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11-11-1893

To Harry de Forest Smith - November 11, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITHGardiner, Nov^a 11 – 1893.My dear Smith.^b

Don't write so damned coarse. Do me this kindness, and humor me. It takes away about half the interest from one of your letters to have it spread over six times the paper it calls for. I do not mean to give offense, but I am truly in earnest. It is pleasant to know that you are good natured, but can't you make a foot-note of the fact, when you do not feel sure that the letter itself shows the state of your mind?

I sent you the "Ballades"¹ after some delay, and you doubtless have them before this. I must ask to be as careful as possible of the book, for I think a great deal of it. It has followed me for three years, and has become one of those things without any particular price—of no value except to the owner. It cost me thirty-five cents, but it would take dollars to buy it. You may think I am a fool, and if so, I shall not attempt to deny it. You have no idea how much associations are to me. Some little thing, almost ridiculous in itself acquires a value in my eyes that sometimes makes me ashamed of myself. But then, we all have our peculiarities and that is one of mine. I rather think you can appreciate it enough not to write me down an ass.

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This would be a fine day for a session at your place, but you do not seem to be at hand. So I live in the expectation of Thanksgiving and our dinner. Throwing out leaving Harvard.^c this trip, if we make it, will be the event of this year for me. I am like a child in some respects, and am glad of it. I only wish that I could be more like one sometimes. Victor Cherbuliez, in that remarkable novel of his, "Jean Têterol's Idea",² says "the first duty of youth is to be young." Crawford says the same thing in Sant' Ilario,³ some years after. If you have never read any of Cherbuliez you have a great time before you. He is altogether [different?] from any writer I know^d and yet he is so true to life that he startles one at times. If I ever get able to read again, I shall make up for lost time, but do not

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA reads this as a comma.

^c WA has a comma instead of a period. Read the period as a comma. Also, there are two unusual marks on either side of "Harvard" that I would almost venture to suggest are single quotation marks, although if such were the case, EAR's reason for using them is not readily apparent. I have followed WA in omitting them.

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

think I shall ever do anything more with German. I hate to drop it, but there are other things in the world; and it is better to have those without the German than not to have either, as would probably be the case if I put much time upon it.

Tryon sent me two theses last week on the Journalism of Events and "A Journalism of Life. They are a part of his Philosophy V work last year—Prof. Peabody's^e course in Ethics. He sends them to me for criticism, and places me in a rather delicate position^f The matter is first class and he is continually saying good things; but his style smacks of the newspaper, as I knew it would. I shall give him my candid opinion of it, and it is a pleasure to know that it will be taken kindly. I fear I can criticise

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better than I can write, but I am going to wait and hear what the years say. I may end up as a clerk in a dry-goods store and acquire "ease of manner". That would be more of a transformation than I ever dreamed of. If I should turn out to be a society man, via a dry goods establishment, how the Gardiner public would congratulate me on my coming out! They might think there was some hope for me then, and a prospect of a still better "job." Life is my job at present, but it will be more interesting when I get settled down for the winter. §I have done great work in forestry this fall and have now arrived a[t] the last stage--"blowing up" the butts. When they are sawed and split I shall consider my{-}self free from a long but upon the whole rather pleasant piece of work. I have no doubt that I have made three times the work of it that was necessary, but I have done it sympathetically—with a poet's^h eye, fine frenzy and all. There is poetry in reducing a sprawling apple limb but Joe cannot see it. I doubt some if you could, though you might.

Gledhill sent me a picture of his wife the other day. She is not pretty—I cannot call her handsome; but G. writes that I cannot see her mind, and so cannot form much of an opinion. There is a case of your "mixing up of souls", I expect, that

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that {sic} is worth considering. If she is all he thinks she is, they will be tremendously happy. But when the kid comes I am

^e WA has "Peabody's".

^f WA adds a period here.

^g WA omits this space.

^h WA has "poet's".

half afraid that Art will feel so hopelessly jubilant that he will have to get drunk. I hope not, though, as a wife sometimes fails to appreciate such emphasis. I am pretty sure that it would go hard with me, were I a woman—that is, if it got to be anything like a periodical affair.

I think I have written enough to bother you for a good half hour, so will stop. If my letters are hard to read, they at least afford a change of occupation. Don't send me any more of that big, bellying chirography of yours, but write as you ~~ye~~ used to before the devil put this last crotchet into your head. Believe me, it takes all the character out of a letter, no matter what you say. More than that, it leads you into the self-deceit that you are writing a letter of respectable length, when you are not.

Find out about your train and get your stomach in order for the 30th.

Sincerely
E.A.R.ⁱ

HCL US, 116-118.

NOTES

1. Gleeson White's *Ballades and Rondeaus, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, etc.* (London, 1887).
2. 1878. Cherbuliez (1829-1899) was a popular French novelist. (SL)
- 3.^j F. Marion Crawford's novel. {Published in 1889.}

ⁱ WA omits the underline.

^j This is WA's note 2.