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2-5-1893

## To Harry de Forest Smith - February 5, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITH

#1716 Camb. St.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,  
CAMBRIDGE.

[February 5, 1893]

My dear Smith:

Now I will try to write you a letter, though I am feeling about as miserably as a mortal can, and be religious. I have had a tremendous pain in my left lung for the past two or three days and and {sic} now I am "broken out" in big blotches both fore and aft. I have no idea what it is, but will consult an MD.<sup>a</sup> to-morrow. I always prided myself on my strong lungs, and if there is any thing the matter with them I shall feel rather down in the mouth. I hate to kick, but it seems as if the Fates kept something in store for me all the time to keep me in hot water. After that long siege with my ear which no one can appreciate but myself, this thing comes on

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like a cannibal after a missionary. It may be a cancer or a lupus; if it is, I shall dodge the exams. in English VII and Philosophy (Logic and Psychology) on general principles, and regain something. Last night the thing ached so that I went down to the square and got a porous plaster, which I fancy relieved it somewhat. In order to drive the pain away I read Emerson's essays on Love Friendship, Prudence and Heroism, but am afraid I did not get much out of them.

As you have already seen, I did not go to town last night, but stayed in Cambridge. Schuman failed to turn up at the gathering in Saben's room but the others were all there. Saben got drunk, as I expected, and made a learned ass of himself. He read Bob Ingersoll,<sup>1</sup> Copée,<sup>2</sup> Omar Khayyam, and to [=the] Elegy in a Country Churchyard<sup>3</sup> as only a drunken man can.<sup>4</sup> The audience seemed well amused, but there is something rather degrading in it, after all. Perhaps I should

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<sup>a</sup> WA has "M.D."

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would have enjoyed it more if I had drunk something, but I have practically given it up, if I ever drank enough to say that. The pipe does me very well. <sup>b</sup>I will send you the Nation with this. It contains some rather hard remarks on Blaine,<sup>5</sup> I think, but then the Post is a democratic paper as much as the Boston Herald and the party spirit must show itself in dealing with such a prominent character. There is something very pathetic to me in Blaine's hand-organ man. I suppose<sup>c</sup> you read of it in the papers.--I have been reading more ~~Thomp~~ Thomson,<sup>6</sup> and Perry's Eighteenth century Literature<sup>7</sup> in preparation for the English VII examination but have found it pretty hard work with the devil in my chest. He is digging away at

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my back now for a change, which is not altogether disagreeable. To morrow at this time I hope to know what is the matter with me. I think I am inclined to look upon the bright side of things after all, and hope for favorable news. Since beginning this note I have thought of carbuncles, but hope I am wrong. They are the devil's own joy and will "have none of them" if I can help myself—which I probably cannot.

Next Monday we begin a German farce entitled "Einer ~~m~~Muss<sup>d</sup> Hieraten" (One must Marry).<sup>8</sup> If the opening speech is a sample of the whole, I think I shall have trouble with it. I wonder why it is that every new German book seems like another language?

Took the Fine Arts examination last Thursday and include a list of the questions. I think you would like the course—in fact, I know you would—for

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you have a fondness for the better things in life,<sup>e</sup>

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<sup>b</sup> WA has a paragraph break here.

<sup>c</sup> WA reads "supposed".

<sup>d</sup> The capital "m" is written directly over the lower-case one. WA transcribes this as "<m> Muss".

which I ~~some~~ sometimes think may be a misfortune rather than a blessing. Wholesome, healthy ignorance and indifference is a thing to be envied.

Well, I think I will stop now and smoke a pipe ~~be~~ before going to bed. Hope to get a letter from you Tuesday.

Sincerely,  
E.A.R.<sup>f</sup>

HCL US, 83-84.  
Undated.

#### NOTES<sup>g</sup>

1. Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), American freethinker and orator, nicknamed "The Great Agnostic." He had recently delivered his celebrated eulogy at Whitman's funeral (the poet had died in March 1892), and it is possible that this is what Saben read. (SL)
2. François Edouard Joachim Coppée (1842-1908), a French writer of fiction and poetry who, along with Alphonse Daudet, was to have a seminal influence on EAR during the latter's apprenticeship to fiction over the next few years. (SL)
3. *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, by Thomas Gray (1716-1771), published in 1751. (SL)
4. EAR was to celebrate another, much darker, drunken recitation of Omar Khayyam many years later, in "Mr. Flood's Party" (1921). (SL)
5. James Gillespie Blaine {{(b. 1830)}}, distinguished American statesman and unsuccessful seeker after the presidency, had died the week before, on January 27, 1893. As a Maine man, Blaine had a special interest for EAR and Smith.
6. Francis Thompson (1700-1748), Scottish poet who is probably most famous today for *The Seasons* (1730). (SL)
7. EAR's copy of Thomas Sergeant Perry's *English Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1883) is dated March 21, '92.
8. *Einer Muss Heiraten!* by Alexander Victor Wilhelmi (pseudonym of Alexander Victor Zechmeister, 1817-1877). Wilhelmi was a German playwright and actor. (SL)

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<sup>e</sup> WA omits "in life,".

<sup>f</sup> WA omits the underline.

<sup>g</sup> Notes 5 and 7 here are WA's notes 1 and two, respectively.