



9-29-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - September 29, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Sept^a 29 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

I have my choice this afternoon between working at my "profession", gathering apples, reading the "Yellow Book", going to a foot-ball game & writing to you. I have decided upon the last.

No, I have not forgotten you, I have only been busy with my thoughts—thinking seriously, but, I am glad to say, not morbidly of the things to come. I think I have got almost through my morbid period. I am beginning to see that it is all a waste of time and of vitality and that if things are bound to go to the devil anyway the best thing for me to do is to let them go with a feeling that I have done as well as I can.

I have finished that little study in darkness, "The Black Path" and after reading two or three stories in the Yellow Book do not feel that my time is wholly wasted. It seems to me to be something of a gain on Theodore, but I doubt if you will like it so much as you liked the longer sketch. There are no ~~s~~ Sicilian^b Vespers in it, nor any educational uneasiness—except from a purely mental (I might say moral) point of view. I am

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afraid that there is a little of my old fault of over condensation but I hope to overcome that someday. If I ever do, I shall reap big benefits from my present punctiliousness in writing.

If things go on as well as they have started (in my head) I shall have a good sized volume by next May to ~~ee~~ correct & copy during the summer. My next thing to tackle is a marionette story touching lightly on divorce. I am afraid I shall make a botch of it, but there is always that chance to try. After that I think I shall take the opportunity to recast Theodore. He needs it.—With what I have written and am sure of writing, in my own way, I can now count on at least six sketches toward a volume of twelve or fifteen. The winter ought to finish it.

My interest in Antigone is increasing every day and my

^a WA adds a period here.

^b The upper-case "S" is written directly over the lower-case "s".

anxiety to see the thing in print amounts almost to child-ishness. So please give it to me as fast [as] you can with anything like ~~convenience~~ [?] convenience and then go to work on your notes. I have done all that you gave me that day in the woods but am a little in doubt as to two passages. On{e}^c is the very first words of the Chorus after Creon's speech. I found it absolutely impossible to make anything like satisfactory poetry of your version so turned to your particular "black beast" the Oxford version and found what I wanted. You must have left out something by accident as you say "Your pleasure is this, O

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Creon—"The Oxford says something like {"}your pleasure is this and my pleasure is yours."^d My version runs:

"Your pleasure—of the friend as of the foe—
Is one with mine, O Creon."

The Greek must say something of this kind or the passage is without any point at all. The other place that troubles me occurs somewhere about line 308. "For death alone shall not suffice before, hung up alive, you shall make clear this outrage, in order that &c^e." I suppose "death" means a natural death or the poor guard would have no chance to improve his ways. Kindly tell me what Plumptre does with this place, and give me your own ideas on it. Send me the next chorus as soon as you can and let me get at it—I want it over with.

I carried a handful of Chap-Books down to the Doctor the other day and he read, among other things, Sharps^f second "Vista", The Birth of a Soul.¹ He says "it doesn't amount to a cuss" and I am inclined to agree with him. There isn't^g much satisfaction in showing anything like the Chap-Book to the "doc"^h He seems to be down on all the younger writers and I am afraid the cause is partly envy. It is not wholly strange if it is, as he has written poetry for the past twenty years² which is better than the average magazine stuff—but, on the other hand, he has not made the slightest effort to dispose of it. He seems to lack all

^c WA transcribes the "e".

^d WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^e WA has "etc".

^f WA has "Sharp's".

^g WA has "isn't".

^h WA adds a period before the quotation mark.

action. I have [been] trying for a year to get him to write

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a story in verse, but have failed thus far. I hope, for his own sake, he will start something this winter. The doc has reached that stage now when he is likely to do something great without in the least expecting it.

I stopped writing yesterday afternoon because I found that I was not in the mood. To dayⁱ I am not much better—in fact I do not feel like doing much of anything. The weather is cold and raw and I am damnably lonesome. Sunday is a bad day with me now--^jicant^k do anything but chew tobacco and try to make up my mind to read something. Have read the Yellow Book—all I care for—and found it pretty thin. Henry James' story & Arthur Waugh's essay are the only things I care for.³ The Yellow Book, in my humble [opinion], is an elegantly got up fake and has no excuse for ~~being~~ being that I can see. I have not read the second number—that is called an improvement over the first.

I[f] possible, this letter is more disconnected and rambling than yours, but if it proves half as welcome I shall be satisfied. I can appreciate your remarks on the pathos of boyish ambitions. I feel it every day.—There was a football game yesterday between Gardiner & Augusta ^{yl} but I have not heard how it came out. Don't think I care.

Write and tell me what you think of Trilby⁴ compared with the Greater Glory—if there is any comparison.

Most sincerely

E.A.R.^m

HCL US, 166-169.

NOTES

1. See *The Chap-Book* I, No. 9 (September 15, 1894), 224-228. *Vistas*, by the Scottish author William Sharp (1855-1905), is a collection of "dramatic interludes" which "are vistas into the inner life of the human soul, psychic episodes" (Sharp 2). It was published in 1894 in book form,

ⁱ WA has "To-day".

^j WA has "now__"

^k WA has "can't".

^l This is my reading of the mistake; WA does not offer a suggestion, having simply "<[?]>".

^m WA omits the underline.

where "The Birth of a Soul" is actually the third piece. (SL)

2. US reads

3. Henry James' "The Death of the Lion" and Arthur Waugh's "Reticence in Literature" appeared in the first issue of *The Yellow Book* (April 1894).

4. One of the current best-sellers, a novel by George Du Maurier (1834-1896). {It features the memorable villain, Svengali, and was later adapted into several films. As it wasn't published in book form until 1895, EAR must have been reading it in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, where it was being published serially between January and August, 1894. He may, however, at this point only have read *about* it in reviews, such as the one in the *Chap-Book* by Louise Imogen Guiney. See *The Chap-Book* I, No. 7 (August 15, 1894), 157-160.}