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## To Harry de Forest Smith - January 23, 1892

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

**Harvard University,**  
**Cambridge, Mass.** Jan<sup>a</sup> 23 – '92

My dear Smith,

I received your rather extended epistle about a week ago, and you may be sure that it was welcome. It struck me at about the right time. I needed some such medicine, and it was a great relief for me to be assured that the writing of long confidential letters was not a lost art with you. It reminded me of the ones I used to receive from Bowdoin. I am afraid if the letters I received from you when you were at Brunswick were to be compared with those you have ^ from Harvard, my candle ~~will~~ would shine with a poor light. I do not know what ~~it~~ is the matter with me,

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but somehow I have not been able to write a decent letter to anyone since I came—er--to college. That doesn't sound just right, does it? I suppose I am as much a college man as anyone here, and yet, when I think it over I cannot reconcile myself to the fact. Specials are not regulars, to be sure, but if you could see some of the latter class that hang around here you would not for a moment question the equality of the matter. Sometimes I almost think that special students who do good work attract particular attention on the part of the instructors. I am not speaking of myself now, God knows, but I really believe that some of the brightest men in Harvard are not in the undergraduate dep't. The elective system is a godsend to the fellows who really wish to pursue certain branches, and when people condemn it, they don't know

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<sup>a</sup> WA adds a period here.

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what they are talking about. Of course it is the means of ~~may~~ many people getting through with less work than they would under a prescribed course, but I have about concluded that it does not require a genius to get an A.B. from most any college in the country. At Harvard, the case is just this: every opportunity is offered for a man to get what the world calls an education; and it lies with him entirely whether he does it or not. There is

but

no question ^ that one can go through w[?] and do<sup>b</sup> but little work, but no one with any pride could stand the continual warnings and low-marks that attend such a course.

The mid-years are close at hand and for sport I will make a prophecy as to the marks I get. Keep these and compare them with the real ones which will come in about a month. Of course this is all guess-work

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as I have no idea what the exams will be like. However, here goes:

Eng <sup>c</sup> A (Comp. & Rhet <sup>d</sup> )	say B
" 2 (Shakespeare)	B minus (B-)
" 9 (19 <sup>th</sup> cent. prose)	B-
French A	C

B plus or minus counts as B on the record, so with the other letters. I do not seem to have much use for A's; and in fact, have not met with many † who do. They are shadowy ideals and in my opinion do ~~not~~<sup>e</sup> not really signify much. B, and in that vicinity is a very comfortably and safe place to hang. Then there are no warnings and no fear from a reasonably amount of cutting, if you care to cut. I pulled a B

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<sup>b</sup> WA has "to".

<sup>c</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>d</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>e</sup> WA transcribes the mistake as "n" only.

in all the hour-exams last fall, but it may not occur again. I am not much alarmed though, as C's will carry me through all right. Good night. Robinson.<sup>f</sup>

HCL *US*, 50-51.

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<sup>f</sup> WA places the valediction on the two following lines.