

12-8-1891

## To Harry de Forest Smith - December 8, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Cambridge, Mass<sup>a</sup>, Dec<sup>b</sup> 8—1891.

My Dear Smith,--

I suppose about this time you are wondering where in the devil my letter is; and in view of this state of things I will explain. Last Sunday I was (to use a worldly expression) sick enough to kill. I did nothing but lie around my room and feel blue and nasty. If I had written a letter I should probably put the pessimism of our friend Omar Khayyam completely in the shade; so I concluded to let it go till I was in a better humor. I trust I am now and will try to make up for my failure to keep up the agreement.

This is the first opportunity this evening I have had a chance to write though I have been intending to do so since I came out of Memorial from dinner at six o'clock. As soon as I got settled for a ruminative smoke in walked Mr. H.A. Cutler, business manager of the "Advocate," and a rattling good fellow. He had the proof of my latest poetical (?) effusion,--a rondeau entitled "In Harvard 5."<sup>1</sup> The subject is Shakespeare and you will see it in due time. I have not sent the last number containing the "Villanelle of Change" as I was hoping to send you a copy of the Monthly with one

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of my productions; but in this my hopes were blasted. After Cutler left, my cousins from Cambridgeport<sup>2</sup> came and staid till nine o'clock. Then came a knock at the door; and at my yell of "eCome!"<sup>c</sup> in stepped Robert Morss Eliott, perhaps the leading spirit of Harvard outside of athletics. Of course Capt<sup>d</sup> Trafford<sup>3</sup> & his crew are with the immortals. ~~EH~~ Eliott is a Senior and in many respects a remarkable man. Without any "gushing" I actually felt honored to receive a call from him, being a Special and a first year man at that. He is editor in chief of the Monthly and brought back the manuscript of my son-

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<sup>a</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>b</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>c</sup> The capital is written directly over the lower-case "c" in the holograph. WA has a single closing quotation mark.

<sup>d</sup> WA adds a period here.

net on Thomas Hood.<sup>4</sup> At a meeting of the board of editors it was weighed in the balance and found wanting. (Perhaps I have some foolish opinions of my own, but they are of no value in this case.) We talked of college papers and kindred matters for about half an hour, when he left with a request for another contribution—which I have decided to to [to=not?] make—and an urgent request to call on him. If I succeed in getting in with such fellows as that, college life will prove most agreeable. I think the best way to do it will be to keep silent on the matter of contributions. I may change my mind but these are my feel-

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ings at present. I was sailing along in such elegant shape, putting whatever I chose into the Advocate, that I must confess this declination put a slight "damper" on me; but Mr. ~~Lovet~~ Lovett (I wrote Eliott before by mistake—must have been thinking of the President.<sup>5</sup>)—showed himself to be such a gentleman and "white man" that I could not feel offended. If I am a little foxy I may get in with the whole gang, which will be rather more pleasant than my present situation.<sup>6</sup> Of course I have found some good fellows—but you will understand precisely what I mean. I will send you the Advocate with Villanelle to-morrow with this letter. Perhaps I have tired you with talk of my own affairs, but you know I am prone to enter into confidence with now and then a fellow-spirit. Of course I need not ask you not to mention anything that I have written.

Our blue books in French came due to-day, and as I was badly prepared I shall get a low mark. But will work up in the review and ought not to get into trouble. The courses here in elementary French are conducted in a rather peculiar manner, and in my own poor opinion call for much unnecessary work on the part of the student; but I foresee good results in the future if I half do myself justice. My rank on the last

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blue-book was 9—scale same as G.H.S. That was not bad, but quite a number got 10. The exams go by letters—A-B-C etc. I have not yet heard from my English 9

exams. <sup>e</sup>At last I am through with that most estimable lady, Jane Austen. Next week we go to work on the essayists—Hazlitt first, then Lamb and Leigh Hunt. When DeQuincey &<sup>f</sup> Carlyle come, there will be trouble. They are two writers of whom I am absolutely ignorant. I have read Sartor Resartus, but should hate to be called upon to write a review of it.

I am afraid that this letter will prove rather dry picking. I am sure it would to anyone but you, and feel a little guilty as it is. <sup>g</sup>Rec'd a letter from Gledhill to day. He is going on swimmingly and is apparently one of the "big guns" of St. L. University. That is one advantage, as I have said before, of a small college. For the leaders it is clover, but for the others it cannot be so pleasant if they are at all sensitive. Here at Harvard there is less of the real college spirit, but there is more equality. I have been treated first rate by everyone I have seen and have tried to do the same myself. Lovett said that my sonnet was about the first contribution on record by a first year man to the Monthly. I have an idea that that fact was instrumental in its restoration to its "inventor."

<sup>h</sup>I have been writing for three quarters of an hour, and begin to feel sleepy. Will have a little smoke and turn in. Wish you were here with me.

Sincerely

Robinson

HCL US, 44-47.

#### NOTES

1. Published in *The Harvard Advocate* LII, No. 6 (December 11, 1891), 85.
2. Daughters of EAR's uncle Edward Proby Fox, who later helped make arrangements for the printing of TNB.
3. Bernard Walton Trafford (1871 - ), captain of the Harvard Crimson football team for the 1891-92 seasons. Harvard had had an excellent season in 1891, winning every game except the last (against Yale). See statistics at <http://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/harvard/1891-schedule.html> (accessed March 18, 2017). (SL)
- 4.<sup>i</sup> Later published in *The Globe*, VI (February 1896), 91.
5. Charles William Eliot (1834-1926) was president of Harvard from 1869 until 1909. (SL)
- 6.<sup>j</sup> EAR never did get in with the *literati* of *The Harvard Monthly*. Robert Morss Lovett later went

<sup>e</sup> WA omits this space.

<sup>f</sup> WA has "and".

<sup>g</sup> WA omits this space.

<sup>h</sup> The rest of this letter, including the valediction, is written vertically in the left margin.

<sup>i</sup> In WA's manuscript, this is note 3.

on to a distinguished career of teaching at the University of Chicago. When apprised of this letter of EAR to Smith, Lovett wrote: ". . . I have no recollection of the incident, i.e., my call on Robinson, but I'm glad I did. I always thought that we treated him badly at Harvard. Moody was abroad the year 1892-1893 which is the time when I remember Robinson's contributions to the Monthly being rejected. In 1891-'92 Moody was active on the board with special reference to poetry, and must have passed on E.A.R.'s poem." [Letter to Wallace L. Anderson, January 1, 1948.]

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<sup>j</sup> In WA's manuscript, this is note 4.