12-2-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - December 2, 1894

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

https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/robinson_transcriptions/156

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. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

Gardiner, Dec\sp a \hspace{1em} 2 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

While fighting with the third chorus yesterday I became disgusted with everything under God's heaven and wrote a few remarks under the last antistrophe which you will kindly take good naturedly. I do not just understand that part nor the last lines of the strophe before it, beginning "Nothing of offense creeps &c." The Ox has that, "nothing comes to the lives\sp 1 of mortals far removed at least from calamity." To that there is a note by the editor stating that "This is very corrupt. Donaldson would have it 'In all the life of mortals mischief in every state has franchise claims.'"\sp c Which is like yours. Will you kindly translate these two passages again and be sure that you have the best authority behind you? I am doing this chorus easier more easily than any of the others, and but for this difficulty in interpreting it, should have had it done days ago.—

The only fault I have to find with your translation is an occasional ambiguous sentence, like line 549 "Ask Creon, for you are mindful of him." Does that mean that Ismene is afraid of him or in love with him? I made it "Let Creon say; his words are your concern"—which, fortunately, will do in either case. There is an over frequent occurrence of "Hades" lately which I do not like, and <,> so avoid it the best way I can\sp d It is all right in Greek, I suppose, but it knocks all the poetry of \{off\\} any line I can make. With every ten lines I feel that I am doing something and if you ever care to compare my version \& with yours you will see how much I am indebted to you for striking \{exciting\} words and phrases.—Line 551 can also be read in two ways—with "if" or "although."\sp e

My eyes have been so weak lately that I have done very little reading—nothing definite except De Mussets\sp f "On ne badine pas avec L'Amour" & Fantasio.\sp g "Fantasio" is Shakespeare's They are really great and in many respects the nearest to Shakespeare to anything I have ever seen. Think I shall have to make you a present of them in English—if you persist in refusing to read French. They are not very simple, so perhaps\sp h you could enjoy the English better just now. I have the Prisoner of Zenda and A study\sp i in Scarlet to read but do not know when I shall get at them. I cannot seem to enthuse over Conan Doyle, but perhaps I shall

\sp a WA adds a period here.
\sp b WA has "etc".
\sp c WA places the period between the two quotation marks.
\sp d WA adds a period here.
\sp e WA places the period outside the quotation mark.
\sp f WA has "Musset's".
\sp g WA adds a period here.
\sp h WA transcribes the "s".
\sp i WA uses an upper-case "s".
be able to some day when I know him better—if that day ever comes.
"Micah Clarke" repels me, so does "The Refugees." Joe is reading almost
every thing now—the four just mentioned—Marcella—which seems to him
in no wise remarkable but for a "hell of a lot of agony in it"—The
Duchess, Capt Maryatt &c." Joe is stranded and is waiting for the
river to freeze over and give him a job. He had a good time in Fairfield
but "didn't save a damned cent."

I am on the last quarter of "Christmas Eve" and am wondering if I
shall tear it up when it is done. There is a pathos in striking such a
happy subject (to my mind) and making a failure of it. I am too young in
the business to do such things, I am afraid, but shall keep on with it and
then write a little story about a girl called Antigone who disappointed
a certain professor of Greek who found her on his doorstep when returning
from his third lecture on The Children of Aeschylus—or something else. It
ought to be easy work after what I am doing now, and will not in any way
appeal to the classical public—nor any other, probably. It will simply
show, or try to show, the obstinacy of human nature in an uncongenial
atmosphere. I can foresee a danger of making the professor unreal and
must try to avoid it. I write about my stuff as if every publisher
in the land were clamoring for it; but you are the only man who knows
anything about what I am doing—the only man in Maine, I mean—so
you will forgive me and keep it to yourself. When the revelation of
the damned fool comes, as it may, then there will be time enough
to amuse ourselves over our fatuity.

You will be glad to hear that I was positively depressed over Har-
vards double failure at foot-ball, but I see no chance for any excuses.
There must have been howling in Pennsylvania Thursday night. It is not
pleasant for me to look at the big H in my room and think of Harvard
ranks—even in athletics. So you see I am not callous to such things
after all.

This is not one of my days for letter writing, and I fancy this will sound a little "forced."

Very truly yours

E.A.R.

This is not economy—I took it from a pile of half-sheets, supposing I
should write three or four of them. But I can't do it today.

---

\(^{1}\) WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

\(^{2}\) WA adds a period here.

\(^{3}\) WA has "etc".

\(^{4}\) This is the last word of the previous line.

\(^{5}\) WA has "Harvard's".

\(^{6}\) WA has a comma here.
HCL  US, 189-191.

NOTES

1. US read "tens."
3.⁹ By Mrs. Humphry Ward.
4. US reads "Dashers[?]."
5.⁹ Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848) was an English novelist well-known for his sea stories. (SL)
6. Harvard had lost to Yale on November 24, and then to the University of Pennsylvania on November 29, the final game of the season. (SL)

⁹ Notes 3, 4 and 5 are WA's notes 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

⁹ WA started but did not complete this note, writing only "Capt. Marryat ??" in the allotted space.