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9-14-1894

## To Joseph S. Ford - September 14, 1894

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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### Recommended Citation

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TO JOSEPH S. FORD

Gardiner, Maine,  
Sept 14-1894.

My dear Ford,

I am beginning to realize that if I aspire to keep what few friends I have I must be friendly myself. I should have written to you weeks ago, but I hav{e} been through such mental hell during the past two months and particularly during the past four or five weeks that I hav had little courage or  
make  
inclination to ^ myself agreeable in correspondence. Things have been running far from smoothly but now I am in a little better frame of mind and see no good reason why I cannot write you a letter once in a fortnight during the coming winter—that is, if you take any pleasure in reading them. I know you would prefer to have me use the machine, but as this is my first effort for a long time, instinct, or something else, directed me to the old fashioned way—and the best way when one can write so that his friends can read him. As you have

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seen long before this, there is a good deal of the old fogy in my nature. I cannot help it, and would not if I could; so you must make the best of it and try not to think any less of me for not liking to see little spitfire narrow guage railroads running across the old still farms I used to know, or for thinking Munsey's Magazine, or rather the natural success of it, a monumental disgrace to the close the nineteenth century. I do not think that Norton is the cause of this; it ~~wall~~ was all in me years ago when I was too young to know anything about acute culture or an artistic impulse. I am an old fogy, and that is all there is to it.

Since last writing to you, I have read "The Scarlet Letter". Of course I had read it before, but that was so long ago that my second reading was quite as much a revelation as if I had never seen the book. As a romance it is incomparably superior to The Marble Faun; but an author is surer in his way when handling a simple passion—however intense it may be—like that of Hester and Dimmesdale, than in trying to master such an almost unnatural one as that of Miriam and Donatello. I do not find any fault with the

misty conclusion of the book—in fact, it is the best conclusion it could<sup>a</sup> have; I do not object to the descriptive digressions; but, for some reason, *The Marble Faun* is not all

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that its author intended it to be. But the *Scarlet Letter* is a masterpiece—the greatest history of a passion, as far as I know, in the whole world of fiction. Without wishing to make irreligious comparisons, I will say that *The Silence of Dean Maitland* is well worth reading, although it stands for what it is—a sensational novel.<sup>1</sup> But there are different kinds of sensational novels, and "*Dean Maitland*" is one of the best. It is hardly worth your while to read it in your busy season, but it is worth your while to read "*Esther Waters*",<sup>2</sup> which will attempt to prove to you that "we are human first and religious after."—I now have under consideration "*The Greater Glory*"<sup>3</sup> and "*Pembroke*",<sup>4</sup> two of the strongest of recent novels, but I fear it will be a long time before I can read them. My eyes are in a bad state just now and I cannot do much of anything except work around the house and garden and try to make Creon talk in respectable blank verse. Before long I shall send you a copy of his address to the Chorus.—And this brings to my mind the fact that you had nothing to say of my scheme of doing the choral parts of the play into ordinary heroic metre. I expected you would "kick", but am glad you did not as I am hopelessly convinced that my way of doing them is the right way—the only way. The repeated failures of past translators to give anything like an adequate lyrical rendering of a Greek chorus, and the more important fact

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that my purpose in translating *Antigone* is to make a modern reading poem of an ancient acting play, convinced me that I am doing wisely in keeping my measures unbroken. This is not conceit, but conviction.

My beans are now beginning to suggest Swinburne's "ghost of a garden."<sup>5</sup> They are spotted with yellow leaves and look sadly bedraggled as they cling to the poles. Last week I pulled a lot of "yellow-eyes" and started [staked?] them up in regular—or irregular—farmer style. That told me more than anything I have done this year that fall is coming and the time will

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<sup>a</sup> WA reads "can".

soon be at hand for me to go into my hole for the winter. When I have been in my hole for two or three—or four or five—years, you may possibly hear from me; if not, I shall probably have joined the "innumerable caravan" (of men after a job) and have faded away into a memory—as far as you are concerned. I could [would?] not have the face to try to keep up my college friendships if I should prove to be the total failure which often seems inevitable.—Smith and I have had our last fire in the woods, roasted our last corn, and he has gone away, and I am alone. There is a kind of poetry about the whole thing, but it isn't the kind that pays.—When you get this, I suppose you will be entering upon your new life. Well, you have all my best wishes and I trust you will find the Exeter atmosphere congenial. I have heard nothing this summer from Tryon—somehow I am half afraid that he is drying up from sheer over work. I shall have more to say of Antigone and short ~~storiys~~ stories when I write again.— Very truly,—Rob.

UVA

1. *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, a popular novel of 1886 by Maxwell Gray (pseudonym of Mary Glead Tuttiett (1846-1923)). (SL)
2. By George Moore (1857-1933), 1894.
3. By Maarten Maartens (1858-1915), 1894.
4. By Mary E. Wilkins (1852-1930), 1894.
5. A reference to Swinburne's poem, "A Forsaken Garden": "Walled round with rocks as an inland island,/ The ghost of a garden fronts the sea" (ll. 3-4). (SL)