

Colby



Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and
Transcriptions

The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A
Digital Edition

10-1-1893

To Harry de Forest Smith - October 1, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - October 1, 1893" (1893). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 107.

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/107

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the The Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Digital Edition at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, October 1, 1893.

My dear Smith,

You are probably getting a little impatient by this time, but I have made a "big brace"^a at last and am going to write you a letter, or something that will take the place of one. My room is too cold for a free flow of thought,^b and I may get discouraged at the end of the first page; but my inclinations are all right, and with a little effort of imagination you will be able to fill in as many more pages as you like.

I have nothing in particular to say except that it is rather lonesome here without you, and on dark, dull Sundays like this I find it ~~ha~~^c [hard] to be cheerful and optimistic, and everything else that a useful man should be in order to fill his place in nature to the satisfaction of himself and his dear friends who feel so much for his welfare. I am half ~~af~~^d afraid that my "dear friends" here in Gardiner will be disappointed in me if I do not do something before long, but somehow I don't care half as much about the matter as I ought. One of my greatest misfortunes is the total inability to admire the so~~x~~^ecalled successful men who are pointed out to poor devils like me as examples for me to follow and

^a These quotations marks are written in black ink.

^b This comma is written in black ink.

^c WA omits this mistake. In the holograph, the "a" was typed directly over the "h".

^d WA omits this mistake. In the holograph the "f" was typed directly over the "a", and there is a diagonal line struck through the pair.

^e This "x" is written in black ink, over an illegible deleted letter.

revere. If Merchant A and Barrister B are put here as "ensamples to mortals,"^f I am afraid that that {sic} I shall always stand in the shadow as one of Omar's broken pots.¹ I suspect that I am pretty much what I am, and that I am pretty much a damned fool in many ways; but I further suspect

2. . .^g

that I am not altogether an ass, whatever my neighbors may say. I may live to see this egotistic idea exploded, but until that time comes I am to hug my own particular phantoms² and think as I like. If I turn out a failure after all, and go hopelessly to the devil, I shall have Aldrich's lines^h to console myself with:

"Then if at last thine airy structure fall
Dissolve,ⁱ and vanish, take thyself no blame:
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven."³

For I am going to strive, and strive hard this winter. My eyes are are {sic} a little better, and I am pretty well convinced that I shall be able to work three or four hours a day without injuring them any. I know from experience that five hours of the kind of work^j I mena^k {=mean} is all, if not more than I can stand. I can work ten hours^l [=hours] with my arms and legs if^l

the occasion requires it, but not with my fancy- I will not yet presume to give it the title of imagination. Fancy and imagination brings to my mind the "hell" sonnet that you wanted me to copy. I will enclose it

^f The closing quotation mark is written in black ink.

^g This and all page numbers in this letter, as well as the elipses, are reproduced from the holograph.

^h The "s" is written in black ink.

ⁱ The comma is written in black ink. WA omits it.

^j The "r" is written in black ink.

^k EAR drew an arc in black ink between the "e" and the "a" by way of correction.

^l These are the last two words of the previous line.

with this letter if I do not forget it. My fancy gets a little lively in ^m those fourteen lines, I have never been quite able to know what to make of them. They may be nothing but rot - they surely are if the reader can make nothing of them- but I have always cherished the idea that there is a thought mixed up in them that is worth the trouble of the thinking. Saben's over-friendly statement that the thing is a "great poem" doesn't affect my opinions much, as his enthusiasm is liable to run away with him when it has a chance - especially in matters where his friends are concerned. He is a magnificent fellow with all his peculiarities, but not just the one I should go to for an impartial criticism. I do not think it possible for a friend to criticise another's work,^o without being influenced 3. . .

in his favor to^p some extent. I hate self-praise, or much of it, but it really seems to me that I have brought out the idea of the occasional realization of the questionable supremacy of ourselves over those we most despise in a moderately new way. If there is a little poetry in it, then all the^q better. There is poetry in all types of humanity - even in lawyers and horse-jockeys - if we are willing to search it out; and I have^r tried to find a little for the poor fellows in my hell, which is an exceedingly worldly and transitory one,^s before they soar above me in myig-

^m WA omits this mistake.

ⁿ The "o" and "n" are typed over letters that I am unable to make out with certainty. The "r" may be a faded "n".

^o The "o" is typed over an "e" by way of correction.

^p The "t" appears to have been typed over an "e".

^q WA has "the".

^r The "e" is written in black ink.

norance^t of what is, to sing in the sun - not in triumph over me, but in the^u
 glad truth that destiny has worked out for them. I will state here that
 the verses in question must be taken as rather vague generalities: they
 will not bear, and I never intended them to bear, any definite analysis.
 To me they suggest a single and quite clear thought; if they do as much to
 you and to any other^v person who has seen them [=them], I am satisfied.

Excuse this flourish of trumpets.^w and let me have a smoke. I
 wish you were to have it with me; but as you are not, I shall try to
 make the best of it as it is. You may smell the tobacco from where you
 are: it is bad, but it burns.^x

Yours truly,

E.A.R.^y

I called at your house some time ago—about a week.
 Your father and mother were hardly reconciled to your absence
 and the place seemed strange. When you come home again
 we will have sessions^z

R.

^s The comma is written in black ink.

^t WA separates these two words.

^u The "e" is written in black ink.

^v The "t" here is typed directly over an aborted "h", and EAR has written a black ink "t" above the pair, by way of indicating his intended reading.

^w WA omits this mark, which seems to be a period by is faded in the holograph.

^x EAR typed an "r" directly over a first "n", and also wrote an "r" above the line in black ink.

^y The signature and postscript are written in black ink. WA omits the underline.

^z WA has a period here.

[Enclosure]

SUPREMACY.^{aa}

There is a drear and lonely tract of hell
From all the common gloom removed afar;^{bb}
A flat sad land where only shadows are ,
Whose lorn estate no word of mine can tell.
I walked among the shades, and knew them well -
Men I had scorned upon life's little star
For churls and sluggards, - and I knew the scar
Upon their brows of woe ineffable.

But, as I moved triumphant on my way,
Into the dark they vanished, one by one;
Then came an awful light - a blinding ray -
As if a new creation were begun:
And with a swift importunate dismay
I heard the dead men singing in the sun.⁴
E.A. Robinson^{cc}

HCL US, 107-109.
{Typewritten.}

1. See quote from Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam in the letter to Smith from March 10, 1891. (SL)
- 2.^{dd} An echo of Bryant's "Thanatopsis": "and each one as before will chase / His favorite phantom."
3. From Thomas Bailey Aldrich's sonnet "Enamoured Architect of Airy Rhyme," slightly misquoted. See EAR's letter to Gledhill, March 21, 1893.
4. First published in *The Harvard Advocate*, LIII, No. 8 (June 16, 1892), 122. Included, with considerable modification, in TNB.

^{aa} WA omits the period.

^{bb} The "r" is typed over a semicolon.

^{cc} The signature is written in black ink.

^{dd} This and the next two notes are WA's notes 1, 2 and 3, respectively.