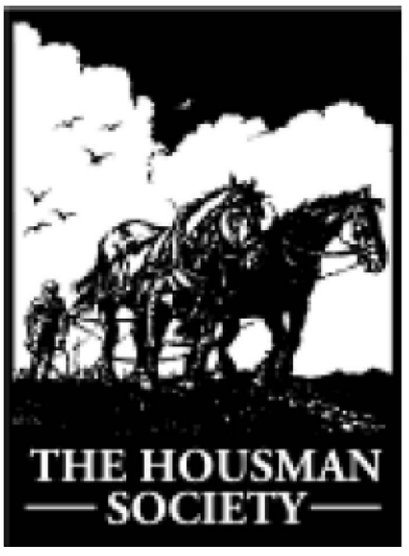
The Housman Society Journal

Volume Forty 2014

Editor: David Butterfield



The Housman Society
80 New Road
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire B60 2LA
England

Charity Number 100107

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Website: http://www.housman-society.co.uk
E-mail: info@housman-society.co.uk

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The Housman Society

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Editor of the Journal	David Butterfield, MA, MPhil., PhD Queens' College, Cambridge, CB3 9ET
Editor of the Newsletter	Andrew J.M. Maund, MA, MPhil. 57 Marlborough Avenue, Bromsgrove, B60 2PH
Committee	Sonia French, BA, Dip. Lib. Soc. Sci. Jennie McGregor-Smith Elizabeth Oakley, MA, LRAM, Dip.RSA Valerie Richardson Daniel Williams BA, PGCE

Housman Society Journal

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Chairman's Notes 2014

In writing a summary in last year's Chairman's Notes on the first forty years of the Society I told the story of how a proposed statue of A.E.H. became the focal point for the pedestrianisation of Bromsgrove's High Street and through the energy of our first chairman, John Pugh, it became a reality in 1985. Enoch Powell was the obvious choice for the unveiling but political opposition to this was so strong that in the end that task fell to the Duke of Westminster. Now almost thirty years later, in a commendable movement by the District Council to regenerate Bromsgrove's High Street, it has been completely refurbished using high quality materials such as granite and York stone. Part of this plan entailed moving the statue to a slightly more central location, but in the move the original panels were damaged and new ones are in the process of being made. Although there was much debate as to whether these had to replicate the originals in style and wording, agreement was readily reached on filling the other two panels with quotations from *A Shropshire Lad*. The process of making these has been lengthy but it is hoped to have them in place for an unveiling early in the New Year.

Our founders laid down the aims and objectives of the Society in very specific terms in 1973 and these are enshrined in the constitution. They are divided into five sections: 1. To promote knowledge and appreciation of the lives and works of the Housman family. 2. To encourage research into and about the lives and works of the Housman family. 3. To encourage preservation of premises, documentary and other material relating to members of the Housman family or their work. 4. To publish or encourage publication of writings relating to members of the Housman family or their work. 5. To encourage and promote the cause of literature and poetry amongst the public, including young people and school children.

I think we can say that all five of these have been fairly well covered over our first forty years and the retirement at the end of this year of one of our stalwarts over the last twenty-five of those forty years is the moment to pay tribute to the contribution Robin Shaw has made. When in 1987 he took on the role of Treasurer the Society's annual expenditure was less than £1,000 and in his thirteen years in the post he was responsible for a five-fold increase in our assets. He was on the sub-committee which drove the

1996 celebrations for the centenary of the publication of *A Shropshire Lad* and as well as making a vital contribution there he found time to carry out the research for his invaluable and original book *Housman's Places*. He followed this with the beautifully produced *Three Bromsgrove Poets*, where, as in *Housman's Places* his stylish line drawings added immeasurably to the quality of both books. He was one of the team who fulfilled requests from organisations of all kinds for talks and was active in selling our books. The partnership with his wife Kate is a very creative one as between them they have been responsible for initiating many of the best projects that the Society has undertaken. *The Name and Nature of Poetry* lecture, the Poetry Competition, the afore-mentioned books and the revival of the Newsletter spring to mind.

At this year's Annual General Meeting we welcomed Peter Sisley back on to the committee as General Secretary and already he has taken on a number of jobs which I have previously carried out, and hopefully that will help us find my successor. We also welcome Daniel Williams as the new representative of Bromsgrove School.

The Society's year has taken its normal course, though holding the Bromsgrove Commemoration by the John Adams Memorial in Bromsgrove's cemetery was a great success, as with Julian Hunt as our Guest of the Day not only did we hear an accurate account of John Adams' life but it enabled us to show our guests what a fine job the restoration is. After the Ludlow Commemoration we were given a tour of St Laurence's by the leader of the Vision Project. What we did not expect was to find ourselves being handed hard hats and climbing up tortuous stairs to view the general state of the roof and especially the pinnacles - which will cost about £10,000 each to restore. It was a fascinating day and sincerest thanks go to Shaun Ward, the leader of the project, for sharing his expertise with such fluency.

The Schools Poetry Speaking Competition was moved to March and saw the usual keen competition. There were ten schools participating and for the first time the Housman Cup was awarded to a twelve year-old pupil from a Middle School, who, showing a maturity way beyond his years, won the judges favour over some very sophisticated Sixth Formers.

2015 sees the 150th anniversary of Laurence Housman's birth and, in anticipation of this event, one of our members, Jill Liddington, led a walk which retraced the route that Laurence had taken in 1903. Meeting up

with members in Chipping Campden where Janet and C.R. Ashbee lived, the party arrived some nine days later at Scarsdale Arms in Kensington, opposite where Laurence and Clem had lived for twenty years. In the process a substantial sum was raised for Book Aid. Bromsgrove Society's Summer School has featured some interesting Housman talks in recent years and next year will see a study day entitled 'The Housman Family in Peace and War'. Our committee member Elizabeth Oakley, whose book *Inseparable Siblings* illuminated the lives of Laurence and Clemence so well, will be co-ordinating that, and we shall be holding a day of celebration of Laurence's 150th in conjunction with the Street Society on 18 July. Full details of both events will be given in the February Newsletter.

Our sponsored lecture at Hay on *The Name and Nature of Poetry* was unusual because in speaking about "The Poetry of Plays" David Edgar compared the way plays were constructed with the way that poetry works, which gave a quite different perspective to the lecture's subject matter than we have had before. I am delighted that once more members not able to be there have the opportunity of reading the lecture later in these pages, and although in print one does not have the benefit of the fine reading of Ian Billings and Stephanie Dale, the profound sentiments that David Edgar was sharing with his large audience come across very clearly.

In July the Society put on a special event in a regenerated Bromsgrove Festival in which a former winner of the Housman Cup, Emily Collie, and her father Michael, who is a well known television presenter, joined with Polly Bolton and her folk band to tell the story of Housman's life through his poetry, letters and folksong settings. The format worked really well and the local audience in Artrix's intimate studio was genuinely moved by the understanding the artists showed of the traumas that were central to A.E.H.'s life. Another Housman-related event was held during the Much Wenlock Poetry Festival when Gladys Mary Coles gave a lecture on 'Three Shropshire War Poets', in the course of which she showed fascinating insight into the similarities between three very different characters - A.E.H., Wilfred Owen and Mary Webb.

2014 marked the end of Chris Edwards's time as Head of Bromsgrove School and we said an official farewell to him at the lunch after the Poetry Speaking Competition. His life was too busy for him to take more than occasional participation in our events, but he has been most supportive of the

Society. Initially we were not too enthusiastic about the School's decision to buy Perry Hall and change its name to Housman Hall, but we soon realised we were being a bit grudging as the generosity the School has shown to the Society and community as a whole has been great. Further, its use as a Sixth Form boarding house where pupils of many different nationalities live during term time has meant that the name of Housman now has far greater international resonance than one would have ever thought possible. We welcome Chris Edwards' successor, Peter Clague, as a Vice President and he will be our Guest of the Day at next year's Bromsgrove Birthday Commemoration.

Jim Page
3rd November 2014

The Housman Lecture:
The Name and Nature of Poetry

by
David Edgar

The Poetry of Plays

Delivered at the Hay Festival of Literature on 28th May 2014
with readings by Ian Billings and Stephanie Dale.

I have just returned from the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario, which I visited to see the opening of an English language version of Brecht's *Mother Courage* which bears my name. I had agreed to give a talk to the theatre's supporters and had intended to talk a bit about Brecht the playwright. Having not read the emails properly, I didn't realise until I saw the poster that I had committed myself to giving a lecture on Translating Brecht, which was not what I'd done (my version was based on an excellent literal translation by Tony Meech).

Needing to make things clear at the outset, I came clean. I stood before them as a shameful monolingual. Lest they thought that that was British self-deprecation, I laid it on the line. I do not "have a smattering" of Italian. I do not "just about get by" in Spanish. To say that I have schoolboy French is an insult to a fine body of young men. I speak restaurant-foreign only in the sense that I am capable of finding the English-language section of a foreign the menu. Once in Budapest, tired, confused and hungry, I stumbled into a sandwich bar. The language of despairing gesture having failed, I decided that – as I eat anything the Hungarians were likely to put in sandwiches – I'd just point to a line in the menu and eat whatever came. The waitress took me by the hand and led me into the kitchen to point. I had apparently ordered the service charge.

I am in a comparable situation today. Having (eventually) accepted Jim Page's kind and generous invitation to deliver the Housman lecture, I eventually had to confront the fact that I had agreed to give a talk on poetry.

Well, I wrote poetry when I was small, but happily little of it survives. I read poetry, but neither widely nor often - though I have an entry, Shelley's *The Masque of Anarchy*, in Anthony and Ben Holden's hugely successful *Poems that Make Grown Men Cry*.[1] I had recently read a magnificent book *about* it – Glyn Maxwell's *On Poetry* – which I shall quote several times this evening. But to say that I am remotely qualified to give a lecture titled *The Name and Nature of Poetry* is a triumph of British over-statement.

Worse than that, I was not only following a group of previous lecturers whose qualifications were dramatically superior to mine – Christopher Ricks, John Carey, Germaine Greer, Lisa Jardine, Peter Porter - but I was also following, of course, Housman's original lecture of the same name, which begins with an egregious pieces of self-deprecation. Speaking of the decision of the organisers of the lecture to choose him to give it, he condemns their judgement and deplores their choice, going on to deliver an argument which is rightly still read and marvelled at 81 years later.

Hence my title: 'The Poetry of Plays'. And hence too my starting point. What follows is what I *don't* plan to address.

Romeo. If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Juliet. Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Romeo. Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Juliet. Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in pray'r.

Romeo. O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

1. A and B. Holden (edd.), *Poems That Make Grown Men Cry* (London, 2014).

Juliet. Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo. Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

This is of course a section of Act One Scene Five of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it is also a sonnet. But despite the fact that plays contain poems (and lyrics) I don't want to talk about poetry in plays but the poetry of plays.

Much of this is based on thoughts that arose out of a Masters programme in playwriting studies which I founded at the University of Birmingham in 1989, and which went some way to developing a language for discussing playwriting. The programme began in a rather ramshackle way: my first act was to invite playwright friends to come and talk about scenes from plays they liked (Trevor Griffiths on *The Cherry Orchard*, Howard Brenton on *Galileo*, Bryony Lavery on *The Bacchae*). Among the most memorable guests in the first year was the then playwright (and later screenwriter and film director) Anthony Minghella, who said that he wanted to explore a scene from Edward Bond's *The Bundle*. We all duly read and studied this difficult if great play. At the beginning of Anthony's three-hour session, he announced that - by way of introduction - he planned to outline ten basic principles of playwriting which he had always found useful. Three hours later, he was on to number seven. The following year, I invited him back, but told him not to bother with The Bundle, but just to do the Basic Principles. That he did, getting through all ten. Sadly, we then lost him to a distinguished Hollywood career and to his early death. The Basic Principles remained, and I have plundered them remorselessly ever since. There is much of them in a book I subsequently wrote about playwriting.[2]

The book's working title was drawn from the best definition of poetry I know (written by the same playwright, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*):

> The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth

2. D. Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London, 2009).

The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

My publisher thought "A local habitation" would make it sound like a BBC2 lifestyle show or a travelogue, and so we settled on the mechanical, but accurate, *How Plays Work*.

But apart from sometimes being written in poetry, what on earth does the most airy of the literary art forms, the one most associated with free expression and inspiration have, in common with the form closest to carpentry?

For many people the answer is "not very much". In his imaginary fraternity of writers, Glyn Maxwell casts poetry as the hard-up elder son, and the screenwriter the little brother that's loaded, but nonetheless sharing more with each other than the "difficult middle children", playwriting and fiction. I disagree with this not just because I think playwriting shares most of its fundamental craft toolkit with screenwriting, but because Maxwell himself gives instance after instance of how playwriting and poetry walk hand in hand (including the fact that the poetic form in which much of the greatest drama has been written – the iambic pentameter – is the length of a human breath). Most importantly, for Maxwell, the crucial, defining element of poetry, that which distinguishes it from prose (and thus from the novel) is the line-break, which is essentially a device which points out difference. Novels have methods of dividing themselves up: paragraphs, chapters, double-breaks within chapters, volumes, various forms of numerical notation, And of course novelists maintain interest by contrast, across or between chapters, as in Dickens' description of his structural technique as "the streaky bacon method", with red stripes alternating with white. But the poet doesn't just use contrast as a way of keeping the story going, but as a way of conveying meaning. Through alliteration and rhyme, he or she points out unexpected similarities; through the short and long beats of a line, the poet demonstrates contrast. Juxtaposition is thus not just an enabler but a bearer of meaning.

The basic unit of the play, too, is the line - though, of course, the line in a different sense. And while the novel has dialogue, and may even change the narrative voice, the contrast between one line and another,

corporeally presented by two present and living actors, is closer, it seems to me, to the effect of the move from one line to another in poetry, whether or not underlined by scansion and rhyme. Out of that come many of the effects I want to talk about - including the importance of silence in plays (represented, for Maxwell, in every line break, and doing "the work of time"). Out of that comes, too, Maxwell's claim that the closer the effects are together (the shorter the lines, thus the more frequent the rhymes) the more the poet is brought to the foreground. Similarly, the more frequent and prominent the effects that I'm going to describe, the more visible the playwright is.

So, like poets, playwrights use the sheer music - the melody, harmony and rhythm - of language, to a surprising degree, to create dramatic effect and to reveal meaning.

In addition, there are two particular theatrical devices by which playwrights pursue an essentially poetic project, to manipulate forms of speaking and doing we know from everyday life, and to find unexpected connections between them. The best description of this project is by the great theatre director Peter Brook, who isolates two fundamental elements of any work of art. The first is concentration: by reducing the chaos and redundancy of the visual and aural worlds by elimination of what doesn't interest them, artists draw attention to the characteristics of what does interest them, particularly how any one element relates to the elements around it, a relationship often obscured in the arbitrary profusion of the real world.[3]

The second is that one of these fundamental elements is pattern itself; Brook is convinced that there are rules of proportion and rhythm (like the mathematical Golden Section or the rule of three) which are more fundamental than taste or culture, which are hard-wired into us as humans.[4] Furthermore, these patterns and shapes operate between different media and are universal: "the movement of the eye as it passes across a painting or across the vaults and arches of a great cathedral is related to a dancer's leaps and turns and to the pulse of music".[5]

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3. P. Brook, *There are No Secrets* (London, 1993) 10.
4. P. Brook, *The Empty Space* (London, 1968) 47.
5. P Brook, *Threads of Time* (London, 1998) 10.

What Brook doesn't ever quite say - though I think he could - is that these two perceptions are connected. The principle by which the artist concentrates (what to eliminate, what to juxtapose) draws attention to what is being observed: the patterning of notes in music, of shapes and colours in painting, of words in scansion and rhyme.

There is a staggeringly good example of all of this in one of the great scenes in dramatic literature, the screen scene from Sheridan's eighteenth-century masterpiece, *The School for Scandal*.

The situation is this: the supposedly virtuous Joseph Surface has brought the young and beautiful Lady Teazle into his first-floor drawing room in order to seduce her. Faced with a series of highly inopportune visitors (including Lady Teazle's husband, Sir Peter Teazle), Joseph has hidden her behind a screen from both his brother Charles (who doesn't know anyone's there) and Sir Peter himself (who does, but not that it's Lady Teazle: he thinks it's a little French milliner with whom Joseph is having a dalliance).

To his great alarm, Joseph has had to leave to head off Lady Sneerwell, who has arrived downstairs, leaving Sir Peter and Charles alone. This is what happens:

Sir Peter. Hark'ee, have you a mind to have a good laugh at Joseph?

Charles. I should like it of all things.

Sir Peter. Then, i'faith, we will! I'll be quit with him for discovering me. (whispers): He had a girl with him when I called.

Charles. What! Joseph? you jest.

Sir Peter. Hush! - a little French milliner - and the best of the jest is - she's in the room now.

Charles. The devil she is!

Sir Peter. Hush! I tell you.

(He points to the screen.)

Charles. Behind the screen! Odds life, let's unveil her!

Sir Peter. No, no, he's coming: - you shan't, indeed!

Charles. Oh, egad, we'll have a peep at the little milliner!

Sir Peter. Not for the world! - Joseph will never forgive me.

Charles. I'll stand by you -

Sir Peter. Odds, here he is!

*(*CHARLES SURFACE *throws down the screen, revealing Lady Teazle. Re-*enter JOSEPH SURFACE.*)*

Charles. Lady Teazle, by all that's wonderful!

Sir Peter. Lady Teazle, by all that's damnable!

Charles. Sir Peter, this is one of the smartest French milliners I ever saw. Egad, you seem all to have been diverting yourselves here at hide and seek, and I don't see who is out of the secret. Shall I beg your ladyship to inform me? Not a word! - Brother, will you be pleased to explain this matter? What! Morality dumb too? - Sir Peter, though I found you in the dark, perhaps you are not so now! All mute! Well - though I can make nothing of the affair, I suppose you perfectly understand one another; so I'll leave you to yourselves. Brother, I'm sorry to find you have given that worthy man grounds for so much uneasiness. - Sir Peter! There's nothing in the world so noble as a man of sentiment!

(*Exi*t CHARLES).

Joseph. Sir Peter - notwithstanding - I confess - that apperances are against me - if you will afford me your patience - I make no doubt - but I shall

explain everything to your satisfaction.

Sir Peter. If you please, sir.

Joseph. The fact is, sir, that Lady Teazle, knowing my pretensions to your ward Maria - I say, sir, Lady Teazle, being apprehensive of the jealousy of your temper - and knowing my friendship to the family - she, sir, I say - called here - in order that - I might explain these pretensions - but on your coming - being apprehensive - as I said - of your jealousy - she withdrew - and this, you may depend on it, is the whole truth of the matter.

Sir Peter. A very clear account, upon my word; and I dare swear the lady will vouch for every article of it.

Lady Teazle. For not one word of it, Sir Peter!

Sir Peter. How! don't you think it worth while to agree in the lie?

Lady Teazle. There is not one syllable of truth in what that gentleman has told you.

Sir Peter. I believe you, upon my soul, ma'am!

Joseph. 'Sdeath, madam, will you betray me?

Lady Teazle. Good Mr Hypocrite, by your leave, I'll speak for myself.

I want to explore the music of the scene. It begins with a series of short lines, alternating between Sir Peter and Charles, speeding up to the climax of the flinging down of the screen:

Charles. Behind the screen! Odds life, let's unveil her!

Sir Peter. No, no, he's coming: - you shan't, indeed!

Charles. Oh, egad, we'll have a peep at the little milliner!

Sir Peter. Not for the world! - Joseph will never forgive me.

Charles. I'll stand by you -

Sir Peter. Odds, here he is!

And down comes the screen. Then there is an antithetical couplet: a line that is repeated with one word changed, thus involving repetition and rhyme:

Charles. Lady Teazle, by all that's wonderful!

Sir Peter. Lady Teazle, by all that's damnable!

At this point, we might expect (and we certainly want) to hear from the two people who are exposed by the discovery. In fact, tantalisingly, we get a long aria directed by the only wholly innocent character (Charles) to two of the three other characters on stage, which makes the point that none of the scene's protagonists are saying anything:

Charles. All mute! Well - though I can make nothing of the affair, I suppose you perfectly understand one another; so I'll leave you to yourselves.

Then, finally, Joseph tries to come up with a plausible explanation of Lady Teazle's presence, in two, broken-lined speeches, both of which are countered by much shorter prompting lines by Sir Peter. Joseph's speeches are a wonderful example of how an emotional state - shrivelling embarrassment - and a rhetorical purpose - the doomed attempt to give an innocent explanation - are reflected in the very sentence structure.

Sir Peter -
notwithstanding -
I confess -
that appearances are against me -

if you will afford me your patience -
I make no doubt -
but I shall explain everything to your satisfaction.

Sir Peter. If you please, sir.

The fact is, sir, that Lady Teazle, knowing my pretensions to your ward Maria -
I say, sir, Lady Teazle, being apprehensive of the jealousy of your temper -
and knowing my friendship to the family -
she, sir, I say -
called here -
in order that -
I might explain these pretensions -
but on your coming -
being apprehensive -
as I said -
of your jealousy -
she withdrew -
and this, you may depend on it, is the whole truth of the matter.

Sir Peter. A very clear account, upon my word; and I dare swear the lady will vouch for every article of it.

Then, finally, there comes a line from the person who has been silent thus far, Lady Teazle, whose simple statement contrasts with the bombast of what preceeds it, and reverses the direction of the scene:

Lady Teazle. For not one word of it, Sir Peter!

The techniques of this scene - manipulations of tempo, rhythm, contrast, repetition - are to be seen in almost every play ever written. The last technique - the unexpectedly short line that contrasts with what precedes – is a staple of poetry, classically in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*:

O, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
  Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
  And no birds sing.

So, too, the opening of a scene in Caryl Churchill's 1980s play *Ice Cream*, in which a young woman called Jaq explains her backstory to Vera:

Jaq. Paper round, busker, Tesco, toy factory, jeans shop, Woolworth, winebar, van driver, pavement artist, singer with a rock group, photographer's assistant, office cleaner, primary school teacher, drug pusher, vet's receptionist, journalist, cleaning chickens, hospital orderly, gardener, carpenter, my friend's dress shop, traffic warden, tourist guide, hypnotherapist, motorbike messenger, frozen peas, stall in the market, plumber's mate, computer programmer, translator, escapologist, and five secretarial.

Vera. You make me feel so boring.

The very length of Jaq's speech contrasts with the shortness of Vera's to create a comic effect. (It's also what we the audience are thinking.) This technique was used long before Sheridan. There's a scene in *A Comedy of Errors* in which Adriana thinks that she sees her husband, who has missed dinner, and she suspects him of infidelity, sitting in the town square. Little knowing that she's talking to his identical twin, she upbraids her husband thus:

Adriana. Ay, Ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown,
Some other Mistress hath thy sweet aspects:
I am not Adriana, nor thy wife.
The time was once, when thou un-urg'd wouldst vow,
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing in thine eye,
That never touch well welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savour'd in thy taste,
Unless I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carv'd to thee.

Twenty-five passionate lines later, she reaches a climax:

Adriana. For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion:
Keep then fair league and truce with thy true bed,
I live distain'd, thou undishonoured.

To which Antipholus responds:

Antipholus. Plead you to me fair dame? I know you not:
In Ephesus I am but two hours old.

A long speech followed by a pithy drop-line is an example of theatrical tempo. Playwrights reading novelists' plays tend to find themselves encouraging them to make long speeches longer and short speeches shorter. Like the screen scene, many sections of theatre scenes have a highly rhythmic structure. An example is the opening of Act Two of Howard Brenton's *Epsom Downs*. A Derby runner is being led around the parade ring by a Stable Lad.

Horse. I am a Derby outside chance.

(They parade.)

The mentality of a race horse can be compared to the mentality of a bird. Nervous, quiet, shy and rather stupid.

(*The Horse flashes his teeth at the spectators. The Stable Lad restrains him*.)

Stable Lad. Don't give me a bad time.

Horse. Many a racehorse has a fixed idea. Chewing blankets. Kicking buckets over. Biting blacksmiths.

(They parade.)

My fixed idea is that I must have a goat tied up with me, in my box. And there, tied to a stick in the Yard, when I come back from the gallops. I will kick the place down, if I don't have my goat.

They parade.)

Where is my goat?

(They parade.)

I want my goat!

Stable Lad. Stop thinking about your bloody goat!

It's all about the rule of three. Even before the last three, short sentences, Brenton establishes a rhythm: each of the Horse's previous speeches consist of three sentences. The last three lines are structured like a joke: all end with the word "goat"; the first two rhyme; and the third is both predictable (it ends with the same word), and, of course, a surprise (the Stable Hand knows what the Horse is thinking).

Then, there is this example of how shamelessly a playwright uses the essentially lyrical device of repetition in prose. In *Hamlet*, there is a five-line exchange between Hamlet and Polonius about acting, in which there's one instance of "actor", two of "enact", two of "killed" and a "kill", and puns on "brute" and "capital":

Hamlet. My lord, you played once i' th' university, you say.

Polonius. That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

Hamlet. And what did you enact?

Polonius. I did enact Julius Caesar: I was killed i' the Capitol; Brutus killed me.

Hamlet. It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. Be the players ready?

By a sudden switch both of subject and vocabulary, "Be the players ready?" being, of course, a drop-line.

Unlike the section from *Epsom Downs*, which is structured like a joke, or the *Comedy of Errors* speech, which is in verse, the *Hamlet* dialogue is formally naturalistic, and in prose. On the other hand, there is a clear element of artifice.

The difference between this and what you'd hear in real life is, of course, the frequency of repetition, and the lack of redundant phrases and words (the meaningless "ums", " ahs", "wells" and "anyways"), an absence which draw our attention to underlying characteristics of the dialogue which we might miss in actual speech. The dramatist is giving an insight into the way people actually speak to each other, first, by noting a pattern and, then, by limiting the amount of redundant material that would obscure it.

In this way a linguistic device is not just pleasing to hear but conveys meaning. There's a wonderful example in a scene in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. Twenty-one-year-old, unemployed Shona is trying to get on the books of an upmarket employment agency and is being interviewed by an older woman, Nell.

Nell. Is this right? You are Shona?

Shona. Yeh.

Nell. It says here you're twenty-nine.

Shona. Yeh.

Nell. Too many late nights, me. So you've been where you are for four years, Shona, you're earning six basic and three commission. So what's the problem?

Shona. No problem.

Nell. Why do you want a change?

Shona. Just a change.

Nell. Change of product, change of area?

Shona. Both.

Nell. But you're happy on the road?

Shona. I like driving.

Nell. You're not after management status?

Shona. I would like management status.

Nell. You'd be interested in titular management status but not come off the road?

Shona. I want to be on the road.

What Churchill has here is a deceitful and nervous applicant (who is lying about her age and her qualifications), doing what lots of us do, trying to do what she thinks is wanted of her by repeating elements of the question in the answer. On no less than thirteen occasions through the scene, Shona repeats a word or phrase from Nell's preceding line, probably unconscious that she's doing it and definitely unconscious that she's employing the rhetorical technique the Greeks called stichomythia.

In the section quoted above, the repeated words/phrases are "problem", "change", "management status", and "road". To drive the point home, at the end of the duologue, Shona tries to justify her claim to be twenty-nine by saying:

Shona. We look young. Youngness runs in the family in our family.

to which Nell responds by asking Shona to describe her present job, to which Shona replies:

Shona. My present job at present.

Shona then embarks on a long speech, in which her claim to be a white goods saleswoman falls apart, and Nell realises that she's been fed a pack of lies. The two cases of "young", two of "family" and three of "present" cap the twelve previous repetitions. It's hard to believe that a listener wouldn't notice the device (though they might pick it up subliminally). But it should be noted that Churchill doesn't use it in every exchange. There are twenty-nine exchanges in the scene. In real life, one might imagine that Shona would have repeated an element of the question in around eight or nine of the answers.

If every answer contained a word from the question, the strategy would be over-obvious (indeed, the scene would become a kind of lyric). Thirteen echoing exchanges is enough concentration to draw your attention to the patterns, but not enough to seem forced or artificial.

There's a contrasting use of antiphonal speaking - and indeed stichomythia - in the Cecily/Gwendolin tea-party argument in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In a sense, the *Top Girls* scene uses the same words to express something different (a probing questioning, a nervous respondent). The repetitive technique that Wilde uses is quite simply a series of antiphonal lines expressing the same meaning (applied to each of the participants) in different words. Gwendolen and Cecily have just met, and are getting on famously, when Cecily makes a confession. That and the subsequent couplets involve two newspaper announcements, two diary entries, two mock apologies, two accusations and two challenges. Even the sentences have the same structure (and are thus a kind of rhyme).

Cecily. Dearest Gwendolin, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwendolen. My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr.

Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

Cecily. I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago.

(Shows diary.)

Gwendolen. It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so.

(*Produces diary of her own.)*

I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

Cecily. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolin, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

Gwendolen. If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

Cecily. Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

Gwendolen. Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

Cecily. Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

Gwendolen. I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

There's a similarly antiphonal passage in the Irish playwright Brian Friel's masterpiece, *Translations*. Again, it involves saying the same thing twice, but in this case, the playwright is drawing attention not to the similarity but to the difference. The play is set in early-nineteenth century Ireland. There is a scene in which a group of British Army officers are explaining a survey they are conducting, to what is in effect a public meeting of Gaelic-speaking Irishmen and women. The scene includes a number of important set-ups - including the fact that the British plan to "standardise" the place names of the region - but its main purpose is to show the British Army attempting to sell what they describe as a benign process of rationalisation, but which the locals regard as an act of colonial interference.

Although it could be dramatised in a different way, this action is revealed through using the format of translation, enabled by the fact that both English and Gaelic are rendered in English, so we can hear both the original English of Captain Lancey's pitch and the content of Owen's translation.

Lancey. His Majesty's government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country - a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographical information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile.

Owen. A new map is being made of the whole country.

Lancey. This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

Owen. The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

Lancey. And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation.

Owen. This new map will take the place of the estate agent's map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law.

Lancey. In conclusion I wish to quote two brief extracts from the white paper which is our governing charter: "all former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property; the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation".

Owen. The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced.

Lancey. "Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland". My sentiments, too.

Owen. This survey demonstrates the government's interest in Ireland and the captain thanks you for listening so attentively to him.

The scene works because understand three things: first, what is supposed to be happening (an accurate translation to communicate to the listeners what the Captain is saying); and second, what is actually happening (a simplification and sanitation of what the listeners might find baffling or offensive). But we understand both what should be happening and what is happening not because Brian Friel has explained it to us, but because we know it from our experience of life. We know from seeing it happen that translation is supposed to be an accurate rendition, so we notice when the rules of the game are broken.

In the same way we know the rules of the ceremonies which appear again and again in drama: the weddings, the funerals, the trials, the plays-within-plays. In *Hamlet* there are four such ceremonial scenes, all of which are disrupted. First, a formal court scene, in which the new King and Queen are heckled by the Queen's son; at the end a sporting contest, a fencing duel, which is the cover for a murder; and, between them, the performance of a play during which the author interrupts the action and the audience storms

out; and a funeral which ends up with two of the principal mourners having a fist-fight over the corpse in the open grave.

All of those scenes - and scenes set in trials, religious services, parliamentary debates - use forms of speech which we recognise from the world, in order to manipulate them to convey meaning. Poems too often glory in the recognised phrases of the law, of commercial life, of public ceremony, of religious ritual. Earlier, there was one such rubric, from Caryl Churchill's *Ice Cream*, in which Jaq listed her previous employment, from "Paper round, busker, Tesco, toy factory, jeans shop, Woolworth, winebar, van driver, pavement artist, singer with a rock group" to "stall in the market, plumber's mate, computer programmer, translator, escapologist, and five secretarial". There's a similar trope in Sarah Woods's play *Grace*:

Grace. Tidy room. Hoover. Sort out washing. Fix cupboard door. Put up shelves. Have a child. Make some tea. Get out of bed. Buy: pasta, lettuce, cheese, olives, bread, Ultra Bra, baked beans, washing-up liquid. Cut nails. Eat. Breathe. Get up. Get fit. Learn Russian. Decide what to wear. Phone mum. Phone bank. Put wash on. Back up computer discs. Pay Visa bill. Get married.

Both these speeches are playing the same game. Formally, Jaq's speech is a CV and like any CV, intended to impress. But, in this case, what it intends to impress with is not Jaq's particular skills or even her breadth of experience but her dizzying professional promiscuity and a certain degree of chutzpah. CVs organise a biography into an attractive narrative by giving its elements priority, hierarchy and chronology. Jaq puts her past jobs in any old order ("paper round, busker, Tesco, toy factory"), she refers to them - seemingly arbitrarily - by position, product and place ("motorbike messenger, frozen peas, stall in the market"), she juxtaposes the admirable with the delinquent ("primary school teacher, drug pusher ") and she runs out of steam at the end. Jaq's CV tells us a lot about her, but not what a CV is usually designed to convey.

Similarly, Grace's speech is something we recognise, a to-do list. But, again, it doesn't fulfil its usual purpose. The point of to-do lists is to bring system and order to chaotic schedules. But Grace's seemingly arbitrary, random switching from immediate domestic tasks to huge life choices ("Put

up shelves. Have a child" and "Pay Visa bill. Get married") tells us both about her ambitions (the subject of the play) and the state of mind which provides an obstacle to their achievement. Like Jaq's CV, Grace's speech is eloquent, but what it communicates is at odds with what to-do lists are usually designed to do. The disruption of our expectations of the speech-form draws attention to the meaning.

Manipulation of recognisable formats of human behaviour, especially when expressed in a form of speech, is something poets do all the time. But Grace's speech does something else poets do frequently, which is to set up and repeat words and phrases through the length of a work, pointing up unexpected linguistic connections, codifying and recodifying words, lines and images, adding freight to their meaning on each occasion they're used.

In Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III*, the king's irritating mannerism "what-what" becomes a sign of his health: when mad, he stops saying it, so when he does say it, we know he's on the mend. In my version of Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, I noticed a tiny scene in the novel in which Nicholas, who has joined a theatre company, rehearses his young travelling company in the apothecary scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. The companion is Smike, a crippled orphan whom Nicholas has rescued from Wackford Squeer's brutal Yorkshire school earlier in the novel.

Smike can't read, so Nicholas - playing Romeo - has to teach him line by line. The experience bonds them, and, through the rest of the play, the words of the apothecary scene become a kind of comic code between them. At the end of Smike's story, however - as he dies in Nicholas' arms - the apothecary's opening words take on a tragic resonance. They are "who calls so loud?".

In the same way, Brian Friel's translation format becomes a mechanism for a love scene between a Gaelic woman of the village and one of the soldiers. We already know the army's project, and the fact that part of its purpose is to rationalise the place-names of the area. Having thus learnt the Irish place names, the soldier George Yolland is increasingly attracted to Maire, whose Aunty Mary taught her a single English phrase which she doesn't know the meaning of but which she can recite. But she does know one or two basic English words. Armed with all of these set-ups, Friel takes George and Maire out of a village dance and into the night.

First of all he reminds us that they don't understand each other, by having them say the same thing, in their different languages, but not realising it's the same thing.

Maire. The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.

Yolland. Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking.

Then they point at one other and say each other's names, but they can't go any further. Maire tries Latin but George doesn't speak it. She manages to say her three understood English words - water, fire and earth - but that doesn't get them very far. So Maire tries her Aunty Mary's sentence, which provokes George into excitable speech, and Maire into a dreadful supposition:

Maire. George. "In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll".

Yolland. Good God, do you? That's where my mother comes from - Norfolk. Norwich actually. Not exactly Norwich town but a small village called Little Walsingham close beside it. But in our own village of Winfarthing we have a maypole too and every year on the first of May -

Maire. Mother of God, my Aunty Mary wouldn't have taught me something dirty, would she?

Then George starts saying the place names he's learnt in Gaelic, which Maire takes up, mentioning other place-names which share a word:

Yolland. Lis na nGall..

Maire. Lis na nGradh. Garraig an Phoill.

Yolland. Carrig na Ri. Loch na nEan.

Maire. Loch an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.

Yolland. Mchaire Mor.

Then they speak in parallel meanings, but not understanding each other, so almost to themselves:

Yolland. I wish to God you could understand me.

Maire. Soft hands; a gentleman's hands.

Yolland. Because if you could understand me I could tell you how I spend my days either thinking of you or gazing up at your house in the hope that you'll appear even for a second.

Maire. Every evening you walk by yourself along the Tra Bhan [Traw vann] and every morning you wash yourself in front of your tent.

Yolland. I would like to tell you how beautiful you are, curly-headed Maire. I would so like to tell you how beautiful you are.

Maire. Your arms are long and thin and the skin on your shoulders is very white.

Yolland. I would tell you ...

He gives up. But then she realises something:

Maire. Don't stop - I know what you're saying.

Yolland. I would tell you how I want to be here - to live here - always - with you - always, always.

Maire. "Always"? What is that word - "always"?

Yolland. Yes-yes; always.

And then a little later, the same thing happens the other way round:

Yolland. Don't stop - I know what you're saying.

Maire. I want to live with you - anywhere - anywhere at all -

Then, in English:

Maire. always -

Then, in Gaelic:

Maire. always.

Yolland. 'Always'? What is that word - 'always'?

And then he realises, and kisses her.

There is a Shakespeare scene which brings together a vast number of the techniques I've been describing. It has changes of tempo, rhythmical writing and rules of three aplenty. It presents a recognised form of human activity - in this case, playacting - and disrupts it by reversing it, so having encoded the drama one way, you see the same thing the other way round. It ends with a speech replete with repetitions which culminates in one of the great drop-lines in drama, though in this case, not for comic but for tragic effect.

We know that the roistering Prince Hal plans to throw off his rude associates eventually, particularly the fat reprobate Sir John Falstaff ("redeeming time when men least think I will"). In the Boar's Head at Eastcheap, Hal and Falstaff are bantering back and forwards when a messenger brings a summons for the Prince to go to London to see his father. Then this happens.

Falstaff. Well, thou wilt be horribly chid to-morrow when thou comest to thy father. If thou love me, practice an answer.

Prince. Do thou stand for my father and examine me upon the

particulars of my life.

Falstaff. Shall I? Content. This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown.

Prince. Thy state is taken for a join'd-stool, thy golden sceptre for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown.

Falstaff. Well, an the fire of grace be not quite out of thee, now shalt thou be moved. Give me a cup of sack to make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses' vein.

Prince. Well, here is my leg.

Falstaff. And here is my speech. Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied. For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villanous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point: why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher and eat blackberries? A question not to be ask'd. Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? A question to be ask'd. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch. This pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest. For, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also: and yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

Prince. What manner of man, an it like your Majesty?

Falstaff. A goodly portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty,

or, by'r Lady, inclining to threescore; and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff. If that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff. Him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me where hast thou been this month?

Prince. Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father.

Falstaff. Depose me? If thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker or a poulter's hare.

Prince. Well, here I am set.

Falstaff. And here I stand. Judge, my masters.

Prince. Now, Harry, whence come you?

Falstaff. My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

Prince. The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

Falstaff. 'Sblood, my lord, they are false! Nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i' faith.

Prince. Swearest thou, ungracious boy? Henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace. There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting hutch of beastliness, that swoll'n parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuff'd cloakbag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein

crafty, but in villany? wherein villanous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

Falstaff. I would your Grace would take me with you. Whom means your Grace?

Prince. That villanous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff. My lord, the man I know.

Prince. I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know. That he is old (the more the pity) his white hairs do witness it; but that he is (saving your reverence) a whoremaster, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damn'd. If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord. Banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company. Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!

Prince. I do, I will.

Let's note first of all that the climax of Falstaff's speech – written, like most of Falstaff, in prose – consists of a repeated tetrameter: "Banish not him thy Harry's company". This line is followed by a iambic pentameter: "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world". But, dramatically, just look at what's happening. In what is - in essence - an improvised role-play, Falstaff Hal's false father plays the true father and instructs the actual son not to spurn him. Then, playing the true son, he argues to the actual son (playing the true father) that he (the father) shouldn't banish him - which, because it is a repeat in a different form of the previous joke, we laugh at,

until we realise what the underlying situation has become: not that the false father as the true son is pleading with the true father, but that the false father is pleading directly with the true son. So the stage plea ("banish not him thy Harry's company") becomes a real plea, which is rejected first in role and then - indeed - for real.

So what is it about poems and plays that make them closer than either to novels? The answer is a paradox. Poetry, the literary form most associated with inspiration/free expression (Shakespeare's "fine frenzy rolling") is actually the one that involves the most sheer, hard, practical, literary graft; not just because of the compression involved, but, literally, in terms of the amount of word-choosing you have to do to achieve poetry's effects, from scansion to metre to alliteration to rhyme.

Similarly, the craft of play making is defined by the limitations in the form which don't apply to novels: limitations of time, of location, of numbers of characters, of what you can present on a stage. Like poetry, the art comes out of battling the constraints. What both poetry and plays are doing - to a much greater extent than novels - is to concentrate human experience so that you see the connections, patterns and shapes that we miss in real life. Thus, for both, not just "fine frenzy rolling" but also giving to airy nothing "a local habitation and a name".

Part of that habitation is, in plays, the human body. As Glyn Maxwell remarks, poems "must act upon you in a way that resembles a human encounter". Well, drama doesn't just resemble human encounters, it consists of them. But there's an irony in the inescapably literal presence of the corporeal actor on the stage. It is that sometimes that presence is most effective when representing encounters that couldn't take place. In Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* there is one such encounter, when an old man meets a young man walking in Oxford. An old man who might well be marvelling at the unexpected success of a lecture he gave in Cambridge three years before.

AEH. What are you doing here, may I ask?

Housman. Classics, sir. I'm studying for Greats.

AEH. Are you? I did Greats, too. Of course, that was more than fifty years

ago, when Oxford was still the sweet city of dreaming spires.

Housman. It must have been delightful then.

AEH. It was. I felt as if I had come up from the plains of Moab to the top of Mount Pisgah like Moses when the Lord showed him all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea.

Housman. There's a hill near our house where I live in Worcestershire which I and my brothers and sisters call Mount Pisgah. I used to climb it often, and look out towards Wales, to what I thought was a kind of Promised Land, though it was only the Clee Hills really – Shropshire was our western horizon .

AEH. Oh … excellent. You are …

Housman. Housman, sir, of St John's.

AEH. Well this is an unexpected development. Where can we sit down before philosophy finds us out. I'm not as young as I was. Whereas you, of course, are.

(They sit).

Classical studies, eh?

Housman. Yes, sir.

AEH. You are to be a rounded man, fit for the world, a man of taste and moral sense.

Housman. Yes, sir.
AEH. Science for our material improvement, classics for our inner nature. The beautiful and the good. Culture. Virtue. The ideas and moral influence of the ancient philosophers.

Housman. Yes, sir.

AEH. Humbug.

Housman. Oh.

There is more than a whiff of humbug-hunting in the lecture we commemorate tonight, and Housman ended it, deliberately prosaically, by promising to return – "with relief and thankfulness" – to his "proper job". I'm aware that I've been talking more about my proper job than the subject you had every right to expect me to address. But I hope I've persuaded you that – in setting poetry and playwriting at opposite ends of the writerly spectrum – Glyn Maxwell is, in this respect if no other, wrong.

‘Where we should never be’: Housman and the Unattainable

by
Scott Pettitt

I. Reconsidering Shropshire

Thomas Churchyard, Mary Webb, Wilfred Owen, even Philip Larkin: all have a greater claim on Shropshire (biographically speaking, at least), but when a lonely lad walks on Wenlock Edge, he takes for his friend not one of these, or even a nameless Roman, but a socially awkward Cambridge don born and raised over the border in Worcestershire. So what are we to make of A. E. Housman and Shropshire? Received wisdom provides us with a delicious irony: the poet indelibly associated with the county in the popular imagination for more than a century was almost wholly ignorant of the land he hymned. Salop was thus simply a useful source for some pretty verdant colouring, we are told; there was no concern with the actual region at all.[1] The proof is, apparently, everywhere for those who care to look. Take Hughley, sans steeple, or Bredon Hill, belligerently refusing to abandon the Vale of Evesham. That Housman’s ashes found their final resting place in the shadow of Ludlow tower can almost appear a final joke after a lifetime sadly deficient in laughter. (Admittedly, the presence of his sepulchral abode in Shropshire is not quite so incongruous as, say, Shelley’s in Bournemouth or, to stray momentarily into the realm of twentieth-century Russian politics, Alexander Kerensky’s in Putney, but it’s enough to raise a few wry smiles among the cognoscenti none the less.) Should we leave it at that? Some indefatigable Housman explicators haven’t, and it has been postulated, contrary to prevailing opinion, that the poems are animated by

1. For minimising views of Shropshire’s importance in the poems see, for example, Ralph Franklin, ‘Housman’s Shropshire’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 24 (1963), pp. 170-1; Norman Page, *A. E. Housman: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke, 2nd edition, 1996), pp. 187-8; Richard Perceval Graves, *A. E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (London, 1979), pp. 105-6; George E. Haynes, ‘The Importance of Housman’s Lad’, *Housman Society Journal*, 37 (2011), pp. 110-11.

profound first-hand knowledge of Shropshire.[2] However, this whole debate, in its unremitting insistence on a correlation between the county's degree of significance and the extent of Housman's direct acquaintance with it, takes us a very long way indeed from the real point of the place in the poems.

Housman rarely missed an opportunity to disclaim close personal connection with Salop. Variations on 'I do not know the county well'[3] were apophthegms frequently deployed in his letters, as if to repel over-inquisitive correspondents. At times, he seems to have positively relished confounding expectations. When A. S. F. Gow, his future Trinity colleague and quasi-biographer, first encountered him, he was disappointed to learn that Housman holidayed on the continent, rather than in Shropshire[4] (there's a distinct possibility that the ever-perspicacious professor had divined that Venice and Paris offered better odds for sexual adventure than Claverley or Market Drayton).

It's certainly understandable that this notoriously reticent man's zealous efforts to disassociate himself from the county have come to be regarded as thoroughly disingenuous in some quarters. For all his

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2. J. L. Bradbury, 'Poetry and Place in A. E. Housman', *Housman Society Journal*, 5 (1979), pp. 11-18.

3. For this particular version of the denial see AEH to Houston Martin, 14 April 1934, in Archie Burnett (ed.), *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (Oxford, 2007) II, pp. 415-16. There are eighteen further surviving letters in which Housman discusses, or at least mentions Shropshire: to Laurence Housman, 5 October 1896 (*Letters* I, pp. 90-1); to Lucy Housman, 25 June 1897 (*Letters* I, pp. 96-7); to Grant Richards, 4 June 1907 (*Letters* I, p. 209), 27 May 1908 (*Letters* I, p. 220), 6 June 1908 (*Letters* I, p. 221), and 5 February 1927 (*Letters* II, p. 9); to an unknown correspondent, 14 July 1927 (*Letters* II, p. 30); to Seymour Adelman, 17 January 1928 (*Letters* II, p. 52); to an unknown correspondent, 11 February 1929 (*Letters* II, pp. 110-11); to Jeannie Housman, ?Autumn 1929 (*Letters* II, p. 146); to H. E. Butler, 3 January 1930 (*Letters* II, p. 164); to Max Judge, 27 January 1930 (*Letters* II, p. 167); to Denis Symons, 25 February 1932 (*Letters* II, pp. 281-2); to Maurice Pollet, 5 February 1933 (*Letters* II, pp. 327-330), and draft (*Letters* II, pp. 325-6); to Gerald Bullett, 22 April 1933 (*Letters* II, p. 340); to Houston Martin, 20 November 1933 (*Letters* II, p. 389), and 17 October 1934 (*Letters* II, pp. 444-5); to Grant Richards, 20 January 1936 (*Letters* II, p. 517).

4. A. S. F. Gow, *A. E. Housman: A Sketch* (Cambridge, corrected impression, 1936), p. 47.

protestations that 'my topographical details... are sometimes quite wrong',[5] and Hughley steeple notwithstanding, Housman's Shropshire particulars have proved remarkably resilient in the face of meticulous scrutiny,[6] and he had clearly seen enough of Ludlow and Wenlock Edge to comment discerningly on William Hyde's illustrations for the 1908 edition of *A Shropshire Lad*.[7] But it's stretching it a bit to aver that his irrefutable precision as a literary Baedeker (when it comes to certain Shropshire places, at least) presupposes meaningful familiarity with the county. He possessed a copy of John Murray's 1879 *Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire*,[8] and certainly made good use of it; for instance, he owed the Dead Man's Fair of *Last Poems* XIX to Murray's reference to the last in Church Stretton's annual round of fairs, which bore this macabre appellation.[9] Decent guides like Murray's contain exactly the sort of information Housman required to enrich and authenticate his poetry. Of the composition of *A Shropshire Lad*, he told his acquaintance Percy Withers (as is so often the case with Housman, 'friend' would probably be too strong a word): 'He had written six of the poems before he set foot in Shropshire, but having decided on the title he felt he should pay the county a visit – 'to gain local colour', he added with a laugh and a look of derision.'[10] There's no reason to doubt Housman's

5. AEH to Maurice Pollet, 5 February 1933 (*Letters* II, pp. 327-330), and draft (*Letters* II, pp. 325-6).

6. Bradbury, 'Poetry and Place', pp. 11-18; Keith Jebb, *A. E. Housman* (Bridgend, 1992), pp. 73-6.

7. AEH to Grant Richards, 27 May 1908 (*Letters* I, p. 220), and 6 June 1908 (*Letters* I, p. 221). Housman told Maurice Pollet: 'I know Ludlow and Wenlock' (*Letters* II, pp. 327-30). He had sufficient knowledge of their environs (however acquired) to inform one correspondent: 'At Buildwas there is the ruin of an abbey church, not large but fairly complete, of Norman date… The Wrekin is wooded, and Wenlock Edge along the western side, but the Clees and most of the other hills are grass or heather. In the southern half of the county, to which I have confined myself, the hills are generally long ridges running from north to south, with valleys, broad or narrow, between… The Wrekin is isolated': AEH to Houston Martin, 14 April 1934 (*Letters* II, pp. 415-16).

8. George E. Haynes, 'Housman's Shropshire', *Housman Society Journal*, 20 (1994), pp. 19-20.

9. John Murray, *Handbook for Shropshire and Cheshire* (London, 1879), p. 15.

10. Percy Withers, *A Buried Life: Personal Recollections of A. E. Housman* (Lon-

veracity here. He often derived a furtive pleasure from throwing disciples off the scent, but if he had been a regular visitor to the county in the years before the appearance of *A Shropshire Lad*, as has been suggested,[11] it would seem extraordinary that neither his brother Laurence, nor his sister Kate Symons deigned to mention it in their respective biographical sketches.[12] So, probably not a haunt of his youth or early manhood; it certainly wasn't a place he exhibited any particularly pressing concern to visit in later life. In 1929 he stayed overnight in Shrewsbury and scaled Brown Clee Hill, and the Breidden Hills on the Shropshire-Montgomeryshire border.[13] There was a further journey to Shropshire, with Laurence Housman, five years later,[14] but we have no especially firm evidence of any more.[15] When Housman informed the young French scholar Maurice Pollet, in February 1933, that it was a county 'where I have never spent much time',[16] he was withholding nothing.

However accurate the individual topographical details may be, taken together the Shropshire locations that constellate in the poems[17] betray a decidedly limited cartographic sensibility. Housman's Salop is a very remote relation of the geographical county. He gives us nowhere north of

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don, 1940), p. 67.

11. Bradbury, 'Poetry and Place', p. 17.

12. Laurence Housman, *A. E. H.: Some Poems, Some Letters and a Personal Memoir* (London, 1937); Katharine E. Symons, 'Boyhood', in *Alfred Edward Housman: Recollections* (Bromsgrove, 1936), pp. 7-29.

13. AEH to Jeannie Housman, ?Autumn 1929 (*Letters* II, p. 146).

14. Laurence Housman, *Memoir*, pp. 118-19.

15. It's possible that he returned to the Breidden Hills in 1932: 'If all goes well I shall be at Tardebigge in July, and if we go to Rodney's pillar [an eighteenth-century monument in the Breiddens] I may recover a gold band which fell off an expensive umbrella into the bracken there' (during the 1929 excursion): AEH to Denis Symons, 25 February 1932 (*Letters* II, pp. 281-2).

16. AEH to Maurice Pollet, 5 February 1933 (*Letters* II, pp. 327-330), and draft (*Letters* II, pp. 325-6).

17. Shropshire appears in fourteen of the sixty-three poems of *A Shropshire Lad*, three in the forty-one of *Last Poems*, and a Shropshire hill can be adduced as the viewpoint in *More Poems* XXXIII, in which 'Shropshire' is a cancelled variant: Archie Burnett (ed.), *The Poems of A. E. Housman* (Oxford, 1997), p. 318.

Shrewsbury, and even a perambulation taking in just the county's southern half reveals the omission of countless glories. Bridgnorth, preeminent hill town, and the Long Mynd, one of Salop's most recognisable natural features, are just two examples. I could go on. None of this is to suggest that Shropshire is an irrelevance, its place-names merely providing a convenient pastoral armature. But Housman's nebulous picture tells us that he has no sense of autochthonous connection with the place. His vision only begins to make sense when we think of his Shropshire as a county seen from afar. We will not assimilate the meaning of Shropshire through tramping its own highways and byways. Rather, it's necessary to look to the world of the poet's adolescence, the Worcestershire lands which he returned to time after time,[18] and a view long remembered.

Housman's years in Cambridge seem to have been the happiest of his adult life (though this probably isn't saying very much). Still, his transplantation to fen country must have disheartened the inveterate rambler at least a little; he'd always had an edacious appetite for commanding vistas. Passages of rapture are a rarity in his generally terse letters, but he was once moved to write: 'I have never seen a picture of what I think one of the most wonderful views I know, Egdon Heath, seen from the hills south of it, with the heather in bloom and Poole Harbour reaching its arms into the midst of it.'[19] In a less expansive mode, he told Percy Withers: 'One great charm of all the parts of Oxfordshire I know is the wide horizon you command even from a slight elevation.'[20] There was, though, one panorama that held primacy in his imagination, that bewitched him like no other.

'I had a sentimental feeling for Shropshire', Housman wrote towards the end of his life, 'because its hills were our western horizon.'[21] He gives no more away, but it is enough. Near the site of Fockbury House (a couple of miles from Bromsgrove), where Housman spent his adolescence, there rises a nameless hill, frequented by all the family, but especially Alfred,

18. After the First World War he holidayed regularly with his favourite brother, Basil, at Tardebigge, near Bromsgrove: Graves, *Scholar-Poet*, pp. 141-2.

19. AEH to Alice Rothenstein, 18 July 1910 (*Letters* I, pp. 253-4).

20. AEH to Percy Withers, 4 May 1920 (*Letters* I, pp. 439-40).

21. AEH to Maurice Pollet, 5 February 1933 (*Letters* II, pp. 327-330), and draft (*Letters* II, pp. 325-6).

for the extensive views it afforded. 'It was there', in a field off Worms Ash Lane, his sister Kate recalled, that 'he would go to gaze on the sunset lands of Shropshire.'[22] The places of the poems are all gathered in or around the landscape Housman looked to, a region entered, from Worcestershire, through 'the wild green hills of Wyre'.[23] The view from Fockbury embraces the southern Shropshire of the Clee Hills, the Wrekin, and Wenlock Edge. Here stand Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Knighton, Buildwas, Church Stretton, Clun, the ruins of Uricon. And through here the Severn and Teme flow, as do the lesser-known Onny and Corve.

'Comrade, look not on the west',[24] Housman implores, but when did he do anything other? *A Shropshire Lad* unforgettably opens with the beacon burning on Brown Clee Hill (the county's highest) to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of 1887[25] (Alfred and his sister Kate had surveyed this very scene from Fockbury[26]). In 1922, when AEH came to arrange the contents of that collection's successor, the intransigently titled *Last Poems*, he placed *Fancy's Knell* at its end. This bucolic evocation of the village of Abdon's mirthful yokels would be his valedictory poetic utterance, for his lifetime at least. The poem has some beautiful lines, but it's far from being among his finest works, and its weaknesses are thrown into sharp relief by its juxtaposition to the sublime 'Tell me not here, it needs not saying'.[27] But the reasons for *Fancy's Knell*'s position are easily appreciable when we look beyond the purely aesthetic, for Abdon nestles under Brown Clee. As he takes his leave of us, Housman's message is this: an old man in Cambridge he may now be, but he is still turning longingly to that horizon, the Shropshire hills ineffaceable from his mind's eye.

The Housman children christened their special Fockbury hill 'Mount Pisgah', from where God had shown Moses the Promised Land in the Book

22. Symons, 'Boyhood', p. 15. Any pilgrims wishing to visit this very special location should consult Robin Shaw, *Housman's Places* (Bromsgrove, 1995), pp. 33-5.

23. *A Shropshire Lad* XXXVII, 1.

24. *Last Poems* I (*The West*), 2.

25. *A Shropshire Lad* I (*1887*), 1.

26. Symons, 'Boyhood', p. 15.

27. *Last Poems* XL.

of Deuteronomy, but the view would have possessed other associations for an impressionable youth like Alfred, already displaying some erudition as a classicist. The western horizon has haunted the European imagination since the age of the Greeks: beyond lies paradise, the world of the Fortunate Isles and the garden of the Hesperides. It gives itself to magic. From Fockbury, the Shropshire hills seem to inhabit some mysterious liminal region, just close enough to still be readily delineated, to offer the possibility of exploration and acquaintance, and yet also somehow already ethereally distant, belonging to a realm of fantasy, tantalisingly out of reach (as Housman put it: 'my Shropshire, like the Cambridge of Lycidas, is not exactly a real place'[28]). Those hills, though rooted in physical reality, became a mythical land, where a different existence could be imagined. A heady admixture of the familiar and strange, their alluring tangibility suggested to Housman that his daydreams might there be fulfilled, but their distance ensured that those dreams remained unencumbered by the disappointments of reality. Shropshire retained its potency for the poet precisely because it was a place where he scarcely trod; it was forever beguiling, forever unblemished by the quotidian.

II. Housman's Men

'Mount Pisgah' does not look out solely on a Shropshire landscape, though. To the south, the Severn plain opens out, flanked by Bredon and the unmistakable Malverns. These hills incontrovertibly belong to Worcestershire (though the Malverns reach partly into Herefordshire and Gloucestershire as well), but the imagination has no respect for history or geography, and they became part of Housman's Shropshire too.[29] Bredon is

28. AEH to Gerald Bullett, 22 April 1933 (*Letters* II, p. 340). Curiously, Housman goes on to cite his portrayal of Abdon in *Last Poems* XLI (*Fancy's Knell*) as evidence of this coalescence of fantasy and reality in his work (cf. AEH to Maurice Pollet, 5 February 1933 (*Letters* II, pp. 327-330), and draft (*Letters* II, pp. 325-6)). In fact, his portrait is impressively accurate. Abdon Burf's greater height means that, as the Sun goes down, it remains 'bright' while Wenlock Edge is 'umbered': Bradbury, 'Poetry and Place', p. 16; Burnett, *Poems*, p. 416.

29. It's perhaps unsurprising, then, that there are Worcestershire towns in the

now ineradicably associated with the poet; the Malverns play a surreptitious, but ultimately far more significant role in his oeuvre.

After Housman's death, it was discovered that he had carefully preserved a newspaper report on the suicide of a gentleman Cadet beside 'Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?'[30] in his own copy of *A Shropshire Lad*. It was clearly a tale he wanted told after he had been safely consigned to oblivion. The poem's genesis lay in the death, in August 1895, of 19-year-old Henry Clarkson Maclean, of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, driven to self-destruction (as his suicide note makes patently obvious) by irrepressible homosexual desires. The tragedy did more than inspire one of Housman's most striking works. Maclean's suicide, like the Wilde trials, and the death of his own father, generated something of what Housman memorably called the 'continuous excitement'[31] that brought *A Shropshire Lad* to fruition. Though Maclean had spent the last months of his short life in London, he was in fact one of Housman's Shropshire lads; he hailed from Storridge, at the foot of the Malverns.[32] A. E. Housman and Henry C. Maclean both dwelt in the tragic realm of Victorian homosexual guilt. In Housman's dreams, though, they inhabited another kingdom, that fantasy Shropshire that might, just might, be a true place. There, they could, perhaps, have been together.

Of course, it was not the real Henry C. Maclean who mattered to the poet. Whatever kind of man Maclean was cannot be grasped (only the searing anguish of the suicide note remains), he is lost to us forever, but one thing is certain: in 'Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?' he becomes something he can never have been. The tormented man of flesh and blood is metamorphosed into an idealised romantic hero. A gentleman Cadet, the humble rankers, the burly farm labourers: the men of Housman's Shropshire might initially seem to be ordinary enough, but they are no more real than

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drafts of *A Shropshire Lad*. 'Buildwas' was once 'Bewdley' (*A Shropshire Lad* XXVIII (*The Welsh Marches*), 13), and 'Wenlock' was 'Stourbridge' (*A Shropshire Lad* XXXIX, 1): Burnett, *Poems*, pp. 30, 39.

30. *A Shropshire Lad* XLIV.

31. Prefatory note to *Last Poems*.

32. J. M. Nosworthy, 'A. E. Housman and the Woolwich Cadet', *Notes & Queries*, New Series 17 (1970), pp. 351-3.

the buxom beauties adorning Philip Larkin's railway posters.[33] Spurned by fickle girls, Housman's virile youths all enlist and find their ends on battlefields abroad, or stay at home to die on the gallows or through heroic suicide. 'The lads that will die in their glory and never be old'[34] are fanciful figures from his sexual reveries; like the Shropshire where they are able to lead their brief lives, they transcend actuality. Housman could never exalt the everyday as something potentially miraculous, or appreciate that the smallest gestures can be the noblest expressions of humanity. He eschewed the commonplace and took refuge in a Shropshire of the mind. This had something to do with arrogance (and shyness), certainly, but it had something to do with an unattainable yearning for perfection as well.

Few other poems in the Housman canon can match *The Land of Biscay* for haunting beauty and resounding sorrow. Its protagonist lives in a world where he has no place. At the land's end, gazing at the horizon, he has renounced society, the here and now; the expectation of escape to some elsewhere is all that vindicates his existence. And then, at sunset, a wondrous ship approaches, laden with the prospect of rescue, offering the chance of a utopian tomorrow. The protagonist surrenders to his dreams:

> Oh, said I, my friend and lover, take we now that ship and sail
> Outward in the ebb of hues and steer upon the sunset trail;
> Leave the night to fall behind us and the clouding counties leave:
> Help for you and me is yonder, in a haven west of eve.[35]

But his burgeoning hopes are crushed the moment the ship's helmsman becomes audible:

> And the mariner of Ocean, he was calling as he came:
> From the highway of the sunset he was shouting on the sea,
> "Landsman of the land of Biscay, have you help for grief and me?"[36]

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33. Philip Larkin, *Sunny Prestatyn*.
34. *A Shropshire Lad* XXIII, 16.
35. *More Poems* XLVI (*The Land of Biscay*), 9-12.
36. Ibid. 16-18.

Housman the saturnine prophet has imparted his chastening wisdom. No sooner does reality intrude on our dreams than they are shattered. The only escape from grief is through our imagination; once our chimerical fantasies are tarnished, we are left with nothing.

But surely the mariner offers the protagonist at least partial salvation? Here is another outcast, a kindred spirit, a dreamer searching for meaning in a world without it. If love was ever going to take the protagonist by the hand and offer up its secrets, now is surely the moment. He need only speak, but he stays silent:

> When I heard I did not answer, I stood mute and shook my head:
> Son of earth and son of Ocean, much we thought and nothing said.
> Grief and I abode the nightfall, to the sunset grief and he
> Turned them from the land of Biscay on the waters of the sea.[37]

Why does Housman insist that it must be thus? There's a revealing vignette, first recounted by A. S. F. Gow, which, though now well known, bears repetition still: Housman once came across the following passage from T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in a review article:

> There was my craving to be liked – so strong and nervous that never could I open myself friendly to another. The terror of failure in an effort so important made me shrink from trying; besides, there was the standard; for intimacy seemed shameful unless the other could make the perfect reply, in the same language, after the same method, for the same reasons.

'This is me', he wrote in the margin beside it.[38] It was something the most perceptive of those who encountered Housman came to appreciate. Professor G. B. A. Fletcher, who had been a student of his at Cambridge, recalled:

37. Ibid. 19-22.

38. Gow, *Sketch*, pp. 53-4. For the passage from Lawrence in context see *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London, Penguin edn., 1962), p. 580.

> He was shy by nature and he had a passion for perfection – for perfection in scholarship, food, personal relationships and everything else. Anything imperfect was torture to him. Conversation that fell short of what he felt to be worth while he instinctively avoided. Taciturn he often was, but it was not more often than in other people the taciturnity of moroseness. He was often silent because he preferred not to speak inaccurately or shoddily. He was often solitary because any substitute for perfect intimacy seemed to him too poor a thing.[39]

We love others because of their faults, not despite them; it is our faults that make us human. An ineluctable truth this may be, but it is not one Housman could ever have accepted. Perfection was everything. Of course, he was never going to find perfection in any conventional relationship, because there's no such thing for anyone, but especially for Housman, who set the bar so impossibly high (after all, most of us would think that the mariner in *The Land of Biscay* comes as close as it's possible to get to the perfect 'other' that he wanted). He could only have the prospect of perfection, and, as *The Land of Biscay* makes clear, preserving this required keeping people at a distance.

It's not surprising, then, that he generally recoiled from humanity, choosing to inhabit an anteroom to life. True, his status as costive misanthrope par excellence is something of an exaggeration. There are many testimonies to his spontaneous wit, charm, kindness, even near ebullience.[40] He was never naturally loquacious, but at gatherings of 'The Family', the exclusive Cambridge dining club to which he belonged, and with non-intellectual friends like the Wises of Woodchester, he could be extremely good company. He was known to pull crackers at Christmas, and, on one occasion, rather improbably sought to engage the interest of a

39. In Grant Richards, *Housman, 1897-1936* (Oxford, corrected impression, 1942), p. 385.

40. See, for example, Richards, *Housman*, pp. 92-3, 319-21, 325-6; A. W. Pollard, 'Some Reminiscences', in *Alfred Edward Housman: Recollections* (Bromsgrove, 1936), pp. 32-3.

baby, with the aid of a cuddly toy![41] There was certainly a part of him that savoured his fearsome reputation, and at times he no doubt played up to it for effect. When the artist William Rothenstein was seeking to create a group portrait of Thomas Hardy's pall bearers, Housman dryly remarked: 'I have some slight reason to think that you will not capture all your 10, and I feel a suspicion that you want to use me as a decoy: 'the churlish recluse A. E. Housman has consented, how then can you or anyone refuse?''[42] But, as we all know, for every tale of Housman the amiable companion, there are legions of his legendary aloofness. Moments of bonhomie in conducive environments aside, he was fundamentally a solitary, had no intimates, and spurned countless friendly overtures, whether they were from E. M. Forster[43] or the anonymous soldiers his poems lionised.[44] Manly farm labourers frolicked round his mind, but when, during a country ramble, Percy Withers presented him with an opportunity to pass the time of day with a real one, Housman marched on without a word.[45] Friendship could only be relished when the avoidance of disappointment was guaranteed. The touching epistolary relationship he struck up towards the end of his life with the young American Houston Martin[46] was conducted safe in the knowledge that they were never likely to come face to face.[47] It is almost always disappointing, Housman once quipped, to actually meet anyone.[48]

One of the many facets of W. H. Auden's sometimes cruel genius is an uncanny knack for capturing a subject's very essence in a single pithy

41. Joan Thomson, 'Biographical Reminiscences', in Richards, *Housman*, p. 448.

42. AEH to William Rothenstein, 17 February 1928 (*Letters* II, p. 59).

43. Graves, *Scholar-Poet*, p. 238.

44. See his treatment of Evan Pughe in Richards, *Housman*, pp. 323-4.

45. Withers, *Buried Life*, pp. 55-6.

46. Housman corresponded with another American, Witter Bynner, for over thirty years, but his surviving letters to Bynner are far less warm. That said, Bynner did receive a presentation copy of *Last Poems*. They never met.

47. Housman memorably informed (only half-jokingly) one of Martin's compatriots who had valiantly resisted the urge to call on him in Cambridge: 'My heart always warms to people who do not come to see me, especially Americans, to whom it seems to be more of an effort': AEH to Neilson Abeel, 4 October 1935 (*Letters* II, p. 496).

48. Thomson, 'Biographical Reminiscences', p. 448.

phrase. His *A. E. Housman* is a case in point. Housman, writes Auden, put his emotional money on the uncritical dead.[49] AEH might have winced in recognition. Most of his friends, if they ever existed as he imagined them, are lying horizontal, waiting for a day that will never come: the 'Dead clay that did me kindness',[50] the lads 'That shepherded the moonlit sheep | A hundred years ago',[51] and the Roman, no more than 'ashes under Uricon.'[52] Or they are the 'Unborn and unbegot', who'll read him 'when they're in trouble | And I am not.'[53] That Alan Bennett tramped the streets of Headingly at some point in 1950 feeling that the one person to whom he could have confided the secret of his sexuality was the late Kennedy Professor of Latin must bring us very close indeed to Housman's idea of the sublime.[54] In Housman's world, time is no obstacle to meaningful intimacy; it's imperfect conversation that proves the most insurmountable barrier.

In his most personal pieces, where he dispenses with his ill-fitting countryman's disguise, there are erotic encounters between Housman and living men, and even a god, but they are forever bathed in luminous incipience, unconsummated, the eyes articulating what the lips never will. Think of

> The street sounds to the soldiers' tread,
> And out we troop to see:
> A single redcoat turns his head,
> He turns and looks at me.
>
> My man, from sky to sky's so far,
> We never crossed before;
> Such leagues apart the world's ends are,
> We're like to meet no more;

49. W. H. Auden, *A. E. Housman*, 11-12.
50. *Last Poems* XXX (*Sinner's Rue*), 17.
51. *A Shropshire Lad* IX, 31-2.
52. Ibid. XXXI, 20.
53. *More Poems* ('They say my verse is sad: no wonder'), 6-8.
54. Alan Bennett, *Untold Stories* (London, 2005), p. 140.

What thoughts at heart have you and I
  We cannot stop to tell;
But dead or living, drunk or dry,
  Soldier, I wish you well.[55]

and of the journey with Hermes in *The Merry Guide*. Of the guide of souls' many enticements, it's the 'lips that brim with laughter | But never once respond'[56] that seem to excite Housman above all. The poet revels in these silent meetings for their miracles, for the infinite possibilities they invite, and what they preclude. His imagination is allowed to remain untrammeled, the promise of perfection perpetually shines out, and the insipidity of the everyday is repelled:

Oh whence, I asked, and whither?
  He smiled and would not say,
And looked at me and beckoned
  And laughed and led the way.

And with kind looks and laughter
  And nought to say beside
We two went on together,
  I and my happy guide.

Across the glittering pastures
  And empty upland still
And solitude of shepherds
  High in the folded hill,

By hanging woods and hamlets
  That gaze through orchards down
On many a windmill turning
  And far-discovered town,

55. *A Shropshire Lad* XXII.

56. Ibid. XLII (*The Merry Guide*), 57-8.

With gay regards of promise
And sure unslackened stride
And smiles and nothing spoken
Led on my merry guide.[57]

Still, in real life, it's possible that Housman was willing to endure some human imperfection in the interests of sex (not an activity which involves much conversation anyway). If we are to believe Laurence Housman (not always a reliable witness), there was a halcyon interval with Adalbert Jackson (Moses' younger brother) amidst those soul-destroying years at the Patent Office,[58] but the plain-spoken, emotionally uncomplicated sorrow (not trauma) of Housman's memorial to the young man, *A. J. J.*,[59] renders theories of an affair improbable. We're perhaps on firmer ground speculating about the nature of Housman's relationship with Andrea, his Venetian gondolier (word of Andrea's 'final illness' (extremely premature, as it turned out) had Housman racing across Europe to bid him farewell[60]), and his encounters with young men in France,[61] even though there have been some almost puritanical efforts to prove that he never had any fun.[62] But, of course, sex alone is one thing; love is something else altogether, and, as Housman famously said, anyone who thinks he has loved more than one person has simply never loved at all.[63]

57. Ibid. 13-32.

58. Page, *Critical Biography*, pp. 53-4.

59. *More Poems* XLII.

60. See AEH to Walter Ashburner, 1 June 1926 (*Letters* I, pp. 617-18); to Katharine E. Symons, 2 June 1926 (*Letters* I, p. 619). The references to the visit are facetious, but the fact remains that Housman made the trip. In the event, Andrea survived another four years: 'My poor gondolier is dead, after a bad pulmonary attack of about three weeks. Now there is nobody in the world who respects me as much as Noble [the Housman family dog] did': AEH to Katharine E. Symons, 11 December 1930 (*Letters* II, p. 221).

61. See Graves, *Scholar-Poet*, pp. 155-63.

62. See, for example, David M^cKie, 'Housman Abroad', *Housman Society Journal*, 39 (2013), pp. 21-41.

63. Thomson, 'Biographical Reminiscences', p. 449.

III. Reconsidering Moses Jackson

> We are about to part... Here are the boxes; here are the cabs. There is Percival in his billycock hat. He will forget me. He will leave my letters lying about among guns and dogs unanswered. I shall send him poems and he will perhaps reply with a picture post card. But it is for that that I love him. I shall propose meeting – under a clock, by some Cross; and shall wait, and he will not come. It is for that that I love him. Oblivious, almost entirely ignorant, he will pass from my life.[64]

So says Neville – shy, supercilious classics don (who daydreams 'of naked cabin-boys squirting each other with hose-pipes on the decks of ships'[65]) – of *Boy's Own* hero Percival, in *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf's Modernist masterpiece. The passage is a memorable evocation of love's all-too-frequent lopsidedness, and it's one that would seem to provide an unmistakable analogy for Housman's unrequited love for the supposedly callous Moses Jackson. But how much do we really know about Jackson? We all think we know him: startlingly beautiful, but intellectually unprepossessing and brutish; an Adonis with, to borrow Housman's most famous invective, the brain of an 'idiot child'.[66] Is this fair? Admittedly, the familiar photograph of him with his fellow St. John's rowers does him few favours. They all appear to be absolute horrors, and Jackson, perched haughtily on the arm of a couch, cuts a repellently Flashmanesque figure.[67] But if that's the man Moses Jackson really was, would Housman have fallen in love with him?

Many a great writer's choice of muse (if 'choice' comes into it) has left generations of their admirers perplexed, even exasperated. Plenty were,

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64. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London, Vintage edn., 2004), p. 37.

65. Ibid. p. 119.

66. Applied to Robinson Ellis in the preface to *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber Quintus* (London, 1930). See A. E. Housman, *Selected Prose*, ed. John Carter (Cambridge, 1961), p. 45.

67. See Page, *Critical Biography*, pl. 3.

apparently, utterly unworthy of the devotion they inspired. A select few from among these have been subjected to particularly vicious posthumous pillorying. One thinks of the characterisations (little more than parodies) of: Nora Barnacle (James Joyce), the uncouth chambermaid; Maeve Brennan (Philip Larkin), the dull librarian with all the sexual allure of the Dewey Decimal System (never mind that Larkin himself was a librarian); Vivienne Haigh-Wood (T. S. Eliot), the deranged fascist; Chester Kallman (W. H. Auden), promiscuous and perennially pissed. Moses Jackson has the dubious distinction of belonging to this incongruous cluster of victims of highbrow disdain (which is at the root of all this abuse, irrespective of the form it actually takes). Housman, who had sought to build his friend a lasting monument in the form of his edition of Manilius (the work was dedicated to Jackson), ultimately has brought down on him nothing but a torrent of ridicule and opprobrium. Within weeks of Housman's death, he was already being condemned by an Oxford contemporary as irredeemably philistine, with no interests beyond sport,[68] and the caricature of Jackson as an unsympathetic ignoramus, cruelly insensitive to Housman's feelings, was quickly born. It endured down the decades, and has now attained immortality in Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*.

All this does blameless, decent Moses Jackson a grave disservice. Leaving aside for a moment the crass fatuity of judging an individual's worth by conventional middle-class measures of accomplishment, even the most cursory of glances at his career makes it perfectly plain that he was no fool. After his First in science from St. John's, he went on to gain a D.Sc. from UCL; as Principal of Sind College, Karachi, he developed a modest establishment into a nationally renowned educational institution.[69] Any remaining doubts about his abilities are best dispelled by this glittering testimonial in support of his (successful) application for a fellowship at UCL (I need not say who wrote it):

> I believe that if he had been caught young and kept away from chemicals and electric batteries and such things, he might

68. E. W. Watson to A. S. F. Gow, 25 May 1936, in Page, *Critical Biography*, p. 41.

69. Andrew Jackson, 'A Pivotal Friendship', *Housman Society Journal*, 36 (2010), p. 37.

> have been made into a classical scholar. Even now, in spite of his education, his knowledge of Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon has often filled me with admiring envy. He also, when his blood is up, employs the English language with a vigour and elegance which is much beyond the generality either of classical scholars or of men of science.[70]

A precious glimpse of the real man is provided by his final letter to Housman, acknowledging receipt of *Last Poems* (replying 'with a picture post card' was certainly not Jackson's way of doing things). The letter he'd received from Housman, which accompanied the volume, must have made for uncomfortable reading, reviving as it did embarrassing, even painful memories of Housman's declaration of love in 1885 (it's the only plausible explanation for the dramatic quarrel that led to Housman abruptly moving out of the Bayswater lodgings he shared with Moses and Adalbert Jackson (he initially vanished for a week)). Though, four years later, Jackson (understandably, given the circumstances) had kept the news of his marriage to Rosa Chambers from Housman, the two had later become reconciled sufficiently for Jackson to invite him to be godfather to his son Gerald (b. 1900), a duty Housman fulfilled assiduously. Now, as he lay dying in Canada, Jackson was forced to read: '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.'[71] Then there's the content of *Last Poems*. It's hard to imagine what thoughts raced through his head as he digested *Epithalamium*:

> So the groomsman quits your side
> And the bridegroom seeks the bride:

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70. AEH to the University College, London, Fellowship Committee, c. November/December 1893 (*Letters* I, p. 75).

71. AEH to M. J. Jackson, 19 October 1922 (*Letters* I, pp. 516-17). Housman's final letter to Jackson is even more explicit about his feelings: 'Why not... behave nicely for once in a way to a fellow who thinks more of you than anything in the world? You are largely responsible for my writing poetry and you ought to take the consequences': AEH to M. J. Jackson, 4 January 1923, in Jackson, 'Pivotal Friendship', pp. 46-7. The letter never reached Moses, who died on 14 January.

Friend and comrade yield you o'er
To her that hardly loves you more.[72]

How could a typical Victorian heterosexual lying in a Vancouver hospital respond to this outpouring of raw emotion that he'd, through no fault of his own, provoked? Jackson, saddled with a passport to eternity that had never been sought, rose magnificently to the challenge, successfully diffusing any awkwardness with a keen humour: 'I haven't your last letter here, but remember an extraordinary ebullition about blacking boots! My most presentable boots are brown, requiring no blacking'.[73] And this alleged philistine had perceptive things to say about *Last Poems* and the reviews the collection had elicited, even if he couldn't quite bring himself not to indulge in a bit of undergraduate joshing: 'I thought of heaping sarcasms on your brain products, as usual, but some of the pieces are good enough to redeem the rest. The *Times* critique was good, and its selections sensible, but the *Observer*... was still better.'[74] Perhaps most astonishing, given all we thought we knew about Moses Jackson, is his reproduction, from memory, of Housman's *Parta Quies*,[75] a work he hadn't seen for forty years.[76] 'It deserved', he insisted, 'a place in the Shropshire Lad! It was the condensation of so much meaning into a few words – furiously unorthodox though it might be, that struck me.'[77]

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72. *Last Poems* XXIV (*Epithalamium*), 5-8.

73. M. J. Jackson to AEH, 23 November 1922, in Jackson, 'Pivotal Friendship', pp. 43-5 ('ebullition' was originally mistranscribed as 'exhibition': see Andrew Jackson, 'Corrections', *Housman Society Journal*, 38 (2012), p. 189).

74. Ibid.

75. Understandably, Moses' reproduction is not quite perfect: see David McKie, 'Jacksoniana', *Housman Society Journal*, 37 (2011), pp. 140-50.

76. *More Poems* XLVIII. Jackson's recollection certainly gratified Housman: 'I was never more astounded at anything than at your reproducing my contribution to *Waifs and Strays*. I remember your reading it at Miss Patchett's, and I how nervous I felt. If I had known you would recollect it 42 years afterward, my emotions would have been too much for me': AEH to M. J. Jackson, 4 January 1923, in Jackson, 'Pivotal Friendship', pp. 46-7.

77. M. J. Jackson to AEH, 23 November 1922, in Jackson, 'Pivotal Friendship', pp. 43-5.

Jackson's letter summons up a chap worthy of the tribute Housman paid to his old friend and colleague Arthur Platt: 'good, kind, bright, unselfish, and as honest as the day'.[78] It's worth bearing in mind, too, that there isn't a word of self-pity from this mortally ill man. Not that difficult to understand why Housman fell in love with him after all. Still, it must have often seemed to Housman that Jackson's friendship was a poor return on the devotion that animated every particle of his being. 'Sodali meo M. I. Iackson harum litterarum contemptori'[79] ('To my comrade M. J. Jackson, who cares nothing for these writings'), the dedication to the Manilius edition runs. 'Or their author',[80] he might have added, and really meant. Jackson would be forever unresponsive, like the countryside that gave Housman the strength to bear his life:

> For nature, heartless, witless nature,
> Will neither care nor know
> What stranger's feet may find the meadow
> And trespass there and go,
> Nor ask amid the dews of morning
> If they are mine or no.[81]

But that's the way it had to be if the love was to endure.

However strong the feelings Housman revealed to Jackson in Bayswater, however fine the man who inspired this initial passion, there can be little doubt that Housman's love grew still more in intensity in the ensuing decades Jackson spent living in India and Canada. His poems have nothing to say of the years he and Jackson shared in Oxford and London. He is not preoccupied with the qualities of the man he knew, considerable as they were; it is Jackson's having vanished from his life that dominates his thoughts. We learn nothing of Jackson's character; rather, it's that parting, that farewell, and the eternal separation that pervades Housman's work.

78. Preface to Arthur Platt, *Nine Essays* (Cambridge, 1927). See A. E. Housman, *Selected Prose*, ed. John Carter (Cambridge, 1961), p. 159.

79. *M. Manilii Astronomicon Liber Primus* (London, 1903), p. v.

80. Well, editor.

81. *Last Poems* XL, 25-30.

Consider

> Because I liked you better
> Than suits a man to say,
> It irked you and I promised
> I'd throw the thought away.
>
> To put the world between us
> We parted stiff and dry:
> "Farewell," said you, "forget me."
> "Fare well, I will," said I.
>
> If e'er, where clover whitens
> The dead man's knoll, you pass,
> And no tall flower to meet you
> Starts in the trefoiled grass,
>
> Halt by the headstone shading
> The heart you have not stirred,
> And say the lad that loved you
> Was one that kept his word.[82]

or the heartbreaking

> He would not stay for me; and who can wonder?
> He would not stay for me to stand and gaze.
> I shook his hand and tore my heart in sunder
> And went with half my life about my ways.[83]

(There are other examples.[84]) Of course, had Jackson not been such an admirable man, Housman could never have grown to love him in the first place, but it was the fact he ultimately passed out of Housman's world that

82. *More Poems* XXXI.

83. *Additional Poems* VII.

84. Most obviously *More Poems* XXX, 1-5, and *Additional Poems* II, 9-12.

secured his abiding significance. For all Housman's claims in the poems of craving union with his beloved, the true secret of Jackson's imperishable appeal lay in his very unattainability, his distance (in every sense of the word). If Jackson had ever reciprocated his feelings, or even merely been a frequently encountered friend in later years, the sublunary would have encroached and irreversibly sterilized Housman's passion. Instead, Jackson's absence meant that Housman was able to transform this bourgeois college head into yet another impossibly perfect figure, unsullied by the everyday:

> Oh were he and I together,
> Shipmates on the fleeted main,
> Sailing through the summer weather
> To the spoil of France or Spain.
>
> Oh were he and I together,
> Locking hands and taking leave,
> Low upon the trampled heather
> In the battle lost at eve.[85]

Hardly a role that could have been filled by Moses Jackson M.A., D.Sc., who once applied for the post of director of education to the Borough of Bradford[86] (admittedly, it's equally difficult to imagine AEH as his martial companion). With the real man half a world away, Housman's mythical alternative could be brought to life unimpeded. When Jackson died, Housman cried to A. W. Pollard: 'Now I can die myself: I could not have borne to leave him behind me in a world where anything might happen to him.'[87] But the Moses Jackson who haunted Housman's dreams had never quite been of this earth. He was always a figure who belonged more to that unreal Shropshire than anywhere in this world.

85. *Additional Poems* II, 1-8.

86. Jackson, 'Pivotal Friendship', p. 39.

87. AEH to A. W. Pollard, 17 January 1923 (*Letters* I, pp. 533-4).

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I am grateful to The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of A. E. Housman for allowing me to quote from Housman's letters. The Housman Society kindly gave me permission to quote from the writings of Katharine E. Symons. It is a particular pleasure to be able to thank Andrew Jackson and his brothers for allowing me to include extracts from Moses Jackson's final letter to Housman. I also owe Ian Venables a great deal. As a composer, he is responsible for some of the finest settings of Housman poems, and our many discussions about the great man have done much to shape my thoughts. Were it not for Ian's encouragement, I doubt I would have made the time to sit down and write this article. I can only hope it meets with his approval.

Two Unpublished Housman Letters in Cape Town

by
Jeffrey Murray

In his review of Archie Burnett's magisterial two-volume edition of A. E. Housman's letters, David Butterfield expressed the desire that should any further unpublished letters come to light, that they would not be consigned to oblivion nor to obscure publication, but that rather either the Oxford University Press or the *Housman Society Journal* should facilitate their publication according to Burnett's editorial principles.[1]

Two previously unpublished letters have come to light during archival research in Cape Town. The first letter (chronologically) is housed among the Rossetti Papers at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town (Box 6 Letters II). The letter is addressed to William Michael Rossetti (1829 – 1919; hereafter "WMR"), brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (hereafter "DGR") and Christina Georgina Rossetti, one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The contents of the letter deal with a matter of textual criticism regarding the printing of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem, "The Orchard-pit" in WMR's edition, *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1886).

The second letter is held in the manuscripts and archives section of the Jagger Reading Room of the University of Cape Town libraries among the Colin Taylor Collection (BC 76, A1. 16). Colin Taylor (1881 – 1973), the recipient of the letter, was an English composer and pianist, the son of James Taylor, organist at New College, Oxford. He was trained at the Royal College of Music in London, as well as in Leipzig, Germany. From 1904 he was assistant music master at Eton College, a position he held until 1921 when he joined the South African College of Music in Cape Town, where he remained until his retirement in 1941. He died in Stellenbosch in 1973. The contents of the letter are brief and are, undoubtedly, a response to a request

1. David Butterfield, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2007.08.40 <http://bmcr.bryn-mawr.edu/2007/2007-08-40.html>; Archie Burnett, *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (Oxford, 2007); I wish to express my thanks to the editor, David Butterfield, for his improving comments on this note.

to print Housman's poems in a concert programme.[2]

Below are my own transcriptions of the letters, following, as far as possible, Burnett's editorial principles.

TO W. M. ROSSETTI

Patent Office | Southampton Buildings, W. C.
9 April 1890.[3]

Dear Sir,

Your brother's[4] fragmentary poem 'The Orchard-pit' (*Collected Works* vol. 1, p. 377) begins with the lines 'Piled deep below the screening apple-branch They lie with bitter apples in their hands.'[5]

For various reasons I thought it likely that what he wrote was not bitter but bitten.[6] For instance, because the bitterness of the apples could not

2. Colin Taylor is mentioned nowhere in W. H. Lewis, *Housman Settings* (Oxford, 1997) – the most comprehensive listing of musical settings of Housman's poetry. In the Colin Taylor Collection there is, however, a recording of "By Wenlock Town" by Janet Hamilton (with Housman credited), with Gervase Elwes as tenor (Colin Taylor Collection, BC 76, S 2.4).

3. This adds to the letters surviving from his period at the London Patent Office (1882-92; a period characterised by paucity in the epistolary record, see Butterfield, 2007); bringing the total up to 4 letters now for the year of 1890 (Burnett (Oxford, 2007), 64-68).

4. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882); Housman appears to be quite familiar with DGR the man and his work, cf. e.g. Letter to A. S. F. Gow, Burnett II 482.

5. William Michael Rossetti (ed.), *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1886).

6. DGR did indeed write "bitten" rather than "bitter" in the MS version of the poem, see DGR, MS, Duke University Library (Writing XXVIII, Notebook IV, pp. 57-58); cf. DGR, MS, Huntington Library (HM6087, p. 7); DGR appears to have subsequently also altered the line to read "Those dead men lie with apples in their hands" (which, however, seems never to have reached print). Housman was later to present the results of his textual criticism in a paper delivered to the Cambridge Philological Society on the 17th of November 1921. The paper is referred to by A. S. F. Gow*, A. E. Housman: A Sketch Together with a List of his Writings and Indexes to his Classical Papers* (Cambridge, 1936), 79, as "Notes on English Literature";

readily be conveyed to the dreamer's mind; because bitten adds something to the picture but bitter nothing; because it was through the eating of the fruit that all these dead came by their death and the vision ought to make their story plain. And on turning to the prose sketch of the poem (p. 427) I find that the words tallying with these lines are 'they lie in heaps beneath the screen of boughs, with her apples bitten in her hand.'

But this arguing of probabilities is idle work if authority exists to settle the question. The poet's manuscript is I suppose still extant and if so is probably in your possession: I have ventured therefore to write to you and ask if you could, at your leisure and without trouble to yourself, consult the autograph and ascertain whether or no I guess right.

I am

Yours faithfully

A. E. Housman[7]

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an abstract of which is printed in the *Cambridge University Reporter*, no. 2363, vol. lii, no. 13, Tuesday, 29 November 1921 (= *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* (1922), 16-17); the relevant section of the abstract reads as follows: "Rossetti, *The Orchard-Pit*, stanza 1, 'Piled deep below the screening apple-branch | They lie with bitter apples in their hands.' The context requires 'bitten' instead of 'bitter'; and the author's prose sketch of the poem has 'with her apples bitten in their hands.'" It was also reprinted by P. G. Naiditch, "A Forgotten Report of a Paper by A. E. Housman" *HSJ* 34 (2008), 124-6, the relevant passage appearing on p. 125.

7. On the bottom left-hand side of the page of the letter the following note is written (in another hand, no doubt that of WMR), "18/4 Note to Ellis & E. to make the alteration as convenient". "Ellis & E." refers to the publishers of the collected works, Ellis and Elvey. In subsequent editions (of which there were many; 1891, 1898, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1911) of DGR's *Collected Works*, however, the reading "bitter" was never changed. The correction was, however, incorporated without comment by F. L. Lucas (who could well have attended Housman's paper in 1921) in his *Eight Victorian Poets* (Cambridge, 1930), see p. 83, and subsequently in his DGR anthology, see *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Anthology Chosen by F. L. Lucas* (Cambridge, 1933), 143. Oswald Doughty, in his edition of Rossetti's poems, advances the correction (London, 1957), 307 n. 1, claiming that "J. W. Mackail, the biographer of William Morris, son-in-law of Burne-Jones and friend to many of the Pre-Raphaelites, informed me personally that *bitter* in the printed text of this poem was in fact a misprint, and that what Rossetti wrote was *bitten*. The change is by no means unimportant as to the meaning of the poem". And it was subsequently recorded also as a probable variant in the third edition by Clive Wilmer of selected poems and translations by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Abingdon, 2013), see p. 99 n. 1.

TO COLIN TAYLOR

25 October 1910
University of London, University College.

Dear Sir,

It would not be to the purpose to give the reason why I have in the past refused permission to print my poems in concert programmes: The point is that I have done so, and that to make an exception in your case would not be fair to others.[8] I hope, and I believe that the suffering entailed is not very great,

I am yours faithfully

A. E. Housman.

8. Cf. e.g. Letter to Messrs Grant Richards, Burnett I 255; Letter to Ivor Gurney, Burnett I 566.

A Dinner by Housman

by
David Damant

Meursault Goutte d'Or 1918	Huîtres de Whitstable
Oloroso	Croûte au Pot Parisienne
Steinberg Cabinet Auslese 1921	Filets de Sole Walewska
Pommery 1921	Côtelettes de Mouton à la Nelson Pommes de terre Noisette Haricots verts au beurre
Romanée Conti 1921	Bécasses rôties sur Canapé Salade Flamande
	Rocher de Glace Mocha Petits Fours Secs
Cockburn 1878	Moëlle au Madère Fruits
Latour 1920 Cognac Courvoisier 1869	Café

The Menu of a dinner held for The Family by Housman in 1929[1]

1. Reproduced from S.C. Roberts, *The Family: The History of a Dining Club* (Cambridge, 1963) 22-3: see *HSJ* 37 (2011) 191.

Grant Richards, who knew Housman well, and indeed travelled on the Continent with him, wrote

> "Is one shocked that I have so frankly shown A.E.H. taking pleasure in, and spending much time on, what he ate and drank? His passion in life was, I should say, accuracy in Latin and in Greek, and he had also pleasure in architecture, but he liked his meals."[2]

This astonishing and disgraceful comment reflects the sad truth that the English do not regard an interest in food and wine as a cultural activity, an activity which in France and Italy is perfectly natural and which would not draw such a comment. And, one has to add, this attitude is still pervasive today. I have sophisticated friends who, on hearing that a kind host had spent £150 a head at the Fat Duck at Bray, on the food, before the cost of the wine, turned away in dismissive rejection, seeing such expenditure as ridiculous. Yet these same friends spend the same amount and usually more on a seat at Glyndebourne. And a comment in the Journal has given as the best explanation of Housman's ardent love of food the sublimation of his repressed sexual energy into a more social acceptable way.[3] Perhaps this blind spot in the English cultural eye stems in part from Protestantism.

The antipathy of Protestantism to a love of food and wine may be exemplified by the film "Babette's Feast" which also exemplifies the moral dimension (to which Grant Richards was blind). The action in a remote and Calvinist village shows a magnificent meal served to villagers very doubtful about such sensual indulgence ("We will go, but we will NOT enjoy ourselves"). This is said to be the favourite film of Pope Francis, whether because of the excellence of the food and the wines (worthy of Housman) or because of the film's explicit portrayal of the cramping effects of Calvinism or - and this would be a very positive and human reason for his reaction - because of the description of the physical and spiritual effects of the feast which dissolved the embedded and long standing animosities and tensions in the village, so that a new happiness reigned. "A mystical

2. G. Richards, *Housman: 1857-1936* (Oxford, 1941) 238.
3. T. French, 'Housman and the Food of Love', *HSJ* 30 (2004) 110-27, at 111.

dimension of the human spirit settled over the table." It is in this light that Housman's menus should be seen.

There were of course and are those who see food and wine as a splendid activity, Professor George Saintsbury (1845-1933), has a name which lives on today at the Saintsbury Club, probably the most prestigious dining club in the country. His *Notes on a Cellar Book* was a pioneer work in the field of writing on wine, and contains in the appendix menus of which Housman would have approved: often very long menus, but in the pre-World War One days it was possible and indeed expected – even as host or hostess – to refuse one or more of the dishes. Of wine Saintsbury wrote:

> There is no money, among that which I have spent since I began to earn my living, of the expenditure of which I am less ashamed, or which gave me better value in return, than the price of the liquids chronicled in this booklet. When they were good they pleased my senses, cheered my spirits, improved my moral and intellectual powers, besides enabling me to confer the same benefits on other people. And whether they were bad or good, the grapes that had yielded them were the fruits of that Tree of Knowledge which, as theologians too commonly forget to expound, it became not merely lawful but incumbent on us to use, with discernment, when our First Mother had paid the price for it, and handed it on to us to pay for likewise.[4]

Housman's copy of "Notes on a Cellar Book" was inscribed to him by Saintsbury.

Housman's menu which I analyse here is classical, and in structure does not innovate. But no more would one look for innovation - except as a special departure - in a symphony showing classical first movement form at its opening. And as Napoleon said of war, everything is in the execution, and the same is true of food. We cannot ourselves judge the quality of the execution of Housman's 1929 dinner, but we can rely on a man who

4. G. Saintsbury, *Notes on a Cellar-Book* (London, 1920) xiv.

possessed the same balanced and perceptive judgement in gastronomy as he displayed in the other concerns of his life. Housman excelled at classical scholarship and at poetry, and he excelled also at the table. This menu is magnificent.

Preliminary Comment

The serving of champagne in the middle of a meal such as this may seem a bit odd, but it was often seen in earlier days. Professor Saintsbury had champagne in this way very frequently, placing a large bottle in the centre of the table. (Note – champagne today is served far too cold, so that good champagne tastes like plonk.) However Saintsbury usually had a special course (artichokes for example) with the champagne so as to have an overall "pause". I suppose that the haricots verts could be such a course in this case (they would be fine for that) but this seems unlikely, looking at the layout of the menu. One would now prefer to have this wine as aperitif, although until the Americans brought in cocktails it was not very usual to have drinks before a meal (un mauvais quart d'heure). This champagne – Pommery 1921 – is from a grande marque and of a wonderful year.

Also I would prefer to have the Latour 1920 with the cutlets (Bordeaux is usually served best before Burgundy), but again the serving of a claret after dinner was then usual and indeed the practice continues in Cambridge combination rooms. I have not had the Latour but I have had the Haut Brion 1920 (admittedly a Graves) and the year was very fine.

I have excluded these wines from my analysis below but I recognise that they are in the menu in traditional places.

The Food

Huîtres de Whitstable

To start the dinner with oysters is a very good idea. They are very digestible, and even if served regularly there is always a certain drama about them.

Croûte au Pot Parisienne

This will be a soup (consomme, probably with vegetables) in a dish with a pastry covering. The dish was given prominence when Valerie Giscard d'Estaing as President gave a dinner at the Elysee prepared by several of the great chefs of France. The contribution of Paul Bocuse was such a soup which he christened Consomme VGE and it is still served. When the pastry is broken open the aroma of the soup arises. It is essential NOT to drink the soup till it has cooled (having been kept hot under the pastry) as one's palate can be scorched - not a good idea so soon in the menu.

Filet de Sole Walewska

The sole is perhaps the finest white fish (certainly in the case of a dish with a luxurious sauce) but has to be on top form (as it will have been for Housman). The sauce with slices of lobster make this dish a masterpiece.

Côtelettes de Mouton à la Nelson

This is what the 19th Century called the entree - often butchers meat, and before the game. Now the word in used in various ways - in America for the main course, and in Australia for the first course.

This recipe is quite difficult to get right, which again Housman will have done. The cutlets are breaded with cheese added, but it would be very easy to get the meat overcooked. The dish is sometimes served with mashed potatoes, but Housman has chosen little sauté potatoes in the shape of hazelnuts which I think better. The haricots verts will have been full of taste as they seldom are nowadays (and properly cooked, unlike the ones today one has to crunch through).
Presumably the meat is mutton and not old lamb. The present Prince of

Wales led a campaign to get real mutton (properly grown up sheep) back into production, but of course it takes time for them to grow and this can put up the price.

Bécasses rôties sur Canapé

The woodcock has claims to be the most magnificent of all game birds. The flavour is sensational and demands (and here gets) the greatest of wines.

The Salade Flamande is a masterstroke. With a woodcock, one thinks of a sharply dressed salad, but vinegar would be a mistake with a fine (or any) wine. In the Salade Flamande there can be no vinegar (though there is oil) but there is endive which has a sharp taste to balance the lack of vinegar. Brilliant. It should be noted that Housman was renowned for his salads: "I have known many men who prided themselves on their ability to make a good salad, but Housman was the most able."[5] (There are variations on this recipe, some containing mustard or vinegar, which should be avoided in this context. Also sometimes haricots verts are added, which should be omitted in this case as they were served with the cutlets.)

Rocher de Glace Mocha

Petits Four Secs

Ice cream is very correct after rich food but is by itself rather direct. Thus cake or biscuits are excellent in providing a contrast

Moëlle au Madère

Bone marrow is interesting and always rather intriguing. Piques the interest – a very positive point at this stage of the dinner.

5. Richards (as n.2) 94.

Fruits

Fresh tastes. Avoid citrus fruits because of the cognac

The Wines

Meursault Goutte d'Or 1918

This is one of the best and most famous of the vineyards of Meursault. It is often said that Chablis is the wine for oysters but it can be argued that the fuller Meursault may to certain palates be better. 1918 was a very good year for many French wines, but also the last year of a terrible war. One supposes that so long as the vineyard was not fought over and that some aged workers were there and not in the army the picking and vinification would not be affected.

Oloroso

This wine and the one following make one yearn for the days when the popular taste judged wines on their true merits and appropriateness and not avoided because they were "sweet" – so that wines of a certain sweetness could be served early as in this menu. An oloroso would stand up to the impact of the consomme and its vegetables. There are dry olorosos but I would think that if this were the dry variety it would have said so.

Steinberger Cabinet Auslese 1921

The word Cabinet was used rather loosely until defined by the German Law of 1971 and before that generally meant a fine wine. A hardly necessary

addition in this case. Steinberg is one of the greatest estates on the Rhine (and the wine is allowed as a distinction to stand as Steinberger – if it were to follow the general rule the name of the vineyard would be attached to the name of Hattenheim, the village in which it is situated). A splendid partner for the sole.

1921 was a tremendous year for German wines - the greatest ever perhaps. As an Auslese it was made from selected bunches of grapes chosen for their ripeness but as for all great German wines there is a balancing acidity to the sweetness. Nowadays the market wants dry wines and so many (admittedly not usually of the Auslese grade) are made trocken or halbtroken. In other words castrated.

Romanée Conti 1921

Serena Sutcliffe, currently head of wine at Sotheby's, has written of this wine:

"A mind blowing, extraordinary taste of bewitching spices – heady concentration and opulence on a solid base. Unequalled. I can taste it now."

Cockburn 1878

It is with sadness that I come to a fault in this menu. This port – any port – would seem obvious after such a sequence of wines. And if the age of this port entailed that it was less obvious and more elegant, even so that would point to another type of wine. An ancient Madeira would have been appropriate. ("Housman had a great liking for Madeira, drinking it now and again instead of Port"[6]) I therefore give this menu 97%. With an appropriate Madeira I would have awarded the perfect score of 100%

I appreciate that the argument can be brought against me that in those days

6. Richards (as n.2) 107, n.1.

port at the end of such a sequence of wines was strongly conventional ("instead of Port", as above), and that I should have excused the port on this ground as I did the Pommery and the Latour. But in the instance of the port the quality of the meal is affected, which is not the case for the other two wines which are merely (in my view) misplaced. In any case Housman can only be judged by the highest standards.

Courvoisier 1869

A fine (pun intended) conclusion.

Those who plan to repeat this menu with more recent vintages should note that the Romanee Conti 2001 is retailing at Berry Brothers in St James at £10,600 for each bottle. Or from another source the 2006 (the same age now as the 1921 was in 1929) – at £9,200.

Delight It Is in Youth and May

by
Andrew Breeze

More Poems XVIII, dropped at proof stage from *Last Poems*, is a spring song with a difference.

> Delight it is in youth and May
> To see the morn arise

- says the speaker, inviting the girl to leave her distaff, pace the flowery meads with him, and be told lies. Stanza two plays the same trick. Day departs, the nightingale is heard:

> Oh follow me where she is flown
> Into the leafy woods alone,
> And I will work you ill.

The lyric can be classified. It is a reverdie, a medieval poem which welcomes spring, and then turns to the speaker's desire (often a frustrated one) for the beloved. Housman here thus owes a debt not to the Classics, but to Middle English, Old French, Provençal, Medieval Latin, and the like. (His subversion of the genre is, of course, his own.) It is not his only reverdie. In a previous issue of this journal we discussed 'Spring Song' (*Last Poems* XVI), beginning 'Star and coronal and bell / April underfoot renews', which also moves on to thoughts of (scorned and disappointed) love, as we shall see below. This note is more focused. It relates *More Poems* XVIII to one Middle English poem, which was perhaps Housman's model.

This textbook instance is 'When the Nyghtegale Singes' in the *Harley Lyrics* of London, British Library, MS Harley 2253, copied at Ludlow in about 1330. The song's forty lines begin,

> When the nyhtegale singes,
> The wodes waxen grene....

Leaf and grass and blossom spring forth in April, and so does the poet's love. He tells his *lemmon* or sweetheart that he has sighed many a sigh for her mercy:

> Ich have siked moni syk,
> Lemmon, for thin ore.

But a kiss would cure his sorrows.

> A suete cos of thy mouth
> Mihte be my leche [doctor].

And he says that she is the fairest maid from Lincoln to Northampton (and so of the north-east Midlands, like the poet's own dialect). His inspiration, however, came from the *trouvères* of medieval France, as stated in a popular anthology perhaps known to A.E.H.[1]

Housman's lyric is close to 'When the Nyghtegale Singes'. In both a man speaks to a woman, who is not heard, and who is young and unmarried; both poems welcome spring; both use its properties (specifically woods and nightingales) as a background to love-talk. So similar are they that the first may have inspired the second, with Housman intentionally imitating (and spoofing) medieval lyric. Analysis of the Harley lyric will hence suggest how A.E.H. subverted it. It offers a picture of him as a latter-day *trouvère*, writing an idiosyncratic *chanson courtois* in Cambridge at a time when colleagues there were writing about such verses.

Wells describes the Harley poem as a *reverdie*, a welcome to the spring, leading to thoughts on love's woes, and an *estrif*, a dialogue of lovers.[2] This may be qualified. In the classic *reverdie*, the lover despairs, whereas the Harley verses and Housman's never come to that, and neither of them is a dialogue. The girl is mute. Yet Wells was correct in seeing the lines as an offshoot of French lyric, itself indebted to Provençal, a theme in the air of

1. E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick (edd.), *Early English Lyrics* (London, 1907) 10-11, 274.

2. J. E. Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English* (New Haven, 1916) 489-90, 495-6.

Housman's Cambridge.[3] In a standard edition, the poem is called 'A Love Message'.[4] Another editor stresses the conventionality of the spring opening in such lyrics, whether English or French.[5] A third corrects a reading.[6] The poem appears in a useful anthology.[7]

It thereafter gained extended discussion of its motifs (in a volume unfortunately not at hand).[8] But some of these were surely popular ones. When the lover tells the girl how much he has sighed, 'Beloved, for your mercy' (*Lemmon, for thin ore*), he uses the cliché in a scandalous tale told by Gerald of Wales (d. 1223) about a Worcestershire priest kept awake by late-night revellers, so that at mass next morning he intoned not *Dominus vobiscum*, but 'Swete lamman dhin are'. This happened between 1184 and 1190, when William of Northall (who duly pronounced an anathema on anyone singing that song) was Bishop of Worcester.[9] So the Harley lyric shares the idiom of the people. Other images are more international, including the lover's protest that love has pierced his heart with a 'spere so kene', echoing the troubadour Folquet de Marseille (d. 1231), who complained that the god of love had run him through with a lance of such kind (*nafrat de tal lanza*).[10] Perhaps this helped gain the Harley lyric the accolade of an Oxford Book of Verse.[11] Another anthology emphasizes its litany of cliché, such as the declaration that the girl's kiss is the lover's medicine.[12] Hence a remark on how it amply

3. H. J. Chaytor, *The Troubadours and England* (Cambridge, 1923).

4. C. Brown (ed.), *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford, 1932) 114.

5. R. M. Wilson, *Early Middle English Literature* (London, 1939) 260-1.

6. G. L. Brook (ed.), *The Harley Lyrics* (Manchester, 1948) 63, 85.

7. B. Dickens and R. M. Wilson (ed.), *Early Middle English Texts* (Cambridge, 1951) 123.

8. T. Stemmler, *Die englischen Liebesgedichte des MS. Harley 2253* (Bonn, 1962) 138-40.

9. R. T. Davies (ed.), *Medieval English Lyrics* (London, 1963) 62-3, 312.

10. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1968) 126, 330.

11. C. and K. Sisam (edd.), *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse* (Oxford, 1970) 131-2.

12. T. Silverstein (ed.), *Medieval English Lyrics* (London, 1971) 93.

supplies 'the characteristic images and sentiments of courtly love'.[13]

At this point we leave the Harley lyric for Housman's. As noted, it was omitted from *Last Poems* at proof stage 'because it carried a message which was conveyed more effectively in "The sloe was lost in flower"' or *Last Poems* XXII.[14] This last certainly has a most un-medieval bite. Yet our concern here is comparison of *More Poems* XVIII with yet another poem, Heine's 'Ich will meine Seele tauchen', which is printed with it, has been taken as prompting it, and is translated thus:

I will my soul submerge,
  Into the lily's calix dart;
The lily should resounding urge
  A song about my dear sweetheart.

The song should shudder and quiver
  Like her mouth and like the kiss
Of which she was the giver
  In that sweet moment of bliss.[15]

The theme of love excepted, it is not easy to see what the two have in common. Heine deals with courtship that ends happily; Housman with courtship that (for her) ends unhappily. So A.E.H. here resembles a medieval English poet more than the German one. He speaks of 'youth and May' and 'flowery meads'; the anonymous writer of how 'Lef ant gras ant blosmé springes / In Averyl, I wene'. Housman alludes to a distaff, a deliberate touch of the antique. His lovers hear the nightingale; the medieval poet begins 'When the nyhtegale singes'. A.E.H.'s nightingale retires to 'leafy woods'; the Middle English one is heard when 'wodés waxen grene'. Housman's lover is a liar who intends seduction; the medieval one lists his sufferings, assuring the girl that a 'sueté cos of thy mouthe' is the cure. Finally, both poems begin with a salute to the spring, before telling the woes of love, in the manner

13. D. A. Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977) 126.

14. R. P. Graves, *A. E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (London, 1979) 229.

15. G. Hall, 'Selected Poems by Heinrich Heine', in J. Bourne (ed.), *Housman and Heine* (Bromsgrove, 2011) 11-103.

of reverdies, including Housman's own 'Spring Morning' (*Last Poems* XVI) already mentioned.[16]

More Poems XVIII hence derives form and language from medieval English lyric, and perhaps from a well-known item in the *Harley Lyrics*. If so, this would be unremarkable. Housman read and admired Chaucer, as shown by *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (where it provoked a response from Ezra Pound).[17] If he read other Middle English poems, putting his knowledge to original and disconcerting use, it should be no surprise; and further investigation will reveal other debts of his to early English verse.

16. A. Breeze, 'The Wild Green Hills of Wyre and Other Notes', *HSJ* 38 (2012) 89-135.

17. D. Brewer, *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage, 1837-1933* (London, 1978) 333, 491-3.

Housman's Continental Life

by
Jeffrey Scott

> Housman enjoyed travelling abroad as though he were a wealthy man: which of us would not? But his foreign visits meant, above all, freedom – a temporary escape from the conventional sexual morality by which, even in the Cambridge of Forster, Brooks and Keynes, he felt imprisoned.
>
> R. P. Graves, *A.E. Housman: The Scholar Poet* (London, 1979) 163.

> He enjoyed a glass of port. That is something. One wishes he could have enjoyed the happy highways which he resigned in the body and possessed so painfully in the imagination. Perhaps he had a better time than the outsider supposes. Did he ever drink the stolen waters which he recommends so ardently to others? I hope so.
>
> E. M. Forster, 'Ancient and Modern', *Listener* 17 (11 Nov. 1936) 922. [1]

Housman was indeed imprisoned, and Forster had spotted why – that Housman was gay.[2] No doubt someone as reticent in all things as was Housman could not bring himself to come out even to those such as Forster

1. Compare Housman's own verses: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth | And hath the price to give, | Come to the stolen waters, | Drink and your soul shall live." (*MP* 22). The influence of Biblical language is clear, e.g. Isaiah 55.1: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come to the waters, | and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat."

2. I use the current word "gay" rather than "homosexual". Although many have objected to the loss of a word from other usages, the term gay is now in general use, and was in fact applied to ladies on the game many years ago.

and Keynes who were like minded in so many ways.

It is difficult nowadays to realise the extremely negative attitude towards sexual activity at that time. In 1929 William Empson (who published *Seven Types of Ambiguity* in 1930, at the age of 24), was caught *in flagrante delicto* with a young woman, and with condoms in his rooms (!). As a result he was expelled from Magdalene, his name struck from the College records, and forbidden to live in Cambridge.

It was of course even worse for gay men. The 7th Earl Beauchamp, Knight of the Garter, Lord President of the Council in Liberal Cabinets, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Chancellor of the University of London, was forced in 1931 to live abroad when his homosexual activities came to light. He loved his children and they loved him, but the Establishment including the King was horrified. It is said that George V remarked "I thought people like that shot themselves" and although this cannot be verified the rumour reflects the moral views of the time. Even as late as the 1950s Alan Turing was prosecuted, and forced to choose between prison and de-sexing chemical injections. He eventually committed suicide. It is not surprising that Housman put up barriers, penetrated only by astute minds such as that of E.M. Forster and by some members of his close circle who knew but were discreet, or put the matter in the back of their minds.[3]

Abroad the barriers could be let down. Housman had a number of (presumably) arms-length relationships even with Englishmen such as Moses Jackson, but it was on the Continent that he had the freedom to act openly. And of course he did. For such a man, and on such travels, it was not surprising that he found a gondolier in Venice, or other young men such as Gaston Roy, who even claimed money from Housman›s will.[4] As for the companions and chauffeurs, these could be sexual partners sometimes and sometimes not. In cases where this was not the case, no doubt having an eager and no doubt good looking assistant or driver would be an attraction. But it is not surprising that Housman was "very closed up" about the existence

3. Housman wrote, "Please yourself, say I, and they | Need only look the other way."(*LP* XII).

4. D.S. McKie, 'Housman abroad', *HSJ* 39 (2013) 21-78, at 37. Housman clearly liked Roy, despite his importunities, otherwise he would not have continued the relationship. Roy was typical of the sort of young man who always overplays his hand.

of a companion.[5] Housman was a gay man and he appreciated male beauty in a high degree. In Constantinople he recorded "the handsomest faces I ever saw... Some of the Greeks make you rub your eyes; the features and complexions are more like pictures than realities"[6]

In May 1932 he wrote to Richards:

> I shall be in Paris at the Continental from May 29 to June 14. I cannot offer you anything of an invitation, for I shall have a friend with me who would not mix with you nor you with him; but if by chance you should be there I hope you would come to dine or lunch with me one day.[7]

Housman had arranged to spend a fortnight at the Paris hotel with a friend, that is with a young man with whom Housman got on well generally as well as sexually. The word "friend" was and is usual in certain circles as a description of a gay partner, without social connotations. It is a euphemism that other gays will recognise and which will disguise the relationship from others.[8] It would be rare for such a friend to be of a type to introduce into Housman's normal social circles, even if the friend was someone who Housman had met socially.

It was indeed in Paris that Housman became most sexually active. The cards discovered as bookmarks after his death record in one case the restaurants he visited and in another case his meetings with boys (I use the usual word "boys" to mean young men. The word does not imply any underage sex). Aide memoires of this kind are useful as a record of visits. After the passage of time it is easy to get one restaurant (etc.) mixed up with another. I would imagine that many such cards were written out covering the

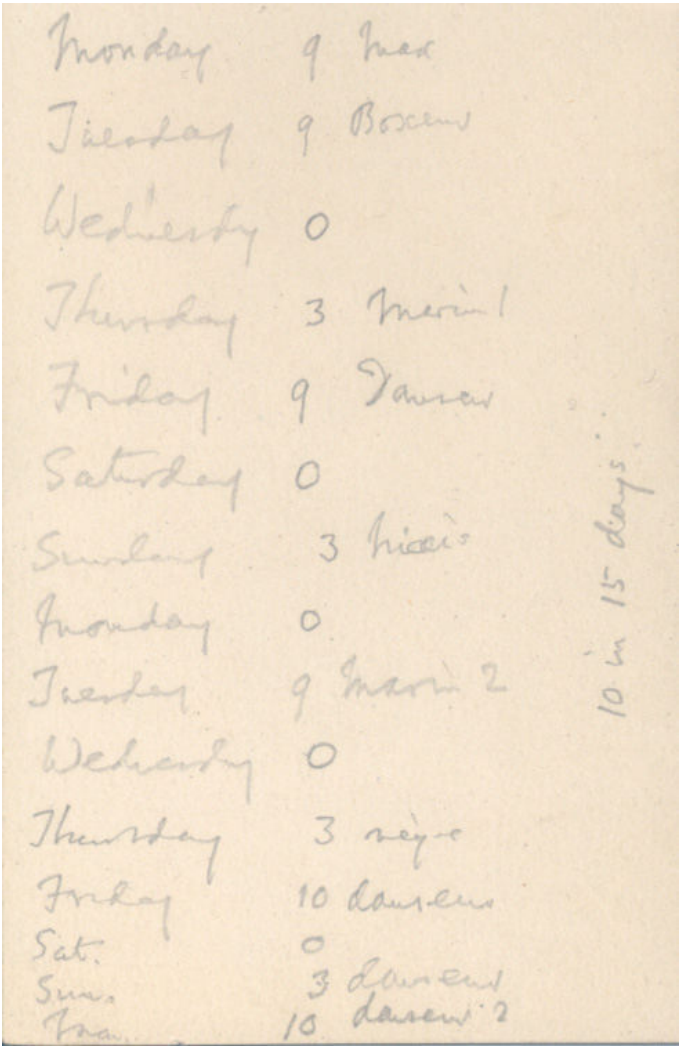
5. McKie (as n.4) 36, who also comments "For the reticence there could only be one reason, a fear that the relationship be open to misinterpretation" – one would rather conclude, open to a correct interpretation. Dr McKie's efforts to avoid this interpretation are extensive

6. A. Burnett (ed.), *The Letters of A.E. Housman* (Oxford, 2007) I 163.

7. Burnett (as n.6) II 293.

8. So W.H. Auden in 'Uncle Henry': 'When the Flyin' Scot | fills for shootin' | I go southward | .... | visit yearly Wome, Damascus | .... | Where I'll meet a fwend, | don't you know | ... | like a Gweek God and devoted: | how delicious'.

series of visits to Paris, only to be thrown away, or deliberately destroyed, forgetting only the ones used as book marks.



'Card 3' (reproduced with permission of the President and Fellows of St John's College, Oxford)

The card in question has several types of entry:

10 in 15 Days – The last thing one wants to feel as one travels home is that opportunities have been wasted, especially when returning to prison. This shows that in the 15 days he had had 10 encounters... not bad, and one wonders whether he thought that he had done well enough.

Names – Of course the names shown were of boys – just a note such as "Max" and the day, and 9 (see below) would be enough to bring back the memory

0 3 9 10 – the easiest solution to the meaning of these numbers is to say that we do not know, and that it does not matter: but I have a possible solution of a practical nature. These numbers are Paris arrondissements – except for 0 which is used when Housman did not go out to see what he could find – as the result of a late music hall or an especially large dinner. After a normal dinner he might leave to find a boy.[9]

The 9th arrondissement and especially the north end which is the south side of Pigalle contains the Folies Bergere, the Moulin Rouge and many theatrical and musical facilities. At around midnight it would be pullulating with establishments and with people of all ages and types. The 10th contains the Gare du Nord and the Gare du Midi – boys will gather around major railway stations to meet men who arrive looking for sex.

As for the 3rd arrondissement (the north side of Le Marais) it is just to the south of the 10th. At present the Marais is in part a definitely gay place. I do not know what could be found there in Housman's time. But in any case the idea that the numbers on the card stand for areas of Paris is also persuasive in that a record of where the encounters occurred over time would not only be a useful aide memoire of individual encounters but also a way of noting if Housman was seeing an increasing or decreasing degree of success in one place rather than another, since areas of sexual activity tend to move around.[10]

9. For example "Housman after dinner went off to keep some engagement" (G. Richards, *Housman, 1897-1936* [Oxford, 1941] 243); cf. McKie (as n.4), 41 and nn.

10. If a financial solution is required I would suggest that the numbers refer to the number of small notes or coins expended. In Paris at that time it was unlikely

The use of the word "prostitute" is not always appropriate. It implies a professional, and there will of course have been many gay prostitutes in Paris then as always, at various prices reaching up no doubt to the male equivalents of the *Grandes Horizontales*. There were several male *maisons* close in Paris (Proust had had a financial interest in at least one), and some may well have been quite respectable, and possibly based in the three arrondissements. Perhaps Housman patronised these places, where he would have been welcomed as an English gentleman, or perhaps his reticence kept him away (one might meet a colleague! I knew a very senior British Civil Servant to whom that happened. They ignored each other.) But in the streets of Paris there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of young men – and these were the years before the social revolution had even started. The young, who had no benefits to claim and no job, and no assets except their bodies and their personalities, would sell themselves for the price for a meal. (*Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin describes this kind of Parisian life very well). They would only have to glance at Housman to see money and, one must add, a decent gentleman, something that would attract a boy down on his luck.

As for Housman's age, however old, it is no impediment. At the end of his life John Betjeman said that he regretted not having had more sex. How much more is that true of a gay man, thwarted for so long in the exercise of his natural instincts. Nor is sexual congress limited to the active role – if one action has to be abandoned as age advances there are many others. "A formidable sexual athleticism"[11] is not necessary, though I

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that Housman was in any physical danger even late at night, but there was a near certainty of pick-pockets, and a possibility of blackmailers. It was wise in those circumstances to fillet one's wallet and jacket, to remove all identification, and to carry only as much cash as might be needed, in suitable currency. Also one must bear in mind that the value of money changed enormously in the period 1933 to 2014. In the United Kingdom (depending on which statistics one takes) £1 then would have the buying power of £50 now. Housman obtained around 80 francs to the pound in 1933. (So P.G. Naiditch, 'A.E. Housman' in Paris', *HSJ* 12 (1986) 55-70, at 64 (= id., *Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E. Housman* [Beverley Hills] 48-59, at 55.) On the interpretation of 0 3 9 10, methinks Mr Naiditch doth protest too much.

11. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 'A.E. Housman', *Grand Street* 4 (1984) 151-62, at

have observed it even in a man approaching ninety. And anyway, I know of men, even straight men, and with happy families, including a distinguished Cambridge scholar, who in extreme old age found pleasure in the embrace of an ardent young male.

Were Housman to be in his prime at Trinity today he would be in a Civil Partnership with a younger man, probably an academic, perhaps someone musical, as providing difference. What happiness Housman would find in seeing his partner conducting Dido, or singing Aeneas. But this avenue was not open to him. Had his sexual activities been broadcast at the time it would have been a scandal. His secret life is not a scandal now, nor is it to be regarded as "low life".[12] There is no need to resist this significant aspect of his life, indeed it distorts our view of a considerable man to try to do so. Sexual activities were and are part of life and since Housman handled them with the balance and judgement he demonstrated in other aspects of his life he is to be commended.

153.

12. McKie (as n.4) nn.28, 57.

Five Housman notes and queries

by
David Butterfield

1. **'Really and truly':**

It may seem surprising that the anecdotal tradition attributes to Housman the frequent use in speech of the adverbial modifier 'really and truly'. University lecturers, past and present, of course, are wont to have their peculiar favourite words and phrases, usually deployed either as markers of emphasis or as mere placeholders for thought: a quick survey of modern Classical lecturers could turn up, for instance, 'as it were', 'so to speak' and 'truth be told'. Yet it is interesting that Housman's favoured phrase served no semantic role beyond intensifying the veracity of whatever the utterance was. The source for this linguistic quirk relates to his first teaching position, as Professor of Latin at University College London (1892-1911). Writing of her time as an undergraduate (1900-03) G.H. Savory recorded:

> I was one of the comparatively few women undergraduates of those days, and I remember [AEH] as a tall, slender, serious-faced man, who never seemed to see his class. There was an occasional flash of humour, sometimes so dry that we might easily miss it; there was never a moment wasted or misspent; and we had greater satisfaction in listening to his calm, judicial pronouncements on the interpretation of the Latin texts we read – Livy, Ovid, Plautus, Lucretius, Cicero, Horace.
>
> A favourite phrase of his was 'really and truly'. He said it hundreds of times. We mocked it once in the college magazine.[1] 'So-and-so would translate the

1. P. G. Naiditch, *A. E. Housman at University College, London: The Election of 1892* (Leiden, 1988, 129) suggests that the parody in question could be that in the *University College Gazette* of 4 Feb., 1903, at 313: 'the word really and truly doesn't mean that: really and truly it means something quite different. For next

> passage *thus*', he would say, 'And so-and-so in *this* way, but' – the habitual pause – 'really and truly'. And we would wait breathlessly for the real thing to come.'[2]

Although the lecture notes for Housman's career at University College London do not survive, Naiditch (as n.1, 129, n.43-21) has cited three occurrences of the phrase in Housman's extant writings. Two are cited from the *Classical Papers*:

> (on Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1206): The term [παλαιστής, 'wrestler'] would be perfectly right and apt on the lips of Marpessa: to her Apollo <u>really and truly</u> ἦν παλαιστής κάρτα πνέων χάριν ['was a wrestler, powerfully breathing his favour'], when he contended with Idas for her hand. (*Classical Papers*, 80 [1888])

> (on [Juvenal] *Satire* 6.O9-13): I only ask, what is it that the spectators are bidden to *believe*, and to believe on the grounds assigned? That the gladiator under their eyes is Gracchus? But they *know* that it is Gracchus: his face is bare and upturned and recognisable, as we were told in 205 sq. That Gracchus has <u>really and truly</u> turned *retiarius*? But if they were not convinced of this by seeing him cast his *retia* in 204 sq., nothing will convince them; certainly not his *tunica* nor his *spira* nor his *galerus*. (*Classical Papers*, 620 [1904])

to these two we can add a third example from his Classical writings:

> (on Martial, *Lib. Spect.* 21.8): The antithesis [of Schneidewin's proposal *haec tamen, haec res est facta ita, ficta prior*] has no point, the emphasis of the repeated *haec* is mere ineptitude, and *tamen*, so far as I can see, means

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time, that is Wednesday, prepare to the end of chapter 15.'

2. *Birmingham Post*, 22 June, 1937, reprinted in G. Richards, *A.E. Housman: 1858-1937* (London, 1942) 330-1.

> nothing at all; for there is no sort of contrast between verse 7 and verse 8, between being killed by a bear and being really and truly killed by a bear. (*Classical Papers*, 536 [1901])

Despite these occurrences in his published writings, investigation of Housman's extant lecture notes from Cambridge has not (yet) turned up any instance of the phrase. Did the parody recalled by Savory flag up to Housman that he deployed the phrase excessively, such that he never did again? At any rate, this particular verbal quirk has been reproduced in Housman's wake. The phrase is found several times in Tom Stoppard's *Invention of Love* (1997), attributed both to the younger and older Housman:

> Housman: Oh, yes, really and truly. (p.32)

> Housman: I know it's not useful like electricity, but it's exciting, really and truly, to spot something. (p.56)

> AEH: Really and truly. (p.98)

At one point the two instantiations of Housman even use the phrase in dialogue together:

> Housman: The point of interest is – what is virtue?, what is the good and the beautiful really and truly?

> AEH: You might think there is an answer: the lost autograph copy of life's meaning, which we might recover from the corruptions that have made it nonsense. But if there is no such copy, really and truly there is no answer. (p.41)

Stoppard himself even managed to reflect this Housmannian idiosyncracy in his own discussion of the play: when interviewed by Daniel Rolle for the *Oxford Times* (3 Feb. 2010; reproduced in the *Housman Society Newsletter* 32, 14):

> Really and truly, every play needs a point of origin, a spark which tells the writer that there's a play here – and in my

> case, there were no ramifications involved, other than the simple core of the matter which was that the classical and the romantic were here combined in one life, and in a way the two halves were fighting each other in some sense. Or, if you like, the scholar and the poet were taking turns to live a single life.

It is also no surprise that the phrase has left its imprint upon Housman's most devoted and successful student, Paul Naiditch:

> (on the 'Fockbury ghost'): But really and truly there was such a report. (*HSJ* 31 [2005] 105)[3]

But what of Housman's use of the phrase? Perhaps the most interesting instance comes from a lively letter written in 1896 to his brother Laurence, largely discussing his first book of poems, *Green Arras* (1896):

Illustration to *Green Arras* (Clemence Housman) facing p.75

3. H. W. Garrod, in his lecture 'Mr. A. E. Housman' (1928), presumably used the phrase without any knowledge of its connection with his subject when describing Housman's attitude to truth: see p.107 of this volume.

> I have *Green Arras* and thank you very much for it. Of the poems I think I have seen all but one or two before. Of the illustrations I like *The Queen's Bees* the best, with its distant view and its kidney bean sticks: the scarecrow is full of life and is perhaps the best of your wind-blown pillow-cases to date; and the figure in the foreground wins upon one when one realises that what one at first took for his nose is really and truly his chin. (Burnett I, 88)

The phrase 'really and truly', deployed as it is here within a humorous remark, may reflect the amusing use of the phrase from their earlier life. It could be telling that Laurence used the same phrase when reminiscing about a tale from boyhood with AEH:

> I remember a day when Alfred came up into my climbing-tree, and told me I was to write a sonnet. I did not then know what a sonnet was; but he having one to give away (for I think that was the explanation) I was to write one, and take over by thought-transference his as mine. He had a tough task, stuffing it down my throat and getting it out again; for the rudiments of poetic diction had not then come to me; and when he tried to get from me some water-bird suitable for the opening of a sonnet, I gave him first a duck, and then (when he asked for something larger) a goose; and only finally a swan, which enabled me to think that the first line which ran: "The swan is sleeping on the river's breast" was really and truly my own.[4]

Is this phrase, placed in the climactic position, reminiscent of a youthful phrase of AEH? It may or may not be significant that the phrase occurs a number of times in Laurence's own writings. The first is in the light-hearted context of his (initially

4. *The Unexpected Years* (Indianapolis 1936 = London 1937) 20. This version is cited by P. G. Naiditch, *Additional Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E. Housman* (Los Angeles, 2005) 80-1; Naiditch points out *ad loc.* that there are three other versions of this tale: these do not involve the same phrase.

anonymous) parodic work *An Englishwoman's Love-Letters* (1900):

> But really and truly, are you better? It will not hurt your foot to come to me, since I am not to come to you? How I long to see you again, dearest! it is an age! (Letter XXIII, p.114)[5]

Could then the phrase 'really and truly' reflect a common saying of the Housman household? It will not do to cite the phrase from the pious sermons of an elderly relative,[6] but I would be glad to learn of any further instances of the phrase in the writings of Housman and his immediate family.

2. **Housman and the North:**

Housman is well known to have enjoyed travelling the English countryside, in particular to inspect ecclesiastical architecture. However, these travels, much aided by the proliferation of the motor-car, were primarily limited to the East, South and South-West of England. For a man raised in Worcestershire, it is therefore surprising that Housman did not come to know the North of England. Housman did – to general surprise – once visit Scotland in 1931,[7] and a letter to Jeannie Housman (21 Aug. 1931, *Burnett* II, 255) reveals that he spent an hour or so on the platform between trains at both Stafford and Crewe.

Housman naturally came to know a decent portion of the Midlands: he visited Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire,[8] Rutland and

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5. In a much more serious context, and after Housman's death, Laurence also used the phrase in earnest within *The Preparation of Peace* (London, 1941) at 183.

6. Henry Housman (AEH's first cousin once removed), *Seven Sermon Stories* (London, 1875) 84: 'The greater sermons, – those I mean which are addressed to congregations of grown-up people, – will naturally declare that He is really and truly God as the Father is, and as Jesus Christ the Son is.'

7 See the account of Sir Nicholas Goodison, 'Housman in the Highlands: a Poet's Argyllshire Holiday', *HSJ* 36 (2010) 54-9.

8. See the letter to Percy Withers of 21 Sept. 1926 (*Burnett* II, 626), which recalls visits to Coventry, Southwell, Newark and Tideswell: he adds that the country of Derbyshire was new to him. He repeats this last remark in a letter to Katharine Symons (14 Nov. 1926 = Burnett II, 638), adding that it was 'in parts very

South Lincolnshire.[9] Yet only once – to judge from what material I have encountered – did Housman venture into what may truly be called the North of England. In 1928 he tells Charles Wilson, a minor poet and resident of Durham, that he visited that city 'about 15 years ago', i.e. around 1913.[10] After this confession Wilson repeatedly asked Housman to visit again, but Housman repeatedly refused.[11] It is regrettable that extant correspondence from 1910 to 1916 offers no clues about this trip to Durham (and environs?) and I have failed to turn up any information elsewhere. If we can presume that Housman was not fabricating an excuse so as to refuse an invitation (cf. n.11), does any material survive regarding this excursion? Setting aside this passing reference, I have not found any evidence that Housman ever visited Cheshire, Liverpool and Merseyside, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Yorkshire, Tyne and Wearside, Northumbria, and Cumbria. Why?

3. **Three poetic allusions in Housman's *Manilius*:**

Housman's edition of Manilius (5 vols, 1903-30) combines lively – and justly celebrated – prefaces in English with technical and detailed commentary upon the five-book poem in Latin. Alongside the regular swipes at previous and contemporary editors of the poet, occasional humour,[12] and the strange

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picturesque indeed, especially Dove-dale, of which I walked the best ten miles.' (Did Housman mean 'the best <part of>'?) Withers moved to Epwell Mill in 1935: although this is recorded in Burnett (I, liv; II, 485 n.1) as being in Warwickshire, it rests a couple of miles from the country border in Oxfordshire. Detailed images of the millhouse in its current state are available at http://search.savills.com/property-detail/gbbarsbas130189 .

9. Visits to Oakham and South Lincolnshire are recorded in a letter to Katharine Symons of 11 Feb. 1930 (Burnett II, 171).

10. Burnett II, 87.

11. *Burnett* II, 112 (1929); 233 and 262 (1931); 415 (1934); 461 (1935). Wilsonwas also a dealer in autographs, and therefore a keen correspondent with Housman: see P. G. Naiditch, *Problems in the Life and Writings of A. E. Housman* (Beverly Hills, 1995) 162. It is probable that Wilson was the unnamed recipient of the letter – and signed manuscripts of two poems – written by Housman on 25 July, 1926 (Burnett II, 264).

12. See in particular G.P. Goold, 'Housman's Manilius', in A.W. Holden and J.R

bizarre detail,[13] Housman's Latin prose – which is itself of an interesting style, and one that does not find a very close parallel either in the ancient or modern age – on numerous occasions alludes to classical poetry to add colour to a negative comment. I cite three of the more striking examples:

> *ad* II.233 (*foedere mixta*): **foedere** F. Iunius, **degere GL**, **de genere M**, *lege remista* Scaliger ed. 1: mox Iunii emendationem uidet uisamque cupit potiturque cupita.[14]

The phraseology in which Scaliger's passion for the emendation of Franciscus Junius (the Elder, 1545-1602) is expressed echoes the rape of Silvia the Vestal Virgin by Mars, as reported by Ovid *Fast*. 3.21: *Mars uidet hanc uisamque cupit potiturque cupita*. Housman thus approximates the sly adoption of an attractive textual emendation to an infamous mythological account of sexual violation.

> *ad* III.7: hoc loco **M**, post **37 GL**, quo fonte deriuata clades in omnes editiones fluxit Bentleio priores.[15]

This image of destruction or ruin (*clades*) emanating from a fixed source is Horatian: at *Odes* 3.6.19, amidst the last of the so-called Roman Odes, Horace declares that the collective sins (*culpae*) of Romans have ruined marriages, their race and their homes: *hoc fonte deriuata clades | in patriam populumque fluxit*.[16] A misordering of a verse in some Manilian manuscripts is therefore expressed in the hyperbolic terms of the moral ruin of an imperial

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Birch (edd.), *A. E. Housman: A Reassessment* (Basingstoke, 2000) 134-53, at 146-8. For further context see E. Courtney, 'Housman's Manilius' in D. J. Butterfield and C. A. Stray (edd.), *A. E. Housman: Classical Scholar* (London, 2009) 29-44.

13. See, e.g., the reminiscence of throwing mud at his siblings *ad* Man. V.295.

14. '*foedere* F. Junius, *degere* GL, *de genere* M; 'read *remista*' Scaliger in his first edition [1579]; soon after he sees the emendation of Junius, desires what he has seen, and takes possession of what he has desired.'

15. 'M places this verse here but GL after 37, from which source derived the destruction that flowed into all editions prior to Bentley.'

16. 'The destruction derived from this source has flowed into the homeland and its people.'

capital. The heroic labours of Richard Bentley, much like the powers of the Emperor Augustus, were needed to restore order to such chaos.

> *ad* IV.478: hunc uersum si nosset Theodorus Birtius, in hospitium suum calamitatis I. Muell. manual. class. antiqu. I iii p. 72 recepisset.[17]

Housman thought little of Theodor Birt's 1913 volume on textual transmission and criticism; after asserting that Birt was ignorant of this verse's existence, he refers to his collection (either of metrical examples or as a whole)[18] as an 'abode of woe' (*hospitium calamitatis*). The phrase is drawn from the comic playwright Plautus' *Trinummus* (553-4): *hospitium calamitatis, quid uerbis opus est*? | *quamuis malam rem quaeras, illic reperias.* '[The human mind is] an abode of woe: what need is there for words? Whatever bad thing you may search for, you may find it there.' The attack on Birt is therefore phrased in grimly pessimistic terms about the fundamental impurity of man's mind.

4. **A little-known poem on Housman:**

In *The Times* for 26 March 1959, John Masefield (1878-1967), Poet Laureate (1930-67) and occasional correspondent of Housman,[19] published a poem marking the centenary of his birth. The poem has rarely been reprinted and seemingly not discussed.

> Too many lads of pith and relish
> Who put their all in pledge,
> Find Love a hell and living hellish
> Twixt Clun and Wenlock Edge.

17. 'If Theodor Birt had known of this verse, he would have welcomed it into his abode of woe at Vol. 1.iii p.72 of Iwan von Mueller's *Handbuch der Klassischen Altertums-wissenschaft* [*Kritik und Hermeneutik*, Munich, 1913].'

18 Birt provides *ad loc.* a controversial series of cases where final short vowels appear to be standing in lieu of long syllables in dactylic verse.

19. Correspondence between Housman and Masefield began at least as early as 1910 (Burnett I, 256)

Cureless are broken hearts and breaking,
They ache; but here was one
Who made a music of the aching
Twixt Wenlock Edge and Clun.

5. **A representation of the funeral of Thomas Hardy:**

Whereas a film survives of the burial of the heart of Thomas Hardy on 16 January 1928,[20] no corresponding photographic evidence survives for the main service held simultaneously at Westminster Abbey, where Housman figured among the distinguished group of pall-bearers.[21] Nevertheless, a little-known painting of the pall-bearers' procession exists, as published in the *Illustrated London News* for 21 Jan. 1928 (p.97). The painting, by Steven Spurrier (1878-1961), the paper's 'special artist in Westminster', is reproduced on the following page. The text records the following account:

> After the congregation had assembled, the funeral procession entered, with the urn containing Mr. Hardy's ashes, placed on a bier and covered with the Abbey pall of white brocade embroidered with the Cross and the Abbey arms. On either side of the bier walked the ten pall-bearers – the Prime Minister [Stanley Baldwin], Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, Sir James Barrie, Mr. Bernard Shaw, Sir Edmund Gosse, Mr. A. E. Housman, Mr. John Galsworthy, the Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge (Mr. A. B. Ramsay), and the Pro-Provost of Queen's College, Oxford (Dr. E. M. Walker).

It may well be that the figure depicted to the right of the procession is Housman; if so, and if the picture is an accurate representation, Housman himself may not have actually helped carry the bier.

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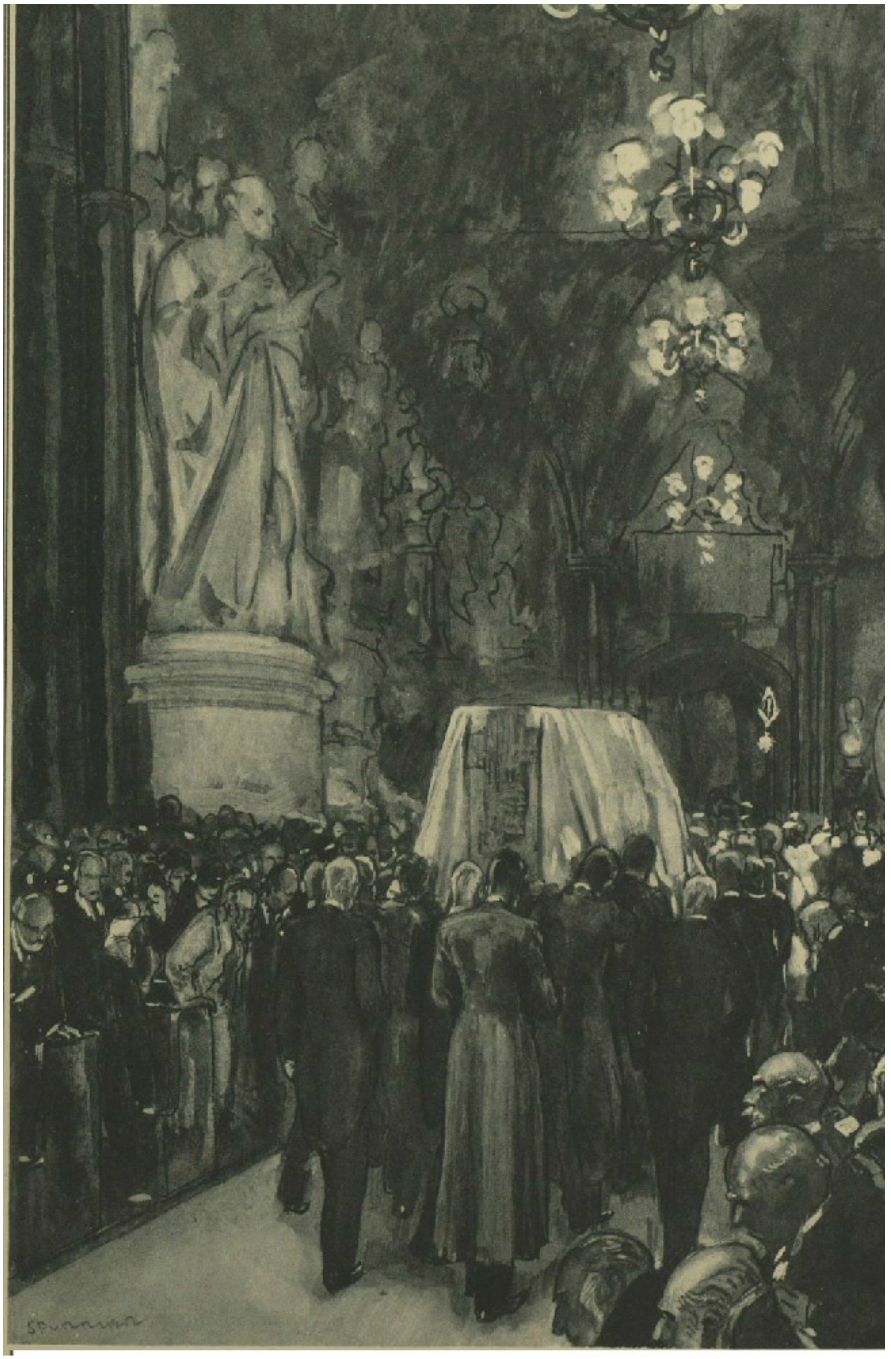
20. This can most conveniently be viewed by searching 'Hardy funeral' at www.britishpathe.com .

21. For the most detailed account of the relationship of Housman and Hardy, see Naiditch, 'Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman' (as n.4) 15-18.



Some Thoughts on the Language of *More Poems* XXIV

by
Darrell Sutton

Stone, steel, dominions pass,
  Faith too, no wonder.
So leave alone the grass
  That I am under.

All knots that lovers tie
  Are tied to sever;
Here shall your sweetheart lie,
  Untrue for ever.

Introduction

Individual poems of A.E. Housman appear in numerous anthologies issued in the last century. Considered by some persons to be a minor poet, his popularity as the composer of the verses of *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) rose significantly during the early 1900s, definitely after World War I. In rapid manner, his fame for versifying dispersed further and wider in English speaking cultures than did his eminence for text-criticism. This is accounted for by the fact that his poems were comprehended by a larger number of people than were his classical publications. Housman's poetic output was measured. But of his shorter poems, several that contain religious tones or imagery of varied types deserve detailed comment. A full-scale descriptive commentary on the whole of his corpus of poetry is still a *desideratum*. For a definitive edition of his extant poems, complete with explanatory notes, see A. Burnett's *The Poems of A.E. Housman* (1997).

An example of the sort of exegesis that the author of this essay aspires to disseminate, a technique which may prove useful to furthering critical studies in this sphere of research, is supplied below. It is original; but the method is shaped by an endeavour to treat concurrently several

aspects of the poem's structure. Conventional themes undergird much of his verse. It is common knowledge to his readers that death, sadness and sorrow appear overtly, even covertly at times. This fact is recognisable immediately from the lines that head this paper.

Intertextuality

It was not necessary for Housman to master reams of classical literature in order to be able to compose a poem like the one above. He easily drew material from the circumstances of everyday life. Working as a classicist, in the narrow fields of textual criticism, he often extracted material offered by the literatures of Greece and Rome. Much of his poetical oeuvre is built upon these deposits, as are Greek and Latin poems preserved since antiquity. His colossal labours on the astronomical texts of Manilius evidence this point. His was a wide-ranging acquaintance with ancient writings; certain of Housman's poems, *inter alia*, affect luminary impressions.[1] In Manilius' poem one uncovers an assortment of readings from ancient myths, and it too parades luminary arrangements: conceivably the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms is in accordance with these designs (see, e.g., *Man*. 1.495ff.).

One may presume that Housman, likewise, made suitable use of his extensive knowledge of the idiom of Roman elegists when converting his own thoughts into verse. Propertius' and Tibullus' elegies treat varied facets of bonds of love, and of despondent lovers. This is an unexceptional fact; but Housman's version of 'Knots Untied' very well could have been the literary theme of either of the two. The 'magical knot' was a source of fascination in antiquity. Used by sorcerers, it was assumed that one needed to know a special enchantment to sever its bonds. Its strength is noted in more than one place: by Ovid in *Her*. 4.136:

> *inposuit nodos cui Venus ipsa suos*
> on whom Venus herself did impose (knots [bonds])

but see also Lucretius' *DRN* 4.1147-8:

1. See, e.g., *More Poems* VII and XLIII.

non ita difficile est quam captum retibus ipsis
exire et validos Veneris perrumpere nodos
(it is not so difficult as, when you are caught in the toils,
to get out and break the strong knots of Venus.)[2]

Exposition

1. This is a poem in which the reader may trace the lines of doubts that disturbed the peace and quiet of Housman's life. Stone and steel consist of entirely different substances: the one may be hewn out in a quarry or evolve from wholly natural circumstances; the other is definitely a fabrication of the genius of man. 'Dominions' or [modern] kingdoms are made of a conjunction of the two. Still, they all fade away and 'pass' from the scene, as do the humans who make use of them. On the other hand, when a supposedly rock-hard substance like faith is placed alongside the others, one expects its durability or eternality to be noted. Not so, says Housman. Its resilience is superficial and it too slips away unremarkably. Therefore these lines are expressive: in speaking of 'stone, steel…' he appears to move from the strong, to the stronger, to the strongest, and then onward to that which is supposed to be of infinite power: 'faith'. Yet every one of them fare little better than the impermanent grass of the field. No pastourelle[3] image is visible here; this is somewhat reminiscent of *James* 1: 10b-11 where it reads:

> … for he will pass away 'like the flower of the field'. For the sun comes up with its scorching heat and dries up the grass, its flower droops, and the beauty of its appearance vanishes. (*New American Bible*, rev. ed., 2010)

2. Cf. M.F. Smith, *Lucretius on the Nature of Things* (Cambridge, MA, 2006) 365.

3. This is defined by Andrew Breeze as 'little shepherdess' and so 'song of shepherdess'. See his article 'The Wild Green Hills of Wyre and Other Notes' in *HSJ* 38 (2012) 90.

2. This faith seems to be like a Janus insertion:[4] it peers outward toward deity, and peers inward at the emotions of his or her beloved. The cumulative effect of such reasoning proceeds, and he wants the growing blades of grass to be left to themselves. One must inquire, What is this place? Is this a burial plot? If so, where is it located? The word, 'grass' is vague, it does not signify greenish colors specifically – there are many rustic plains where tanned grasses blow in the breeze - nor does it reveal if this is a meadow or pasture. In a certain way the grass is a protective barrier for the decedent, that there is no danger of excarnation, whereby the body is left exposed to birds of prey whose feasting would release the spirit to its afterlife. Since that ancient concept goes unrealized, the sweetheart remains intact. The knots, though, are an altogether different matter: when tied rightly, knotted fabrics are usually strong and sturdy. And here I think the plural form 'knots' denote *bonds*, *covenants* or *promises* made by consenting parties whose affections seem genuine.

3. The union of the two lovers or their joining of hearts is bound to be severed: since, according to the poet, nothing lasts forever, i.e. not even an especial fondness is eternal. Infatuations of the most extreme kind can blind lovers to this truth. 'Sweetheart' may refer to the first-person speaker of line 4, the one lying beneath the soil. His or her death may have proven this person to be untrue, presumably having promised to abide with the beloved without end. Conversely 'sweetheart' could be metaphorical: referring to the 'knot' itself: supposedly sure and secure, but now unraveled it lay sprawled out upon the soil. At one time it was thought to be tough and stalwart; now it is proven to be 'untrue' or untrustworthy: for it can no longer hold together what it formerly united. Such is an unreliable man or woman. Such is a faith misplaced in an unreliable love. In addition, if 'lie' is not indicating a prostrate position, but an oral falsity, then the final scene changes because it would now read 'At this point will your sweetheart deceive, deceptive for ever!' Maybe the lover's knot is not tied to sever!

4. I.e. a literary unity that looks backwards and forward to unite two units.

Poetical arrangement

Thirty-four words entertain us here. For line length Housman utilizes a 6/5 syllable count. There are in effect two strophes comprised of four stanzas. The original arrangement fixes Housman's ideas as he placed them; but if reset as a quatrain of extended verses, it would, I think, enhance their display. I detect parallelism in the first and third stanzas. It certainly exists in lines 4 and 7 if 'lie' is taken to be an intransitive verb denoting rest; others may read it as an active verb denoting speech, in which case it alludes to the following word 'Untrue'. And depending on how one wants to read each sentence there is no consistent stress pattern; 'That' and 'Are' heading lines 4 and 6 must remain unstressed for the verses to be acoustically firm; but at the end of lines 2, 4, 6 there is noticeable accent on the penultimate syllables.

Monosyllabic words predominate: there are twenty-five of them; eight two-syllable words, with the most undelectable sound in line 7's phrase 'sweetheart lie'; and a tri-syllabic, 'dominions', which may have originally been 'kingdoms',[5] a two-syllable word. With six verbs, including an exceptional use of the infinitive 'to sever', the speaker's homily reflects on a persistent philosophical problem: that the material and immaterial eventually ceases to be – signifying that those things that are untied and are left to themselves do erode and rot. With the sweetheart set to be the final subject of the poem, its neutral gender returns us to the passing of those things mentioned in line 1. Remarkably, the adjectives are not unveiled until the final two lines are read. The profusion of nouns in use is a credit to the poet's precision. Stories are difficult to tell in this manner.

Grammar and Punctuation

A few comments. Note the strong use of the durative concluding both line 1 and line 8. The continuous tense is reinforced by his employment of the word 'pass' and 'for ever'. The entire poem sounds the note: this misery is

5. It appears as 'Stone, steel and kingdoms pass' in the Contents section of *A. E. Housman*: *More Poems* (New York, 1936) xii.

never-ending. The eternality of that term marks outs its disparity to faith's mutability. The latter term, 'ever' is an intensifier, but it further indicates any time in the past or future.

Line 1: the three nouns and verb and are less of an oddity to native speakers of English. Non-native readers might be put off track by the oddity of syntax or relationship between the words. A modicum of clarification emerges through Housman's use of punctuation.

Line 2: A minor ambiguity in its connections to line 1 could have been avoided by the placement of a semi-colon after the word 'pass' instead of the comma now there. If Housman believed faith to be a substance, as noted in *Hebrews* 11:1,[6] evidently it consists of an ethereal matter. The idiom 'no wonder' is not imprecise; however I think the expression 'small wonder' might have improved the poem, providing more of a contrast to the images of both lines.

Language derivation

Poetic compositions require meticulous revision. Poets tend to be finicky about not only metrical issues, but also the specific words used. In the above verses, words derived from Old English have a strong showing. Naturally many of the OE etymologies are akin to what is extant in Old High German, but I have avoided providing a strict comparative display of analogous roots in similar IE languages, all of which are available in the best multi-volume English lexicon: *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Below, each of the words of *More Poem*s XXIV is followed by its etymological derivation. Thus you have the *word* / IE origin and semi-colon [;] to mark the conclusion of linguistic facts.

> *Stone* / OE; *Steel* / OE; *dominions* ME / MF /L; *Pass* / OF/ L; *Faith* / ME / OF / L; *too* / ME / OE; *no* / ME / OE / OHG; *wonder* / ME / OE; *So* / ME / OE; *leave* / ME / OE; *alone* / ME; *the* / ME / OE; *grass* / OE; *that* / OE; *I*

6. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (KJV).

/ OE; *am* / OE; *under* / OE; *All* / ME / OE; *Knots* / ME / OE; *Lovers* / ME/ OE; *tie* / ME / OE; *to* / OE; *sever* / ME / MF / L; *Here* / OE; *shall* / OE; *your* / OE; *sweetheart* / ME; *lie* / ME/ OE; *Untrue* / ME / OE; *for* + *ever* / OE.

Arranged in this mode and underlined, the words are striking. There is much more analysis to be done along these lines. Inductive and deductive approaches to the reading of Housman's poems turn up treasures of diverse kinds. But it is all buried within the language. Nuances aside, punctuation and lexical forms are not trivial matters. They are crucial to the process of forming original ideas.

Conclusion

Industrious souls might sort out a poem's content as arranged above. Reading poems in this way is time-consuming indeed, and most folk have better things to do in spare moments. This, though, should not deter the avid reader from scrutinizing a poem closely during unhurried periods of rest. The mastery of fundamental details could lead to a profounder appreciation of a poem, adding personal value to the whole of its design. So much skill may be intuitive, requiring repeated readings. While all this may be instructive, repetition itself should not be someone's chief guide. Frequent readings may predispose readers to good or bad habits. Depending on the procedures employed, good practices can be made into better ones; bad practices may become worse yet; but it is harder still to stagnate mentally when one who possesses an inquisitive mind is diligently pursuing a poet's thoughts line by line. As for Housman, he may or may not have been a 'minor poet' – that is a matter of opinion.

Mr. A. E. Housman

by
H. W. Garrod[1]

I have confessed before to a fondness for the poetry of Fellows of colleges. I have not observed that the world in general shares it with me; but I have not allowed that to worry me. I like Matthew Arnold; and, as he did, I like Gray: Gray not too much, but I like him. I even like old Tom Warton, who was contemporary with Gray, and has some of Gray's merits. Warton, I suppose, unlike Matthew Arnold, will be remembered, not as a poet, but as a professor of poetry, and as the first historian of our poetry. He belongs, in any case, to an order of Fellows of colleges which has gone beyond recall. He loved the tavern better than the lecture-room. He was the last of the 'jolly' dons. But coming to a period nearer my own, and, I suppose, a more respectable one, I like the poetry of Rupert Brooke, who was a Fellow of a Cambridge college. I like the poetry of J. S. Phillimore, of Gerald Gould, of Godfrey Elton, all of them Fellows of Oxford colleges. And yet again, I like the poetry of Mr. A. E. Housman. Mr. Housman is a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Even so, the Latin that he teaches there he learned in Oxford. Two terms ago, speaking of Mr. Humbert Wolfe, I put it to his account that he was the only poet I knew who had taken a first in Greats. I believe I was one out; and though that should teach me caution, yet Mr. Housman, I verily believe, is the only great poet who, taking the same school, has ever been ploughed outright. I do not say that from malice; though, if I wanted to be

1. This lecture, one of lengthier treatments of Housman's poetry during his lifetime, was delivered in 1928 and printed in H.W. Garrod, *The Profession of Poetry and Other Lectures* (Oxford, 1929) 211-24. Housman approved of the republication of the poems cited in the lecture: see the letter of 17 Dec. 1928 (Burnett II, 99). Garrod's publication of a commentary upon Manilius' second book in 1911 necessarily subjected himself to the criticism of Housman (whose second volume appeared in the following year); Garrod (1878-1960) was wounded by such an episode for a long time, as this article still hints. Later in life, when giving the J.H. Gray Lectures in Cambridge (1946), Garrod could say of Housman: 'A great scholar and, as I shall always think, a great poet – if with a range somewhat limited and special' (*Scholarship, Its Meaning and Value,* Cambridge, 50).

quietly malicious, I do not see why I should not. But I record it as a material circumstance. I put it in as evidence—if we knew what it was evidence of, we should know all about poetry; of which at present we may sum all our knowledge by saying that the spirit bloweth where it listeth. However, here is a poet, the most considerable of his generation, who refused learning in his youth, and has since dedicated himself to it with deadly austerity. He stands to-day the first scholar in Europe; if this country has had a greater scholar, it will be only Bentley. The sum of his achievement in poetry is two small volumes of verse, separated from one another by an interval of near thirty years; and the title and Preface to the second of them intimating to us that we must expect no more. It is not often that a man may sit and choose which of two immortalities he will. Mr. Housman, I truly think, has had this singular privilege; and to a good many people, perhaps to most, he will seem to have used it perversely. As plainly as what a man does can tell us what he thinks, he has told us that he thinks more highly of scholarship than of poetry, that he prefers to be immortal along that line. For the perpetuity of his fame as a scholar, he has laid the foundations deep and broad; and has done all his work as though only that mattered. What he has done for, and in, poetry, he has done with a savage insouciance, as though he could say all that he had to say in verse by biting his lip. I suppose that there will always be scholarship in the world; and the hard and narrow immortality that comes by it Mr. Housman can count on. But I am not sure that, biting his lip at poetry, he has not been caught in the act: arrested and frozen into a second immortality.

Meanwhile, one of the facts of his poetry is his contempt for it. He is the only poet I know whose primary interest is exact knowledge. That he is a scholar most persons are aware who read his poetry; but they are aware of it in a rather dim and careless fashion: as though it were an accident and an irrelevance. Of no man's life can nine-tenths be irrelevant; least of all of a poet's life. I cannot think it a matter of indifference that Mr. Housman is a scholar, nor that he is the kind of scholar that he is. He is the kind of scholar that bad scholars call a 'mere' scholar; that is to say, he mixes with his scholarship nothing that appeals to any other instinct than the instinct for knowledge. The drier the knowledge, the better: the less it leads anywhere, the safer. Much of his time has been given to editing Latin poets. But you will search his works in vain for any expression that betrays a sense in him

that poetry is what it is, or that the scholarship of poetry is, in any respect, different from, or better than, entomology, palaeontology, or the geometry of hyper-space. His favourite poet is a writer so difficult and obscure that, of persons in this room, perhaps not ten have heard his name, and, of living Englishmen, I vow that Mr. Housman and myself alone have read him from cover to cover, and only Mr. Housman has understood him. I do not mean that Mr. Housman's scholarship is not, often, very lively. Mr. A, an eminent living scholar, had a disciple, Mr. B; and Mr. B was so unwise as to publish a book. 'I suppose', writes Mr. Housman, 'that Mr. A, when he perused Mr. B's book, must have felt somewhat like Sin, when she gave birth to Death.' That is what I call being lively—you will see that it is not very different from being deadly. Mr. Housman's scholarship has these emotional passages. But they are so far proper to his purely scientific temperament that they are provoked only by the unscientific behaviour of other scholars. For him scholarship is a science, as much as any other of the sciences; and the death of it is the intrusion into it of qualities proper to other departments, those qualities, in particular, which belong to *belles lettres* and to poetry. Across the page of Mr. Housman's scholarship there falls never so much as the shadow of literary appreciation. You could no more suspect him of poetry than you could suspect Darwin or Linnaeus.

So much about Mr. Housman's scholarship I have felt obliged to say. For myself, like other people, I am more interested in his poetry. I think he would think us all wrong; though not, I fancy, for the right reasons. In any case, I have no wish to disparage scholarship. Bad poets are at least worse than bad scholars, and they are infinitely more numerous. And touching good poets and good scholars, let me say at any rate this much. We do not, I think, sufficiently reflect how rare, in comparison with genius, is consummate learning. That learning should be less admired than genius is natural enough. Men admire what is grand most of all when it seems to be done easily, and the mark of genius is its divine facility—it may endure agonies, but it does not take pains. Learning, on the other, hand, must both take pains and give them. Mediocrity, or less, can appreciate genius. But learning can be known only by its like. The effects of genius are easily apprehended. It is sensibly known in the quickening of the blood, the tension of the nerves, the fine thrill of the whole being. It does not merely move us; it drives us before it, as the wind the leaves. It has something stinging and

compelling. It accomplishes its end in being felt. We never inquire—or we are foolish if we do inquire—what it would be at. There is a sense in which genius, mysterious as it is, is the most intelligible of all things. But learning is at once less direct in its aims and less clear in its effects. One thing only it seems to share with genius—its unhappiness. It rises up early and late takes rest. There is a pallor upon its cheek, and in its eye a latent fever; and over all its attainment there broods the shadow of something missed and desired.

I hope that these reflections, general as they are, will not seem too distant and irrelevant. I cannot think them so. I was brought up in what is called scholarship; and I was familiar—if my memory serves me rightly—I was familiar with Mr. Housman's scholarship before I read his poetry. There is an unhappiness in his scholarship, just as there is in his poetry. He edits poets in the manner of a man hating poetry. He criticizes critics with an inhumanity grounded on the fierce conviction that there is no truth in man. Speaking of the difficulty of arriving at a good text of his favourite Latin poet, 'the faintest of all human passions', he writes, 'is the love of truth'. Take truth in what sense or in what connexion you will, Mr. Housman, I think, really believes that. There is no truth in man or woman. This gloomy persuasion informs his scholarship. This gave birth in him to his poetry, his hate of poetry, his fear of poetry. For really and truly, as I think, Mr. Housman does hate poetry—poetry and all those parts of life which make up into poetry. He is a scholar because he hates poetry; seeking from scholarship an anodyne for the wounds which poetry has wrought in him; not expecting to find here, any more than in life, truth in other men; but finding, here as elsewhere, a savage satisfaction in detecting, and blazoning, other men's falsehood, the intellectual dishonesty and incompetence of all the world save himself. Of his fellow scholars he is pleased, in one place, to sum the merits by a sentence from Swift: they are 'as little qualified', he says, 'for thinking as for flying'.

To Swift Mr. Housman bears a considerable likeness; save that, firstly, he is a better poet, and secondly, he is more mysterious. Like Swift, he waits for a world 'ubi saeva indignatio cor ulterius lacerare nequit' ['where savage indignation cannot harm the heart more deepy']. Life has done him some injury; the nature of which I am not curious to inquire beyond what his poetry tells us. If we may believe what it tells us, once 'in glory and in joy' he 'followed his plough along the mountain-side'.

Is my team ploughing
  That I was used to drive ?

Once he had loves, who now has only hates. There is no truth in man or woman.

His folly hath not fellow
  Beneath the blue of day,
Who gives to man or woman
  His heart and soul away.

But there was truth in himself:

If Truth in hearts that perish
  Could move the powers on high,
I think the love I bear you
  Should make you not to die. . .

But now 'all is idle'. Once he had loves. Once, like other men, he had friends; and drank with them from sheer good-fellowship, who drinks now in no better cause than that of self-forgetfulness. He had friends. But they were even more unlucky than himself. 'Souls undone, undoing others', the more respectable of them were murdered, the less engaging were hanged. Ned, and one or two others, lie long in Shrewsbury gaol. Here and there a lucky one got away, and enlisted for foreign service. 'The enemies of England' saw these and were sick. Of these 'lads' and 'chaps', as their poet calls them, some found a second service, in 1914, in that army of mercenaries who, 'in the day when heaven was falling', 'held the sky suspended', defending 'what God abandoned'. These 'took their wages and are dead'. It is odd that the most striking poem which the war produced should have this sardonic ring. These 'chaps' were the lucky ones: though their girls walk now with other 'chaps'. Next blest were those who took a pistol and put a clean ending to the sickness which was their soul:

Oh soon, and better so than later
  After long disgrace and scorn,
You shot dead the household traitor,
  The soul that should not have been born
. . . . . .
Now to your grave shall friend and stranger
  With ruth and some with envy come:
Undishonoured, clear of danger,
  Clean of guilt, pass hence and home.

A fine funeral march. For the morality of it, God knows.

Some few more tender memories, indeed, this poet's youth offers; but the sweet tenderness of them makes only chaplets for headstones:

With rue my heart is laden
  For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
  And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
  The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
  In fields where roses fade.

Those golden friends will outlast, I think, the gaol-birds, and suicides, and chaps that were hung; for they have met that immortality which there is in a commonplace when it is handled by a master of the classical manner. Of the golden lads that were swift of foot, there was one who merited an individual elegy; and for him, summoning again his purest classical manner, Mr. Housman has woven this unfading laurel:

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder high.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel blows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honour out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head
Shall flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

Of this beautiful elegy I am ashamed to qualify the praise. Yet I cannot let it pass without voicing an uneasiness and embarrassment which the first two stanzas of it create in me. The poem as a whole has been so truly felt, and to the verse and the diction so much art has been brought that it would be pedantic to prefer nature; and yet these perfections have been framed, I feel, in a setting not only false but preferred for its falsity.

The time you won your town the race...

Mr. Housman was at an English public school; he was an undergraduate here in Oxford; he speaks of himself some-where as a 'Son of Sorrow' playing, or playing at, cricket and football, and I dare say he played at running races. But the athlete of his poem is his fellow-townsman; the scene a market-place; the prize a municipal challenge-cup; the victor was 'chaired' shoulder-high. I am even prepared to believe that the victory was celebrated in 'pints and quarts of Ludlow beer', and that the poet and his friends (I draw inferences here from other poems) lay down in the road 'in lovely muck' and went home leaving their neckties God knows where. I say 'I am prepared to believe' that. But no: I am prepared to be told it. But it will not do. And why does Mr. Housman do it? Do you really see him all that degree interested in the Ludlow sports—if in Ludlow they hold sports? This false-pastoral twist is altogether too tiresome. I hate vulgarisms; but I hate 'fakes' still more; and I do not know what to call this false pastoralism if I am not to be allowed to call it a not too clever fake.

The trouble pervades nine-tenths of the *Shropshire Lad*. The very title prepares you for a false world. I do not mean that Mr. Housman is not so far a Shropshire Lad that he has vivified and glorified large tracts of that pleasant country-side—I reckon it with my best luck that I first made acquaintance with these poems in a village not twenty miles from Ludlow. But the rest is fake: the town-and-county patriotism; the lads and chaps with their ploughshares and lost neckties; the girls with their throats cut, and their lovers that were hanged for it. I call it false pastoralism. It is not quite the pastoralism, it is true, of Mantuan or Spenser or Pope. Since those days, there has flowed under the bridges of pastoral a good deal of Villon and water, of Verlaine and absinthe. But I do not know that it has made the pastoralism of Mr. Housman either more intelligible or less false.

Utterly false this world of his, of course, is not. Open his heart, and you will find written there, I do not doubt, not Cambridge, but Clunbury and Clun. Nor do I question that the stuff of his poetry is the stuff of a real experience. I believe it of him more readily than of some other poets; because only so could it have happened that his best work should, in this false setting, yet shine so true—perhaps *glower* so true would be nearer.

When Mr. Housman lifts his eyes to the hills whence the strength of his youth came, sure enough (we might wish it otherwise) he sees gaols and gibbets and ditches strown with 'lovely lads and dead and rotten'; and sure enough Ned and Dick and himself are or were, all of them, of all men most miserable. But was it not enough that they should be that, without being dressed, or undressed, into tiresome allegoric personages? If there be no truth in man nor woman, if the heart be so made that every wind which blows through it clanks chains and shakes a gibbet, must we none the less make a charade of it?

I suppose we must leave poets to do things in their own way. Very likely Mr. Housman uses these veils and pretences out of some mercy to himself and others. Yet he rarely writes like a merciful man; and I am inclined to seek a different explanation; and to find it in what I have already said. Mr. Housman hates poetry, and he believes that all men hate truth. His poetry is wrung from him, as from so many poets, by some pain of life:

> Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt,
> Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen was ich leide.
> [And while mankind is made dumb in its torment,
> God gave me the power to say how I suffer.]

Some god gave it to him to say what he suffers; but he would rather have been given the power to hold his tongue. He hates poetry sufficiently, and he so little credits men in general with any genuine taste for the truth, that he will not be persuaded to take pains enough to deal truly with his material. He will not be more true with it than he thinks good enough for his readers; and he knows what he is doing. His gaol-bird stuff, the cruder of his macabre pieces, the curiously elaborated perversity of such poems as *The Immortal Part*—these nine-tenths of his readers have preferred to his best work; and he knew that they were going to do so. That some of these poems are absurdly false, he knows, without caring. Even so, into all of them he has put—from an instinct for truth which he is never quite able to suppress in himself—enough of truth to make them poems not to be dismissed without consideration. If I call Mr. Housman's poetry an astonishing medley of false and true, in the long run I am praising it; for it is a marvel that it should be so true as it is, under the conditions which he has deliberately imposed upon it.

Lest I should be misunderstood, the best of it—much of it, that is—is wholly true and set beyond cavil.

When I watch the living meet
  And the moving pageant file
Warm and breathing through the street
  Where I lodge a little while,

If the heats of hate and lust
  In the house of flesh are strong,
Let me mind the house of dust
  Where my sojourn shall be long.

In the nation that is not
  Nothing stands that stood before;
There revenges are forgot,
  And the hater hates no more;

Lovers lying two and two
  Ask not whom they sleep beside,
And the bridegroom all night through
  Never turns him to the bride.

There is no gainsaying perfections of that order; and perhaps I could find near a score of pieces equally adequate in feeling and expression. I suppose none of us were ever very happy about our war poetry, the patriotic verse, I mean, of the Great War. Simonides, Horace, Wordsworth —take any of it to these high tests, and it seems almost sordid. Let me take a poem of an earlier war—which of our wars I know not; but it must have been somewhat earlier than the Boer War. What a great war we thought that, and how little and provincial it looks since! This was a yet littler war. But here are some lines of Mr. Housman's which it provoked, neither little nor provincial, but sufficiently answering high needs:

On the idle hill of summer,
  Sleepy with the flow of streams,

Far I hear the steady drummer
  Drumming like a noise in dreams.

Far and near and low and louder
  On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,
  Soldiers marching, all to die.

East and west on fields forgotten
  Bleach the bones of comrades slain,
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;
  None that go return again.

Far the calling bugles hollo,
  High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow:
  Woman bore me, I will rise.

The *Shropshire Lad* was first printed in 1896. The greater part of it was written early in 1895. Mr. Housman tells us so much himself, in the Preface to *Last Poems*. That Preface contains some few words of self-revelation such as its author is commonly shy of. Most of these early poems, he says, were written in the early months of 1895, under the condition of a 'continuous excitement'. Of the nature of this excitement nothing is said: save that it was such that it is not likely to revisit its poet; 'nor indeed', he says, 'could I well sustain it if it came'. Let us not ask too many questions, therefore. But I had this passage in mind when I said that Mr. Housman, besides hating poetry, feared it. He has a real superstitious fear of it, I believe. The same superstitious fear of his own poetry haunted Byron, as I have noticed elsewhere. And both poets react upon their fear in the same fashion. They meet it with a kind of gloomy insolence; and it deprives both of them of the power of being perfectly sincere; and even of the will to be so. They are only perfectly sincere in their best moments; and in despite of themselves. But I have a further, and not illegitimate, curiosity about the 'continuous excitement' which brought to birth the poems of the *Shropshire Lad*. For I take Mr. Housman to mean that these poems were written in, and

from, the passions or emotions which they treat. That is interesting, because it has not been the way of some great poets. It was not the way of Byron, who speaks of his poetry as the language of his *sleeping* passions—when his passions were awake, the poetry in him died, he tells us. It was not the way of Wordsworth. Wordsworth's way was Byron's way; he had to set some interval between his emotion and the expression of it. But we must take poets as we find them; and it is interesting when they reveal anything of the conditions in which they work.

Between Mr. Housman's *Shropshire Lad* and his *Last Poems* there lies, as I have said, an interval of nearly thirty years. But it is a less real interval than it seems. Three-fourths of the *Last Poems*, he tells us, were written between 1895 and 1910. They are the belated reverberation of the shock, or excitement, of the *Shropshire Lad*. The other fourth part of the *Last Poems* belongs to the April of 1922. About that month and year, again, I would not wish to show an impertinent curiosity; but the mention of it by Mr. Housman may serve to remind us how unpredictable are the comings and goings of poetical inspiration. Most of us, I suppose, who had read the *Shropshire Lad* somewhere near the time at which it first appeared felt some sense of disappointment with *Last Poems*. That was wrong. We looked for some advance in art, some new curiosity of theme, some widening of range. We forgot that we were dealing with a poet who had a strong distaste for poetry—for his own poetry a distaste, if I may say so, almost insolent. Very instructive, in this connexion, is the reason that he gives for printing these *Last Poems*; he thinks that he had better print them while he can himself see to the spelling and punctuation. If you know his scholarship, its savage absorption in the minutiae of pointing and orthography—and, indeed, in all minutiae—you will know that this is not affectation; but that what truly interested him about this last volume was that it should have deadly accuracy. For one or two of the pieces in it I have a liking beyond what I have for a good many of the earlier poems; one or two of them seem to me softer, more tender, more feminine. Too much of the *Shropshire Lad* is marred by what I will call a sham masculinity. The trick of this sham masculinity Mr. Housman learned, I have always fancied, from Stevenson. The pessimism of Mr. Housman, like the optimism of Stevenson, has an exaggerated masculinity which alienates. I cannot but think, I may add, that Mr. Housman owes to Stevenson something of both the verse and the

diction of his poetry. And there are other likenesses: such, however, as may perhaps be explained out of the interest both have in some French poets.

About Mr. Housman's verse and diction—both so individual in their melancholy bareness, in their damped-down fire—I had wanted to say something—indeed, a good deal; but I have left myself no time. I am not sure that, fifty years hence, he will not be principally esteemed for the classical finish of his best work; that this will not be the 'immortal part' of him, 'the steadfast and enduring bone' surviving 'the man of flesh and soul' who to-day is so interesting to us. Indeed, I do not know why else he writes. Who despises more than he all that 'fire of sense' and 'smoke of thought', as he calls it, which has made his poetry so interesting to his contemporaries? Why any writer writes, perhaps no one knows. The simplest explanation is that we write because we want to, and there is nobody to stop us. That does not, of course, explain why we do it so badly. But here is a writer, a poet, who does not want to write at all; and indeed he has sworn never to do it again. But Jove laughs at 'last poems'; he scents from afar yet more last poems. From Mr. Housman I do not know whether we shall get them, But he has written, and he may do so again, in his own despite; hating poetry, thinking life a false thing, cursing the flesh and blood in him. But there is no lust of the flesh quite so strong as the craving of art. Among many false obsessions, that, I think, is real with Mr. Housman, the veritable tyrant of his mind.

Of all this I could have wished to say a good deal more, I have lost myself—which of his contempararies has not?—in the enigma of the man. What matters, and what will outlast curiosity, is the pure and cold art of his good work. But we are human creatures; and this enigmatic figure—one of the most notable of our time—this enigmatic figure, lonely, irresponsive, setting us so many questions and answering none of them, crediting none of us with truth or intelligence, but allowing us to make what we can of the fire and ice that contend in his nature, the Byronic and the donnish—we may be forgiven if we look at him a little like men who have forgotten good manners. It is his fault if we stare.

Biographies of Contributors

Andrew Breeze, FSA, FRHistS, PhD, was born in 1954 and has taught at the University of Navarre since 1987. Married with six children, he is the author of the controversial study *Medieval Welsh Literature* (Dublin, 1997), and co-author with Richard Coates of *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000). He has also published over three hundred research papers, mainly on English and Celtic philology.

Email: abreeze@unav.es

David Butterfield is a Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, and Lecturer in Classics at the University of Cambridge.

Email: djb89@cam.ac.uk

David Damant attended Queens' College Cambridge and has a degree in Logic and Scientific Method. As an investment manager he pioneered the use of Modern Portfolio Theory in the management of portfolios, and as a non-accountant he spent many years establishing international standards for accounting and auditing. In both these fields the application of the logic of the models concerned was directly relevant. His interest in food and wine stemmed from the day when, as a young National Service officer, he arrived at a Royal Air Force radar station trained and ready to defend the Western Way of Life, to be informed at once by the Commanding Officer that he would also be in charge of food and wine for the Officers Mess, a task for which he was neither trained nor ready.

David Edgar is a British playwright, from whose prolific corpus of drama more than sixty plays have been performed across the world. He has also written about dramatic technique, and is President of the Writers Guild of Great Britain as well as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Jeremy Murray is currently writing a commentary on Book 9 of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* towards a PhD in Classics at the University of Cape Town. He has taught Classics at both the universities of Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, and published a number of articles and reviews.

Scott Pettitt was born in Worcestershire in 1986, read history at Durham University, and gained an MPhil. from Cambridge for a dissertation on Nonconformity and the Liberal Party in Victorian Birmingham. An archivist by trade, he is currently cataloguing the records of Somerset's manors. He has contributed entries to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and has recently written for *About Larkin*, the journal of the Philip Larkin Society.

Email: spettitt524@gmail.com

Jeffrey Scott lived in Amsterdam for a decade, and has also traveled extensively on the Continent, especially to Paris since he worked for several years at a French bank. In Paris one of his colleagues, a countess, asked for his advice as to whether she should accept the offer of the President of France to become his mistress. After discussion, a negative answer was returned, on the grounds that she would not be his sole mistress.

Darrell Sutton is an American Pastor and Biblicist who resides in the state of Nebraska, USA. He enjoys reading and writing about all aspects of the poetry and Classical Papers of A. E. Housman. He is also the director of Semitica Language Academy – a private tutorial, in which he offers instruction on classical languages: including Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic grammar.

Email: dssemitica@hotmail.com

The Housman Society and Journal

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The Housman Society was founded in 1973, its main purpose being to bring together all those interested in the lives and works of the Housman family and to generate interest in literature and poetry. The subscription year starts on 1st May and the current annual subscriptions are:

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The 2015 Journal will be published in late November of that year. Articles intended for publication, or books for review, should be sent to **David Butterfield, Queens' College, Cambridge, CB3 9ET.** If possible please send as an attachment to an e-mail, preferably in Microsoft Word, or as a file on a CD-Rom. E-mail: djb89@cam.ac.uk . Proof copies will be sent by PDF.

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Articles submitted to the journal are preferred in digital form (ideally in Microsoft Word format and double-spaced throughout) and should be sent either as an attachment to the editor's email address or as a file on a CD-Rom to the editor's postal address (as above). If submission is only possible in hard copy, articles must be typed, double-spaced and paginated. Italic, which should be employed for titles of books and articles, and for quotations and words in languages other than English, is indicated in typescript by underlining. Quotations from other languages, from whatever source, should be enclosed within single inverted commas; quotations should be enclosed within double inverted commas. Greek quotations may be included in articles: if submitted digitally, contributors are asked to state the Greek font they have used; if in hard copy, Greek should be written clearly by hand.

Lines of poetry quoted within a sentence should be indicated by the siglum |: e.g., I to my perils | Of cheat and charmer | Came clad in armour | By stars benign.

Numbers of poems, where appropriate, should be in upper case Roman numerals: e.g., ASL II (not ASL ii).

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