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6-9-1895

To Harry de Forest Smith - June 9, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH9 June, 1895

My dear Smith:

I have [been] trying all day to screw up courage to write you a letter; but my room has been too confoundedly hot to permit of any prolonged thinking so I have let the day go by until now—six o'clock, or thereabouts. I hav{e} been reading Schuman som{e} prize bits from Degeneration.¹ He seems to enjoy the book and is inclined to be of the opinion that Nordau could not write so elegantly and so lingeringly upon sexual aberrations without being a victim himself to one or more of them. Did you read the chapter on Zola? It is pretty good work and sound too, I think; only it is overdrawn and unnecessarily vituperative—if I may use two big words together.

I had a letter yesterday from Ford, in which he speaks of Barret{t} Wendell's William Shakspear^{2a} as "quite characteristic of the author, paradoxical, impertinent, and little, and yet interesting in a way,"

-2-

If you had ever had the slightest acqua{in}tance with Wendell, these three adjectives would strike you as they do me—almost like magic. What I hav{e} just quoted is so far the best thing that I ever knew Ford to say, that I shall hav{e} to tell him so in a letter. I hav{e} given up my trip to Boston but shall partly mak{e} up for it by spending next sSund{a}y in Exeter when^b I shall hav{e} a good talk, and, I hope, som{e} good beer, with Ford. If he wer{e} to be married, however, I should stay at home & make the best of it by myself.

Sometimes I am half afraid that

^a WA has "Shakespeare".

^b WA has "where".

you do not, that is, can not, understand
 my feeling as to attending your wedding.
 But I shall not attempt to make any ex-
 planation upon paper, for I am sure
 that it would be labor wasted. I only
 know that it is better for me to stay
 wher{e} I am, an{d} also better for you.
 If you cann{o}t understand what I mean
 by the last clause, I will tell you
 when I see you

-3^c-

Now, old man, I am going to preach for just about six lines or so.
 You hav{e} always had pretty much your own way and hav{e} been
 forming the habit for the past twenty-five years of exercising a devil
 ef^d a lot of authority, especially at home, without the smallest sus-
 picion of what you were doing. You have no desir{e} to hurt the
 feelings of any body on earth, but you are the victim of a mild
 form of impulsive selfishness, which it will be well enough for
 you to bear in mind. If this sounds stronger in writing than I in-
 tended it to let this little apology be enough to assur{e} you that

in

I am quite honest saying what I do, and would not, if I could,
 to

say any thing ~~that~~ hurt your peace of mind or give you the slightest pos-
 sible^e chance to doubt my sincere friendship and general admiration
 for yo{ur} character, ambitions, intellect, and hair.

Yours most sincerely,

E.A. Robinson

I like Theocritus—especially "the blunt-faced bees"

HCL US, 229-230.

NOTES

1. *Degeneration (Entartung)*, a book by the Hungarian writer Max Nordau (1849-1923) in which he analyses society's ills, including "degenerate" art. It was published in 1892. (SL)
2. Wendell's *William Shakespeare: A Study in Elizabethan Literature*, published in 1894. (SL)
- 3.^f From "Harvest-Home," {the seventh Idyll} line 80^g. {This is apparently from Andrew Lang's translation—see his *Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus Rendered into English Prose*, 40.}

^c Written vertically.

^d WA does not read this as crossed out.

^e WA omits this word.

^f This is WA's note 1.

⁸ I've corrected WA's attribution, who has it at line 94.