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To Harry de Forest Smith - December 4, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

1716 Cambridge St.
Dec^a 4 - '92

My dear Smith,

Here it is Monday again
and now before the week goes on any
farther I will write you something^b to
let you know that I am still here and
rather anxious to get back to Gardiner.
I am not feeling very lively to day
as I worked last night until about one
o'clock and then lay awake until four.
That kind of thing takes the ambition from
a man about as quickly as anything I know.

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The principle things I have to trouble
me just now are a midyear examination
in Logic to come sometime and a thesis
on the British Periodical Essayists (which
I think I have mentioned) to come just
after Newyears^c. Yesterday I took out
John Dunton's "Life and Errors" and the sup-
plement to his "Athenian Oracle" to
consult for the groundwork of the thing I
expect to write. John Dunton was the
founder of the so-called "Athenian Society"
which consisted chiefly of himself, and pro-
fessed to answer all questions in its power
through the agency of the "Mercury".¹ This
seems to be the original form of that
class of literature so well known in the
Spectator² etc.--^dSome of the propositions

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and answers are, to say the least, curious.
For example take the following:
Quest:--

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA has "comething"—doubtless a simple typo.

^c WA omits the underline.

^d WA omits the dash.

"Why does a Bladder full of Wind, thrust by force under the Water, ascend suddenly on the top thereof?"

Answer.--"Because the Air, or Wind, wherewith it is filled, returns to its natural place which is above the Water."

Question.

"Why does a Dog, of all other Animals, remain attached to the Bitch after Copulation, being not easily to be separated?"

Answer.

"Alexander Aphroditius³ saith, Prob. 75.^e it has is because the Bitch ^ the Passages of Nature very strait; and the Yard of the Dog swelling within by the ebullition of the spirits, it is difficult after Copulation to withdraw it."

This book was printed about 1700 and was presented to the library in 1837. I find by

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the slip on the inside back cover that it has been taken out by two persons ~~since~~ besides myself since Dec^f 13, 1881. You see there is not a great call for Mr^g Dunton's^h work, though I will say that his "Life and Errors" is stamped with a few more dates. An incidental phrase in one of Mr. Gates' lectures put me on to them. I am not exactly discouraged over this thesis but somewhat uneasy. If I had a chance for a general "spew" like my last years paper on Pendennis, I should not be troubled. But then I think

in

I shall get through it ^ someway.--Dontⁱ know exactly when I shall go home but probably somewhere about the 23d. Shall be glad to see you once more and have a pipe with you. I am smoking "Catac" right along now—find that a light tobacco goes better in the long run.

^e WA reads a comma here.

^f WA adds a period here.

^g WA adds a period here.

^h WA reads "Dunton's".

ⁱ WA reads "Don't".

Yours &cj.
Robinson.

HCL US, 77-78.

NOTES

1. John Dunton (1659-1733) was an English writer and founder/editor of the first of the British periodicals, *The Athenian Mercury* (1691-1697). The *Mercury* was especially innovative in that it featured a section where readers' questions on various subjects were answered by the members of the Athenian Society. *Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705) was his autobiography, its full title being *The life and errors of John Dunton: late citizen of London; written by himself in solitude. With an idea of a new life; wherein is shewn how he'd think, speak, and act, might he live over his days again.* (SL)
2. One of the major British periodicals, established in 1828. (SL)
3. Or Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200 C.E.), an important ancient Greek commentator on Aristotle. (SL)

^j WA reads "etc".