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11-19-1894

## To Harry de Forest Smith - November 19, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, November 19 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

I could not get a chance to write you  
not  
a letter Sunday and am afraid that I am in the mood  
for it to-day. Since the middle of last week I have  
been hopelessly "out of sorts" on account of the kids, who  
keep running by my door and shake the house generally<sup>a</sup>  
Sometimes I get desparate<sup>b</sup> {sic} and go down street—or any where  
where I can cool off. If they stay here all winter God  
only knows what will become of me.

And yet I did something Friday,<sup>c</sup> I did four pages  
about 1600 words, of "Christmas Eve", a somewhat queer  
sketch which might easily become great in the hands of Kipling  
or Stevenson, but in the hands of "me"—well, I may do  
something with it and I may not. I was a fool to un-  
dertake it, as it is quite beyond me; but it kept bother-  
ing me until I took it up, and now I am letting it siz-  
zle awhile before going ahead. I wrote too much Friday  
and shall have to write it over again. This sketch must  
be longer than the others—say 12,000 words. It reflects  
the wasted part of a brilliant but "unruddered" man in  
the company of a poor devil he has taken as a companion  
for the simple reason that he can master him. There is  
nothing that is improbable, but there is much that is  
impossible—for me to bring out.

-2-

Did you see what Bok had to say about Trilby and The  
Manxman<sup>1</sup> in the Sunday Journal? It was a little stronger  
than any thing I have yet read, but it has the savor of truth  
in it. The difference between Du Maurier & Harding Davis is  
ridiculously large, I suppose, but I cannot help thinking that  
Americas<sup>d</sup> preference ~~to~~ for Trilby to the Manxman is due to the  
same reason that the average reader of Harpers<sup>e</sup> seems now to  
be looking forward with far more eagerness to the appearance of  
The Princess Aline<sup>2</sup> than to that of "The Simpletons"—or "Hearts

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

<sup>b</sup> WA corrects the spelling to "desperate".

<sup>c</sup> WA has a period instead.

<sup>d</sup> WA has "America's".

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

Insurgent.<sup>3</sup> This comparison is mine, not Bok's. He simply says that the book of the year is not Trilby, but "The Manxman".

Did I tell you that I was reading "Le Maitre de Forges". I think I did. There is something in it that makes one willing to forgive the author his unnecessary pages.—The other day I received a very acceptable little gift from Ford in the shape of a Clarendon Press edition of De Musset's *On ne badine pas avec L'Amour & Fantasio*. He apologized for the edition but assured the [=me] that the contents would more than make up for it; and from what I have read, here & there, I think he is right. There is something decidedly Shaksperian in Musset's<sup>f</sup> best work—quite different from "On ne saurait pas, etc.",<sup>g</sup> which you have read with "Il faut qu'un porte" & "Pierre & Camille."<sup>h</sup>

Hall Caine praises Sharps<sup>i</sup> "Vistas",<sup>4j</sup> and thinks that if the book had appeared ~~with~~ three years ago, we should have heard nothing of Maetterlink.<sup>5</sup> All of which seems to me to be a slip of genius. You will see this in the last Critic,—which, by the way, is exceptionally good. And I will say here that you need not return the Critics I have sent you. I have given up the scrap book scheme. Shall send the last number in a day or two.

Sincer{e}ly

E.AR.<sup>k</sup>

(over)

-3-

{Written vertically across the right side of the page;}

I am on the last "bunch" of Antigone. Please send another lot as soon as possible and oblige &c.

R

HCL US, 186-187.

#### NOTES

1. By Hall Caine (1853-1931), popular writer of Manx novels. *The Manxman* had just been published, 1894.
2. By Richard Harding Davis (1864-1916), journalist and writer of popular fiction.

<sup>f</sup> WA has "Musset's".

<sup>g</sup> WA places the comma outside the quotation mark.

<sup>h</sup> WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

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

<sup>j</sup> The superscriptive numeral is mine.

<sup>k</sup> WA has "E.A.R."

3. Thomas Hardy's novel, later called *Jude the Obscure*.
- 4.<sup>1</sup> See the letter to Smith of September 29, 1894, and note 1 for that letter. (SL)
5. Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was an important Belgian Symbolist poet and dramatist. (SL)

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<sup>1</sup> WA made a space for note 4, but he did not complete it, writing simply "Sharp/s {sic} 'Vistas' ??"