion is the correct one, and it probably is not, M. Coppee, whose greatest reputation rests upon his poems and dramas, is "greater than the world suspects". And there let us leave him. Catulle Mendés is fine, but he is a reptile.¹ Halévy² must have heart enough to suit you, and is the author of "L'Idée de Jean Teterol"³ wholly an icicle? And then there is de Banville⁴, who created *Gringoire* to suit himself and put a world of rejuvenated humanity into a book of verses so artificial in form than no man could match them - unless he be the ghost of Villon. As for the elegant master of drool, Edmond About,⁵ I shall say nothing. I am told that he writes excellent French, and for that I congratulate him.

Do not think by this that I have totally misconstrued your remarks; I am sure that that is not the case. I think you refer in the main to the intensely "realistic" school and to the "~~décadrouse~~ accent over the e ~~décadents~~". I have some idea of what I am talking about, but, I fear, not much. What I mean is that I fancy you do not care so very much for Flaubert, the Goncourts, Maupassant, Loti, Mendes, and the rest of them.

Did you hear "Phormio"⁶ last evening? Of course you, did, though. If we backwoodsmen are to judge it by the trumpeting it has received, it must have been very fine in its way - that is, as an elaborate novelty. Apropos of old plays, I have lately

^a WA has a colon here.

developed a great interest in the Greek tragedy, and if the fates are propitious, I shall make a metrical translation of "Antigone" during the coming year. I intend making the work a

-2-

kind of heavy recreation. It will be fun for me, but I am afraid that it may interfere with my other work. In anticipation of that, XX I have said to myself that I shall do ten lines a day—no more and no less. At that rate, I should have it completed,

n

in my own peculiar manner, in about six months. I suppose such a performance is, from the practical man's point of view, a deliberate and criminal waste of time, but what does life amount to if we cannot do a few of the things we wish to. Here is more of my bad philosophy. Take Tryon for a model, if you ever feel down in the mouth and discouraged, and you will come out all right; that man is all iron - excepting his heart. He has perseverance enough for a dozen ordinary men; and I, with my vacillating ways, can only look upon him with gaping admiration. I may know a little more about him than you do, so you need not be surprised at my eulogy. And above all, do not think I am addressing you as if you needed any particular help from anybody; if I am any judge of men, you are quite able to take care of yourself. All of which is respectfully submitted.

No, I have not heard from Hubbell for a long time. I do not remember when I wrote him my last letter, but it was some months ago. Considering my comparatively slight acquaintance with him, I am rather surprised that he should write as often as he does. He is a fellow I think a great deal of, however, and I shall be glad if he comes to the the Divinity School. It is unpleasant to feel that Harvard is nothing to me except for its existence and its past associations; and it will be very much like that after next June. It would seem strange to walk through the yard and feel that there was hardly a man in Cambridge to call upon; but, with the exception of Mead and the man from Kentucky,⁷ I hardly know of anyone who will be there next year. It is my misfortune to make friends and then lose them, except through the medium of an occasional letter; and letters are, I suppose, likely to stop in the course of a few years. I only know that I am here in Maine, and, as I recently wrote to Tryon, God only knows when I shall get out. I care little for the people here, and they care infinitely less for me. I look back upon my two years at Harvard as my life, and none knows better than I what ill justice I did the place. To be sure, I was half sick most of the time; but then, perhaps I might have done much better than

I did. However, that is as it is, and I am thankful for it. But I am alonenow, and sometimes I get "grouchy"; but seldom really unhappy. There is nothing in the "sorrow's crown of sorrow" bus{-}iness. Were it not for "remembering happier things",⁸ I might as well be in the ground. I am sure I should have no strength for the work I am trying to do.

I am ashamed to say that I have never read a line by Merimée. Write whenever you feel the spirit moving, and read Coppée for a spring tonic. He is a true "terrae filius", and you will find him a friend. Vale,

Rob

^bWhen I write letters I always write loose sentences. Kindly excuse them and creditem^c them to friendly haste.

R.

Read "Ships that Pass in the Night"¹⁰
and Rose & ~~Nitt~~ Ninette¹¹—if you have not^d
already.

UVA Typewritten

NOTES

1. EAR had bought *Contes Choisis* of Mendes (1841-1909) just before he left Harvard.
2. Ludovic Halévy (1834-1908). While at Harvard EAR had read Halévy's first and most popular novel, *L'Abbé Constantin*. See his letter to Smith, October 18, 1891.
3. Victor Cherbuliez {1829-1899}.
4. Théodore de Banville (1823-1891), called the "king of rhymes" because of his use of diverse and complex metrical forms.
5. EAR had read *La Mere de la Marquiese* by About (1828-1885) at Harvard. See his letter to Smith, March 13, 1893.
6. A comedy by Terence.
7. Shirley E. Johnson of the Corn Cob Club.
8. Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."
9. Prosper Merimée (1803-1870).
10. By Beatrice Harraden (1834-1894).
11. By Alphonse Daudet.

^b This postscript is written in black ink, vertically, up the right side of the page.

^c This is WA's suggested reading (see the margin of his manuscript transcription of this letter, p. 5).

^d This line is one with the previous line in the holograph.

