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The enduring specter of E. A. Robinson

by [X.J. Kennedy](#)

On the underappreciated American poet.

It has been a long while—seventy-two years, to be exact—since Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935) was hailed in his obituaries as America’s foremost poet. In recent times, his work has been tacitly dismissed as old hat. Few current candidates for MFA degrees in creative writing, I suspect, have ventured any deeper into it than “Miniver Cheevy” and “Richard Cory”—items still, as the poet himself remarked, “pickled in anthological brine.” Even back in his critical study of 1969, Ellsworth Barnard was sadly marveling that in the thirty years following the poet’s death his name and fame had suffered a “slow return to obscurity.” Ever since, that process seems only to have accelerated.

Causes for this neglect aren’t hard to find. To the with-it poet of nowadays, Robinson’s rhyming stanzas must look stodgy, his mastery ...

X.J. Kennedy is **X. J. Kennedy's** new and selected poems were published in Spring 2007 by Johns Hopkins.

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