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12-2-1894

To Harry de Forest Smith - December 2, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, Edwin Arlington, "To Harry de Forest Smith - December 2, 1894" (1894). *Edwin Arlington Robinson Letters and Transcriptions*. 156.

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITHGardiner, Dec^a 2 – 1894.

My dear Smith,

While fighting with the third chorus yesterday I became disgusted with every thing 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."^b The Ox has that, "nothing comes to the lives¹ 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.'"^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 ~~easi~~ 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^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."^e

My eyes have been so weak lately that I have done very little reading—nothing definite except De Mussets^f "On ne badine pas avec L'Amour" & ~~Fantasio~~ "Fantasio"^g 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 perhap{s}^h you could enjoy the English better just now. I have the Prisoner of Zenda and A studyⁱ 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

^a WA adds a period here.

^b WA has "etc".

^c WA places the period between the two quotation marks.

^d WA adds a period here.

^e WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^f WA has "Musset's".

^g WA adds a period here.

^h WA transcribes the "s".

ⁱ WA uses an upper-case "s".

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be able to some day when I know him better—if that day ever comes. "Micah Clarke" repels me, so does "The Refugees."^{2j} Joe is reading almost every thing now—the four just mentioned—Marcella³—which seems to him in no wise remarkable f but for a "hell of a lot of agony in it"—The Duchess,⁴ Capt^k Maryatt &c^l.⁵ 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^m

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 Harvardsⁿ double failure at foot-ball,⁶ 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^o

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.

^j WA places the period outside the quotation mark.

^k WA adds a period here.

^l WA has "etc".

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

ⁿ WA has "Harvard's".

^o WA has a comma here.

HCL US, 189-191.

NOTES

1. US read "tens."
2. *The Refugees*, a historical novel by Conan Doyle, published in 1893. (SL)
- 3.^p By Mrs. Humphry Ward.
4. US reads "Dashers[?]."
- 5.^q 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)

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

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