Four Letters from George Henry Boker to John Seely Hart

The four letters published here are part of a collection of thirty-nine letters owned by Cornell University. A significant figure in the history of American drama, George Henry Boker (1823–1890), the son of Charles S. Boker, a prominent Philadelphia businessman and President of the Girard Bank, graduated from Princeton in 1842. Following his marriage in 1844, Boker settled on Walnut Street where, over the objections of his father, he pursued a literary career. In 1848, he published his first play, Calaynos. By 1856, when he published his two-volume Plays and Poems, he had completed three more tragedies, including his best known play Francesca da Rimini (1855), four comedies, and numerous poems.

Unfortunately, Boker’s works attracted only slight attention; and their neglect, a lawsuit brought by the Girard Bank against his father’s estate, and the upheaval of the Civil War effectively ended Boker’s literary ambitions until 1882 when Lawrence Barrett’s successful revival of Francesca da Rimini rekindled Boker’s interest in the theatre. But although he completed two plays, Nydia (1885) and Glaucus (1886), they were never produced. Recognized in his time for the poetry he wrote in support of the Union, for his role in establishing Philadelphia’s Union League, and for his diplomatic service, Boker saw his ambition of being a great writer go unfulfilled.

Thirteen years older than Boker, John Seely Hart (1810–1877), the recipient of the thirty-nine letters, graduated from Princeton in 1830 and from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1834. In 1836, he purchased Edge Hill School, which he ran until 1841 when he became principal of Central High School in Philadelphia. Between

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1 I am grateful to the American Philosophical Society for a grant that assisted in this research and to the Cornell University Library for permission to publish the letters, which are reproduced here without corrections to the original spelling and punctuation.
1849 and 1851, Hart edited *Sartain's Magazine* and was throughout his life a prolific writer on education, the Sunday School Movement, literature and composition. In 1870, he published *Composition and Rhetoric*, becoming Professor of Rhetoric at Princeton in 1872. When he retired from Princeton, Hart was writing on Shakespeare; his *Life of Shakespeare* appeared posthumously in the Avon edition of Shakespeare's works.²

Since this collection of Boker's letters has never been discussed—indeed, neither the collection nor Hart himself is mentioned in Edward Sculley Bradley's *George Henry Boker, Poet and Patriot*³—it is useful to place these four letters within the entire collection. It begins in November 1848 and ends with a letter dated October 23, 1875.⁴ Unlike Boker's letters to Bayard Taylor, then, the letters to Hart were not written at fairly regular intervals over the course of many years. Instead, they fall into four groups, each having a particular focus.

The first group, nineteen letters written between November 1848 and May 1851, was addressed to Hart in his capacity as editor of *Sartain's*. Hart sent Boker many of the poems submitted to *Sartain's*, and Boker advised him as to whether or not they should be published. In examining these poems, Boker was most concerned with matters of technique; but while these letters indicate something of Boker's critical perspective, the poets mentioned (e.g., Frances Osgood, Alice Casey, Caroline and Edith May) are now forgotten. The poems Boker examined seem for the most part to have been ones Hart was uncertain about accepting, and thus those of such poets as Longfellow or Poe either were not sent to Boker or, if they were, Boker did not feel it necessary to comment on them.

Following the letter of May 1851, the correspondence breaks off until September 12, 1854. This second group consists of eight relatively insignificant letters written between then and June 23, 1868. Most respond to requests for poems or reviews or congratulate Hart on his having published a new book.

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² For a fuller account of Hart's life, see Frank M[onaghan], "Hart, John Seely," *Dictionary of American Biography*.
³ Philadelphia, 1927.
⁴ Dates given are exact. Several letters have no date other than the month and year; one letter, written to Hart while he was editor of *Sartain's*, is undated.
In 1870 the correspondence again becomes more frequent. Between March 26 and September 13, Boker wrote eight letters to Hart that form a third group. All except the last of these letters, which discourages Hart from seeking a diplomatic appointment for Boker, are concerned with Hart's *Composition and Rhetoric*. The first of these eight letters indicates that other letters having to do with Hart's book were written; unfortunately, they appear to have been lost. In those that survive, Boker advises Hart on matters of prosody, literary theory, and style. Like the letters of 1849-1851, they demonstrate Boker's concern with, and considerable knowledge of, poetic technique.

While the entire collection of letters is of interest to students of Boker and the literary period of which he was a part, the last four letters, those printed here, are particularly significant. The first three were written while Boker was Minister to Turkey, the last while he was Minister to Russia. As the first letter indicates, Boker renewed his correspondence with Hart more or less by accident. Hart, ill at the time, welcomed the correspondence. Since both men were nearing the ends of their careers, the letters provided Boker an opportunity to reflect on his earlier life and his present situation. They contain biographical information that supplements and corrects Bradley's biography. Moreover, Boker's comments on his works provide new historical information on them, and his discussion of Shakespeare illuminates Boker's understanding of Shakespearean drama and hence sheds light on his own plays.

Most importantly, the letters provide an intimate glimpse of Boker himself. Boker was not given to expressing his feelings openly, and he particularly kept hidden his frustration and disappointment over the failure of his literary career. As his friend Charles Godfrey Leland noted, Boker "trained himself from boyhood to self restraint, calmness, and the *nil admirari* air." In fact, so well did Boker keep his disappointment hidden that even Marie Taylor, Bayard Taylor's second wife, wrote in her memoirs that Boker "seemed satisfied with the fame" his work enjoyed.

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But Boker was not satisfied with his literary career, and his intense disappointment is expressed in these letters. In their intimacy and intensity, the letters recall Boker’s letters to Taylor during the 1850s. But whereas the letters to Taylor were written when Boker still had some hope of fulfilling his literary ambitions, these letters to Hart were written when Boker knew his ambitions would never be realized; they indicate the extent and depth of Boker’s disappointment.

Creighton University

Oliver H. Evans

I

Légation des Etats-Unis d’Amérique
Constantinople le 4 Novembre, 1874.

My dear Father Hart,

I have often meditated writing to you this note, and I have often promised myself the pleasure which it now gives me to bear, in your sight, these fruits of my meditations; but something has always arisen between me and my good resolutions, to postpone the fulfilment of that which I have always regarded as a plain duty, the neglect of which has been a burden upon my conscience. Because I have been naughty and remiss, you must not therefore suppose that your image has not lived warmly in my memory surrounded with a sort of saintly halo, the product of a thousand tender and grateful remembrances.

There, old man! I always loved you, and I always shall love you, and no silence of mine will ever prove anything more than simply that I am not giving utterance to that which is within my heart. I hate to prose over neglected duties. They are bad enough in themselves, to a man with a modicum of conscience, without being used as texts for sermons. If you did not always look so awfully grave and thoughtful over everything that is presented to you, I should never have thought of beginning a note to you in this solemn manner. Never say after this that I have no sympathies, when, as you see in this instance, they have led me to the point of making myself abhorrently stupid for your dear sake. “Ah!” you exclaim, “if I had only trounced that boy when I had the chance and the
right, what might I have not done for his impudence!” Spare your regrets! All the birch blisters in the world could not have taken the innate insolence out of me. It was always deeper than that skin which might have received the honor of your superficial applications.

Do you remember the time when I ran away from Edge Hill, and my poor mother, pretending to me that she believed that I had covered myself with irreclaimable disgrace, sent me back to you with my tail between my legs, and under vows to bear the severest punishment from you without a murmur and with a lively expectation of having to endure something borrowed, but aggravated from a profound study of the arts of the Spanish Inquisition? Do you remember how you received me? It was with a smile, and a kind hand upon my head—*ach Gott!* that head is gray now!—and with: “George, I hope that you have found nothing disagreeable in your residence with me!” in a tone of the deepest anxiety. What a defeat for me! what a moral collapse! No conceivable fustigation would have punished me as those words did. I said in my poor little unhappy heart: “This man is a gentleman. I will die at my post before I will hurt his feelings again.” Thenceforth, wretched and homesick as I was at times, I stayed firmly at Edge Hill through mere love of you; nor have the many years which have passed obliterated one incident of that occasion, nor lost you one corner of the heart which you then won.⁷

But when I entered upon the writing of this note, it was not to exhaust my time in apologies, nor to recall that past which we possess in common. What I wish to know is something about yourself and your surroundings. I saw by an article in the “New York Herald,” that you are a Professor at Princeton. What do you profess, and how long have you been professing it? How do you like your situation? Is it your purpose to remain at your present post? Above all, what are you doing, particularly in the literary way?

⁷ According to Bradley (7–10), in 1831 Boker entered a school run by Sears C. Walker and remained there until entering Princeton in 1838. But Bradley based his account on Leland’s *Memoirs*. Leland himself remained with Walker until 1835; he then entered Bronson Alcott’s school where he remained until 1837. When he returned from Alcott’s school, Leland found Boker still at Walker’s, although the school had by then passed, first, to Sears Walker’s brother, Joseph, and then to B. F. Hunt. This letter, as well as a letter to Hart dated June 23, 1868, shows that part of Boker’s early education took place at Hart’s Edge Hill School.
I have a right to know all about you and yours, and I expect you to answer the above questions to my satisfaction.

By the article in the "Herald," just mentioned, I was informed that you had been "interviewed" about Aaron Burr's posthumous history, and also as to whether or not Francis Bacon wrote the plays of the "divine Williams,"—poor Delia Bacon's craze, so pathetically mentioned by Hawthorne. Burr's old ghost you stripped of the lying mystery and sent to Hades; but I wonder that you had the patience to talk about the Shakespeare folly. I wonder that you did not reply to that by an argumentum ad hominem, viz: by kicking the fool who interviewed you out of your study. It seems, too, that you have written an article, which I never read, about the mask.  

How can I get a peep at that? You likewise had a photograph of the mask taken which I have not seen, although I have one at home, taken by Page, I think. Can you not send me a copy of yours? How much I miss, by residing in this out of the way place where there is no art, no literature, no education,—nothing, in short, but rot and imbecility!

Have you read what we used to call a "pome" of mine in "Lippincott's Magazine" for February, 1873, I think, entitled "Kismet"? It is a curious story, chiefly because all the incidents are literal facts, which I took the pains to verify. The hero of the poem, Halil Pacha, I knew very well, almost as intimately as a Frank may know an Osmandic; and, with all his vices and tyrannies to the people, he was a fine specimen of a Turkish gentleman of the new school, *ie*: that class of half scientific men who believe in nothing but themselves and their little science. Among the high caste Turks, there is no religion of any kind remaining, and nothing but a *pseudo* rationalism to supply its place. My poem is written from the old Turkish, or bigoted and reactionary, stand point; and now read it, and be instructed!

Perhaps you wonder at the fact that I have remained here so long. My reason for that is that I have a great fancy for diplomacy, a real enjoyment of the business, and a certain natural capacity for it, too,

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9 The date Boker gives for his poem is incorrect. "Kismet" appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine*, XIII (February 1874), 212-219.
my flatterers tell me. Besides, I have been able to accomplish many things for the U. S. Government here, at which my predecessors failed, and for the accomplishment of which I have good cause to be satisfied.

You doubtless know of my final victory over those scoundrels at the Girard Bank, and, for the sake of my Father's memory, I know how greatly that ending must have delighted you. Those miserable beggars at the Bank were after money, and now see how they finished! In the end, they were one hundred thousand dollars worse off than they would have been had they accepted the terms which I proposed to them at the outset. The moral of the history is that a fool should never attempt to play the rogue.

It is my intention to come home early in the year 1876, and then I shall run up to Princeton and pay you a visit, if I do no other good thing during my stay. It is not probable that I shall return to Turkey; but that matter I shall not decide until after I am at home.

Do you ever see anything of our old friends in Philadelphia? I have had two or three letters from Mr. Wm. D. Lewis, and he told me all about the coterie that frequented Mr. Carey's house; but from the individuals composing that coterie I have not had a line. Absence seems to be a sort of a living death: a man has but to stay abroad long enough, to be forgotten by everybody.

I wish that you could inspire some able fellow to write a magazine article on the American drama. At the first view, this may seem next to impossible for want of material; but a further inquiry will show that sufficient material exists for such a purpose, although from what quarter it can be gathered is more than I know. I remember once being struck with an article, in an old quarterly, on Tom Paine's "Brutus." It seemed to me that, as compared with other modern dramatic works, this tragedy showed well, and was something for an American to feel some pride in. I have no doubt that if a skilful hand would go through the works of Paine, Bird, Conrad,

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10 For an account of Boker's lawsuit with the Girard Bank, see Bradley, 185-187. The suit began in 1858, shortly after the death of Boker's father, and continued until 1873.

11 Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879), political economist and art collector, conducted a salon Sunday afternoons at his house, 1102 Walnut Street, attended by the city's leading men for discussions of national problems. These meetings were known as the Carey Vespers. "Wm. D. Lewis" was presumably the Philadelphia artist William Darch Lewis.
Stone, Willis\textsuperscript{12} &c., an article could be written that the literary world of to-day sadly needs for its information. Everywhere, in the newspapers, I read laments that America has produced no dramatic writers; yet the authors of these articles seem to be in utter ignorance of the names even of such dramatic writers as our country has produced. This is a little hard and unjust towards the poor devils who have tried to do something for our drama, and, I for one, am not patient under our fate. At all events, such an article as I have suggested would have the great merit of perfect freshness, and would certainly attract attention to its author. Come, old gentleman, sharpen up your pen, and go at us! I shall forgive you, in advance, all the blood you can draw from me. If your article should expand to a series, and afterward become a volume, the greater would be the credit of the work. Here is a fallow field; stick in your hoe, or some less able fellow will anticipate you someday, and do the neglected throng, which I have commended to your care, an injustice. Do you remember Charles Lamb's charming articles on the early dramatists? There is a model for you.

Remember me very kindly to your family.

Yours sincerely,
Geo: H. Boker

II

Légation des Etats-Unis d'Amérique
Constantinople le 31 Jan: 1875.

My dear Father Hart,

Although I am pleased to know that my poor little note to you was the means of doing you so much good, I am sorry that you required a setting up by any instrumentality. To show you that I am not a designing fellow, had no knowledge of your illness, and was not covertly endeavoring to earn a fee, please to deduct the payment for my services from your doctor's bill, and apply the

\textsuperscript{12} The playwrights referred to are John Howard Payne, Robert Montgomery Bird, Robert T. Conrad, John Augustus Stone and Nathaniel Parker Willis.
amount to some charitable object. I take it for granted that your physician is a rational person, and, therefore, that he will make no stupid objections to so proper an arrangement.

Alas! alas! I have waited the arrival of a half dozen mails, since the receipt of your note, but the “Scribner,” containing your article on the mask of Shakespeare, has not yet reached me. I used to swear; but no profanity can do justice to this sort of annoyance which is but too frequent on the part of the European post offices. I have never missed a letter nor a despatch; but books, pamphlets, magazines and printed matter in general are stolen from me with a regularity worthy of a better cause. The scoundrels have good literary taste, too; they never think of hooking a Pub: Doc: or any such rubbish, but they confine their depredations strictly to those things which I most desire to receive. Is it too much to ask you to try the uncertainties of the mail once more, by sending me another copy? This may be an impudent request, but then I shall be so grateful!

You have earned your repose, and I am glad to know that you are about to take it for the remainder of your days which, I pray God, may be [as] long as they have always been useful. I am not in the least sorry that you will cut Princeton. I bear that institution a grudge for the shabby way in which Jimmy Alexander—Heaven rest his soul!—induced the Faculty to act towards poor little me when I graduated: not to have given me honors would have been one and, perhaps, a very just thing; but to award them, and afterwards take them away, was an insult which no one felt so keenly as your good friend, my dear Father. More than that, I have studied a learned profession, I have won, according to various “whoppers,” told by Dr. J. S. Hart, an honorable place in literature, I have received the highest distinction for diplomatic services—something earned, not bestowed through favor,—and yet that nasty old College has never conferred a degree upon me. Not so much as the L.L.D. which it sows about among the obscure men who write unread and unreadable books upon subjects as dry as the

13 James Waddel Alexander (1804-1859), professor of rhetoric and belles lettres (1833-1844).
14 Actually, Boker received the degrees of A.B. in 1842 and M.A. in 1848, although as he did not attend commencement he did not acquire his diplomas. What he regretted was not being awarded an honorary doctorate.
“remainder biscuit.” Why is this thus? I say, and then I shake my fist at my Alma Mater, and wonder if they of the Faculty still remember what Jimmy Alexander told them about my poor lost astonished boy’s soul being “steeped in Hegelism!” If Jimmy could have heard how that great man, Albert Dodd,¹⁵ laughed at the charge when I went to him, my dear, dear friend—I bewildered and almost whimpering with shame and grief—he, the aforesaid Jimmy, would have not felt easy in his orthodox soul when Dodd added: “Well, I shall tell Prof. Alexander that all you know of Hegel and his philosophy, I taught you. Meanwhile, do not grieve. You will live to consider this injustice a trifle.” Here was an awfully prophetic opening of the future before my young eyes, by a man whom I considered to be the wisest of men, and I stood appalled at the prospect. It dried up my eyes as with a whirlwind, and I have lived to know its utter truth.

Why, O Father Hart, have I the trick of recurring forever to the recollections of my boyhood, and to the moral condition of my heart at that time? I find a mysterious sort of comfort in it. Perhaps it is a relief to me to consider that comparatively pure thing, rather than the ugly sin-begrimed and guilt-stuffed organ which is now halting along in my perturbed bosom, woe is me!

You are in a good line of literary business in writing criticisms and illustrations of the early poets. You know that these great fellows have furnished such brains as I possess with the bulk of their intellectual pabulum. Of course, I say “God speed! for even when you may turn your pen towards the criticism of modern work, the old boys will provide your judgment with the highest and safest standard for deductions. With one's fundament upon the writers down to Milton, the critic sits in the chair of Solomon for all literary decisions, let who will come before the tribunal.

I am not a little astonished at your report of your industry in getting up text-books, without the assistance of your favorite pupil to review your bad work, and to add his own stupidity thereto. However did you do it? as the English say. In your “American

¹⁵ Albert Baldwin Dod (not Dodd), professor of mathematics from 1830 until his death in 1845.
Literature," did you tell any fresh and more incredible lies about the aforesaid favorite pupil, myself? Ah! Father Hart, when a man once gets into that habit, whether with tongue or with pen, who can say to what lengths he will go upon a way that is irretraceable? I have no faith in late repentance; but you will have to try it, *volens volens*, in your case, and I hope that you may find a grace which I am not prepared to assure you.

I have read many favorable notices of Morgan's book about the German Universities, and I need not tell you with what pleasure. The book itself I have not seen, because here one can get hold of no kind of literature, save scrofulous French novels; but I shall read it someday, possibly very soon, when I go to Paris, and can lay my hand upon fresh books. How is Morgan, and what manner of man is he? Is he a deadly earnest fellow, like you, subject to sporadic explosions of mirth that almost rend his normal fibre?

I do not back out. I confess judgment. I acknowledge that you owe me a licking. It is your due, you brute, and I shall be ready to yield myself to it at any time, now or hereafter. Only hurry up; for when you behold me fluttering about as a singing cherub, I—if there be any truth in high Catholic art—shall have no bottom to spank. So come on with your vested and entailed rights: only I think that it is mean in you, at your age, to remember them.

That article of Bill Read in the "World" is all fair. I like that sort of fun, and am willing to pay the piper, that other's spirits may dance. There is no malice in it; for the man really likes me, as much as he can anybody save Wm. B. Read. Perhaps that article helped promote me to St. Petersburg. Who knows? for Mr. Fish hates newspapers and newspapermen, and he has a way of taking their advice inversely.

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16 In his *A Manual of American Literature* (1873; rpt. New York, 1969), Hart printed four Boker poems and wrote that while an important writer, Boker "has not been a prolific writer" (336). Boker comments on this statement in his next letter.

17 John Seely Hart's son, James Morgan Hart (1839-1916), author of *German Universities: A Narrative of Personal Experience* (1874).

18 William Bradford Reed (1806-1876) was a former Philadelphia lawyer and diplomat who wrote for the *New York World*. Hamilton Fish was Grant's Secretary of State.
Now I must go out for exercise. Give my kindest regards to Mrs. Hart—Mother Hart, I suppose I should say, as you are my father—and to Morgan, to Brother Morgan also.

God bless you!

Yours sincerely,
Geo. H. Boker

III

Légation des Etats-Unis d'Amérique
Constantinople le 7 Avril, 1875

My dear Father Hart,

I am glad to know that my foolish notes give you some amusement. If, as you say, they assist you in regaining your health, I shall bless the inspiration that induced me to begin a correspondence just as you stood in need of it. There are no friends like old friends; and the longer I live, the less I feel inclined to let a veteran ally like you escape from the toils which your kind heart spun for you years ago.

You ask me to tell you the story of the unpleasant incident between St. James W. Alexander and my then very humble self which happened at the time of my graduation.

I was a Clio, and Clio Hall ranked me as its “best writer”. The Clios set great store upon the speech which would certainly be given to me at the Commencement Exhibition, “if merit had a right to expect reward”—&c., which speech was to take down, shut up and cover with dismay our rivals, the Whigs. When the “honors” were announced, sure enough my name figured on the list, and the Clios were happy. But lo! you, how our joy was turned to sorrow! I had hardly strutted about the Campus for a day, and gathered in the congratulations of all my admiring friends, before another edict was issued by the Faculty, stating that there had been a mistake in according a speech to me, and that my name was stricken from the list, for reasons within the knowledge of the Professor of Belles Lettres, the aforesaid St. James of blessed memory. This was pretty hard upon a poor boy of eighteen. It was not only an insult, but it was an unprecedented one, and cruel because it was needless. If a blunder had been made in conferring a speech upon me, it was not
mine, and I should not have been made to suffer for it. So thought my dear friend, Albert Dodd, who loved unworthy me just as you always have done, and with as little reason, and so he set himself to work in investigating the affair. He traced the cause of my disgrace to Jimmy Alexander who, as an excuse for his action, declared that my writings were tainted with the atheistical philosophy of Hegel! At this Dodd roared with laughter, and said to Jimmy: "If the poor boy knows anything of German philosophy, he knows no more than that which I have taught him." It was in vain, however, that my great friend expostulated, and used his wonderful eloquence in my behalf. Jimmy was firm, and in that position of the matter I think that he was in the right; for to have once more revised his judgment, and given me a speech after all, would have been to confess himself thrice in the wrong. So I hid my diminished head, went sorrowing home to my Father, and at Commencement I had not the assurance to present myself before my fellow students. If you will examine the record of my class, you will find that I never received a diploma from the college, although the two usual degrees were conferred upon me in due course of procedure.¹⁹

The only revenge I ever got out of the affair was this. My friends, the Clios, insisted on printing my speech in the "Nassau Monthly," a little periodical of my time. There you may find it, under the title of "Preëminence of the Man of Letters,"²⁰ and it was pronounced to be better by long odds, than anything that was delivered at that Commencement. All of which I most potently believe, even at this late date.—What the devil are you laughing at, you old cynic? Were you never a boy?

I am glad to know that you are satisfied with Morgan. The direction of his studies has my full sympathy; for that, in a more incomplete and desultory way, has been the line of my own reading. I

¹⁹ Bradley speculates that "it was probably in recognition of Calaynos that the honorary degree of M.A. was conferred upon Boker by Princeton College in June 1848, although that degree was sometimes a mere formality in those days" (65). This letter, as well as Boker's comments on Princeton in the previous letter, makes it clear that Princeton's granting of the degree was not a recognition of Boker's literary activity.

²⁰ Bradley (343) erroneously gives the publication date of this essay as November 1842. The essay, important for an understanding of Boker's literary theory, was published in The Nassau Monthly, II (January 1843), 74-79.
wish my younger brother all kinds of success in his noble pursuit. Perhaps when I come home, he will find some things in my little library that may be of interest to him.

How you do blow out at Princeton, old man! Whatever is the matter with you? as the English say. I solemnly believe that if you would swear one good round oath at the College, and then repent of your profanity, that you would feel easier, and would hereafter better be able to accomodate your soul in your body. Nothing is so perilous to one's ultimate salvation as bottled up wrath. Get rid of your humors in one volcanic eruption of objurgations, and you will not suffer with periodical earthquakes of the flesh.

Thank you for the magazine containing your article on the death-mask of Shakespeare! It came to me safely at last, and I read your paper with great interest and to the development of my knowledge in that new province of Shakespearian learning. I, for one, believe in the authenticity of the mask. When I first saw a photograph of the mask, having no previous knowledge that such a thing had been discovered, I looked at it with awe, and whispered, "Shakespeare!"

Do you remember this anecdote? Some virtuoso one day, in Wordsworth's presence, was exhibiting a watch, said to have belonged to Milton. When the company got through with the inspection, Wordsworth, in all the innocence of his sublime vanity, exclaimed: "And here is my watch!" drawing forth his chronometer before the admiring throng. Even so let us turn from the face of Shakespeare to that which I send you,—the only photograph which I have had taken since I came abroad. Of course, it does not do justice to me: nothing short of the gallows could do that; but such as it is, I send it to you.

In your "American Literature," you lied well and roundly and to my entire satisfaction: else were I ungrateful for the peril in which you have placed your immortal part for my poor sake.

It seems to me that it is only by this sort of sturdy and impudent lying that my literary reputation can be kept alive. Once in a while, some eminent liar illuminates my name with a burst of glory such as you got off—Heaven pardon you!—in your American Literature, and then I pass into obscurity again. Of popularity, in any sense, I have none. I do not believe that Lippincott sells a hundred copies
of my poems in a year, and I really believe that, in the end, I shall lapse out of man’s knowledge as a poet. You say truly that I have not been a prolific writer. The reason for my sterility is patent. I never had an audience to address. I was choked off by neglect. If in my youth, I had secured even a little band of admirers, it was in me, with that encouragement, to have written perhaps too much. Now, however, it is too late to hope that the old tree will bear again. That unhappy law-suit with the Bank, killed my enthusiasm, quenched my feelings, made a dull, dry, hard, prematurely aged man of me,—another man, in short. The impulse to write never comes to me now. It has gone, and with it all the glory of the hope of my youth. Sometimes I weep tears, almost of blood, over this condition of things, in thinking of what I was and of what I am. Yet men, comparing me with others, might call me, in the main, a successful man. But the success, such as it is, is nothing to me. I have gained that which I did not care to win, while my poor little beloved poetical crown has lain withering at my feet. Forgive me this egotism, Father Hart, but sometimes one must unpack the stuffed bosom; and besides you know me almost as though you had made me. It is devilish hard that, do what a man may, when he comes to gather in the spoils of his life, he must look upon himself as a conscience-stricken and a dreary failure. There must be an hereafter, or this life never would have been the thing it is.

When you see Mr. Wm. D. Lewis again remember me to him in all kindness. I hope to see you all in the Spring of the next year, and then we will all gather about my dining-table, and have one more jolly symposium at least.

There are two men alive, of the old Faculty of Princeton in my day, for whom I cherish a deep regard,—Dr. Maclean and Dr. Joseph Henry. When you come across either of these good men, give them a greeting and a blessing from me.21

We shall start for St. Petersburg about the end of the present month, at which city please to address your next note.

Give my love to Mother Hart and to Brother Morgan. Dear

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21 John Maclean (1800–1886) graduated from Princeton in 1816 and shortly after joined its faculty, serving as President from 1853 to 1868. Joseph Henry (1797–1878) was professor of natural philosophy 1832–1846.
God! I wish that we were all at Edgehill [sic] again, as we were in the old day! I would be a better and a more studious boy, I promise you; and much that there would be in the life to come, even with no change in the surrounding circumstances, I would remedy and bring to finer issues. What an exasperating thing it is to look back, and have nothing better to say of yourself than: "What a damned fool I have been!"

God bless you, Dear Father Hart! I hope that your health is entirely reëstablished, and that you have no further need of the medicine of Momus which I have been sending to you.

Your dutiful son,
George H. Boker

IV
Légation des Etats-Unis d’Amerique
À St. Petersbourg October 23, 1875.

My dear Father Hart,

I cannot blame you for delaying to reply to my former note, because I am not without sin in that respect towards others, as my writing-table drawer will show. In fact, I get so horribly tired of doing the writing which I am obliged to do, that I hate the sight of pens, ink and paper, and private correspondence loses its zest by confounding itself with official drudgery.

I was glad to hear from you, old man. I was glad to know, from the plans which you unfolded, that you have recovered your health, and have yet energy enough in you to do mischief. Go ahead! you have my blessing and best wishes. I believe in your scheme for lecturing the people about Shakespeare. I believe in it, "picters" and all; only you must call the pictures illustrations, and be as dignified as you, in your new character of showman, can be.

You are quite right in your estimate of the character and acquirements of Shakespeare. His was altogether an exceptional nature, and we should not try to measure him by the usual human standards. I believe that Shakespeare was a man of vast and, for his age, of very accurate knowledge, understanding knowledge in
its widest sense, as something more and above mere learning. He understood, to the heart of the matter, at a glance that which it might take even superior men years to learn. After all, what is our science but a knowledge of nature? and we know that he could read in her book deeper and more rapidly than a college of doctors. Before him the whole cosmos was open, and what he knew was essential truth; not mere learning, much of which was at his time, is at ours, and will be hereafter, anything but truth. If his perceptions were of electrical quickness, as compared with those of other men, and absorbed and assimilated and extracted the principles from things in a way that we, of duller minds, can hardly comprehend, it is not necessary to believe him to be an inspired being, only the most intellectually perfect of God's creatures. The process by which he gained knowledge was the same as with other men, but it was infinitely more rapid and more comprehensive. After the creation of nature, I think Shakespeare to have been the greatest work that God ever brought before human senses, and the nearest resemblance to Himself, in whose image He created him.

Surely you are right to think that each play of Shakespeare grew out of an organic law, as the tree from the functionary life of the seed. Have you ever observed also how, after all this internal structure is created, Shakespeare wraps each whole in its peculiar tone, spirit and atmosphere. For example, what could be more sylvan in its very indication than "As You Like It?" It fairly smells of the forest. "Romeo and Juliet," too, is all night and summer-heat and love, and their products. By the way, notice how many scenes of that tragedy take place at night. I observed that peculiarity long ago, when I wrote the line, "Where Juliet's nightly beauties shine," in my poem "Ad Criticum."²²

You might profitably pursue this investigation, and find and describe the tone and the atmosphere belonging to each play, as readily as you would detect them in a picture. But my, dear Father, I am turning the tables on you. I am lecturing the Shakespearian lecturer! "Jam Satist."

"Why does not the Czar send to the Centennial?" He is going to

²² The poem, which was completed by April 1857 (Bradley, 348), was published in Boker's Königsmark, The Legend of the Hounds and Other Poems (Philadelphia, 1869), 199-202.
send. What is the matter with you? All things between your country and Russia are as smooth as that "oily tongue" about which you so impudently wrote. When I come home, I will tell you lots of diplomatic secrets about this matter, but even you will grant that it would not be safe to set them down in writing in a country where it is believed that every letter that passes through the post-office is read by a dirty scoundrel appointed for the purpose,—much good may my sentiments regarding him and his office do him!

It was hard and delicate work to bring about this change of resolution in Russia; but it is done, and neatly done, without abating one jot the dignity of the United States; and now you may praise me just as much as you like, because I am one of your "boys," only do not let me hear of it, for I am modest, and given to blushing, and am easily brought to tears. In fact, Father Hart, the older I grow, the d—er fool I think myself; and I believe that you were right about me in the beginning. Do you remember me, and what a poor, miserable, ignorant little curse I was, and how wofully [sic] sad at being taken away from my mamma? But I was very pretty, was I not? I always stick to that; and I know too what Mrs. Hart thinks about it.

You are very much given to scribbling, here and there—you know that you are:—now, if you have any of the old love for me, you will send me everything that you publish, and everything of Morgan's, too, that you wish me to see. You are about the only one of my literary friends who has not deserted me since I became a diplomatic "swell." I do not know to what suspicion my change of character has subjected me in the literary world; but the fact is as I say: no one of my old friends ever writes to me, although they all owe me letters, and some of them,—d— bless them!—more gratitude than they could pay by a mere show of regard. Father Hart, this is a nasty world; and there are few men in it as true to the mere proprieties of truth as even you and I. Heaven knows, we never set out to be modern saints; but you begin to look like one to me, as compared with other men.

Mrs. Boker wrote to me that you had been so good as to call on her at a time when she was out, not constructively, but really out.

23 For an account of Boker's diplomatic work in Russia, see Bradley, 305–312.
Do not be discouraged. Pray call on her again, for she regretted not having seen you.

Give my love to Mrs. Hart, and tell her that I was touched at your account—which I trust was true—as to where she keeps the photograph of unworthy me. Remember me too very kindly to Morgan.

God bless you!

Yours very sincerely,

Geo: H. Boker