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1-13-1893

To Harry de Forest Smith - January 13, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

#1716 Camb^a St.,

Jan 13 – '92 [=1893]

My dear Smith,

I suppose you have put me down for a "flat" (whatever that is) long before this but I trust you will not be too hard upon me. I will not say that I have not had time to write, as that excuse is too threadbare. I suppose the chief reason is that I thought I would wait until I subscribed for the "Nation". For some reason I have

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failed to do it, but will see to it the first of the week. Your "Critic" came all right.--That thesis is due to morrow and I have written after my own way. Have no idea what mark it will bring & shall not hear for five or six weeks.

The mid year examinations are only a little over a week ahead, and I do not know where they will land me. I have a difficulty in expressing myself at times which leads one to think I know less than I really do—which, God knows, is little enough. But

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then, I shall not worry about it. The only things that trouble me to any great extent are Logic of which I am absolutely ignorant, and German Composition, which I lack the logic, or something else, to put together in the right order. However, I shall steer through it some way and will soon be beyond these small rocks, and out into the ocean of life etc., where, I am told, the rocks are of much more portentous dimensions. This life is a

^a WA adds a period here.

curious mess, after all. Sometimes I
sit here by my fire and wonder how

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it is all coming out. I look back
upon the millions who lived and died a
thousand years ago and wonder if it makes
much difference how it comes out, after all.
I do not look pessimistically upon the
matter. I am inclined to regard it more in
the light of a big joke—whose joke
it is, or whether it is a good one, I cannot
tell. Maarten Maartens has written a
novel called "God's Fool".¹ Think I shall
read it. Bought a copy of "Tom Jones" the
other day and shall read it, soon in my
English course. Butler,² who has the room
next to mine, began it yesterday noon and finished
it at four o'clock this morning, about
a thousand good sized pages. I do not know
whether to look for another letter from you to-morrow
or not, but will be glad to get one--^b Yours.^c R.^d

HCL US, 79-80.

EAR misdated the letter 1892.

1. Maarten Maartens (1858-1915) was the pen name of Joost van der Poorten Schwartz, a Dutch author who wrote in English. Although trained as a lawyer, he turned to writing and attracted popular and critical attention with the publication of his first novel, "The Sin of Joost Avelingh" in 1890. "God's Fool," his fourth work, was published in 1892.
2. William E. Butler (1874-1912), a close friend at Harvard, was helpful to EAR on two occasions in particular. He underwrote the publication of *CN* in 1897, and he gave EAR a job in his drygoods store in Boston early in 1905 when the poet was down and almost out. Butler committed suicide in November 1912. EAR dedicated *MATS* "To the Memory of William Edward Butler." There is no record of any extant letters of EAR to Butler. {See Donaldson for more on Butler and for speculation on the nature of Butler's and EAR's relationship.}

^b WA reads a period here instead of a dash.

^c WA reads a comma here.

^d WA places the closing below the last line of the letter, with "Yours" and "R." on two separate lines.