3-22-1891

To Harry de Forest Smith - March 22, 1891

Edwin Arlington Robinson

TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Me., March 22, 1891.

My Dear Smith, -

It is Sunday and raining like like {sic} ten thousand devils; I don't seem to feel in the mood for reading, so I will take this opportunity and strike off something in reply to your last letter.

Did I say anything in my last epistle about {W}illiam Black' s latest novel, "StandFast, Craig-Royston"?[1] I do not remember of mentioning it, so will say a few words now at the risk of repetition. The book is great in a small way- that is, the author has made a work of art of a rather tame threadbare story: The same old anguish and lossof useful flesh and strength; the same young man and the same - no, I can hardly say the same young woman, for in many welcome respects she is an exception to the general run of frowzy confectionary heroines. Mr. Black devotes very little space in this book to the usual amplexo-osculatory demonstrations so necessary to the mushroom novelist of to-day, but he gives us all that we can reasonably demand of the most amorous lugubriousness. (I do not know whether there is such a word as "lugubriousness" in the dictionary or not, but it seems to convey the meaning.) But the most attractive character in the story- from a psychological point ~~{?}~~ of view- is the girl's (Maisrie) father:he is a curiosity, I will not attempt to analyze him here, but will leave you to read the book for yourself. The story goes on in a masterly man{-}

ner until we reach the closing chapter,when the author seems to me a trifle inconsistent.

[a] The page numbers for this letter, their format and placement, are reproduced from the original holograph.

The hero has passed through months ofthe most harrowing anxiety, and oneday receives a letter from the long absent damsel asking him to come to Scotland (he is in London) immediately. [Two sentences mistyped {across the rest of this line, and part of this line}.] (Excuse this blundering, please.) He goes, and meets her in the doorway, with the conventional literary happiness glowing in her eyes. To be sure, the illness of her grandfather-I should have said grandfather above- renders her somewhat sad, but that is no excuse for what follows, or rather what does not follow. He takes her by the hand and asks her if she has any better news for him. That is all. Might not the reader naturally ask for something a little more spirited upon such an occasion? Here, if anywhere , would seem to be the place for a little sacchariferous hugging.

I am now reading Thomas Hardy's "The Return of the Native". Hardy is really greater than Black, but he lacks a certain naturalness that characterizes the former's (excuse me, latter's writings. The "Native{"} is one of his quiet stories of English country life for which he is noted.[2]

You must make some allowance for my giving all my space for the discussion of literary matters, as you are awarethat I have little else to write about, situated as I am. I hope you will succeed in getting a commencement part, for I think you could make it rattle. But before you go on stage you had better read "The Future"[3] once or twice for enthus a{i?}sm. -

You{r}s, E.A.R.

HCL *US*, 15-17.

Typewritten {except for the valediction, which is in pencil or light black ink}.

NOTES

1. Published in 1890. William Black (1841-1898) was a popular romantic novelist who wrote about his native Scotland, best known perhaps for *Macleod of Dare*.
2. Published 1878, EAR obviously had not read very far into the novel when he wrote this statement. He had, however, finished it when he wrote his next letter to Gledhill.

3. Possibly a humorous reference to Matthew Arnold's manifestly *un*enthusiastic poem of the same name. (SL)