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5-7-1893

## To Harry de Forest Smith - May 7, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

#1716 Camb.,  
May 7 - '93.

My dear Smith,

I am straightened out again at last and will try to write something that will be at least rational, though I have nothing of importance to say. I was going to put it "communicate", but I was afraid you might overlook a very mild joke and lose your good opinion of me.

I have spent the past day or two in reading George Meredith's "Diana of the Crossways".<sup>1</sup> There is a good deal

-2-

of Meredith in it, but it is decidedly worth reading. Full of philosophy and sharp sayings, but rather heavy upon the whole for a novel. It might be called a "study" and come nearer to the truth. Here are a few sentences from it as I remember them:

"An empty house is colder than out of doors"<sup>a</sup> The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay--I have the ideas of dozens more, but find I cannot quote them. You had better read the book and see what you think of it.

Last evening I put my foot in it

-3-

to a small extent. Latham is always growling about novel-reading, and asks me why I don't read the "American Statesmen"<sup>b</sup> I have been trying all winter to get him to read Tess, but have failed. At last I told him if he would read it I would read Lodge's "Life of Alexander Hamilton".<sup>2</sup> He agreed, and I am rather

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<sup>a</sup> WA adds a period, i.e. "doors."

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

that  
 glad I did. I have no doubt it  
 will do me good, though I must con-  
 fess that I do not anticipate any great  
 pleasure from my part of the bargain.  
 I may be agreeably disappointed, however,  
 and am generous enough to hope that I

-4-

shall. Last fall I bought a  
 cheap copy of Chateaubriand's "Atala"<sup>3</sup>  
 and have neglected reading it until to-day.  
 This forenoon I took it up and read  
 it at one sitting. It is very easy &  
 more than interesting. I will send it to  
 you after readi{n}g<sup>c</sup> the ~~o~~<sup>d</sup> other pieces printed  
 with it. When the masterpieces of the  
 worlds<sup>e</sup> literature only occupy a hundred  
 small pages, there is no great excuse  
 for letting them pass unread. It is  
 hard to believe that such a bold subject  
 can be handled with such delicacy. The  
 girl dies for want of something she comes dan-  
 gerously near getting. But then, you must  
 know the story—and will see at once

-5-

that the above sentence is brutal—  
 not to say cruel.

I commenced this letter yesterday but  
 was interrupted when half through so  
 you will get it a day late. It is now  
 Monday morning and I am feeling pretty  
 rocky on account of the siege I went  
 through last evening. Saben and Crapo  
 struck an argument at 7<sup>00</sup> PM<sup>f</sup> and  
 kept it up until 12.00. I began to  
 get crazy about that time and drove

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<sup>c</sup> WA transcribes "reading".

<sup>d</sup> WA transcribes the second crossed-out letter as a "t", though to me it looks like the beginning of an "f".

<sup>e</sup> WA has "world's".

<sup>f</sup> WA has "7.00 P. M."

them ~~both~~ out.<sup>g</sup> I do not know that I ever passed through the mental suffering in my life that I did during those five hours. I was

-6-

a fool to stand it as long as I did, but one of the men was a comparative stranger to me and I felt a little delicate. But I have now come to the conclusion that courtesy does not demand any such a sacrifice and I shall not be so squeamish another time. I didn't sleep any to amount to any thing<sup>h</sup> and am about played out to-day. I cut "Wilhelm Tell" and must go to work now to make it up. After that I must read on Hume and in the evening go to a lecture on Wordsworth and write a German Composition. The afternoon † is taken up in college

-7-

exercises so you see it is a busy day for me—especially if I crowd in an hour or two of "Kenelm Chillingly"<sup>4</sup> and write two more letters.

Well, I shall stop now and see what my tired and if I may say it, outraged brain can do with German blank verse. The morning is fine and there is a hand organ playing to [=the] Irish Washerwoman somewhere in the distance. I think I should like to have him grind under my window for about three quarters of an hour. I could let the German go to the devil willingly.

Shall look for your letter to-morrow. Send a bundle of papers and Mr. Bolles<sup>i</sup> pamphlet,<sup>j</sup>

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<sup>g</sup> WA omits the second period.

<sup>h</sup> WA has "anything".

Sincerely.—Robinson.<sup>k</sup>

HCL US, 95-97.

#### NOTES

1. 1885
2. Henry Cabot Lodge's book may have played a part years later in the composition of EAR's poem about Hamilton and Burr, "On the Way." EAR sent the manuscript to Lodge for his criticism of it prior to publication. See EAR's letter to Lodge, August 4, 1919.
3. François René Chateaubriand (1768-1848), father of the Romantic movement in France. *Atala* is a romance glorifying the American Indian and "the state of nature." At the end, the heroine, torn between leaving her lover and breaking her vow to her mother that she would never marry, commits suicide.
4. Bulwer Lytton's novel, 1873.

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<sup>i</sup> WA has "Bolle's".

<sup>j</sup> WA reads this as a period.

<sup>k</sup> WA places the signature on the following line and omits the period.