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To Harry de Forest Smith - February 27, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
CAMBRIDGE.

Feb^a 27 – '93

My dear Smith

My time was pretty well taken up Sunday, and this is the first chance I have had to day^b to write you a letter. It is now about 11 P.M. and I will admit that I am a trifle sleepy, so you must excuse me, if I fail to be interesting. After dinner I worked for an hour on a French composition and then went to Mr. Black's lecture on Daniel DeFoe. It was excellent like all of his lectures, though as I have just been over the ground in English ⁷ I did not learn a great deal. When I came home I had a ~~sk~~ smoke and read some of Matthew Arnold's poetry. Now I am trying to write something to you. I know you will not object to the time spent with the

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pipe and the poetry, if I did indulge in them at the expense of your letter. I fancy it makes no great difference in the quality, as my mind has not been particularly brilliant at any time to day^c.

Friday afternoon I cut Prof^d Royce's lecture on Neural Activity and went to a symphony concert in town. I think I got more from the concert than I ever did from one of the lectures, and intend to repeat the deed next Friday. I wish you were here to go with me. Mendehllsson's "Fingals^e Cave" overture¹ is enough to render a man indifferent to all worldly woes and blasted hopes while it lasts, which is some twenty minutes, I should say. To-day, however, I went to his lecture and found him rather more entertaining than usual. He must be great in his own field.

Saturday evening I went to the Museum² with Schuman to see "Shore Acres". It is a great

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA has "to-day".

^c WA has "to-day".

^d WA adds a period here.

^e WA has "Fingal's".

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piece of work, filled with human interest. The scene is at Frenchman's Bay, Maine, and the characters are Maine Yankees—by far the best stage Yankees that I have ever seen. There is a vein of pathos running through the whole thing, and the best of it is—it never gets ridiculous. There is, in reality, no "horse-play", and if you have ever seen Alvin Joslyn³ and like caricatures, you will realize what that means. Mr^f Hearn is an artist, both as playwright and actor.⁴

The other day I sent you the Nation (which I hope you have got more from than I did) and a book of Kipling's poems. I would have sent them before, but I didn't. That is about all the excuse I have to make, and I think it is a pretty

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good one.--In German we have begun Freytags^g Soll und Haben (Debit & Credit)⁵ and I find it pretty stiff reading. It is a great novel, though, and there is some satisfaction in knowing it. When a man knows he is reading a masterpiece he can go to work with better courage. If you ever feel that you would like to amuse yourself with a ~~fr~~ French or German novel, let me know and I will get you anything you want at a very low price. They are all bound in paper and range from thirty to ninety cents a volume—according to the edition.

Well, I think the best thing for me to do will be to stop and go to bed. To morrow^h morning I have Fine Arts and French. The contrast between ~~æ~~Nortonⁱ and Bruhn is painful, but I have to stand it.

Sincerely,
R.

HCL *US*, 87-89.

^f WA adds a period here.

^g WA has "Freytag's".

^h WA read's "to-morrow".

ⁱ The correction is written directly over the canceled letters.

NOTES

1. Also known as *The Hebrides*, Op. 26 (1830), a concert overture by the German Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847). (SL)
2. The Boston theater. See notes for January 18, 1892 and March 13, 1892. (SL)
3. From *The A to Z of American Theater: Modernism* (entry for Davis, Charles Lindsay [1848?-1900]): "The actor known as Charles "Jumbo" Davis was born in Baltimore, Maryland. *Alvin Joslyn* (1882), the vehicle he wrote for himself, about a rube in the big city, became a popular piece in middle America and made Davis a fortune, which he used to build the Alvin Theatre in Pittsburgh" (Fisher and Londré 128). A good idea of the character of this play can be gleaned from an ad from 1885 that promises "180 Laughs in 180 Minutes" (see ad in "additional files" for this letter). (SL)
- 4.^j *Shore Acres* by James A. Herne (1839-1901) was one of the most popular and successful plays of the period. After a somewhat mixed and short run in Chicago in 1892, it opened for what was to have been a two-week stay at the Boston Museum in February 1893; it ran for one hundred and thirteen performances. The play is essentially a character study, with Herne himself in the leading role of "Uncle Nat" Berry.
5. *Soll und Haben*, a realist novel by Gustav Freytag (1816-1895). Published in 1855, it was immensely popular throughout Europe. In it, Freytag celebrated the German people, particularly the *bourgeoisie*, at the expense of the Poles and Jews. (SL)

^j This is WA's note 1.