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To George W. Latham - October 31, 1895

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO GEORGE W. LATHAM

My dear Latham,

I have kept a little too much steam on since I came home from Boston, so to-day I will take a vacation and write a few letters that should have been written before. My trip was very pleasant, though I felt strange and out of place during the first three or four days. Why I should have had such a feeling I can not tell but I had it in spite of all the kind treatment of the fellows I met. I spent a rainy Sunday afternoon with Hubbell and found the man most woefully changed from the fellow I used to know. He was cordial enough, and all that and I know he was glad to see me; but still I could not, and even now can not, but wonder if his religion quite agrees with him. Like Ford, I think of him as the fellow who danced on a table after a game with Yale, and wish that fellow back. He would hardly dance on tables now, I fear, but I am partly consoled by the thought that he is the only man in the world with whom I ever drank straight whisky over a bar. That was in Springfield, and then there was no talk of Swedenborg or of marriage. Now the whole presence of the man is redolent of both, and the devil only knows what is coming of it all.

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My confidence in Hubbell, however, makes me feel that he knows what is best for him and I am sure enough, when I stop to think, that his present asceticism, if I can call it that, is a thing that will wear away with time. His experience in Brooklyn made a terrible impression upon him and that, no doubt, has a deal to do with his present attitude toward the earthy side of things.—Do not think from all this that I hav{e} lost any of my regard for your old room-mate, for that is not so; on the contrary I feel the inward strength of him and wish to God that I had a little more of the same stuff. Only, when a strong

man permits the spiritual that is in him to overrule the human—or seem to do so—it is hard for me to feel wholly at home in his company. The fault is, I fancy, mostly with myself, for I know as well as any body that I am a kind of semi-intellectual vagabond with an eye for all the higher things that do not tear one away from the every day doings of this iniquitous world whereon we live and whose air we must breathe and thrive upon in spite of all our spiritual uneasiness. Carlyle tells us to beware of spiritual pride, and I think he is right in doing so. If I only had a little more of Thomas's apparent belief in

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man's free agency in the building of his own temple, I should be able to deal better off.

I suppose that you have by this time read and passed judgment upon Une Vie, and I am rather anxious to get your opinions. As to my distinction between "smut" of the ordinary sort and that which need not be smut when considered from the point of view of common sense, I cannot do better than to turn from Une Vie to Mlle de Maupin¹—or to save time and trouble—to Swinburne, whom you already know. Maupassant's later books will not stand this test; but Une Vie, unless I am mistaken, is a book that could hardly do any sensible man or woman any moral damage. That flashy, and to me ridiculous, simile about the sea and the sunlight is the only thing in the book that does not belong there. I do not care for such novels for a steady diet, but it is good now and then to come across such an insight into human nature as we get in Jean and Tante Lijon. Esther Waters is the only book that I can think of just now—unless it be Madame Bovary—where there is any thing to

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match it. If you have not read Flaubert's masterpiece,

^a Written vertically.

you must do so. For it is a perfect revelation to any one who will take the trouble to give it anything like a careful reading.

There is a possibility that I may get out a small volume of "pomes" during the coming spring and I am now hard at work upon them. I feel that I am not quite old enough to launch my prose, as I have undertaken a kind of writing [that takes?] a devil of an amount of consideration. When it appears you will understand me better and will be ready, I hope, to overlook the crudities that may appear.

Tryon and his brother are in the Episcopal Theological School and hav a fine room in Lawrence Hall. Everything is free and easy there and I am glad to say that JL. – has become gloriously humanized. Butler has taken cheap lodgings near Bowdoin Square, and seems full of hope for better things in the future. I had a good talk with Mead and can quite agree with you in your opinion of him. You did not tell me if you wanted Moulton's book on the Drama, but I shall send it all the same when the planets are right.

Yours most sincerely.

Gardiner, Maine E.A. Robinson.

31 October, 1895.

HCL

NOTES

1. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Théophile Gautier's highly controversial novel of 1835. (SL)