



## The Journal of Jules Renard

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Spanning from 1887 to a month before his death in 1910, *The Journal of Jules Renard* is a unique autobiographical masterpiece that, though celebrated abroad and cited as a principle influence by writers as varying as Somerset Maugham and Donald Barthelme, remains largely undiscovered in the United States. Throughout his journal, Renard develops not only his artistic convictions but also his humanity as he reflects on the nineteenth-century French literary and art scene, and on the emergence of his position as an important novelist and playwright in that world. Renard provides aphorisms and quips, and portrays the details of his personal life—his love interests, his position as a socialist mayor of Chitry, the suicide of his father—that often appear in his work.

## The Journal of Jules Renard Details

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## **From Reader Review The Journal of Jules Renard for online ebook**

### **Ana says**

why have i put this book on hold for such a long time? i guess i forgot that i had it on my shelf. review to come!

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### **Chuck LoPresti says**

Montaigne for your library  
Aurelius in your lodge  
take LaRouchefoucauld walking  
but leave Renard on your night stand so it can leaven your dreams and illuminate your mind when you wake before the sun rises.

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### **Kevin Shannon says**

I am an avid reader, and have been since I was an asthmatic and myopic youth and found refuge in the world of ideas. In 3 decades, at say 50 books a year, I must be up to 1500 under my belt. This I would place in my top 5, I absolutely loved everything about this work, the character of the author, it is a journal, and the glimpses into the literary world of 1900s Paris. Mallarme, Verlain are there, Gide has a cold, and Lautrec and Sarah Bernhardt are mentioned in snippets interspersed with aphorisms on , well everything, eg "the cat is the furniture of life" or "taste ripens at the expense of happiness". He writes about his servants at home, the death of his brother, and suicide of his father, and the impossible temperament of his mother. This is the most human book I have read. Now I have to recall the other 4 top books.....

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### **Christin Lee says**

possibly not an exaggeration to say that my writing life will be divided into the time before I read this book and after.

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### **Richard says**

Requires some skimming, but still, I would have parts of this book tattooed on my body.

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### **Alisu' says**

"Sa pictezi pe pinze de paianjen."

"Nu sintem fericiti: fericirea noastra este doar tacerea nefericirii."

"Reveria este clarul de luna al gindirii."

"Luna, medalion la gitul noptii."

"Ploaia aseza pe jos oglinzi pentru stele."

"Cind ma gindesc la toate cartile pe care mai trebuie sa le citesc, am certitudinea ca mai sint inca fericit."

"Felinarul: o luminare in inchisoare."

"Dupa o reverie pe banca, sa adormi cu ochii plini de stele."

"O ploaie amestecata cu picuri de pian."

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### **Ioana Dragos says**

It is impossible not to slowly fall in love with Renard and his style of writing throughout the entire journey through the selections from his journal. While most phrases are not connected to each other, thus making the work lack continuity in some parts of the book, the aphorisms themselves are simply splendid and often surprising. To see the world through Renard's eyes must be a delight. But the journal is much more than that; it covers parts of introspection regarding his work as a writer in comparison to his (possibly) aspirations or the work of contemporaries and authors he deeply admires ( Victor Hugo to name one), his childhood with a focus on the relationship with his mother, his father's suicide, his family life and love for his wife, but also his beliefs, doubts, struggles at times ( especially towards the end, but never in a distasteful way).

There is a quote from his journal which says " It must be exasperating not to be Victor Hugo" to which I say: It must be exasperating not to be Jules Renard.

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### **A. Khare says**

it will be foolish to express opinions about this book.

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### **Troy Rutman says**

Peace in a paperback

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## Terence says

It's not Jules Renard that I'm giving two stars to in this review but to the editors/translators who put this compilation from his *Journal* together. The biggest complaint I have is the book's lack of context. There's only the sketchiest of biographies in the introduction. From this book you would have only the merest hints about Renard's decidedly dysfunctional family, or the circle he ran with in Paris, or his career as a politician in Chiry (a rural French village). The nuggets you can extrapolate are frustratingly incomplete. And the stage-setting paragraphs at the beginning of each year are laughable. Examples: "1897 – Jules Renard began his Journal this year, at the age of twenty-three," or "1910 – By the end of February, severe worsening of JR's condition. May 22: death of JR in Paris of arteriosclerosis. Burial in Chiry."

Bogan writes in the Preface, "Renard's *Journal*, from its beginning, shows a young writer who is consciously moving away from early mistakes, whose goal is cleanliness of style and precision of language" (p. 10). This may be true but one wouldn't get that impression from the fragments reproduced here. She also writes, "Renard's passion for factual truth and stylistic exactitude...remained central to his work throughout his career" and "(t)hroughout life...had been distorted by literature. He applied himself to correct that distortion...by an analysis based on sympathy, warmth, and tenderness" (p. 11). Again, the editors may be correct but the always-too-short selections translated here give only the faintest glimmer of that sensibility. In fact, from the extracts concerning the deaths of his father, brother and mother, one could develop exactly the opposite opinion.

And then there's the problem that a reader in 2009 (especially an English-language one), unless they're very exceptional, has little familiarity with the late-19th century French artistic scene, and the editors give us no help in this matter. Thus, names appear out of nowhere – some familiar enough (Rostand, Sarah Bernhardt), others less so (Goncourt, Guitry, Antoine). What's worse, the "unknowns" of Renard's life (his servants, family and friends) make cameos, disappear for long stretches and then pop back up in the author's life. For example, it takes several entries to realize that "Philippe" and "Ragotte" are the couple who maintains Renard's country estate, La Gloriette.

That said, the glimpses we do get of Renard as a writer, humanist and observer are interesting enough that I want to find a more complete translation of the *Journal* and perhaps read other examples of his writing.

There are pithy, little observations that become fewer and fewer as they years go by – "At twenty, one thinks profoundly and badly"; "He is deaf in the left ear; he does not hear on the side of the heart"; or "The fear of boredom is the only excuse for working" (pp. 54-5). As I've been emphasizing, it's a bit hard to follow the evolution but Renard's insights become deeper and more nuanced, and he begins to articulate his feelings without relying on the words of others. By the 1900s, Renard is confident enough to put his thoughts into his own words.

In 1906, at the age of 42, Renard produced an entry that reflected on what he had accomplished in his life. A subject of particular pertinence as I approach that benchmark this year (2009). Some of the more interesting (or depressing) observations:

*"Forty-two years old. What have I achieved? Almost nothing, and already I am no longer achieving anything at all....*

*"Am I a better man? Not much. I have not the energy to do wrong....*

*"Out of forty-two years, I have spent eighteen with Marinette (his wife). I have become incapable of hurting her, but am I capable of any effort to do her good?....*

*“I still do certain good things pretty well: sleeping, eating, daydreaming....  
“On the whole, I don’t care about women. Now and then, a romantic dream or so....  
“There is nothing I desire ardently: I’d have to struggle too hard to get it....  
“Nowadays, I am afraid of action itself, or, rather, I have acquired a taste for inaction....”*

Observations on hunting:

*“It is dangerous to carry a gun. You think it doesn’t kill. I shoot, not in order to kill the lark, but to see what will happen. I come near. It is lying on its belly; its claws flutter, its beak opens and closes, yawns open: the tiny scissors are cutting blood.  
“Lark, may you become the subtlest of my thoughts and the dearest of my regrets!  
“It died for the others.  
“I have torn up my permit and hung my rifle on a nail”*

and

*“Advice to hunters: to go out some time without their gun and walk through the fields where they have killed. The magpie becomes familiar. The partridges sit still until one comes quite near. The prunelles wait to be picked, and the juicy little wild pear.  
“The ox stops and looks around, and the ox that follows him licks his hindquarters with a lazy tongue.  
“The meadow draws to itself the entire green blanket.  
“And one has not murdered: that at least is something.”*

A few random thoughts:

*“I am in no great hurry to see the society of the future: ours is helpful to writers. By its absurdities, its injustices, its vices, its stupidities, it feeds a writer’s observation. The better men will become, the more colorless man will be”*

(p. 249);

*“Imagine life without death. Every day, you would try to kill yourself out of despair”*

(p. 234);

and (one of my favorites)

*“‘I have no religion,’ says Borneau, ‘but I respect the religion of others. Religion is sacred.’ Why this privilege, this immunity?... A believer creates God in his own image; if he is ugly, his*

*God will be morally ugly. Why should moral ugliness be respectable?"*

(Apropos of this sentiment, I would recommend Tanith Lee's "Paid Piper," which traces a god's descent into such a condition.)

And, finally, returning to my theme of incompleteness, there's the frustrating instance of the lack of context about Renard's marriage. Apparently, he was blessed with a truly happy marriage, the clearest indication being the following passage: "*When I was ten years old I didn't dream. Or, rather, I wanted to be happy day by day, no matter how. It is no secret that, for twenty years I have had the best of wives. My other dreams have never come true. No doubt it would be better not to say it, but it is thanks to her that, now and then, it has seemed to me that my other dreams might also be coming true*" (p. 294).

On the whole, the reader would have been better served with a more complete and more fully annotated translation. As it stands, a better title for this book would be "The Witty Observations of Jules Renard, Without Context or Deeper Meaning."

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### **Don says**

The book that inspired Maugham to write *The Writer's Notebook*. Fantastic read.

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### **Susan says**

A nineteenth century French writer observes and takes notes on: writing, stage productions, encounters with famous people of the age (Sarah Bernhardt, Guy de Maupassant, Edmond Rostand), his family, life in Paris, life in the country, literature, and nature. This 300 page selection, which is excerpted from a much longer work, covers a period of years (1887-1910), so the selection also works as an informal autobiography where we slowly get to know the man and his thoughts.

"She has a very mean way of being kind."

"The true artist will write in, as it were, small leaps, on a hundred subjects that surge unawares into his mind. In this way, nothing is forced. Everything has an unwilled, natural charm. One does not provoke: one waits."

"Winter: A pale smoke in the diffused pallor of cold air."

"I understand life less and less, and love it more and more."

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### **Anna says**

French authors are amazing. Compared to the other author notebooks I've read so far, the French authors (Renard, Camus, Joubert) have been the most lovely and interesting.

Jules Renard was easy to read and incredibly talented. I had sticky notes all over my copy to refer to so many

of his beautiful notes and aphorisms. I wonder if any of his works have been translated into English.

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## Cristina Boncea says

Jules Renard e un naturalist. Acum în?eleg de unde s-au inspirat autorii români clasici ?i de ce înv??toarea mea din I-IV tot insista pe diferite lucr?ri semnate de autori francezi, precum "Morcovea??".

Acest jurnal, de care am observat c? s-au plâns chiar c?iva oameni, este structurat mai degrab? pe scurte idei ?i noti?e, în locul unor confesiuni propriu-zise, cum ar fi fost de a?teptat. Mie una mi-a pl?cut toate mult aceast? idee a celor care au lucrat pentru realizarea edi?iei de la Nemira ?i mi s-a p?rut c? a fost mult mai u?or de citit, astfel, cartea. Sunt mai mult ca sigur? c? dac? m? for?am un pic ?i citemai multe de un an pe zi, a? fi terminat multe mai repede de citit - aproape, jurnalul se întinde din anul 1887 pân? în 1910, anul mor?ii autorului. Fiind o carte non fictiv?, voi presupune c? oamenii ?tiu deja cum a sfâr?it aceast om al literaturii, a?a c? nu poate fi vorba despre spoilere, cum ar fi fost pentru o carte de fic?iune.

Cel mai frapant lucru mi s-a p?rut tocmai intuirea proprietiei mor?i, chiar cu c?iva ani înainte ca Renard s? afle faptul c? era bolnav cu inima. Aceasta moare la 46 de ani iar însemn?rile din jurnal se opresc cu o lun? înaintea acestui eveniment, a?a c? nu pot oferi date exacte cu privire la înmormântare ?a.m.d. Ideea e c? Renard suferea ve?nic de b?trâne?e, înc? de la vârsta de treizeci de ani, de?i el ne declar? faptul c? diferen?a dintre aceste perioade (tinere?e, b?trâne?e) e o minciun? ?i c? nu ?tii cu adev?rat mai multe lucruri la patruzeci de ani decât la dou?zeci, sau cel pu?in, c? tocmai în asta const? tinere?ea; pu?in contradictoriu, nu-i a?a?

Am început recenzia prin a-l numi naturalist, curent în care se autoîncadreaz? autorul de mai multe ori pe parcursul însemn?rilor sale. O foarte mare parte a Jurnalului este ocupat? de descrieri ale naturii ?i aprecierea scriitorului francez pentru elementele men?ionate. O alt? mare parte este ocupat? de critic? ?i ironie cu privire la colegii s?i de breasl?, având o mare admira?ie pentru Victor Hugo ?i fiind plin de antipatie pentru Oscar Wilde. Pe parcursul anilor, Jules î?i repro?ează? lenea, ce poate fi mai degrab? considerat? o depresie rezultat? din moartea tat?lui ?i al fratelui s?u, Maurice, cât ?i a diferitor prieteni iar la final, a mamei sale. Autorul a dus o via?? s?r?c?cioas?, împreun? cu so?ia sa Marinette ?i cei doi copii ai lor; iubirea pe care i-o nutrea so?iei sale a fost plin? de loialitate a?a c? nu au existat probleme pe acest plan în noti?ele sale. Frustrarea autorului este acest repro? despre care v? spuneam mai devreme, faptul c? nu e în stare s? mai scrie ceva cel pu?in la fel de bun ca "Morcovea??" ?i moare renun?ând de tot la încercarea de a face acest lucru. În Jurnal ne este prezentat? de asemenea ?i atmosfera din lumea literar? ?i în general din Parisul de la începutul secolului XX, la fel de plin? de fast, parveni?i ?i oameni vanito?i pe cât m? a?teptam. Pe de alt? parte, pe parcursul vie?ii sale Jules Renard a fost numit primar la Chitry, localitate unde se retr?gea deseori pentru a se sim?i ca acas?, în mediul rural.

Am g?sit foarte multe citate demne de memorat printre aceste noti?e scurte ?i mi-am putut crea o imagine de ansamblu foarte bun? asupra acestui autor, cât ?i a mai multor scrieri fran?uze?ti din perioada aceea. Renard a fost genul de autor c?ruia nu i-a pl?cut ling?eala ?i acesta a fost probabil motivul pentru care nu a fost extraordinar de apreciat în perioada în care a tr?it. Am uitat s? men?ionez c? eu nu am citit nimic din ce a scris înainte de a pune mâna pe acest Jurnal îns? ceva îmi spune c? e probabil cununa muncii sale ?i poate chiar cea mai relevant? dintre scrieri, c?ci este de asemenea ?i o mini lec?ie de istorie. De asemenea, îl g?sesc pe Renard ?i g?ndirea lui (sus?in?tor al feminismului, chiar) foarte actual ?i m? bucur c? am avut ocazia s? tr?iesc în mintea sa pentru câteva zile.

Din peste cele 550 de pagini mai pot scoate faptul că valorile după care îi-a trăit viața acest om nu erau apreciate de societatea în care trăia iar acesta ar putea fi unul dintre motivele pentru care Renard nu a avut foarte mulți prieteni apropiati sau oameni pe care să-i simpatizeze; asta și că caracterul său pur în mizantropic care îi-l fac instant mai simpatic nou să-i ne ajută să împătrăască cu temerile și slăbiciunile lui.

Recomand cartea astăzi tuturor celor care sunt pasionați de mărturii sincere provenite de la mari oameni ai lumii și care, la fel ca mine, caută să fie iluminați de gândiri mai avansate, din care pot extrage idei pe care să le aplică în viața de zi cu zi.

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### **Caroline says**

This selection from Jules Renard's journals is beautiful in itself, but also an invitation to read the full journals and some of his other works as well. He was a man whose whole life, to judge from these pages, was lived in reaction to his harridan of a mother. One of his best known works is *Poil de Carotte*, a 'fiction' about his life as a boy in the small town where they lived. His father, the mayor, solved the harridan problem by ceasing to speak to his wife--literally and absolutely--early in the marriage; their son had no such tool at his disposal. Yet what did Renard do as a man? Buy a small house in the same small town (or nearby?) and take his family there to live every summer under the constant watch of his mother. Very strange.

In part his return to the country is due to a profound love of nature. His *Nature Stories* are snippets of life that give various animals and insects a moment of close attention--their quotidian actions become poetic as he gives the animals full worth in creation.

Equally fascinating is his attitude toward peasants and servants. Nowhere else have I read such an honest and inclusive portrayal of actually living with servants in one's house, their moving in and out of the rooms and commenting on one's life and their lives. Hiring them, disciplining, firing, watching their slow decline and death. For Renard, some are comical adolescents, others pathetic declining dependents. He may describe living in close proximity with them, but for him they are also a different species; he speaks about peasants as a species somewhere between the animals in *Nature Stories* and the educated humans he sees as equals.

But Renard was also un homme de lettres complet in Paris. He was fully engaged in the theater, turning his novels into plays and writing other plays as original works. Many of the entries are about the perils of getting a play into shape on paper and on stage. Sarah Bernhardt and many others pepper the entries: Rostand, Mallarme, Daudet, Goncourt.

Finally there are the epigrams. This is a book to open again and again for a thought to carry about for the day, or to plunder for quotes.

For my Goodreads companions:

'You have read everything, but they have read a book you ought to read, that makes them superior, and annuls all you have read.'

[early in his career] 'The friendship of a talented man of letters would be a great benefaction. It is a pity that those whose good graces we long for are always dead.'

'A little premonitory shiver that comes when a beautiful sentence is about to take shape.'

'My style, full of tours de force that no one notices.'

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