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To Harry de Forest Smith - December 13, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Harvard University,
Cambridge, Mass. Dec 13 '91

My Dear Smith,

This time I will endeavor to be prompt in my weekly letter and give you a page or two of my usual drool so that it may reach you the first of the week. I also hope to hear from you, as usual. Your letters form no inconsiderable item in my college existence. A letter from a human being who realizes the fact that there is some breadth to human sympathy, and that all men are in a way themselves, is a matter not to be disregarded. I think you give me much credit when you tell me that I know a different Smith from that popularly regarded as "Smithy"--at least that was the former title you bore. At present you are Mr. Smith, of Rockland, and as such I send you greeting. By your permission, or I suppose

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more properly "with your permission", I shall make you a Christmas present in the form of Wm^a Hazlitt's essays. Some of them will please you—if they don't you need not read them. You may be amused at my freedom in this announcement, but you must remember that Robinson is writing and Robinson sometimes says strange things. I think that the Annex Girl has some such an idea. I have not seen her since and do not expect to.

Last night I went to the "Globe" with Barnard¹ to see Agnes Huntington in "Captain Thérèse."² Agnes was well enough but the opera was painful in its vacuity, if I may use the word. We left at the end of the second act, and repaired to Herr Engelhart's beer shop where [we] spent the remainder of the evening quite pleasantly and I think profitably. If you

^a WA adds a period here.

could come up here for a week or so this spring I should be more than happy; and I think you would manage to enjoy yourself too. Harvard University is a great place to

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set a man's thoughts going. Yesterday I ~~watched~~ watched two able-bodied men spreading fragrant New England dung on campus. I began to wonder if they were not deriving quite as much benefit from Harvard as some its more scholarly inmates. I think they were, and I have an idea that I felt a kind of envy for their lot. There is a kind of poetry in scattering dung—if the dung is good—that must needs awaken a fine sentiment in the mind of a man of any imagination. The excrement gives the increment to the emerald grass, etc., and when the spring zephyrs begin to blow the transformation becomes apparent. It is great stuff, and the faculty are obviously poets. They use no prepared fertilizer whatever, but cling to the mushy manner of our, and their, ancestors. And shades of Cincinnatus, doesn't it stink! The odor made me homesick I think; never before have

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I realized what a real countryman^b I am. No man of feeling can smell the odors of his native land two hundred miles from home without experiencing a tender surge of emotion within his breast. In the play of "Alabama"³ just closed at the Tremont Theatre,⁴ there is an artificial odor of magnolia raised by burning something or other. If it affects the Southern students wonderfully. So you see that it is only a natural consequence that the frank sincerity of the odor I have mentioned should turn my thoughts towards Maine. There is no counterfeit about it.

^b WA has "contryman".

Well perhaps I have gone far enough with this subject. If I keep on the letter will smell so that you will not dare to open it. If it were earlier I would go out and get a nip of the substance and mail it to you; but you might not appreciate it, so I will not.

I cannot tell you the author of that quotation, though the expression "infinite manslaughter"⁵ sounds familiar to me. Will see you before long--
cVale, for a time,
Robinson.

HCL US, 47-48.

NOTES

1. Leonard Barnard from Gardiner was studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
2. "The Globe Theatre," Washington Street near Essex Street in Boston, where Agnes Huntington and her opera company, under the direction of Marcus R. Mayer and Ben Sterns presented Robert Planquette's latest successful opera, *Captain Therese*, with a company of seventy. {The Globe burned down in 1894.}
3. By Augustus Thomas. Concerned with the reconciliation of the North and the South, *Alabama* became an immediate success from the time of its first production at Madison Square Theatre in New York on April 1, 1891.
4. The Tremont was established in 1889 at 176 Tremont Street. (SL)
5. Milton, *Paradise Lost*: "To overcome in battle, and subdue/ Nations, and bring home spoils with *infinite/ Manslaughter*, shall be held the highest pitch of human glory. . . ." (11.691-93 emphasis added) (SL)

^c WA starts the valediction on the next line.