

## *A Circumscribed Triangle*

IT would be a rare pleasure to sit down with E. A. Robinson for an hour's discussion of "Roman Bartholow" (Macmillan), his latest dramatic poem. Such a talk would, doubtless, save a great deal of pother; for in this story of three souls torn by love Mr. Robinson is exceedingly faithful to the gods of obscurity. This narrative contains some of the loveliest lines Robinson has written. It also contains more of his curious inverted structures, more of his verbal tentatives ("or may be so", "or so I fear", "or at the least", "or I've a notion so"). These, I fancy, are the best lines of that character to serve as samples:

. . . for so it seems to me,  
And so to me it is — or so it was.  
Was, is, or may be always — let it fade.

This is not a parody. Vide page 137.  
"If" with Mr. Robinson is the focal

point, both of intellectualization and of the process of drama. He is the great poet of the subjunctive mood.

There are four characters in the poem: Roman Bartholow himself, Penn-Raven, who has wakened Bartholow from lethargy and shown him the way to his soul; Umfraville, a sort of Greek chorus to the progress of events; and Gabrielle, Roman's wife, who might have loved him, who hasn't the ability to seize life boldly, so finally takes her own life. These four move curiously through a sort of allegorical House of Love. For me, it is a veritable House of Mirrors, a Crystal Maze in which I can only grasp vainly at the slightest reflected, distorted, inverted image of Robinson's actual thought. Perhaps it is the poet's contribution to psychoanalysis. At any rate, you will find it fascinating in all its pristine murkiness. It moves me so much, and it means so little to me, that I suspect it of being great. Shall I read it again? Or perhaps, in E. A.'s own words (page 84):

. . . There would be no more next time  
For it to fall upon than there was now.  
The fire that smote so deep had smitten  
    less  
Than he supposed, for there was less to  
    smite;  
And the waves coming after were no  
    more  
Than waves at midnight on an empty  
    ocean.