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To Harry de Forest Smith - February 4, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Feb. 4 – '94

My dear Smith,

I find that I misjudged things in telling you that I should have my study of "the selfishness of self-denial" finished by to-day. The fact is it is only a little over half done, but I think I see my way out of it. I have to put a good deal in a few words and there is a great danger of a general effect of "roughness". When the thing is smoothed out and copied it will be the best^a piece of work I have done yet, which, I suppose, is not saying a great deal. It is "No^b 4" in my recent ambitious series, and, as I said in my last, a little too complex for a short sketch in the hands of a novice. I am anxious to read it to you and get your candid opinion of its merits or faults, as the case may be. My next work will be in a lighter vein—the sketch of a philosophical tramp ("Anxious Hendricks," probably) looking for rest.¹ Merely an experiment in a new field.—Forgive me for saying so much about myself in this and my past letters, but you see what a hold the scheme has upon me. If it fails totally, I think I shall get drunk and then hunt for a "job". "Let the dream go!" sings² the poet. Good advice.^c perhaps, but like all good advice, hard to follow.

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I have only worked five or six hours during the past week. I had an itch for reading and tired my eyes in consequence. I finished "Toute une Jeunesse"^d by Coppée, and [have] done³ a lot of browsing through various books of poems and essays. To-^e morrow I hope to settle down in earnest and bring something to pass before next^f Sunday. When the five sketches are all finished up to the best of my ability, I intend to copy them on the machine, and start them somewhere. The expectation^g of a returned manuscript is better than no excitement at all. I have been thinking up a little scheme for the summer, but shall make no promises, even if it is agreeable to you. I think you first suggested something^h

^a WA has "pest".

^b WA adds a period here.

^c WA has a comma here. Read as a comma.

^d This is the last word of the previous line.

^e These are the last words of the previous line.

^f This is the last word of the previous line.

^g This is the last word of the previous line.

^h This is the last word of the previous line.

of the kind. My scheme is to mak[e] a metrical translation of the Antigone. You might find pleasure and profit in writing out a correct ~~prose~~ prose version of the play, keeping the Greek spirit as much as possible, and in guiding me in the choice of words and suggestions as to the classical effect of my verses.

Myⁱ

choice would be to make it in the main unrhymed depending upon sonority and^j

picturesqueness for the effect. If the thing should prove anything like a success we might have a small edition printed at the cost of an ordinary indulgence in the world's^k pleasures.⁴ A title page something like this would not be bad: "The Antigone of Sophocles: A Translation by Harry de Forest Smith and Edwin Arlington Robinson.—An edition of fifty copies printed for private circulation. Gardiner, Maine. REPORTER-JOURNAL JOB PRESS (!) MDCCCXCIV."

This will probably end up like the stone house on the hill,⁵ but we have a right to build castles in Spain or wherever we please. This is a kind of a Spanish Castle in Greece. I wonder if the shade of Sophocles is grinning over my shoulder as it [=I] write this? If he is, I suppose he knows how the

-3-

thing is coming out. The one great objection to this performance is the time it would take. The question is, would the time be well spent? Somehow all my schemes involve the spending of money instead of the making of it. If time is money,^l

I make way with a fortune every week. I suppose I shall keep on doing this and live from hand to mouth all the days of my life. Sometimes the realization of my non-success thus far in my life makes me totally discouraged for days at a^m

time. Then it clears away and I am full of hope again. The things that I enjoy the most—no matter how much labor they may require are the things that keepⁿ

me from getting on in the world, as the practical men say. You, who are making a living, cannot imagine how cutting it is for a man of twenty-four to depend upon^o

his mother for every cent he has and every mouthful he swallows. But I won't dwell^p

longer upon this,--I begin to hear the dog in the manger.

I began my French lessons with Labiche & Martin's ~~œ~~ comedy "La

ⁱ This is the last word of the previous line.

^j This is the last word of the previous line.

^k WA has "world's".

^l This is the last word of the previous line.

^m This is the last word of the previous line.

ⁿ This is the last word of the previous line.

^o This is the last word of the previous line.

^p This is the last word of the previous line.

Poudre aux^q
Yeux."^{6r} This business will give me considerable pleasure, and be a good thing
from an^s
educational point of view. A thorough review of the elements of the language
will be a^t
good thing for me.

Well, my fingers are getting stiff, and my writing correspondingly illegible;
so^u

I will stop here and await your opinion of the "Antigone" business. I shall probably be the one to throw up the sponge, but still it is worth thinking over. Hoping for a letter to-morrow, I remain.^v

Yours sincerely.^w
E.A.R.^x

HCL US, 124-126.

NOTES

1. This was perhaps an early attempt to explore a subject that was later to take shape as *Captain Craig*. (SL)
- 2.^y US reads "says."
3. US reads "did."
4. The translation was never published. The manuscript was unwittingly destroyed by his nieces playing with it. See EAR's letter to Smith, September 13, 1916.
5. A pipe-dream they had of building a stone refuge in the "bower."
6. 1861. (SL)

^q These are the last words of the previous line.

^r WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^s These are the last words of the previous line.

^t These are the last words of the previous line.

^u This is the last word of the previous line.

^v WA has a comma here.

^w WA has a comma here.

^x WA omits the underline.

^y Notes 2 through 5 are WA's notes 1 through 4, respectively.