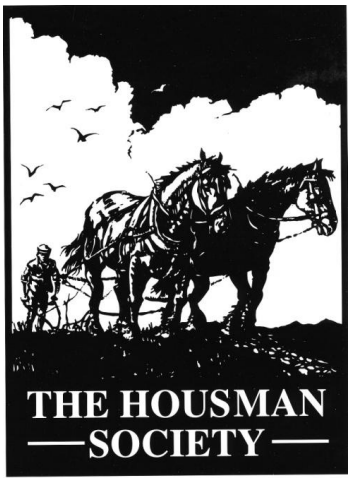
The Housman Society Journal

Volume Forty-Eight 2022



The Housman Society
7 Dowles Road
Bewdley
DY12 2EJ

Charity Number 100107

ISSN 0305-926X
Website: www.housman-society.co.uk
E-mail: info@housman-society.co.uk

The illustration on the cover is from the drawing of A.E. Housman by Francis Dodd, 1926
Reproduced by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

The Housman Society

Founders	John Pugh and Joe Hunt
President	Sir Christopher Ricks MA, BLitt., FBA
Vice-Presidents	Prof. Archie Burnett MA, DPhil Prof. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV Sir Andrew Motion FRSL Jim Page MBE, MA Prof. Norman Page MA, PhD, FRSCan. Sir Tom Stoppard OM, OBE
Chairman	Peter Waine BSc
Vice Chairman	Jane Allsopp B.Mus
General Secretary	Max Hunt MA, Dip.Ed.
Treasurer	Richard Aust OBE, M.Ed., MSc, Dip.Sp.Ed.
Journal Editor	Julian Hunt FSA
Editorial Assistant	Linda Hart BA, MA, M.Litt. (Oxon)
Newsletter Editor	Julian Hunt FSA
Committee	Pat Tansell Jo Slade BA (Hons) Econ.

Housman Society Journal

Volume Forty-Eight **December 2022**

Editorial

As the media have constantly reminded us this year, 1922 was a watershed in English literature with the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. At the time however, A.E. Housman's *Last Poems*, coming out fully 26 years after *A Shropshire Lad*, caused greater excitement. The *Housman Society Journal*, volume 48, 2022, therefore begins with Nicholas Murray's 'A Hundred Years On: Modernism's Annus Mirabilis, 1922.' This paper was given at the Presteigne Festival on 29 August 2022.

Gregory Leadbetter's 'Hail and Farewell: Leaving, Greeting, and Lasting in Housman's *Last Poems*,' was the annual Housman Lecture, given at the Evesham Festival of Words in June 2022. The event took place in the Friends Meeting House in Evesham, a more intimate venue than the two previous annual lectures which were held in All Saints Church. Evesham.

Peter Parker, author of the celebrated *Housman Country*, shares with us his new research on Henry Clarkson Maclean, the officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, who took his own life in 1895. This event prompted A.E. Housman to write one of the best-known poems in *ASL* (XLIV). Peter gives us a real insight into the mind of A.E. Housman during the months leading up to the publication of *A Shropshire Lad*.

Another regular contributor to the *Housman Society Journal*, Colin Leach, offers us a thoughtful review of the strengths and weaknesses of the various Housman biographies. He brings his critique up to date with the inclusion of Peter Waine's contentious *A.E. Housman: Finding a Path to Flourish.* In his chapter 17, Waine makes the case for Housman's curmudgeonly character being the result of autism. Max Hunt discusses this issue in his article and gives plenty of examples of A.E.H.'s ability to be welcoming and even convivial. No doubt Peter Waine will come forward with further evidence to back his

retrospective diagnosis and perhaps he can persuade someone with recent clinical experience of autism and a knowledge of A.E. Housman to give a more objective view.

This debate over Housman's real character has led Linda Hart to bring to our attention a contemporary view of Housman in an extract from the memoirs of the American actress, Mary Anderson de Navarro. She met Housman on at least three occasions and managed to break through his natural reserve. She recounts how Laurence Housman and his brother (here referred to as 'Fred) visited her house in Broadway in 1934 and shared good food and lively conversation.

On a sadder note, we include the obituary of the American bibliophile, Paul Naiditch, perhaps the most erudite and prolific contributor to this *Journal* over the years. The tribute is appropriately written by Archie Burnett, another towering figure in Housman scholarship.

This *Journal* concludes with two book reviews. In Kristin Mahoney's new book, Laurence and Clemence Housman command over 30 pages in a survey of the life styles and sexual mores of the early 20th century literary elite. In the second, John Cartwright enthuses over Roger White's new account of the excavations at Wroxeter. White, unusually for an archaeologist, includes a literary and artistic dimension to his reports of the finds and their impact.

A Hundred Years On: Modernism's *Annus Mirabilis*, 1922

Nicholas Murray

This article is based on a talk given to the Presteigne Festival in August 2022.

"He was not of an age, but for all time,"[1]
That was the poet Ben Jonson paying tribute to Shakespeare in a poem specially written for the First Folio of the playwright's works published in 1618. The line is famous, but is it true? Does the greatness of a writer, a musician, a painter, a scientist or philosopher mean that they transcend their time, soaring above it, as it were, to some universal plane, not held back by what might be seen as the passing fashions or preoccupations of a particular epoch? Are they above the mere accidents of history? Or, on the contrary, is a great creative artist defined *precisely* by their ability to speak for their age, to be its unique interpreter, to register its reality more profoundly than anyone else?

In looking at one year – an outstanding year for literary creativity – I want to argue that the writers that matter *are* marked indelibly by, energised by, become the interpreters of, their own time. It's true of course that some writers and artists who were highly fashionable in their time are now forgotten. This fate is lying in wait for many of those who troop into the tents at literary festivals and cram the bookshop windows. But that is because their books are ephemeral, speaking too easily to us, reflecting back the most superficial characteristics of our age rather than exploring below the surface. They don't unsettle us, disturb us, challenge us, make us think and feel in new and meaningful ways.

[1] *To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author Mr William Shakespeare And What He Hath Left Us,* from the First Folio of 1618

I also want to interrogate a little the notion of modernism itself. What is it? Does the term still mean anything? Is it a concept that can describe adequately the whole range of modern art and literature? Or have we now moved on, even beyond so-called "post-modernism"? Are these labels in fact of any use at all? But first let's step into the time machine and set the controls for 1922.

It was less than four years since the trauma and mass slaughter of the First World War, closely followed by a further quarter of a million deaths in the UK alone from the so-called Spanish Flu. Is it any wonder that a shattered world threw itself into the manic pleasure-seeking of The Roaring Twenties with its flappers and jazz bands? It was time to party.

Meanwhile the map of Europe had changed radically. At the start of the war a young insurance company lawyer in Prague, Franz Kafka, was a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By 1918 he found himself about to become a citizen of the Czech Republic. Can we, therefore, attribute the outburst of avant-garde literature, art and music of the 1920s simply to the war and its aftermath of crumbling empires? Aldous Huxley was typical of the angry young at this time: "We think too much of the past, of metaphysics, of tradition, of the ideal future, of decorum and good form; too little of life and the glittering noisy moment,"[2] he asserted and for those like him who had lost their young friends in the war their disillusionment was understandable.
Lord Peter Wimsey, in Dorothy L. Sayers' 1930 novel *Strong Poison* puts it more succinctly – and blandly – in his conversation with the vicar: "The post-war generation and so on. Lots of people go off the rails a bit – no real harm in 'em at all. Just can't see eye to eye with the older people. It generally wears off in time. Nobody really to blame. Wild oats and – er – all that sort of thing."[3]

[2] Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: an English Intellectual (2002), p152*
[3] Dorothy L Sayers, *Strong Poison* (1930) New English Library ed 1968, p55

In his memoir *It Was the Nightingale* (1933) the writer Ford Madox Ford recalled, back from the war, looking down on central London from Primrose Hill with

> the sense that vast disaster stretched into those caverns of blackness. A social system had crumbled. Recklessness had taken the place of insouciance. In the old days we had seemed to have ourselves and our destinies well in hand. Now we were drifting towards a weir...
>
> You may say that everyone who had taken physical part in the war was then mad. No one could have come through that shattering experience and still view life and mankind with any normal vision...it had been revealed to you that beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos. One had come from the frail shelters of the Line to a world that was more frail than any canvas hut.[4]

But the revolution in the arts of the first quarter of the twentieth century had many other causes and had been a long time in gestation. Even the radical movement known as Dada which would be the parent of so many subsequent modernist movements erupted – and the word seems appropriate – early in the war in the antics of the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara and others in the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich. But we need to go further back. Historical change – outside the pages of that comic masterpiece *1066 and all That* (1930) – is a complex process with long gestation periods and incalculable aftermaths. The modernist revolution did not happen overnight. To illustrate this point let's take a deliberately random, you might think surprising, example from the middle of the previous century. Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar-Gipsy* was first published in 1853, sixty years before Dada. Its melancholy, Romantic flavour, its plangent pastoral mood and, to us, old-fashioned poetic language, might seem light years away from Modernism. But

[4] Ford Madox Ford, *That Was the Nightingale* (1930; Carcanet edition 2007) p48

Arnold's poem is about an alienated intellectual, observed by a poet who himself, like the Modernist poets, was a diagnostician of his fractured times. Addressing the wandering scholar, Arnold envies his relative freedom from "this strange disease of modern life,/With its sick hurry, its divided aims." Is this not also the subject of *The Waste Land*? An art that dealt with the confusions, lost certainties, alienation of the modern world had its roots in the nineteenth century.

So we should perhaps see 1922 as the culmination of a longer process of collapse of the old certainties which included artistic and literary conventions. The traditional novel with its omniscient narrator, its naturalism, its familiar structure of plot and character, was, like the painting and sculpture and music of the past, about to undergo a revolution. But this revolution was more than just a development in period style in the way for example that Classicism gave way to Romanticism in the early nineteenth century. It saw itself – and seemed at the time – a more radical break with what had been known. As the critic Herbert Read put it,[5] unlike earlier movements in style "it is not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic." A similar point was made by C.S. Lewis in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1954: "I do not think that any previous age produced work which was, in its own time, as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the Cubists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and Picasso has been in ours."[6]

The early Modernists would have approved of the French poet Rimbaud's assertion: "*Il faut être absolument moderne.*" [We must be totally modern]. Here is an early sign of the emergence of what I call The Modernist Policeman. It was not enough to make it new, it was a duty, a necessity, and there was to be no backsliding. Special Constable Ezra Pound wielded his truncheon more vigorously than most in pursuit

[5] Herbert Read, *Art Now* (1933), cited in "The Name and Nature of Modernism" by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism 1890-1930* (1974), p20
[6] *Loc.cit.*

of compliance with modernist rules. His famous manifesto for the Imagist movement in poetry was called "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste,"[7] Ezra Pound was fond of don'ts. Many of them were good advice for writers such as "Use no superfluous word...which does not reveal something...Go in fear of abstractions. Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose...Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap." Writing to his friend H.L. Mencken in March 1922 Pound said that in 1922 "year 1, p.s.u." [post-Ulysses] had begun and the Christian era had ended. Unfortunately, Pound's politics became more infatuated with the "don'ts" of Fascism and by the end of the year he had abandoned Joyce's calendar and adopted the new one of Mussolini who had just seized power in Italy.

For many modernist critics the new era meant that the old forms had to be rejected totally. After *Finnegans Wake*, the argument would run, the realistic novel was dead. But in fact it continued to be written – though not untouched by, not failing to learn from, the avant-garde practitioners. Artists break rules, they don't obey them and no one can tell the creative imagination what it should be doing, what turn it should be taking.

But here is another question: how modern are the modernists? For a start we are talking of works now more than a century old. In addition, both of the most famous works of the year – James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* – may have been revolutionary in form but they hardly constituted a Dadaist rejection of the past. Joyce's novel is named after the hero of a Greek epic of the eighth century BC and the whole work is structured around the episodes of Homer's poem. *The Waste Land* takes its title from the Arthurian literature of the middle ages and the legend of the maimed Fisher King, keeper of the Holy Grail, who lives in a sterile land where nothing grows and where he awaits his healer. Of course both of these key works also describe and

[7] From *Poetry* (March, 1913) reproduced by Peter Jones (ed) in *Imagist Poetry* (1972), pp130-4

evoke the modern European city – Dublin and London – and are not in any sense backward-looking or refusing to face contemporary reality. As Eliot's most important essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) (published three years before *The Waste Land*) puts it, there is a seamless connection between the works of the past and the present, each new work simultaneously influencing our perception of past works and itself being influenced by them. As the poet looks at the crowd of commuters crossing London Bridge he quotes from that passage in Dante's *Inferno* where the Italian poet, descending to hell in company with the shade of Virgil and looking on all the dead souls there, declares: "I had not thought death had undone so many."
That is the way the poem works: direct quotations or more oblique allusions to the poetry of the past sit with evocations of the immediate present of the "unreal city", often its squalid and least edifying details:

> *What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow*
> *Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,*
> *You cannot say, or guess, for you know only*
> *A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,*
> *And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,*
> *And the dry stone no sound of water.*

The idea that "a heap of broken images" might make a poem would not have occurred to Alexander Pope nor would he have concluded a poem with: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." But they are beautiful ruins and, with every reading, I find, the music of the poem, its haunting rhythms, never fail to seduce.

Joyce's great novel equally was the product of a deeply learned acquaintance with the literature and thought of the past – much of his aesthetic theory deriving from the medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas – and at the same time an evocation of the vivid present of early 20th century Dublin. Its explicitness was, for its time, shocking and it was published (in an edition of 1000 copies) in Paris by Sylvia Beach, someone prepared to take the risk of doing so.

Notoriously, some of its English readers, and in particular Virginia Woolf, disliked it intensely. "Genius it has, I think; but of the inferior water," she told her diary on 6th September. "It is underbred, not only in the obvious sense, but in the literary sense...I'm reminded all the time of some callow board school boy."[8] The grounds for dismissal couldn't have been clearer: Joyce was not English, not upper middle class, and had no business writing such an ambitious book. There are none of these supposed vulgarities in her novel *Jacob's Room* which would appear later in the year.

Meanwhile, three weeks after *Ulysses*, Katherine Mansfield's finest collection of short stories, *The Garden Party* was published. Mansfield was an exquisite practitioner of the art of the short story and these vivid, impressionistic, but sharply observed and keenly satirical stories aroused the admiration and, she frankly admitted, the envy of Virginia Woolf. The best of the collection – "At the Bay" and 'The Garden Party" – are set in her native New Zealand and with a fine, light touch evoke that society from which she was generally in flight but which, quite naturally, had marked her for life. In both these stories the snobberies and pretensions of the characters are laid bare and the settings brought to life with dramatic clarity and a sense of intimacy with human character that one doesn't always get with Virginia Woolf who could sometimes seem *outside* her characters.

Also in February, in the space of 21 days of extraordinary creativity, the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote two of the most celebrated poetic sequences of the 20th century: *The Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus.* Rilke was, like so many of the leading modernists, not in the progressive camp but his poetry has been enormously influential in spite of its complexity, strangeness and enigmatic mysticism. The opening lines of the first Duino Elegy (in Stephen Cohn's translation) are quite unlike *The Waste Land* in their idiom and range of reference:

[8] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 2 1920-24* (1978), p199

Who, if I cried out, might hear me – among the ranked Angels?
Even if One suddenly clasped me to his heart
I would die of the force of his being...[9]

But when he talks of "how insecurely we're housed in this signposted world" we know ourselves in the world of twentieth century unease, twentieth century modernity.

In the same month Thomas Hardy published his *Late Lyrics and Earlier.* No greater contrast could be conceived between Hardy and Rilke and this is perhaps the point at which we should ask: was Modernism in 1922 the only show in town? In the "Apology" which introduced his collection Hardy ruefully declared: "The launching of a volume of this kind in neo-Georgian days by one who began writing in mid-Victorian, and has published nothing to speak of for some years, may call for a few words of excuse or explanation."[10] Hardy seemed keener to apologise for his habitual pessimism – hardly a fault in the eyes of the Modernists – than for any outmodedness of style but the reference to the "neo-Georgian days" is a reminder that the group of poets known as the Georgians – who would later be mocked by the poets of the 1930s as phoney ruralists – saw themselves, every bit as Eliot and Pound and the Imagists did, as writing at the cutting edge. In 1915 Robert Graves had written from the Front: "I am still in my teens and when this ridiculous war is over I will write Chapter II at the top of the new sheet and with the help of other young Georgians...will try to root out more effectively the obnoxious survivals of Victorianism."[11] The young Robert Graves was in no doubt that he and his fellow-Georgian poets were in the vanguard of poetic change.

[9] Rilke, *Duino Elegies* translated by Stephen Cohn, 1989.
[10] Thomas Hardy, *Apology* in *The Complete Poems* (1976) edited by James Gibson, p556
[11] cited in Nicholas Murray, *The Red Sweet Wine of Youth* (2011) p11u

Even more of a challenge than this, however, to the Modernist narrative was the appearance on the day before publication of *The Waste Land* of the final collection of A.E. Housman, *Last Poems.* This was a runaway success, the initial print run proving hopelessly inadequate with the Cambridge bookshops exhausting their stock before lunch. There was even a cartoon in *Punch* and a leader in *The Times.* The collection was the first by Housman since *A Shropshire Lad* twenty-six years earlier and the impetus to completing it – the new poems and older ones reworked – was the news that his undergraduate passion, Moses Jackson, was dying in Canada of cancer. His publisher, Grant Richards, was overjoyed at the manuscript, later recalling: "As each poem was read and returned to the envelope I became encompassed by the sad, haunting, tragic air that the book has and I felt uplifted into ecstasy by its beauty."[12] In a foreword to an excellent centenary edition of *Last Poems* published by the Housman Society this year the former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, praising the poems also concedes the occasional archaism of style: "Their trimmed verse-blocks might easily be taken for stones in a wall that Housman built to keep Modernism out."[13] He also suggests that many other themes "vital to the Modernists" are here: "Same-sex love, the unreliability of memory (and its ambiguous consolations), the value of personal relations in a Godless universe. By engaging with these things as deeply as he does, Housman proves that he is a man of his time."

As I have already claimed, art is not fashioned by rules (leaving aside specific technical and formal questions) and poets must feel free to choose the ways of writing that best express what drives them. And just as there is a diversity of writers there is a diversity of readers and no period of literature is ever – or should ever be – homogeneous. Readers and writers are always free to choose. Thumb your noses at those policemen!

---

[12] Cited by Edgar Vincent in his Introduction to *Last Poems: Centenary Edition* (1922) p9
[13] *op.cit.,* p5

Having dispatched Joyce's *Ulysses* Virginia Woolf was free in the autumn to oversee the publication of her own novel *Jacob's Room.* With this third novel Woolf was firmly in her modernist stride. Her narrative dispenses with conventional plot and characterisation and creates impressions, images, suggestive pictures but declines to tell us everything a reader might once have wanted to know. The cause of Jacob's death or disappearance on the last page of the novel is never actually given although we know from biographical sources that Woolf's brother Thoby Stephen, who had died of typhoid in Greece in 1906, lay behind the character. Instead we have a sort of restless, darting method that tries to evoke what happens around him in a series of descriptions and visual swoops and oblique suggestions. Here she is describing an office in the City of London and the commuting office workers preparing to return home by Underground:

> Innumerable overcoats of the quality prescribed hung empty all day in the corridors, but as the clock struck six each was exactly filled, and the little figures, split apart into trousers or moulded into a single thickness, jerked rapidly with angular forward motion along the pavement; then dropped into darkness. Beneath the pavement, sunk in the earth, hollow drains lined with yellow light for ever conveyed them this way and that, and large letters upon enamel plates represented in the underworld, the parks, squares, and circuses of the upper."[14]

This is the equivalent perhaps of an Expressionist painting, deliberately distorting reality in order to force us to see it in a new, unfamiliar way. We may not have thought of a London Underground tunnel as "a hollow drain lined with yellow light" but now that you mention it...The book is charged with the passion of Virginia Woolf the *flâneuse*, the compulsive wanderer, for London. "The streets of London, have their map;" she writes "but our passions are uncharted. What are you going to meet if you turn this corner?"[15] And faced with analysing the

[14] Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922; 9th ed 1960) p65
[15] *op.cit.* , p94

character of Jacob (what she calls in the novel "character-mongering") she declares: "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done."[16]
Jacob's room in London was, we can work out from circumstantial detail, in Lamb's Conduit Street in Bloomsbury and just around the corner in Guilford Street were the "grubby lodgings" of Aaron Sisson, the protagonist of D.H. Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod.* Lawrence does do "character-mongering" rather well and the novel is much more orthodox in its narrative method and style than Virginia Woolf's. Lawrence has his own gift for bringing places and people to life and we see London, the bustle of Covent Garden market, or Florence in the rain:

> Peasants with long wagons and slow oxen, and pale-green huge umbrellas erected for the driver to walk beneath. Men tripping along in cloaks, shawls, umbrellas, anything, quite unconcerned. A man loading gravel in the river-bed, in spite of the wet. And innumerable bells ringing: but innumerable bells. The great soft trembling of the cathedral bell felt in all the air.[17]

Lawrence's direct, fresh rendering of scenes is not in the manner of Virginia Woolf but works in its own way just as effectively. Her novel makes almost no reference to the war but Lawrence confronts it directly in his opening paragraph: "Also the war was over, and there was a sense of relief that was almost a new menace. A man felt the violence of the nightmare released now into the general air."[18] That is a shrewd analysis. After the horror of the trenches the long-term consequences of the war were now starting to be diffused throughout the entire society.

Aaron, surprisingly, turns out to be a Midlands miner who, his marriage falling apart, decamps to London with his flute (the "rod" of the title) and is found playing in the orchestra pit at Covent Garden. He is

---

[16] *op.cit.*, p153
[17] D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (1922; 1929 ed, p224)
[18] *op.cit.*, p7

restless, unsatisfied both with himself and the "progressive" artistic and intellectual people he meets along the way. Josephine, for example, a Bohemian artist who tells him: "What I should really like more than anything would be an end of the world. I wish the world would come to an end."[19] His response to this is to tell her that the state of the world doesn't concern him: "So long as I can float by myself."

Although Aaron is in some ways like his creator, Lawrence was very much concerned with the world and with hurling his prescriptions at it. Aaron's rootlessness is in part due to his failed marriage and in part to the times. And the war persistently comes back to haunt the characters, like Captain Herbertson who holds forth on the subject at every opportunity: "and every time it was the same thing, the same hot, blind, anguished voice of a man who has seen too much, experienced too much, and doesn't know where to turn. None of the glamour of returned heroes, none of the romance of war: only a hot, blind, mesmerised voice, going on and on, mesmerised by a vision that the soul cannot bear."[20]

In Italy Aaron is forced to confront the reality of his attempted escape, his rejection of any ties or commitments: "Let no new connection be made between himself and anything on earth. Let all old connections break. This was his craving."[21]

This could stand as a summing-up of the post-war mood of many at the start of the 1920s: "Let all old connections break." Ezra Pound's slogan: "Make it new" expressed this desire for change, for jettisoning what had not seemed any longer to work, or which had led to disastrous consequences such as the war, of clearing the way for a new direction in art and society. A century on, we might want to ask if that is what actually happened. Those innovations which seemed daring, and even shocking, are now absorbed. Are we any longer shockable –

[19] p72
[20] p120
[21] p190

notwithstanding all those warning signs that increasingly face us as we enter cinemas and art galleries and museums: “Some may be upset/offended by some of the content etc etc”? At the end of the following decade another world war broke out, the Russian revolution of 1917 turned into the Stalinist nightmare, after the Second World War the Sixties mirrored in some sense the social liberation and rebellion of the Roaring Twenties and now, sobered by the facts of climate change, and the lesson that pandemics never go away, we look out on the world in a chastened spirit. Or do we? Is this just my appendix to *1066 and All That*, another cartoon history trying to offer simple answers? Actually, I don’t have any answers and nor, I suspect, do you. But we have the art of the twentieth century, great and powerful individual works, that are still available to us, still exerting their pull. 1922 presented a range of them in striking abundance.

Hail and Farewell: Leaving, Greeting, and Lasting in Housman's *Last Poems*

Gregory Leadbetter

My subject here is Housman's second volume of poems, published under the title *Last Poems*.[1] It was indeed the final collection of Housman's verse published in his lifetime – on 19 October 1922, a hundred years ago this year. In putting together what follows I was mindful of something Housman himself said, in his wonderfully biting way, in the inaugural lecture he gave on becoming Professor of Latin at the University of Cambridge in May 1911:

> It is unfortunately true that audiences in general are fond of being told what they know already, and that the desire of most readers and hearers is not to be given thoughts which are new and true, but thoughts which, whether true or false, are their own thoughts, and which they rejoice to recognise dressed up in the current variety of academic journalese, and tricked out with an assortment of popular adjectives.[2]

While I can't promise to tell you what you know already, and certainly not to give you your own thoughts (true or false), I will do my best to avoid fashionable academic journalese – for which I have feelings very similar to Housman – and I may even avoid popular adjectives, though I hope readers will indulge me if one or two of those slip through.

In thinking about *Last Poems* here, I want to dwell on that word 'last' – which has a particular resonance in and for Housman's poetry. He had

[1] First delivered (with minor variations, given the form and occasion) as the Housman Society Lecture at the Evesham Festival of Words on 2 July 2022. I am grateful to the Housman Society for the invitation to give that lecture.

[2] A.E. Housman, *Collected Poems and Prose*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Allen Lane, 1988), p. 303. All references to Housman's poems and prose works (excluding his letters) are to this edition unless stated otherwise.

only published one previous volume: *A Shropshire Lad*, his most famous work, published in 1896, twenty-six years previously. A title like *Last Poems* appears to be bidding farewell – and indeed, it is very clear that Housman did intend a kind of finality in that title – but it is equally clear that he knew and felt that these would not be the last poems he would write, nor the last of his poems to appear in print. He wrote to his friend Robert Bridges, then Poet Laureate, on 2 July 1923 that 'The title of the next volume [that is, after *Last Poems*] will be *Posthumous Poems* or *Chansons d'Outre-tombe* ['Songs from beyond the grave']' – and ten years later in another letter he said that *Last Poems* were 'Not necessarily the last, but the last volume which will appear in my lifetime' (15 October 1932).

In one sense, 'Songs from Beyond the Grave' would be a good title for Housman's collected poetry in its entirety – so many of the speakers of the poems speak from beyond the grave, or adopt an explicitly or implicitly posthumous perspective. The poems are often, as it were, ghosts by daylight. To put it another way, a kind of ending is there from the beginning, in Housman: it is there *in* his beginnings. The farewell is also a kind of greeting – a new emergence. The leaving and the greeting happen simultaneously, as one and the same thing, and occupy the very same space. The greeting – the very arrival and being of the poem – is conditional on a kind of leaving. There is *always* a 'Hail and farewell' in Housman – that phrase that has passed into common use in English, which derives from the Latin 'ave atque vale' in Catullus's elegy to his dead brother (a phrase to which I return below).

The peculiar simultaneity that I'm thinking of is vividly illustrated in the fact that in private (as his letters show) Housman often referred to the collection *Last Poems* as *New Poems*. The 'last' and the 'new' are happening at once. And that pattern recurs in the poetry itself. The ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, in one of his enigmatic aphorisms, said that 'The way up and the way down are one and the same'. In Housman, we might say, leaving and greeting – the last and the new – are one and the same.

Housman is a poet of paradox and doubleness – absence felt as presence, presence that summons absence – deathliness and playfulness – austerity and lyricism. There is an unusually productive tension in Housman's poetry between form and impulse, resilience and despair, beauty and horror, dream and nightmare, conformity and subversiveness, revealing and withholding, sense and more-than-sense, silence and utterance. His poems have a *double-grained* quality: he can so often be read one way *and* another at one and the same time, each grain laced between the other and going in the opposite direction – its *invisible but substantial* life going in one direction, towards sensuous life, pleasure and emotion, and the *apparent* theme going in another, towards loss and nothingness. He is, as the American poet John Berryman wrote, 'a fork / saved by his double genius'. So while his poetry certainly uses the nostalgic impulse, it is not cosy, complacent, or misty-eyed, as some of Housman's detractors would have us believe. It possesses a radical energy.

Housman knew what he was doing as a poet. We can infer from the very fabric of the poems themselves his own sensitivity to these paradoxical resonances: he knew they were there, and that they constituted a distinctive feature of his poetry. And in that word 'last', which Housman chose for the title of his 1922 collection, there is a double sense – perhaps more than one double sense. Its lastness was itself a renewal. It is at once final *and* ongoing – a lastness and a last*ing*ness. Its ostensible farewell is also a fresh beginning, a new greeting. The poems turn the adjective 'last' into a verb: a 'last*ing*' – something active, and creative – something open in the very pith of apparent closure. This *lasting* marks a continuity that transcends both speaker and addressee, poet and poem. In its fine-tuned attention to loss – to the passing of time, and being, and life – Housman's poetry *makes* that moment, that time, that being, that life, *last*, in the magical space-time of the poems themselves. His poetry performs a *lasting*, in the very moment of its losing. Housman's poetry is always *lasting*, in this sense – and has proved 'lasting' in the everyday sense of that word, in its

interest for readers – partly because of these distinctive, paradoxical qualities and effects.

To see and hear all this in action we must turn to the poems themselves – but it's worth pausing for a moment on the man that wrote them. Housman himself said – when he had still only published *A Shropshire Lad* – that 'some men are more interesting than their books but my book is more interesting than its man' (27 September 1921). That, of course, is the famous Housman reticence, and manifests his desire, perhaps, to put the curious off the scent. Housman the man is, in fact, always more interesting than he would have us believe.

He is, as is well known, a Worcestershire lad rather than a Shropshire lad. He was born on 26 March 1859 at Valley House in Fockbury, Worcestershire, the eldest of seven siblings in a relatively prosperous family; his father was a solicitor, but became an alcoholic. Housman's mother died on his twelfth birthday. He attended Bromsgrove School, where he excelled in Classics, and won a scholarship to attend St John's College, Oxford. While he was at Oxford, he met and fell in love with another student, Moses Jackson. Jackson was described by Housman's friend A.W. Pollard as 'lively, but not at all witty'. He was athletic – a very capable science student, with (by all accounts) very little interest in the arts or humanities – though his schooling had ensured he knew his classics. Jackson appears to have been unaware of the extent of Housman's feelings for him – and in any case, was clearly heterosexual.

After a very promising start at Oxford, Housman mysteriously blew his final examinations – apparently barely putting pen to paper – and left Oxford without a degree. He took the Civil Service Examination, however, and in 1882 went to work for the Patent Office in London. He lived with Jackson and his brother Adalbert from 1882 until 1885, when some kind of crisis occurred and Housman went missing for a week. He may or may not have demonstrated his feelings for Moses and been somehow rebuffed, but the truth is we can't be sure. Anyhow, whatever awkwardness there was – and we can infer its nature from Housman's

poetry (see e.g. *More Poems* VI, VII, XXXI) – the friendship continued, though Jackson left to teach in India in 1887 and got married in 1889 (without informing Housman, who simply noted in his diary that he had heard of Jackson's marriage). Jackson subsequently moved to Canada, where he lived with his family for the rest of his life. Housman, meanwhile, had spent his evenings keeping up his classical studies at the British Museum Reading Room – and remarkably, not only given what had happened at Oxford just over ten years before, but also because of the barbs he was already aiming at his classicist peers – he was elected as Professor of Latin at University College, London, in 1892.

In 1911, he became Professor of Latin at Cambridge, and a Fellow of Trinity College. As W.H. Auden would later write after Housman's death, 'Heart-injured in North London, he became / The Latin Scholar of his generation' – and, more daringly: 'Deliberately he chose the dry-as-dust, / Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer'. His classical scholarship focused on textual criticism – that is, emending corrupted ancient texts – and in particular on the work of a minor Latin poet Manilius, for whose poetry Housman scarcely had a good word to say. Housman dedicated the first volume of his edition of Manilius's *Astronomicon* to Jackson, in 1903, with verses composed in Latin. The fifth and final volume would be published in 1930.

What then of Housman the person and his view of life? Again, he is paradoxical in the impressions he could give – distant, severe, even rude, but also generous, warm, and funny, depending on which light you catch him in. Max Beerbohm compared his look and manner to that of 'an absconding cashier'. He wrote in a letter of 1933 that: 'My real trouble, which I have often had before, is nervous depression and causeless apprehensions' – depressions which tended to last for three months at a time. His sister Kate said that he was 'quick to see humour in things about him, or to give grim things a humorous turn.' The critic John Bayley recognised in Housman's teasing, donnish, dry humour 'a kind of undercover language, or bush telegraph.' He wrote to an

American admirer in 1935: ‘My heart always warms to people who do not come to see me,’ he writes, ‘especially Americans, to whom it seems to be more of an effort.’ In one of his most ticklish epistolary asides, Housman said of the writer and editor Alphonse (A.J.A.) Symons: ‘If Mr Symons ever feels sad, he ought to be able to cheer himself up by contemplating his handwriting.’

He was, he tells Maurice Pollet, an atheist at 21:

> I was brought up in the Church of England and in the High Church party, which is much the best religion I have ever come across. But Lemprière’s Classical Dictionary, which fell into my hands when I was eight, attached my affection to paganism. I became a deist at thirteen and an atheist at twenty-one. (5 February 1933)

This is borne out in his poetry: for the critic Christopher Ricks, ‘The blasphemy of the poems is their central energy’ – for Ricks, and others, an admirable and daring quality.[3]

Late in life, Housman summarises his philosophy for another correspondent:

> In philosophy I am a Cyrenaic or egoistic hedonist, and regard pleasure of the moment as the only possible motive of action. As for pessimism, I think it almost as silly, though not as wicked, as optimism. George Eliot said she was meliorist: I am a pejorist (22 March 1936)

A meliorist believes that humankind can gradually improve itself and its own situation; a pejorist – which he claimed to be through observation of human life – that things have a tendency to get worse, or at least (this is perhaps more accurate in Housman’s case) maintain their difficulty.

[3] Ricks (ed.), p. 10.

Nevertheless, what he says there about pessimism and optimism shows that he took the view that nothing over which humankind had any power was necessarily inevitable. Housman is not a philosopher or a poet of despair – he's not that simple, nor so easily reduced.

The Cyrenaic philosophy that he declares is also telling: a love, a pleasure as a motive. Housman loved food and drink, both beer and wine – and he appears to have been a genuine gastronome. When he became a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, he looked forward to joining the Wine and Garden Committees, and made regular contributions to the Kitchen Suggestions Book: he is said to have introduced Trinity's famous crème brulée to the High Table menu. He enjoyed a pint of beer at lunch before going for long walks of two or three hours (alas, timetables and expectations in academia have changed quite a lot since then, in ways to which Housman the pejorist would nod, having been proved right).

Being a pejorist didn't mean that he couldn't embrace new technologies. He loved flying, when commercial air travel was in its infancy, and enjoyed many continental touring holidays. And of course, he loved reading poetry and literature for pleasure, and for their life-enhancing qualities. His friend Joan Thomson recalled in Housman:

> the power of receiving ecstatic pleasure from great poetry and from loveliness in the countryside. To hear Professor Housman speak even a few lines of good poetry was a revelation of the mysterious power which lay within it and of the musical loveliness of which language is capable. He talked of poetry with almost a note of gratitude in his voice – as if it had given him a great deal of joy.

The prefatory note with which Housman presents *Last Poems*, dated September 1922, reads as follows:

> I publish these poems, few though they are, because it is not likely that I shall ever be impelled to write much more. I can no longer expect to be revisited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my first book, nor indeed could I well sustain it if it came; and it is best that what I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation. About a quarter of this matter belongs to the April of the present year, but most of it to dates between 1895 and 1910.

Last Poems arrives, then, in the context of its own belatedness, relative to *A Shropshire Lad* – and in the context of the scarcity of his poems, to which Housman refers. That in itself had invested in Housman a kind of mythic aura by this time – an aura he was quite happy to encourage. For all his privacy, he was acutely aware of his public reputation. By 1922, he was a famous poet – but *A Shropshire Lad*, published in 1896, had had a slow start. It had been published with Kegan Paul at his own expense, but had become hugely popular during the First World War, achieving peak sales of around 16,000 copies in the year 1918.

Housman refers to the patterns of his own writing as a poet: his intense periods of productivity, as during the 'continuous excitement' of the first few months of 1895, when he was 35-36, when most of *A Shropshire Lad* was composed – and again in April of 1922. In the intervening years he had added to his oeuvre occasionally – and had been pondering the possibility of making another book since around 1910, getting more serious about the idea in 1920. By April 1922 he was 'practically certain' that he would have the collection out in the autumn.

Publication may have been accelerated by Housman hearing news of Moses Jackson's ill-health in 1922 – a condition that, though they didn't yet know it, would be terminal. The publication of *Last Poems* in fact renewed Housman's connection with Jackson – and hence, in many ways, renewed his connection with the springs of his own poetry.

Housman sent Jackson a copy of *Last Poems* on the day it was published. In the letter that accompanied the book, Housman wrote: 'The cheerful and exhilarating tone of my verse is so notorious that I feel sure it will do you more good than the doctors' – and that 'you do not know, and there are no means of driving the knowledge into your thick head, what a bloody good poet I am.' He continues: 'Please to realise therefore, with fear and respect, that I am an eminent bloke; though I would much rather have followed you round the world and blacked your boots.' The jokiness, the confidence, but also that last declaration of almost self-abnegating affection, are all telling. Housman, in another letter in these final exchanges with Jackson, joked again:

> Why not rise superior to the natural disagreeableness of your character and behave nicely for once in a way to a fellow who thinks more of you than anything in the world? You are largely responsible for my writing poetry, and you ought to take the consequences.

Note that double sense of 'thinks more of you…': an expression of esteem, but also recurrence in thought.

It was, as it turned out, a 'Hail and farewell' between Housman and Jackson. Movingly – in replying to Housman – Jackson recalled a poem by Housman dating to 1881, their Oxford undergraduate days:

> That thing that you published in some aesthetic magazine seems to me, in its disregard of all politeness towards possibilities in the unknown future, seems to me to contain nearly half the philosophy of your two books. You will be surprised at my remembering them so nearly, if I am not quite word-perfect.

Here it is:

Good-night; ensured release,
Imperishable peace,
    Have these for yours,
While sea abides, and land,
And earth's foundations stand,
    And heaven endures.

When earth's foundations flee,
Nor sky nor land nor sea
    At all is found,
Content you, let them burn:
It is not your concern;
    Sleep on, sleep sound.

This poem was eventually collected in *More Poems* after Housman's death under the title 'Parta Quies' (meaning 'rest is won', from Virgil's *Aeneid*). But – a little eerily – Jackson remembered the title as 'Ave Atque Vale': 'Hail and farewell', the final words of Catullus's elegy for his dead brother. Jackson's memory – and his suggestive misremembering – was, in the circumstances, both apt and remarkable. Housman replied:

> I never was more astounded at anything than your reproducing my contribution to *Waifs and Strays*. I remember you reading it at Miss Patchett's, and how nervous I felt. If I had known you would recollect it 42 years afterwards, my emotions would have been too much for me.

Last Poems had both marked and renewed the connection between Housman and Jackson over one of Housman's very first poems, to which Jackson had been an early witness.

The final letter Housman received from Jackson was signed off simply 'Goodbye'. Housman once remarked to Joan Thomson that if anyone

thinks that they have loved more than one person truly, they have never loved at all. Speaking of the picture of Jackson that remained above his fireplace in his College rooms, after his friend's death, when his brother Laurence asked him who it was in the picture, Laurence tells us that: 'In a strangely moved voice he answered, "that was my friend Jackson, the man who had more influence on my life than anyone else".' It is peculiarly fitting that Housman's final connection with Jackson would be through a new collection of verse called *Last Poems*: hail and farewell indeed. 'Ave Atque Vale' was also the title given to an editorial in *The Times* in the same issue in which *Last Poems* was reviewed. There is a lovely symmetry in the Latin: the 'av' of greeting mirroring the 'va' of leaving, with the 'and', the 'atque', connecting them, marking that simultaneity of greeting, leaving, and *lasting*, that is my theme here.

Besides its prose prefatory note, *Last Poems* includes a verse epigraph:

> *We'll to the woods no more,*
> *The laurels are all cut,*
> *The bowers are bare of bay*
> *That once the Muses wore;*
> *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.*

Here is a beginning – the first poem, the book's greeting – that is also an ending ('We'll . . . no more'). It is also, in the fabric of the poem, a *lasting*: its rhythms and sound-patterning make a kind of eternal present in which the moment is held, at once suspended and dancing – in the psychic dimension of its own invocation – as is so often true in

Housman's poetry. Its 'no' is also a 'more': its full stop on line eight stirs another 'Oh we'll…' – when it's up, and off again, in its song of 'no more', marking the ongoingness of its ending.

I have selected a few poems of the forty-one that follow to illustrate some salient features of the book connected in some way to the patterns and personal history that I have described, and – at the invitation of the editor – include here as much of the text of the poems I have chosen as feasible, given the constraints of space.

The first numbered poem of the collection, called 'The West' – Housman didn't like giving his poems titles, so they're a little unusual – sounds the book's poignant note. The speaker of the poem addresses a silent comrade at his side. Both of them have, we learn, been saved from drowning in the sea to the west, where they now look:

> 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.
>
> Oh lad, I fear that yon's the sea
> Where they fished for you and me,
> And there, from whence we both were ta'en,
> You and I shall drown again.
>
> Send not on your soul before
> To dive from that beguiling shore,
> And let not yet the swimmer leave
> His clothes upon the sands of eve.
>
> Too fast to yonder strand forlorn
> We journey, to the sunken bourn,
> To flush the fading tinges eyed
> By other lads at eventide.

Wide is the world, to rest or roam,
And early 'tis for turning home:
Plant your heel on earth and stand,
And let's forget our native land.

When you and I are spilt on air
Long we shall be strangers there;
Friends of flesh and bone are best;
Comrade, look not on the west.

The appeal to stay on dry earth, though far from home, is also a plea to remain as 'flesh and bone', rather than the ghosts that in some sense – at once within and out of their element – they already are. The lost 'home' of their 'native land' might be the sea (as Housman once suggested, perhaps will-o'-the-wispishly, in correspondence), but it also suggests the 'sunken bourn' not only of origins, now lost and distant, but of death. A version of the Isles of the Blessed silently haunts the poem: a hint of a transfigured, paradisical deathlessness 'Leagues beyond the sunset bar', that is also a form of oblivion, where friends become 'strangers', 'spilt on air'. The lure and siren call of the west is both a calling 'home' and a call of death – or a form of life that, in human terms, is indistinguishable from death. To 'look not on the west' is, in the context of the poem, to refuse – for now, and while they can – that call. The ballad-like style, the sense of a story elliptically told, the emphasis on mood – and those metrically charged, dilated vowels, sensuously framed in self-echoing consonance – are characteristic of Housman at his unsettling, haunting best.

Last Poems is self-conscious of its status as a post-war book. Its consolations, such as they are, do not release the present from that painful recent past, but makes it last: Housman's poems hold open the wound as they pour their curious balm. The ordering of the poems foregrounds recent history, with a sequence of poems straight after 'The

West' each addressed to soldiering, that each turn on the fulcrum of death – as here, in poem II:

As I gird on for fighting
  My sword upon my thigh,
I think on old ill fortunes
  Of better men than I.

Think I, the round world over,
  What golden lads are low
With hurts not mine to mourn for
  And shames I shall not know.

What evil luck soever
  For me remains in store,
'Tis sure much finer fellows
  Have fared much worse before.

So here are things to think on
  That ought to make me brave,
As I strap on for fighting
  My sword that will not save.

It is again a mark of Housman's preoccupations – and perhaps the sad fact that war was so common in human experience – that this poem reads as both prolepsis and memorial, in light of the First World War, but was written in April 1895. The final line sounds a posthumous note: it looks forward to an event that, on some level, has already happened – which chills the speaker's attempts to comfort and encourage himself considering others' experience, which 'ought' to make him brave.

The next two poems of the collection are in a sense memorials for Housman's nephew, Clement, who was killed in action in 1915. Here is poem IV, 'Illic Jacet' ('There Lies…'):

Oh hard is the bed they have made him,
And common the blanket and cheap;
But there he will lie as they laid him:
Where else could you trust him to sleep?

To sleep when the bugle is crying
And cravens have heard and are brave,
When mothers and sweethearts are sighing
And lads are in love with the grave.

Oh dark is the chamber and lonely,
And lights and companions depart;
But lief will he lose them and only
Behold the desire of his heart.

And low is the roof, but it covers
A sleeper content to repose;
And far from his friends and his lovers
He lies with the sweetheart he chose.

Again, the poem's positioning in the book repurposes it in the post-war context. It was written in 1900, but gains a new force in this moment. Housman had sent the poem to his sister Katharine, Clement's mother, on 5 October 1915, after he heard that Clement had been killed:

> I do not know that I can do better than send you some verses that I wrote many years ago; because the essential business of poetry, as it has been said, is to harmonise the sadness of the universe, and it is somehow more sustaining and healing than prose.

As so often in Housman, its seeming simplicity becomes stranger the more (and more closely) it is read. There is a dark irony in its hint of death as a 'sweetheart', contrasted to 'friends' and 'lovers' in the breathing world: the dark and lonely chamber of its fatal fulfilment is presented as a kind of exchange for a world of human warmth, which is

nevertheless also the world in which 'lads are in love with the grave'. Agency and impulse, cause and effect are at once obscured and exposed. Whatever consolation they contain, the poem's harmonies do not equate to easy explanation.

The poet Robert Lowell would later remark that, in *A Shropshire Lad*, it was as if Housman had somehow foreseen the Somme. References to soldiering and danger are indeed there from the beginning in Housman's poetry – together with a sense strangely akin to survivor's guilt, even without the shadow of a world war. The sense of another life not lived is often present in the poems, usually with an imputation of some failure of courage on the speaker's part (see, for example, *Last Poems* XXXII). There may have been a personal sexual connotation for him in this regard – in his recurrent references to hidden 'hurts' and 'shames' – but these responses also figure Housman's acute sense of others' ill luck, the hazards of human life, the self-betrayals of the human species and the horrors that we inflict on one another, while figuring, in evocations of spontaneous compassion, a humanity that at once involves and transcends those horrors.

The next two poems in the book were written at the time of the Boer War (1899-1902) but again take on special resonance in the context of 1922. In the first of these (V: 'Grenadier'), a soldier who goes to war on behalf of the Queen is killed for a wage of 'thirteen pence a day'. In the second (VI: 'Lancer'), the lure is not of money but of false glamour: '*Oh who would not sleep with the brave?*' goes the refrain – but the speaker of the poem is dead:

> For round me the men will be lying
> That learned me the way to behave,
> And showed me my business of dying:
> *Oh who would not sleep with the brave?*

The English landscape itself is imaginatively refracted and ultimately haunted in Housman's handling of these themes:

VII

In valleys green and still
    Where lovers wander maying
They hear from over hill
    A music playing.

Behind the drum and fife,
    Past hawthornwood and hollow,
Through earth and out of life
    The soldiers follow.

The soldier's is the trade:
    In any wind or weather
He steals the heart of maid
    And man together.

The lover and his lass
    Beneath the hawthorn lying
Have heard the soldiers pass,
    And both are sighing.

And down the distance they
    With dying note and swelling
Walk the resounding way
    To the still dwelling.

Death and sex are maying together in the music of this poem. The almost Elizabethan pastoral idyll of lovers beneath the hawthorn is given pause within the sound of soldiers marching to the 'drum and fife' of martial music. Again the poem signals a dangerous allure: the romanticised soldier 'steals the heart' of man and woman alike – but the poem has already made the sign of death over the soldiers passing by. The music from over the hill carries them 'Through earth and out of

life': they are already ghosts, unseen – in effect, already dead. Most of the poem was written in April 1922, except for the final stanza which was composed long before – and it is here that Housman's paradoxical vision is at its most concentrated: 'dying' and 'swelling' are simultaneous and, suspended in the present tense, the 'walk' to 'the still dwelling' is both final and ongoing. The music's sounding is also a '*re*sounding' (my emphasis). The poem ties a knot in time: playing, loving, listening, moving, dying are bound up in the 'still' moment – that word framing the poem in its first and final line – to extraordinarily eerie effect. It is a wholly haunted between-place, at once a coming and a going, a beginning and an ending – life and death looping through each other in their ever-lasting.

The next poem creates another between-place:

VIII

Soldier from the wars returning,
Spoiler of the taken town,
Here is ease that asks not earning;
Turn you in and sit you down.

Peace is come and wars are over,
Welcome you and welcome all,
While the charger crops the clover
And his bridle hangs in stall.

Now no more of winters biting,
Filth in trench from fall to spring,
Summers full of sweat and fighting
For the Kesar or the King.

Rest you, charger, rust you, bridle;
Kings and kesars, keep your pay;
Soldier, sit you down and idle

At the inn of night for aye.

The opening line is loaded with an irony only wholly revealed at the poem's close. This soldier's 'return' to what at first appears to be the friendly, welcoming warmth and familiar pleasures of a homely inn, is it seems no return at all: 'At the inn of night for aye', the charger's bridle left to rust, the implication is that he is dead. This is a picture of a life not lived, and at the same time a kind of afterlife. While remarkably resonant in the post-war context, once again this poem dates much earlier, chiefly to 1905.

At times the poems manifest Housman's considered and deliberate irreligion. The speaker of poem IX laments a 'spoilt spring', blighted with bad weather – and is not the first, he says, to have 'cursed /Whatever brute and blackguard made the world'. That sense emerges once again in one of the most striking poems in the collection, poem XII:

XII

The laws of God, the laws of man,
He may keep that will and can;
Not I: let God and man decree
Laws for themselves and not for me;
And if my ways are not as theirs
Let them mind their own affairs.
Their deeds I judge and much condemn,
Yet when did I make laws for them?
Please yourselves, say I, and they
Need only look the other way.
But no, they will not; they must still
Wrest their neighbour to their will,
And make me dance as they desire
With jail and gallows and hell-fire.
And how am I to face the odds

Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.
They will be master, right or wrong;
Though both are foolish, both are strong,
And since, my soul, we cannot fly
To Saturn or Mercury,
Keep we must, if keep we can,
These foreign laws of God and man.

Much of the astonishing power of this poem comes in the directness and daring of its defiance. God and man are both rejected and accused for the wrongs they commit ('Their deeds I judge and much condemn'); both are fallible and culpable; both participate in 'bedevilment'. The poem's emotional force is amplified by the vulnerability that underpins the speaker's righteous indignation: 'I, a stranger and afraid / In a world I never made'. His alienation is existential. We can infer a critique of late Victorian sexual mores here, but the poem's scope is wider: it is deeply antinomian (in the non-theological sense), and reaches for ethical grounds and ideas of liberty beyond the sanctioned forms of worldly power, figured in the form of 'foreign' (i.e. extraneously imposed and enforced) laws. Towards the end of the poem, a grudging acceptance sits alongside this deeper recusancy – but in echoing the first line of the poem, with the important variation of 'foreign', its final line sends the reader back to the beginning, and the attitude of defiance. The speaker of the poem is both in and out of the world of 'God and man', reconciled not to them but to a state of lasting doubleness.

Last Poems includes an 'Epithalamium', a wedding-poem, which was begun either 1895 or 1900, and finished around April 1922 – which obliquely addresses, readers have supposed, Moses Jackson. I give here its first stanza, which is a little odd, given its ostensible purpose:

He is here, Urania's son,
Hymen come from Helicon;

God that glads the lover's heart,
He is here to join and part.
So the groomsman quits your side
And the bridegroom seeks the bride:
Friend and comrade yield you o'er
To her that hardly loves you more.

The poem ends with a blessing and an image of the bridegroom's friends, like 'Harnessed angels', keeping watch and guard over him: a blessing that, like these lines, hardly lets the bridegroom go – and in its way lays a lasting hold.

The poems towards the end of the collection return to scenes that evoke *A Shropshire Lad*: 'The sumless tale of sorrow / Is all unrolled in vain: / May comes tomorrow / And Ludlow fair again' (XXXIV). Those lines capture once more a kind of doubleness: bliss in the coming of the May is a kind of spontaneous, healthy ignorance of the shadows that attend upon it. The life that takes no heed of sorrow lives on, but so does sorrow: the poem acknowledges and incorporates it in the very moment of its negation. The pleasures of this imaginary land are invoked to keep the soldier home from war:

XXXVIII

Oh stay at home, my lad, and plough
The land and not the sea,
And leave the soldiers at their drill,
And all about the idle hill
Shepherd your sheep with me.

Oh stay with company and mirth
And daylight and the air;
Too full already is the grave
Of fellows that were good and brave
And died because they were.

In Housman, the virtues of ‘goodness’ and ‘bravery’ are too easily extinguished by their own action, and death feeds upon the paradox. The clarity and simplicity of Housman’s stark terms exposes the problem – as if, by seeing it so vividly, its fatal equation might be swerved. This ten-line poem presents an implicit critique of a vast tradition in the history of masculinity – the sublimated militarism of a patriarchal order. Its call to husbandry, company, mirth and the ‘idle hill’ is the call of a radically different world – which is nonetheless a possible world within this world.

The final three poems of the book embody again that peculiar fusion of ending, beginning, and lasting on which I’ve been dwelling. This is the final stanza of poem XXXIX:

So here’s an end of roaming
  On eves when autumn nighs:
The ear too fondly listens
  For summer’s parting sighs,
  And then the heart replies.

In the ending that these lines describe, there is also a searching – a listening – and a continuing: ‘the heart replies’. This describes well the effect readers so often experience after reading a Housman poem – the heart replies. New life is quickened, however much the poem might describe a loss or an ending. Its farewell is also an arrival.

The penultimate poem – one of the last to be written for *Last Poems*, in April 1922 – is a gem, and I include it here in full:

XL

Tell me not here, it needs not saying,
  What tune the enchantress plays
In aftermaths of soft September

Or under blanching mays,
For she and I were long acquainted
And I knew all her ways.

On russet floors, by waters idle,
The pine lets fall its cone;
The cuckoo shouts all day at nothing
In leafy dells alone;
And traveller's joy beguiles in autumn
Hearts that have lost their own.

On acres of the seeded grasses
The changing burnish heaves;
Or marshalled under moons of harvest
Stand still all night the sheaves;
Or beeches strip in storms for winter
And stain the wind with leaves.

Possess, as I possessed a season,
The countries I resign,
Where over elmy plains the highway
Would mount the hills and shine,
And full of shade the pillared forest
Would murmur and be mine.

For nature, heartless, witless nature,
Will neither care nor know
What stranger's feet may find the meadow
And trespass there and go,
Nor ask amid the dews of morning
If they are mine or no.

The poem bears many different readings. Nature, the 'enchantress', is often taken ultimately to have abandoned the poet-wanderer; soldiers are imagined to have fought and died for a vision of England and its

countryside that is in fact entirely indifferent to them; or, in its beguiling beauty and abiding power, nature is akin to a deathless lover that simply moves on to another. I find, however, a Housmanian solace in the anonymity upon which the poem ends, which highlights and cherishes the vanishing self – a self that somehow finds itself in self-abnegation. There is a sense of loss, for sure – of being a 'stranger' here on earth, a 'trespasser' – but also the implicit acknowledgement of a supra-human self-sufficiency: a life greater than human life, in which human life participates, and in which it is a wonder to *be* and *have been* at all. The self-sufficing aimlessness, the 'idling', of the life that the poem describes may have no ostensible purpose, but it is none the worse, nor less wonderful, for that. The poem is in fact alive with wonder, the memory of wonder, and its anticipation, and plays each of these states out – past, present, and future – together. Its wonder is the wonder of knowing and unknowing at one and the same time. It is at once a valediction and an affirmation that, in its utterance, re-originates the experience and the vision it inscribes.

In the final poem of the collection, Housman returns to his imaginary Shropshire, and the speaker of the poem is a piper leading the maying. The poem plays with its tenses: it is at once in the past, a memory, and in the final stanza, today:

> The lofty shade advances,
> I fetch my flute and play:
> Come, lads, and learn the dances
> And praise the tune to-day.
> To-morrow, more's the pity,
> Away we both must hie,
> To air the ditty,
> And to earth I.

The poem's 'to-day' summons an imagined memory in its imaginary moment – an eternal present – that both acknowledges its ending,

tomorrow, and fends it off in the here-and-now of the poem. Its farewell holds open its beginning.

Last Poems was warmly received. 4,000 copies were printed initially, but by the end of 1922 a further 17,000 copies had been printed to meet demand. Reviews were for the most part hugely admiring. A cartoon in *Punch* showed Housman with his pipe a-playing, and the Muses very glad to see him again. Amabel Clough-Ellis described Housman as 'that rare being, a poet with a public. Indeed, his one chance of being misjudged may be that he is too popular'.

'Poetry', said Housman in his 1933 lecture, 'The Name and Nature of Poetry', 'is not the thing said but a way of saying it'.[4] Robert Frost said something similar: 'All the fun's in how you say a thing'. Poetry is, Housman maintained, 'more physical than intellectual', and cannot so much be defined as recognised 'by the symptoms which it provokes in us'; Housman quotes a phrase from the book of Job to describe its effects: 'A spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up' (Job 4:15).[5] I want to conclude on this note – this sense of what carries on after the poem has ended, the sense that its leaving is a greeting, and that its ending is also a beginning. I quote again from 'The Name and Nature of Poetry':

> in these six simple words of Milton—
>
> Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more—
>
> what is it that can draw tears, as I know it can, to the eyes of more readers than one? What in the world is there to cry about? Why have the mere words the physical effect of pathos when the sense of the passage is blithe and gay? I can only say, because they are poetry, and find their way to something in man which is obscure and latent, something older than the present organisation of his

[4] Ibid, p. 364.
[5] Ibid, p. 369.

> nature, like the patches of fen which still linger here and there in the drained lands of Cambridgeshire.[6]

Notice, in that image of the ancient, lingering fen – woken, as if from hiding, by the invocation of the poem – its *lasting*

[6] Ibid, p. 369.

A Herefordshire Lad

Peter Parker

As you approach the church of St James the Great in the Herefordshire village of Cradley, you pass a large stone cross on a triangle of grass. This Grade II listed monument commemorates four local men: two sons and two grandsons of Major-General Henry John Maclean, all of whom were killed in the First World War. Maclean himself was a distinguished and long-serving soldier who had joined the Rifle Brigade in 1843 at the age of sixteen and had subsequently taken part in both the Crimean and Anglo-Ashanti wars. He had died aged 87 in January 1915, at which time, as *The Times* noted in an announcement headed 'A Family of Soldiers,' he had two sons, three grandsons and five nephews all serving in the army. The memorial at Cradley to the four of these who died was erected by Maclean's second wife, Frances Clarkson, an American who was twenty-seven years his junior and had lived at Chirbury in Shropshire. The General already had four children, two boys and two girls, from his first marriage to an Anne Buchanan, who had died in Aden in 1871; with Frances, whom he married in 1875, he had a further three sons and one daughter.

The family had been living at Burton Court in Linton, near Ross-on-Wye, but in around 1890 they moved to The Halesend, a large Georgian house outside Cradley. It was from here that in 1894 Henry Clarkson Maclean, the eldest son of the General's second marriage and known in the family as Harry, went to London to become an officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. While his two younger brothers, Ivan and Alec, are commemorated on the Maclean memorial, when I began writing this article Harry lay forgotten in the churchyard at Cradley, his gravestone sunk into the earth, its inscription entirely hidden from view. Harry had already died by the time of the First World War, having committed suicide on 6 August 1895. The irony is that of all the family he is, or should be, the most famous, his death

having inspired one of the best-known poems in A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*.

Notoriously reticent, especially when asked about his own poetry, Housman evidently wanted people to know the story that lay behind 'Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?' (*ASL* XLIV) because next to the poem in his own copy of *A Shropshire Lad* he had tucked a clipping from the London *Standard* newspaper reporting the inquest into Maclean's death. The poem also contains lines that more or less paraphrase the letter Maclean wrote before killing himself. It seems likely that Maclean's suicide also stood behind 'If it chance your eye offend you,' the poem that not only follows 'Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?' in *A Shropshire Lad*, but was also written immediately after it in one of Housman's notebooks. Both poems date from between 10 August and 30 September 1895, and so were written in more or less immediate reaction to news of Maclean's death. It is possible that Housman may also have had Maclean in mind when writing 'Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?' (*Additional Poems* XVIII). The poem was written at the same time as the other two and is generally agreed to have been inspired by the fate of Oscar Wilde, whose trials had taken place in April and May of the same year. While this is undoubtedly right, the fact that Wilde was not exactly a 'young sinner' but a mature man of forty suggests that Housman may also have had Maclean in mind.

Harry Maclean was in his second year as an officer cadet at Woolwich when at 5pm on Tuesday 6 August he booked a single room in London's Charing Cross Hotel. This was Room 330 in what was known as the 'bachelors' quarters' on the building's fifth floor (which were badly damaged during the Blitz and subsequently rebuilt). Having burned some letters and photographs, he wrote what the newspapers called an 'extraordinary letter to the coroner,' which he propped on the mantelpiece, and at around 10pm. he put a loaded revolver to his head and fired once. No one took any notice of the sound of the shot, which was apparently mistaken for a door slamming, and it was not until 10.15

Harry Clarkson Maclean

the following morning that a chambermaid, finding the door unlocked, entered Maclean's room and found his body lying on the carpet. There was 'a quantity of blood around the head' and a large-calibre service revolver lay nearby where it had fallen from Maclean's hand. The gun's chamber had been loaded with six bullets, only one of which had been discharged.

Maclean's letter to the coroner had been written on two sheets of the hotel's writing paper. It ran:

I wish it to be clearly understood that I am not what is commonly called 'temporarily insane', and that I am putting an end to my life after several weeks of careful deliberation. I do not think that I need to justify my actions to anyone but my Maker, but for the sake of my mother and the few other people who love me I will state the main reasons that have determined me. The first is utter cowardice and despair. There is only one thing in this world that would make me thoroughly happy; that one thing I have no earthly hope of obtaining. The second – which I wish was the only one – is as follows:- I have absolutely ruined my own life; but I thank God that, as yet, so far as I know, I have not morally injured – or 'offended,' as it is called in the Bible – any one else. Now I am quite certain that I could not live another five years without doing so, and for that reason alone, even if the first one did not exist, I should do what I am doing. Of the dreadful blow I am dealing to my mother and the few other people who care for me I am quite aware. It is the one

> thing that has almost diverted me from my purpose, but, at all events, it is final, and consequently better than a long series of sorrows and disgraces. I hope that they will live to forgive and, perhaps, to forget me. May God, in His infinite mercy, forgive me for what I am doing. – HARRY C. MACLEAN

The inquest into Maclean's death was held in the church hall of nearby St Martin-in-the-Fields before the Westminster coroner, Mr John Troutbeck. In direct contradiction of what Maclean had written, a verdict was brought in of 'Suicide while temporarily insane,' which may have been intended as a kindness to the young man's family.

Maclean's father gave evidence at the inquest that although he and his wife had been surprised to receive a telegram from their son three days before his death to say that he was in London, since they had been expecting him to return to The Halesend after staying with friends in Oxfordshire, they had no inkling that Harry had 'any trouble on his mind.' Indeed, he 'was usually exceedingly cheerful, and there was not the slightest reason to suppose that he contemplated suicide.' He had bought the revolver he used to kill himself from a fellow cadet at Woolwich, but there was nothing sinister or unusual about this because as part of his training he had been practising shooting a good deal, and 'the commandant of the college had written to say that they had no reason to suppose that anything was amiss with the boy.' Harry had not intended his death to be a mystery, and what was amiss with him was there for everyone to read in his letter to the coroner, though couched in terms that were evidently less clear to the jury than they were to Housman. One detail that was not mentioned in the *Standard*, nor in most of the other newspapers that reported the case, was that alongside the letter to the coroner on the mantelpiece of Room 300 were the remains of the photographs and letters that Harry had burned. The Macleans' local newspaper, the *Malvern News*, reported that 'several unburned fragments showed traces of a woman's handwriting and it was assumed that the suicide was due to love troubles.' Under the headline 'A Malvern Gentleman's Romance and Tragedy' another local

newspaper, the *Worcestershire Chronicle*, gave similar details, adding that Maclean had risked 'setting the hotel on fire while he was destroying his correspondence. A large mirror over the mantelpiece was cracked by the heat from the burning papers.' Quite how it was determined that the surviving handwriting was that of a woman is unclear, but if it had been, then the letters had most likely been written to Maclean by his older half-sister, Mary, to whom he was particularly close and who, his family believed, he had been desperately trying to meet before his death, but who was unavailable because she was about to give birth.

Maclean's letter to the coroner makes it seem very unlikely that its author had killed himself because of an ill-fated romance involving a woman. The young man's assertion that he had no hope of obtaining the one thing in the world that would make him happy was inexplicit. Housman, however, whose own emotional life had been blighted by his unreciprocated love for another man, certainly thought Maclean was expressing a pessimism that was common to many homosexual men whose affections were deemed unlawful and so had to be suppressed or kept secret. Maclean had also suggested that whatever the fallout from his suicide for other people, he believed this would be 'better than a long series of sorrows and disgraces.' The kind of sorrows and disgraces that he might have faced had recently been made very public in the Wilde trials, details of which had appeared in most newspapers. When Maclean wrote that he had 'absolutely ruined' his own life but had not 'morally injured – or "offended," as it is called in the Bible – any one else,' Housman recognised the reference. In the Gospel of St Matthew Christ tells his disciples that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven they should become like children and warns that 'whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.' It seems possible that this was a coded reference to Maclean's fear that he might live to 'offend' a fellow soldier younger than himself, the recruitment age at the time being sixteen.

When I began researching the story of Harry Maclean for my book *Housman Country* I had no idea that the person generally referred to as 'the Woolwich cadet' was, like me, brought up in Herefordshire. This undoubtedly added a personal element to my interest in him, but above all I wanted to rescue him from more or less anonymous obscurity. When I discovered that he had been buried in the churchyard at Cradley, I decided to find his grave. I was still writing my book in September 2015 when I went with a friend to Cradley, bringing a bunch of flowers we had picked from the garden of my mother, who had recently died. I had not reckoned on the churchyard at Cradley being so extensive, and it soon became apparent that it would be very hard indeed to find an individual grave. I thought of asking the vicar if he could help, but was told that he was away on holiday. We eventually admitted defeat and laid the flowers on the memorial to Harry's brothers and nephews as the next best thing to do.

Six years later, something reminded me of my failed quest and I took another look at Cradley church's website. I was delighted to find that this now included a plan of the churchyard with every grave identified. All I had to do was type in Maclean's full name and up came the location: a large grave on the north side of the church marked on the plan by an oblong. I was about to visit my sister in Herefordshire with my friend Naman Chaudhary, another great admirer of Housman, and so I decided to enlist their help in having another go at finding Maclean's grave. Even with the plan, it was quite hard to locate the grave since all the lettering on the pink granite slab had been completely covered by the surrounding turf in which long and unkempt grass was growing. All we could see on the slab was the large plain cross and it was clear that no one had visited the grave for many years. I kicked away some of the turf and gradually uncovered the word 'Maclean'. I kicked some more, but what we really needed were tools. A man was playing the organ in the church and so I asked him if he knew where I could find a spade or trowel. He told me apologetically there were some tools in a shed but he didn't know the combination of

the lock. In spite of the rain that was now falling, we took some broken slates and pieces of tile from the top of a drain and borrowed from the church porch a notice about parking attached to an iron pole with a spike on the end. With these crude implements we gradually managed to hack away at the turf to uncover the words incised along three edges of the gravestone: 'HENRY CLARKSON MACLEAN, DIED AUGUST 6TH 1895, AGED 18 YEARS / GRANT HIM THY PEACE / WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING'. I realised that there may have been a further inscription along the top edge of the slab, but the turf had proved impossible to remove and by now the rain was sheeting down, so we decided to leave our flowers and depart. It was 5 August 2021, the day before the 126th anniversary of Maclean's death.

On reading the inscription, I realised that unless the monumental mason had made a mistake Harry was only eighteen when he died, not nineteen as had been stated in the press – and indeed my book. Housman himself, appalled by Maclean's youth, had begun the second draft of the poem with the exclamation 'Nineteen!' In the online England and Wales Birth Index I found that Maclean's birth had been registered in Elham, a village some nine miles south of Canterbury, in October, November or December 1876, which means that he was indeed eighteen when he died. A subsequent search in the British Newspaper Archive brought up his name in a report in the *Reading Mercury* of 'Prize Day at Marlborough College,' published on 4 August 1894. Harry was listed amongst those who had won open places to R.M.A. Woolwich. Now that I knew he had been at Marlborough, I could look him up in the school's register, which gave me his actual date of birth, 11 October 1876. It also provided the information that the house he had been in was B1, that he had been a prefect, that his home address was Burton Court, and that he had left school at the end of the Christmas Term 1894. An email to the school's archivist brought further details of his time there. His academic record was rather erratic, in that he was sometimes ranked between 1st and 3rd in his class but at other times 11th out of 15 and once 21st out of a class of 26. He ended his school career with

distinction, however, winning three scholarships during his final year, including an Old Marlburian Exhibition for two years at Woolwich.

Finding out anything about Maclean's time at RMA Woolwich was more difficult. His name appeared in the Academy's register, which stated that he was admitted to the college in 1894 and 'left' in 1895, but enquiries to the Sandhurst Collection, where the archives of R.M.A Woolwich are kept, went unanswered. By this time I had also written to Mike Hames, who had written a piece in the *Cradley Enquirer* mentioning that a descendant of the Maclean family was going to attend the village's Remembrance Day service in 2018. I asked Mike whether he would forward a letter from me to this John Maclean, which he promptly did, adding that he would be happy to help in any other way. Some weeks later I got a reply from John Maclean, who turned out to be the General's great great grandson from his first marriage. A correspondence ensued and John Maclean was able to send me not only additional information but copies of two photographs of Harry, as well as one of The Halesend in the late 19th century.

It is unclear why General Maclean apparently failed to correct the statement in court that his son was nineteen rather than eighteen, a mistake repeated on the death certificate, but when Harry's death was announced in *The Times* on 13 August, his age was given correctly. The inquest's merciful verdict had at least meant that Harry could be given a decent burial in the graveyard at Cradley, where his father was a churchwarden. Until 1882 suicides could only be buried in churchyards at night and without a Christian service, but a parliamentary act that year allowed burial in daylight hours. Suicides were, however, often buried only on the north side of the church, a practice Housman refers to in describing the churchyard in 'Hughley Steeple' (*ASL* LXI):

> North, for a soon-told number,
> Chill graves the sexton delves,
> And steeple-shadowed slumber
> The slayers of themselves.

As is well known, Housman got several details wrong in this poem, the church at Hughley having no steeple and, as Laurence Housman discovered when he visited the place in 1896, those buried on the north side of the church were in fact 'respectable churchwardens and wives of Vicars, all in neatly tended graves.' At Cradley Harry Maclean's grave is indeed on the north side of the church, but so are a great many others, including, right beside it, that of Clementina Maxwell, a lifelong friend of Alice Elgar, wife of the composer, who died in 1902. It is presumably through Maxwell, who lived in Cradley, that Alice Elgar got to meet the Maclean family, and she visited Frances Maclean at The Halesend on several occasions. In June 1907 she wrote in her diary: 'Very touching going through Cradley & seeing the dear old spots – & a great choke thinking of dear At. Clem.'

So Harry Maclean went to his grave 'undishonoured,' as Housman put it, and his death was reported in the parish magazine, which expressed its heartfelt sympathy with his parents and siblings. His grave has now been properly tidied and cleaned by Mike Hames and his wife Julia, and the lettering on the memorial slab can now be read, the missing words along its top revealed as simply 'IN MEMORIAM.' One could say, however, that Maclean's true memorial is the one written by Housman, who would hardly have approved of the Christian message on the actual grave, taken from Psalm XXX. The final resting place of 'the Woolwich cadet' can now be found easily at Cradley, perhaps fulfilling Housman's prediction

> Now to your grave shall friend and stranger
> With ruth and some with envy come…

I would like to acknowledge Sandy Fraser's article on the Maclean War Memorial, written for the Cradley Branch of the Royal British Legion in 1998. I would also like to thank John Maclean, Mike and Julia Hames, Gráinne Lenehan at Marlborough College, Edward Behrens, Naman Chaudhary and Sue Nevill-Parker.

The biographers of A.E. Housman: a critical review

Colin Leach

In 1985 C.O. Brink wrote: "(Yet) writing about Housman continues to come from biographers, poets, literary critics and classical scholars." He was right, and there was much still to come. This survey covers those books which can properly be described as "biographies," whether full or, as in (e.g.) the cases of Grant Richards and Withers, only partial. Thus in a kind of *recusatio* I exclude works in which Housman makes only (relatively) brief appearances (e.g. R.W. Chambers) or where his life is secondary to a larger theme (e.g. P. Parker on *Housman Country*). Similarly ignored are Norman Marlow`s *A.E. Housman: Scholar and Poet* (actually, all about the poetry); Carol Efrati`s determination in *The Road of Danger, Guilt and Shame* to make the poetry entirely related to AEH`s homosexuality; John Bayley`s appraisal of his poetry; C. Ricks`s assemblage of critical essays; and detailed studies of his classical scholarship (especially Brink, and Butterfield and Stray (eds.)). Nor does the superlative work of Paul Naiditch (with whom I once spent a long and deeply engaging evening) call for separate appraisal here. There is much more, *sed haec hactenus;* the many *reasons* which have made Housman so frequent the subject of biographies, in addition to the story of a life divided between scholarship and poetry, will become clear in the course of this review. At the same time, it is salutary to recall the words of Hugh Lloyd-Jones: "Although it is good to have a general biography of Housman, it was not a particularly urgent need" (he was writing of R.P. Graves`s work). However, even the worst of the biographies noticed here has, surprisingly, something new to offer. It is only natural that biographers have tended to concentrate on the poetry (and its genesis) which would interest their readers, rather than the scholarship, which is difficult and in large part written in Latin. I also append a list of some books referred to but not discussed.

The omissions still leave us with biographies running into double figures. Housman died on 30 April, 1936 (inexplicably, Brink postdated his death to 16 October of that year), aged 77: first out of the starting gate was A.S.F. Gow, with his *A.E. Housman: A Sketch* (1936). Gow (1886-1978) was 27 years younger than Housman; he was a distinguished classical scholar and his notably dry nature and (on occasion) sarcastic tongue were traits which he shared with Housman, whose colleague he was at Trinity College, Cambridge. Like Housman, he was unmarried. Thus Gow gives an unvarnished account of AEH`s work and life, with few (but well chosen) anecdotes; and of course a clear account of Housman`s failure to be classified in his Final exams in 1881. This was not as surprising as might at first appear: the "Greats" course, consisting of Ancient History and Philosophy from Plato/Aristotle to the present, bore no relation to the Literature and Language work demanded by Classical Honour Moderations, which was far more to Housman`s taste and abilities than the course which followed. Housman may be assumed to have recognised this quickly, with the regrettable consequences which, as will be seen again, have so exercised biographers. It was the philosophy rather than the history side of the course which was responsible for his downfall. It is a matter of mild surprise that only one – Martin Blocksidge (see below) – of AEH`s biographers, appears to have taken the trouble to look at the Greats papers for which he actually sat: they would certainly be available in the Bodleian library. Perhaps the most interesting features of Gow`s biography are (a) the list of lectures which A.E.H. gave at Cambridge as Professor, and (b) the list of his writings, given both alphabetically by author and with an index of subjects. Of course this latter item has now been rendered largely superfluous by the three volumes of Diggle and Goodyear`s *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman* (1972). Characteristically, Housman deplored, or purported to deplore, the effort involved for his colleagues in creating these lists.

Next to come was Laurence Housman, AEH's long-lived younger brother, whose life was spent (sometimes rather precariously) on the fringes of the artistic and literary worlds. AEH held him in mildly

amused contempt, as one or two published anecdotes reveal – and one unpublished one, told to me by Hugh Last, who was present at the occasion in St John`s College (Oxon) in the 1930s. Breakfasting were AEH, Hugh Last and a guest. The last-named, after several abortive attempts to engage AEH in conversation, at last asked "Did you see the letter in today's *Times* about (such-and-such a topic)?" "Yes," said AEH, "I saw it was signed by my brother, and assumed it to be arrant nonsense." Laurence's *A.E.H.* appeared in 1937. The first part – *A Memoir* – is particularly strong on early family life, and emphasises AEH`s life-long friendship with a German lady, Sophie Becker, governess-companion to his godmother's children, and about 15 years his senior. She died only a few years before him, aged 87 (Laurence wrongly says 90). Laurence quotes extensive extracts from AEH`s early verse (hardly poetry), which do few favours to their author; he gives an account of how the title of *A Shropshire Lad* came about; and he quotes for the first (but by no means the last) time the well-known extract from T.E. Lawrence`s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in which he gives an introspective account of himself, and where AEH sees himself also. No less interestingly, he cites a lengthy passage from an article by Percy Withers, whom Housman frequently visited, in which Withers (*v*ide *infra*) gives a pretty sombre view of AEH`s personality, while praising his memory and precision of mind. And it is here that we read of Housman`s declining the Order of Merit (which Gilbert Murray accepted – as more recently did Martin West, a great classical scholar who also had found Greats not to his taste [he got a Second]**).** After the *Memoir*, much of the book is taken up with a selection of *Letters* (but we now have Archie Burnett`s virtually complete two volume collection – but more letters have subsequently appeared – itself following the much smaller collection edited by Henry Maas (1971)). This in turn is followed by the publication of 18 poems, including "*Who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?*" Again Archie Burnett subsequently published the complete poetry, including his comic verse, of which there had been an earlier partial and unsatisfactory compilation. Housman scholars will perhaps have welcomed the substantial extracts from the four Note-books (Laurence

improperly gave them cavalier treatment: “troubled” is Elizabeth Oakley`s word, and she justly adds that Laurence`s handling of his role as literary executor would cause “confusion and severe criticism”). Laurence also cites some variant versions and readings. The book closes with a list of dated poems and the (curiously accurate) Natal Horoscope of A.E. Housman, worked out by the philosophy Professor C.D. Broad a few years before his death. Laurence states his conviction that AEH was a born bachelor – partly to rebut “journalistic nonsense” concerning a “hidden romance.” At the time he could not have said more. Such interest as the book retains mainly lies in the lively description of AEH`s early years. For the differences which arose between Laurence and his sister Kate Symons, see Blocksidge`s article in *HSJ 42* referred to above. (Incidentally, Laurence postdates the death of Moses Jackson by two years.)

Twenty years passed before, in the less constrained atmosphere of 1957, G.L Watson`s *A.E.Housman: A Divided Life* appeared. Watson avers that the “material with which to construct a factual biography of so reluctant a subject is at best marginal and scanty” – a highly questionable assertion. It is the “cryptographic evidence of the poems” on which Watson will mainly “compose his likeness of the inner man.” No scholar (he seems not to understand what *Sabrinae Corolla* means and implies and “marginalia” is treated as a singular noun; and it is simply untrue that Housman’s failure in Finals had anything to do with the language and literature of Greece and Rome successfully studied in his first two years at Oxford), Watson claims that “the secret writhings of sexuality were laid bare as he read Propertius, while in the presence of (Moses) Jackson`s vigorous and magnetic youth the cold intimations of death began to dissolve.” (No word shall we find here or later of Housman`s actual work on Propertius, or his very public row with Postgate. Propertius in the end was to defeat Housman’s best endeavours). For Watson, Jackson played the same role in Housman`s life that Arthur Hallam had played, some 50 years earlier, in the life of Tennyson. Watson suggests that the poem “*Good night*; *ensured release,*” composed and published (in an Oxford magazine) in 1880/81,

displays all the evidence of a man "desperately in love," following which the failure in Greats was the "next step and minor (!) consequence." Then come the years of flat-sharing in London and a break up with Moses Jackson (but not, it seems, with his brother Adalbert). After some years in the Patent Office, Jackson, who married a widow, spent his life first as Principal of Sind College, Karachi, and then in Canada, farming in British Columbia. Housman from time to time made unsuccessful efforts to secure Jackson a Fellowship at UCL or a Headmastership in London. Watson emphasises the physical distance from Housman of the "quondam Oxford blue." No evidence is offered for this distinction: Jackson did not row for Oxford between 1887 and 1891 and cannot have won a Blue. Watson rather pointedly observes that he received no help from Laurence, and is aware of important sources such as Grant Richards and Percy Withers. He opens his book with a lengthy (but not especially interesting or relevant) genealogical introduction to the forebears of the Housman name, going back to the 16th century. He diligently chronicles the main (both scholarly and poetical) events of AEH`s life: but one is conscious that the real point of the book is to document what is known or can be inferred about Housman`s unrequited and lifelong love (there is no better word) for a man who was aware of and indifferent to it – except, perhaps, as an intermittent cause of embarrassment. The book now contains little of value (indeed, a later biographer took the view that Watson actively disliked Housman) and there is no point in listing such minor errors as I detected. A linguistic curiosity is that Watson more than once refers to Jackson's prowess at "racing" – presumably athletics? Jackson was a quarter-miler of some minor distinction. It is tempting to quote extracts from Watson`s evidence-free offerings on the mental processes involved in the Housman-Jackson "relationship" as the years proceeded, but space is limited and life is short.

Maud Hawkins *A.E. Housman: Man Behind a Mask*, like Watson an American, followed hard on Watson`s heels, but whereas, as noted, Watson had received no help from Laurence, Hawkins not only exchanged the "hundred or so letters (which) passed between

(Laurence) and me," but also spent three weeks with Laurence and Clemence at their house in Somerset. Thanks to *Victoria Regina*, Laurence was now wealthy – as AEH had acknowledged – but by 1951 he was 85 or 86 (and letters continued at least up to 1957), with a memory that could be, and almost certainly was, prone to error. This led critics, with justice, to treat Hawkins harshly and her book has played little part in subsequent commentary (but *vide infra* Graves). Inevitably, the main problem concerns AEH`s relations with Moses Jackson, with whom he shared a flat for a time in London when they were both working at the Patent Office. Adalbert, Jackson`s younger brother, then an undergraduate at UCL, also shared the flat. Hawkins says "we know now that he (Moses) had 'intimate relations' with Housman during this period." Presumably the source for this revelation – not posited by any other biographer – was Laurence. Hawkins continues, "Housman no doubt offered a sexual satisfaction which he (Jackson) could easily throw off for a normal one at marriage;" she backs up her belief of an unwanted declaration of love by AEH with the help of lines crossed out in a rough draft of *More Poems* XXXI, but surprisingly remains silent on the subject of Adalbert. A disquisition on homosexuality follows. The book in general is lively, though Hawkins frequently claims improbable glimpses into Housman`s mind: "to avoid a haunting desire for suicide, Housman kept himself at his task in the British Museum;" he "possibly never attempted relief for his tension within the walls of a prostitute`s den" (here she calls *ASL* XXI in evidence, but *Last Poems* XXI must have been meant). She later suggests that "to read the complete notes in one of his criticisms appalls (sic) the average student," while expressing surprise – unlikely to be widely shared – that he did not lecture (at Cambridge) "on his greatest research work, Manilius, nor upon his old love, Propertius." She also opines that AEH`s "valuable" paper on the *Application of Thought to Textual Criticism* was "especially helpful for teachers and would-be writers of criticism," thus confusing literary and textual criticism. There is much else in a similar vein: "his students in class were irked because no likeness to his poetry could be discovered in his lectures" (misinterpreting a remark made many years later by Sir Mortimer

Wheeler). It is unnecessary to labour the point: Hawkins is simply out of her depth – and not only here (what were the "boat races" which AEH had "usually attended" as an undergraduate? Where were the "campus political meetings" held which he described to his stepmother? In her favour, Hawkins does not ignore those neglected brothers, Robert and Basil, though she has little to say about them: both predeceased AEH: and for one, possibly highly relevant, citation from Laurence, see below, on Graves.

In 1979 there appeared what may be fairly termed the first full modern biography, *A.E. Housman*, *Scholar and Poet*, by Richard Percival Graves. On its appearance, the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford chided Graves for describing the Roman playwright Terence as a Greek dramatist (to be fair, he was described by Julius Caesar as a "cut-price Menander") [or "bargain basement"], and at once Graves's qualifications for writing about "scholarship" were undermined. Far more important was the discovery by Graves of a cryptic card in AEH's handwriting, which, suggested Graves, gave details of Housman`s sexual activities in Paris, with "dancers" and others. The interpretation has by no means been universally accepted (was Housman too old, at 73, for such behaviour?), but no better or more plausible theory has been advanced, and Paris offered favourable opportunities. For a different view, Vincent`s detailed exposition will be considered in its place: however, of possible relevance is a view communicated by letter to Hawkins from Laurence, that Housman regarded "the inextricable mix-up of love and lust as one of God`s most deplorable mistakes" (Hawkins, p. 89). Admittedly, any statement that depends on Hawkins plus Laurence may not be thought the most reliable of witnesses (a plausible guess on when AEH said this to Laurence would be on one of the holidays which the brothers shared in Housman`s final years). Unable to deal in detail with Housman as a scholar, Graves pays more attention to his poetry: however, as Hugh Lloyd-Jones pointed out, Graves's desire to attach biographical relevance to "every poem" is simply unjustified: Housman himself explicitly denied it. Other topics discussed by Graves include the influences on his poetry (notably

Heine), and his reading (heavily dependent, like the sources, on the work of Grant Richards). This is not a bad book, but it leaves many questions unanswered, especially on the subject of literary criticism; Housman denied that he had any ability in that field – yet his textual criticism demanded sensitivity to language of the highest order. Incidentally, Graves attributes the editorship of *Sabrinae Corolla* to Benjamin Hall Kennedy: actually, there were three editors ("tres viri floribus legendis"): Henry Holden, James Riddell, and Richard Dacre Archer-Hind, though it would not be surprising if Kennedy had become involved in one way or another.

Norman Page`s *A.E. Housman: A Critical Biography* was described (by a reviewer) on its publication in 1983, as "by far the best biography" so far published, and it remains a pleasure to read. There is much to be said for that summary, and Page spends far more time on AEH's life as a scholar, especially at Cambridge, than on his poetry, which gets only a chapter towards the end. He shows himself well-informed about what Housman was aiming to achieve as a scholar, but misses some relevant points: Housman`s arguments, as a youthful scholar, with Postgate did not show him at his best (Postgate would prove to be remarkably forgiving), and Page might have made more of the Lucan (1926), which cemented Housman`s reputation in Germany (even Wilamowitz admired him), and Housman`s rejoinder (in Latin) to the long review of the Lucan by Edouard Fraenkel would have been well worth quoting. And Page missed a trick by failing to cite Housman's near miraculous recovery of *Manilius* 1,423, even though its exposition would of necessity have called for no little detail; nor does he quote Giorgio Pasquali`s exclamation that when it came to textual emendation, Housman stood alone. Housman was familiar with scholarly German, but neither Page nor anyone else pauses to ask when and how he acquired familiarity with this language, essential for a scholar.
Here the slight and unpretentious – but not ignored by the diligent Efrati – *A.E. Housman* by Keith Jebb (1992) deserves to be mentioned. One of a series of books on the "Border poets" – there is a chapter on *Shropshire* – it lays especial emphasis on the poetry, following largely

familiar ground; however, a chapter entitled Sexuality shows sturdy good sense, and of course cautiously considers *that* card: but more noteworthy is Jebb`s admirable explication of what a scholar concerned about textual criticism actually has to do: see especially pages 117-120 , and the succinct words (also quoted by Christopher Ricks) from *The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism,*1922: "It is the science of discovering error in texts, and the art of removing it." Jebb concludes: "the more the poet was at pains to hide the biographical aspects of his work, the more I have been led … to say how central they are to the poems."

A.E. Housman: A Single Life , by Martin Blocksidge, was published in 2016, but does not appear to have received much, if anything, in the way of reviews – indeed, it has so far remained unnoticed even in the *Housman Society Journal*, in which, however, his valuable study of *A.E.Housman*`s *early biographers* appeared in Volume 42 (2016). This is distinctly a pity, since it is an enjoyable and thoroughgoing piece of work. Blocksidge's aim was to argue that there is no fundamental tension between the Housman the poet and Housman the scholar: thus "his career is presented very much as that of a working academic who also wrote poetry." No very great surprise here (in some respects there is similarity to Graves) and indeed other biographers have pursued broadly similar lines, if less explicitly and with differing emphases. Blocksidge is notably sensible about Housman`s failure in Greats: philosophy was responsible, and he alone gives examples of the questions (in the Moral Philosophy paper, presumably) which Housman was asked, and wholly failed to answer or discuss. In general, Blocksidge shows himself sensible and informed about AEH's work in scholarship. (We learn from more than one biographer that Jackson got a First in "Science," but nobody particularises about which area of this huge subject Jackson specialised in. His work in the Patent Office involved Electrical Specifications, which may (or may not) provide a clue.) He also gained a DSc. which, at least when I was at Oxford, was a noteworthy distinction. It is interesting to learn the difficult circumstances in which Moses Jackson met his future wife. We learn

that AEH's estate at death was valued at £7,923 (say, £400,000 in terms of 2022 retail prices) – no small sum, especially bearing in mind his repeated generosity to, among others, Grant Richards, the UK Treasury, and the Jackson family. Additionally, Blocksidge goes into considerable detail about Housman's putative sexual activities in Paris (pp.181-85). "It is possible," he concludes "that the rather sensationalistic scenario proposed by Graves and seconded by (Peter) Levi could be true; there is nothing in the existing evidence that can be used to disprove it." He, like others, goes on to point out that AEH was 73 at the time (1932), and was probably accompanied; however, he seems not to have noticed AEH's remark to Laurence quoted (from Hawkins) above.

Martin Blocksidge was perhaps unfortunate in that his biography, adequate though it was, preceded Edgar Vincent's full-scale *A.E.Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life* by only a couple of years. Since this admirable book has already been reviewed in the *Housman Society Journal* (2018), and has separately received a deserved accolade from David Butterfield, I shall confine my comments to a few more or less random remarks. The book is of substantial size, at least partly because of a certain diffuseness: see, for example, pp.131-143 for reflections on noted homosexuals and Venice, all leading up to the gondolier Andrea. There are other examples, some of them of a kind earlier criticised by Norman Page, for irrelevance to the theme at hand. Vincent cannot be criticised for scantiness of information: by contrast, let me commend the crisp, helpful and accurate way in which Vincent introduces AEH's *Manilius* 1 (pp. 122-4). Vincent appears to be not censorious exactly, but a little worried by Housman's motives in writing *Praefanda*. For me, it is nothing more or less than a work of scholarly explication. Much later, J.N. Adams's *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* did not need the concealment of Latin. Vincent might have given us a little more of A.C. Benson's sometimes disobliging comments on AEH in his *Diary* (I noted that one index citation relating to Benson is incorrect, and the *Diary* is not included in the bibliography). One point made by Vincent – and not, I think, by anyone else – is what he calls, with justice, the "paucity of Housman's aesthetic life," in regard to matters of classical

music or art (in both these areas, AEH's taste was anything but elevated; he preferred music hall to Mozart, and Beerbohm cartoons to Botticelli). Vincent takes an admirably thorough look at that cryptic card already twice mentioned here: suffice it to say that, on a number of plausible grounds, he comes down on the side opposed to Graves, Blocksidge and Levi. I was surprised, however, to see him giving cautious credence to a highly speculative interpretation by the distinguished classical scholar D.R. Shackleton Bailey. Although Vincent provides a photograph of Moses Jackson, it is one which makes him indistinguishable from many another undergraduate of his time: a far better one, which displays a distinctly good looking young man, is in fact on view via the internet, sv. Moses John Jackson. In summary, it is hard to see why any other biography of AEH will be needed for a very long time.

It remains to consider three "partial" biographies: those of Percy Withers, Grant Richards and Peter Waine. With Dr. Percy Withers (*A Buried Life,* 1940) we see AEH *en pantoufles,* or as nearly so as is possible. Withers (1867-1945) was a man with a "rare talent for friendship," and had many friends in the literary world. Housman got on well with the family, but Withers's fundamental misreading of Housman's nature becomes clear in the little anecdote when "Housman, in the most intimate talk we ever had, told me of a lady recently dead, and in the telling his voice faltered and a look of unutterable sadness suffused his face" – which he believed helped to confirm his wife`s remark (uttered seventeen years earlier!) that "That man has had a tragic love affair." It is just possible that Housman was thinking of Sophie Becker, a long-standing friend who had been governess of the daughters of AEH's godmother, who died aged 87 in 1931. It is quite clear from Withers's *Personal Recollections* that he was an exceptionally nice man. He was also a doctor and a (?devout) Roman Catholic, and one may suspect that at least part of the reason for his getting along so easily with Housman, whom he met in Cambridge in 1917, is that he – and his wife – posed no threat, academic, social, collegiate (Wittgenstein had rooms on the same staircase), imaginary or other to

Housman. Lady Rothenstein, whose relationship with AEH is well brought out by Vincent, was another such. Withers and Housman also shared an interest in, and appreciation of, church architecture. This slender book brings out a pleasant, almost easy-going side of AEH, of which his colleagues in Cambridge may well have been largely unaware: though waspishness did break in on one occasion – and was speedily apologised for.

Grant Richards (*Housman*, 1897 -1936), son and nephew of Oxford dons, one of whom had been an examiner for AEH in Greats in 1881, was a "scamp." Thirteen years younger than Housman, he was far from prudent in financial matters, and even, in an amusing reverse of the normal practice, begged Housman for "loans" which were never repaid; he also withheld – by accident? – royalties due to AEH from the USA. His publishing firm twice went bankrupt – a misfortune which appears to have had no effect on a vigorous social life. Vincent tells of a beach holiday in 1916 in Cornwall with "his new wife Maria, five children, an aunt, a nurse and maids." Tragically, his eldest son was killed by the collapse of a sand cave: one might wish that Housman`s letter of condolence had shown a greater depth of sympathy. The book – which makes lively reading – is noteworthy not only for the accounts of publishing mishaps in *Manilius* and *A Shropshire Lad*, and for the publication of *Last Poems*, but for the extended gastronomic tours in France which the pair took: the recipe for Barbue Housman can be found in Appendix VII, on p.445. As for the protracted (and highly favourable, even naïve), analysis of Housman's character which Richards offers in chapter XXXIV, readers must make up their own minds. O.L. Richmond's account of AEH as a classical scholar (Appendix X) is still worth reading, and Appendix III (*Reminiscences in Housman*'s *Poetry*, by Professor G.B.A. Fletcher) is not without interest.

Peter Waine`s *A.E. Housman: Finding a Path to Flourish* (2021) – the author is Chairman of the Housman Society, and a self-confessed admirer of the poetry – cannot properly be called either a biography or

a partial biography: rather, this book consists of a series of thematic "riffs" – nineteen in all – on aspects of Housman's life and character. They in turn are followed by over 100 pages of Selected Poems (the publisher`s "blurb" calls *A Shropshire Lad* a poem). Although there is an admirable review of Waine in *HSJ* 2021, its list of many of the errors which mar the book is still incomplete – Moses Jackson died in 1923, not 1922, the name of Oxford's first Professor of Latin has three "n"s, not four, and Housman was not in his 63rd year, as here, when he made that notorious (the "card", not "cards", as here) visit to Paris, but 10 years older: these slips in matters of detail, while not important individually, combine to create an unfortunate impression. The "riffs" include *Poems Put To Music* (AEH did not at all welcome Vaughan Williams's abbreviation of a poem); and chapters on *Holiday and Travel* and *Food and Drink* remind us that Housman, austere though he must have seemed to most, was also fully capable of enjoying himself: *dulce est desipere in loco*! However, this is not a book which sets out to offer any revelations or new thinking – at least until the long and contentious chapter 17, *Housman as Autistic.* This writer strongly suspects that this chapter is the real reason why Waine decided to write the book (and may explain why so many earlier errors were allowed to remain). "Many of Housman's behavioural patterns place him on the autism spectrum," says Waine, who cites deficits in social communication and social interaction, and concludes that the *combining* of so many of the traits associated with autism help to place him on the autistic spectrum. However, other explanations are not only possible, but more likely when the overall picture – including the real and severe traumata of AEH's early life – is taken into consideration. Waine seems, surprisingly, not to know Blocksidge's biography, though he cites the article by him in *HSJ* 2016.

A well-known problem for biographers of mathematicians is that demonstrations of their subjects` work would almost certainly be incomprehensible to the lay (wo)man: so it has proved with A.E. Housman: none of the biographers considered here (even Gow or Page) has attempted to demonstrate in print just what the qualities were

displayed that justly led him to the pinnacle of Latin scholarship that he attained. They cannot be blamed – nor did they have access to Butterfield and Stray's collection of articles on the subject (*sv supra)* in which, for example, S.P. Oakley offers a palmary study on Housman's *Lucan,* as well as on Fraenkel's review of it – and Housman's unforgettable reply to Fraenkel [who indeed could forget it?]**.** A similar caution appears to have overtaken biographers in their reluctance to quote from AEH's caustic reviews from which certain people, as AEH observed, may have derived "a low enjoyment." Your reviewer commends what Housman wrote about Elias Stoeber in his *Manilius* 1*,* p. xix, for a fine example of his prose style. No such caution, however, attends the biographers' (notably Graves and Blocksidge) willingness to identify AEH's poems with episodes in his life. Almost all the biographies discussed here have something to offer, except perhaps Watson; even Hawkins offers one "nugget" (not picked up by any of the others). All the (full) biographers naturally seized upon "the great and real troubles of my early manhood," and I do not wish to single any one of them out. Vincent and Blocksidge are notably sensible about the failure in Greats: whether it coincided with or speedily followed realisation that Jackson could not reciprocate his own feelings, who can tell? (That Housman's feelings were lifelong is demonstrated all too clearly in the embarrassing final letter which he sent to Jackson in January 1923: it is given by Vincent in full.) Suppose that Housman had been no more than a superb classical scholar: then he might have interested at least one biographer – for example, E.R. Dodds, and Richard Jebb; Jane Harrison (three) and Gilbert Murray have both had more than one: or if he had been no more than a "major minor" poet, again a biography would not have been out of the question (there are two of Wilfred Owen, for example); it was the contrasting and heady mix of scholar, poet, unrequited lover and reclusive personality that has combined to lead so many authors to commit their thoughts about AEH to paper – and persuaded so many publishers to offer the results to the reading public.

In the course of this extended *tour d`horizon*, I have intermittently come across (usually trivial) disagreements between one biographer and another, but have only rarely felt a need to comment (thus Hawkins calls AEH's landlady "Mrs Trim" – but a later biographer points out that her actual name was Hunter). On one subject I feel competent to have an individual view: unlike any of the biographers, I read for Classical Honour Moderations and Greats at Oxford, and can vouch for the shock at the abrupt "disconnect" between the first and the second parts of the course. Even so, Housman's failure in Greats was assuredly not one of the intellect. It has also been instructive to learn how few of those who have dared to write about Housman really understood, as I have observed above, what his work as a scholar actually entailed, and why that work remains valuable. A last word: even after reading these biographies again, I still do not know whether AEH succeeded in persuading Gilbert Murray to accompany him to a music hall; and, on a purely personal note, if I may be forgiven, I mention that, at my first tutorial at Oxford, I was given AEH's elegiacs for Moses Jackson to translate *viva voce*. My tutor, who venerated Housman, then asked me who I thought was the author of the lines: I said that I had no idea, but the lines did not seem to be classical. That was my introduction to Housman as scholar.

Colin Leach

Some books referred to, directly or indirectly, but not discussed:.

Adams, J.N, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary,* 1990
Bayley, John, *Housman*`s *Poems*, 1992
Benson, C.A, *Diary,* 1926
Birch, J. R, *Unkind to Unicorns*, 1995
Brink, C.O , *English* C*lassical Scholarship,* 1995
Burnett, A, *The Poems* of *A.E. Housman,* 1997; *The Letters of A.E.Housman* (2 vols), 2007
Butterfield, D. and Stray, C. eds, *A.E Housman: Classical Scholar*, 2009
Chambers, R.W., *Man*`s *Unconquerable Mind*, 1939

Diggle, J, and Goodyear, F.R.D., *The Classical Papers of A.E.Housman,* (3 vols), 1972
Efrati. C., *The Road of Danger, Guilt and Shame*, 2002
Hibberd, D, *Wilfred Owen*, 2003
Jebb, Keith, *A.E. Housman*, 1992
Lawrence, T.E., *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1926
Maas, H., *The Letters of A. E. Housman*, 1971
Marlow, N., *A.E. Housman: Scholar and Poet*, 1958
Oakley, Elizabeth, *Inseparable Siblings*, 2009
Parker, Peter, *Housman* C*ountry*, 2016
Ricks, C, *A.E Housman: Collected Poems and Selected Prose,* 1988
Stewart, J., *Jane Ellen Harrison: A Portrait from Letters.* 1959
Stray, C, and others: *Rediscovering E. R. Dodds,* 2019
Stray, C (ed), *Sophocles Jebb: A Life in Letters,* 2013
Symons, K.(ed), *Alfred Edward Housman Recollections,*1936
Sabrinae Corolla, (Fourth edition), 1890
West, E., *Gilbert Murray, A Life,* 1984

(For a more comprehensive bibliography of works relating to Housman., see Edgar Vincent, 2018)

[Housman was a member of the *Arcades*, a dining club comprising about 20 College Fellows from Oxford and Cambridge, & dining in Colleges, in alternate terms, in the two universities: some 50 years later I too joined that Club, and very agreeable it was.]

"Housman as Autistic"

A Response by Max Hunt

Those encouraged by Gregory Leadbetter's review in last year's *Housman Society Journal* to pick up Peter Waine's *A.E. Housman: Finding a Path to Flourish* will have reflected on the central contention that A.E. Housman is best understood in the light of a retrospective diagnosis of Autism. Leaving aside the current questionable enthusiasm to "medicalise" human behaviour traits, and taking up Waine's suggestion at the end of his contentious chapter that the issue would repay further research, I am moved to offer a counter view. Indeed, I would suggest that he tries to build a case (or propose a theory) with rather selective examples and quotations from available evidence.

As one with some professional background in the provision of services for students with special educational needs, the very phrase "Housman as Autistic," used to head a chapter, worries me. The Autism Spectrum is a difficult construct. I will suggest that Waine attaches a simplistic label to a wide range of behaviours and, in selecting his evidence, runs the risk of ignoring some strong contrary indicators to be found in contemporary accounts and expounded in various of the well-known biographies.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are usually diagnosed in infancy and are revealed in childhood behaviour. Typical indicators, as Waine suggests, are difficulties in communication and social interaction with other children. It is hard to find anything in the biographies of Housman that describes other than a normal middle-class Victorian childhood (at least up to the time of his mother's death). Graves tells of Alfred's enjoyment in passing on what he had learned to others "for which he had a gift even as a small child."[1] And, quoting his sister Kate, "Alfred

[1] R.P. Graves *A.E.Housman The Scholar-Poet,* 1979, p.8

had a way of making things he did amusing as well as interesting."[2] These happy family interactions were paralleled by his apparent ease with the Wise family during visits to Woodchester where Sophie Becker "drew Alfred into their games and conversations and their rambles through the surrounding countryside."[3] Dr. Blore, his first headmaster at Bromsgrove School, described a successful pupil -- "a determined personality, able to take his own way, and yet to avoid troubles."[4]

Moving on to Housman's time in Oxford, his friend Pollard wrote that "he was quietly happy and was generally recognised in the College as exceptionally able."[5] Waine suggests that his failure in Finals might have been because he was disoriented on entering the unusual environment of the examination room, but this had clearly not been a problem two years previously when his papers earned him his First in Mods. Returning to Bromsgrove after his failure, his old headmaster Herbert Millington offered him a part-time teaching post. Engaging with an established class of teenage boys would, I suggest (contrary to Waine's unusual notion that some people with autism positively "choose teaching ") have been almost impossible for a young man with any significant level of ASD. Yet Millington described him as "a thorough and sympathetic teacher, warmly interested in his work and his pupils."[6] At the end of this 'gap year' Housman moved to London to join the Patent Office. Again, from sources quoted by Peter Parker, he seems to have had little difficulty in striking up new relationships. According to W.H. Eyre, a friend of AEH's work colleague John Maycock, Housman was "a most delightful companion" when the three walked together in the Surrey countryside, regaling them with "many

[2] K. Symons *Memories of A,E, Housman*, the Edwardian, Vol. 17, 1936
[3] R.P. Graves *The Scholar-Poet,* p.14
[4] R.P. Graves Ibid. p.22
[5] K. Symons et al. *A.E.Housman: Recollections* (Bromsgrove) 1936
[6] Herbert Millington *A.E.Housman: Testimonials* 1892 C.U.P.

little anecdotes, which were very amusing, & indeed had a most delightful sense of humour."[7]

In Housman's later years as a leading academic Waine writes of "difficulties with the unwritten rules of social interaction" and seeks to build an argument around his "lack of interface with undergraduates." I have to say that in mid-1960s Oxford one still encountered dons whose lecturing style was just as formal and dry as Housman's. Enoch Powell is held up as an example of a student whose enthusiasm was ignored, yet Powell himself held Housman in high regard and treasured correspondence in which the revered Professor had acknowledged the perceptiveness of a particular interpretation which he had offered. And what of the evidence provided by the recently discovered letters written to William Semple, whose PhD Housman was supervising in the 1920s? These tell, surely, of friendly and helpful engagement with a young student whom he went on to encourage through the latter's early academic career right up to the time of his own death in 1936. As Christopher Stray has suggested, Housman emerges from the correspondence as "a conscientious, thoughtful and supportive supervisor."[8] And what about the many references to AEH as a "bon-viveur" and "a witty and compelling after-dinner speaker."

Waine would not, of course, have had access to the most recently discovered personal letters written by Housman to a former student from his time at London University. Annette Meakin attended his Latin class at UCL from 1897 to 1900. The reference Housman wrote for her in March 1900, already printed in Burnett (Vol. I, p.118), indicates a willingness to recognise and encourage the talent of women students (contrary to frequent assumptions about his supposed misogyny). The letters spanning the period 1926 to 1935 take us much further. In this "epistolary relationship," as Chris Stray has described it,[9] we are shown a much-respected academic offering friendly and constructive

[7] Letter to Gow, n.d. Trinity College, Add MS.

[8] C. Stray A.E. *Housman and W.H. Semple*, HSJ Vol. 46, p.9

[9] C. Stray *Housman and Annette Meakin,* HSJ Vol. 47, p.30

comments to a long-term correspondent anxious to have his views on her own attempts at verse composition. Housman's sensitive blend of praise and criticism and the choice of closing words like "So you must forgive me for not approving," surely place him at some remove from the autism spectrum. This was not a man lacking the sensitivity to navigate the nuances of personal relationships.

There are parts of Waine's chapter 17, one has to say, where autism is inferred from behaviours which could equally well be interpreted in other ways. Housman's life work on Manilius is described as "an obsession" and therefore evidence of autism. I seem to recall a previous editor of this Journal mapping out a career largely devoted to the study of a single Latin author – it is what these academics do! And, contrary to Waine's assertion, I suggest it was not the behaviour of an autistic to take a commercial flight to Paris in 1920 when flying was in its infancy. This would have been quite outside Housman's normal routine and comfort zone. A similarly contentious inference is drawn from Housman's enthusiasm for continental motor tours in the 1920s; yet Rudyard Kipling was touring France with Claude Johnson in a Rolls Royce ten years earlier[10] and no-one has attributed autistic tendencies to Kipling; he simply enjoyed (and could afford) continental travel. With further strained interpretation, autism is read into AEH's negative reaction when Percy Withers and his wife played some Vaughan Williams song settings for him. But Housman was known to be less than enthusiastic about attempts to set his poems (and, dare I say, there are many devotees of his verse within the Society today who actually find the music a distraction).

I suggest then that Peter Waine is here flying a rather fragile kite. Housman no doubt displayed some behaviours which are seen in Autism Spectrum Disorders being, as the author says, "honest, open and forthright in his views." But these behaviours could equally be explained by personality traits with quite different origins. The trauma

[10] J. Walker *Kipling's Cars,* Kipling Society Website, 2022

of his mother's death on his 12th birthday while he had been sent away to Woodchester; his brutal circumcision at age 14; his agonising over loss of faith; his gradual awareness of his sexual difference in an unforgiving age; the sense of intellectual superiority inculcated by his grammar school suddenly challenged when he arrived in Oxford to encounter young men apparently more confident and talented than himself; the humiliation of his failure in Finals; the hopelessness of his infatuation for Moses Jackson. All these surely help explain the complex personality that was A.E. Housman: the Kennedy Professor of Latin who had little time for small talk and did not suffer fools gladly, and the senior academic wrapped up in his life's work.

All these circumstances and behaviours no doubt help us to understand the man who, we must remember, died more than eighty-five years ago. But they do not lead this reader at least to the bold confidence in a quasi-medical diagnosis offered by Peter Waine. And is our appreciation of Housman's poetry materially enhanced by applying clinical concepts conceived long after his death?

’Fred and Laurence visit Broadway

Mary Anderson de Navarro
(Linda Hart introduces a reprint from the archives.)++

I have been reading old issues of our *Journal* and discovering some gems that are worth reprinting. Who knew, for example, that AEH and the famous Edwardian actress Mary Anderson bonded over bottles of Tokay. All will be revealed in the article below, which appeared in our 1990 *Journal* under the title ‘A.E. Housman.’

Mary Anderson was born in California in 1859. While still in her teens she performed as Shakespeare’s Juliet and Lady Macbeth. For a dozen years she was on stage in New York and toured throughout America, before coming to London and appearing in a very successful production of *The Winter’s Tale*. She retired early, perhaps due to stress from overwork, and in 1890 married an American, Antonio Fernando de Navarro (1860-1932), who was a barrister in London. They purchased Court Farm in Broadway, Worcestershire in 1895. She soon became friendly with several American artists living in Broadway, including the landscape painter and garden designer Alfred Parsons RA (1847-1920). Together they developed the extensive garden, which included land from a farm next door, and by 1905 it was considered to be the best preserved Edwardian garden in England.

According to Dr Colin Houghton, an expert on Broadway who spent many decades living there as the local GP, “In the 20th century [Court Farm] was the most noteworthy house in the village. Through its doors have passed kings and queens, prime ministers, musicians, and many well-known members of the literary world.” A.E. Housman and Laurence Housman were two members of that literary world who spent time at Court Farm, as Mary Anderson de Navarro recalled in her 1936 autobiography, titled *A Few More Memories*.

Linda Hart

Once, on a short visit to the Burkitts in Cambridge, I was asked by my thoughtful hosts if there was anyone I especially wished to meet. I replied I would very much like to meet Professor A.E. Housman whose poetry I had long admired. Despite the very short notice, Housman accepted the invitation to lunch. It was a bright winter's day and though snow lay newly fallen upon the ground, he arrived on foot.

As he entered the room, the loose gait of his otherwise trim, spare figure contrasted strangely with the rigid carriage of his head. At first sight there was something forbidding, almost disdainful, in his expression – enhanced perhaps by the darkness of his level brows and the slight downward droop. of his evenly-trimmed, grey moustache; then, with disarming swiftness, this look of severity resolved itself into a most taking smile. A man of subtle contrasts.

He was introduced to the other guests, lastly to my son, a Fellow of Trinity then but of few months standing. "I observe," said Housman as they shook hands, "that the younger Fellows of Trinity pay scant attention to their elders." The truth was that our boy's veneration for Housman had withheld him from introducing himself, and the older man, with characteristic reserve, had not made the first step. [My son] Toty murmured some incoherent excuse; whereat they both laughed, and Housman's laughter was musical and silvery.

I had been warned that in speaking to him I was not to refer to his poetry, Shropshire or to Bredon Hill (which is partly visible from my bedroom window at Broadway!). He sat on my right at lunch, in utter silence, toying with his bread. Believing silence at table to be inconducive to good digestion, I addressed him with artless guile:

"I motored up yesterday from a picturesque little village you have probably never heard of."

"Oh? "

“Yes, Broadway, in Worcestershire.”

“I know it well.”

“Indeed? Then you know the Cotswold country.”

“I know it intimately.”

“... and the lovely view from our hills?”

At this juncture he gave me a strange and searching look in which were mingled suspicion and relief. From that moment he talked easily and well.

His silence was a byword among his acquaintances. Sir James Barrie told me how he and Housman met as guests when Barrie was staying at Jesus College, Cambridge. Throughout hall they sat by each other and neither of them uttered.

“When dinner was over,” said Barrie, “I was dying to ask him up to my rooms for a smoke and a chat – but I couldn’t. So I sat down and wrote him a letter:

DEAR PROFESSOR HOUSEMAN,
You must have found me very incommunicative in hall tonight. But I am a strangely silent man.
Yours sincerely,
J.M. BARRIE

The reply came by return of post:

DEAR SIR JAMES,
You must have found me very incommunicative in hall the other night: I, too, am a strangely silent man.

Yours sincerely,
A. E. HOUSMAN.
By the way, you spell my name wrong.

Housman, like Tennyson, many people found alarming. I think this was largely due to their being shy men. For my own part I can truly say that I found both of them human, engrossing. Each of them in their different ways, though without conscious effort, exercised a fascination over me. Pretentiousness and loose thinking may have drawn stinging rebukes from his pen, but I never heard Housman say an unkind word – even about people who had the reputation for being tiresome.

Two years ago he and his brother Laurence proposed themselves to lunch. I was alone at the time. They were motoring through our district that summer and visiting some of their relatives. Laurence Housman I had known for many years; in vivacity and ease of manner he is strangely different to A. E.

Knowing what a connoisseur of good fare the professor was, I did my best to procure him what he relished. The luncheon passed most pleasantly. With the dessert were served a bottle of old Imperial Tokay and a remarkable liqueur, made from a Huguenot recipe, and only to be procured at one place in the IsIe of Thanet. This I recommended to the professor.

“I have a great liking,” he replied, “for old Tokay. I have some in my cellar at Cambridge. But I will try the other, since you recommend it.” He poured it out, held his glass to the light, sniffed it long and critically, tasted it and then, after a considerable pause, exclaimed: “The most distinguished liqueur I have tasted in a long while!” I could not have felt prouder if I had invented and made it myself and, as a token. of my appreciation I offered him the unopened bottle of Tokay!

After lunch I showed them the house and then took then into the garden. It was a fine summer’s afternoon. A.E.’s love and knowledge of flowers

were extraordinary, even in a Poet. But time began to press and his brother: called out, " 'Fred, we must be going." He paid no attention. " 'Fred, if we don't go, we'll be late." And as he went off to see about the car, the professor turned to me and said: "I am being hurried away; and I would like to stay here for hours."

As they issued forth to the car, A.E. carrying his bottle of Tokay with an air of sacerdotal reverence, I exclaimed: "A lonely woman. Two gallants leaving her house – and one armed with a bottle of amber Hungarian fluid. It looks odd!" They left laughing.

I have since learned that Laurence Housman considers that his brother dealt him a cruel blow that day by taking my advice and drinking the liqueur from Thanet. Had he not done so, Laurence Housman, who had always longed to taste Tokay, might have gratified his life's ambition. As it was, A.E. bore off the unopened bottle to his Cambridge cellar.

The last time I saw him was in the autumn of 1935 – again lunching at the Burkitts. He was looking very ill and shrunken. I sat by him at table and he told us of the plays he, Laurence and their sister had given as children. We spoke of Dickens, and he told me that of the novels the one he admired most was *Great Expectations*. I said I was rereading *Little Dorrit*. As a whole it was not one of his favourites, but he had marked all the parts in which Flora Finching appears. He considered her to be one of the two best women characters created by Dickens.

On returning from what proved to be the last of his holidays abroad he had cut his head in a motor accident in Paris. This necessitated his wearing a cap – a cap of black velvet that covered most of his head – which made him look like some old Venetian doge. Despite his declining health ("Oh, going downhilI, thank you," was his answer to my enquiries) his mind and spirits seemed unimpaired.

During the early months of 1936 his health seemed to be slightly improving. He was giving lectures only a week before the end, which

came peacefully on April 30th – a day which gives an added poignancy to his lines:

> The sunless tale of sorrow
> Is all unrolled in vain:
> May comes to-morrow
> And Ludlow fair again.
>
> [*Last Poems* XXXIV]

OBITUARY

Paul Naiditch

Housman scholar Paul Naiditch died on 12 March 2022 at the age of 73, after a struggle for some years with diabetes and Parkinson's Disease. Though readers of the *HSJ* will know him from his work on Housman, his professional career went far beyond that specialization. He held degrees in Classics and Library Science, and for a time (1982–7) worked for the Los Angeles rare bookselling firm of Zeitlin & Ver Brugge. (Jake Zeitlin, himself a scholarly man, held him in the highest esteem.) Paul's subsequent career centred in the libraries of the University of California at Los Angeles. He was Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Department of Special Collections, Publications Editor for the department, and Classics Bibliographer for the library's general collections. In Special Collections he edited the catalogue of the department's Aldine collection, which supplemented publications by Aldus Manutius with non-Aldine pre-1600 Italian imprints, and he oversaw the department's Occasional Paper publications. His deep knowledge of classical studies and his bibliographical acumen resulted in his catalogue, published in 2011, of the library of Richard Porson (1759–1808), Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge. It is a formidable achievement: Porson's library had been dispersed around the time of his death, and tracing its contents meant archival research in numerous libraries in Cambridge and London, and consulting auction catalogues and directories.

I first met Paul in 1985 when I had begun work on my Oxford edition of *The Poems of A. E. Housman* (1997). I had corresponded with him beforehand, and his stiffly formal manner in his letters, which was to persist, had led me to expect a silver-haired somewhat senatorial presence. He was about my own age and was wearing an anorak and carrying a plastic bag full of books from Blackwell's in Oxford. He spoke as formally as he had written, but there was a kindliness about

him that was manifested over some 25 years in the invaluable help he provided when I was preparing editions of Housman's poems and letters.

In July 1985 I visited the Seymour Adelman collection of Housman manuscripts and books at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. I had the good sense to visit Paul in Los Angeles beforehand to discuss that archive and others. The collection had not been catalogued by the librarians: Adelman had died in the spring of that year, and everything was in cardboard boxes. However, Paul had persuaded Adelman to let him catalogue it (he wanted to know what the collection contained), and he handed me a printout of his index cards. It was indispensable: for instance, Adelman had pages from Housman's fourth notebook bearing poems published posthumously in inaccurate texts by Laurence Housman, as well as other poetry manuscripts, letters, and volumes from Housman's library with his markings in them. When I was editing Housman's letters I was invited to Los Angeles and set up in the garage of the family home with a desk and chair and filing cabinets that contained Xeroxes of Housman letters. Letters tend to be widely dispersed, and it takes a long time to travel to see them or to acquire copies: Paul's generosity saved years of work.

His scholarship on Housman may at first seem narrow: *A. E. Housman at University College: The Election of 1892* (1988) and two collections of articles with the unglamorous titles *Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E. Housman* (1995) and *Additional Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E. Housman* (2005). Paul was interested in biography and scholarship, and only incidentally in the poetry as poetry. Within its scope, the scholarship is always impressive in its penetration, at times breathtaking. It is of the no-stone-unturned type. In the volume on Housman's election to the Chair of Latin at UCL, the testimonials and their authors, the rival applicants for the chair, and Housman's life and duties at UCL are all treated comprehensively. The supporting footnotes are astonishing in their range of reference. The contents of another two volumes of collected articles cover a very wide range, some of them of

comparatively slight interest: ‘A. E. Housman’s “Prize Books”’, ‘Housman’s Landlady’, ‘Housman and Music’, ‘A. E. Housman’s British Museum Reader’s Ticket’. But they are always definitive, as are truly valuable pieces such as ‘A Chronological Analysis of Housman’s Notebook A’, ‘Notes on the Life of M. J. Jackson’, ‘Biography and Method: the Marginalia of A. E. Housman’. There is everywhere a sense of the work not needing to be done again.

Like Housman, Paul was unsparing of himself and, in print, unsparing of others. His review of Richard Perceval Graves’s 1979 biography of Housman is particularly so: ‘The author has generally failed to conduct research in a systematic fashion . . . The author does not know the printed writings directly relevant to his subject . . . The author does not know how to present evidence . . . The author is unusually inaccurate . . . Mr Graves is no logician’, and so on. But the supporting evidence for such claims is scrupulously presented.

A lively sense of Paul Naiditch can be obtained from his article ‘A. E. Housman in Paris’. In the Higham Collection of Housman at St John’s College Oxford, Richard Graves had come across a card in Housman’s handwriting. It listed days of the week, numerals ranging from 0 to 9, and nouns such as ‘Boxeur’, ‘Marin’, and ‘Danseur’. To the side is written ‘10 in 15 days’. Graves interpreted the numerals as prices and the names as those of prostitutes. Paul considers the possibilities: prices (in pounds and francs), scores for services rendered, bordellos, room numbers, times of day . . . and cogently dismisses all of them. He concludes: ‘But an explanation, if it is rightly to command assent, must perfectly combine all of the elements in the “document”, not merely some or most of them; and the argumentation ought to be logical and sensible and fair.’ There is humour too: ‘Housman must seem remarkably appreciative or generous to have awarded no fewer than six 9’s or 10’s, with only four 3’s.’ Nothing more vividly brings to mind this scholarly, sane, and kind man.

Archie Burnett

Review

Queer Kinship after Wilde: Transnational Decadence and the Family, by Kristin Mahoney

Published by Cambridge University Press at £75.00.

Kristin Mahoney's new book is a wide-ranging survey of unusual social and domestic arrangements amongst the literary and cultural elite of the early 20th century. Her subjects include Wilde and his son, Vyvian; Compton and Faith Mackenzie; Harold Acton and the aesthetes; Eric Gill and his sisters; and Laurence and Clemence Housman. Her work is based on a multiplicity of letters, diaries and photographs, all meticulously referenced and footnoted. In particular, she draws our attention to a remarkable photograph album, later entitled 'Extraordinary Women,' depicting the social gatherings of the glitterati on Capri around 1920. The original album is in the Library of the Centro Caprense Ignazio Cerio, but Ms Mahoney has relied on a copy in the Norman Douglas Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. This may explain the variable quality and small formatting of the reproductions in her book, which might otherwise have given the typically-modern C.U.P. volume greater appeal. The reader soon gets used to the words 'decadents' and 'dissidents' being used to describe members of communities with fewer restraints than normal on their sexual activities. She suggests that these individuals were in Capri for the sexual freedom it offered, rather than for the commendably low cost of living, which certainly attracted impecunious writers like Francis Brett Young.

The chapter on Laurence and Clemence Housman extends to 35 pages, chronicling their upbringing at Perry Hall, their training at art colleges in Bromsgrove and London, and their shared adult lives in London, the New Forest and, latterly, at Street in Somerset. This is ground well covered by Elizabeth Oakley in her *Inseparable Siblings, a Portrait of Clemence and Laurence Housman*, 2009. Ms Mahoney points out, however, that their devotion to each other was far beyond the norms of

brother and sister relationships and that they co-operated closely on literary and artistic projects as well as on political campaigns such as women's suffrage and international peace. She backs this up with extensive quotation from their correspondence where brother and sister address each other as "Dearest" and "Dearest One" and quotes a letter from Laurence to his friend Sarah Clark at Street, saying, "Clem is the right man for me in much the same way as Roger [her husband] is for you."

Laurence Housman was a prolific writer but the quality of his work varied enormously. Ms Mahoney has taken the trouble to read some of his more obscure works and suggests that his fairy tales, particularly *All Fellows: Seven Legends of Lower Redemption* (1896), look forward to a world of social tolerance and sexual freedom. Laurence sent this collection to Oscar Wilde on his release from prison in 1897. The book is dedicated by Laurence to "my friend and dear fellow, Shadwell Boulderson," whose family were close to the Housmans in Bromsgrove. Ms Mahoney suggests that Boulderson is the young man, twelve years his junior, who features in Laurence's unpublished autobiography *Outrageous Fortune, the Story of a Concealed Life, 1862-1933*, now in the *Laurence Housman Papers* at Bryn Mawr College Library, Pennsylvania. Ms Mahoney quotes Laurence's justification for an autobiography: 'The duty to which I now feel called is to give the facts of my life for the sake of others less able to bear the same burden that has been laid on them – to a public which understands so little what that burden is like.' She also quotes from a pamphlet entitled *The Relation of Fellow-feeling to Sex*, in which the author describes long-lasting but unconsummated relationships outside the norms of social convention. This anonymous pamphlet was one of a series published by the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology around 1917, but the author is named as Laurence Housman in a subsequent pamphlet issued by the Society in 1918. This shows that Laurence was an active campaigner for sexual freedom as well as for women's suffrage and international peace.

Ms Mahoney has also re-read and reconsidered Clemence Housman's novels, *The Were-Wolf* (1896) and *The Unknown Sea* (1898). In both books she finds Clemence putting sibling devotion and family ties ahead of sexual desire. She traces Laurence's devotion to his sister back to their childhood in Bromsgrove. She quotes from Laurence's unpublished *Family Remains* in the *Laurence Housman Papers* at Bryn Mawr College Library, 'I suppose it was because I was the most put-upon member of the family ... that in quite early days Clemence began to take pity on me and become my protector.'

Ms Mahoney also tackles the issue of to what degree did Laurence's brother, A.E. Housman, share Laurence's views on sexual freedom. She acknowledges that A.E.H., despite including the poem 'The laws of God, the laws of man,' in *Last Poems*, mostly kept his views to himself. She points out the irony that A.E.H., in appointing Laurence as his literary executor, gave him the opportunity to posthumously enlist A.E.H. in his campaign. She quotes Laurence's discreet reference, in the introduction to *A.E.H.* (1937), to his brother's 'greatest and most lasting friendship with one who died in 1923.' She also repeats Laurence's more bold question to A.E.H. (recounted in *A.E.H.* p. 62) as to the subject of the photograph hanging over the mantle shelf in his room at Trinity. A.E.H. had named him as Moses Jackson, "the man who had more influence on my life than anybody else." She quotes Laurence's justification for including the poem 'Oh who is that young sinner ...' in *Additional Poems*, as it was 'so strong an expression of his feelings against social injustice.'

The reader of Ms Mahoney's book may not always agree with her analysis of Laurence and Clemence Housman's relationship, but her footnotes regularly sent your reviewer scurrying to the bookshelf to read her quotations from their books and correspondence in broader context. I had never before opened my copy of *Echo de Paris* (1923) with its remembered conversation with Oscar Wilde. Nor had I read *A.E.H.* and *The Unexpected Years* so carefully.
Julian Hunt

Kristin Mahoney is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Faculty Fellow in the Centre for Gender in a Global Context at Michigan State University. Her first book *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2015.

Review

Wroxeter: Ashes Under Uricon – A Cultural and Social History of the Roman City by Roger H. White. Archaeopress, 239 pp, 137 figures (mostly colour), paperback £17.99.

"To-day the Roman and his trouble/Are ashes under Uricon" is one of Housman's great lines. It compresses in a stroke the fall of a great civilization, the end of each individual life, and the enduring presence of what Housman often called "trouble." It is fitting therefore that in a social and cultural history of the Roman city of Wroxeter (variously also called Uricon, Uriconium and Viroconium) its title should reference this poem.

Readers looking for a technical, dry as Roman dust, archaeological monograph on Wroxeter with complex floor plans of the various phases of occupation will be disappointed. Readers looking for a colourful, engaging, and insightful text, drawing upon art, literature, poetry and biography, that examines the first and subsequent excavations at Wroxeter and the cultural reception of the site over the last 150 years will be delighted.

The book opens with a personal account of how the author in his youth (he is now retired from the University of Birmingham) undertook excavations at the site from 1976 onwards. We then learn how some of the earliest excavators approached their work. The first of these was Thomas Wright, a scholar and antiquarian who was born in Tenbury but who grew up in Ludlow. He persuaded the MP for Ludlow, Beriah Botfield, to fund his excavation which began in 1859. In describing Wright's work and the work of a later archaeologist, Professor Donald Atkinson, who began work in 1924, Roger White is particularly good in exposing the tendency of archaeologists to create fanciful narratives, often based on flimsy evidence, that more often reflect their own assumptions than what might have actually happened. One of these oft-repeated stories is that the remains of an old man and two other

skeletons (one female) found in the hypocaust with a heap of Roman coins nearby must have resulted from the destruction of the city by marauding Saxon invaders. White convincingly shows how the evidence for fire is minimal and that the remains could easily be the result of a later casual burial.

Another often cited conclusion that White questions relates to the discovery of a finely carved dedicatory panel discovered by Donald Atkinson in 1924. About 75% of the original panel survives but there is general agreement on the missing text. It reads:

IMP(ERATORI) CA[ES(ARI)] DIVI TRAIANI PARTHI-
CI FIL(IO) DI[VI N]ERVAE NEPOTI TRA-
IANO H[A]DRIANO AUG(USTO) PONTI[FI-]
CI MAXIMO TRIB(UNICIA) POT(ESTATE) XIII[I CO(N)S(ULI) III P(ATRI) P(ATRIAE)]
CIVITAS CORNOV[IORUM]

In translation:
For the Emperor Caesar Trajan Hadrian Augustus, son of the deified Trajan, conqueror of Parthia, grandson of the deified Nerva, pontifex maximus, in the fourteenth year of tribunician power, thrice consul, father of his country, the Canton of the Cornovians (erected this).
The inscription allows a dating of the dedication to around 129 AD. The quality of the carving is high and led Atkinson to tentatively suggest that its creation coincided with a visit by the Emperor Hadrian himself to the site around 122 – a conclusion more firmly endorsed by a later archaeologist called Graham Webster. It is a lovely story and one I remember being told when I first visited the site many years ago. White exposes just how weak is the argument linking the inscription to a visit by the Emperor, a visit that itself now looks to be very unlikely.
A chapter likely to be of considerable interest to Society readers is entitled “Poetic Visions.” It considers the work of five poets: an unknown Welsh poet writing around 800-900 AD in a collection of poems called *Canu Heledd*, preserved in manuscripts comprising the

Red Book of Hergest (c.1382-1410), A. E. Housman, Henry Lang Jones (a relatively unknown teacher and later headmaster 1876-1972), Wilfred Owen and Mary Webb.

The author quotes a relevant section from the early Welsh poem referring to the destruction of Wroxeter and the loss of lands by the Welsh to the invading Anglo Saxons. There is then a rather long digression on Powys and the lands east of the Severn designed to show that the poems are not historically accurate. It is a fine piece of reasoning, but this section would have benefitted from a clear signposting of the supposed dates of the original Welsh collection (I had to look up elsewhere for the details to make sense of the chronology discussed). The digression also detracts from the main thrust of the chapter.

Housman gets two pages of treatment in a discussion of his poem "On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble" (*ASL* XXXI). White follows Wells (1988) in suggesting that Housman used *Murray's Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire* (1879) for information about Wroxeter and Shropshire. White speculates that the young Housman and his family may have travelled to Wroxeter, but notes that he has not found Housman's name in the visitor books relating to the site. The influence of the *Handbook* often cited is where Murray refers to the view of the Wrekin from Shrewsbury castle tower where nearby is to be found the "City of Iconium," whose ashes smoulder beneath its slopes, (Murray, 1879, p. 58). Wells (1988) explained that in Housman's copy of the *Handbook* he had underlined "smoulder."

I was motivated by reading White's book to look at the reports of Thomas Wright on his excavations. My conclusion was that if we are looking for a source of inspiration for the idea of Roman ashes beneath a vanished city then Wright is also a candidate. Wright constantly refers to his discovery of human ashes beneath a city that he assumes was destroyed by invading Saxons (Wright, 1872). Housman may have been familiar with Wright's work. In a poem that can be related to "On

Wenlock Edge," "The Welsh Marches" (*ASL* XXVIII), for example, we read a description of ancient warfare on the banks of the Severn between the Romano -British and Saxon invaders, where "Couched upon her brother's grave/The Saxon got me on the slave." In relation to this poem, Burnett (1997) detects a plausible influence of Wright's *History of Ludlow* (1852).

White moves on to consider a long poem by a young Wilfred Owen : "Uriconium, an ode," written in 1913. Owen had visited Wroxeter in 1909. The language is flowery and archaic (with "thees and thous") and describes the usual narrative accepted at the time of Romans conquering the Celts, creating an ordered civilization that was brutally destroyed by the ruthless Saxons. It is a poem very different in style to his later war poems.

Finally, we come to Mary Webb, author of many novels associated with Shropshire and the Marches. White quotes in full Mary Webb's poem "Viroconium" – a mournful reflection on a lost city. Reading the poem in full enables us to make a contrast with Housman. "On Wenlock Edge" ends with the thought that the troubles that haunted the lives of ancient Romans are still present: "The tree of man was never quiet:/Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I." Whereas Mary Webb draws a more upbeat conclusion about the persistence of love and passion:

"But when, through evening's open door,
Two lovers tread the broken floor…
There haunts within them secretly
One that lives while empires die,
A shrineless god whose songs abide
Forever in the countryside"

White makes the interesting point that the poems of Housman, Owen and Webb, full of pathos as they are, were written when the site of Wroxeter was ruinous and unkempt. None or few poems appeared after

the Second World War when the whole site was tidied up and now has an unromantic feel.

There follows a splendid chapter on depictions of Wroxeter in art. A study of paintings and drawings enables us to see how reliable as topographical illustrations such works were since nearly all showed the "The Old Work" – the imposing slab of masonry that still stands. White examines the works of well-known artists such as Thomas Girtin as well as lesser figures. The section on Tom Prytherch is particularly good.

The chapter on "Writing and Visiting Wroxeter" describes the impressions committed to print (in both fictional and factual writing) by visitors to the site. The importance of Thomas Wright once more comes to the fore, as does the ever-present problem from Wright's excavations onward of protecting the site and gaining permission and funding to excavate. In this chapter, White brings a sharp critical intelligence again to some old stories associated with the ruins. One of these is that a party of miners paid a visit to the site and not understanding it knocked down the hypocausts. White shows how there is little direct evidence for this and how it probably reflects middle class prejudices about how working-class visitors were believed to behave.

A fascinating group visit that took place on Christmas day 1864 was reported in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* of 1865 and is quoted here in full. The party arrived by train at Shrewsbury station, walked to Wroxeter, spent some time at the site and then walked back to Shrewsbury station via Haughmond Abbey – a distance of over 20 miles. Clearly those Victorians were made of stern stuff. One clanger in the chapter is the description of Charles Darwin as "a doting father and devout Christian." Doting father he certainly was but his views on Christianity were far from devout. True, he grew up as a Christian, but his faith gradually ebbed away and by around 1851 he became as he later described himself an "agnostic."

The book concludes with an account of Wroxeter as illustrative of the history of archaeology and then stories of the people (including the ancient Romans) who have lived on or near the site and their interaction with it. Wroxeter was once the fourth largest Roman town in Britain and almost as large as Pompeii. The excavated portion that visitors see is but a small fraction of the whole. White estimates that only about 5% of the city has been excavated but cautions against digging more up unless there are specific questions to be answered – the remains are best preserved for the moment underground.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of Roman Britain and the antiquities of Shropshire. Wroxeter is a complex site churned over by generations of diggers. To make sense of the remains you really need to visit, and this book will certainly inspire you to do just that.

References

Burnett, A. (1997) *The Poems of A. E. Housman*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
Murray, J. (Ed.) (1879). *Murray's Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire.* London: John Murray.
Wells, R. (1988, 9-15 September). Uriconium. *The Times Literary Supplement,* 1001.
Wright, T. (1852) *A History of Ludlow*. Jones: Ludlow
Wright, T. (1872) *Uriconium; A Historical account of the ancient Roman City*. London and Shrewsbury: Sandford

John Cartwright

Biographies of Contributors

Nicholas Murray was born in Liverpool and educated at Liverpool University where he read English, He is a poet and freelance literary biographer who lives in Presteigne in the Welsh Marches. His *Elsewhere: Collected Poems* was published in 2022 and he has written biographies of Matthew Arnold, Andrew Marvell, Franz Kafka and others and is the author of *The Red Sweet Wine of Youth: British Poets of the First World War* (2011).

Gregory Leadbetter is Professor of Poetry at Birmingham City University. 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).

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), biographies of J.R. Ackerley (1989) and Christopher Isherwood (2004), and most recently *A Little Book of Latin for Gardeners* (2018). He edited (and wrote much of) *A Reader's Guide to the Twentieth-Century Novel* (1995) and *A Reader's Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers* (1996), and is an advisory editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Colin Leach was educated at Shrewsbury and Brasenose College, Oxford, where he was also a Fellow in Classics. He has written a history of his school, a biography of a 19th century Master of Pembroke

College, Oxford (where he is now an Emeritus Fellow), and with James Michie, an edition-cum-translation of Euripides *Helen*. A frequent reviewer for the *TLS* and *Classics for All*, his life has been divided between Oxford and the City of London.

Max Hunt is the elder son of Joseph Hunt, co-founder of the Housman Society. He was educated at King Edward's Five Ways School, Birmingham, and at Christ Church, Oxford. He was a history teacher at Newcastle under Lyne before embarking on a career in educational administration. He was latterly Chief Education Officer for Stockport. He has been Treasurer and later Secretary of the Housman Society since 2006.

Linda Hart has been a university political science lecturer, an environmental campaigner, a freelance journalist, and founder-chairman of the Friends of the Dymock Poets. Throughout it all she has read almost everything by and about A.E. Housman, and is a regular contributor to the Society's newsletter and journal.

THE HOUSMAN SOCIETY JOURNAL

The *Housman Society Journal*, which is published annually and sent free to members, provides a platform for critical research related to the poetry, prose and classical scholarship of A.E. Housman and the works of other members of his family, and for the review of books concerned with the same. It also enables the publication of documentary evidence relating to the family. The 2023 Journal will be published in December of that year. Articles intended for publication, or books for review, should be sent to the Editor. If possible, please send as an attachment to an e- mail, preferably in Microsoft Word, to julianmhunt@btinternet.com

The *Housman Society Journal* is published by the Housman Society, Abberley Cottage, 7 Dowles Road, Bewdley DY12 2EJ