

Letter from Rupert Brooke to St. John Lucas, Autumn 1905 (RCB/L/2)

'Dear St. John,

The latest + final decree (as I think I forgot to tell you) is that in December I am to try for a scholarship at King's Cambridge, + go there whether I get one or no. So that Oxford will not know me. In consequence of this I am plagued all this term with 'extra work' and have scarcely any time either for writing verse, or for reading (as opposed to perusing grammar). This course of extra work however has its advantages. It introduces me to many authors whom the usual course neglects as 'unclassical'. Of these Pindar I do not appreciate, Propertius I like a little (and should do more, no doubt, if the dullest poems were not chosen), Lucan I find pleasing, but a little above me yet; Theocritus I adore. The hour

a week which is reserved for Theocritus almost compensates to me for all the interminable dullness of Demosthenes + the grammar on other days. And that is very high praise. I have never read Theocritus before. I am wildly madly enchanted by him.

Another thing which occupies my waking hours at present is the composition of a paper on 'Atalanta' for our Sixth Literary Society. It is to be read in about three weeks, and at present I have barely started it. Can you, out of your wisdom, enlighten me on one point – who are the Chorus? They speak like old men, but then all Choruses (or Chori?) do. I think they must be elders, but it does not describe them in my edition, so I should like to

be certain. When I found that I had to read I decided that Swinburne would be a great aesthetic blessing to the standard Upper Sixth, but after reflection I reluctantly concluded that our president, being a master, might veto the 'Poems and Ballads',

so I chose 'Atalanta'. The difficulty is to find any part not to quote. The choric odes of course are essential; and how could I omit the messenger speeches? And who would pass over that perfect κόμμος at the end?... If ever I finish anything more this term, I will send it you. But I doubt it. At present I have only one short attempt, which I thought too feeble to send last time I wrote. Nevertheless in default

of anything better I send it. Some photos are coming in soon. You may expect one in a few days, if I don't go mad ere that with excess of Classics. At present I am rather weary of Football + Work. The masters who "teach" me this term are very terrible. Wynne-Willson has gone and left me to the mercy of several soul-less dull automata; who make Beauty tedious and Life an affair of Syntax. I would I were Rhadamanthus to devise new tortures for them, the mummies.

yours  
from an abyss of loneliness  
and dreariness  
Rupert Brooke'