To Harry de Forest Smith - June 10, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Maine, June 10, 1894.

My dear Smith,

The three sketches which I sent to Cambridge some time ago have been through the Atlantic office with far from discouraging results. Of course they were not accepted— I never dreamed of such a thing - but they were damned rather pleasantly by Mr. Scudder, and pitilessly praised by Mr. Whittier, the ancient proof-reader of the magazine. By the way of salve, he tells me that Howell's "Venetian Life"1 was refused by Mr. Lowell, and goes on to say that your humble servant is "a coming writer", that his style "reminds him of Deming",2 that 'Mr. Scudder is not infallible", and other kindred rot, which I take with many allowances for the old friendship between him and my uncle. Mr. Scudder himself writes: "These sketches seem to me not without some claim to notice. They show restraint and an effort at telling something worth while; but, etc." "But"3 is the biggest word in the English language.

1If there is a corner in Hell for those who waste their time in this life, what may I expect for writing a poem of three-hundred and eighty lines during the past three weeks, - to say nothing of the coming revision, which must take place before the thing can be presentable?3 The first writing is all done now, with the exception of eight or ten lines, which I hope to do to-day. Then I shall go for "Theodore", treating him rather differently from any other of my poor creations. The story is rather "bizarre", but not half so much as real life. Theodore is not a typical man.

The Italian stone-cutter, who whistles the barcarolle from

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a WA simply has "which".
b The "e" is written in black ink.
c The first "c" is written in black ink.
d The hyphen is written in black ink.
e The "y" is written in black ink.
f The "n" is written in black ink.
g The space is in the holograph.
h Both quotation marks and the underline are written in black ink. WA omits the underline.
i I have followed the holograph for the indentation of all paragraphs in this letter, in addition to the usual first paragraph, due to their unusual length throughout.
j In the holograph there does not appear to actually be an "of", but rather an "o" typed over (or under) a "g". WA simply has "of", which is doubtless EAR's intention.
k The "r" is written in black ink.
l WA omits this typo.
m The "m" is written in black ink.
n The "a" is written in black ink.
"Sicilian Vespers", and comes at last to carve Theodore's monument, must make or spoil the story. I doubt if I get fairly into it until I return from my Boston trip, but we shall have it in the Pines before long.

In reading Tennyson the other day, I came across a little poem in blank verse dedicated to the Princess Beatrice, in which he speaks of her marriage as "that white funeral of the single life". A Poet Laureate is worth while when he says things like that. And, speaking of Tennyson, how would it do to read him some this summer? His great est charm lies in the fact that one can read him over and over again without tiring of him. I have read "Maud" aloud three times, and am quite ready to do so again - or listen to you. Perhaps the best way to read a long poem like that is alternately. The metre, like the poem, is hard (in a certain sense) and strange. And there are always the Idyls. There also another poet I should like very much to read in our bower: I speak now of Kingsley, whose "Andromeda" I have only read in short snatches. I think, if [we] have a mind to do it, we can make {sic} considerable of the coming three months, having two sittings a week. "Antigone" need not take all our time - if we let it, I am afraid that we should get hopelessly sick of the thing - and I am sure that I shall not let my own efforts interfere to any great extent with things of more importance. Antigone makes me think of Latham, who writes that he is going to take a non-resident course - Syracuse University – in the Greek drama, and that he intensely interested in our
translating scheme. It is one of the regrets of my life that 
you cannot meet that man. It would take you some time to get 
accustomed to his strangeness, but after that you would soon 
discover his real worth. He would talk American history and 
read Matthew Arnold,’s poems with your from morning till night 
if you wanted him to. But such a meeting is probably one of 
the things that is not to be.

I have been reading Lowell’s essays again. 
There is a mine of good stuff of which we know practically 
nothing, and I ask you, is it right that it should be so? 
Essays and poems are the two kinds of literature best adapt-
ed for reading aloud, and as we have between us an unusually 
good stock of both, we ought to make the most of them. 
Have you bought Barrett Wendell’s book yet? If so, what do 
you think of it? And have seen a copy of the Chap-Book, which seems to be making such a stir just now? The scheme of the 
magazine interests me and I am anxious to get to Cambridge 
and find out more about it. My chief fear is that it is too 
good a thing to succeed. I take Bliss Carman to be the guiding spirit of the undertaking.

"Ismene, mine own sister," is dangerously 
like the rendering I decided upon, but I do not think I have 
any reason to change it on that account. Of course there must 
be many little repetitions in the translation of a long work 
like Antigone, but they are not what count. The general effect 
of the play, as a whole, is the point to be considered; and 
it is to that end that I shall do my work. And, now I think 
of it, will you kindly refrain, as far as possible, from intro-
ducing poetical lines into your version?—that is, lines 
of ten properly accented syllables, which are so common in 
the Oxford translation. The more of them you make, the hard-
er my work will be. You would understand this better if you 
were pulling my end of the string. I shall send you some 
Chap-Books from Cambridge.

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\* The upper-case "G" is written over a typed lower-case "g".
\# The "n" is written in black ink over what appears to be a typed "a".
\#
\## WA transcribes the "n".
\### WA omits the typo.
\#### Written in black ink.
\#### The "h" is written in black ink.
\#### The "c" is written in black ink. WA simply has "chief".
\##### WA omits the second "i".
\###### WA transcribes the "o".
\####### WA has "syllable".
Yours sincerely

Robinson

HCL  US, 162-165.
Typewritten.

NOTES

1. William Dean Howells (1837-1920), the great American novelist and man of letters, was editor of The Atlantic Monthly from 1871-1881. Venetian Life (1866) is a memoir of life in Venice in the 1860s. (SL)
2. Philander Deming (1829-1915), Atlantic contributor and author of Tomkins and Other Folks, 1885.
4. Verdi’s opera Les vêpres siciliennes, first performed in 1855. (SL)
5. "To H.R.H. Princess Beatrice."
7. Probably William Shakespeare, 1894. {See also the letter to Smith of March 13, 1892, and note 1 of that letter.}

pp The valediction and signature are written in black ink. WA omits the underline.
qa This is WA’s note 1.
rq This is WA’s note 2.
ss This and the following four notes are WA’s notes 3, 4, 5 and 6, respectively.