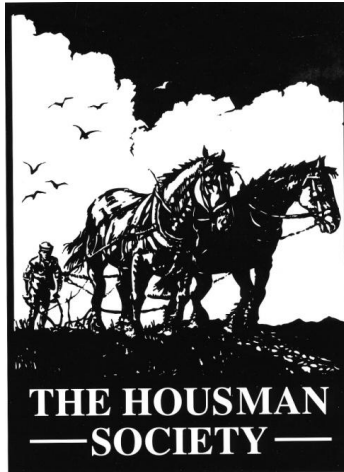


The Housman Society Journal

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Website: www.housman-society.co.uk

E-mail [info@ housman-society.co.uk](mailto:info@housman-society.co.uk)

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Editorial

The *Housman Society Journal*, volume 47, 2021, contains several substantial articles which should entertain and enlighten the reader. The volume begins with Peter Parker's paper, 'Bredon and Other Hills,' which was delivered at the Evesham Festival of Words in July 2021. This continues the tradition of publishing the annual 'Name and Nature of Poetry' lecture which was for many years a feature of the Hay Festival and an important date on the Housman Society calendar. The lecture was delivered to a socially distanced audience in All Saints Church, Evesham, a venue which lacked a working microphone. As some of those present found it difficult to hear the speaker, it is doubly useful that the full text is printed here. Peter's talk was illustrated with a series of sombre black and white photographs of Bredon, Malvern and Wenlock Edge, two of which are reproduced here.

The 2021 Journal has a scoop, as it includes a hitherto unpublished series of letters from A.E. Housman to Annette Meakin, who had attended his Latin classes at University College, London, in the 1890s. Christopher Stray, who introduced us to the William Sempole letters in *Housman Society Journal* 46, 2020, puts this long-term correspondence with another student in context and shows us that AEH was not always the difficult and unapproachable figure some biographers have suggested.

The Journal has an intriguing article by Linda Hart, tracing the history of a particular copy of *A Shropshire Lad* which has recently been acquired by Trinity College, Cambridge. This pocket edition of *ASL* was given by a youthful Ivor Gurney to Rudyard Kipling in 1909. Linda has doggedly uncovered its whereabouts on Kipling family bookshelves at Batemans, Kipling's house in Sussex, and the rather more glamorous Wimpole Hall, his daughter's house near Cambridge. She still has some loose ends in the story which perhaps some bibliophile reader may be able to tie up.

Professor David Sider has followed last year's article by Christopher Stray on the William Sempole letters with further analysis of the collection and a full transcript of the entire correspondence. He has even given each letter a page reference to where it would have appeared in Archie Burnett's *The Letters of*

A.E. Housman, had it come to light before 2007. Although it is unlikely that there will be a revised edition of Burnett's two-volume collection, it is heartening that significant correspondence of AEH is still appearing and, in some cases, modifying our perception of the man.

The final contribution to this Journal is from Gregory Leadbetter, Professor of Poetry at Birmingham City University. Gregory is no stranger to the Housman Society, having run a successful day school on A.E. Housman at the Bromsgrove Summer School in 2017, and contributed to several Housman events at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. He is due to give his talk 'Hail and Farewell: Leaving, Greeting, and Lasting in Housman's *Last Poems*' at the Evesham Festival of Words in July 2022. In this issue, he reviews the controversial new book, *A.E. Housman: Finding a Path to Flourish*. The author, Peter Waine, suggests that AEH's singular character would probably today lead to an autism diagnosis. Gregory's considered reaction will probably not be the last in this Journal.

Looking forward, 2022 will see the publication by the Housman Society of the centenary edition of A.E. Housman's *Last Poems*. This handsomely bound volume will contain a foreword by Andrew Motion, and an introduction by the late Edgar Vincent, author of *A.E. Housman, Hero of a Hidden Life*. It will also include academic commentaries on all 41 poems by John Cartwright. Copies can be ordered from the Secretary, Max Hunt, at Abberley Cottage, 7 Dowles Road, Beewdley, DY12 2EJ or via the Housman Society website. The cost is £14.99 or £10.00 to Society members.

Bredon and Other Hills

The Housman Lecture 2021 for the Evesham Festival of Words 3 July 2021

Peter Parker

On the night of 20 June 1887, the Housman family set out from their home in Bromsgrove to make their way up Worms Ash Lane to the summit of Broom Hill. When they were children, A.E. Housman and his siblings had often climbed this hill, which they nicknamed Mount Pisgah after the eminence from which Moses was able to look out to the Promised Land. Although a fairly modest knoll, a mere 147.6 metres above sea level, it provided views across the Severn Plain to several much larger hills, on which this June night beacons had been lit to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Directly to the west were the Clee Hills in Shropshire, and to the northwest was the Wrekin; to the south-west the long ridge of the Malverns ran between Worcestershire and Herefordshire; and directly south was Bredon Hill. Housman left no account of this night, but the event is recalled in the very first poem of *A Shropshire Lad*:

From Clee to heaven the beacon burns,
The shires have seen it plain,
From north to south the sign returns
And beacons burn again.

Ten years later, rather than remaining in London to watch the elaborate public celebrations of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, Housman returned to Worcestershire and the Clent Hills, some eight miles north of Bromsgrove, and this time left a detailed account of the lighting of beacons in a letter to his stepmother. '[I] got to the top of Walton hill about 9.20,' he wrote.

The sky was fairly clear, and so was the air to the north, but hazy southwards; Malvern had been invisible all day. (On Saturday [three

days before the celebrations] when the rain was about I saw as good a view from Walton Hill as ever I saw, the Sugar Loaf and Black Mountains and Radnor Forest quite plain.) One or two private bonfires started before the time, but most of them waited for 10 o'clock. Five minutes or so after the hour I easily counted 67. Some of these were small affairs in the near neighbourhood, which soon died down; but at half-past there were fifty-two burning merely on the south and west, from the Lickey on the left to the Wrekin on the right [...] Of the distant fires Malvern was much the largest: the pile was sixty feet high and could be seen with the naked eye by daylight: through a telescope it looked like the Eiffel tower, as it was much higher than its width and held together with iron. But it had been so saturated with paraffin that it burnt out in an hour. The Clent fire was on the further hill, and not at the top but on the south-western face. By midnight the number of fires had very much decreased, and only four, beside the Clent one, were visible at two o'clock: two distant ones somewhere by the Brown Clee, and two nearer, - one Droitwich way, and one on Kinver Edge which burnt till daylight brilliantly. It was a fine night, and at midnight the sky in the north had enough light to see the time by my watch. At two I heard a cuckoo, and immediately afterwards larks began to get up and make a deafening noise, and some person at Kingswinford, possibly wishing to stop the row, sent up a sky-rocket.

As this letter suggests, Housman had a very good topographical knowledge of the hills of the region, and one of his chief recreations was climbing them. His sister Kate recalled that when he went out walking he always liked to 'reach some point where he could see extensive views'. In 1920, commending his friend Percy Withers' choice of the village of Souldern near Bicester in which to settle, Housman wrote: 'One great charm of all the parts of Oxfordshire I know is the wide horizon you command even from a slight elevation.' Given Housman's lifelong enthusiasm for elevations great and small, it is perhaps unsurprising that hills feature so frequently in his poetry. It might even be said that his poetic career – at any rate as he planned it – began and ended on a hill. The first of the two volumes of poetry he published in his lifetime, as we have just seen, looks out to Clee and other hills from Mount Pisgah, while the final poem of his second

volume, *Last Poems*, as it were returns the gaze, from Abdon under Clee to Wenlock Edge. It therefore seemed to me that in summertime on – or at any rate within sight of – Bredon, poems about this and other hills in the region, by both Housman and some of his near contemporaries, would be an appropriate subject for today’s Housman Lecture.

Bredon is, of course, one of the topographical anomalies to be found in *A Shropshire Lad*, a landmark of the county in which Housman was born rather than the one he chose as the principal setting of his poems. Given that several other poems in *A Shropshire Lad*, such as ‘Far in a western brookland’, clearly refer to Worcestershire rather than Shropshire, ‘the blue remembered hills’ (it has been argued) are the Malverns, clearly visible to Housman during his youthful vigils on Mount Pisgah, and the original first line of one poem ran ‘’Tis time I think by Stourbridge town...’ Housman Country could be said to extend along the Severn from Shropshire to Worcestershire – though perhaps not as far as the Isle of Portland in Dorset, which also features in *A Shropshire Lad*.



Bredon

‘The heart opens on high ground,’ the American poet Wallace Stevens wrote in his journal in August 1902. ‘I am thinking of some of the hill-tops I stood upon – the blue sky stretching vastly to the low horizon – the clouds seeming to mount step by step – the little world at my feet.’ This is a feeling experienced by many poets, though not particularly by Housman, for whom hills tended to serve other literary purposes, as we shall see. The Malverns in particular have attracted poets almost from the very start of English literature, with Piers Plowman falling asleep and having his vision on these hills in the fourteenth century. The birthplace of the poem’s author, William Langland, has long been disputed, with claims that he was a Shropshire Lad from Kinlet on the borders of the Wyre Forest. However, the great Herefordshire writer and photographer Alfred Watkins, author of that 1925 classic of topography *The Old Straight Track*, plausibly argued that the poet was born in the parish of Colwall, a couple of miles from Ledbury and close to the British Camp. Whatever the case, Langland put the Malverns on the literary map.

In a somer season, when soft was the sun,
I shoop me in shroudes as I a sheep were,
In habit as an hermite, unholy of werkes,
Went wide in this world wondres to heer.
Ac on a May morwenyng on Malverne Hilles
Me bifel a ferly, of Fairye me thought....

‘Ferly’, or wonder, of a less supernatural kind, is what many poets experienced on the Malverns. In 1798, for example, Joseph Cottle, the publisher of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, produced a 1,000-line poem titled *Malvern Hills*. He describes climbing to the top of the Herefordshire Beacon at dawn one Whit Monday and looking out across the countryside spread out below him, exclaiming: ‘What a sweep / For mortal eye! [...] The goodly view / Makes my eyes swim with rapture, and my heart / Feel extasy’. At the other end of the day, the Suffolk-born poet Robert Bloomfield in *The Banks of the Wye*, his 1811 journal in verse describing a walking tour he undertook in

imitation of the Lake Poets, crosses the Malverns at night. He does not much care for ‘Worc’ster’s gloomy vale below’, but is cheered when the sun rises to find himself

... gazing from a height so fair,
Through miles of unpolluted air,
Where cultivation triumphs wide,
O’er boundless views on every side...

Alfred Watkins dubbed the countryside in the western lee of the Malverns ‘Laureate Land’ in an unfinished book he wrote about three ‘local’ poets: Langland, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and John Masefield. Barrett Browning was brought up at Hope End, the Oriental fantasy built by her father a couple of miles outside Ledbury, and recalled her childhood home, with its view of the Malverns, both in ‘The Lost Bower’ (1844) and ‘Aurora Leigh’ (1856). In the former poem Barrett Browning writes:

Far out, kindled by each other,
Shining hills on hills arise,
Close as brother leans to brother
When they press beneath the eyes
Of some father praying blessings from the gifts of paradise.

While beyond, above them mounted,
And, above their woods also,
Malvern hills, for mountains counted
Not unduly, loom a-row –
Keepers of Piers Plowman’s vision through the sunshine and the snow.

It is John Masefield, however, who is the true laureate of this land - and indeed was Poet Laureate when Watkins was writing his book. Watkins was inspired to write what he eventually titled *The Masefield Country* after hearing the speech Masefield gave in 1930 when he was awarded the Freedom of the City of Hereford, in which he extolled the region in which he considered himself lucky enough to be born. This occurred in 1887 at a house in Ledbury called The Knapp, from which to the west



Malvern

the young Masfield could see the prehistoric hill-top camp of Wall Hills, while to the east were Eastnor and the Malverns. Although Masfield left Ledbury at the age of thirteen to train in Liverpool with the merchant marine, and would never again live in the area, he declared: 'I am linked to Herefordshire by ties far deeper than I can explain'. These ties led him to write several poems about or set in the region, as well as a beautiful memoir of his childhood, *Grace Before Ploughing*, published the year before his death in 1967. The memoir opens: 'For some years, like many children, I lived in Paradise, or, rather, like a specially lucky child in two Paradises linked together by a country of exceeding beauty and strangeness.' These two linked paradises were Ledbury and Bredon Hill: 'For some blissful years I knew them both as only a child can know a country,' he wrote. This became a land of lost content when, after he had spent several years at sea, Masfield returned not to Herefordshire but to London where, like Housman, he got a job as a clerk. He too looked back longingly to the rural landscapes of his youth, which inspired him to write such poems as 'On Malvern Hill', 'On Eastnor Knoll', and 'Tewkesbury Road', as

well as set some of his longer narrative poems in the area: *The Everlasting Mercy*, *The Daffodil Fields* and *The Widow in the Bye Street*. (The last of these, though unmistakably set in Ledbury, begins ‘Down Bye Street, in a little Shropshire town...’, ‘Herefordshire’ being too cumbersome a word to fit easily into a line of poetry.) Of particular interest are two poems which are clearly influenced by Housman. ‘I had a very great admiration for his poems,’ Masfield wrote when Housman died, and this is evident in both ‘On Malvern Hill’ and ‘London Town’. The latter, though very unlike Housman in tone, mentions several of the places named in *A Shropshire Lad* and like that book champions the attractions of the countryside over those of the capital.

Oh London Town’s a fine town, and London sights are rare,
And London ale is right ale, and brisk’s the London air,
And busily goes the world there, but crafty grows the mind,
And London Town of all towns I’m glad to leave behind.

Then hey for croft and hop-yard, and hill, and field, and pond,
With Bredon Hill before me and Malvern Hill beyond.
The hawthorn white i’ the hedgerow, and all the spring’s attire
In the comely land of Teme and Lugg, and Clent, and Clee, and Wyre.

Masfield’s celebration in this poem of ‘all the land from Ludlow town to Bredon church’s spire’ is even more topographically comprehensive than *A Shropshire Lad*. If its Herefordshire hawthorn hedgerows recall those in Housman’s ‘’Tis time I think by Wenlock Town’ and its ‘hey for the road, the west road, by mill and forge and fold’ clearly echoes ‘the forge and the mill and the fold’ in ‘The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair’, then ‘On Malvern Hill’ is virtually a recapitulation of ‘On Wenlock Edge the wood’s in trouble’. Masfield had visited Wroxeter, formerly the Roman city of Uriconium, and been impressed by the archaeological remains there, so it is perhaps unsurprising that this should combine with his admiration for Housman to produce a poem that not only follows the metrical form and rhyme scheme of ‘On Wenlock Edge...’ but begins like Housman’s poem with wind-tossed trees, strewn leaves and Roman soldiers. Here’s Housman:

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
The gale it plies the saplings double,
And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger
When Uricon the city stood:
'Tis the old wind in the old anger,
But then it threshed another wood.

Now Masfield:

A wind is brushing down the clover,
It sweeps the tossing branches bare,
Blowing the poisoning kestrel over
The crumbling ramparts of the Caer.

It whirls the scattered leaves before us
Along the dusty road to home,
Once it awakened into chorus
The heart-strings in the ranks of Rome.

In the final verse of the poem, there is a return, as in Housman, to the storm of the opening stanza, and Masfield both echoes Housman's 'There, like the wind through woods in riot' and ends his poem with the long-ago death of the Romans:

The leaves whirl in the wind's riot
Beneath the Beacon's jutting spur,
Quiet are clan and chief, and quiet
Centurion and signifer.

(A signifer, incidentally, for those like me who don't know their Roman history, is a Legion's standard-bearer.)

Masefield was not the only 20th-century poet inspired by the hills of the Three Counties. There are of course the Dymock Poets, who colonised the village of that name on the Gloucestershire-Herefordshire border, along with their frequent visitor John Drinkwater. Then there are ‘local’ poets of a later generation for whom the region provided inspiration, among them, U.A. Fanthorpe, Molly Holden and Geoffrey Hill, but unfortunately time does not allow me to do more than mention most of these writers in passing. Radclyffe Hall, however, is less easy to pass over, and her debt to the region is perhaps less well known. She bought a house in Malvern Wells in 1906, published a volume of *Songs of the Malvern Hills* in 1913, and set her notorious 1928 lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, in Upton-on-Severn. Hall’s poems, though tinged with melancholy, bounce along almost too jauntily:

Bredon is a lonely hill,
It hasn’t any brothers;
It stands within the Severn Vale,
Apart from all the others.

The Cotswold Hills go hand in hand,
The Malverns touching shoulder;
But Bredon all alone does stand,
More proud than they, and bolder...

And so on. Hall’s poems were intended to be set to music, which they were in 1916 by Robert Coningsby Clarke, a now-forgotten composer whose American wife, Dolly, was not only Radclyffe Hall’s cousin but had also, before her marriage, been her lover. The songs were first performed in public by Hall’s replacement for Dolly, the much older Mabel Batten, a respected amateur lieder-singer who lived with Hall in Malvern Wells.

A rather more distinguished poet, W.H. Auden, spent a couple of very happy years in the early 1930s teaching at the Downs School in Colwall, and – as I did when I attended the school some thirty years later – often went walking on the Malverns. His poem ‘The Malverns’,

among other things, beautifully evokes the sensation of being on one of the range's summits:

Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand.
A fathom of earth, alive in air,
Aloof as an admiral on the old rocks,
 England below me:
Eastward across the Midland plains
An express is leaving for a sailor's country;
 Westward is Wales
Where on a clear evening the retired and rich
From the French windows of their sheltered mansions
See the Sugarloaf standing, an upright sentinel
 Over Abergavenny.

Auden's friend, and Masefield's successor as Poet Laureate, C. Day Lewis, spent part of his early childhood in Malvern and drew upon his memories of the region in his poem about Edward Elgar, of whose music he writes:

Hills are in it – the Malverns, Bredon, Cotswold.
A meadowsweetness of high summer days:
Clovering bees, time-honeyed bells, the lark's top C.
Hills where each sound, like larksong, passes into light,
And light is music all but seen.

There is, however, one poet who outdoes all the rest in his love of the region's hills. Whether in London studying at the Royal College of Music, training in Northampton and Essex for service in the First World War, huddled in the trenches of the Western Front, recuperating in Edinburgh after being gassed, or attending a signalling course in Northumberland, Ivor Gurney dreamed of the places in Gloucestershire where he had spent his childhood and youth. In his letters he recited the names of hills, rivers and villages like a mantra, and his longing to see these places again suffuse much of his poetry. It is hardly surprising that he should be attracted to the poems of *A Shropshire Lad*, a copy of which he had been given by his godfather at the impressionable age of

seventeen, and several copies of which he seems to have taken to the Western Front and lost. Much of what Gurney wrote about missing his homeland echoes Housman's 'Far in a western brookland', and he would set this poem to music in the first of his two 'Shropshire Lad' song cycles, *Ludlow and Teme* (1923). Elsewhere he set a poem written by his close friend F.W. Harvey, another Gloucestershire Lad who had fought in the trenches, and who had ended up in a prisoner of war camp. Like the poems of *A Shropshire Lad* 'In Flanders' struck a particular emotional and topographical chord with Gurney:

I'm homesick for my hills again -
My hills again!
To see above the Severn plain,
Unscabbarded against the sky,
The blue high blade of Cotswold lie;
The giant clouds go royally
By jagged Malvern with a train
Of shadows. Where the land is low
Like a huge imprisoning O
I hear a heart that's sound and high,
I hear the heart within me cry:
'I'm homesick for my hills again -
My hills again!
Cotswold or Malvern, sun or rain!
My hills again!'

Gurney rightly felt his setting of the poem captured the landscape beautifully: 'Gloster itself shines and speaks in it,' he wrote. 'And the end of the song is exactly like the "high blue blade" [sic] fading away to distant Bredon just above Evesham.'

Hills are also a recurring feature of Gurney's own poetry. In a letter to his friend Marion Scott from the Western Front in 1917, wondering how Harvey was getting on in his POW camp, Gurney writes: 'My thoughts of England are first and foremost of the line of Cotswold ending with Bredon Hill, near Tewkesbury, and seen with him. Or the blue Malverns seen at a queer angle, from the hayfield, talking when

War seemed imminent, and the whole air seemed charged with fateful beauty.’ Sent to a field hospital after being gassed the following September, Gurney rejoiced in the clear air he was able to breathe there after the close confinement of the trenches, writing to Scott: ‘It is a day to see Cranham above you and Portway in front, to stalk knee deep through drifts of early fallen leaves; to climb higher for the sight of Severn, Wales, Malverns, Bredon and Clee Hills.’ The exhilaration Gurney felt while walking these English hills was very different to what he experienced during the long and monotonous route marches he was obliged to go on in France. As he writes in his poem ‘First March’,

Flat country going leaves but small chance for
The mind to escape to any resort but its vain
Own circling greyness and stain.

Small wonder that a poem probably written in France at the same time should begin:

What Malvern is the day is, and its touchstone –
Grey velvet, or moon-marked; rich, or bare as bone;
One looks towards Malvern and is made one with the whole;
The world swings round him as the Bear to the Pole.

As with the Shropshire Lad, exiled in London, the hills of home are what Gurney thinks about longingly on the Western Front and continues to write about in the short period between the war’s end and his permanent confinement in mental hospitals after September 1922. As in Housman’s work, many of Gurney’s poems contain upland place names - ‘Above Ashleworth’, ‘Crickley Hill’, ‘Above Maisemore’, ‘Cotswold Ways’, ‘On Foscombe Hill’, ‘To Crickley’, ‘Above Dryhill’ - while in other poems the hills are unnamed but evidently based on real ones: ‘Up There’, ‘The Bare Line of the Hill’, ‘The High Hills’. Gurney always believed that physical labour helped to restore his mental balance and in April 1919 he found a job as a farm labourer at Dryhill Farm. It was, he wrote, ‘under a Roman camp near the site of a Roman villa where many things have from time to time been discovered. A place of thorn, oak,

ash, elm, clear streams, a 500 feet-up place where one gets a sight of the Severn sea, May Hill, and on clear days of the Welsh Hills by looking out of a window merely or wandering out of a gate.’ In both ‘Up There’ and ‘The Bare Line of the Hill’ Gurney, like the Shropshire Lad on Wenlock Edge, thinks back to the Romans who came before him:

The bare line of the hill
Shows Roman and
A sense of Rome hangs still
Over the land.

So that one looks to see
Steel gleam, to hear
Voice outflung suddenly
Of the challenger.

Bredon Hill itself is mentioned in both ‘The County’s Bastion’ and ‘Larches’:

Larches are most fitting small red hills
That rise like swollen ant-heaps likeably
And modest before big things like near Malvern
Or Cotswold’s further early Italian
Blue arrangement [...]
I thought, ‘You beauty! I must rise soon one dawn time
And ride to see the first beam strike on you
Of gold or ruddy recognisance over
Crickley level or Bredon sloping down.

This notion of rising at dawn to see the sun strike the hills once again recalls Housman’s poems, in particular ‘Reveille’ in which a slug-a-bed is urged

Up, lad, up, ‘tis late for lying:
Hear the drums of morning play;
Hark, the empty highways crying
‘Who’ll beyond the hills away?’

If Langland put the Malverns on the literary map, then it could fairly be said that Housman did the same for Bredon. 'Bredon Hill' has always been one of Housman's most popular poems, not least because of the many musical settings of it, more than any other of his poems apart from 'Loveliest of trees, the cherry' and 'When I was one-and-twenty'. Thirty-two settings of the poem were published between 1904 and 2005 and there have been several others since then by various folk artists. Housman's Bredon has also inspired orchestral works. As well as setting three of Housman's poems for mixed chorus before his death in the First World War, Ernest Farrar wrote a suite of *English Pastoral Impressions*, the second movement of which is titled 'Bredon Hill' and contains many elements of Housman's poem, evoking a still summer's afternoon with distantly pealing bells and a lark soaring on solo violin. Farrar had been born in London and brought up in Yorkshire, but Julius Harrison was a Worcestershire Lad, born at Stourport-on-Severn, and his *Bredon Hill*, a 'Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra', reflects his view that his home county was 'the very Heart of England, and there is a song and a melody in each one of its lovely hills, valleys meadows and brooks'. The piece was written while Harrison was teaching at Malvern College and received its world premier when broadcast on the BBC's Empire Service in August 1941 with the intention of reminding soldiers of what they were fighting to defend. A month later it was broadcast to the United States in the hope of showing Americans, who had not yet joined the war, what England stood for and was in danger of losing without their help. Housman's poetry was hugely popular in America, so it seemed altogether appropriate that a piece of music inspired by it should be used in this way. Listeners were reminded that the composer was 'Worcestershire born of generations of countrymen' and 'lives in sight of Bredon Hill', as if to emphasise the authenticity to the work.

Bredon is, of course, merely one of the hills in *A Shropshire Lad*. Four others are mentioned by name: Clee, Wenlock Edge, the Wrekin and, perhaps less precisely, 'the wild green hills of Wyre'. But there are many other, unnamed hills in the book: 'the idle hill of summer' and

‘those blue remembered hills’; ‘the standing hills, long to remain’ that console the poet of ‘In my own shire, if I was sad’; those hills which the young man is urged to explore in ‘Reveille’; ‘the hilly brakes’ where the Lent lily is found; the ‘empty upland [...] in the folded hill’ in ‘The Merry Guide’; and ‘the half-mown hill’ near Severn shore on which the murdered Maurice lies in ‘Farewell to barn and stack and tree’. Housman would claim that all but one of the poems of *A Shropshire Lad* were written while he was living at Byron Cottage in Highgate, and it would seem no coincidence that this burst of creativity should have taken place after he had moved from flat and manicured Bayswater to the comparatively untamed uplands of London. Though scarcely requiring the kind of energy needed to scale the heights of Shropshire or Worcestershire, Highgate and Hampstead Heath provided a hilly and near-rural terrain, complete with woods and ponds, for Housman to walk in and help think himself back into the lost countryside that was such a feature of the poems he was writing.

Housman Country is equally hilly in *Last Poems*. In 1935 the conductor Eugene Goossens wrote of Housman’s poetry that: ‘Nobody who hasn’t lived somewhere near the Wrekin or Bredon Hill or, to go a little farther afield, the Costwold country, as I have, could ever hope to relish these works and their peculiar “aura”.’ The widespread popularity of Housman’s poetry, both in other parts of Britain and in other countries of the world, suggests that this is something of an exaggeration, but ‘the particular psychology [the poems] express’, as Goossens put it, certainly owes a good deal to landscape. As we have seen, Housman’s habit of climbing hills was acquired early. ‘Daily walking, love of flowers and trees, woods and hills, all were part of his Fockbury life’, his sister Kate recalled. ‘His sense of some pleasures was acute, and seemed exercised best alone. It was alone that he liked to tramp to enjoy the sight and smell of the woodlands, or to gaze on a setting sun or a starry sky.’ In this he resembles Empedocles – at any rate as the Ancient Greek philosopher was imagined in Matthew Arnold’s dramatic poem ‘Empedocles on Etna’. This, it will be remembered, was one of Housman’s favourite poems, containing he said ‘all the law and the prophets’, and in it Pausanias says of Empedocles:

... his pleasure is
To be left musing these soft nights alone
In the high unfrequented mountain-spots...

It might also be added parenthetically that Empedocles' own account of his character recalls Housman at his most intellectually fierce and socially recalcitrant:

I have lived in wrath and gloom,
Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.

While Housman did not end up like Arnold's hero casting himself into the mouth of a volcano, the thoughts that preoccupied him while standing on high tended to be more melancholy than enraptured. While Moses ascended the original Mount Pisgah in order to be shown the Promised Land, Housman's Pisgah provides a view in a different direction, not of a promised land almost within reach, but of somewhere already in an unattainable past, a 'land of lost content' crisscrossed with 'The happy highways where I went / And cannot come again'.

Not only are hills a recurring image in Housman's poetry, both as a geographical feature and as a metaphor, summits from which one gets a clear and unillusioned view of the world or life; the emotional structure of the poems often mimics the act of climbing and then descending a hill. Getting to the top of a hill to admire the view tends for most people to be an exhilarating experience, whereas the inevitable descent can seem more like a chore as well as representing a return to the level, everyday existence from which they have briefly escaped. Many of Housman's poems start out with similar energetic optimism, but in their conclusion come in every sense back down to earth. 'The Lent Lily', for example, begins by enthusiastically exclaiming: 'Tis spring; come out to ramble /The hilly brakes around'. Those young people the poet urges onto the uplands in order to gather flowers are, however, quickly reminded that life is short and that while primroses and anemones may

still be around for gathering when ‘girls go maying’ daffodils will have died on Easter Day. ‘March’ starts on a similarly cheerful note, as boys clamber up into the hills at dawn in order to pick daffodils, while girls go in search of pussy-willow. This joyful vision is once again undermined in the final verse. There is ‘no dearth of daffodils’ for the boys, nor any shortage of pussy-willow for the girls, but the poet is unlikely to be similarly rewarded:

In farm and field through all the shire
The eye beholds the heart’s desire;
Ah, let not only mine be vain,
For lovers should be loved again.

‘Again’ is used here by Housman in the archaic sense of ‘in return’, unreciprocated love being one of the major themes of *A Shropshire Lad*. In ‘’Tis time, I think, by Wenlock Town’, the Lad is once again excluded from cheerful communal flower-gathering in the hills – this time of yellow broom and white hawthorn – and at the end of the poem is left, as it were, at the bottom of the hill, looking up at it from a great distance:

Oh tarnish late on Wenlock Edge,
Gold that I never see;
Lie long, high snowdrifts in the hedge
That will not shower on me.

For Wallace Stevens, idling on a hilltop was an unalloyed pleasure. ‘The one I napped on was specially delightful,’ he continued in his 1902 journal entry. This kind of relaxation is not long granted to the young man who lies ‘On the idle hill of summer’, lulled by the sound of nearby streams. His reveries are interrupted by a file of redcoats, and – despite the fact that they are ‘Soldiers marching all to die’ – he decides to leave his hilltop dreaming in order to join up.

But perhaps the best example of a poem that mirrors the ascent and descent of hills is ‘Bredon Hill’ itself. The poem also moves through

the seasons, from ‘summerime’ to ‘the snows of winter’, and its mood changes with the weather. It begins with two lovers who have made the ascent on a Sunday morning and now lie at the summit on the ‘springing thyme’, looking out across ‘the coloured counties’ and listening to larks singing in the clear air above them. They also hear the ‘happy’ sound of bells summoning them to church, but they prefer to remain in each other’s company than attend a service. ‘Oh peal upon our wedding,’ the young man tells the bells, ‘And we will hear the chime, / And come to church in time.’ But then winter comes and with it the death of the young woman. The sound of the bells has changed:

They tolled the one bell only,
Groom there was none to see,
The mourners followed after,
And so to church went she
And would not wait for me.

The poem ends some time later with the young man once again on Bredon, but now alone. He hears the bells ring out once more, and this time answers their call:

Oh, noisy bells, be dumb
I hear you, I will come.

And one is left to imagine his slow, reluctant descent to a solitary life spent mourning his lost love.

In a similar structural arc, Housman’s poems sometimes start with the rising sun on a day full of promise, only to end at sunset, when all that potential sinks with the dying sun below the horizon. When Housman confessed that he had ‘never spent much time’ in Shropshire and had barely visited the county before writing his poems, he went on to say: ‘I had a sentimental feeling for Shropshire because its hills were our Western horizon.’ The fact that it was a western horizon is significant, and was the one, as Kate recalled, that her brother was in the habit of going to gaze at while the sun sank below it. Two poems suggest what

it was about sunsets that particularly appealed to Housman. Although the actual viewpoint is not stipulated in ‘How clear, how lovely bright’, the mood is very similar to the one of ‘When summer’s end is nighing’, in which the poet climbs a beacon at sunset in order to ‘muse on change and fortune / And all the feats I vowed / When I was young and proud’. The first of these poems was the first to be written, and indeed predates many of the poems of *A Shropshire Lad*, having been composed between 1886 and 1890. When Housman came to selecting the contents of *Last Poems*, however, he rejected it, and it was the second poem, written possibly several decades later, that was given a final polish and included. We of course have no way of knowing whether Housman actually weighed up the one poem against the other, though their similarities would probably have prevented him including them both in the same volume.

Such are the vagaries of fame that it is the rejected poem that has become the more familiar one, chiefly because it featured in the final episode of ITV’s long-running, hugely popular and oft-repeated *Inspector Morse* series. Indeed, both this episode and the novel by Colin Dexter on which it is based take their title, *The Remorseful Day*, from the final line of the poem. It will be remembered that Morse is not only as much a fan of Housman as Dexter was, but is also a keen solver of crossword puzzles. Given the Inspector’s generally gloomy outlook and the fact that this is the novel in which he dies, it must have seemed irresistible to select a title which actually contains within it Morse’s own and only name (his embarrassing forename of Endeavour having been discarded).

As in other hill poems already mentioned, this one starts off in a cheerful mood, so that, like Housman’s idler on the hill of summer, the reader is lulled into a dreamy serenity by the prospect.

How clear, how lovely bright,
How beautiful to sight
 Those beams of morning play,
How heaven laughs out with glee

Where, like a bird set free,
Up from the eastern sea
 Soars the delightful day.

To-day I shall be strong,
No more shall yield to wrong,
 Shall squander life no more;
Days lost, I know not how,
I shall retrieve them now;
Now I shall keep the vow
 I never kept before.

Vows, as readers of Housman will know, tend to be broken, and the hopes that soared with the bright morning are comprehensively dashed in the final stanza, where the poet's mood, like the day, bloodily darkens:

Ensanguining the skies
How heavily it dies
 Into the west away;
Past touch and sight and sound
Not further to be found,
How hopeless under ground
 Falls the remorseful day.

'Hopeless *under* ground' seems an unusual way of describing how the sun sets and a day ends, but of course under ground is where many of Housman's lads end up, with both their hope and their lives irretrievably doused. The second poem also looks to the west as the day dies, and along with it the summer:

The weathercock at sunset
 Would lose the slanted ray,
And I would climb the beacon
 That looked to Wales away
 And saw the last of day.

Back then the poet still looked forward to the future, even when the weather was poor:

The year might age, and cloudy
The lessening day might close,
But air of other summers
Breathed from beyond the snows,
And I had hope of those.

Hope is once again immediately extinguished in the next stanza:

They came and were and are not
And come no more anew;
And all the years and seasons
That ever can ensue
Must now be worse and few.

The west is not only where the day ends, it is the direction in which the Lad looks back yearningly at his former life. In *A Shropshire Lad* 'As through the wild green hills of Wyre' is a hinge poem, dividing poems mostly set in Shropshire from those in which the Lad looks back on this land of lost content from his exile in London. The poem describes the journey by train from Shropshire to the capital, and already the Lad is missing his friends. To look from London to Ludlow (or, indeed, Bromsgrove) is, more accurately, to look north-west; but for the purposes of the poems, Housman Country is located due west because this is where the sun decisively sets on happier times. It is to the 'western brookland' the Lad turns when tossing sleepless and alone on his London bed. And now that he is travelling by train to the capital, he does not look forward towards his destination, but backwards, where,

far behind, a fading crest
Low in the forsaken west
Sank the high-reared head of Clee.

The familiar landmarks themselves are sinking with the sun to invisibility, as if they had never been. In the poem that follows this one, it is this ‘west land’ from which the wind blows, ‘Warm with the blood of lads I know’; but by the time it reaches the speaker in London the voices it carried have, like the land itself, faded to nothing:

Oh lads, at home I heard you plain,
But here your speech is still,
And down the sighing wind in vain
You hollo from the hill.

Fair warning that the mood of *Last Poems* – a title which in itself suggests no hope of any future – is unlikely to be any more cheerful than that of *A Shropshire Lad* is given in the volume’s epigraph. In these lines Housman bids farewell to poetry and so more or less restates in verse what he had written in the volume’s terse prefatory note: ‘I publish these poems, few though they are, because it is not likely that I shall ever be impelled to write much more.’ The epigraph begins:

*We’ll to the woods no more,
The laurels all are cut,
The bowers are bare of bay
That once the muses wore...*

It is perhaps significant that the leaves for the poet’s wreath were gathered from another eminence, ‘the high wild woods of laurel’; even more significantly the poem refers to the dying day, brought ever earlier by the turning season:

*The year draws in the day
And soon will evening shut:
The laurels all are cut,
We’ll to the woods no more,
Oh we’ll no more, no more
To the leafy woods away,
To the high wild woods of laurel
And the bowers of bay no more.*

This poem was for some time mistakenly described as ‘a translation of the traditional French song *Nous irons plus au bois / Les lauriers sont coupés*’, but the French song that opens with these lines is in fact a children’s rhyme in which little girls dance about and sing that the laurels will grow back again – not something one can imagine Housman either translating or endorsing, particularly in this context. Indeed, in a letter to the American poet Mark van Doren refusing permission to include the poem in his 1936 *Anthology of World Poetry* translated into English by famous authors, Housman quoted the fourth line of the French song incorrectly and added that it was followed by ‘an unintelligible refrain which I have quite forgotten’, stating clearly that it would be ‘absurd’ to describe his poem as a translation. In fact, apart from the repeated lines from the French rhyme, the poem is entirely Housman’s creation.

In the first numbered poem of the book Housman once again looks out west to the sinking sun – or, rather, advises against doing so. The poem is one of those handful to which Housman gave a title: ‘The West’.

Beyond the moor and mountain crest
– Comrade , look not on the west –
The sun is down and drinks away
From air and land the lees of day.

Housman is insistent here about the dangers of looking west, and indeed repeats his injunction:

Comrade, look not on the west:
'Twill have the heart out of your breast;
'Twill take your thoughts and sink them far,
Leagues beyond the sunset bar.

The volume’s final poem has also been given a title, ‘Fancy’s Knell’. One of the definitions of ‘fancy’ in the Oxford English Dictionary is ‘the faculty of imagination’, the very quality that produces poetry, and

Housman's title is sounding its death-knell and so echoing his farewell to the muses at the volume's opening. The poem is set at the day's end in the upland village of Abdon in the Clee Hills. The speaker is providing music for the village lads and lasses to dance to at the end of a working day. The second verse seems at first glance to maintain the first one's mood of merry-making; but it is in fact sounding the kind of warning to which readers of Housman are by now well accustomed:

Ours were idle pleasures,
Yet oh, content we were,
The young to wind the measures,
The old to heed the air;
And I to lift with playing
From tree and tower and steep
The light delaying,
And flute the sun to sleep.

'Idle pleasures' on this hillside setting recall the 'idle hill of summer' in *A Shropshire Lad* on which the young man lies until he is woken from his innocent dreaming by the call to arms, while 'content' is the lost quality the Lad looks back on in 'Into my heart an air that kills'. Sure enough, in the final stanza 'The lofty shade advances' across this happily sunlit scene as evening turns to night. The music too will fade and the player will soon enough, like the sun, be 'under ground', lying in the churchyard:

To-morrow, more's the pity,
Away we both must hie,
To air the ditty,
And to earth I.

Beneath which is printed 'THE END' in decisive capital letters.

Housman's poetry has come full circle. It ends where it began in sight of Clee, having travelled from Worcestershire to Shropshire, from height to height, from Mount Pisgah, by way of Bredon and other hills, to Abdon Burf.

Housman and Annette Meakin: an epistolary relationship

By Christopher Stray

In the previous issue of this Journal, I discussed Housman's letters to his only graduate student, William Semple, which show Housman to be a conscientious, thoughtful and supportive supervisor, as well as a master of ancient astrological lore. Those letters were donated by Semple's grandson to the Housman Society, which in turn deposited them with Trinity College Library, Cambridge. More recently another collection of Housman's letters to a pupil has come to light: in this case to a member of his Latin class at University College London. Annette Mary Budgett Meakin attended the class from 1897 to 1900; she did not proceed to a degree, but received a notable accolade from Housman in the form of a glowing reference:

Miss A.M.B. Meakin has during the last three years attended many of my Senior and Junior Latin classes in this college. She has displayed not only much intelligence but also an interest in and even an enthusiasm for her work such as I have seldom known. Her progress in general grasp of the subject has been steady and in some respects rapid. I have been particularly struck by the zeal with which she applied herself to Latin composition, not only in prose but in verse. It was at her own wish that she began the study of the latter art, which is not usually practiced by students here; and she soon attained a fair degree of proficiency in more than one of the metres. If Miss Meakin should herself engage in the teaching of Latin, I have no doubt she will be found both a careful and an effective teacher.¹

Housman's reference shows that he was willing to recognise the talent and achievements of women students, despite the evidence for his being a misogynist. In his biography, Edgar Vincent stated that 'There were

¹ A. Burnett, *The Letters of A.E. Housman* (Oxford, 2007), 1.118-19. The reference is dated 26 March 1900, Housman's 41st birthday. Perhaps Meakin had thought of working as a teacher of Classics; she seems never to have done so, though she did at times make a living as a piano teacher.

women students at University College but Housman evidently saw no need to encourage them.² A memory of Housman at University College published after his death by a woman student suggests at least that he was impartial:

I remember him as a tall, slender, serious-faced man who never seem to see his class. There was an occasional flash of humour, sometimes so dry that we might easily miss it; there was never a moment wasted or misspent'.³

Housman's reference for Annette Meakin found its way into Archie Burnett's admirable edition of Housman's letters because the manuscript original was preserved in the scrapbooks which Meakin bequeathed to the Bodleian Library.⁴ She also featured in a letter from Housman to J.G. Frazer, the source of *a famous anecdote about Housman's reputation in Germany*:

*...last year one of my old pupils went to see him, and Wilamowitz ... said 'Although we Germans know that Housman is a rabid Germanophobe, we are unanimous in regarding him as the greatest authority both on Greek and Latin among the English-speaking peoples.' Unfortunately he is almost as wrong about my Greek as he is about my Germanophobia; but it is an amiable error.*⁵

² E. Vincent, *A. E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life* (Woodbridge, 2018), 118.

³ *Ibid.*, 115-16. The ex-student is referred to by Vincent as 'G.H. Savory'. She was in full Gundred Helen Lydia Savory, who took Housman's class in 1900 and 1901 and graduated in 1903. Savory went onto teach geography at Mary Datchelor School in S. London, and then at Birkbeck College; she published several geographical handbooks and atlases.

⁴ There are two scrapbooks: Bodleian Libraries, Special Collections, MS Eng. Misc.d.509, folios 71-2. Burnett refers to it as d.509, folio 36, using Meakin's original page numbering.

⁵ Housman to Frazer, 22 October 1927; Burnett, *Letters* II.39-40. Meakin herself reported Wilamowitz's declaration in a letter to *The Times* just after Housman's death, 7 May 1936, in which he described herself as 'an old pupil, and also an old friend, of Professor Housman'. Her account was quoted by Grant Richards, *A.E. Housman, 1897-1936* (Oxford, 1941), 84 n.

Some time after Archie Burnett's edition appeared, he was sent scans of letters from Housman to Meakin by a member of Meakin's family; he kindly copied them to me so that they could be published. I was then lucky enough to locate Meakin's great-niece Catherine Budgett-Meakin, and she in turn introduced me to her second cousins Jess Mortimer and Margaret Tompsett, who were arranging for the publication of short biographies of several family members. Thanks to their invaluable help I have been able to locate additional material and to learn more about Annette Meakin.⁶

Annette's father Edward Meakin was a tea planter in Almora, in the far north of India, near the border with Nepal. Her mother Sarah was the daughter of Samuel Budgett, a merchant and committed Methodist. William Arthur's biography of Samuel Budgett, *The Successful Merchant* (1852), became a runaway bestseller, and had reached a 43rd edition by 1878; it portrayed Budgett, who had died in 1851, as both a talented businessman and a committed Methodist with high moral standards. Edward and Sarah were married in Calcutta in 1864; at some point they returned to England, and their first two children were born in Bristol, James in 1866 and Annette in 1867. The 1871 census showed the family living in Reigate, with a governess living in; the 1881 census found Meakin boarding at a private girls' school in Walthamstow. In 1882 the family moved for the sake of Edward's health to Tangiers, where he founded and edited *The Times of Morocco*, the first English-language newspaper to be published in the country, which appeared from 1884 to 1893. James helped his father with the newspaper, and later became its editor. He adopted local dress and an Arabic name, and

⁶ I am particularly grateful to Jess Mortimer, who holds the originals of Housman's letters, for her generous help in clarifying texts and providing additional material, and to Margaret Tompsett for providing material from Annette Meakin's published books, and the two images reproduced below with permission to publish them. I must also thank David Butterfield, Peter Gilliver, Jean Gooder, Max Hunt, Julian Hunt, Chris Kraus, Ashley Larson, Meredith Martin, David Sider, Liam Sims and Graham Whitaker for help on specific points, and more generally Linda Hart for a skilful blend of editorial information, encouragement and constructive castigation.



Annette Meakin 1867-1959

Photo courtesy of Margaret Tompsett

in 1891 produced an English-Arabic dictionary. This was followed by four books which established him as an authority on Morocco.⁷

In 1884 Annette was sent back to England to pursue her education; she attended the Royal College of Music in London in 1887-9, and then the Stern Conservatory in Berlin.⁸ In 1897, at the age of 30, she enrolled in Housman's Latin class at UCL. Just before Housman wrote his glowing reference, Annette and her mother left London to travel on the Trans-Siberian Railway, the first English women to do so. On reaching Vladivostok they went on to Japan to avoid insurrections in China, and returned to England via North America; Meakin wrote about the trip in her *The Ribbon of Iron* (1901). She also travelled to and wrote about Spain, Portugal and Russian Turkestan, and in *Woman in Transition* (1907) compared the position of women in several different countries. Meakin's output also included *Polyeuctes*, a translation of a play by Corneille; *Inez de Castro*, a historical drama set in Portugal; and *Nausikaa*, a translation of Book 6 of the *Odyssey*. Her final work, based on several years' research in Germany, was *Goethe and Schiller, 1785-1805: The Story of a Friendship*, a three-volume work published in 1933. This talented and versatile woman knew several languages (Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Russian). Annette Meakin died in a family home in 1959.

Thirteen letters from Housman to Meakin have been preserved, dating from 1926 to 1935; they give the impression that the two had corresponded previously. In most cases, Housman is responding to enquiries from Meakin or to gifts of her books. His responses are unfailingly polite, but at times critical of what he saw as her failures in language, translation and (in particular) metre in the verse translations they contained. He is at pains to emphasise that the rules of Greek and English verse are very different. The very first letter shows him careful to offer some praise, before dwelling on what he sees as the defects in

⁷ James Edward Budgett Meakin died in 1907 aged 39; unlike his sister Annette, he was given an entry in the *ODNB*.

⁸ In 1884 her sister Ethilda was at a girls' high school in Göttingen; it is possible that Annette also spent time there.



Annette (back row) and her mother (front row) in Japan in 1900
Photo courtesy of Margaret Tompsett

what she has sent him, closing with ‘So you must forgive me for not approving’. He also comments on other writers: ‘T.S. Eliot, whom I know and like, is a sober and thoughtful critic, though he does not write what I call poetry’ (22 June 1928).

This combination of positive and negative comment runs through Housman’s letters to Meakin; he is polite and supportive but frank in his assessments of her verses. A similar blend of support and criticism can be seen in Housman’s comments on the poetry of Pearce Higgins. Higgins’ father, a fellow of Trinity, had asked Housman to read his son’s poems. The comments he sent to young Higgins ended:

I demurred when your father asked me to look through your poems, because I am always afraid of hurting young poets’ feelings, and one of them once wrote back to say that he had put his verses in the fire; but your father assured me that you would not mind, and that my criticism would probably be less than his own, so I hope no bones are broken.⁹

⁹ Housman to A.G.McL. Pearce Higgins, 28 December 1924, quoted by R.P. Graves, *A.E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (London, 1979), 239; cf. Vincent, 290. Higgins’ father Pearce Higgins was a fellow of Trinity from 1926 to his death in 1935.

A.E. Housman: letters to Annette Mary Budgett Meakin 1926-1935

Trinity College Cambridge 16 Dec. 1926

Dear Miss Meakin

I am glad to hear of you again, as living and I hope flourishing; and it is very kind of you to send me your translation.¹⁰

Its style is pleasantly simple and straightforward, and if sometimes it is rather prosaic, that is a fault on the right side. But as verse I cannot speak well of it. To write hexameters in English requires very great skill and care, and the only person I know of who has made even a respectable job of it is Charles Kingsley in his *Andromeda*.¹¹ Many of your verses are positively unpleasant to my ear. In particular, like most of your fellows, you make short syllables long (as the in verse 1) and long syllables short (as while in verse 3) without any apparent scruple; and verse 5 is hardly a verse at all.¹² To find syllables in English which are definitely quite long or quite short like Greek syllables is so difficult

¹⁰ Housman is referring to Meakin's translation of Book 6 of the *Odyssey*, *Nausikaa: The Sixth Book of the Odyssey* [sic], *Done into English Hexameters* (Versailles, 1926). It was reprinted in Oxford by Basil Blackwell in 1938 as *Nausikaa, A Love Story. The Sixth Book of the Odyssey, Done into English Hexameters by Annette Meakin*.

Nausikaa, daughter of Alcinous, prince of the island of Phaeacia, gave the naked Odysseus clothes when he was shipwrecked; Alcinous then gave Odysseus a ship to continue his journal home to Ithaca.

¹¹ Kingsley, *Andromeda and Other Poems* (1858). Frederic Harrison wrote of Kingsley's hexameters that 'Having set himself this utterly hopeless and thankless task, to write English hexameter, Kingsley produced some five hundred lines of *Andromeda*, which in rhythm, ease, rapidity and metrical correctness are quite amongst the best in the language'. F. Harrison, *Studies in Early Victorian Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895), 170. For a modern analysis see A.A. Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (Columbia UP, 1989), 55-74.

¹² The first verse was originally as follows: 'There he laid himself down, the much-tried, godlike Odysseus'. In the second edition this became 'Weary he laid him down, our much tried godlike Odysseus'. Meakin's translation continued: 'Soon he had fallen asleep, overcome by fatigue and exhaustion. Meanwhile Athena set out for the Phaakan city and people. Formerly they had dwelt in the far-stretching land, Hypereia, Hard by the Cyclopes; most rapacious and unpleasant neighbours.'

that versifiers who take the pains to do it are obliged to write an odious jargon, like Robinson Ellis in his *Catullus*;¹³ yet, if it is not done, the hexameters are not true hexameters; and even Kingsley's require indulgence. If the infidelity gave me pleasure, I should not quarrel with it, but the verses, whether hexameter or not, sound ill to me. So you must forgive me for not approving.

Yours very truly,
A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge 20 December 1926

Dear Miss Meakin

Certainly you are at liberty to tell publishers what I wrote about your translation.

Many thanks for your interesting letter. I was particularly glad to hear of Miss Best, who had long disappeared out of my sight and knowledge.¹⁴

Trinity College Cambridge 21 June 1928

Dear Miss Meakin

I was abroad when your letter came, and have only just returned.¹⁵

¹³ *Catullus*'s longest poem, no.64, is written in hexameters. Robinson Ellis began his translation thus:

Born on Pelion height, so legend hoary relateth,
Pines once floated adrift on Neptune's billowy streaming
On to the Phasis flood, to the billows Aetean.

R. Ellis, *The Poems and Fragments of Catullus, Translated in the Metres of the Original* (London, 1871), 53. Ellis discussed English verse written in classical metres by Kingsley and others in his preface (pp. vii-xx). He himself attracted one of Housman's harshest comments: 'his readers were in perpetual contact with the intellect of an idiot child'. Housman, *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber Quintus* (London, 1930), p.xxiii.

¹⁴ Frances Best was in Housman's Latin class in 1895-6. Information from Robert Winckworth, Library Records Office, University College London.

¹⁵ Housman had been to France with his publisher Grant Richards: Graves, 163. As usual since 1920, he had gone by air (Graves 158-9). After his first flight, in September 1920, he told Richards that 'I am much more celebrated in Cambridge for

The newspaper article which you send does not mean anything formidable. A certain number of American authors are read in England, some of them are praised, and some of them deserve it. T.S. Eliot, whom I know and like, is a sober and thoughtful critic, though he does not write what I call poetry. I am myself accused of having introduced into England Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, which certainly amused me immensely.¹⁶ Nobody that I know of makes any fuss about American literature, or overestimates it. As to the Oxford and Cambridge presses, I have not observed that they issue many American books, but if they do, it is probably due to the fact that American scholars, however stupid, are probably more widely-read and more painstaking than English ones.¹⁷ The Poet Laureate¹⁸ is at the head of a Society for Pure

having flown to France than for anything else I have done (Housman to Richards, 20 December 1920; Burnett 1.458-9): see the detailed account in M. Hunt, 'A.E. Housman: an aeronautical pioneer', *Housman Society Journal* 46 (2020): 22-31. Cyril Clemens' report that when they met in August 1930, Housman said 'he had never been up in one and had no desire to go' ('Housman as a conversationalist', *Mark Twain Quarterly*, Winter 1936, 9-10, 13, 18, at p.9) suggests that the non-appearance of his projected biography is not to be lamented. (Clemens' text was reprinted in *The Housman Society Journal* 41 (2015): 102-12.)

¹⁶ Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Intimate Diary of a Professional Lady*, a comic novel originally published in America in 1925. According to Graves (233), Housman made the claim himself after J.J. Thomson, Master of Trinity, referring to Housman's recommendation, encouraged the other fellows of the college to read the book (Clemens, 10). Loos's publisher sent Housman a copy of her sequel *But Gentleman Marry Brunettes* (New York, 1928).

¹⁷ OUP had co-published with Yale since 1909, and with Princeton since 1912; by 1943 over a third of OUP's total output consisted of co-publication with other universities, mostly American. See S. Eliot, 'The press and the British book trade', in W.R. Louis, ed., *The History of Oxford University Press III: 1896-1970* (Oxford, 2013), 533-56, at p.537. OUP hardly published books written by American scholars, however, and they do not feature in the chapter on America in D.J. McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press 3: New Worlds for Learning, 1873-1972* (Cambridge, 2004), 295-309. In his later life, Housman became prejudiced against Americans in general: Graves, 233.

¹⁸ Robert Bridges, on whose initiative the Society for Pure English had been founded in 1913.

English (consisting chiefly of Scotchmen and Irishmen),¹⁹ but their enemy is not so much the American as the English Board-school teacher.²⁰ It is true that the theatres are much invaded by American plays, and also of course the cinema; but the English theatre has not been much of an honour to England since Sheridan's time.²¹

I am glad that you are alive and vigorous. Miss Best came to see me a few months ago.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge

19 Jan. 1929

Dear Miss Meakin

Many thanks for the two copies of your book.²² It reads pleasantly and straightforwardly, and I do not object so much as Corneille would to the absence of rhyme and the descent into colloquialism. But your blank verse is sometimes licentious, with a foot added or subtracted, and you seem generally to call Séverus Séverus. Rhyme I think is the right thing for translating French drama, which needs all the ornament it can get, and similarly for the Latin poetry of the silver age, such as Lucan and Seneca, on which French classical poetry was founded.

¹⁹ The list of distinguished members given by B. Mathews, 'A campaign for pure English', *New York Times*, 26 September 1920, suggests that Housman was wrong. In her *Words of the World: A Global History of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Cambridge, 2013), 148-52, Sarah Ogilvie states that by 1946, the date of its final membership list, 40 per cent of the members were based outside Britain.

²⁰ A rather out-of-date reference. Local school boards were established by the Education Act of 1870, but abolished by the Act of 1902, which set up local education authorities. The Board Schools were elementary schools, and their teachers were often denigrated as poorly-trained and uncultivated.

²¹ The dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan died in 1816. Housman, a witty writer himself, was a keen admirer of literary wit, and his statement points to his admiration for the wit of the 18th century in particular. Henry James was also unimpressed by the English theatre of the later 19th century, but his comparison was with the *Comédie Française*.

²² *Polyeuctes: A Christian Tragedy* (Paris, 1929), a translation from Corneille.

You may have seen that dear old Micaiah Hill has just died.²³ I don't suppose you attended his lectures.

I am yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge

29 Jan. 1929

Dear Miss Meakin

All English verse is regulated not by quantity but by stress. In what we call iambic and trochaic metres, quantity is almost negligible. In dactylic and anapaestic metres it is not: long syllables in the place of short ones make the verse lumber, and short ones in the place of long ones make it crumple up. An hexameter beginning with the defies both quantity and stress. Kingsley respects both: you may not like black blank, but it is a real spondee, and that is a great rarity not only in English verse but in English speech.²⁴

The verses in your *Polyeuctes* which are too long or too short are such as p.11 'To honour whose supposed demise the Emperor raised', which has six feet instead of five, or p.45 'And, these are your own words – neglect', which has only four.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Coleridge in *Wallenstein* plays tricks with good effect, as 'Shattering that it may reach and shattering that it reaches', but he could do as he pleased.²⁵ When one has the Holy Ghost within, one need not keep the Ten Commandments.

²³ Micaiah John Muller Hill (1856–1929) was an English mathematician, known for 'Hill's spherical vortex' and 'Hill's tetrahedra'. He was Professor of Pure Mathematics at University College London 1884-1907, and Astor Professor of Mathematics, University of London, 1907-23.

²⁴ 'Wilt thou follow me down? Can we love in the black blank darkness?' Kingsley, *Andromeda*, 44.

²⁵ '... straight the fearful path / Of the cannon ball / Shattering that it *may* reach, and / shattering what it reaches'. Coleridge, *The Poetical Works of S.T. Coleridge* (London, 1828), 3.29.

Trinity College Cambridge

6 Feb. 1929

Dear Miss Meakin

Homer, like Habakkuk, was capable de tout, and his ἄρεξ ἄρεξ scandalised even the ancients.²⁶ He begins verses with ἐπεῖ, which is just Matthew Arnold's 'between'.²⁷

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

²⁶ The prophet Habakkuk appears as a source of power in the story of Bel and the Dragon (Daniel 14, 1-22). Housman may have read an article which called Habakkuk 'capable de tout': F.C. Burkitt, 'The psalm of Habakkuk', *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1914): 62-6, at p.62. The Homeric example is of words which do not fit hexameter verse. ἄρεξ begins lines 31 and 455 of *Iliad* book 5: the first alpha is long, the second short. Elsewhere in Homer ἄρης can have either long or short alpha, depending on its position in the line. Housman is exaggerating for effect by using 'scandalised', though the grammarian Tryphon twice commented on it. (The forms differ, since one is vocative, the other nominative.)

²⁷ On ἐπεῖ, Homer does often do as Housman says, beginning a verse with it so that the epsilon has to be lengthened. His point is presumably that Arnold somewhere does the same, scanning the iamb 'between' as a spondee, as in 'Haworth Churchyard':

Where, behind Keighley, the road

Up to the heart of the moors

Between heath-clad showery hills

Runs....

Similarly in 'Balder dead':

Down to the margin of the roaring sea

He came, and sadly went along the sand,

Between the waves and black o'erhanging cliffs

Where in and out the screaming seafowl fly;

In 1860, in his lectures as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, Matthew Arnold had criticised English translations of Homer, including that of F.W. Newman's 1856 translation in ballad metre. In 1861 Newman issued a scathing response, *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice*; Arnold replied in November that year in a final lecture which was published in 1862 as *On Translating Homer: Last Words*. In one of his specimens of translation of Homer into English hexameters, Arnold had written 'Between that and the ships, the Trojans' numerous fires': Newman declared that 'For a while, I seriously doubted whether he meant his specimen for metre at all, but eventually realised that it was intended as hexameter, so that 'between' counted as a spondee (Newman, *Homeric Translation*, 6-7). It was surely this controversy that Housman was thinking of when he referred to 'Matthew Arnold's "between"'.

Trinity College Cambridge

29 June 1930

Dear Miss Meakin

I am glad to hear from you, and it is kind of you to send me your play,²⁸ which I have read with interest as a story, but not with satisfaction as a tragedy, because the form of verse is incongruous with the matter-of-factness of the language, which is sometimes extreme. I liked Rodriguez on p.82.²⁹

I have been abroad, or would have answered before. I return the copy of the play, because you may be writing it.

I am yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

[a fragmentary letter, with no date or place in the heading: dated '14 Nov.30' at the end, in another hand]

Dear Miss Meakin

Many thanks for the new copy of *Inez*. Any critical remarks of mine would inevitably be mostly repetitious.

negligent (p.73 'And let the universe' &c has a whole foot, or three syllables even, over measure) and the diction is often unsuited to verse (p.65 'has just informed

²⁸ *Inez de Castro*, published in 1930; a historical drama set in 14th-century Portugal. *Inez* had an affair with Pedro, heir to the Portuguese throne; he was beheaded on the orders of his father, King Alfonso. The story inspired many writers, including Aphra Behn, Mary Russell Mitford and Ezra Pound. See M.L.M. de Sousa, 'Inez de Castro in English literature', *Journal of Anglo-Portuguese Studies* 27 (2018): 71-98.

²⁹ In the play, Rodriguez is a friend of *Inez*'s lover Pedro. On p.82 Pedro gives overblown praise of *Inez*, and Rodriguez in an aside declares, 'Enough to rob a spinster of her patience! With all his sentimental vapourings'. Perhaps this is what caught Housman's fancy.

I have just finished the last volume of my Manilius, and hope that I have done with hard labour for the rest of my days.³⁰

Yours sincerely
A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge
24 Feb. 1932

Dear Miss Meakin

Some objections which might be made to your elegiacs as elegiacs cease to apply because they are translated from Goethe, who in treating trochees as spondees or short syllables as long is a worse offender than you: for example the words Wenig-Apfel are really much rather – u – u than – – – –.³¹ But Goethe is comparatively innocent of your favourite misdemeanour, which is treating long syllables as short.

Hear what a tree yester morn taught me beside yonder stream. They are much rather – – u than – u u.

I have not much fault to find with the diction, except that ‘such drastic measures appal me’ is trite and ready-made prose.

I was interested to see the announcement of your book, and am glad that it is soon to appear.³² That period has always attracted me.

I am yours sincerely
A.E. Housman

³⁰ The fifth and final volume of Housman’s edition of Manilius’ *Astronomica* (see note 3 above) appeared in this year, 27 years after the publication of the first volume.

³¹ Housman quotes from Goethe’s ‘Amynthas’ (1799), 15-16:

Wenig Aepfel trägt er mir nur, der sonst so beladne;

Sieh, der Epheu ist schuld, der ihn gewaltig umgibt.

[The tree] that was usually heavily laden bears only a few apples for me. See, the ivy which surrounds it so densely is responsible.

³² *Goethe and Schiller 1785-1805, The Story of a Friendship* (3 vols, London, 1932).

Trinity College Cambridge

17 March 1932

Dear Miss Meakin

There is a notice of your book, though not one much worth having, in the quarterly issue of *Life and Letters*, p.118.³³ The difficulty of writing English hexameters is that the Greek hexameter was quantitative and English verse is not. English verse is regulated not by quantity but by recurrent stress, and 'No better a musician the wren' is the same metre as 'Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death'.³⁴ Moreover the English language has not, as Greek had, or as the Greeks thought it had, two quantities only (♩ and ♪ in musical notation), but ever so many intermediate quantities; and therefore it is not stuff out of which hexameters can easily be made. But slowly is a perfect trochee, and cannot be anything else; and when you use it in 'Slowly dying are they' you are interposing a bar of triple time in a piece which should be in common time³⁵. There are few true spondees among English words, and they are mostly compounds. House-leek is one, but hardly household. Your favourite, however, is, as I said, treating long syllables as short, as in 'storm rage at'.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

I was interested in the German professor's letter.

Trinity College Cambridge

12 May 1933

Dear Miss Meakin

The Greek accent has nothing whatever to do with the structure or rhythm of verse, and the poets pay absolutely no attention to it. It was musical and consisted in pitch, not stress (I am speaking of the classical

³³ The review was by Peter Quennell, *Life and Letters*, March 1932.

³⁴ 'The nightingale, if she should sing by day / When every goose is cackling, would be thought / no better a musician than the wren': Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V Scene 1. 'O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp / *Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death / A universe of death.*' Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2.620-3.

³⁵ Common time: 4/4; triple time has three beats to the bar, for example 3/4.

age). Blackie was a wind-bag, and no scholar has ever thought anything of his scholarship.³⁶ One of his pupils said to me ‘the reason why I don’t know Greek is that I was taught by Blackie’.

A small and very good book which you might get if you don’t know it already is Friedrich Blass, ‘Ueber die Aussprache d. Griech.’³⁷ It has been translated into English, but I dare say your brother would not need that any more than you.

The chief use to us of the signs for the accents, which were not invented till the 3rd century BC, is that in some cases they distinguish one word from another.

I am yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge

7 June 1934

Dear Miss Meakin

I am glad to hear from you and to hear that you are busy and I hope happy. I have not seen nor (before your letter) heard of Laurence’s [*sic*] translation of Homer,³⁸ and I do not remember that anything particular about the digamma &c has appeared lately.³⁹

Vespasian, many years before he became emperor, was in Britain, and conquered the Isle of Wight, so that he must have been in the neighbourhood of Chichester; but I do not remember any story about

³⁶ John Stuart Blackie (1809-95), professor of Greek at Edinburgh 1852-82; over his career he moved from professional scholar to professional Scotsman. See S. Wallace, *John Stuart Blackie: Scottish Scholar and Patriot* (Edinburgh, 2006).

³⁷ Blass’s *Über die Aussprache des Griechischen*, first printed in a Gymnasium program booklet in Naumburg in 1869, had been published in expanded form by Weidmann of Berlin in 1870; the 3rd edition of 1888 was translated by W.J. Purton as *Pronunciation of Ancient Greek* (Cambridge, 1890).

³⁸ T.E. Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Homer* (London, 1932).

³⁹ The digamma was an *F*-shaped letter representing a *w*-sound that disappeared from most Greek dialects, but which has often to be taken account of in discussing Homeric vocabulary and metre.

his elephants, which I should think he could not expect to make much use of.⁴⁰

I have not been very well for the last year. The University (not for that reason) gave me a holiday for the Lent term; so that I have not been overworked. In common with all other scholars here I shall be starved of books for the next four months, as the Library is moving into a new building, which will be a terrible job.⁴¹

Yours very truly

A.E. Housman

Trinity College Cambridge

7 Dec 1935

Dear Miss Meakin

Many thanks for your interesting letter and the impressive photograph. Some one sent me a photograph from Coimbra not long ago, which represented a student in one of the circular capes you describe, but he was occupied in serenading a lady with a guitar.

I am in poor health with weakness of heart, and have come down to the ground-floor, as the rooms at the top of 44 stairs in which I have lived for 24 years were evidently doing me no good.⁴² I find that I can lecture all right, but my walking is slow and feeble.

⁴⁰ Vespasian (9-79 AD, emperor 69-79) commanded the Second Legion (Legio II Augusta) during the emperor Claudius's invasion of Britain in AD 43, and conquered south-west England. The historian Cassius Dio claimed that Claudius himself used elephants.

⁴¹ The new university library was built between 1931 and 1934 to the design of Giles Gilbert Scott. Scott also designed Bankside Power Station on the Thames (1947-53), which is similar in style. The old library closed on 31 May 1934; the books were taken by horse-drawn cart, the last cart travelling across the River Cam to the new building on 26 July. The new library opened on 22 October 1934.

⁴² In the previous month, Housman had transferred from his rooms in Whewell's Court to B2, a ground-floor set in Great Court. In a letter to his godson, he described his rooms as 'exceedingly comfortable, and the bathroom, which the College has equipped at its own expense, strikes the beholder dumb with admiration'. Trinity College Library, Add. MS a/551/55.

Though I have learnt no Portuguese, and should have no idea how to pronounce it, I find that I understand Camöens without much difficulty, much more easily than anything Spanish.⁴³

R.W. Chambers, whom you probably remember at University College, and who succeeded Ker as Professor there, is this term delivering the Clark lectures in this college, and I have met him several times.⁴⁴

Dorothy Platt, whom you must also have known, died a year or two ago; her mother is fairly well, but growing deaf.⁴⁵

I had a pleasant motoring tour in September in Dauphiné and Savoy, the scenery beyond my expectations, and also the cuisine.⁴⁶

I am not clear whether Coimbra is to be your permanent abode, but any rate I wish you a merry Christmas there.⁴⁷

Yours very truly

A.E. Housman

⁴³ Luis Camöens (1524-80), the Portuguese national poet, best known for his epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (1572), which contains a version of the story of Inez de Castro at Canto 4, stanzas 118-35. In 1933 Housman had told an American correspondent that he read Camöens with the aid of Latin and French: Housman to G. Morley, 28 Oct. 1933 (Burnett 2.383).

⁴⁴ Raymond Wilson Chambers (1874-1942), Quain student at UCL from 1899, Quain professor of English language and literature 1922-42. William Paton Ker (1855-1923) had held the chair since 1889. The Clark lectures were founded by an endowment from W.G. Clark, a classical fellow of Trinity, who died in 1878; the first was given by Leslie Stephen in 1883. Recent distinguished lecturers had included T.S. Eliot (1926) and E.M. Forster (1927). The British literary critic George Watson described them as 'a notable event in the British literary calendar': 'The Cambridge lectures of T.S. Eliot', *Sewanee Review* 99 (1991), 566-83, at p.566. (The Clark lectures are not to be confused with the Clark Lecture Series at Scots College, Sydney, founded in 2014 in honour of Graeme Clark, inventor of the cochlear implant.)

⁴⁵ The daughter of Housman's Greek colleague at UCL, Arthur Platt (d.1925). Housman was a friend of Platt's widow Mildred: Housman's letters to her 1900-30 (UCL, MS ADD 165) were published by Burnett.

⁴⁶ Housman was chauffeured around France for three weeks. It was on this trip that he hit his head getting into a taxi, had medical treatment and wore a tall cap to hide the wound. Graves 261; Burnett 2.489-94.

⁴⁷ Coimbra had been the capital of Portugal from 1151 to 1255; its university, founded in 1290, is the oldest in the country.

***A Shropshire Lad's* journey from Gloucester to Cambridge**

Linda Hart

How did a copy of *A Shropshire Lad*, inscribed in 1909 by Ivor Gurney to Rudyard Kipling, end up at Trinity College Library in 2019?

This is the story of a book. I shall trace its journey through life, perhaps making this a biography of a book. The book in question is a “pocket edition” of *A Shropshire Lad*, containing 63 poems by A.E. Housman. It was inscribed to Rudyard Kipling by a 19-year-old music student in Gloucester named Ivor Gurney. It was delivered to Rudyard Kipling by Gurney’s godfather and mentor the Reverend Alfred Cheesman. The book now belongs to Trinity College, Cambridge, and resides in its famous Wren Library.

The book is a 1908 pocket edition of *A Shropshire Lad*. Rudyard Kipling’s richly ornamented Indian-themed bookplate is pasted on the inside front cover. On the facing page is an inscription in bold black ink:

Rudyard Kipling
from his greatest admirer
Ivor Gurney
August 1909

The contents of the book go back to the mid-1890s when A.E. Housman (1859-1936), then Professor of Latin at University College London, looked over the poems he had written in recent years. He chose 63 of them to form a collection and a friend suggested that it should be titled *A Shropshire Lad*. In March 1896 the London firm of Kegan Paul published 500 copies. But they did little to promote the volume and fewer than 400 copies had been sold by the end of the year.

Watching this with interest was a bookish 24-year-old named Grant Richards who had just founded his own London publishing company. He approached Housman with requests to take over the printing and sales of *A Shropshire Lad* from Kegan Paul. Housman finally agreed, and Grant Richards Ltd printed 500 copies of *A Shropshire Lad* in September 1898. From this time onwards Grant Richards was Housman's only publisher, and later became his friend as well as travelling companion.

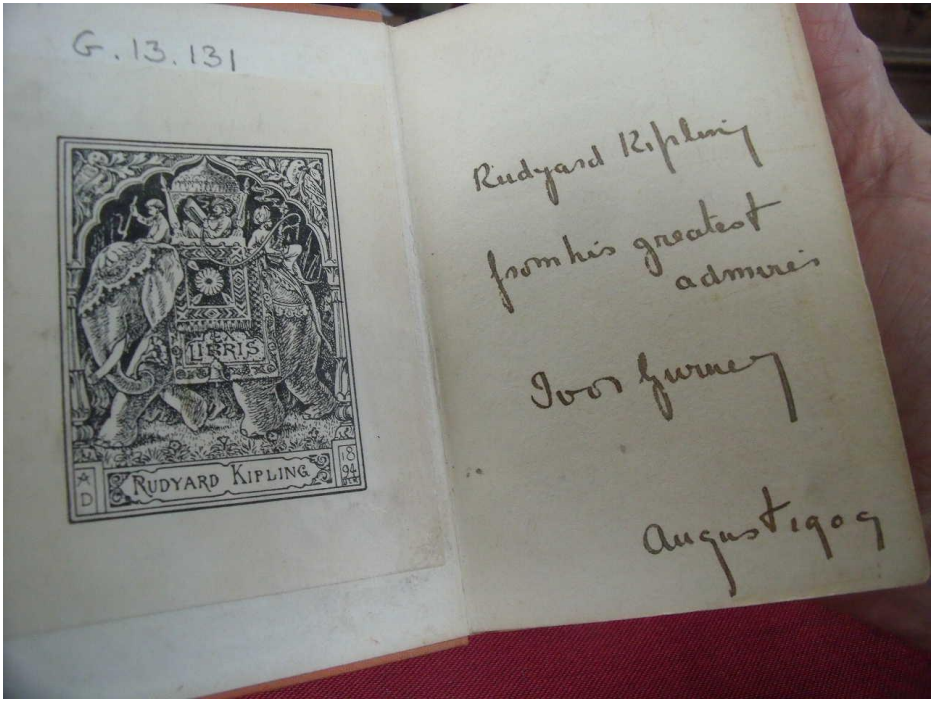
Copies of *A Shropshire Lad* sold slowly until 1906 when sales increased considerably.¹ This may explain why Richards published two *Shropshire Lads* in 1908 – an illustrated edition and a pocket edition. The one I am writing about here, the one that made its way from Gloucester to Cambridge, the one with Kipling's bookplate, is the pocket edition. The title page says:

A SHROPSHIRE LAD
BY
A.E. HOUSMAN
LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS
7 CARLTON STREET, S.W.

The pocket edition is approximately 3 inches (8 cm) wide and 5 inches (13 cm) high. It has 101 pages and was printed in Plymouth by William Brendon & Son, Ltd. The illustration on the frontispiece by the artist William Hyde is titled 'Clee Hill'.²

¹ From 1906 until 1911 the average annual sales of *A Shropshire Lad* were more than 13,500 copies. *A.E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet*, Richard Perceval Graves, London, 1979, p. 119.

² This is one of eight colour illustrations by Hyde that were in the 8vo illustrated 1908 edition. It may have been chosen for the frontispiece of the pocket edition because the first line of the first poem in *A Shropshire Lad* is "From Clee to heaven the beacon burns". But there is more than one "Clee" in Shropshire; the county's two highest



*The bookplate and inscription in the pocket edition of A Shropshire Lad
Courtesy of the Masters and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge*

Dr Nicolas Bell, Trinity College Librarian, showed me the book on 4 September 2020 when I was at the library on a Housman-related errand. He told me that in May 2019 he had purchased the book as an addition to the Library's extensive Housman holdings.³ He knew of my interest

hills are Brown Clee and Titterstone Clee. It is generally accepted that "From Clee to heaven..." in ASL I refers to Brown Clee Hill. (Its peak, called Abdon Burf, is referred to in LP XLI.) But the frontispiece illustration definitely represents Titterstone Clee. This is the peak above Clee Hill village, described by Housman as the "high-reared head of Clee" in *A Shropshire Lad* XXXVII. Thanks to Peter Sisley for this information.

³ For the last 25 years of his life Housman was a Fellow at Trinity College as well as the Kennedy Professor of Latin at Cambridge University.

in Gloucestershire poets, and thought I would be pleased to see this volume. I was more than pleased.

I knew a good deal about Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) – the poetry and music he composed, his tragic life that ended in an asylum, his strange personality most likely due to bipolar disorder, his love of Gloucestershire countryside, his song settings of many Housman poems.⁴ But here was something that said more to me about Gurney’s youthful enthusiasms than any biographer could say. He had paid homage to Kipling by giving him an inscribed copy of *A Shropshire Lad*, and one hundred and eleven years later I was holding evidence of that homage in my hands.

As a young man Gurney would have been drawn to the poems in *A Shropshire Lad* for many reasons. One attraction was in the pastoral scenes and landscape descriptions of places that were on his horizon (the Severn, Britain’s longest river, arrives in Gloucester after a journey through eastern Wales, Shropshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire – a journey through places that Gurney knew or could imagine that he would know some day). And there was the emotional appeal for Gurney in the yearnings, disappointments, rejections, frustrations, and death wishes that Housman’s lads felt. But a love of music would also have drawn Gurney to Housman’s poems – as it would draw many composers over the years. They are attracted to Housman’s poems because of “the brevity of the lines, their essential Englishness, their pastoral atmosphere, their rhythm, and their simple spontaneity of feeling....”⁵ The first composer to set Housman’s poems to music was Arthur Somervell (1863-1937). He composed a song-cycle, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1904 and its first performance was at London’s Aeolian Hall in 1905. In January 1909, a few months before Gurney inscribed *A Shropshire Lad* to Kipling, a performance took place in

⁴ Linda Hart, “Ivor Gurney: From Triumph to Tragedy,” *Contemporary Review*, vol. 291, Spring 2009, pp. 89-93.

⁵ Richard Perceval Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 116, quoting John Quinlan.



Ivor Gurney 1890-1937
Photo courtesy of the Ivor Gurney Trust

London of Ralph Vaughan Williams' song setting of *A Shropshire Lad* XXVII ('Is my team ploughing').

Two years later, when Gurney was only 17, he set *A Shropshire Lad* XI ('On your midnight pallet lying') to music. Perhaps Gurney had heard about, and was inspired by, the Arthur Somervell settings. Perhaps Dr Herbert Brewer, master of the choristers at Gloucester Cathedral with whom Gurney was studying composition, set exercises for his pupil and this Housman poem was one of them. Or perhaps Gurney's godfather, Alfred Cheesman, suggested that he combine his love of poetry and music by setting a Housman poem.

In 1908 Gurney began writing music for two more Housman poems from *A Shropshire Lad*: 'Loveliest of trees' and 'Is my team ploughing'. At this time Gurney wrote to Housman's publisher about permission for a public performance of these and other songs he might write. Housman sent his instructions to Grant Richards on 16 May 1908: "Mr. I. B. Gurney (who resides in Gloucester Cathedral along with St. Peter and Almighty God) must not print the words of my poems in full on concert programmes (a course which I am sure his fellow lodgers would disapprove of); but he is quite welcome to set them to music, and to have them sung, and to print their titles on programmes when they are sung."⁶

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was one of England's most popular and prolific authors at this time – a literary celebrity before the term was invented. The titles of his books were as well known then as they are today: *Barrack-Room Ballads*, *The Jungle Book*, *Stalky & Co.*, *Just So Stories*, *Kim*, *Puck of Pook's Hill*. In 1907 Kipling went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.⁷ In that same year he was

⁶ Housman to Grant Richards, 16 May 1908, *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, ed. Archie Burnett, Oxford, 2007, vol. 1, p. 219.

⁷ He was the youngest recipient of the Prize since its inception in 1901, and the first English-language recipient. The citation from Stockholm said the award was "in consideration of the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas

awarded Honorary Doctorates by McGill University in Montreal and Oxford University. In the following year he received the same from Cambridge University.

Gurney was encouraged to read Kipling and many other writers by his godfather and Sunday School teacher, the Reverend Alfred H. Cheesman (1865-1941). Cheesman received a BA degree from Worcester College, Oxford in 1888 and became curate of All Saints' Church, Gloucester, in the same year. He became one of the most important influences in Gurney's life. Cheesman was an intelligent, inquisitive, educated and cultured man "with a deep love of poetry, literature and history" who "was able and willing to provide [Gurney] with an exciting range of intellectual experiences and education far exceeding what he received at the National School..."⁸ Forty-seven years after christening Gurney, Canon Cheesman presided at his funeral where he "paid 'an eloquent tribute' to his memory". He told the congregation that Ivor "loved beautiful music and poetry" and he loved "the Severn country, the distant hills, the fields, and streams and flowers."⁹

Gurney had a difficult relationship with his parents and siblings. He began spending more time away from home and with Cheesman who lived nearby. Recognising Gurney's instinctive appreciation of music, the vicar did a great deal to encourage this. He suggested that Gurney, only 8 years old, should become a probationer in the All Saints' Church choir. Two years later, with Cheesman's encouragement, Gurney competed successfully for a place in the Gloucester Cathedral Choir. Later Cheesman coached Gurney for the matriculation examination at Durham University (Gurney passed the exam but decided not to study there). Cheesman had a large collection of sheet music, including some

and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the creations of this world-famous author."

⁸ Pamela Blevins, *Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott*, 2008, p. 54.

⁹ Pamela Blevins, *ibid*, p. 265, quoting *The [Gloucester] Citizen*, 1 January 1938, p. 6.

song settings of Kipling's verse published by various composers in 1892 – for example, 'Mandalay', and 'The Young British Soldier' from *Barrack-Room Ballads*, both by Gerard F. Cobb.¹⁰

Gurney attended Cheesman's Sunday School classes, but much more important were his visits to the vicar's very extensive library. "Cheesman's library demonstrates that he was a man who loved both books and knowledge, for whom teaching was second nature."¹¹ They read history together; Cheesman had a special interest in the Romans. They read English literature together; his favourite poets were Tennyson and Kipling. When he was 17 years old Gurney presented Cheesman with a copy of W.S. Gilbert's *Fifty 'Bab' Ballads* inscribed "A.H. Cheesman / In memory of talks / and walks. From Ivor / Easter 1907". It's difficult to know what was more important in Gurney's development: that Cheesman cultivated his love of literature and history, or that he provided a sanctuary for the young man.¹²

Gurney's interest in Kipling continued long after *A Shropshire Lad* was signed and sent to Kipling from "his greatest admirer". In February 1915, when Gurney had just joined the army, he read Kipling's *The New Army in Training* and wrote to a friend that "Kipling's little 6d book on the new Armies is very good."¹³ Later that year, after reading some poems published in the *Times [Literary] Supplement*, he described the ones by Hardy and Kipling as "the best of the bunch". In a letter to his

¹⁰ Items 9 and 10 in the Cheesman Archive in R.K.R. Thornton, "Alfred Hunter Cheesman," *Ivor Gurney Society Journal*, vol. 18, 2012, pp. 63-94 which includes a list of items in the Cheesman Archive.

¹¹ Page 11 in Rolf Jordan, "'A good man, kind and gentle': The Reverend Canon A. H. Cheesman," *Ivor Gurney Society Journal*, vol. 19, 2013, pp 7-38, followed by an Appendix, "The Reverend Canon A. H. Cheesman's Library," pp. 39-44.

¹² Blevins, *op.cit.*, p. 71, says that "between 1905 and 1911, Gurney called on Cheesman at least 2,000 times at his home at 17 Derby Road." See also Michael Hurd's 1978 biography, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* and Rolf Jordan, *ibid.*

¹³ *Ivor Gurney: Collected Letters*, ed. R.K.R. Thornton, 1991, p. 13.

friend Sydney Shimmin in December 1915 Gurney recommended Kipling's *Sea to Sea* and then listed other books by Kipling that he had read: *The Day's Work*, *Captains Courageous*, *Many Inventions*, *Rewards and Fairies*, and *Traffics and Discoveries*.¹⁴

The following year, writing from "beside a French canal" during the war, he told his friend and champion Marion Scott: "I read a great deal of Kipling's *Fringes of the Fleet* in a shell hole during one of the most annoying times we have had."¹⁵ There are several other references to Kipling's works in Gurney's letters. For example, he's been reading Puck of Pook's Hill, short stories which imaginatively recreate periods in English history. He tells Marion Scott that "I admire Kipling as you know. But before Puck of Pook's Hill he was **not** English. Perhaps [he] is not now, but Puck showed us that he realised a virtue not his own."¹⁶ A poem written by Gurney, titled 'September 1922', used some ideas and words from the poems in Kipling's book *Departmental Ditties*. This book was published in 1886, when Kipling was in India, and is about the misdoings of officialdom. It was Kipling's first collection of verse, and launched his literary career. The two poems in particular that Gurney made use of were 'Army Headquarters' and 'Pagett, M.P.'

Gurney's song settings and his letters reveal that he also kept up his interest in Housman and admired the beauty and simplicity of his poems. He used Housman as a benchmark, for example, writing in 1916 that the poetry of Wilfrid Gibson "is not as good as Housman."¹⁷ After being shot in the arm in April 1917, while on active duty in northern France, he wrote to Marion Scott from a hospital in Rouen, wondering "whether at last I might try [setting] Housman's *Shropshire Lad*."¹⁸ She sent him a copy of the book and some manuscript paper.

¹⁴ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁵ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁶ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 353.

¹⁷ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁸ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

In June 1917 he wrote to Scott twice about ‘On Wenlock Edge’, saying that it is in his head waiting to be written, and if she sends him more manuscript paper he “might perhaps summon up energy to set ‘On Wenlock Edge’.”¹⁹

During the war he moved around a lot, and lost books or had to send some back to England. He told Scott she can keep all of his books “except of course *The Shropshire Lad*.”²⁰ He asked another friend, towards the end of the year, to send him a copy of *A Shropshire Lad* and quoted the price of 6d.²¹ In 1918 he told Scott that he has only two books with him in the General Hospital Newcastle – *A Shropshire Lad* and Wilfrid Gibson’s *Friends*.²² In the last few months of 1919 Gurney composed the seven songs from *A Shropshire Lad* that form his song cycle *Ludlow and Teme*. Published in 1923, this was the first of his two song cycles based on *Shropshire Lad* poems. The second, *The Western Playland*, was published in 1926, with settings for eight poems including revisions of the two he had begun working on in 1908.²³

So we have links between Gurney and Kipling, and links between Gurney and Housman, but the three of them were brought together when an inscribed copy of *A Shropshire Lad* was given to Kipling. Where would Gurney – or possibly Cheesman – have purchased the book? Gloucester was quite a thriving place at the start of the 20th century, with many shops. An old Gloucestershire guidebook from around the time has an advertisement from a bookseller, J. Beard, on Eastgate Street in Gloucester. The Sesame Shop in Stroud, nine miles from Gloucester, advertised “The Latest Books on Art, Modern Poetry, Plays, etc.”

¹⁹ Thornton, *op.cit.*, pp. 272 and 276.

²⁰ Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 308.

²¹ Thornton, *op.cit.*, 366.

²² Thornton, *op.cit.*, 405. He says he is in hospital for stomach trouble “caused by gas”.

²³ See Blevins, *op.cit.*

After the book was purchased and inscribed, it was given to Kipling by Alfred Cheesman. We do not know where or when this meeting took place. But we do know that Kipling spent several days in August 1909 away from home, motoring through West Sussex and Hampshire. With him was his wife Caroline (Carrie), his 12-year-old son John and his 13-year-old daughter Elsie. The family drove to Petworth and then via Petersfield to Winchester. Kipling was fascinated to see the graves of Jane Austen and Isaak Walton at Winchester Cathedral. After visiting Lyndhurst in the New Forest, they spent some time at Beaulieu, and John attended a Boy Scout summer camp that was being held there. The motor tour ended in Southampton. From there Carrie and Elsie returned home in the car while Kipling and John carried on to Plymouth. Is this motor tour a possible clue to Kipling's meeting with the vicar from Gloucestershire who had a book to give him?²⁴

Presumably Cheesman presented the book to Kipling within days of Gurney writing the inscription in August 1909. Cheesman later recalled,

I think I was guilty of introducing him [Gurney] to Kipling, Tennyson and others – which I used to make him read aloud. But I think from his early years he had a love of reading. Once I spent a day with Rudyard Kipling – and Ivor sent most warmly respectful messages and the gift of Housman's *Shropshire Lad* – and I had to write a minute description of my visit and everything Kipling did and said.²⁵

The subject of my biography now disappears from view for many decades and I can only speculate. But before looking at what might have happened after 1909, there are some hard facts about where the book resided at the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st.

²⁴ Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling*, 1999, p. 539; Caroline Kipling's Diary, August 1909 courtesy of the Kipling Society.

²⁵ Alfred Cheesman, in a letter to Marion Scott, 19 April 1937, quoted in Michael Hurd, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney*, 1978, p. 16.

The book's current home – where it will undoubtedly spend the rest of its life – is the Wren Library at Trinity College in Cambridge. It is here that I first saw the book, first held it in my hands. It is here that I first wondered how and why this copy of *A Shropshire Lad* had travelled from Gloucester to Cambridge, had left the home of an impecunious young music student to reside on a shelf in a famous university library.

Dr Bell purchased the Gurney-Kipling *Shropshire Lad* for the library in May 2019 from the catalogue of James Fergusson Books & Manuscripts. The book had previously belonged to David Hall (1947-2015), who had been Deputy Librarian at Cambridge University Library.²⁶ In addition to the black ink inscription from Ivor Gurney to Rudyard Kipling, the number 1574 is lightly pencilled in the top left corner of the front endpaper. This is the number Hall had assigned the book in his own library catalogue. He also made this lightly pencilled note overleaf:

See The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney.

This title refers to Michael Hurd's biography of Ivor Gurney, which was published in 1978 i.e., several years after Hall had purchased *A Shropshire Lad*.²⁷

Hall later added another pencilled note with information he had gleaned from Hurd's book:

²⁶ David Hall had been a student at Trinity College in the 1960s and then worked at the University Library for four decades. Over the years he donated many books from his substantial personal library to the University Library, including a 1913 American edition of Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (this book is not recorded in any other UK library). According to his wishes, after his death many of his books were sold and the profits donated to the Friends of the National Libraries. This was one of a number of books which James Fergusson sold on behalf of the executors for this good cause.

²⁷ Michael Hurd (1928-2006) was born in Gloucester, read music at Pembroke College, Oxford, and became a professor of music theory as well as a composer. He also wrote biographies of Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Felix Mendelssohn.

This book was given by Gurney to Kipling through the agency of Alfred Cheesman. Gurney, composer & poet, 1890-1937, composed two song cycles with words from ASL.

On my behalf Dr Bell asked David Hall's executor if he still had the catalogue in which David had assigned the number 1574 to the Gurney-Kipling *Shropshire Lad*. He did, and from the brief entry we know that David Hall bought the book from Galloway & Porter for £1, probably on 1 August 1971.²⁸

The book now has a longer and more detailed catalogue entry at the Trinity College Library, as follows:

| | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Author | Housman, A. E. (Alfred Edward), 1859-1936. |
| Title | A Shropshire lad / by A.E. Housman. |
| Imprint | London: Grant Richards 7 Carlton Street, S.W., 1896 (1908 printing) |
| Descript. | viii, 100 p.; 14 cm. |
| Note | Copy note: Bookplate of Rudyard Kipling. UkCU-TRI Copy note: 'Rudyard Kipling from his greatest admirer Ivor Gurney. August 1909.' UkCU-TRI |
| Subject | Poems. |
| Other Auth. | Gurney, Ivor, 1890-1937, inscriber. UkCU-TRI Kipling, Rudyard, 1865-1936, former owner. UkCU-TRI |

The last line of this entry describes Rudyard Kipling as “former owner”. But when the book made its way from Gloucester to Cambridge, was Kipling the former owner or only a former owner? Where did the book live, where was it shelved, who looked after it between 1909 when Gurney inscribed it and 1971 when Galloway & Porter sold it? No biographer likes having 62 years undocumented and unaccounted for.

In 1902 Rudyard Kipling – with his wife and two young children – moved to a secluded and substantial 17th-century house called Bateman's, near the East Sussex village of Burwash. The house came

²⁸ Galloway & Porter was a well-known Cambridge bookshop that closed in 2010.

with 33 acres of land, enough to give Kipling the privacy he sought (he was probably England's most famous living writer). He had a very large study, whose floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on several walls meant that this room was also his library. We must assume that this is where he put the inscribed copy of *A Shropshire Lad* after pasting his bookplate inside.

In November 2002 William Hale was commissioned by the National Trust to compile a report on the current contents of Kipling's study at Bateman's.²⁹ Hale's report states that "Almost all [of the books at Bateman's] contain the bookplate devised by his father, the watercolour design for which is on display in the study." This is the bookplate in the Gurney-Kipling *Shropshire Lad*. Hale also reports that "There are a considerable number of presentation copies from Kipling's friends and contemporaries." But there is no reference to any copies of *A Shropshire Lad* and there is not much poetry.³⁰

Over the years, Housman's path occasionally crossed with Kipling's – on paper though rarely in person. In July 1892 Housman sent a copy of Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* to his brother Herbert for his 24th

²⁹ Kipling lived at Bateman's until his death in 1936. When his wife died three years later, she gave Bateman's to The National Trust. I am grateful to William Hale and the National Trust for permission to quote from this unpublished report which is the property of the National Trust. William Hale now works in the Rare Books and Early Manuscripts Department at Cambridge University Library and is Treasurer of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society.

³⁰ Hale's report states that: "Kipling's taste in imaginative literature was, if his library may be believed, selective and highly conservative. He read the Latin poets (in translation) extensively.... There is a significant collection of works on Shakespeare such as Sir Sidney Lee's *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London, 1915) (I.1.30). Of works by his contemporaries, however, there is little or none. There is a little literature of the Great War but no Owen, Sassoon or even Brooke – only forgotten volumes such as Cecil Barber's *Sandbag Ballads* (London, 1919) (E.3.3) and J.L. Crommelin Brown's *Dies Heroica* (London, 1918) (E.1.3), which has a letter from its author thanking Kipling for his encouragement. Overall, literature published after 1900 is conspicuous by its absence."

birthday.³¹ A few years later, a line of Kipling's inspired Housman to write a pastiche. In *The Seven Seas* (London 1896) Kipling had written: "They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all! But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star, Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are!"

Next to these lines, in his copy of *The Seven Seas*, Housman wrote:

"The God of Things as They Are is never the God for me,
For He is the God of Things as They Did Not Ought To Be."³²

Housman also made a number of annotations in the margins of his copy of Kipling's *Songs from Books*, which was published in 1913. He pointed out some rhymes which he didn't like, and wrote an "ugh" beside one line; he also made several alterations to Kipling's poem 'Heriot's Ford' so that it sounded much more like a Housman poem.³³ On 16 January 1928 Housman and Kipling were among the ten pallbearers at the funeral of Thomas Hardy in Westminster Abbey. After the death of the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges in 1930, both Kipling and Housman were being considered for the post. "Apparently the King favoured Kipling and the Prime Minister Housman, but both were expected to decline, and so John Masefield was chosen."³⁴ In 1933 Housman wrote to his brother Laurence that "I hear that Kipling says that I am 'dead right' about the pit of the stomach."³⁵ This was a reference to Housman's famous lecture in Cambridge on 'The Name and Nature of Poetry' in which he said that poetry came from, *inter*

³¹ A.E. Housman: *The Scholar-Poet*, Richard Perceval Graves, London, 1979, p. 127. Herbert was with the King's Royal Rifles in Burma at the time. He wrote to their step-mother that: "The book that Alfred sent me has been the delight of myself and my comrades ever since I got it." Herbert was killed in action in the Boer War on 30 October 1901.

³² William White, "A.E. Housman on Blunt and Kipling," *Notes & Queries*, 181 (Nov. 29, 1941), p. 301.

³³ Graves, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

³⁴ Graves, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

³⁵ Letter to Laurence Housman, 24 May 1933, *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, ed. Henry Maas, London, 1971, p. 335.

alia, the pit of the stomach. In 1935 Kipling gave his friend Lady Milner a copy of Housman's poem 'Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries', telling her these are "the finest lines of poetry written during the war."³⁶

As for Kipling's inscribed copy of *A Shropshire Lad*, we can only surmise that it resided for possibly three decades in his study/library at Bateman's. One possibility is that it was lost or sold by the National Trust when it was given the house on the death of Kipling's wife in 1939. This seems very unlikely, for two reasons: (1) the National Trust would have recognised the value of an inscribed book from a "greatest admirer"; (2) the book next surfaces at a bookshop in Cambridge c.1970. Cambridge is 106 miles from Bateman's. But Kipling's daughter Elsie was living very near Cambridge from 1938 until her death in 1976.

I believe that Elsie (1896-1976) is the key to deciding what may have happened to the book in the intervening years. She had a pampered but rather lonely childhood. Her sister Josephine, four years older, died in 1899 when Elsie was 3; her brother John died, age 18, at the Battle of Loos, when she was 19. She seems to have been at a loss about what to do after the 1914-18 war, spending most of her time with her parents either at home or on their frequent travels. There must have been pressure on her to get married, especially after her 'coming out' and presentation at court in June 1913. The Kiplings lavished money on her social life, and she was given a generous annual income.³⁷

She finally found a marriageable Irish Guards Officer, George Bambridge (1892-1943). He worked in the Diplomatic Service as an honorary attaché, not quite distinguished enough for the Kiplings who saw him as an "impoverished diplomat, lacking connections".

³⁶ Lycett, *op.cit.*, p. 798. This poem was published in 1922 in Housman's final volume, *Last Poems*; there is no copy of the book at Bateman's.

³⁷ Lycett, *ibid.*, p. 706.

Nevertheless, they married in October 1924. Over 1000 guests attended the wedding at St Margaret's Church in the grounds of Westminster Abbey. Elsie rode in her father's Rolls Royce 'Silver Ghost', wearing a wedding dress purchased on a shopping trip to Paris with her mother. Her father gave her a house in Brussels as George was about to be posted there.³⁸

When Kipling was elected in 1932 to an Honorary Fellowship at Magdalene College in Cambridge, the Bambridges took a four-month lease on Wimpole Hall. George Bambridge was familiar with the very large and attractive Wimpole Estate. He "had known and loved the place since his youth when he used to shoot there with the Agar-Robartes family."³⁹ It was located near Royston, only eight miles from Cambridge, which meant that Kipling could combine visits to his college with visits to Elsie.

Wimpole Hall dates back to the 1640s, and had been owned by several aristocratic families over the centuries. In 1938 the Bambridges purchased the mansion with the inheritance Elsie received after Kipling's death. It was, and still is, the grandest and largest stately home in Cambridgeshire. "Set in 2,400 acres of land, Wimpole was a monument to gracious aristocratic living" and the Bambridges "lived there in great comfort and virtual seclusion."⁴⁰

Along with the estate the Bambridges purchased the extant great library of the Earls of Hardwicke (owners from 1740-1894). It contained over 6,000 books, which were "enhanced by Elsie Bambridge's own collection that includes books that belonged to her father, the author Rudyard Kipling."⁴¹ But the most important thing about Wimpole Hall

³⁸ Lycett, *ibid.*, pp. 712-13.

³⁹ Lycett, *ibid.*, p. 779.

⁴⁰ Lycett, *ibid.*, pp. 779 and 797. Elsie bequeathed Wimpole to the National Trust. Her bequest stipulated that the diaries and private papers at Wimpole that belonged to her, her husband and her mother should be destroyed. Lycett, p. 798.

⁴¹ From the Wimpole Hall website.

for the purposes of tracing *A Shropshire Lad* is its proximity to Cambridge and to the place where the book definitely arrived in 1971 – Galloway & Porter’s bookshop in Cambridge.



The library at Wimpole Hall

Courtesy of the National Trust

I think we should assume that Elsie took the book from Bateman’s and brought it to Wimpole Hall. This might have happened in 1932, and then the book stayed with her until she purchased the house in 1938. If she didn’t take it to Wimpole, then a most unlikely coincidence occurred. For example, at some earlier point in time Kipling sold, gave away or lost the book and it somehow made its way to Cambridge via a recipient. Or Kipling’s wife Carrie could have sold or given away the book while it was still in East Sussex, perhaps after his death, and again somehow the book made its way to Cambridge.

In 2003 Elizabeth Quarmby-Lawrence wrote a report for the National Trust about the library at Wimpole Hall.⁴² She noted that “Elsie Bambridge inherited, among other things, her father’s books and papers” and “Many of his books remained at Bateman’s [but] Elsie took the bulk of his papers to Wimpole.” Most importantly, the report says that “Mrs Bambridge sold much Kipling material over the years, some of the evidence for which can be found among her papers.” It seems that Elsie continued to have a relationship with Bateman's long after it had been given to the National Trust. She would take things from Wimpole to add to the collection at Bateman’s, and remove things from Bateman’s to take back to Wimpole. This should not have been allowed, but apparently it went unnoticed or no one felt able to stop her. Tim Pye, Libraries Curator at National Trust headquarters, confirms that “Elsie’s removal of things from Bateman’s to Wimpole is well known about and there’s certainly plenty of evidence that she either gave away or sold things. Enough books with Kipling or Elsie provenance come on to the book market to know that this wasn’t an uncommon situation.”⁴³

Given the geographical proximity of Wimpole and Cambridge, I am going to assume that the inscribed copy of *A Shropshire Lad* was at Wimpole Hall some time after, say, 1940. Perhaps Elsie saw no reason to keep the inscribed copy. The name Ivor Gurney may not have meant anything to her; he was not well known in the 1940s and 1950s. He had set the *Shropshire Lad* poems to music in his published song cycles of 1923 and 1926, but there is no reason that she would have known about that. It’s interesting to note that the list of books accepted by the National Trust when Bateman's was given to them in 1940 includes

⁴² This unpublished report is the property of the National Trust. Elizabeth Quarmby-Lawrence is now Rare Books Librarian at the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh. Elsie Kipling Bambridge, on her death in 1976, bequeathed the Wimpole Estate and its contents to the [National Trust](#). The Trust later deposited Kipling’s manuscripts to the [University of Sussex](#) to ensure better public access to them.

⁴³ Email from Tim Pye.

only one book by Housman: *The Name and Nature of Poetry*. This is the famous lecture that Housman delivered to a packed Senate House in Cambridge on 9 May 1933. The book is still on the shelves today.⁴⁴

At this point one can only speculate; several things might have occurred when Elsie was at Wimpole. One is that she sold the book to Galloway & Porter, possibly with other books during a clear-out to make space on the shelves for new arrivals. Another is that Elsie gave the book to a friend, neighbour, acquaintance or visitor; later the recipient or the recipient's heirs sold the book to Galloway & Porter. John Walker, the Kipling Society librarian, has speculated on what might have happened both before and after her move from Bateman's to Wimpole: "Did Elsie take *A Shropshire Lad* with her when she left home on her marriage to Bambridge, or did Rudyard equip her with some choice volumes, or did Elsie collect it from her father's library after his death? Did she meet someone in Cambridge, and like this person enough to give away her father's copy? Did Kipling himself donate it to a village library (as he was known to do), from which it then gravitated to Cambridge?"⁴⁵

Based on oral history interviews he has conducted, Iain Stewart, House and Collections Manager at the Wimpole Estate, believes that Elsie Bambridge was "a generous person who gifted things to her friends, staff, some of the local community and apparently also to some of the people who came to work at the house." Elizabeth Quarmbury-Lawrence thinks it is more likely that the book was sold by Elsie. Tim Pye, the National Trust's Libraries Curator, says we'll never know why the Gurney-Kipling *Shropshire Lad* was removed from Wimpole "but it's worth mentioning that there is a copy of *A Shropshire Lad* at Wimpole today. It belonged to Elsie's husband George Bambridge. One might speculate that there was one too many copies of *A Shropshire Lad* on the Bambridges' shelves. But I don't think that really provides us with a

⁴⁴ I am grateful to John Walker, the Librarian of the Kipling Society, for this information.

⁴⁵ Email from John Walker.

decent reason for Elsie to dispose of an earlier edition, and one that was from her father's personal collection."⁴⁶

Biographies often leave the reader with unanswered questions. Perhaps there are too many of them in this biography. Following in the footsteps of a book has been more difficult than I imagined when I undertook the journey. I believe that Elsie Kipling Bambridge holds the answer; she is buried at St Andrew's Church, on the Wimpole estate. And there the matter must rest.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Emails from Iain Stewart, Elizabeth Quarmby-Lawrence and Tim Pye.

⁴⁷ One undisputed fact is that Rudyard Kipling and A.E. Housman both died in 1936 – Kipling on 18 January (age 70) and Housman on 30 April (age 77). Ivor Gurney died the following year on 26 December (age 47).

AEH and W. H. Semple in Letters

David Sider

Although Archie Burnett aimed for completion in his edition containing over 2200 letters of AEH, it was inevitable that others would come to light later.¹ Two such caches are discussed in this issue of the Society's *Journal*, one by Christopher Stray and the one below. The letters from Housman to William Hugh Semple (1910–81) were generously given to the Housman Society by Robert Semple, who came upon them after the death of his father Andrew in 2019. It appears that Robert's grandfather had saved many if not all the letters sent to him by his doctoral advisor AEH, and gave them to Andrew for safekeeping.² Later, two more letters (nos. 24 and 34, below) were found among Semple's diaries. Here is Robert Semple's own description, which is quoted here with his kind permission:

As I was growing up, Housman was very much part of our lives. We went to Ludlow very regularly as my maternal grandmother lived there and “blue remembered hills” and “Ludlow tower” were often quoted! I obviously knew that my grandfather had been taught by

¹ Archie Burnett, *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (Oxford, 2007). Some will never be recovered: only one letter remains to his good friend Arthur Platt, whose wife Mildred destroyed many because they were ‘too Rabelaisian’; cf. H. Maas, *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (London, 1971) 144 n.1; Burnett, *Letters*, 359 n.1. Housman's eleven quite jovial letters to Mildred, however, suggest that she had no objection to Rabelaisian matters as such; only to the world knowing about how much fun AEH and the Platts had in each other's company.

² An initial announcement was made by Linda Hart in the *Housman Society Newsletter* (No. 52, September 2020, p. 1), ‘New Housman letters come to light’. Some few of them were reproduced and put in context by Christopher Stray, ‘A. E. Housman and W. H. Semple in correspondence’, *HSJ* 46 (2020) 8-21 (to be referred to below simply as ‘Stray’ and the page numbers), from which there is much to learn. This will be their first publication in full. The letters have now been donated, appropriately enough, to the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. The new letters have been catalogued as ADD. MS. a. 614.

Housman, but don't remember ever talking about the letters.

The first my stepmother, Susan (Sue), heard about the letters was in the early 2000s when my dad mentioned at a lunch party that he had some correspondence between his father and Housman among his father's papers from Manchester. She was interested, as were a couple of the other guests. But my dad was a bit dismissive—he said that the letters were all very brief and just about organising meetings etc. In other words, he did not feel they were of any interest outside the immediate family. However, he did keep hold of them so he must have thought something of them!

When dad passed away in 2019, Sue was going through his papers and found the letters in an envelope labelled (perhaps predictably) “Housman”. The rest is history. Sue contacted me and I contacted the Housman Society.

Semple, born and raised in Belfast, attended the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and then Queen's University, Belfast, before becoming a research student at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1925, where he began work on a doctorate under AEH's supervision on the *Epistles* of Apollinaris Sidonius.³ His doctoral dissertation, [*Quaestiones Exegeticae Sidonianae: Being New Interpretations of Difficult Passages in the Epistles of Apollinaris Sidonius*](#), was approved on 27 June 1927. Semple then went to Reading University, first as Lecturer from 1927 to 1931, during which time he expanded his dissertation to include Sidonius' poems, publishing this (with the word *Epistles* now replaced by *Works*) in the *Transactions* of the Cambridge Philological Society

³ His full name is Gaius Sollius Modestus Apollinaris Sidonius. Although it is customary among classicists to reverse his last two names and refer to him as Sidonius Apollinaris (perhaps for reasons of euphony), AEH and hence Semple kept to the original order. All, however, are also willing to call him simply Sidonius. For a fuller account of Semple's relationship with AEH, see Stray, and Ian Rogerson, 'W. H. Semple: A Research Student of A. E. Housman', *HSJ* 25 (1999) 70–2, although Rogerson consistently writes 'Apollonius' for 'Apollinaris'. For more on Sidonius, a literary and political figure of 5th-century France, see Jill Harries, [*Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407-485*](#) (Oxford, 1995).

(1930, vol. 4, part 6).⁴ In this same year he married Hilda Madeline Wood. From 1931 to 1937, he served as Reader in Latin, at which time he moved to Manchester University as Hulme Professor of Classics, a post he held until 1967, when he retired as Emeritus. Semple, however, had been making overtures to Manchester for some time before his move there, having received an honorary M.A. from them in, it seems, 1930; see below, letter 28.

Semple was Housman's only doctoral student, so that these letters do more than simply add to the number already published. As Stray writes, they show that Housman was always willing to help Semple with his work on Sidonius (as Semple himself was happy to acknowledge) and to help in the advancing of his career over many years.⁵ Semple may never have been among Housman's closest friends (to whom he wrote his most humorous letters), but the letters do show a good deal of affection for Semple both as his student and then as his fellow classicist. The new cache is also welcome to classicists, for they significantly add to the number that deal with the minutiae of textual criticism.⁶

Barred by the pandemic travel restrictions from visiting Cambridge to see the letters in person, I have worked from photocopies of all, as well as from transcripts made by Linda Hart and again by Nicolas Bell, the

⁴ Part 1 of this volume was AEH's 'The apparatus criticus of the *Culex*'.

⁵ After his expanded dissertation, Semple published only one other work on this author: 'Apollinaris Sidonius: a Gallo-Roman seigneur', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 50 (1967) 136–58, although he contributed significantly to the Loeb Classical Library volume on Sidonius. His other articles are primarily on Vergil, Claudian, and St. Augustine, with one article each on Persius, Tacitus, Lucan, St Jerome, and John Milton. He also collaborated with C. R. Cheney on the *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England (1198-1216)* (London, 1953). Housman himself had published a short note on Sidonius earlier: 'On Apollinaris Sidonius', *Classical Review* 14 (1900) 14 = *Classical Papers of A. E. Housman* (Cambridge, 1972) 516.

⁶ See J. H. C. Leach, 'Classical scholarship in Housman's correspondence', in D. Butterfield and C. Stray (eds), *A. E. Housman: Classical Scholar* (London, 2009) 229–43.



W.H. Semple and his wife Hilda

Photo courtesy of Robert Semple

Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge. AEH's hand was a firm one until, as the letters themselves describe, illness slowed his pen, and at the end his pencil. It was also helpful to me that some years ago, while teaching at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I read over a hundred of AEH's letters housed in their rare book room.

I thank the Housman Society for offering me the opportunity to prepare these letters for publication. They comprise all the known letters from AEH to Semple, only two of which had appeared earlier in Burnett; two letters from A. F. Scholfield, the Cambridge University Librarian, concerning AEH's request that Semple be allowed to borrow more than the normal limit of five books at a time from the Cambridge University library; and, at the end, a fragment from a letter written by Semple himself on his dealings with AEH. Particular thanks are due to Linda Hart, who has been helpful in many ways throughout, but also to Max Hunt, Robert Semple, Christopher Stray, Leofranc Holford-Strevens, Henry Spelman, Dhimat Acharya, Mirte Liebrechts, Richard Thomas, and Alexander Jones, all of whom offered guidance and information of various sorts.

The Letters

1 [1.599 Burnett]⁷

Trinity College

21 Oct. 1925⁸

Dear Mr Semple,⁹

Perhaps you would let me have the translations by Saturday the 31st.

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

[*The passages to be translated are written out on the reverse:*]

| | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| I. 5. 10 ¹⁰ | Transalpino—visum |
| 11. 8 | perge—desistant |
| 10 | par—geminatis |
| 13 | obiecta—cassauerimus |
| 15 | contionatoris mei |
| II. 2. 1 | iam uer ... porrigitur |
| 2 | concaua—compressus |
| 3 | nisi—uerere |
| 7 | tamquam—truncatum |
| 14. 2 | non amplius—rideat |
| IV. 11. 3 | hinc etiam—laudabilis |
| 21. 2 | ecce habes—existimabis |
| 22. 3 | itaque—opportunitas |
| V. 8. 2 | nisi quod—appenso |

⁷ Figures in brackets indicate the volume and page in Burnett where the letter would be found if it had been known to Burnett. Three letters (8, 16, and 25), known from before, are located in Burnett without brackets.

⁸ This date is toward the beginning of the first academic term of the year, Michaelmas, Semple's first term as research student at St. John's College, Cambridge. He could not have known Housman for more than a few weeks.

⁹ Two letters are addressed to 'Mr Semple', after which he drops the more formal address. As he says to Grant Richards after he has come to know him better, 'If I may drop the Mr. '; letter of 12 Oct. 1902. On this initial mark of formality, see Leach (op. cit.) 230.

¹⁰ The references are to the letters of Apollinaris Sidonius, which are referred to by book, letter, and section numbers. Elements of references repeated from the previous line are omitted in the MS. For more on Sidonius, see below.

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 10. 4 | quapropter—adhiberi |
| 13. 1 | iam Clausetiam—insorduit |
| 15. 2 | restat—mercedem |
| 19. 1 | nutricis—impunitatem |
| 20. 4 | praeterea—uenitur |
| | namque erit—uideris |
| VI. 12. 6 | illum dubia—complesti |
| VII. 1. 4 | miraculo—naturam |
| 12. 4 | haec omnia—adiungi |
| 14. 11 | nostram quoque—exhorruit |
| *15. 1 ¹¹ | sed et ille—possessio |
| VIII 6. 2 | insuper—supergressus |
| 8 | quid multa—audiui |
| 16 | dein, quod—fortuitis |
| 8. 2 | redde te patri—affectus |
| 9. 3 | ago laboriosum—impetro |
| .5 | lines 48–51 ¹² |
| 11. 9 ¹³ | |
| 12. 7 | quid multa—epulones |
| 16. 3 | si refutamur—simpliciter ¹⁴ |
| IX. 2. 1 | iubetis—incipitur |
| 9. 13 | huic copulatum—philosophari |
| 14 | curua ceruice—cute distenta |
| 13. 1 | crederem—fallere |
| 16. 3 | de reliquo—munerabor |
| | lines 33–36. ¹⁵ |

[*There are also brief pencil notes, presumably by Semple:*]

¹¹ The significance of the asterisk is unclear.

¹² Chapter 5 contains a poem by Sidonius written in answer to a request by his letter's recipient. Housman refers here to lines 48-51 of the 59-line poem.

¹³ If this bare reference refers to the entirety of chapter 9, it would be the longest of any of the passages listed here, most of which are quite short, some not even complete sentences.

¹⁴ The *-er* of 'simpliciter' was corrected by Semple to *-as* in pencil.

¹⁵ Once again, these line numbers belong to a poem of Sidonius embedded in the letter.

Add. MS. a. 614/1. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College'.

2 [1.603]

Trinity College

3 Dec. 1925

Dear Mr Semple,

The text in which to read Symmachus¹⁶ would be Seeck's, *Mon. Germ. Auct. Ant.* VI i.¹⁷ I don't know of any commentary: you might look to see if Lectius, 1604,¹⁸ starred by J. E. B. Mayor, would be of use.¹⁹

Yours sincerely

A.E. Housman

Add. MS. a. 614/2

¹⁶ Symmachus (340-402 CE), a Roman Senator, was an author of panegyrics and the letters alluded to here, which were initially edited by his son in ten books. His letters are available in the French Budé series, but not in the Loeb's, an indication of how minor an author he is regarded. Indeed, the famous Roman historian Ronald Syme characterized the fourth century as 'the age of the dull Symmachus and the dreadful Jerome'. Nonetheless, boring or not, there is much for a scholar to learn from and to discover, just as AEH was happy to spend many years on the Latin didactic poet Manilius (the fifth and final volume of which was at the press at the time of this letter), whom nobody reads for his poetic charms.

¹⁷ Otto Seeck, *Q[uinti]. Aurelii Symmachi Quae Supersunt, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 6, part 1 (Berlin, 1883; reprinted 1961). The *MGH* (1826–), a multivolume collection of texts, comprises texts of importance primarily to medievalists, but of course many of these authors concerned themselves with classical matters.

¹⁸ Jacob Lectius, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi...Epistolarum ad Diversos Libri X* (Paris, 1604).

¹⁹ J. E. B. Mayor, *Bibliographical Clue* [i.e., guide or outline] *to Latin Literature, Edited after Dr E. Hübner* [i.e. his *Grundriss zu Vorlesungen über die römische Literaturgeschichte*], *With Large Additions* (London, 1875). Mayor put an asterisk alongside the more important works of scholarship.

3 [1.607]

Trinity College

15 Jan. 1926

Dear Semple,

I suggest that you should come and see me on Thursday the 26th at the usual time, if that suits you. If you have any passages to ask me about, you might send me a list some time next week.

Yours very truly

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/3. Envelope (with a 1½ d. stamp and postmarked at Cambridge, 11 a.m., 16 January) addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq | 12 Brunswick Walk²⁰ | Local'.

4 [1.116]

Trinity College

23 April 1926

Dear Semple,

I suggest that you should come to see me at the usual time on Tuesday May 4, if that suits you. If you have passages to consult me about, you might send them some time next week.

I am yours sincerely

A. E. Housman

Add. MS. a. 614/4. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | 12 Brunswick Walk | Local'. The envelope, with a 1½ d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge on 23 April. The time cannot be read.

5 [1.616]

Trinity College

2 May 1926

Dear Semple,

Several unexpected inroads have been made upon my time,²¹ and I am afraid that if you come on Tuesday I shall not have been able to look

²⁰ This building is no longer standing.

²¹ The nature of these inroads is not known. It is possible but not very likely that one of them was initial preparation for the second edition of his *Lucan*, which was

through your notes. Would it suit you to come on Friday instead? If not, perhaps you will yourself suggest a later date.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/5. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | 12. Brunswick Walk | Local'. The envelope was postmarked Cambridge, 10.15 p.m. 2 May.

6 [1.623]

Trinity College

16 July 1926

Dear Semple,

I shall be going away for a month on the 26th, so perhaps you had better come and see me some day next week, Tuesday at the usual time if you like.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman

Add. MS. a. 614/6. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | E Third Court | St John's College', for which no stamp was necessary for university mail.

7 1.623

TO A. F. SCHOLFIELD²²

Trinity College

21 July 1926

Dear Scholfield,

published in March 1927. The first appeared in January 1926 (see his letter to J. D. Duff of 21 January). Housman may of course simply have had to attend to some domestic chores or academic tasks.

²² Cambridge University Librarian, 1923-49, a friend of Housman and the recipient of many of his letters. He is known to classicists for an edition of the didactic poet Nicander prepared by him and A. S. F. Gow (another of Housman's friends): *Nicander: The Poems and Poetical Fragments* (Cambridge, 1953). Scholfield also helped Gow to compile the list of AEH's writings which appears in the latter's *A. E. Housman: A Sketch Together with a List of His Writings and Indexes to His Classical Papers* (Cambridge, 1936) 63-80.

It appears that the Library has a rule by which no more than 5 books can be had out for a person in statu pupillari.²³ I do not know if this is ever widened, but, if so, it might properly be done for W. H. Semple, a research student in St. John's College, who is studying Apollinaris Sidonius under my direction and finds that 5 books are not enough to work with and that the books he wants are not to be found elsewhere than in the Library. He is a graduate of Belfast, and has acted for three years as assistant to the Professors of English and Latin there.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman

*TCC Add. MS c. 112*³. *Maas*, 239

8 [1.623]

A. F. SCHOLFIELD TO A. E. HOUSMAN

Reply to THE LIBRARIAN *University Library Cambridge*

Dear Housman,

I cannot myself grant your request on behalf of Mr Semple, but I have circulated your letter to Members of the Library Syndicate²⁴ and hope to be able to send you a favourable answer in three or four days' time.

Yours sincerely

A F Scholfield

22 July 1926

Add. MS a. 614/7

²³ From the Statutes and Ordinances of the University of Cambridge, Statute K: 'Commencement, Interpretation, Invalid Proceedings', 3(h), 'the term "person *in statu pupillari*" shall mean a member of the University ... who has not been admitted to an office in the University (or to a post in the University Press specially designated ... or to an appointment approved by the University ..., or to a Fellowship or office of a College, or to a degree which qualifies the holder for membership of the Senate ..., and is of less than three and a half years' standing from admission to his or her first degree (if any)'.

²⁴ The Cambridge University Library is managed by a committee known as the Syndicate, whose members are Syndics.

9 [1.625]

A. F. SCHOLFIELD TO W. H. SEMPLE

Reply to THE LIBRARIAN *University Library Cambridge*

Dear Sir.

I write to inform you that the Syndics of the University Library have granted you permission to borrow ten books at a time during the present quarter. The application must be renewed every quarter; but this I will see to, and there will be no need for you or for Professor Housman to write again; only until it *is* renewed (on Oct. 20) it will not be possible for you to borrow more than 5 books after Aug. 31.²⁵

Yours truly

A F Scholfield

4 Aug 1926

Add. MS. a. 614/8. Envelope addressed to 'W H Semple Esq: | St John's College', sent by campus mail.

10 1.625

AEH TO A. F. SCHOLFIELD

Thanks to you and the Syndicate for your action in the matter of W. H. Semple.

A. E. Housman

21 Aug. 1926

Trin. Coll. Camb.

TCC Add. MS c. 112 5: A postcard addressed to 'The Librarian | University Library | Local'.

²⁵ The 'present' term ended on 31 August, when Semple's extended privileges end and he would have to wait until the Syndics meet again before regaining them. Whether he would have to return five books on the 31st is not clear. If not, this bureaucratic gap would have no practical effect.

11 [1.630]

Trinity College

14 Oct. 1926

Dear Semple,

I am glad to hear from you, and suggest that you should come and see me on Tuesday the 26th at 6 o'clock, sending beforehand the notes you want to discuss. I do not propose next Tuesday because my hands just now are very full.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/9. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | 8 Hertford Street | Local'. The envelope, with a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.45 p.m. on 14 Oct.

12 [2.6]

Trinity College

19 Jan. 1927

Dear Semple,

I am sorry you have been out of sorts and glad you are so no longer. The check to your studies does not fall out inconveniently for me personally, as I am and shall be molested by the University Scholarships down to the middle of next month, and not anxious to see you or anyone unless it is required. If you do require an interview, of course write, and I will arrange one; but otherwise I will not at present make regular appointments with you. I understand from other directors of studies that this is not shabby conduct on my part, and that they sometimes see their victims only once or twice a term.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/10. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College', sent via campus mail.

13 [2.9]

Trinity College, 5 Feb. 1927

Dear Semple,

It will probably be most convenient for you if I put down in writing what there is to say about Sidonius ep. VIII 11 9.²⁶ It is the case that he

²⁶ Here is the passage in full, with the words discussed by Housman printed bold face: illud sane non solum culpabile in viro fuit, sed peremptorium, quod mathematicos quondam de vitae fine consuluit, urbium cives Africanarum, quorum, ut est regio, sic animus ardentior; qui **constellatione** percontantis inspecta pariter annum mensem diemque dixerunt, quos, ut verbo matheseos utar, climactericos esset habiturus, utpote quibus **thematē** oblato quasi sanguinariae **geniturae schema** patuisset, quia videlicet **amici nascentis anno**, quemcumque clementem planetorum siderum globum in **diastemata zodiaca** prosper ortus **erexerat**, hunc **in occasu** cruentis ignibus inrubescentes seu **super diametro** Mercurius **asyndetus** seu super tetragono Saturnus **retrogradus** seu **super centro** Mars **apocatastaticus** exacerbassent.

This text is taken from the Loeb Classical Library two-volume text and translation of Sidonius' poems and letters (1936), edited by AEH's successor as Kennedy Professor of Latin, W. B. Anderson, who writes in his preface that 'Dr. W. H. Semple was good enough to read the proofs of the translation and of a large part of the notes. I am indebted to him for many acute and valuable observations; my obligations to him are by no means confined to the places where I have expressly acknowledged them'. Anderson, however, having spent long years on vol. 2, died in 1959 before completing it. E. H. Warmington, the then general editor of the Loeb, wrote to A. S. Pease, a Loeb Library Trustee, telling him that 'We have deciphered all that Prof. Anderson wrote before his death. The footnotes and critical notes are being added by me except where Anderson and his pupil Prof. Semple (who deciphered Anderson's material) have provided them'. In a later letter to Pease, he adds that 'Sidonius Vol II is a special task which, with Prof. Semple's help, I have nearly completed after all those years during which it was impossible to induce the good Anderson in his old age to finish the work'. (I am very grateful to Mirte Liebrechts for having found this material for me in the Loeb archives, and to Professor Richard Thomas for permission to publish it.) In the printed volume II, Warmington acknowledges this help, having 'handed it over to W. H. Semple, ... who, having been Anderson's assistant in his Manchester days...'. Warmington goes on at length (pp. viii-ix), thanking and praising Semple for his assistance. The result is that, although Anderson's name alone remains as sole author of vol. 2, the editorial voice is that of Warmington, who frequently relies on Semple, to the point that the latter is often given his own voice in the explanatory footnotes, occasionally in disagreement with Anderson. Of all these comments, I note only that on *Letter* 8.8.2 Semple says: "I have ventured to use here a translation long ago given me by A. E. Housman."

is making a show of knowledge which he does not possess, and using terms which he does not quite understand.²⁷

thema is the position of the heavens and all the heavenly bodies at the instant of the birth. *geniturae schema* is the same thing; *schema* itself is a more general term, though sometimes used for *thema*, as also *genitura* sometimes is. *constellatio* properly means only the relative position of the seven planets, but practically comes to the same thing.

diastemata zodiaca are probably not the 12 signs of the zodiac but the 12 τόποι into which it was divided at the birth, of which I give an account in my 2nd book of Manilius pp. xxix–xxxi.

asyndetus is rightly explained by Sirmond,²⁸ and has the same sense in the passage you cite from Rufinus. It is not inconsistent with *super diametro*, because a planet might be in the diametrically opposite τόπος (or sign) and might nevertheless be *asyndetus* because not at the diametrically opposite point; in technical language not μοιρικῶς or *partiliter* opposite.

retrogradus you explain correctly, but it is not only the outer planets which retrograde: Venus and Mercury do so, though to a less extent.

apocatastaticus in itself is a vague term, applicable to anything moving in a circle and so arriving at a spot where it has been before. If it here has a precise meaning, it probably is that Mars was in the middle of Scorpius, which is the position he occupied at the creation of the world.

super centro, ἐπίκεντρος, is the opposite of *asyndetus*, and means configured, whether by diameter or trigon or tetragon or possibly hexagon. A planet thus placed is best able to exert its influence; and the

²⁷ AEH's explication in this letter was followed by Semple, who on p. 49 of his published dissertation writes: 'In the elucidation of this, the most difficult in Sidonius' *Epistles*, I have had the great advantage of consulting Professor A. E. Housman, and to his learning and kindness I owe the explanation of the astronomical and astrological terms which follow.' What Semple wrote in his dissertation was then taken over by Anderson in the Loeb; see Semple's note ad loc.

²⁸ Jacques Sirmond, *C. Sollii Apollinaris Sidonii Arvernorum Episcopi Opera* (Paris, 1614).

influence of Mars is malefic. Sidonius apparently supposed the sense of the word to be something more special than it is.

amici nascentis anno and *erexerat* and *in occasu* taken together seem to be mere gabble, for of course planets have no annual rising or setting. *inrubescentes* is another piece of nonsense, Saturn being dull white in fact and black in astrological fiction.

I am nearing the end of my troubles and shall be able to see you at 6 o'clock on Tuesday the 15th if you like to come.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/11. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College.'

14 [2.14]

Trinity College

3 March 1927

Dear Semple,

I should be glad to know what your commentators say about *umbra smaragdi*²⁹ Sid. carm. 11.24.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/12. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College | Local'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.45 p.m. on 3 March.

15 [2.22]

Trinity College

26 April 1927

Dear Semple,

I don't think that the passage of Symmachus has much bearing on Sidonius VIII 16 2,³⁰ who is thinking rather of Juvenal VII 55³¹ or something like: see Mayor there and vol. II p. 448.³²

²⁹ Literally 'the shadow of emerald'; in Sidonius' context it seems to mean something like a greenish shadowy light, which Anderson renders as 'sheen of the emeralds'.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/13. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College.'

16 2.27

c/ Mrs Yorke | Selsey Road | N. Woodchester | Stroud

2 June 1927

Dear Semple,

I enclose something which I hope will do, and wish you success.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

[*Enclosure*]

Mr. W. H. Semple, as a research student in this University, has been preparing for the last two years under my direction a thesis on the *Epistles* of Apollonaris Sidonius. In the course of our relationship I have formed a high opinion of his knowledge and ability, and have been struck by the maturity of his judgment and by the method and thoroughness which he has brought to the pursuit of his studies. I feel sure that he is well qualified for the duties of Lecturer in Classics in the University of Reading, and that he may be expected to produce original work redounding to its credit.³³

A. E. Housman

Manchester Ms. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | St John's College | Cambridge'.

³⁰ Sidonius *Epistle* 16.82 *atque utinam hic nil molle, nil fluidum, nil de triviis compitalibus mutuatum reperiretur!*, 'I only wish that nothing relaxing, nothing flaccid were to be found in my work, and nothing borrowed from the street corner' (tr. W. B. Anderson). The Symmachus passage cannot be identified.

³¹ Juvenal *Satire* 7.54-5 *nec qui | communi feriat carmen triviale moneta*, (the excellent poet) 'who coins no ordinary song from the public mint' (tr. Susanna Morton Braund).

³² **John E. B. Mayor**, [*Thirteen Satires of Juvenal, with a Commentary. 2 vols.*](#) London, 1901.

³³ Semple, who was approved for his doctoral degree on 27 June, was in fact offered this lectureship at the University of Reading; see letter 17.

Trinity College

9 July 1927

Dear Sempie,

Well, this is very satisfactory, and I congratulate you heartily. I only hope that you will not find too few books at Reading and begin to hanker after Manchester.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

17 [2.29]

Trinity College

9 July 1927

Dear Semple,

Well, this is very satisfactory, and I congratulate you heartily. I only hope that you will not find too few books at Reading and begin to hanker after Manchester.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/14. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | New Court | St John's College'.

18 [2.44]

Trinity College | Cambridge

24 Nov. 1927

Dear Semple,

In the poetical astronomy of the ancients the evening star does rise: Catull. 62 7, Verg. buc. VIII 31, culic. 203, ciris 350.³⁴ It also dodges round the sun at night and turns up next morning as morning star: Catull. 62 34 sq. etc. What Horace is saying is that neither evening nor morning takes Valgius' grief away.³⁵ Cinna ap. Seru. georg. I 288 Baehr. frag. poet. Rom. p. 324)³⁶ 'te matutinus flentem conspexit Eous | et flentem paulo uidit post Hesperus idem'.³⁷

I am glad you find Reading pleasant.

Yours sincerely

³⁴ These are references to Vergil's *Bucolics* (or *Eclogues*), *Culex* (*Gnat*), and *Ciris*, the last two short poems found in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, but considered spurious.

³⁵ Horace, *Odes*, 2.9.9–12: *tu semper urges flebilibus modis | Mysten ademptum, nec tibi Vespero | surgente decedunt amores | nec rapidum fugiente solem* ('You, however, never cease to pursue your lost Mystes with tearful verses; your love does not subside when the evening star rises or when it flees before the on-rushing sun', tr. Niall Rudd, whose views on his senior Manchester colleague Semple are quoted by Stray 9-10, 19-20).

³⁶ Spelled out, this reference is 'Cinna the poet as quoted in Servius' commentary on Vergil, *Georgics* 1.288, as this fragment is printed in E. Baehrens, *Fragmenta poetarum latinorum epicorum et lyricorum* (Leipzig, many editions) p. 324'.

³⁷ 'At dawn Eos saw you weeping, and at evening Hesperus saw you still weeping'.

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/15. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 3.15 p.m. on 24 Nov.

19 [2.63]

Trinity College | Cambridge

12 March 1928

Dear Semple,

Neither *timidus* nor any word expressive of character would suit Hor. art. 114³⁸ or any of the four following verses, and it would not match *heros*, which is not such a word: it is applied to Midas in Ouid. met. XI 106 and to Actaeon when running away in III 198.

Neville³⁹ was here some months ago, and I was glad to hear from him that you seemed to like Reading.

Yours sincerely

³⁸ Horace *Ars Poetica* 114-18 *intererit multum, divusne loquatur an heros, / maturusne senex an adhuc florente iuventa / fervidus, et matrona potens an sedula nutrix, / mercatorne vagus cultorne virentis agelli, / Colchus an Assyrius, Thebis nutritus an Argis* ('Vast difference will it make, whether a god be speaking or a hero, a ripe old man or one still in the flower and fervour of youth, a dame of rank or a bustling nurse, a roaming trader or the tiller of a verdant field, a Colchian or an Assyrian, one bred at Thebes or at Argos', tr. H. R. Fairclough).

³⁹ Eric Harold Neville (1889-1961), a mathematician who entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1907, later taking up a teaching post at Reading. He was well known for his theoretical work on mathematics, but achieved wider fame for having convinced the brilliant mathematician [Srinivasa Ramanujan](#) (1887-1920) to travel from India to England to work with his colleague, G. H. Hardy (1877-1947) on number theory. Ramanujan's first Cambridge lodgings were in Whewell's Court, where Housman also lived. Since Hardy and AEH were both at Trinity, they met often at High Table and other college gatherings. It is interesting to read on the first page of Hardy's famous *Mathematician's Apology* (Cambridge, 1940) how, although he had argued with Housman over his high praise of literary criticism in his *Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933)—which he took more literally than was intended—he nonetheless used Housman's argument to justify his own attempt to write *on* mathematics rather than produce a work *of* mathematics. Later (ch. 7), he quotes, without identifying AEH as author, two stanzas from *More Poems* 45 to demonstrate that he, like Housman, wanted to gain a measure of immortality through his works.

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/16. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'.

The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 9 p.m. on 12 Mar.

20 [2.87]

Trinity College

20 July 1928

Dear Semple,

You would generally find me in about 6 in the afternoon, possibly asleep.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/17. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | New Court | St John's College'.⁴⁰

21 [2.116]

Trinity College | Cambridge

6 March 1929

Dear Semple,

In Sidon. c. 15 66 I think I understand *ter denas myras*.⁴¹ When 30 and the Moon are found together, the reference is most likely to the 30 days which are roughly the time of her synodic revolution. These may be called $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha\iota$ ⁴² because a day is roughly the same fraction of the year that a degree is of the zodiac, 1/360; and while the Moon is passing her 30 days the Sun is traversing 30 degrees of the ecliptic.

For *tropico climate* (if it is not mere surplusage and applicable to all the planets alike) I can only think of an explanation

⁴⁰ From this address we may infer that Semple was spending time in Cambridge while preparing his dissertation for publication (in 1930).

⁴¹ Apollinaris Sidonius *Poem* 15.66 *ter denas tropico prope currere climate myras*, [sc. the moon] 'runs on through nearly thirty degrees within the clime of the tropics' (tr. W. B. Anderson).

⁴² In Greek, a $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha$ (spelled *myra* in Sidonius' late Latin) is a portion or fractional share; later it came to refer to one's own share of life; i.e., one's fate.

uncomplimentary to Sidonius. Saturn's sphere, the outermost of the seven, was cold, as in the passages I cite at Luc. X 205-9;⁴³ Sidonius' phrase in 61, *ire per summa polorum*,⁴⁴ may indicate that he thought the orbit of Saturn passed somehow through the two poles; and, if so, he may here be putting the Moon's orbit in the tropics merely because her sphere is the innermost, without reflecting that the Sun's orbit (not to speak of the other planets) must also be there.

prope may be taken locally, as you suggest, the Moon being προσγειοτάτη πάντων τῶν ἄστρον,⁴⁵ or it may modify *ter denas*, the exact time being rather less than 30 days.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/18. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.45 p.m. on 6 Mar.

22 [2.130]

Many thanks for transcribing the notes, one of which I had not got in my other copy.

A. E. H.

31 May 1929

Trin. Coll. Camb.

Add. MS. a. 614/19. A prepaid (1d.) postcard addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading', postmarked at Cambridge at 3.15 p.m. on 31 May.

⁴³ Housman's *M. Annaei Lucani Belli civilis libri decem* (Oxford, 1926).

⁴⁴ [Sc. Saturn] 'travels the highest of the spheres' (tr. Alexander Jones), that is, Sidonius here uses *polus* (Greek πόλος) in its early and poetic meaning, 'firmament, vault of heaven', of which there is usually one. Here, however, each heavenly body (i.e., Earth, Sun, Moon, and planets) is understood to have its own sphere, the furthest one (*summa*) being the one occupied by Saturn. Housman, however, mistakenly understands the plural in its far more usual sense in Greek and Latin, 'poles', as in English, i.e., the ends of the axis about which the earth revolves. I am grateful to Alexander Jones for advice on this note.

⁴⁵ Cleomedes, *Caelestia* 1.2.36 Todd, 'the closest of all the stars' [sc. to earth], where *astra* here includes all heavenly bodies.

23 [2.159]

Trinity College | Cambridge

10 Dec. 1929

Dear Semple,

You can do as you suggest about c. XV 65 sq.⁴⁶

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/20. The envelope is addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 7.15 p.m. on 10 Dec.

24 [2.168]

Trinity College | Cambridge

28 Jan. 1930

Dear Semple,

I do not know anything about the Cape Town professorship except that they have asked me to be one of the electors.⁴⁷ I suppose there will be fewer applicants than for a post of the same emolument in England; and I should think that Cape Colony is quite one of our Sovereign's most agreeable dominions. But I shrink from giving advice, and I think your own judgment likely to be good.

Yours sincerely,

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/21. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.15 p.m. on 28 Jan.

⁴⁶ This is a reference to Sidonius *Poem* 15.65. The manuscripts all read *Arcardium sexto*, which is hard to construe. W. B. Anderson, 'Notes on the *Carmina* of Apollinaris Sidonius', *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934) 17-23, argued for reading *sextum*, which he then printed in his Loeb edition (see above, n. 24). He does not mention Semple in this context (p. 21), although he does acknowledge and follow a suggestion of his earlier (p. 18), concerning *Poem* 5.385.

⁴⁷ 'The chair of classics at the University of Cape Town had become vacant on the retirement of William Ritchie the previous year. Ritchie was succeeded in the event by Benjamin Farrington' (Christopher Stray *per litteras*); see Stray 16.

25 [2.168]

Trinity College | Cambridge

3 Feb. 1930

Dear Semple,

I am told by authorities on etiquette that it would not be wrong for me to let you use my name as a reference;⁴⁸ but it would be aimless, as I shall be there in person.

One probable drawback to the post occurs to me: the University was only founded in 1918, and there must be a dearth of books there.⁴⁹

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/22. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 3 p.m. on 3 Feb.

26 [2.175]

Trinity College | Cambridge

9 May 1930

Dear Semple,

Much occupation, both serious and frivolous, has delayed me in answering your letter. I do not know that commentators either on Ovid or on Vergil have brought the two passages together, but I suppose you had better look at Frazer,⁵⁰ whom I have not at hand. I should think that a connexion is quite possible, though *atria Tiberina*⁵¹ seems to have

⁴⁸ See the previous letter.

⁴⁹ Cape Town University received full university status in 1918, having previously been known as South African College, established 1829.

⁵⁰ [James George Frazer](#), *Fastorum libri sex: The Fasti of Ovid* (London, 1929). Frazer (1854-1941) is better known for his *Golden Bough*. Housman had been friends with Mr and Mrs Frazer for many years, with several letters to them in Burnett's edition, and he had written a formal address to him (*Selected Prose*, 163-4). On 1 May 1934 Housman wrote to Francis M. Cornford, thanking him for the help he gave on Frazer's *Fasti*. For Housman's own advice to Frazer on this poem, see his letter of 22 October 1927.

⁵¹ *Fasti* 4.229-30 *fluminis ad flexum veniunt (Tiberina priores | Atria dixerunt)*, 'they came to a bend in the river (in the past they called it "the Halls of the Tiber")'. The general location is near Ostia.

been a precise local name for the great crook in the river, while *domus*, to judge from Stat. Theb. IV 831 (839)⁵² is wider.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/23. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 7.15 p.m. on 9 May.

27 [2.205]

Trinity College | Cambridge

29 Sept 1930

Dear Semple,

I enclose what I hope will be of use to you, and wish you good luck.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

You should not put M. A. after names on envelopes. I do not know why, but it is so.⁵³

Add. MS. a. 614/24. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple, Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 11 p.m. on 30 Sept.

28 [2.205]

Testimonial for W. H. Semple

Trinity College | Cambridge

29 Sept. 1930

⁵² Statius *Thebaid* 4.839–40, an address to the river Nemea, near Corinth, *laetus eas, quacumque domo gelida ora resolvit / immortale tumens*, ‘may you happily flow, whatever the home wherein you let loose your cool mouth in immortal surge’, tr. [D. R. Shackleton Bailey](#).

⁵³ The M. A. was granted by Manchester, as Semple notes in his *Who's Who* entry. Housman, who abjured all honours (but one) offered him, clearly thought it was improper to parade one's degree in this way. As to why Semple did not affix ‘Ph.D.’ to his name: ‘in the interwar years a lot of Oxbridge people were sniffy about PhDs, an American import that good college chaps need not bother about. MA on the other hand signified full membership of a university community’ (Christopher Stray *per litteras*).

Learning that Mr W. H. Semple is a candidate for the Professorship of Latin in the University of Bristol I have great pleasure in saying that I am sure he is well qualified for such a post. When Mr Semple came to Cambridge as a research student he was placed under my direction, and I was immediately struck by his possession of judgment and maturity much in advance of his years. He pursued his studies with intelligent industry and sound method, and the result, now published as a part of the Transactions of the Cambridge Philological Society, is an examination, based on full knowledge and conducted with great exactness, of many difficulties in the letters and poems of Apollinaris Sidonius which constitutes a notable advance on his predecessors and a valuable contribution to the understanding of the author. I expect from Mr Semple in the future even more distinguished work.

A. E. Housman.

Manchester MS (box A).

29 [2.153]

Trinity College | Cambridge

14 Nov. 1930

Dear Semple,

The Appointments Board wrote to me about Sheffield, and I mentioned your name. By all means use me as a reference; and come and see me when you are here.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/25. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.15 p.m. on 14 Nov.

30 [2.184]

Trinity College | Cambridge

6 May 1930

Dear Semple,

So far as I am able to judge, I approve both your rejection of Harvard and your application for Aberystwyth. I think I would rather be a

referee than write another testimonial, as one can express oneself with more freedom and ease.⁵⁴

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/26. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | The Univ. | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 10.15 p.m. on 6 May.

31 [2.305]

Trinity College | Cambridge

27 July 1932

Dear Semple,

Thanks for sending me the news, though I wish it had been different. I am glad that you are satisfied with Wood,⁵⁵ to whose name I do not myself attach any clear recollection, though I am told he was at this college.

So far as I can foresee⁵⁶ I shall now be here, where I have just returned, till October, so you would probably find me if you came.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/27. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq. | 23 Eastern Avenue | Reading'.

The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 12.15 p.m. on 27 July.

⁵⁴ That is, Housman felt more comfortable expressing forthright criticism as referee than in having to bend the truth somewhat in a testimonial. What would seem rude in another person was Housman's regular way with his friends. One notes the many seeming insults his publisher Grant Richards received without there being any breach in their friendship.

⁵⁵ Edward James Wood (1902-93), was Lecturer in Classics, Manchester University 1928-32; and Professor of Latin at Aberystwyth 1932-38. He wrote on Vergil and Latin poetry.

⁵⁶ *Sic.* A rare slip on Housman's part.

32 [2.388]

Trin. Coll. Camb.

13 April 1933

Dear Semple,

I am glad you are trying again, and very willing to be a referee.⁵⁷

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/28. The envelope is missing.

33 [2.344]

Trinity College | Cambridge

11 May 1933

Dear Semple,

Thank you for your letter. I had no idea that you were there.

Yours sincerely

Servius Augurinus.⁵⁸

MS. a. 614/29. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq | The University | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 5.15 p.m. on 11 May.

⁵⁷ Wherever it was Semple applied, he remained at Reading.

⁵⁸ This puzzling signature is brilliantly explained by Stray (op. cit. 16-17), who shows that Housman was here playfully modelling himself on the poet Sentius (not Servius) Augurinus, whose 'little poems' (*poematia*, such as Housman wrote) are praised by Pliny the Younger who then quotes one in which Sentius praises Pliny. This blurring of the roles between Housman and Semple would seem to indicate that by this date, the two regarded each other as friends. Housman gives himself a Latin name on one other occasion in his correspondence in Burnett. This is a letter to his stepmother Lucy Housman on 29 November 1877 when he wrote: 'Alfred E. Housman, or, as the Vice-Chancellor with superior scholarship writes – Aluredus Edvardus &c.'. He also addresses several letters to friends in Latin, twice to Alfred William Pollard – 'Dear Alurede G.' (23 March 1880) and 'Dear Gulielme' (27 March 1880) – and once to James Frazer as Optime Maxime; i.e., Jupiter (1 January 1925).

34 [2.488]

Trinity College | Cambridge

12 Aug. 1935

Dear Semple,

You are heartily welcome to use my name as a reference in applying for the Hildred Carlile Chair,⁵⁹ and I hope you may succeed.⁶⁰

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman

Add. MS. a. 614/29. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq | Dornie⁶¹ | Barnhold Road | Bexhill-on-Sea'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. Silver Jubilee stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 12.30 p.m. on 12 Aug.

35 [2.586]

Trinity College | Cambridge

22 Nov. 1935

Dear Semple,⁶²

Your letter found me in a nursing home, whence I issued forth three or four days ago. My heart can no longer sustain the 44 steps to my rooms in Whewell's Court, and I have had to descend to the ground floor in the Great Court. Ever since June I have been very weak.

I have lectured however all this term, motoring in from the Home.⁶³

⁵⁹ Sir Edward Hildred Carlile, 1st Baronet, [CBE](#) (1852-1942), endowed Bedford College with 100,000 [guineas](#), in part to provide for a chair in Latin.

⁶⁰ He did not; see next letter.

⁶¹ The Bexhill street directory for 1934 names Eric G.B. Faulkner as the owner of number 20 Barnhold Road, identified further as 'Dornie', as I am informed by Mr Dhimat Acharya of the Bexhill library. Whether Faulkner was a friend of Semple or he let out rooms to vacationers (Dornie is only a 20-minute walk from Cooden beach) cannot be ascertained, but as Max Hunt suggests, Semple was unlikely to give AEH his Bexhill address if he was going to be there for only a short time.

⁶² This letter is written in a notably feeble and shaky hand.

⁶³ The state of Housman's health had been declining for several months now and was the topic of a number of letters, first mentioned in a letter of 3 December 1934 to his sister Kate. To his brother Laurence he wrote: 'I still [contrary to his doctor's orders] go up my 44 stairs two at a time, but that is in hopes of dropping dead at the top', letter of 9 June 1935.

I was sorry that you had missed the award,⁶⁴ though the ladies will probably be smitten with Onians.⁶⁵ I have no distinct idea of his work, and I am afraid that I had never been conscious of Williamson's⁶⁶ existence.

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman.

Add. MS. a. 614/30. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq | 29 Upper Redlands Road | Reading'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 8 p.m. on 22 Nov.

36 [2.528]

24 March 1936

The Evelyn Nursing Home, | Trumpington Road, | Cambridge

Dear Semple,

Alas, I am back here, though not nearly so bad as I was at Christmas. I got through the term quite well, and lecturing was hardly any effort.⁶⁷

Yours sincerely

A. E. Housman

Add. MS. a. 614/31. Envelope addressed to 'W. H. Semple Esq | 29 Upper Redlands Road | Reading', but redirected in another hand to 'Jasmine Cottage | Sheep Street | Chipping Campden | Glos'. The envelope, which bears a 1½d. stamp, was postmarked at Cambridge at 8 p.m. on 24 Mar. and again at Reading at 12.15 p.m. on the 25th.

⁶⁴ Semple had applied for the Latin chair at Bedford College, then the women's college (hence 'the ladies') of the University of London; see the previous letter.

⁶⁵ Richard Broxton Onians (1899–1986), who taught classics at the University of London, was most famous for his book *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge, 1951). He was the Hildred Carlile Professor of Latin from 1936 to 1966.

⁶⁶ Harold Williamson, the previous holder of the chair.

⁶⁷ This letter was written in pencil. As he writes to his sister Kate this very same day, 'I use pencil because it is easier'. Housman died little more than a month later, on 30 April.

Let the final letter be by Semple himself. Housman's long-term publisher and friend Grant Richards includes in his biography⁶⁸ accounts of Housman's 'affability' with several of his students, quoting the following letter to him from Semple.

I was Housman's pupil during the years 1925–7, and later I often consulted him about points of Latinity which puzzled me and, when in Cambridge, I always went to see him. To his direction and criticism and support I owe more than I could ever express.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Housman: 1897–1936* (Oxford, 1941) 327.

⁶⁹ This repeats the praise expressed by Semple in the published version of his dissertation: 'I would like to express my gratitude to Professor A. E. Housman, under whose direction the first part of these notes [i.e., on the *Epistles*] were written and who, since I first knew him, has most generously given me his advice, criticism, and learning' (p. iv).

Review:

A.E. Housman: Finding a Path to Flourish, Peter Waine

By Gregory Leadbetter

The inimitable pairing of poetry and reticence in Housman – and *such* poetry, *such* reticence – both lures and resists biographical and critical attention. The curious fusion of clarity and obliquity that characterises the poems is paralleled in the force and forthrightness of his manner, both in prose and in company, which flourished alongside an equally palpable withheldness. At the beginning of *Finding a Path to Flourish*, his new account of Housman, Peter Waine wonders whether he might have been friends with the poet, had they met – and proceeds in companionable style to address the enigma of his famously prickly subject. Waine adopts a thematic rather than chronological structure, which enables him to range freely over Housman’s poetry, his work as a classicist, his sexuality, his sense of humour, his attitudes to music, women, religion, his love of good food and drink, and – a point the book is keen to emphasise – a new explanation for the paradoxes of Housman’s behaviour: the suggestion that he was autistic (a matter I return to below).

Waine’s style is chatty and anecdotal, and sometimes has the feel of the transcript of an informal talk. This is not necessarily a bad thing, though it contributes to the feeling that the book has more in common with an older manner – that of an affectionate appreciation of its subject, rather than a modern biography – which may be Waine’s intention. The book quotes extensively from Housman himself, together with contemporaries and commentators, so the reader gets a good sense of Housman in his own words, as well as the many – and varied – impressions that he left. Housman’s wit, whether playful or mordant, spices any dish within which it appears, and in the expression of damning judgements he surely rivals William Hazlitt (who, for Keats,

was ‘your only good damner’). As his 1933 lecture, ‘The Name and Nature of Poetry’ – now an established classic in poetics – shows, Housman also delighted in teasing and even provoking his readers and auditors:

I am convinced that most readers, when they think that they are admiring poetry, are deceived by inability to analyse their sensations, and that they are really admiring, not the poetry of the passage before them, but something else in it, which they like better than poetry.

Something akin to a smile can be detected in the archness of this remark – a trace of the puckish freedom and self-delighting confidence that gives Housman’s intelligence such a refreshing quality. He is often the butt of his own sardonic humour, which itself can be curiously revealing, as here (from a letter of 1903):

Vanity, not avarice, is my ruling passion; and so long as young men write to me from America saying that they would rather part with their hair than with their copy of my book, I do not feel the need of food and drink.

For all his reserve – at once white-hot and cool – Housman is also highly performative, both as a writer and in his engagement with the world, and often betrays a desire to be, on one level or another, *known*. Waine is clearly genuine in his attempt to understand him as a person, and remains alive to Housman’s humanity.

Other aspects of Waine’s book, however, might have attracted a severe word from Housman the fastidious textual editor. Quotations are not always grammatically integrated into their surrounding text, and the writing reads rather awkwardly in places; sometimes the wrong word is used (for example ‘excursion’, where ‘exertion’ appears to be the sense: p. 81). While the thematic approach is sound, the organisation of the material can feel somewhat loose: phrases are repeated, and tracking

back and forth over the same ground in slightly different contexts (often with the same quotations) produces a mildly disorientating undertow to the narrative, rather than enhancing clarity. Waine uses footnotes to give brief summaries of some of the dramatis personae of the book, but the referencing is patchy: sometimes sources are entirely missing, and often they are partial and indirect, citing a book or article that contains the quotation, rather than the primary source (and then often without a page reference). These leave the reader with the nagging feeling that if he wanted to check up on something he would need to turn to a more scholarly work to do so.

The book is let down by the nature and frequency of its errors, too. Waine refers to a list of George Orwell's books as 'novels', for example, when some of them are not (p. 25); he misses out the word 'of' when quoting Wordsworth's 'the orange sky of evening' (p. 85); apostrophes are inserted where they should not be (pp. 95, 374); Corpus Christi College is printed as 'Corpus Christie College' (p. 118); and most bizarrely, Henry Nelson Coleridge's edition of *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* is twice cited as '*Specimens of the small oak Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*' (pp. 96, 369)! Housman would undoubtedly have most difficulty in forgiving the misquote that he was 'a deist at 13, a theist at 21' (p. 245): it should of course read 'an atheist'. There is a rather sad irony here, because Waine more than once laments how Housman's texts – and those of his brother Laurence – suffered in this respect, especially during his lifetime: 'Carelessness in the printed word in one form or another seemed to have plagued both brothers' (p. 74). *Finding a Path to Flourish* would certainly have benefitted from more careful editing and more thorough proof-reading.

Waine's contention that Housman was autistic, to which he devotes one of the lengthiest sections of the book, is intended to provide a new key to unlock his character: 'The assertion simply helps us to understand him better' (p. 225), Waine suggests, and that 'if we were able to assess

him by today's criteria, surely he would be diagnosed' (p. 244). It's an interesting speculation, but for this reader, at least, the case is not made out. Waine is often strangely sweeping in pressing his point: 'Housman was honest, open and forthright in his views – not peculiar to autism, but nevertheless autistic traits' (p. 228), for example, casts the net very wide. Identifying Housman's love of flowers with the fact that '[a]utistic people are often more sensitive to particular sensory stimuli', Waine says 'We need look no further than *ASL [A Shropshire Lad]* XXIX: "And there's the windflower chilling / With all the winds at play"' (p. 231), which by no means self-evidently proves his point – and misquotes the poem to boot (the word is 'chilly', not 'chilling'). As Lara Feigel noted in a recent issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*, there is currently something of a vogue for diagnosing or medicalising biographical subjects – as if 'achieving a diagnosis' necessarily more adequately explains the organic mystery of our lives. Even if readers were to accept that Housman was autistic, that in itself would not account for his highly individual character, and may even occlude more comprehensive views of the complexities of the man.

Waine includes quite an extensive selection from Housman's poems as an appendix to the book, including some illustrations from classic editions, and gathers useful examples of Housman's remarks on poetry in general, his accounts of poetic composition, and the story of his publications as a poet – including the fraught instructions he left in his will for Laurence to grapple with, as his literary executor. Waine's abundant admiration for Housman's poetry is apparent throughout the book, but as he points out in the introduction, it is not his aim to analyse it, and he often pulls up in wonderment: Housman 'could make the mundane poetic', he writes; 'I cannot fathom how he does it, why it should work, but it does' (p. 88). In places Waine takes Housman's own remarks a little too literally – at one point stating that he 'even regarded his flying as a greater achievement than both his poetry and classical

reputation' (p. 239), which is surely better read in the light of Housman's teasing habits of performative irony.

Notwithstanding the editorial and presentational issues that affect the book, and despite my reservations about one of its central contentions, *Finding a Path to Flourish* affirms that spending time with what we know of Housman the man, and not just his poetry, can be entertaining, fascinating, and rewarding, and Waine has clearly relished the task of carrying on the conversation.

Peter Waine's *A.E. Housman, Finding a Path to Flourish*, is published by Eyewear Publishing at £20.00.

Biographies

Linda Hart left her native New York City in 1969 to do a postgraduate degree at Somerville College, Oxford. After teaching political science at an American university for a few years, she moved permanently to England. She has worked as an environmental campaigner and a freelance writer and editor. She founded and chaired the Friends of the Dymock Poets in 1993. Throughout it all she has read almost everything about A.E. Housman, and been a frequent contributor to the Society's newsletters and journal.

Gregory Leadbetter is a poet and critic. He publishes widely on Romantic poetry and thought, twentieth-century and contemporary poetry, and his monograph *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) was awarded the University English Book Prize 2012. His books of poetry include *Balanuve* (with photographs by Phil Thomson) (Broken Sleep, 2021), *Maskwork* (2020) – longlisted for the Laurel Prize for Poetry 2021 – and *The Fetch* (2016), both with Nine Arches Press, and the pamphlet *The Body in the Well* (HappenStance Press, 2007). He is Professor of Poetry at Birmingham City University.

Peter Parker is the author of *Housman Country, Into the Heart of England* (2016). He is also the author of two books about the First World War, *The Old Lie* (1987) and *The Last Veteran* (2009). He has written biographies of J.R. Ackerley (1989) and Christopher Isherwood (2004), and has been an associate and advisory editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

David Sider is a classicist, specializing in Greek poetry and philosophy at New York University. His most recent book is a text and commentary on the elegies and epigrams of Simonides; and he is currently working on the poetry of the presocratic philosopher Parmenides. To earlier articles on James Joyce and E. E. Cummings, he

is happy to add this one on another of his favourite modern authors, A.E. Housman.

Christopher Stray has been an honorary research fellow in the Department of Classics at Swansea University since 1988. He has also held visiting fellowships at the universities of Cambridge, London and Yale, and at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. He has published on the history and sociology of classical teaching and scholarship, examinations, textbooks and institutional slang. His books include *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England 1830-1960* (1998) and *A. E. Housman: Classical Scholar*, edited with David Butterfield (2009). He is currently working on chapters for a 3-volume history of Trinity College, Cambridge.

The Housman Society welcomes new members. For details about the benefits of membership, our newsletter and journal, membership fees and how to join, please visit our website at www.housman-society.co.uk

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