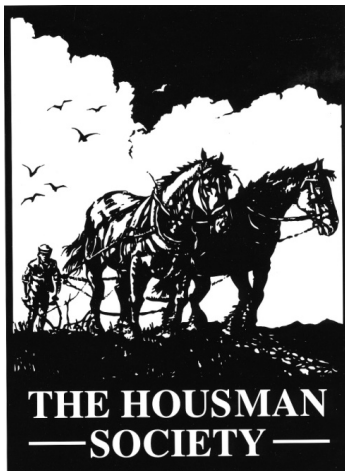


The Housman Society Journal

Volume Forty-Nine 2023



The Housman Society
7 Dowles Road
Bewdley
DY12 2EJ

Charity Number 100107

ISSN 0305-926X

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Editorial

With this issue of the Society's journal, your editors have been reminded of the proverbial wisdom: "A problem shared is a problem halved. A joy shared is a joy doubled". The problems we shared were mainly with layouts – footnotes appearing on the bottom of the correct page; a poem in German and a letter in Latin appearing beside the English translation. The joys we shared were many more:

an article about a letter that Housman wrote in Latin in 1909 to a Russian classical scholar – a letter that was only recently discovered in a state archive in Moscow;

an unsolicited article from eminent playwright and Society vice-president Sir Tom Stoppard;

recent contact with an Oxford undergraduate who sees Bredon Hill from his home in Pershore and encounters A Shropshire Lad for the first time; speaking of ASL, we were pleased that Max Hunt consented to our request to reprint the lecture he delivered at the book launch at St Laurence's, Ludlow;

a book review that sings the praises of this generously illustrated large-format edition of ASL (possibly the 301st edition);

two articles, again unsolicited, are happily matched – one analyses an essay by Seneca that influenced Housman's More Poems VII, and the other analyses poems by Goethe that show the influence he had on Housman's ASL XX;

six letters from Housman (three each to his sister Clemence and his brother Laurence) are published here for the first time;

finally, and on a sad note, we have an obituary about Jennie McGregor-Smith describing her professional and unstinting work for the Society over many years, especially in the run up to the 1996 centenary of A Shropshire Lad.

Linda Hart

Julian Hunt

Housman and Goethe reconsidered

Frederick Bird

The insightful book *Housman and Heine: a Neglected Relationship*, edited by J. Bourne and published by the Housman Society, advances the argument, by presenting texts in parallel, that the poetry of Heinrich Heine and other German Romantic poets influenced that of A.E. Housman.¹ H. R. Woudhuysen's chapter, 'A.E. Housman and Goethe's 'Der Fischer'', offers a brief account of the circumstantial and personal reasons for the elegant translation which Housman made of this poem of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's in 1875 at the age of sixteen, as well as providing a careful analysis of the literary merits of Housman's translation in relation to the German original.² In his conclusion, Woudhuysen mentions that Housman professed admiration for Goethe in 1892 in his 'Introductory Lecture' at University College, London,³ and that he occasionally makes reference to Goethe in those of his letters edited by A. Burnett.⁴ He nevertheless concludes that the 'evidence for Housman's later interest in Goethe is minimal'.⁵ In this article I demonstrate, by re-examining two of Housman's poems and by considering evidence which has recently come to light, that

¹ *Housman and Heine: a Neglected Relationship*, ed. J. Bourne (Bromsgrove, 2011).

² The discovery of the text of Housman's translation was announced in C. Mitchell and H.R. Woudhuysen, 'Spider song: A.E. Housman's Fisherman', *The Times Literary Supplement* (14 May 2010), p. 14.

³ A.E. Housman, *Introductory Lecture* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 30: 'Who are the great critics of the classical literatures, the critics with real insight into the classical spirit, the critics who teach with authority and not as the scribes? They are such men as Lessing or Goethe or Matthew Arnold, scholars no doubt, but not scholars of minute or profound learning'.

⁴ In a letter to Gilbert Murray, dated 13 October 1904, Housman mentions Goethe, *Wanderns Nachtlied* II, written in 1780; in a letter dated 19 April 1912, Housman thanks P.G.L. Webb for sending him a book which contained Webb's translations of Heine and Goethe, though Housman only mentions Heine.

⁵ H.R. Woudhuysen, 'A.E. Housman and Goethe's 'Der Fischer'', in J. Bourne, *Housman and Heine: a Neglected Relationship* (The Housman Society: Bromsgrove, 2011), p. 125.

Housman's interest in Goethe, and indeed Goethe's influence on Housman, is greater than has previously been thought.⁶

'Der Fischer' and *A Shropshire Lad* XX

This article is not a merely speculative response to Woudhuysen's comment that the 'rediscovery of Housman's fine translation of 'Der Fischer' ... suggests that more might yet be discovered about the English poet's interest in his German predecessor'.⁷ Rather, I was struck by the similarity of 'Der Fischer' and ASL XX while reading both texts independently before I was aware of Housman's translation of this poem of Goethe's. Therefore, when I learnt of Housman's translation, I was able to verify my initial observations regarding the similarity of the poems. Below is the text of Goethe's poem⁸ and Housman's own verse translation.

⁶ Woudhuysen, 'A.E. Housman and Goethe's 'Der Fischer'', p. 125 notes that no echoes of Goethe or allusions to Goethe are detected by A. Burnett in his edition of *The Poems of A.E. Housman* (Oxford, 1997). This is perhaps unsurprising, because Burnett, who produced his edition before Housman's translation of 'Der Fischer' was discovered, may have considered there to be little reason to search in the works of Goethe for phrases which Housman borrowed.

⁷ Woodhuysen. 'A.E. Housman and Goethe's 'Der Fischer'', p.125.

⁸ As it appears in *Goethes Werke*, ed. G. von Loeper et al. (Weimar, 1887-1919) Vol. i. pp. 169-70 with speech marks added.

Das Wasser rauscht', das Wasser schwoll,
Ein Fischer saß daran,
Sah nach dem Angel ruhevoll,
Kühl bis ans Herz hinan.
Und wie er sitzt und wie er lauscht,
Teilt sich die Flut empor;
Aus dem bewegten Wasser rauscht
Ein feuchtes Weib hervor.
Sie sang zu ihm, sie sprach zu ihm:
„Was lockst du meine Brut
Mit Menschenwitz und Menschenlist
Hinauf in Todesglut?
Ach wüßtest du, wie's Fischlein ist
So wohlig auf dem Grund,
Du stiegst herunter, wie du bist,
Und würdest erst gesund.
„Labt sich die liebe Sonne nicht,
Der Mond sich nicht im Meer?
Kehrt wellenatmend ihr Gesicht
Nicht doppelt schöner her?
Lockt dich der tiefe Himmel nicht,
Das feuchtverklärte Blau?
Lockt dich dein eigen Angesicht
Nicht her in ew'gen Tau?“
Das Wasser rauscht', das Wasser schwoll,
Netz' ihm den nackten Fuß;
Sein Herz wuchs ihm so sehnsuchtsvoll
Wie bei der Liebsten Gruß.
Sie sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm;
Da war's um ihn geschehn;
Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin
Und ward nicht mehr gesehn.

The water rushed, the water swelled,
 A fisher sat thereby;
 With peaceful heart his rod he held,
 And watched it quietly.
 And as he sits, and as he lists, 5
 The lifted floods divide;
 A dripping maiden rushes forth
 From out the scattered tide.
 She sang to him, she spoke to him:
 ‘Why lurest thou my brood, 10
 With human wit and human guile,
 To the death-glow from the flood?
 Oh! didst thou know how gladly dart
 The fishes through the seas,
 Thou’ldst step down hither as thou art 15
 And then alone find ease.
 ‘Bends not the blessèd sun, the moon,
 In ocean depths to lave?
 Rises he not twice beautiful
 Fresh breathing of the wave? 20
 Lure not the deeper heavens below
 The ocean-brightened blue?
 Lures not thy mirrored form to know
 This everlasting dew?’
 The water rushed, the water swelled, 25
 His naked foot struck chill;
 As if his true love called, he felt
 His heart with longing fill.
 She spoke to him, she sang to him;
 His span of life was o’er: 30
 Half drew she him, half sank he in,
 And was beheld no more.

An examination of the content and style of Goethe's poem reveal several points of close similarity to Housman's *ASL XX*, printed here for comparison:

Oh fair enough are sky and plain,
But I know fairer far:
Those are as beautiful again
That in the water are;
The pools and rivers wash so clean 5
The trees and clouds and air,
The like on earth was never seen,
And oh that I were there.
These are the thoughts I often think
As I stand gazing down 10
In act upon the cressy brink
To strip and dive and drown;
But in the golden-sanded brooks
And azure meres I spy
A silly lad that longs and looks 15
And wishes he were I.

Let us first consider the content of the two poems. In the third stanza of Housman's poem, the speaker explains that he frequently stands at the edge of water (line 11), looking into it (line 10); in Goethe's, the fisherman sits on the bank of waters (line 2), looking at his line (line 3) which presumably extends into the water. While Goethe's fisherman is sitting thus, he listens (line 5), and perceives a water-nymph (line 8), who addresses him (line 9). In contrast, Housman does not adopt a fantastical approach to his poem. Instead, he presents the speaker as being in a trance-like meditation as he gazes down into the water; the speaker's thoughts serve as the contrasting second character with whom he is able to engage in internal debate.⁹

⁹ Note that it is possible to read Goethe's poem in a 'rational', non-fantastical way as well, understanding the water-nymph simply as an imagined character who gives voice to the fisherman's unspoken thoughts. This may indeed be how Goethe himself

The methods of persuasion employed by Goethe's water-nymph and by Housman's speaker's internal musings are very similar. The water-nymph draws the fisherman's attention to the contentedness of the fish in the water (lines 13–14), and she makes a vivid comparison with the dissatisfaction that comes with living upon the land (lines 10–12). She tells him that he does not know the extent of their contentedness, but that if he did know, he would not hesitate to join them in an attempt to share in it (lines 15–16). The thoughts of the speaker in Housman's poem also prompt him to look into the water and see the blessedness of being there in comparison to living a life on earth (line 8).¹⁰ In both cases, the subject of the poem is tempted to abandon the dissatisfactory elements of life on land for the greater purity and serenity of the life seen in the water.

Let us next turn to the phraseology of the two poems, which is their most striking similarity. In the third stanza, Goethe's water-nymph asks two rhetorical questions, the first of which is, ‘„Labt sich die liebe Sonne nicht, | Der Mond sich nicht im Meer?“’ (“Bends not the blessed sun, the moon, | In ocean depths to lave?”),¹¹ lines 17–18). The water-nymph is probably referring to the setting and rising of the sun and the

was suggesting that the poem should be read when (according to J. P. Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens, 1823–1832* (Leipzig, Magdeburg, 1836–1848), vol. i, pp. 78–79) he said that when painters paint the scene of this poem they do not understand „daß sich das gar nicht malen lasse“ (“that it cannot be painted at all”). Instead, Goethe said, perhaps with a degree of *faux naïveté*, that „Es ist ja in dieser Ballade bloß das Gefühl des Wassers ausgedrückt, das Anmuthige, was uns im Sommer lockt, uns zu baden; weiter liegt nichts darin, und wie läßt sich das malen!“ (‘in this ballad it is merely the feeling of the water that is expressed, the gracefulness that tempts us to bathe in summer; there’s nothing else in it, and how can that be painted!’).

¹⁰ At first reading, the opening words of Housman's poem, ‘Oh fair enough are sky and plain’, indicate a sense of satisfaction with the human necessity of living upon land. The first three words, however, may also play with the idea of the speaker's sigh of resignation, as if to say, ‘Must I live upon the land? Oh, fair enough!’.

¹¹ The English translations which follow quotations from Goethe are Housman's own, except where otherwise indicated.

moon into and out of the sea, at it appears at the horizon when viewed from a coastland.¹² The water-nymph's question bears resemblance to Housman's lines, 'The pools and rivers wash so clean | The trees and clouds and air' (lines 5–6). It is unlikely that these lines refer to the reflection of the trees and clouds and air in the water;¹³ instead, these commonplace elements of life above the water are presented as creating another world which exists in the water when they are viewed through the lens of the water's surface. Despite this slight difference between the two poems, the effect of their images is much the same: the water cleanses and purifies aspects of normal human life, making it seem as though the water is a place of blessedness.

The second of the water-nymph's rhetorical questions forms the next two lines of Goethe's poem: '„Kehrt wellenatmend ihr Gesicht | Nicht doppelt schöner her?„' ("Rises he not twice beautiful | Fresh breathing of the wave?"), lines 19–20). In these lines Goethe offers an almost mathematical calculation that the sun and the moon, after they have been 'refreshed' and have risen again, are twice as beautiful as they were before they set. Housman's poem also presents comparison in terms of doubles. The common features of life upon land are twice as beautiful when (in the eye of the beholder) they are in the water: 'Those are as beautiful again | that in the water are' (lines 3–4). Once again, Housman's comparison, though differing from Goethe's in detail, conveys the same message.

¹² For a famous classical example of this idea, see the east pediment of the Parthenon, which portrays Helios ('the Sun') on the left-hand side rising from the ocean stream that was thought to encircle the world, and Selene ('the Moon') on the right-hand side setting into the ocean stream. For a similar image in the poetry of Housman, see e.g. *More Poems* XVI 6–7 and 15–21.

¹³ J. Mandel, 'Housman's insane narrators', *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1988), pp. 405–406, seems to insist on interpreting these lines in this way. This and other misunderstandings about the speaker's desires lead Mandel to the unfortunate conclusions that this is 'one of Housman's happiest poems' and that 'it is not very successful' (p. 405).

These similarities of content and of style, together with Housman's known familiarity with 'Der Fischer', suggest that Housman took Goethe's poem as a starting-point for his own. However, *ASL XX* differs from Goethe's 'Der Fischer' in one significant way: Housman spares the life of his subject in a way that Goethe does not. Goethe's fisherman stands on the bank (line 2); the waters lap his foot (line 26); his heart heaves with the yearning of a lover (lines 27–28); persuaded by the water-nymph, he descends to his watery peril (lines 29–31), never to be seen again (line 32). The speaker in Housman's poem at first appears to be in much the same position. He stands 'upon the cressy brink'¹⁴ (line 11) and is 'gazing down' into the water, perhaps with the implication that he is enamoured by what he sees.¹⁵ Unlike Goethe's fisherman, however, he remains unpersuaded. He does not dive to his peril into the water. He refuses to grasp the peace in death which appears to him so lucidly in the water. Instead, he continues to stand on the bank, contemplating the reasons for his desire to drown himself. But he is unable to act on this desire, as he has often been unable in the past (line 9). The end of the poem leaves the reader considering the speaker's counter-balancing resolve to continue living.¹⁶ This resolve is a key element of many of the personas in *ASL*,

¹⁴ May we suppose, admittedly rather speculatively, that the phrase 'Das Wasser rauscht' ('The water rushed') in 'Der Fischer', lines 1 and 25, is responsible for prompting the adjective in Housman's previous version of *ASL XX* 11, 'In act upon the rushy brink' (see the *apparatus criticus* in *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. A. Burnett, p. 22)?

¹⁵ Cf. the romantic context, discussed below, of *ASL XV* 8: 'gaze not in my eyes'. Cf. also how comrades' love is implied by the fact that they 'stand and gaze' in *ASL XLVII* 21, discussed in Burnett, 'Silence and allusion in Housman', *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2003), p. 169; this phrase is repeated in Housman's posthumously published *Additional Poems VII* 2 ('He would not stay for me to stand and gaze'), which Burnett, 'Silence and allusion', p. 170, rightly believes is 'in relation to Jackson'.

¹⁶ Cf. esp. *ASL XVII* 9–12 ('Try I will; no harm in trying: | Wonder 'tis how little mirth | Keeps the bones of man from lying | On the bed of earth'), *XXVIII* 'The Welsh Marches' 33–36 ('When shall I be dead and rid | Of the wrong my father did? | How long, how long, till spade and hearse | Put to sleep my mother's curse?'), *XLIII* 'The

and so it is fitting that Housman should invert the conclusion of Goethe's poem in this way.

There are also similarities in the ideas of sickness and health presented in these poems. Goethe's poem tells how the water-nymph persuades the fisherman that by entering the water he would be healed (line 16). From what disease? The water-nymph's previous words, '„Ach wüßtest du, wie's Fischlein ist | So wohlig auf dem Grund, | Du stiegst herunter....,' ("“Oh! didst thou know how gladly dart | The fishes through the seas, | Thou'ldst step down hither...”', or, in Richard Stokes's translation, ““Ah, if you knew how contented | The fish are deep below, | You'd plunge in...”'), imply that the fisherman's ailment is his dissatisfaction in life. Much of Housman's poetry considers the relationship between discontent and sickness, sometimes focusing more on the former (e.g. *ASL* XL 5–8: 'That is the land of lost content' etc.) and sometimes the latter (e.g. *ASL* XLV 7–8: 'But play the man, stand up and end you, | When your sickness is your soul'). Though sickness does not have an explicit role in *ASL* XX, it is evident from the speaker's longing to drown himself (line 12) that he suffers severe mental (or psychological, or spiritual) affliction. The speaker himself implies that he is conscious of his problem when he describes the lad that he sees in the water, i.e. himself, as 'silly' (line 15), a classic Housmannian understatement.

I shall make one final comment about the similarities between Goethe's and Housman's poems, and about what they might reveal. In a lengthy letter dated 25 July 1922 to J. W. Mackail, who had been the Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1906 to 1911, Housman explains that he considered *LP* XV 'Eight O'Clock' to be 'not much in itself', and only included it in his collection 'for variety', adding that this had also been the case with *ASL* XX.¹⁷ This raises the question: did Housman speak of

Immortal Part' in its entirety, XLVIII esp. 16 ('Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?'), XLIX, L 13–18 and LI 21–26.

¹⁷ *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, vol. i. p. 505. C. Lindsay, 'A.E. Housman's silly lad: the loss of romantic consolation', *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1999), p. 350 n.

ASL XX in this way because he knew that it was unoriginal in some respects, and therefore considered it less deserving of inclusion than some of his more original poems?¹⁸ This question cannot be answered with certainty, but two comments may nevertheless be relevant. First, we ought to note that Housman had an exceptional memory, particularly of details of literature.¹⁹ It is therefore probable that he was consciously aware of the similarities between ‘Der Fischer’ and *ASL XX*, as he was intimately familiar with both poems. Secondly, we ought to note the distinction between parallels which are included consciously by a poet to alter the effect of a passage, and parallels which are included subconsciously by a well-read poet who has become attuned to a particular style of poetic language. Some parallels between Goethe and Housman may simply be a symptom of Housman’s broad literary knowledge rather than deliberate echoes. Nevertheless, the similarities discussed above are so striking that it seems unlikely that Housman would not have been aware of the majority of them, either after he had written *ASL XX* or during the composition of the poem itself.

14, also comments on Housman’s thoughts about this poem, but rather vaguely: ‘Housman apparently recognised that the silly lad poem was a different kind of poem’.

¹⁸ Housman may have thought that if anyone was going to spot the unoriginality of *ASL XX* it would be Mackail.

¹⁹ Housman’s brother, Laurance Housman, wrote that his ‘memory of poetry was extraordinary, even of poetry for which he had no special admiration’, and that he had a ‘mind trained to precision, amazingly retentive, and exquisitely sensitive to literary values’; these and other relevant quotations can be found in *The Poems of A.E. Housman*, ed. Burnett, pp. lvii–lix.

‘Der Fischer’ and *A Shropshire Lad* XV

Let us now turn to a second poem by Housman which may have been influenced by ‘Der Fischer’, namely *ASL* XV.²⁰

Look not in my eyes, for fear
They mirror true the sight I see,
And there you find your face too clear
And love it and be lost like me.
One the long nights through must lie 5
Spent in star-defeated sighs,
But why should you as well as I
Perish? Gaze not in my eyes.
A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain, 10
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There, when the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers 15
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.

In the first half of this poem, the speaker confesses his love for the addressee which leaves him feeling ‘lost’; he urges the addressee not to fall in love with himself in the debilitating way that the speaker has fallen in love with him. Any reader of this journal will not be able to read the poem without seeing in the speaker the person of Housman himself, and in his addressee, Moses Jackson. In the second half of the poem, the speaker uses the tale of Narcissus to warn the addressee of the terrible consequences which befall one who loves oneself; by implication, therefore, the tale also illustrates the terrible consequences which have befallen the speaker because of his love for the addressee.

²⁰ This poem was printed by Bourne in *Housman and Heine*, p. 21, alongside Heine, *Lyrisches Intermezzo* IV ‘Wenn ich in deine Augen seh’. Similarity with one of Heine’s poems does not preclude similarity with one of Goethe’s.

Like ‘Der Fischer’ and *ASL XX*, the second half of this poem also features a young man’s reflection of himself in the water being the cause of his demise.²¹

I shall briefly point out what I consider to be four echoes of ‘Der Fischer’ in *ASL XV*, Housman’s ‘Narcissus-poem’.²² First, Goethe’s water-nymph asks the fisherman ‘„Lockt dich dein eigen Angesicht | Nicht her in ew’gen Tau?“’ (‘Lures not thy mirrored form to know | This everlasting dew?’); or Stokes: ‘“Are you not drawn by your own face | Into this eternal dew?”’). This question is similar to Housman’s phrase ‘And there you find your face too clear’ (line 3), which marks the beginning of his warning about destructive narcissism. Secondly, Goethe writes of the fisherman that ‘Sein Herz wuchs ihm so sehnsuchtsvoll | Wie bei der Liebsten Gruß’ (‘As if his true love called, he felt | His heart with longing fill’, lines 27–28). Housman’s speaker explains that, when love is unrequited, ‘One the long nights through must lie | Spent in star-defeated sighs’ (lines 5–6), expressing a similar sentiment of romantic pining.²³ Thirdly, in ‘Der Fischer’, the water-nymph ‘sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm; | Da war’s um ihn gesehn’ (‘spoke to him [i.e. the fisherman], she sang to him; | His span of life was o’er’); or Stokes: ‘And from that moment he was lost’, lines 29–30). Housman’s portrayal of a lover’s mental discomposure uses the same sort of vocabulary: the speaker fears that his addressee will see beauty reflected in his eyes too clearly and will ‘love it and be lost like me’ (line 4). Fourth and finally, Goethe’s fisherman, having slipped out of sight into the water, ‘ward nicht mehr gesehn’ (‘And was beheld no more’; Stokes: ‘was never seen again’, line 32). Housman employs a

²¹ Burnett, *The Poems of A.E. Housman* (Oxford, 1997), p. 335, notes the similarity of the Narcissus images in *ASL XX* 15–16 and *ASL XV* 9–16.

²² For an in-depth analysis of the similarities of ‘Der Fischer’ and Ovid’s account of Narcissus and Echo, see D. Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe’s Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford, CA, 1996), pp. 274–277.

²³ H.B. Vaisey, in a letter to Grant Richards dated 20 June 1942, explains that he ‘once asked Housman what he meant by “star-defeated sighs”, & his reply was to refer me to the Prologue to *Romeo & Juliet*—“a pair of star-crossed lovers”’ (quoted in *The Poems of A.E. Housman*, ed. Burnett, p. 331).

similar simplicity of language when he writes that, after looking into a forest well, Narcissus ‘never looked away again’ (line 12).²⁴ Though Housman’s line uses a verb in the active voice instead of Goethe’s passive, the similarity of these two lines seems significant in the context of the other linguistic parallels discussed above.

Final remarks

Having considered several aspects of ‘Der Fischer’ and *ASL XX* and *XV*, I believe that their similarities of content and style are too great to be the product of mere coincidence. Housman’s verse translation of Goethe’s poem provides a simple and probable explanation for these similarities: Housman was familiar with Goethe’s poem and admired it, sharing several of the sentiments which it expressed; he therefore considered it a useful starting-point for some of his own compositions. It is possible that Housman even had a special affinity with this poem because it had been the source-material for his first successful entry in a poetry competition.²⁵

Furthermore, one of the newly discovered letters of Housman to one of his students, Annette Meakin, also supports this conclusion.²⁶ Part of the letter which Housman wrote on 24 February 1932 in response to a translation which she sent him reads as follows:

²⁴ Housman himself remarks on the simplicity of Goethe’s poem in a short paragraph appended to his competition translation: ‘I think Goethe’s aim, in writing this poem, was to show how great an effect might be produced by the simplest means. Therefore he made use of the simplest words and wrote the sentences in the most easy sequence, expressing the most natural flow of ideas.’ If this was also Housman’s aim in writing *ASL XX* he certainly succeeded. Of its ninety-four words, eighty-two are monosyllables, and of the other twelve (‘enough’, ‘fairer’, ‘beautiful’, ‘rivers’, ‘never’, ‘gazing’, ‘cressy’, ‘golden-sanded’, ‘azure’, ‘silly’ and ‘wishes’) no more than two or three could be considered at all unusual.

²⁵ See Woudhuysen, ‘A.E. Housman and Goethe’s ‘Der Fischer’’, p. 120.

²⁶ These thirteen letters have been edited by C. Stray in ‘Housman and Annette Meakin: an epistolary relationship’, *HSJ* Vol. 47 (2021), pp. 30–48.

Some objections which might be made to your elegiacs as elegiacs cease to apply because they are translated from Goethe, who in treating trochees as spondees or short syllables as long is a worse offender than you: for example the words Wenig-Apfel are really much rather – u – u than – – – –. But Goethe is comparatively innocent of your favourite misdemeanour, which is treating long syllables as short. ... I was interested to see the announcement of your book, and am glad that it is soon to appear. That period has always attracted me.²⁷

Housman's critique of Meakin's poetry reveals a good knowledge of Goethe's verse, including what he believes to be its faults. C. Stray, the editor of these letters, notes that the words 'Wenig Apfel' are quoted from the beginning of line 15 of Goethe's poem 'Amynthas', published in 1799.²⁸ Housman follows this quotation by noting that Goethe rarely treats long syllables as short. Housman's background in classical scholarship would not allow him to make such generalised statements without the ability to support them with sufficient knowledge and experience of the poet's work. In addition, his expression of interest in Meakin's new three-volume book, *Goethe and Schiller 1785–1805: the Story of a Friendship*,²⁹ is probably therefore more than just a passing compliment, as is implied by his final statement that 'that period has always attracted me'.

So, to conclude, what is the value of recognising Goethe's influence on Housman in *ASL XX* and *XV*? First, and most importantly, we can gain an increased understanding of Housman's craft. It has long been known that Housman was not afraid to use Heine's poems both as a source of

²⁷ Stray, 'Housman and Annette Meakin', p. 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44 n. 31.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 44 n. 32; Meakin's book was published in London in 1932.

inspiration and as a treasure-trove of poetic expression.³⁰ Studies such as *Housman and Heine* by J. Bourne et al. and Stray's edition of Housman's letters to Meakin have broadened the scholarly view of the extent of Housman's familiarity with and use of the German Romantics, and it is hoped that the present article will contribute to this field in a similar way. Secondly, appreciation of Housman's allusions may in turn offer insights into other aspects of his poetry, such as the thought-process underlying his selection of poems for publication, as discussed in relation to *ASL XX*. Although we can recognise certain elements of Housman's poetry as being unoriginal, we should not consider him a lesser poet for it. Instead, a fuller and more accurate understanding of Housman's reading of other poets will allow for a greater appreciation of the way in which he moulded complex ideas and nuanced emotions into simple, compelling verses.³¹

³⁰ See e.g. Haber, T., 'Heine and Housman', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1944), p. 332: 'A.E. Housman, far from being an "original" poet, exercised his eclectic rights more freely than has been generally supposed.'

³¹ Compare, e.g., Plowden, G., 'Housman's borrowings – allusive or not?', *HSJ* Vol. 36 (2010), pp. 151–153, who argues that 'one can sometimes add to the notes of borrowings without adding to our appreciation of the poem in question' and, more forcefully, that 'hunting for borrowings in Housman's serious verse ... will yield little or nothing of value for the appreciation or enjoyment of the poetry itself' (p. 152). Discussions of Housman's poems in articles such as Burnett, 'Silence and allusion', mentioned above, will make it clear that Plowden's view is untenable.

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Housman, Seneca, and rain in the sea

Matthew Steggle

STARS, I have seen them fall,
But when they drop and die
No star is lost at all
From all the star-sown sky.
The toil of all that be
Helps not the primal fault;
It rains into the sea
And still the sea is salt.¹

Housman's brief and jewel-like lyric seems as if it does not need source study.² And yet, as Christopher Ricks observes, Housman is a poet of echoes, often blasphemous and misapplied ones.³ This article argues for just such a misapplied echo, hitherto I think undiscussed, in this poem.

Specifically, it suggests that Housman is alluding to a text that he must surely have known well both in a personal and a professional capacity, and that he might expect his readers to have known too: the essay *De*

¹ Housman, *More Poems*, 7, cited from Archie Burnett, ed., *The Poems of A.E. Housman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

² Previous observations are collected in Burnett's notes *ad loc.*, notably the suggestion made by Norman Marlow, *A.E. Housman: Scholar and Poet* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1958), 109, that the last lines recall Ecclesiastes's "All the rivers run into the sea, and yet the sea is not full". See also Donald Mackenzie, "Two Versions of Lucretius: Arnold and Housman", *Translation and Literature* 16 (2007): 160-177, suggesting a Lucretian flavour to the images of flux and stasis.

³ Ricks, "Introduction" to his edition of Housman's *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (London: Allen Lane, 1988).

Providentia by Lucius Annaeus Seneca.⁴ Seneca is best known now for his tragedies, but his *oeuvre* also includes a number of short moral essays, including *De Providentia*. The text sets out a vision for how the Stoic man ought to behave, working for the general good and remaining true to himself in spite of the attacks of his enemies.

A Classical text, but easily assimilated to Christianity, from the Renaissance onwards *De Providentia* was widely taught in schools and frequently quoted. It is, for instance, central to the Elizabethan tragedy *Antonio's Revenge*, a close relative of *Hamlet*. The play's hero enters reading a copy of it, and quotes from it several times. The play presents it as the key text teaching how a Stoic man should respond in the case of misfortune.⁵ It went on to be highly influential on generations of English writers.

Early on in the tract, Seneca uses a simile which links man's virtue with the saltiness of the sea:

No evil can befall a good man; opposites do not mingle. Just as the countless rivers, the vast fall of rain from the sky, and the huge volume of mineral springs do not change the taste of the sea, do not even modify it, so the assaults of adversity do not weaken the spirit of a brave man.⁶

This simile in particular was picked up by Christian texts about personal virtue of a sort that might especially grate with Housman. As

⁴ E.g. A. E. Housman, "Notes on Seneca's Tragedies", *Classical Quarterly* 17 (1923): 163-172; for the current state of discussion of Housman's engagements with classical literature, see David J. Butterfield and Christopher A. Stray, eds., *A.E. Housman: Classical Scholar* (London: Duckworth, 2009).

⁵ John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977), 2.3.

⁶ Seneca, *De Providentia*, 2.1, cited from *Moral Essays, Volume I* ed. and trans. John Basore (Harvard: Loeb, 1928).

an illustrative example, James Young's consolatory *Faith Promoted, and Fears Prevented* quotes Seneca's passage with approval, even "though ye see he is but a Heathen," as part of its argument that the suffering of this world is part of God's divine plan.⁷

Seneca's simile seems like a strong candidate to be the source of Housman's image in lines 7-8. Crucially, though, Housman reverses the elements of the simile, so that the perennial salinity of the sea in spite of the rain symbolizes not the unchangeable integrity of the good man, but the futility of all his efforts in the face of the "primal fault".

With this clue as a start, one can look back to the start of *De Providentia*, which draws a picture of a divinely ordered, eternally enduring world, arguing:

that this mighty structure of the world does not endure without some one to guard it, and that the assembling and the separate flight of the stars above are not due to the workings of chance; that while bodies which owe their motion to accident often fall into disorder and quickly collide, this swift revolution of the heavens, being ruled by eternal law, goes on unhindered, producing so many things on land and sea, so many brilliant lights in the sky all shining in fixed array...⁸

Housman's opening lines are certainly on the same general wavelength as these (although they also have a loud echo of Ovid).⁹ Again, the difference between Housman and Seneca is in the interpretation of the

⁷ James Young, *Faith Promoted, and Fears Prevented* (Edinburgh: H. Inglis, 1800), 15; Young's book was written in 1697, and went through a number of print editions between 1772 and 1828; another example, quoting the simile in Latin, is John Kendall's *Gleanings, Moral and Religious, from Various Authors* (London: William Phillips, 1828), 279.

⁸ Seneca, *De Providentia*, 1.2.

⁹ See Burnett's notes *ad loc.*

observation. For Seneca, the eternal persistence of the heavens is a sign of their divine ordering by a benevolent creator. For Housman, though, that same persistence, stated neutrally at the start of the poem, turns out to be a mark of the lack of any such order and care.

Housman has a recurring interest in Stoicism, with some of his narrators explicitly advocating what sound superficially like Stoic habits of mind.¹⁰ However, the Stoicism of Seneca starts from belief in a fundamentally benevolent, ultimately just universe, so that Housman takes Stoicism – if it is still Stoicism – to an altogether darker place. But my concern in this short article is not so much with Housman’s philosophy, as with his use of allusion for literary effect. What seems like a sourceless, universal poem gains some of its energy, for classically educated readers, from the way it perverts Seneca’s image of the salty sea: it recalls and yet destroys *De Providentia*.

¹⁰ E.g. *ASL*, 62; *More Poems*, 6.

A Shropshire Lad 1896-2023

Max Hunt

*This is the text of a talk delivered on 4 September 2023 at the launch of a new edition of *A Shropshire Lad* in St Laurence's Church, Ludlow.*

This year the Housman Society is celebrating its 50th anniversary. As part of the celebrations, we are delighted to be supporting the launch of this remarkable new edition of *A Shropshire Lad* in which photographer John Hayward has managed to marry Housman's well-loved verses with a series of stunning new photographs. (See book review, page)

Alfred Housman was 37 years old and Professor of Latin at University College, London when his first slim volume of 63 poems was published in 1896. He was not a "lad" and he had never lived in Shropshire. As Kennedy Professor of Latin in the University of Cambridge, he would go on to win international recognition as the leading classical scholar of his day. Yet, over a century later, he is remembered not for his exhaustive 5-volume commentary on the Latin poet Manilius, but as the author of *A Shropshire Lad*. In all that time the collection has never been out of print and I am assured that it has appeared in some 300 separate editions.

Housman was in his fourth year as Professor of Latin at University College. His path to academic recognition had been anything but smooth. Arriving at St John's College, Oxford in 1877 he was, according to his friend Alfred Pollard, "generally recognised in the college as exceptionally able." Two years later he gained First Class Honours in Classical Moderations, the first examination in his four-year course. For the remaining two years of his time at Oxford he should have been studying Ancient History and Political Philosophy. Unfortunately, that had little appeal to him and he was much more interested in working out how to restore the surviving works of Greek and Latin authors to their original form. The disastrous consequence

was total failure in his final examinations in the summer of 1881. He went home to Bromsgrove with hopes of an academic career dashed.

Faced with the need to earn a living, Alfred returned to Oxford for one more term and did enough to earn a humble Pass Degree. Submitting himself to the Civil Service examiners in the following July, he was eventually offered and accepted a junior post in the Patent Office in London. Moses Jackson -- another St John's College student to whom he was devoted for the rest of his life -- already held a more senior position there. So, Housman left his home in Bromsgrove for the last time in December 1882, settled into lodgings in Bayswater and began commuting to work every day.

Although by all accounts a diligent civil servant, Housman had not abandoned his academic dream. Most of his evenings after work were spent in the Reading Room of the British Museum and, as he famously wrote in his letter of application to the Council of University College in 1892:

During the last ten years the study of the classics has been the chief occupation of my leisure, and I have contributed to the learned journals many papers on ancient literature and critical science of which the following are the more important ...

There followed a long list of academic papers published in the prestigious *Journal of Philology*, the *Classical Review* and the *American Journal of Philology*. Such was the reputation he had earned within the academic world that despite his lack of an honours degree he was appointed Professor of Latin. The rest of his working life would be devoted to the study and teaching of classical literature.

Yet Alfred Housman is far better remembered today for a relatively small canon of lyrical poetry. His verses are typically short. They have both rhyme and rhythm. Using simple words, generally of no more than two syllables, he talks directly to his readers, expressing a natural flow

of ideas in unforgettably melodious cadences. But why did he begin writing poetry? Housman always denied that the poems he began to write in the 1880s were in any real sense autobiographical, but in 1933 he said: “The Shropshire Lad is an imaginary figure with something of my temper and view of life.”

Many of the poems are about a young man who leaves Shropshire for a new life in London. But the Shropshire Lad, can't forget what he has left behind. From the fields Alfred played in as a child he would look to the west, look across Worcestershire, and on the horizon he would see Shropshire's hills and the Welsh borders. This **was** autobiographical; these views would inspire the settings for his nostalgic verse.

As early as 1886 he had produced the first draft of his most frequently quoted lines which became *ASL* 40.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

At times it seems his life in London as a Patent Office clerk was so dreary that he didn't want to get out of bed in the morning. This poem was also written in the late 1880s:

Yonder see the morning blink:
The sun is up and up must I,
To wash and dress and eat and drink
And look at things and talk and think
And work, and God knows why.

Oh often have I washed and dressed
And what's to show for all my pain?
Let me lie abed and rest:
Ten thousand times I have done my best
And all's to do again.

More Poems XI

During these early years of exile in London Housman had filled some 80 pages of a notebook with occasional drafts of poems. Most of them seem to have been particularly gloomy and self-pitying. Hubert Bland in the *New Age* magazine would describe these verses with delicious understatement as “wanting in the note of gladness.” But then, from some time in 1894 and particularly in the early months of 1895, something (or perhaps several things) happened to produce a burst of creative writing. Alfred himself later mentioned a period of “continuous excitement.” He wrote about the long walks he took on Hampstead Heath, often preceded by a lunchtime pint of beer when:

there would flow into my mind with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of.

Aside from the effects of good ale and fresh air the various biographers all highlight three major influences to account for the burst of creative energy in the early months of 1895.

In November 1894 Housman's father Edward died in Bromsgrove. Aged just 63 he had suffered twelve years of infirmity following an earlier stroke. Alfred must have found little to admire in a father whose alcoholism and financial deviousness had caused his son many problems; yet in returning home for a funeral just before Christmas he would have been acutely aware of the added burden of responsibility on his shoulders as the eldest of seven siblings.

Most commentators believe that the publicity given to the trial of Oscar Wilde during the spring of 1895 was another stimulus for Housman's burst of poetic activity. Wilde's misguided libel action against the Marquess of Queensbury had quickly collapsed and led to his own arrest for 'homosexual practices'. On 25 May he was found guilty and sentenced to two years' hard labour. Immediately, other homosexuals feared for their own safety and Housman was deeply disturbed by the case.

Nine years later he told his sister Clemence, perhaps only half-jokingly, in a letter about family finances, that he needed to keep a minimum bank balance "which would enable me to flee to the continent at any moment with a year's income." At the time of the trial he wrote his bitter allegorical poem in which the "young sinner" is sent to prison "for the nameless and abominable colour of his hair." He chose not to publish it at the time, but his brother Laurence published it after his death.

The third influence arose from reports of another incident in the same year. Henry Clarkson Maclean, an officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich and the son of a veteran Major-General, had committed suicide on 6 August. Before shooting himself in the head Maclean had written a long suicide note which he addressed to "The Coroner." In the aftermath of the lurid publicity surrounding the Wilde case, with its incessant theme of the "corruption" of innocent youths by homosexual men, it was not hard to read between the lines of the tormented cadet's letter. The evidence of Housman's notebook makes it very clear that within days of newspaper reports of the inquest he was drafting the poem which became *ASL XLIV*:

Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?
Oh that was right, lad, that was brave:
Yours was not an ill for mending,
'Twas best to take it to the grave.

If the burst of creative activity in 1895 was generated by anxiety and emotional turmoil, Housman himself later related it more prosaically to illness in the harsh winter weather of early 1895. Difficulty in shaking off a sore throat apparently left him feeling run-down, and towards the end of his life he wrote to an admirer that “my poetry, so far as I could make out, sprang chiefly from physical conditions, such as a relaxed sore throat during my most prolific period, the first five months of 1895.”

The completed collection of 63 poems was published by Kegan Paul at Housman’s own expense in March of the following year. It has become commonplace to suggest that sales initially were sluggish. Of the 500 copies printed, 380 sold in the first year – that’s not at all bad for a book of poems by a first-time poet whom no one had ever heard of. Reviewers in the press were almost entirely positive about the book. First out was *The Times* on 27 March praising Housman’s “gift of melodious expression” and recognising that:

The mere mention, here and there, of Ludlow, Wenlock, and Shrewsbury, of Wrekin and Severn, gives a pleasant element of local colour.

Three weeks later *New Age* magazine carried Hubert Bland’s judgement that:

This direct expression of elemental emotions, of heart-thoughts, if we may be permitted the phrase, is the dominant note of Mr Housman’s work ... in this small volume there are many flawless stanzas and not a few flawless poems.

While Norman Gale in the journal *Academy* wrote:

In these poems there is a voice with a beautiful sound. It calls and we are obliged to listen; it continues to speak, and we fear the moment when it will be silent.

Two years later, when Grant Richards published the second edition, William Archer, in the *Fortnightly Review*, reflected that the book contained:

some sixty brief lyrics, occupying less than one hundred pages in all. You may read it in half-an-hour but there are things in it you will scarce forget in a lifetime.

You might think that a pretty succinct summary of the lasting appeal of *A Shropshire Lad* – and isn't it why we are all here today?

The slim volume was far from being a random selection of verses. Housman spent much time and care in the weeks before the manuscripts were sent to the printer in deciding on the order of the poems. In later years he would consistently refuse permission for individual poems to be printed separately in anthologies. Although he denied any strong autobiographical narrative in the book, there are obvious parallels in nostalgic yearnings for “the western brookland / That bred me long ago” while “Here I lie down in London / And turn to rest alone.” If there is a consistent theme it is arguably in what Peter Parker has described elsewhere as “the contrast between a simple and innocent pastoral world and a sophisticated and corrupt urban one”. This is Housman’s “land of lost content” and the “happy highways” that he can never revisit.

Over the years other commentators have gone further in seeing coherent structures in *A Shropshire Lad*. In 1922 J.B. Priestley, picking out Housman’s “various moods”, wrote that

he partly dramatised them in a more or less definite atmosphere, on a more or less consistent plan.

Some American writers have pursued this structural analysis to the point of dividing the lyrics into two distinct groups. The poems from *ASL* II through to *ASL* XXXVII are thus defined as the ‘Shropshire poems’, while XXXVIII to LXI are the ‘poems of exile’, looking westward from London back to the lost land of innocence. In between, as B.J. Leggett argued in 1970, “... is the journey of exile that embodies the myth which lies at the core of Housman’s art.” This may be too much structural imposition for many, but there is still a sense in which *ASL* XXXVII can be seen as a “hinge” poem. The train heads for London “through the green hills of Wyre” leaving the “high-reared head of Clee” to sink “low in the forsaken west.” In the next poem the winds are blowing “out of the westland” as “... through the friendless world we fare / And sigh upon the road.” The mood is now one of nostalgia for something lost and never to be recovered – again the “happy highways where I went / And cannot come again.”

But, as we launch a new photographic edition with stunning images of rural scenery, what of the Shropshire that emerges from the poems themselves? It was one of these descriptions and the question of what he called ‘local colour’ that got Housman into almost immediate difficulty. His brother Laurence visited Shropshire just months after publication and wrote to point out that Hughley church, contrary to the image conjured in *ASL* LXI, had **no** steeple. Housman explained, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that “I thought of putting a note to say that Hughley was only a name, but I thought that would merely disturb the reader. I did not apprehend that the faithful would be making pilgrimages to these holy places.”

He later confided to a friend that he wrote six of the Shropshire poems before ever setting foot in the county. He was a Worcestershire lad and the Shropshire hills had simply formed the western horizon when he looked out from the high ground above his childhood home in Fockbury near Bromsgrove. The Shropshire he wrote about was, as Peter Parker

describes it in his admirable Introduction to the new Merlin Unwin edition, “both imaginary and real, mythical but recognisable.”

That it **was** recognisable probably owed much to a book that we know Housman read carefully. It was titled *Murray's Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire* and was published in 1879. Soon many people preferred Housman's poems as a guide to Shropshire, and embarked on the ‘pilgrimages’ which seem to have surprised him. Peter Parker reminds us that one of the early pilgrims was the American novelist Willa Catha in the summer of 1902. She told a friend at the time: “When we got into Shropshire we threw away our guide books and have blindly followed the trail of the Shropshire Lad.” She had hoped to meet Housman but she recorded that in Shropshire itself “of him not a legend, not a button or feather or mark. Nobody had ever heard of him or seen his book.”

But Housman himself was beginning to realise that he ought to spend some time in Shropshire, as his name was becoming associated with the county. For his summer holiday in July 1899 he spent three weeks at a posh hotel in Church Stretton, hobnobbing with the local squire, Ralph Beaumont Benson, and the ubiquitous and highly regarded local MP Jasper More. These two had recently founded The Shropshire Society, based in London, and were keen to promote South Shropshire as a tourist destination – the ‘Highlands of England’ – with Church Stretton as the next health spa to rival Matlock or Malvern.

If local ambitions for Church Stretton were never fully realised, the visitors still came, many inspired by Housman's poems. To quote the concluding sentence of Peter's Introduction “Even now it is more or less impossible to walk around Ludlow, Knighton or Clun, or climb up on to Clee, the Wrekin or Wenlock Edge, without Housman's haunting lines beating in one's mind.” And so the pilgrimages continue to this day – encouraged, I have to admit, by the Housman Society's booklet with two trails for motorists to follow around Shropshire. I wonder what AEH would think of that!

When Alfred Housman received the first copies of *A Shropshire Lad* from the printer in March 1896 he wrote to his brother Laurence:

the binding seems to me so extraordinarily beautiful that I cannot bear to lose sight of it by opening the book: when I take it down with the intention of reading it the cover detains me in a stupor of admiration until it is time to go to bed.

Now, 127 years later, we have in front of us what may be the 301st edition. Beautiful as the cover of Merlin Unwin's new publication undoubtedly is, I hope **you** will not be deterred from opening the book to enjoy John Hayward's truly remarkable photographs!

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Housman Society Journal vol 45 (2019) for a detailed account of Housman's stay at Church Stretton.

Housman's "conjectural future"

Tom Stoppard

In the New Year of 1888 Housman, still at the Patent Office, was working on his commentary on the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus which was to occupy 46 pages of the *Journal of Philology* that year.

Agamemnon was not the only thing on his mind at this time. His friend Moses Jackson had just sailed on the steamship *Bokhara* to take up a new career in India, and Housman began to use the pages of a pocket diary to track *Bokhara*'s progress. The first entry, for January 4, was simply "*Bokhara arrives at Gibraltar.*" Most of the pages are blank, but many readers will know that this little diary continued in a like register not only for the duration of the voyage ("*January 27. He gets to Karachi.*") but – with gaps – through the year and, as evidenced by loose leaves from two succeeding diaries, as far as November 1890, by which time Jackson had come home on leave to be married and returned to India with his bride.

Apart from a few cash accounts and some nature notes, the pages record solely news of Jackson, without once naming him. Jackson is always "he" or "him". Typically, we have "*I posted letter to him*", "*He came to me at the Office a little after 3*", "*Went to see him 6.30; he had just gone out to Camberwell*", "*I heard he was married*", altogether 30 entries over 35 months, until (using the space for May 22 in

an 1891 diary) the last entry of all: “*Sunday, 1898, 10.45 p.m. said goodbye.*”

Housman’s biographers justly find in these private jottings an emotional pain which nowhere breaks the surface. But perhaps it did so once in a place where no one would look for it, just at the time when Jackson was setting off for India on board *Bokhara*.

At v.415 in *Agamemnon*, to support a reading of no great consequence though against earlier editors, Housman refers us back to v.337 where Agamemnon’s wife Clytemnestra declares that the victorious Greeks will be happily sleeping in conquered Troy, “for the night is passing away as Clytaemestra (*sic*) speaks.” The tense, Housman says, is what may be called “the conjectural future”. And here he adds, “We have the same idiom in English: *he will be crossing the Channel by now.*”

Can one doubt that Moses Jackson in the here-and-now has gate-crashed the palace of Agamemnon? – that Housman has put down what might have been a diary entry before the diary picks up on *Bokhara*’s progress? Personally, I cannot. But there is a problem, and it is in *The Letters of A.E. Housman* (ed. A. Burnett).

On 28 December 1887, Housman wrote to the editor of the *Journal of Philology* in answer, evidently, to a query about the orthography of the name Clytemnestra; from which one would assume that the commentary was already in the

editor's hands when Jackson was crossing the Channel. So when I wrote above that in the New Year Housman was "working on" his commentary, it was a fudge, and Housman was merciless when he detected fudge. In fact, if there was one thing which set off his famously withering contempt it was fudging to defend a conjecture.

And yet I am convinced by mine. How am I to defend it in the light of the December 28 letter?

In Housman's commentary the name of Clytemnestra makes very few appearances but the first mention is in his note on v.415, as I quoted above. It was to v.415 that the editor of the *Journal of Philology* directed Housman's attention. I would offer that while it had his attention, on December 28, Housman had an afterthought about the "conjectural future". "*We have the same idiom in English*" he interpolated. An example was at hand.

Editor's note: Readers who want to delve further into Sir Tom Stoppard's intriguing conjecture on a link between Housman's diary entries and his commentary on the *Agamemnon* might want a few references. Housman's diary entries were published by Laurence Housman in an article titled "A.E. Housman's 'De Amicitia'" in *Encounter* (October 1967) 33-41. All the diary entries for 1888, 1889 and 1890 are listed in Edgar Vincent's 2018 biography of Housman (*A.E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life*, pp 52-4). Laurence believed that the final diary entry ("*Sunday, 1898, 10.45 p.m. said goodbye.*") refers to Moses Jackson who

must have been home on leave from India. Housman's article, "*The Agamemnon* of Aeschylus", appeared in the *Journal of Philology* 16 (1888) 244-90; it is reprinted in *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman*, I (55-90), edited by Diggle and Goodyear, 2004. Housman's 28 December 1887 letter to W. Aldis Wright, editor of the *Journal of Philology*, appears in *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, I (61), ed. Archie Burnett, 2007. W. Aldis Wright became editor of the *Journal of Philology* in 1868, and was the vice-master of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1888-1912.

“I would have died for you, but I never had the luck!”

Douglas Murray

This article originally appeared in The Free Press, an online publication at <https://www.thefp.com>. It was published on 23 July 2023 in Mr Murray’s weekly column on “Things Worth Remembering” where he presents passages from great poets that he has committed to memory.

There is a play by Tom Stoppard called *The Invention of Love*. An interesting title, because it is about a man who never once felt a reciprocated love.

Stoppard’s play begins with a joke: Charon, the ferryman of the underworld, is at the River Styx, and poet A.E. Housman is waiting to cross. Charon is kept waiting because he is expecting “a poet and a scholar.” When Housman realizes the confusion, he confesses that he is both.

Later, Stoppard ingeniously arranges a conversation between the old Housman and his younger self. The younger Housman is madly in love with his fellow student, Moses Jackson, and doesn’t realize that he is speaking with his older self. But when the matter of love comes up, the older Housman has no advice to give. Across his whole long life he has learned nothing of the matter, only of holding true to the one passion of his life — a passion that was never returned. At one point, amid the shades, the older Housman spots Jackson in the distance and says: “I would have died for you, but I never had the luck!”

The line rings painfully true. Not least because men dying young is a regular Housman theme. His poetry is shot through with praise for those who go back to their maker unsullied, “the lads that will die in their glory and never be old.” At its worst, this can be cloying; at its best, it

is, in the truest sense, awesome. Consider this posthumously published poem (*More Poems XXXVI*):

Here dead we lie because we did not choose
To live and shame the land from which we sprung.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
But young men think it is, and we were young.

There is so much packed in there, and as always with Housman, a furious quotability. Indeed, Housman's quotability is one reason why, in his own lifetime, his first volume, *A Shropshire Lad*, was such a hit. It came out in 1896 in an edition of 500 copies with the author paying part of the costs himself. By 1911, it was selling almost 14,000 copies a year in England alone. By 1946, there were 47 American editions. The work has never been out of print.

This popularity means Housman has always been sniffed at by critics. Twenty-three years ago, Craig Raine, in his book *In Defence of T.S. Eliot: Literary Essays*, grouched that "Housman's poetry speaks to the bad poet in all of us." A common complaint.

But the popularity of *A Shropshire Lad* grew when, in 1914, a new generation went to war with it in their pockets, and their relatives looked to it for consolation when they did not return. Indeed, it is hard to think of a poet with a deeper cultural impact. Almost every English composer for a century afterward set Housman's poems to music, not least George Butterworth, who was himself killed at the Somme.

After *A Shropshire Lad*, very little more came from the pen of Housman. He calcified at Cambridge, practicing his scholarship on the almost ostentatiously dry *Astronomica* of Manilius.

As for poetry, there were only *Last Poems* (1922) and the posthumously published *More Poems* (1936). This latter volume, in particular, contains works that make the motivation of Housman's muse more

obvious than he probably would have been able to endure when he was alive.

But *Last Poems* was also pretty self-revealing. When it was published, it swiftly sold out, and *The Times* of London devoted a big, prominent article to its release.

But Housman really cared only about the opinion of one person. Moses Jackson had left England 33 years earlier and was dying in Canada. It seems certain that, at some point, decades earlier, Housman had confessed his feelings to Jackson, and it seems equally clear that Jackson was horrified, made it clear he was not cut from the same cloth, extricated Housman from his life, married, and left the country. Housman was not invited to the wedding and only found out about it afterward.

But in the 1922 letter to Moses Jackson accompanying *Last Poems* (many of which were clearly about Jackson), Housman tried to strike a brave pose, boasting of his success. It is one of the saddest letters I have ever read, especially the line: “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.”

I believe it. Given the choice, he would have. But he didn’t have the opportunity—or the luck. Instead, Housman sublimated his passion into these tiny poems.

Still, what a legacy. His odes—like *A Shropshire Lad’s* poem [XL](#) below— started off as poems written to a lost love, and soon became love poems to a lost world.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

An Unpublished Letter by A. E. Housman Discovered in a Russian Archive

*This is a lightly edited version of an article by Professor Shumilin that appeared in *Philologus* 2022, 166(2): 272–81, under the title “An Unpublished Letter by A.E. Housman Related to the Textual Criticism of Statius’ *Silvae*”.*

Mikhail Shumilin

An autograph letter from A. E. Housman to Grigory E. Saenger (1853–1919), a scholar from Russia, which has so far escaped notice of those who research and write about Housman’s legacy, is in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (ARAS) under the classmark F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 341.¹¹ The letter was written in Latin, in 1909, and contains criticism of Saenger’s 1909 edition of *Silvae*, by Publius Papinius Statius. He was a Roman poet of the first century CE, and *Silvae* (or *Silvae*) is a collection of his Latin poetry. Several features make Housman’s letter interesting despite its brevity: in particular, it is only the third of his letters written in Latin to be published;²² and it makes several comments on both specific and

¹ No other letters by Housman are mentioned in the catalogues of this archive, but it is perhaps not inconceivable that they might also turn up in the papers of Pyotr L. Kapitza (ARAS. Fund 2197), a famous Russian physicist and Nobel laureate who spent years 1921–1934 in Cambridge and is known to have been on friendly terms with Housman: see Boag/Rubinin/Schoenberg (1990) 37, Naiditch (2005) 31. Unfortunately, the corresponding ‘fund’ in the ARAS was only transferred to the archive in 2011 and still remains uncatalogued. It must, however, be noted that the formulations in a letter from E. Rutherford to Kapitza from May 15, 1936 in which Rutherford informs the colleague about Housman’s death seem to imply that Kapitza and Housman did not maintain contact after Kapitza left Britain in 1934: see Boag/Rubinin/Schoenberg (1990) 289–290.

² The other two are the letters to E. Fraenkel from October 1, 1926 and to O. Skutsch from June 5, 1934: see Burnett (2007) 1.627–628, 2.425–427. One of the anonymous *Philologus* readers suggests to me that the 1902 Latin address from University College, London to the University of Sydney, composed by Housman on the evidence

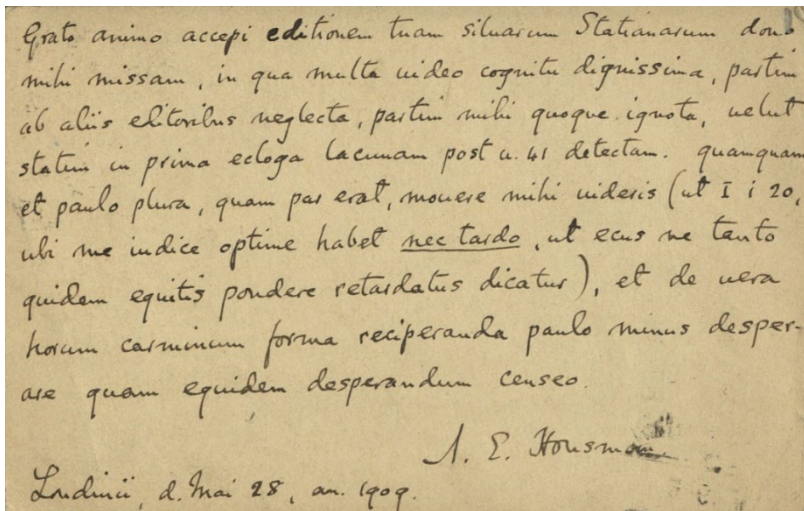
general textual issues connected with Statius' *Silvae* that are not made elsewhere in Housman's published writings. The purpose of this article is to publish Housman's letter: first in print in Latin; then in his handwriting; then in an English translation. A commentary follows, and then a postscript written for the *Housman Society Journal*.

Text of Housman's letter

Grato animo accipi editionem tuam siluarum Statianarum dono mihi missam, in qua multa uideo cognitu dignissima, partim ab aliis editoribus neglecta, partim mihi quoque ignota, uelut statim in prima ecloga lacunam post u. 41 detectam. quamquam et paulo plura, quam par erat, mouere mihi uideris (ut I i 20, ubi me iudice optime habet *nec tardo*, ut ecus ne tanto quidem equitis pondere retardatus dicatur), et de uera horum carminum forma recipienda paulo minus desperare quam equidem desperandum censeo.

A. E. Housman

Londinii, d. Mai 28, an. 1909



Grato animo accipi editionem tuam siluarum Statianarum dono mihi missam, in qua multa uideo cognitu dignissima, partim ab aliis editoribus neglecta, partim mihi quoque ignota, uelut statim in prima ecloga lacunam post u. 41 detectam. quamquam et paulo plura, quam par erat, mouere mihi uideris (ut I i 20, ubi me iudice optime habet *nec tardo*, ut ecus ne tanto quidem equitis pondere retardatus dicatur), et de uera horum carminum forma recipienda paulo minus desperare quam equidem desperandum censeo.

A. E. Housman

Londinii, d. Mai 28, an. 1909.

Fig. 1. MS Moscow ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 341. Fol. 1r. © ARAS

of A. S. F. Gow (see White 1958), should also be mentioned here; but it cannot strictly be called one of Housman's letters.

Translation of Housman's letter

I have received with gratitude your edition of Statius' *Silvae* sent to me as a gift. I find many things in it worthy of attention, some neglected by other editors, and some I myself was ignorant of, such as, right in the first eclogue, the lacuna detected following verse 41. Nonetheless, I suspect that you propose a few more changes than was reasonable (as in I i 20, where I judge *nec tardo* to be quite fine, meaning that the horse is not slowed even by the great weight of the rider); and I think that you despair about recovering the true form of these poems a little less than I personally think we should despair.

A.E.

Housman

London, 28 May, 1909

Commentary: General Context

Grigory Eduardovich Saenger³ was not just “the author of six classical papers in Russian, 1910–1912”, as he is characterized by Archie Burnett in his edition of Housman's letters;⁴ he was a very prolific textual critic of ancient Latin authors, mainly poets, whose work is little known today for the reason of being written almost exclusively in Russian.⁵ In 1909 he published his only critical edition, that of Statius' *Silvae*,⁶ and Housman's letter is explicitly written after receiving an

³ The first name is sometimes spelled Gregory and latinized as Gregorius; the surname is sometimes spelled Senger or Zenger. There does not seem to be a good introduction to his life in English; in Russian, the best treatments of his biography are Shilov (2003) and Smyshlyaeva (2021), which unfortunately fail to give a proper assessment of his scholarly work.

⁴ Burnett (2007) I.288 n. 1.

⁵ The most complete bibliography of Saenger's works can be found in ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 2. Unit 26. Fol. 7–8, 11 and is now available in digitized form: <http://isaran.ru/bookreader/bookreader.php?guid=36285B23-C166-8EA0-BAA6-E0EEB26B2AFF&ida=&kod=5#page/1/mode/1up>.

⁶ Saenger (1909).

exemplar of this edition from Saenger. Saenger's archives in ARAS and the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg preserve letters sent to Saenger from numerous scholars from Great Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Denmark and the USA; in most cases the first letter of each correspondence is also dated to 1909 (most often to May or early June)⁷ and is similarly an acknowledgement of receiving a copy of Saenger's edition.⁸ None of the letters in question implies earlier contacts between the two scholars. It seems that Saenger decided to send the book to various scholars unknown to him personally; this was clearly the case with Housman.

The book was evidently accompanied by a letter from Saenger, the text of which is not extant in Saenger's papers;⁹ the language of this letter must account for Housman's choice to respond in Latin. In particular, while all the responses of the German scholars are in German and those from the French scholars are in French, the language of the responses received by Saenger from the English-speaking scholars varies: the letters from Clark and Merrill are in English, but those from Owen and

⁷ Cf. the date given in the colophon of the edition itself, Saenger (1909) 232: *Prelo hic liber exiit pridie Kal. Maias a. MCMIX*, "This book left the press on 30 April, 1909".

⁸ This is the case of the letters preserved in ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 313. Fol. 1 (from J. Vahlen, 22 May, 1909), Unit 314 (from U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 22 July, 1909, with apologies for the delayed response), Unit 316. Fol. 4 (from R. Helm, 25 May, 1909), Unit 318. Fol. 1 (from M. C. Gertz, 23 May, 1909), Unit 319. Fol. 1 (from G. Goetz, 25 May, 1909), Unit 320 (from I. Hilberg, 2 June, 1909), Unit 323. Fol. 1 (from C. Hosius, 25 May 1909), Unit 327 (from A. C. Clark, 30 May, 1909), Unit 328. Fol. 1–4 (from A. Klotz, 1 June, 1909, with apologies for the delayed response), Unit 329. Fol. 1 (from G. Lafaye, 26 May, 1909), Unit 330 (from P. Lejay, 29 June, 1909), Unit 333 (from E. T. Merrill, 3 June, 1909), Unit 331 (from F. Leo, 15 August, 1909, with apologies for the delayed response), Unit 335 (from E. Norden, 13 May, 1909), Unit 336. Fol. 1 (from S. G. Owen, 30 May, 1909), Unit 337 (from F. Skutsch, 29 May 1909), Unit 338. Fol. 1–2 (from D. A. Slater, dated 31 May, 1909), Unit 340 (from J. S. Phillimore, 23 May, 1909), Unit 343 (from F. Schöll, 21 June, 1909).

⁹ Saenger's archive preserves a draft of such a letter in German addressed to A. Klotz (ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 405. Fol. 1–2, dated "den _ Mai 1909"); the content of this draft makes it clear that the letters did not follow a single standard form, since many points relevant only for Klotz as an addressee are discussed in it.

Phillimore are in French, while Housman's and Slater's letters are in Latin. At the same time all the English-speaking scholars write Saenger's address in French, while all the German-speaking correspondents write it in German. Apparently Saenger's command of English was not sufficient for composing a letter and he chose to address British and American scholars in French (at the same time he was clearly able to read in English,¹⁰ and presumably he later stated this explicitly at least to Owen, who switches to English in his further letters to Saenger).¹¹ It is hard to imagine what else could independently convey the idea to several addressees that Saenger did not speak English and preferred French other than a letter accompanying the book; the book itself was clearly not enough.¹²

The correspondence between Housman and Saenger continued after the letter in question. Six offprints of Saenger's papers in Russian sent by

¹⁰ Sometimes he gives quotations from scholarly literature in English without translation in his articles written in Russian (e.g. Saenger 1911, 186), and his book of verse translations into Latin includes a translation of Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" (Saenger 1904, 16–19).

¹¹ ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 336. Fol. 3 (9 June, 1912), 4 (1 July, 1912) and 5 (1 November, [1912?]). Letters from Robinson Ellis to Saenger, which are all later than 1909 (ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 345. Fol. 1: 11 November, 1910; Fol. 2–3: 23 May, 1912), are in English and seem to continue an earlier discussion of Statius' *Silvae*: it is likely that this correspondence also started in 1909 when Saenger sent his edition to the British scholar, but in this case Ellis's initial response is lost and it is not clear which language Ellis chose to use in it.

¹² It could be argued that Saenger's letter to Housman was in German, not in French, from the fact that in the catalogue of Saenger's archive a draft of a letter to Housman in German is listed (ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 410, dated 30 May, 1909). A closer inspection reveals, however, that this draft with a lengthy discussion of Lucan was in fact addressed to C. Hosius: the name of the addressee is absent from the letter, and Saenger begins with thanking this addressee for his kind reception of the edition and also for sending in response his own "Schrift *de imitatione*", which is clearly Hosius's *De imitatione scriptorum Romanorum imprimis Lucani* (Hosius 1907). Consequently, in the following text of the letter Saenger first discusses parallels to Lucan omitted by Hosius and only afterwards comes to textual problems of Lucan's poem.

him to Housman between 1910 and 1912 are extant,¹³ and in a letter dated 23 April 1912 Housman asked Grant Richards to send a copy of Housman's edition of Manilius II to Saenger (the address he uses is still in French).¹⁴

Commentary: Particular Statements

Four particular points regarding the textual criticism of Statius' *Silvae* are made by Housman in the letter published here.

First, Housman (more or less) approves of postulating a lacuna after Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.41. His formulations are far from unequivocal. On the one hand, he gives this as an example of the information given in the new edition which was unknown to him earlier and is at the same time a useful piece of knowledge, *cognitu dignissima*. This might of course mean that he would still not accept this decision in the text. On the other hand, his expression *lacunam... detectam*, "the lacuna uncovered", appears to come closer to a direct approval of the decision in question. But, whatever the exact degree of approval implied by Housman, it is anyway surprisingly high for a proposal which was rejected in all the post-Saengerian editions of Statius.¹⁵ An additional point implied by Housman might be that this was not Saenger's own decision but just a solution he accepted and thus not so much an idea for which the editor was to be praised as a useful piece of information

¹³ Naiditch (2004) 155. In the same years Saenger also sent offprints of his Russian language papers to J. Vahlen, R. Helm, M. C. Gertz, G. Goetz, G. Lafaye, E. Norden, S. G. Owen, D. A. Slater and R. Ellis, as their responses testify (respectively ARAS. F. 504. Inv. 4. Unit 313. Fol. 3 and perhaps Fol. 4; Unit 316. Fol. 3 and perhaps Fol. 1–2; Unit 318. Fol. 2–3, 6 and perhaps Fol. 4–5; Unit 319. Fol. 3 and perhaps Fol. 2; Unit 329. Fol. 5 and perhaps Fol. 7; Unit 335. Fol. 2; Unit 336. Fol. 3–5; Unit 338. Fol. 5; Unit 345. Fol. 2–3). Helm, Gertz, Lafaye, Owen and Slater managed to read some of the text in Russian and make a few comments on it, while others simply confess their inability to read the works.

¹⁴ Burnett (2007) I.288.

¹⁵ A partial exception is Klotz (1911) 5, who mentions the conjecture in his apparatus and accepts instead a lacuna after verse 40 (Klotz's own suggestion).

discovered by him. Indeed, this is the impression Saenger's apparatus leaves: what he writes there is *lacunam e. g. suppleui, Theodori Korsch uestigiis ingressus, qui loricae mentionem excidisse dudum intellexerat* ("I have proposed an *exempli gratia* supplement for the lacuna, following in the footsteps of Theodorus Korsch, who had some time ago realized that a mention of the cuirass was missing").¹⁶ Now, what actually happened was this:

1. Fyodor (latinized Theodorus) Korsch (1843–1915), another Russian scholar and a friend of Saenger, suggested that a verse (containing a mention of the emperor's cuirass otherwise absent from the description of his equestrian statue) was omitted after line 42.¹⁷
2. Saenger followed him in postulating a lacuna of the same content, but placed it after line 41.¹⁸

Thus, what Housman seems to approve of is actually Saenger's own idea, even though anticipated by Helm,¹⁹ as Klotz pointed out.²⁰

Second, Housman writes that in his opinion the number of conjectural changes introduced by Saenger is "a little too much". Saenger's edition is indeed marked by a certain conjectural radicalism and openly opposed to such conservative editions of the *Siluae* as that of F. Vollmer,²¹ notoriously ridiculed by Housman in 1908.²² We have,

¹⁶ Saenger (1909) 8.

¹⁷ Korsch (1895) 165. Korsch's supplement was "*aegide tecta sacra spirare ut uiua uidentur*".

¹⁸ Saenger's *exempli gratia* supplement was "*flammeus aurato seruat subtemine thorax*". A detailed explanation of this decision in Russian is available in Saenger (1906) 90–92.

¹⁹ Helm (1901) 11. Helm's idea of the content of the lacuna was also the same as Saenger's: he writes of an "Ausfall eines Verses... in dem der Panzer erwähnt war".

²⁰ Klotz (1911) 5. Later editors have naturally tended to misinterpret Saenger's apparatus in the same way as Housman.

²¹ Vollmer (1898). Saenger does not explicitly state this attitude in the edition itself, but often formulates it elsewhere, see e.g. Saenger (1898) 18, (1902) 2, 4; (1903) 471; (1906) 95, 99.

²² Housman (1972) 771.

therefore, two points of reference on the scale of editorial conservatism between which Housman places the ideal edition of the *Siluae*. It will be helpful to introduce some statistics here; in the following list, the number of conjectures introduced in the text of *Siluae* 1.1 (107 lines long) is given for Vollmer, Saenger and the major post-Saengerian editions, so as to determine their place on that scale.²³

Edition	
Vollmer (1898)	26
Saenger (1909)	35
Klotz (1911)	26
Phillimore (1917)	35
Mozley (1928)	29
Frère/Izaac (1961)	23
Marastoni (1970)	25
Traglia in Traglia/Aricò (1980)	27
Courtney (1990)	32
Shackleton Bailey (2003)	36
Lieberman (2010)	29
Hall/Ritchie/Edwards (2021)	65

Tab. 1. The number of conjectures introduced in the text of *Siluae* 1.1 in various editions.

²³ I have not been able to access the edition of Pittà (2021) kindly signalled to me by Dr E. Galfré. *Silu.* 1.1 was chosen as the poem Housman is most likely to have read attentively in Saenger's edition. For the sake of convenience, I treat every departure from ms. M (= Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana 3678) beside trivial orthographical corrections as a conjectural innovation, whether mentioned in the apparatus of the corresponding edition or not. A conjecture replacing several words of the paradosis is treated as the corresponding number of separate conjectures. Some of the editors, including Saenger, considered the so-called A (that is, readings partly extracted by Angelo Poliziano from a manuscript which he called "codex Poggianus") another independent witness for the text beside ms. M, but Saenger at least marks all the three readings of A ever claimed to be superior to those of ms. M in the poem 1.1 (1.1.10 *Ide*, 1.1.73 *trepidans* and 1.1.103 *Taras*) as probably not deriving from the "codex Poggianus", that is, ultimately conjectural.

In other words, in purely quantitative terms E. Courtney's or possibly J. H. Mozley's and G. Liberman's approach seems closest to what Housman recommends here, at least to judge from this portion of the text.

Third, Housman defends the transmitted *tardo* in 1.1.20, where Saenger adopts Poliziano's *tanto*; the context is a description of the statue of Domitian's horse (1.1.18–21):

exhaustis Martem non altius armis
Bistonius portat sonipes magnoque superbit
pondere nec tardo raptus prope flumina cursu
fumat et ingenti propellit Strymona flatu.

No more loftily does a Bistonian horse bear Mars when battles are over and shows pride on account of its great load and in his fast run along the river steams and pushes Strymon forward with his powerful breath.

More or less conservative editors normally preserve the paradox here, but others follow Markland's argument that the second half of this sentence must conceal a further comparison with Domitian's horse:²⁴ in particular, D. R. Shackleton Bailey, like Saenger, adopts *tanto* ("nor so great his speed as he pelts steaming...", tr. Shackleton Bailey), while J. S. Phillimore printed his own conjecture *tantum* ("nor so much he steams and pushes Strymon forward"). Housman argues that *nec tardo* seems to him completely appropriate here, since the litotes is motivated by the implied concessive sense: even though weighed down by such a great (and presumably heavy) horseman as Mars, the horse does not become slow in its run.

Fourth, Housman writes that Saenger seems to him to "despair about recovering the true form of these poems a little less" than the British critic thinks we should despair. What he means is probably that he

²⁴ See Markland (1728) 4–5.

would have used obeli [a mark, in the form of a cross, used by editors to indicate hopelessly corrupt text], and postulated lacunae more often in his edition of the *Siluae*, and possibly also admitted that some transpositions remain unidentified.²⁵ If we consider obeli central to Housman's perspective, this recommendation is striking in two ways:

1. In his own editions Housman is not particularly fond of obeli. He apparently considered the very corrupt text of the *Siluae* a special case.
2. Saenger's edition actually makes a very extensive use of obeli (ca. 100 obelized words in total), second in this respect only to the hyper-obelized edition of Gauthier Liberman (336 obelized words).

It would appear thus that Housman recommended to introduce in the text of the *Siluae* even more obeli than Saenger (though presumably still many fewer than Liberman) – an approach with which we have nothing to compare in modern editions. Perhaps, however, aspects of 'desperation' other than obeli should help account for these words of Housman without seeing in them such a radical statement.

Postscript for the Housman Society Journal

While the original text of this article, written for the academic classics journal *Philologus*, focused mainly on factual matters, readers of the HSJ may welcome a few additional comments on what this correspondence meant to Saenger himself and on the Russian reception of Housman. They may, for example, get the impression from the article that Saenger was something of an oddball who sent articles in

²⁵ One of the anonymous *Philologus* readers suggested to me that the key to the exact meaning of Housman's words might be found in Saenger's Latin preface on the formulations of which Housman reacted, but unfortunately in this preface Saenger refrains from discussing his approach and simply lists the manuscripts with brief comments (in Saenger 1909, V he explains that he plans to publish a separate volume with a critical commentary and a "general introduction to the state of affairs in the textual criticism of the *Siluae*", *prooemium ad criticam 'Siluarum' condicionem uniuerse pertinens*; this project was never realized).

Russian to foreign scholars, even though he was, like Housman, quite capable of producing his editions of classical authors. Saenger's own view of his actions will have been different, of course.

In the Russian Empire of his time, he was very much isolated in his approach to textual criticism and unable to create an environment ready to appreciate his work (even though in 1902–04 he was the head of the Ministry of National Education). The project of sending pieces of his work to foreign scholars in his last years was a rather desperate attempt to breach this wall and to establish contact with the textual critics he modeled his approach on. To judge from the lists of his addressees and the scholars he cites in his work, British scholars influenced his own work – and Housman was probably the most important of these. The place of the British scholars in Saenger's worldview must have been special, not what we would expect from a Russian scholar of the time. German scholars were considered unrivalled champions of classical scholarship in Russia, and it is quite striking that Saenger treated British scholars as equally or even more important than German ones.

Even Saenger's unusual practice of writing his articles in Russian can be seen as an imitation of the British practice of writing in English instead of Latin or German. Saenger's choice of ancient authors to study was also very Housmanian. If I am right that Housman was a particularly important role model for Saenger, he stands at the beginning of a line of Russian classical scholars for whom in various ways Housman's work seems to have been a crucial influence. This is rather surprising, since Housman remained virtually unknown to Soviet culture, a situation that seems to have changed only with Timur Kibirov's *Marginal Notes on 'A Shropshire Lad'* and Viktor Kuperman's Russian translation of Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, both published in 2007.

The list of people influenced by Housman includes two men who, it may be argued, are the most influential Soviet and Post-Soviet scholars

of Latin poetry: Mikhail Gasparov (1935-2005) and Grigory Dashevsky (1964-2013).

Gasparov expressed a radically pessimistic view that it is impossible to establish any kind of dialogue with ancient authors; he constructed his scholarly activities with a kind of quasi-monastic self-restraint, allowing himself to make very few personal comments on the authors he worked on, and limiting himself to technical work like translation and the retelling of standard scholarly commentaries. In his refusal to do anything other than technical philological work, he appears to have been inspired by a comment in Housman's letter to Arthur Platt of 6 April 1916 which Gasparov referred to repeatedly in his writings: "If you prefer Aeschylus to Manilius you are no true scholar." Gasparov seems to have thought this was an exemplary position for a scholar to have. Rather strangely, I think, he interpreted it as 'no personal opinion, just tacit subservience to the ancient texts'.

As for Dashevsky, another scholarly poet, he clearly felt particular kinship with Housman in his late years. He paid tribute to the British poet by including in a book of his own poetry a translation of Horace, *Odes IV 7 (Diffugere nives)*. This poem Housman called "the most beautiful poem in ancient literature" [Richards, *Housman 1897-1936*, p. 289] and his own translation appears in his posthumous *More Poems* (V). In addition, Dashevsky paid homage to Housman by imitating the style of Housman's textual notes in his scholarly work, when he switched focus to the study of 19th-century Russian poetry.

Acknowledgement: I thank the staff of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences for their assistance, and the anonymous readers of this article for their valuable suggestions. In addition I thank the publisher of the original version of the article for permitting its re-publication; and Professor David Sider and Linda Hart for their help in editing the Postscript and the translation of Housman's letter.

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Returning Home: First Impressions of ‘A Shropshire Lad’

Gregory Sidaway

It was early May, three weeks into Trinity Term, when Housman showed me home.

Notoriously, Oxford terms bulge with essays to finish, work to complete. The terms may be shorter than most (only eight weeks long) but we are definitely kept busy. However, as I was coming to the end of my first year – with exams on the not-so-distant horizon – the workload relaxed a little. This easing gave me the freedom to consolidate everything I had covered over the year and – most importantly – to then go further; I explored works that interested me to flesh out a better understanding of particular periods and authors. I found myself in the foggy streets of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the dustbins of Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, and the grey wastelands of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*.

I had never read Housman before, and (dare I admit it before a readership of devoted Housman scholars?) the author’s name only vaguely rang a bell. But, in early May, I was browsing in Waterstones when I noticed a very slim volume sitting on the shelf. Hardback, clothbound, its grey cover embossed with light blue leaves said *A Shropshire Lad* A.E. Housman. (Bibliophiles will want to know it is the Penguin Classics edition from 2017.)

So many greats have studied or taught (or both) at Oxford, but I often find it difficult to properly fathom this when I walk around the city. Entering into the world of Housman, I soon discovered he studied at St. John’s (a vast college with no shortage of quadrangles, gardens and ways to get lost) from 1877 to 1881. While I was preparing for my preliminary examinations, I thought of Housman sitting his own exams one hundred

and forty-two years earlier; when eventually I received my results, I was glad to have avoided the ‘apocalyptic collapse of promise’¹ he apparently showed due to his strong interest in the Latin poet, Propertius, and little else.

After I had conquered my workload and freed up an hour or two of spare time, I found my copy of *A Shropshire Lad* and went for walk. A collection such as this demanded to be read outside. Choosing a bench, I sat down in the cool morning and began to read. The chirrup of birds and whisper of trees played in harmony with the words on the page.

Who was the ‘Shropshire lad’? It stood out to me that Housman had given him no name. The title prioritises place over person; or, alternatively, it suggests interaction between the two, as if the ‘lad’ is who he is because of his surroundings. The collection’s first poem, ASL I, *1887*, has the war dead remembered in the soil they have trodden and in the far-flung locations they have travelled to in the name of Queen and Country. Whether it’s Shropshire or the Severn, Asia or the Nile, place is imbued with a sense of constancy. Locations endure. Lives may touch them for a time, but they cannot last, so it is up to us to rediscover them. In *1887*, tombstones are Asia’s, names are Shropshire’s, and the dead belong to the Severn. Housman appears to encourage the reader to consider place and see in it forgotten lives and past experiences. As suggested by the title, the environment facilitates this act of discovery.

I find reading each poem in a collection has a cumulative effect. The first poem might establish different thematic roads open to readers; the following ones usually continue the journey along one or more of these routes; each poem can stand alone but the sixty-three become weightier when they are assessed as a single unit. The second poem in the collection, ASL II, developed my interpretations of the first and its opening stanza stayed with me:

1 Edgar Vincent, *A.E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life*, 2018, p.37

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

In the front garden at home, in Worcestershire, we have a cherry tree. It blossomed in the last weeks of the Easter holidays; in previous years, downpours and stiff April winds have not been kind to the blossom – but this year showed mercy. Our tree did wear white for Eastertide.

So I was sitting in Oxford reading *A Shropshire Lad*, my mind caroming from assignments, to things to buy at Tesco, to societies I'd signed up for ... when, just for a moment, those thoughts passed like a large cloud caught in a fresh, keen breeze.

Housman had shown me home.

Visualising my front garden gave me a new angle from which to read on. I was fortunate enough as a first-time reader to have two different ways into Housman. Oxford features in our academic lives and our childhoods do not centre around a major city, but the countryside does. Reading the poem through the prism of my own experience, I became interested in the connection between the new and the familiar, the worlds of adulthood and childhood that the speakers drift between. I wanted to explore how Housman presents place and, specifically, home as important throughout one's life.

We have a 'lad' in the title of the collection, so part of me anticipated a coming-of-age story. Would the 'lad' shrug off his home town in an act of self-discovery and make a name for himself? It surprised me, therefore, to discover that Housman presents home not so much as a place to be rejected, but a place to return to. It is never static. ASL II emphasises the mutability of our own lives in connection with the world around us. 'Twenty will not come again', just as 'fifty springs are little room' to appreciate the blossom. There is beauty in the fleetingness of *A*

Shropshire Lad, there is a heartfelt reason to care. Placing 1887 prior to ASL II frames the latter against a backdrop of sacrifice. Reading the two in succession, the celebration of the cherry blossom becomes a celebration not only of nature but of the war dead, whose memory is celebrated through the new life blooming in the country they died for. Moreover, ASL III, *The Recruit*, uses a fondness of home and the desire to protect it to motivate the soldiers – building on the beauty celebrated in ASL II and now putting it under threat from the ‘foes of England’. The fates of people and place are intertwined.

These initial discoveries and ideas prompted me to conduct some reading into Housman and his life, both at home and at Oxford. The works of Edgar Vincent, Norman Page and Jeremy Bourne proved very useful. I hesitate to ‘play the dangerous game of quarrying Housman’s poems for personal allusions’² but there does appear to be a similarity between the collection’s mature presentation of home, and the burden the author himself must have felt as an undergraduate after his family’s situation in Bromsgrove grew dire. His father’s worsening condition and the shadow of responsibility cast over a young Housman mirrors the solemn undertones of his poems; home cannot – as much as we might like – remain exactly as it was in childhood. The speaker returns to it with a mature perspective, informed now by experience and acceptance of the uncertainty in life. I read the romanticisation of the cherry blossom in ASL II (somewhat paradoxically) as an indicator of the speaker’s *pragmatic* understanding of the world. Blossom is celebrated precisely because the speaker knows it cannot last and so must be enjoyed in the moment.

As a first-time reader, what struck me most about this collection was its dichotomous elements. On the one hand, home is a place of new beginnings, rebirth and purity that must be defended. On the other, it is a sombre place – the blossom cannot last, war snatches the young, and the speaker himself recognises that he will leave his mark on the fields and

2 Norman Page, *A.E. Housman: A Critical Biography*, 1996, p.45

then be ‘dead and gone’. These two elements are far from separate and often interweave. ASL XLIX, for example, explores the conflict in attitudes to the wider world; does one choose ignorant bliss or acknowledge its darkness? The speaker of ASL XLIX is so disillusioned with the afflicted world that even thinking is associated with an early grave. The troubles of the adult world surround the bastion of childhood and close in on it throughout the collection. Housman might begin with rallying patriotic verses in *1887*, but the collection itself matures from poem to poem. The speaker of ASL LVII accepts that ‘I shall have lived a little while / Before I die for ever’ and ASL LX understands that ‘There’s nothing but the night’. As we read, patriotism and romance are peeled away, the themes of the collection grow up just as the Shropshire lad grows up.

In a collection of change, of ageing, then, I would argue that home is all the more important. When the speaker refers to home, he does so with a mature understanding of its mutability. He understands the cherry blossom cannot last forever, just as he himself cannot last forever. Place is used as a structural device through which to explore how people change and develop their understanding of the world. It is an anchor, a point of reference from which the reader can better trace a steady darkening of attitudes throughout the collection. For this reason, home allows us to better understand this change just as the ‘lad’ returns home to better understand the wider world. All places have joyous and sombre aspects. To truly accept this fact, one must apply it to places of personal significance – in this case, home.

Following unsatisfactory Oxford results, Housman returned home ‘in disgrace, without a degree and with no visible source of income’³. The demands of the adult world would naturally inform a more mature perspective of the place where he had grown up. Thanks to Herbert Millington, classics teacher and headmaster, Housman would take up a part-time job at the Sixth Form at Bromsgrove School; his home became

3 Jeremy Bourne, *The Westerly Wanderer: A Brief Portrait of A.E. Housman*, 1996, p.46

a place of employment and likely took on new meaning for him. When I first read the title ‘*A Shropshire Lad*’, I expected a wistful exploration of the past, heady with nostalgia and fondness for what no longer exists – for what may have never existed outside of rose-tinted lenses. However, instead of having home exist in the back of a speaker’s mind, part of an inaccessible and unattainable past, Housman does something different. Illusions of the past are deconstructed, they are brought to the forefront. Home is returned to in later life and interacted with to tell us more about how people and perspective changes.

ASL XXI, *Bredon Hill*, is a poignant example of this change. I can see Bredon Hill from my bedroom window. In my copy of ASL, there’s an asterisk and a note at the bottom of the page saying ‘* Pronounced Breedon’ which, as a local, makes me smile. When I think about the late Victorian era in literature, I think of *Dorian Gray*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, etc. – predominantly *London* based stories – so references to Bredon, Ludlow and Wyre feel unusual, literally too close to home. I can’t say how many times I’ve climbed Bredon Hill; I’ve sledged down its slopes in the winter; I’ve orienteered across it with Scouts; I’ve perched on top of the “stone elephants” (formations of boulders that look like elephants) and watched the sun set over Worcestershire – which spreads out like a matte painting, a patchwork landscape of tiny cars and model villages. Just as the hill allows you to see life taking place all around you, the hill in Housman’s poem is a constant, providing the reader with a backdrop against which to view an unfolding tragedy of unfulfilled wishes and love ended too soon. The bells at church are now solemn, no longer heralding the future but a funeral. For me, I imagined the peal of the bells at Pershore Abbey, which has long stood at the centre of my town, just as the hill stands at the centre of the poem.

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

I knew *Bredon Hill* was one of Housman's better-known poems, but I did not expect it to be a poem of grief. Yet, when read as part of the collection, it makes perfect sense. He presents the reader with glimpses of people's lives, creating a collage of experiences and adding multiple dimensions to his presentation of home in the countryside. It is at once a place of childhood joy and new love, as well as weariness and the acknowledgement that everything has its time. It is telling that the outbreak of the First World War led to a surge in popularity for *A Shropshire Lad*, indicative of how Housman uses ideas of home to explore intrinsic themes of innocence and experience, life and death, love and loss, which remain relevant to us as human beings across time, throughout our lives.

Here I was, at a new stage in my life, faced with new choices to make, new obstacles to overcome. Yet such a powerful combination of wistfulness and maturity highlighted to me how the past informs the present. I returned to college and the world of study, but I did not forget what Housman had shown me, the life back at home he reminded me still existed: the bells of Pershore Abbey, the sun setting on Bredon Hill, and cherry blossom stirring in the breeze.

More letters from A.E. Housman

Julian Hunt

Six letters from A.E. Housman to his brother Laurence and sister Clemence were amongst a collection of Laurence Housman's photographs and correspondence recently given to the Housman Society by Christine Walters, of Crouch End, London.

These papers were in the possession of Christine's father, Cyril Hunt (1919-99), who worked for Lloyds Bank from 1944 until his retirement in 1979. He was based in Exeter, where he worked in the bank's probate division. He may therefore have acted for Lloyds Bank Limited, the executor named in the will of Laurence Housman, who died at Street, Somerset, 20 February 1959 and whose will was proved at Gloucester, 20 July that year. The modest probate valuation of £4,367 18s. 5d. might have been partly due to his generosity to Kay Vogel, whose letters form a large proportion of the collection.

These papers have now been deposited at Worcestershire Archives as part of the Housman Society material already held there. The six letters of A.E. Housman have, however, been separately deposited at Trinity College, Cambridge, and were handed to Librarian, Nicolas Bell, on 22 October 2022 as part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the publication of Housman's *Last Poems*.

These letters have been transcribed by Max Hunt and Linda Hart.

First letter

17 North Road
Highgate N.
19 June 1905

My dear Clemence,
I enclose:-

A letter from Basil,
Kate's letter to you,
Two letters from A. Parker to Laurence.

I will fall in with either Kate's scheme or Basil's, if the rest of you can agree on either.¹ For my own part I should prefer to do as A. Parker suggests, and let things continue as at present till [illegible word, possibly 'first'] Kate's death or at anyrate [spelled this way] till the £150 in hand is exhausted. When either of those events arrives, it is to be hoped and expected that we shall all be either dead or richer than now. But I will not oppose any solution which finds favour with the rest of you; and I can quite well pay either £93.15.0 or £125; only, as I have just spent £70 on my new book (a sum which the sale of the whole edition will not bring in), and may want to spend another similar sum before two years are out, and am contributing by instalments of £20 a special subscription of £100 to the College, ^ <and have indulged in the luxury of an assistant, who costs £50, >² and have been rather extravagant in the matter of foreign travel, – it would reduce my balance at the bankers below the comfortable margin which would enable me to flee to the continent at any moment with a year's income in my pockets, or lend a hundred or two at a moment's notice to a friend who might want it.³

I don't know whether the way Basil proposes to dispose of your money has your sanction.

Your affectionate brother
A.E. Housman

¹ This letter refers to the death of Robert Holden Housman who caught a chill while staying with his sister Kate Symons at Bath in 1905. His executor was their step-mother, Lucy Agnes Housman.

² Text in brackets <> is inserted above the line

³ This is presumably a reference to Moses Jackson.

Second letter:

Trinity College
Cambridge
22 Nov. 1922

My dear Clemence,
Yours is the only one of our birthdays which I am not sure about, because either the 23rd was yours and the 25th our grandmother's, or vice versa, and I never remember which. But this should reach you in time for either, and it is to say that you are not to worry about your losses at the ware-housing people's. I hear they are reckoned at about £60, and I can easily find that; so let me know the precise sum when it is ascertained.
Your affectionate brother
A.E. Housman

Third letter:

Trinity College
Cambridge
27 July 1932

My dear Clemence,
I am sending you a copy of vol. 1 of Manilius, which I have managed to put my hand on, and I have added Juvenal, which also has a preface readable in parts. I hope you and Laurence will accept them as a thank-offering for the pleasure of my stay with you.
Your affectionate brother
A.E. Housman

Fourth letter:

Trinity College
Cambridge
23 July 1934

My dear Laurence,
Thanks for the £2.

I have sometimes thought of making a stay at Ripon, where the Spa Hotel is very well spoken of, and which is an excellent centre for the Yorkshire monasteries and dales, with which I have no acquaintance.

Love to Clemence. I shall be glad to see you here in August.

Your affectionate brother

A.E. Housman

Fifth letter:

[on letter-head stationery of]
The Evelyn Nursing Home,
Trumpington Road,
Cambridge.
Tel. 343.

[written in pencil]

18 June 1935

My dear Laurence,

So far as I can see the date you propose would suit me equally; but I have been sent here 'for a fortnight or perhaps a week' by reason of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, described in Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger, where it is an embellishment of the death-bed of the hero's father. They are getting the better of it with morphia, and I slept last night.

If I were in proper health I should at this moment be representing Cambridge at the tercentenary of the French Academy.

Your affectionate brother
A.E. Housman

Sixth letter:

[on letter-head stationery of]
The Evelyn Nursing Home,
Trumpington Road,
Cambridge.
Tel. 3401.

8 Nov. 1935

My dear Laurence,
I should be glad to see you between 5 o'clock and 6.30 on Monday, and at the earlier hour if you let me know, I could offer you tea. I shall not be leaving before that day.
I am much more tranquil, and the dropsy has almost disappeared, so the doctor is quite satisfied, but he does not realise how weak I am [there is no full stop at the end of this sentence]
Your affectionate brother
A.E. Housman

The remainder of the Laurence Housman papers preserved by Cyril Hunt and now at Worcestershire Archive, comprise the following:

- 1) Photographs of the Housman family including the Wises of Woodchester House, Gloucestershire. There are also photos of various houses, including: Valley House, Catshill, near Bromsgrove, birthplace of A.E. Housman, 1859; the Clock House, Catshill, home of A.E. Housman 1873-8; and Longmeadow, Street, Somerset, home of Laurence Housman c. 1921-59.
- 2) Miscellaneous literary papers of Laurence Housman c. 1920-59
- 3) Letters from Ilse Klara (Kay) Vogel to Laurence Housman 1952-9. Kay was the wife of Julius Hannes (Hans) Vogel, an Austrian playwright who came to England in the 1930s.⁴ Laurence Housman took a special interest in Hans Vogel and supported his family with regular payments by cheque and in cash. Laurence's nephews, particularly Gerald Symons, who was to have been his literary executor, advised him to curtail these payments, but this led to a rift between Laurence and Gerald.

⁴ Hans Julius Vogel was born in Vienna, 4 December 1902. His wife Ilse K. Focken was born, probably in Germany, 6 February 1910. They had three children: Gladys M K. (Katinka), born in Oxford in 1940; Anthony Leslie (Tony), born Oxfordshire, 1942; and Christine J.M., born in Bideford, Devon, in 1948. During the period of the correspondence, Hans and Kay Vogel were living at 31 Kew Green, Richmond, an elegant four-storey house overlooking the Green. Tony Vogel became a successful actor and played Dick Barton in the 1979 television series.

On Being Present at a Housman Lecture

R.D. Bloomfield

It was my good fortune to be in the audience in Cambridge in May 1933 for Housman's celebrated lecture on "The Name and Nature of Poetry". This was the Leslie Stephen Lecture, endowed by a bequest and given annually. When Housman accepted the invitation, it was decided to hold it not in one of the University lecture halls but in the Senate House. The authorities had foreseen, correctly, that the attendance would be great.

The lectures which Housman gave in his capacity as Kennedy Professor of Latin were invariably on arcane textual studies, heard only by small audiences of would-be classical scholars. It is said that only once in his long years of lecturing did Housman speak of the actual poetry of a work whose text he had been analysing. This was the Ode by Horace which he had translated ("The snows are fled away"). To the surprise of his class, and some embarrassment, he read both the original and his English version, with evident emotion. But few were present on this very rare occasion.

When it became known that for the first time ever Housman was going to speak publicly as a poet, who was famed for what he had published but was otherwise unknown and unknowable, the interest aroused throughout the University was immense. The Senate House was packed with an eager and expectant audience, many of them distinguished men and women. Admission was free but by ticket, and my companion and I felt we were fortunate to get in. We were all gowned, Housman at the rostrum in his professional robes.

I cannot clearly recall his voice, except that it was dry and academic in style. We were conscious of the precision of his thinking, and of the felicity and economy of his words; occasionally there were glimpses of his famed wit and irony. When he came to passages about himself,

which in effect were rather moving, he spoke with restraint, and it was evident that he was curbing the emotion which he was describing.

My clearest recollections are naturally of the two short but famous passages, towards the end of the lecture, in which he spoke of his own response to poetry, and of his own writing of it – “how this stuff came into existence.” We had already been listening to Housman the literary critic, replacing Housman the classical scholar; now at last we were to hear Housman the poet, speaking of himself as such. We were amazed by these very personal revelations by this notoriously private, reclusive and supposedly stoic man.

I must mention that, very soon after the lecture had been given, it was in print. My own copy of this small volume, a first edition which I would now greatly prize, vanished, alas, from my library very soon after. It was not until the other day that, more than 60 years later, I reread the lecture. I was pleased with the accuracy of my memory. I had especially carried in my mind the passage describing the celebrated walk across Hampstead Heath, after lunch and a pint of beer at The Spaniards Inn, during which first two and then a third stanza of a poem flowed into Housman’s mind, to be followed by laborious composition over a long period of the fourth stanza, “completed by the brain.”

It may be of interest to mention that I was puzzled however to read that the reason Housman had given for guarding against a line of poetry straying into his mind while shaving, was lest his razor ceased to act. I had retained all those years a belief – and, as I supposed, a memory – that he had said that the recollection of a line of poetry might make him cut himself. Could it be that this small but intimate disclosure, spoken at the lecture, had been modified for publication? It is known that Housman had some regrets about things he had said in the Leslie Stephen Lecture.

My companion in the Senate House on this memorable occasion was the late Patrick White, the Australian novelist and Nobel Prize winner,

who was my contemporary at Cambridge. At that time he was writing a good deal of verse and, according to his biographer, he “was writing under the spell of A.E. Housman, trying to achieve something of the old man’s clipped, lyrical style.” ... I can bear witness to White’s devotion to Housman, and to his own acceptance that inspired writing is not cerebral but wells up from within.

Review

A Shropshire Lad by A.E. Housman. Full colour photographs throughout by John Hayward. Merlin Unwin Books, Ludlow, 128 pp., hardback, £20.00.

Linda Hart

This new illustrated large-format edition of *A Shropshire Lad* has been published to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Housman Society. The sixty-three poems are printed on high quality paper in an attractive 14pt serif font. A photo accompanies almost every poem, and the layouts are attractive, inventive and varied. There are many photos across a double-page spread (14.5 inches, or 36.5cm, wide), and this enlargement means we can see details in the foreground (such as hedgerows and trees) with hills and cloudscapes in the background. Sometimes a poem (e.g. XXXIV) is on the left-hand page with a full-page photo on the right. Sometimes (e.g. XXXV) the photo spreads across a page and half with the poem to the right of it. An exception occurs when a wonderful photo of a rainbow over the Clun Valley appears across the entire double-page spread, with XXXII printed over the sky and rainbow on the left-hand page and XXXIII printed over the sky and darkening clouds on the right-hand page.

Those who know well (sometimes by heart) the 63 *ASL* poems may think that another edition is unnecessary. But this book is a showcase for John Hayward's superb and evocative photographs as much as it is a book of Housman's poems. Hayward is a young professional photographer who lives in Shropshire, and is well known for his equipment-laden forays to the county's remote corners and noteworthy places – at unusual times of the day, in freak weather conditions -- to get the finest views and the best lighting.

For anyone who finds Housman's relentless pessimism overwhelming at times, the photos provide an uplifting antidote. Take your pick from

Hayward's daffodils and bluebells, swans and sheep, hay bales and hedgerows, autumnal mists and winter snows, sunrises and sunsets, young blossoms and old trees. The comforting reassurances of the photos act as a restraint on Housman's frequent expressions of grief, despair and hopelessness. Anyone who has walked on or near Wenlock Edge, Brown Clee, Caer Caradoc, the Wrekin or the Long Mynd will find reminders here. And there are numerous photos to satisfy anyone feeling nostalgic about visits to Much Wenlock, Ludlow, Shrewsbury, Ironbridge, Church Stretton – and of course to Hughley Church to see the non-existent steeple.

In addition to the photos and the poetry, there is Peter Parker's excellent Introduction, which Max Hunt quoted from in his lecture at the book's launch in Ludlow. (His lecture, reproduced on page xx in this journal, discusses the background to the poems – when and where and why they were written – and the poems themselves.) Housman Society members will know Peter Parker as the author of *Housman Country: Into the Heart of England*, a brilliant book published in 2016 which shows how *A Shropshire Lad* has permeated English life and culture (high and low) over the 120 years since its publication. In addition to Parker's Introduction there is a short essay by Dr David Lloyd on "The Life of A.E. Housman", accompanied by a timeline of key dates in his life. (Dr Lloyd's essay is reprinted from Merlin Unwin's 2009 illustrated edition of ASL.) For those who want to head straightaway to a favourite poem or two, there is an index of first lines.

In addition to the brief captions accompanying the photos, there are four pages of additional notes about the photos that have been written by the photographer. Perhaps these four pages, which are headlined "Photographers Notes", should have been given more prominence. I came across them by accident, at the back of the book, as there is no table of contents (though I now see they are mentioned on the copyright page). John Hayward's notes provide interesting information on a variety of matters – where Mr Hayward was standing when he took the photo, or what time of day/night it was, or what the lighting was like,

what season it was, what the weather was doing. Occasionally he provides bits of history, geology and geography, as well as some personal comments. This is all salutary.

For those of you who noticed the missing apostrophe on “Photographers” near the start of the previous paragraph: Housman would have noticed it too. He would have wondered why “Photographer’s Notes”, the heading that appeared in the previous Merlin Unwin edition of ASL, has been printed without an apostrophe in this new edition! But this is only a small glitch in an otherwise attractive book that more than ever links Housman with Shropshire.

Obituary

Jennie McGregor Smith (1938-2023)

For 32 years Jennie contributed very significantly to The Housman Society. She joined the committee in 1987 when Jim Page became chairman. There followed some vibrant years for the Society, leading up to the centenary celebrations of 1996. Jennie was instrumental in ensuring that all these celebrations -- taking place throughout the year and in many different locations -- were carefully organised and skilfully promoted.

There was a literary weekend in Ludlow packed with notable speakers; a musical weekend in Bromsgrove; a special performance of the CBSO at Ludlow conducted by Sir Simon Rattle with Thomas Allen as soloist; a commemoration in Westminster Abbey; events at St John's College, Oxford and at University College London; a national poetry competition; song settings were commissioned; and several books were published. Can ever a literary society have done more for a centenary!

Jennie played a very important part in all this. It began in 1991 when she took on the role of fundraiser and programme director to the Society's centenary sub-committee. She was amazingly successful in raising funds from individuals, organisations and grant-giving bodies. (A significant proportion of the healthy financial assets of the Society today is the result of Jennie's fund raising.) She coordinated activities and maintained a flow chart showing what was planned, what needed to be done, and who was doing it. She worked tirelessly at administration; at phoning and writing to people; at typing and then designing programmes, brochures and leaflets. Everything she produced was of professional quality.

Jennie retired from the committee in 2020, leaving a legacy that carries on today (for example, with Merlin Unwin's publication of a new edition of *A Shropshire Lad*). There is little record of all the things

Jennie did for the Society. Her name seldom appears in the *Journal* (except in the list of committee members) and she was self-effacing at the Society's public events. But all of us who worked with her knew that her contribution was enormous.

But this wasn't all. She also did so much to contribute to the arts in Bromsgrove. For many years, through Bromsgrove Concerts, she helped bring classical music to the town. She played pivotal roles in starting The Bromsgrove Society and the literary organisation WORDS. And when not occupied with all of this, she was busy recording the town's history in several books that she researched, wrote and published.

In 2018 she was named in the Queen's New Year's Honours list, and she received a British Empire Medal later that year. Her legacy is immense.

Robin Shaw

