The Housman Society Journal

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The Housman Society

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Chairman's Notes 2015

As I embark on my twenty-eighth Chairman's Notes I find it hard to believe that it will be the last, but having decided that the time has come for me to retire I will be standing down at next year's AGM, which, by happy arrangement with Bromsgrove School, will be held in Housman Hall (formerly Perry Hall), the Housman family home.

It is pleasing to report on another good year for the Society, during which there was an outstanding Hay lecture from Anthony Holden, the editor of the extremely popular *Poems that Make Grown Men Cry*. He was invited because in the introduction to his collection of tear-jerking poems, he refers not only to the poetry of Housman, but also to the original lecture and the "brouhaha provoked at the time by Housman's emphasis on the emotional power of poetry". It was a personal, thought-provoking and thoroughly enjoyable event which attracted an audience of over three hundred to the Oxford Moot pavilion. As usual you will be able to read it in full later in these pages.

Another high profile event occurred on 17th July when a blue plaque was placed on 'Longmeadow', the Street home of Laurence Housman for the last thirty-five years of his life. It was a perfect summer's day and Longmeadow was an idyllic setting for a gathering of members of the Housman and Street Societies and guests. The plaque, beautifully made by Croft Castings of Whitby, is well placed under the 'Longmeadow' sign and clearly visible to passers by on the road. The day was impeccably planned and we are indebted to Elizabeth Oakley and the Street Society for such good organisation. After the unveiling of the plaque and a pleasant buffet lunch in the garden, Elizabeth Oakley gave a talk in Street Library on the work of Laurence and his sister Clemence. The books on display, which we were able to handle, had beautiful examples of engraving and embellishment by both Clemence and Laurence, which were reminiscent of the artistry found in a medieval manuscript.

The Bromsgrove Commemoration was to see the unveiling of the refurbished statue, but a succession of unfortunate mishaps saw this postponed. For the full story see the last Newsletter! Nevertheless with the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School as our guest it was good to have

an opportunity to meet this friendly New Zealander who seems to have made an excellent start in his new post by showing that his respect and understanding of the past – an archivist is now in place – is combined with a progressive attitude to the future. His blog is worth reading on the School's website, with the last two entries drawing parallels between bringing up a child and both pottery and the TMO (Television Match Official) in the Rugby World Cup! It was the turn of Bromsgrove District Council to host the lunch afterwards and once more a good gathering of members and guests enjoyed the hospitality of the Chairman of the Council.

After the traditional ceremony by the plaque on the north wall of St Laurence's the Ludlow Commemoration turned into a light-hearted affair when Ludlow resident, Ian Barge, told us of campaigns he had been involved in to preserve the town from various threats from modern-day "progress" – the latest being the plan to move the Accident and Emergency Services to Telford. He has written Housman parodies for each of these campaigns and for this latest he produced a classic last verse of

> Oh never fear. We'll fight my dear,
> For justice-under-Clee.
> For tell me, what would Housman do
> Without his A and E.

The Bromsgrove Society has featured courses devoted to Housman topics at each of its last two Summer Schools and this year's day focused on "The Housman Family in Peace and War". Jeremy Bourne brought much insight to George Herbert's time as a soldier in Burma, and this contrasted vividly with Elizabeth Oakley's scholarly account of Laurence's role in the pacifist movement at the start of the twentieth Century. Andrew Maund talked about the poetry and the way in which many shades of conflict form the subject matter of Housman's writing. A shortened version of the day's presentations will be given after the Ludlow Commemoration next year.

When I took over from John Pugh as Chairman in 1987 I really did have doubts as to whether I was the right person, for my knowledge of Housman the classicist was very sketchy and my insight into the poetry was limited. Hence it has been a steep learning curve, but I have been very fortunate in having round me a committee whose combined skills have

enabled us to make the Society one of the liveliest of literary societies. So I express my gratitude to all those who have contributed over the years but especially to stalwarts like Robin and Kate Shaw, Dieter Baer, Roy Birch, Jeremy Bourne, Ann FitzGerald, Tom and Sonia French, Alan Holden, Jennie McGregor-Smith, Andrew Maund, Elizabeth Oakley, Valerie Richardson, Peter and Diane Sisley, Stephen de Winton, and in recent years David Butterfield and the founder's sons, Max and Julia Hunt.

After "living" with A.E.H. for all these years one does feel an instinctive sympathy for the man and for his extraordinary achievements in such varied fields. Each year has had some highlight but inevitably it was the range of the celebrations during the Centenary of *A Shropshire Lad* year that furthered the cause of A.E.H. most and gave the widest pleasure. The publication of books was one of the many achievements of that year and the Society has continued to add new titles where there was a need. Each of these required real dedication from its author or editor and Robin Shaw, Roy Birch, Jeremy Bourne and Elizabeth Oakley all provided these – with Jennie McGregor-Smith often as either adviser on design or typesetter. The idea of a set of Society greetings cards was initially greeted by the committee with some reserve but steady sales have been a healthy bonus for the Society's finances.

Seeing four different productions of Tom Stoppard's amazing play about A.E.H., *The Invention of Love*, has been an enduring memory and, with the last ones occurring some five years ago from undergraduates at both Oxford and Cambridge, we hope that some courageous company will stage it again soon. Walks, as part of the Society's summer calendar, have always been enjoyable and negotiating Wenlock Edge, Bredon Hill and Clun have given us new insights into 'Housman Country'. Library visits too have taken us to places I would have never gone to otherwise and having special guided tours of the wonderful collections at Eton, the Wren Library at Trinity College Cambridge and UCL will always remain in the memory

But it is not just activities that have illuminated my time as Chairman, there have been important articles in both the Newsletter and the Journal that have contributed to Housman scholarship, and none more important than those by Moses Jackson's grandson, Andrew Jackson, following the publication of his book *A Fine View of the Show*. And this is the moment to mention that Andrew Jackson and his brothers are putting up for auction,

a collection of fifteen letters from A.E.H. to his godson, Gerald Jackson, Moses' youngest son. They are scheduled to be auctioned by Sothebys in New York, on 14 December in a 'Fine Books and Manuscripts' sale. The family have been advised to combine all the letters as a single lot, rather than selling them individually.

Thanks to three very prudent treasurers during my time the finances of the Society are in a very healthy state and although membership numbers have declined in recent years we still have well over two hundred paying members.

So I retire with a multitude of memories and wish the Society every success in the future, confident in the knowledge that the name of Housman will live on for as long as there is civilisation on earth.

Jim Page
November 2015

"Dirty Postcards in a Drawer"

Anthony Holden

In the spring of 1939, just three years after A.E. Housman's death, the young W.H. Auden published a strikingly sour sonnet about him in John Lehmann's influential periodical *New Writing*. Republished in more permanent form the following year, in Auden's sixth collection of poetry, *Another Time,* it begins with an anti-Cambridge crack from this lifelong Oxford man, almost 50 years Housman's junior:

> No-one, not even Cambridge, was to blame;
> – Blame, if you like, the human situation –
> Heart-injured in North London, he became
> The leading classic of his generation.

So far, so good. But there follows an astonishingly *ad hominem* quatrain, from the second line of which I take the title of my talk this evening:

> Deliberately he chose the dry-as-dust,
> Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer;
> Food was his public love, his private lust
> Something to do with violence and the poor.

Whatever Auden meant by those last two lines – and there has been much academic, and not so academic, speculation – let us concentrate for now on the crude, almost brutal line preceding them.

> "*Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer*"

Can Auden have been unaware of Housman's celebrated Cambridge talk of just five years earlier, the 1933 Leslie Stephen Lecture on 'The Name and Nature of Poetry', precursor and foundation-stone for this very lecture, still continuing more than 80 years later?

Perhaps its most striking passage, towards its end, reads:

> Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another which consists in a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes; and there is a third which I can only describe by borrowing a phrase from one of Keats's last letters, where he says, speaking of Fanny Brawne, 'everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear.' The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach.

"A precipitation of water to the eyes" … I do not call that the public admission of a man who kept his tears "like dirty postcards in a drawer." Milton's 'Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more', Housman has also just told us, "can draw tears, as I know it can, to the eyes of more readers than one…"

Housman's lecture caused quite a stir at the time in Cambridge and beyond. At the age of 75 – with, as it turned out, less than three years to live – he had revealed himself to be a less austere, more emotional man than his reputation as a severely cerebral classicist would suggest – and not afraid to show it. Various colleagues in the Cambridge English department publicly deplored his remarks on the emotional appeal of poetry, with F.R. Leavis openly lamenting that the damage the lecture must have inflicted on his students would take years to remedy.

All of which makes it all the more surprising that Auden could even suggest, within a few years of this literary brouhaha, that Housman was a man to hide away his tears, wherever he might do so. Musing on Housman in a 2007 edition of the *London Review of Books*, the late scholar and critic Sir Frank Kermode said of the Lecture: "For so reticent a man it was a surprising performance. It possibly upset his health, and he came to regard [its] date, May 1933, as an ominous moment in his life."

Kermode was perhaps the one critic of recent years who would pass Housman's test, prescribed while himself disavowing any claim to the title, that good literary critics are less common than returns of Halley's comet –

i.e. once every 75 years – while poets, said this by now very distinguished one, are almost as common as gooseberries.

I quoted this remark of Kermode's in my preface to a poetry anthology I co-edited last year with my son Ben under the title *Poems That Make Grown Men Cry*. Frank Kermode was a close and very dear friend of mine, especially in his later years, during which he played a significant role in the genesis of the book, as I detail in its Preface.

The idea first emerged over Sunday lunch one weekend at Frank's Cambridge home, when I told him of a mutual friend who had recently choked up while reciting a poem by Thomas Hardy. At the end of an especially dark day in his life our friend, a Hardy scholar, had started quoting *The Darkling Thrush*, which ends:

> So little cause for carolings
> Of such ecstatic sound
> Was written on terrestrial things
> Afar or nigh around,
> That I could think there trembled through
> His happy good-night air
> Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
> And I was unaware.

Our friend wasn't feeling much hope that evening, and so broke down over those last two lines. It was a very moving moment.

So I asked Frank – rarely an emotionally demonstrative man – whether there was any particular poem *he* couldn't read without choking up. Immediately, he told me to "go and fetch the Larkin".

In front of his half-dozen guests, Frank then proceeded to read aloud Philip Larkin's *Unfinished Poem* – about death treading its remorseless way up the stairs, only to turn out to be a pretty young girl with bare feet, moving the stunned narrator to exclaim: "What summer have you broken from?" It was this startling last line Frank couldn't get out; with a despairing waft of the hand, visibly moved, he handed the book to someone else to finish reading the poem.

Also there that day were several other English Literature academics, from Cambridge and elsewhere, so it was not surprising that

this topic of conversation lasted all afternoon, ranging far and wide, not just over other candidates for this distinct brand of poetic immortality but the power of poetry to move, the difference between true sentiment and mere mawkishness, and of course the pros and cons of men weeping, whether privately or in public.

Thus were the seeds of the anthology sewn, but thereafter it was delayed by many years devoted to other projects. Thanks to my son Ben, I got back to work on it – in collaboration with him – after Frank's death in 2010. When the resulting volume finally appeared last year, Housman and Hardy emerged as two of the most tear-provoking poets in the collection. With three poems each, they are bested only by Larkin himself and (ironically enough) Auden, with five each.

So four of us supposedly buttoned-up Brits top the charts of 96 poems from eighteen countries, more than a dozen of them written by women, chosen by 100 eminent men of twenty nationalities ranging in age from their early twenties to late eighties. Four pairs of contributors happened to choose the same poem, for intriguingly different reasons.

It is hard to think of two more disparate men than the Middle East war correspondent Robert Fisk and the creator of *Downtown Abbey*, Julian Fellowes; but they both chose 'Remember' by Christina Rosetti. Or the film producer David Puttnam and Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International – with whom we formed a partnership on the book – who both chose Tagore's "Let My Country Awake". Or the historian Simon Schama and the actor Simon Callow, who both opted [from different sexual points of view] for Auden's 'Lullaby' ("Lay your sleeping head, my love, Human on my faithless arm…") – which – again ironically – first appeared in that same slim 1940 vol as that mean-spirited Housman sonnet. Or indeed the biologist Richard Dawkins and the former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion – who both chose A.E. Housman. Specifically, *Late Poems* XL:

Tell me not here, it needs not saying,
  What tune the enchantress plays
In aftermaths of soft September
  Or under blanching mays,
For she and I were long acquainted
  And I knew all her ways.

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

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

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

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

In his explanation, Dawkins drew on the first two lines of that final stanza – "For nature, heartless, witless nature / Will neither care nor know" – to say with due professional sang-froid: "DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."

Housman's poem had been a favourite of Dawkins' mentor and friend, the evolutionary biologist W.D. Hamilton, at whose funeral it was read by his sister. "I was not surprised to learn that it was one of Bill's

favourites," says Dawkins, "because he had long brought to my mind the melancholy protagonist of *A Shropshire Lad*… This poem is not from *A Shropshire Lad* but it has the same hauntingly wistful air. I knew it by heart as a boy in love – not with any particular girl but with the idea of being in love, and especially the tragedy of lost love…"

For Andrew Motion, "The wish (the impulse, the need) to make an audience cry…has always been high on my list of requirements as a reader. As I get older, the requirement is more and more easily met. Why is this? Because our hearts grow softer as the years click past? Perhaps. But also because we feel the sadness of the creatures (and our fellow human beings) more keenly. And because we can see the dark at the end of the tunnel more and more clearly."

The fifth contributor to our anthology to choose Housman was the American journalist Joe Klein, perhaps better known as Anonymous, author of *Primary Colors*, the insider novel about Bill Clinton's 1992 primary campaign later filmed by Mike Nichols. With its author still known only as Anonymous, Klein's book spent nine weeks at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list before he was "outed" by a combination of wily colleagues and "literary analysis" by computer.

Both Klein's parents, he tells us, passed away in the winter of 2011-12; they had been together for 86 years, since their first day in kindergarten. At the time, Klein continues, "my wife and I were in the midst of a major television-watching project: all 33 episodes of Inspector Morse in chronological order. There are no 12-step programs for British mystery lovers. We're addicted, and Morse – irascible, imbibing, extravagantly literate – was a favorite.

"We came to the final episode a week after my father died and I began to blub – decorously, blotting the corner of my eye with an index finger, but in full blub all the same – when Morse, played by the brilliant John Thaw, recited Housman."

To my own amazement – whatever happened to copyright? – I discovered the scene in question on YouTube, and was able to email a delighted Joe Klein the link to the relevant moment, where a world-weary Morse, reluctantly contemplating retirement, is telling his sidekick, Lewis: "You really should persevere with Wagner, you know, Lewis. It's about important things. Life and death. Regret." Desperate to change the subject

Lewis says, “Cheer up, sir. It’s a lovely evening! Look at that sunset…”

As the camera pans across a lake to a sky dramatically reddened by the sinking sun, Morse intones:

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

“It was triply poignant,” as Klein concludes. “Morse was dying. Thaw was near death himself. My parents had just passed away…

“When I later read the poem, I was slightly disappointed. *Ensanguing the skies* seemed a bit much… until I read it aloud, and the funereal metre reasserted itself. I miss Morse, Thaw, and of course my parents. But the poem remains, a reminder of grief so pure that it can also cleanse.”

En passant, it is worth pointing out that the title of this last episode of Morse, as indeed of the last Inspector Morse book – “The Remorseful Day” – was taken from Housman’s *More Poems* XVI (“How clear, how lovely bright”) by Morse’s creator Colin Dexter, a devout lover of Housman, and indeed Wagner, and a fellow classicist who has previously delivered this Lecture.

As in this instance, intimations of mortality are one of the most common themes of our anthology – of those poems that cannot easily be read without what Housman called “a precipitation of water to the eyes”. Other motifs range from pain and loss to the beauty and variety of nature – as well, of course, as love, in all its many guises. Three of our contributors have suffered the ultimate pain of losing a child; others are moved to tears by the sheer beauty of the way a poet captures, in Alexander Pope’s famous phrase, ‘what oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d.’

A sudden shock of emotion overcomes different people in different ways. Whether or not he knew he was echoing Housman’s lecture, Vladimir Nabokov wrote that the proper way to read poetry is not with one’s brain or heart, but with one’s back, waiting for ‘the tell-tale tingle between the

shoulder-blades'. To our contributors, as to Housman, a moist eye seems the natural, if involuntary response to a particular phrase or line, thought or image. The vast majority are public figures not prone to tears, as is supposedly the manly way, but here prepared to admit to caving in when ambushed by great art.

But what is it about a particular poem, *any* poem, that moves us so? Working on this project with my son proved the perfect stimulus for me to think again about the name and nature of poetry. Housman's own distinction in his lecture is, I think, between poetry and what he called mere 'verse', taking a then revolutionary line on the 17th Century, 'when wit masqueraded as poetry' and indeed the 18th, 'when verse became pretentious and intellectual to the exclusion of what he considered to be poetry'.[1] Intellect, in sum, was not enough. Poetry, to Housman, was 'the transmission of emotion' and had 'no direct relationship with the meaning or intellectual content of the words.'

On the poets of the 18th Century, he quoted Matthew Arnold to the effect that the primacy of intellect entails 'some repressing and silencing of poetry' and 'some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul'. The wit of Samuel Johnson, for instance, was 'no more poetical than anagrams'; the satire and burlesque of the Augustan poets was 'literature of the highest order, but not poetry'. Metaphor and simile were devices to 'startle by novelty and amuse by ingenuity a public whose one wish was to be startled and amused.'

To Housman, the essence of poetry was 'not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what is felt by the writer.' Milton's 'Nymphs and shepherds', for instance, 'find their way to something in man which is obscure and latent.'

In my own case : thanks to my first wife's early career as an accompanist, I was introduced while still a callow youth to Vaughan Williams' setting of 'Is my team ploughing?' from *A Shropshire Lad* in his song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. I believe it to be a rare example of a song in which the words overpower the music.

"Is my team ploughing

1. These two summations [in quotes] are taken from Robin Shaw's excellent introduction to the Society's edition of Housman's 1933 Lecture.

That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

Here I commit the same transgression, in Housman's eyes, as Vaughan Williams,[2] and skip two verses (about football) to the heart-rending conclusion:

"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

2. "I also feel," Vaughan Williams added, "that a poet should be grateful to anyone who fails to perpetuate such lines as: "'The goal stands up, the Keeper / Stands up to keep the Goal.'"

That George Butterworth, Ivor Gurney and other composers also set these words speaks of their appeal to a generation blighted by war. But it lingers poignantly on for those, like myself, lucky enough to be of the 'baby-boomer' generation who have never been called upon to fight our fellow-men. Had Ben and I invited ourselves to contribute to our own anthology, I believe these lines of Housman's might have been my choice. Which made it doubly satisfying to discover, during my reading towards this talk, that when Thomas Hardy said his favourite Housman poem was 'Is my team ploughing?', Housman replied that it was his, too.

What would Housman himself have chosen? His published correspondence emboldens me to answer that question. According to one of those present, Housman had difficulty reading that ode of Horace which begins *Diffugere nives* ['The snows are fled away']: '"That," said Housman hurriedly, almost like a man betraying a secret, "I regard as the most beautiful poem in ancient literature."'

Housman's own translation begins:

The snows are fled away, leaves on the shaws
  And grasses in the mead renew their birth,
The river to the river-bed withdraws,
  And altered is the fashion of the earth.

The Nymphs and Graces three put off their fear
  And unapparelled in the woodland play.
The swift hour and the brief prime of the year
  Say to the soul, Thou wast not born for aye…

And ends:

Night holds Hippolytus the pure of stain,
  Diana steads him nothing, he must stay;
And Theseus leaves Pirithous in the chain
  The love of comrades cannot take away.

Like Housman, not to mention Colin Dexter, I too was bred a classicist, who published English translations of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

and *Greek Pastoral Poetry* for Penguin Classics in my twenties. I like to think that my youthful grounding in Latin and Greek has given me a sharper feel for English poetry and prose, the measured tread of a sentence, the right place for its emphasis, and so on.

This means that I know, like Housman, that the word 'poetry' is coined from a Greek root meaning simply 'making'. It also means that I am familiar with the potent Greek phrase *Gnothi seauton* or 'Know thyself'. This is what Housman has in mind, I think, when he asks: 'Can you hear the shriek of the bat?' Who among us, in other words, is qualified to know poetry when we hear it? As Housman puts it, 'Am I capable of recognizing poetry if I come across it? Do I possess the organ by which poetry is perceived?' His implication, of course, is that 'the majority of civilized mankind notoriously and indisputably do not.' So, as he asks, 'Who has certified me as one of the minority who do?'

W.H. Auden would certainly come into that category. Which may be why in later life he withdrew that youthful sonnet, and made much more sympathetic remarks – as one gay poet to another – about Housman and unrequited love, of which both had grievous experience. Perhaps Auden believed that Housman had hidden away his tears *until* that 1933 lecture? If so, he himself was equally guilty, as he confessed in a 1974 interview with the *Paris Review*, in which he finally reveals some knowledge of Housman's Lecture.

> I can, for instance, enjoy a good tear-jerking movie, where, oh, an old mother is put away in a home. Even though I know it's terrible, the tears will run down my cheeks. I don't think good work ever makes one cry. Housman said he got a curious physical sensation with good poetry — I never got any.

Anyone bothering to attend this lecture will, I hope and believe, disagree with that, knowing exactly what Housman means by a physical response to poetry. As with music, in my own experience, familiarity is also a great provoker of the "precipitation of water to the eyes". Far from breeding contempt – a cliché from which I have always recoiled – familiarity can often inspire many positive emotions, not least affection.

Twice last summer I awoke to find a line of poetry in my head, which would have me in tears before the day was through. In early August, staying with friends in Norfolk, I emerged from an unusually lurid dream of warfare to find myself thinking: "That was a smothering dream…" "Smothering dream"? was my next thought. "Dreams don't *smother* you…" Then I realised this could only be a half-awake reference to the potent passage by that other great First World War poet, Wilfred Owen: "If in some smothering dreams you too could pace / Behind the wagon that we flung him in" *etc*, which culminates in the devastating lines that lend the poem its title:

> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie: *Dulce et Decorum est*
> *Pro patria mori*.

As I mused on all this with my hosts, we realised that this very day marked the centenary of the outbreak of World War One. What would Dr. Freud have had to say about that? With due solemnity, to commemorate the occasion, I read the entire poem aloud to them, and found myself choking up as I did so.

Might Dr Freud also have reflected that the loss of self-control when a man breaks down in tears is equally a *liberation* of the self from all the checks and balances to which we are subject in our daily lives? Is this the liberation we feel when a poem moves us to tears? Is this why we choke up? The secret of great poetry is precisely that it catches us off guard.

Barely a month later, in mid-September, we all awoke to the news of the barbaric beheading of a British aid worker by the terrorists of the self-styled Islamic State. "Any man's death diminishes me," I caught myself thinking, auto-remembering those great lines of the metaphysical poet John Donne:

> Any man's death diminishes me,
> Because I am involved in mankind,
> And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
> It tolls for thee.

When Ben and I did the rounds publicizing our book, and were each inevitably invited to read a poem that especially moved us, I had usually chosen John Donne's ravishing love poem *The Good Morrow*. At a London literary festival that day, instead, I recited "No man is an island" – and again choked up as I did so.

It had, moreover, been my late, lifelong friend Christopher Hitchens who chose the Wilfred Owen poem for our book, emailing me just five days before his death in December 2011 to stress: "The passage that begins 'If in some smothering dreams…'"

So you could say that all this was no coincidence, that I am predisposed to weep at these and other select lines of poetry by spending three years compiling that anthology, and a year and more going around talking about it, in public as much as in private.

And you'd be right, in the sense that I freely admit to being an easy weeper, at music as much as movies, prose as much as poetry. Thanks to Ben's research on the subject, however, I now know that weeping is good for me.

Human beings, I did not know before my son told me, are the only species that cries. Darwin, as Ben points out, called it "that special expression of man's". Elizabethan and Victorian Britain venerated male tears as a sign of gentility, of high moral character; but that seems to have died out in the brutish 20th Century, when weeping somehow became unmanly.

There are complex chemical explanations why tears are a beneficial release of pent-up feelings, both physically and emotionally – the spiritual equivalent, you might say, of going to the gym. While interviewing me about the book on Radio 4's *Today* programme, John Humphrys choked up reciting Owen; ditto Jeremy Vine on Radio 2, in his case Yeats. And both later agreed that they had felt the better for it.

The subject-matter doesn't have to be as powerfully emotive as war, or (as with Vine's Yeats) intimations of mortality. The predominant theme to emerge from our anthology, apart from such obviously overwhelming experiences as pain and loss, was some elusive sense of yearning, often at missed opportunities.

As you grow older – whether male or female (Ben and I are now co-editing *Poems That Make Grown Women Cry*) – you have more, alas,

to yearn for, more opportunities to have missed. You experience ever more loss, of family and friends. Andrew Motion is not alone in testifying that he weeps more easily as he grows older. The film-maker Richard Curtis adds the interesting gloss that, as with his father, advancing age invokes tears less at the "sad and serious things in our lives" than at "a tale of something good, some gracious or loving piece of behaviour".

"Increasingly so as we age" says Melvyn Bragg in our book of his eloquent response to a Shakespeare sonnet: "All great poems are about each one of us. This speaks as directly to me over the centuries as any evening's call from a close friend."

So whatever might move you to the verge of tears, never hesitate to let them flow freely – and openly. It is mankind's natural way, when words are not enough. Since the therapeutic experience of publishing this book, my post-imperial slogan has become: "Let's abolish the British stiff-upper-lip!"

When I wrote some words to that effect in the venerable *Oldie* magazine last year, it provoked a caustic response from a *Daily Telegraph* columnist, Michael Henderson, who wrote:

> When Holden was at school his housemaster would have told him that if he didn't throw off his soppy ways he would be for the high jump. On the whole that is a better way of dealing with life's slackers than encouraging them to cry it all out. Otherwise we shall end up like those emotionally incontinent Mediterranean types. If we surrendered to our deepest feelings all the time life would become impossible. Get rid of the stiff upper lip? You must be joking. We need it more than ever.

Presumably, Henderson also had in mind the days after the death in 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales, when the British briefly permitted themselves a rare and uncharacteristic display of public emotion. But that was a mass communal moment, reflecting the tragedy of Diana's life as much as her death, and the pervasive feeling that she was more 'one of us' than the rest of the royals. Here we are talking about intimate private moments, when we read a few lines of poetry that – at the very least – strike a chord of

recognition in our deepest self.

That is precisely what Housman was urging us to do – and I am tonight attempting to echo – to 'surrender to our deepest feelings'. Far from becoming 'impossible', life can suddenly seem more live-able, thanks to the unique power of poetry to tap into our innermost reserves – or to set up, in Housman's well-chosen word, 'a vibration'.

Perhaps the best-known definition of poetry, quoted by Housman in his 1933 lecture, is Wordsworth's in his Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*: 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', or 'emotion recollected in tranquility'.

The late Seamus Heaney, who contributed to our collection only months before his death, once described poetry as 'language in orbit'. Robert Frost said that 'Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.' To Carl Sandburg, 'Poetry is an echo asking a shadow to dance.' This is a strange pre-echo to the novelist and poet John Wain: 'Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking.' To the contemporary American poet Patrick Lewis, 'Poetry is the tunnel at the end of the light.' Finally, Philip Larkin observed that the difference between novels and poetry is that novels are about other people and poetry is about yourself.

Would Housman approve of those musings? I rather doubt it. But I do like to think that the original 1933 lecturer on the Name and Nature of Poetry *would* approve of the lachrymose anthology that emerged from that literary lunch 60 years later, with one of his most eminent recent admirers, in his adopted home town of Cambridge.

Thanks in large part to Frank Kermode, Ben and I were offered the perfect chance to illustrate, and so vindicate, the central, enduring message of A. E. Housman's landmark 1933 lecture.

Two Versions of Lucretius: Arnold and Housman

Donald Mackenzie

Commenting on *A Shropshire Lad* in *The Fortnightly Review* of 1 August 1898, William Archer – serenely unaware that its author had been appointed to the Chair of Latin at University College London six years previously (with a sheaf of testimonials from leading classical scholars) – observed:

> Mr Housman writes, for the most part, under the guise of 'A Shropshire Lad' – the rustic namefather of his book. But this is evidently a mere mask. Mr Housman is no Shropshire Burns singing at his plough. He is a man of culture. He moves in his rustic garb with no clodhopper's gait, but with the ease of an athlete; and I think he has an Elzevir classic in the pocket of his smock frock. But it is not Theocritus, not the Georgics or the Eclogues; I rather take it to be Lucretius.[1]

This may rank as perceptive in itself, and intriguing in the possibilities it opens: Lucretian pastoral? A lyric Lucretianism? In what follows I should like to explore both by setting Housman's lyric and pastoral assimilation of Lucretian elements against Arnold's assimilation of Lucretian elements into a georgic of the mind in *Empedocles on Etna*.[2]

A. W. Pollard recalled the undergraduate Housman recommending

1. *A. E. Housman: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Philip Gardner (Routledge, 1992), p. 76.

2. In what follows, Arnold's poetry is quoted from *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Kenneth Allott, second edition revised by Miriam Allot (London, 1979; hereafter 'Allott'). Housman's poetry is quoted from *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, edited by Archie Burnett (Oxford, 2004). The standard abbreviations are used for individual Housman volumes. The *De Rerum Natura* (hereafter *DRN*) is quoted from the Loeb edition, revised by Martin Ferguson Smith (London, 1992[2]). Translations of Lucretius are taken from H. A. J. Munro's *De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (Cambridge, 1886[4]).

Empedocles on Etna to him as containing 'all the law and the prophets'.[3] We can take it that this commendation must have borne strongly on the deliverance offered in Empedocles' hymn to Pausanias in I.ii; and, whatever tinge of the sardonically blasphemous it might have carried, it bears witness – as, much more grandly, does Lucretius' celebration of Epicurus and of his own enterprise – to the continuing power of religious language to articulate the deliverance from religion. Housman revered Arnold as a critic,[4] and was steeped in his poetry. He 'knew Arnold's poetry by heart', wrote E. W. Watson to A. S. F. Gow, 'and would challenge us to cite a line the continuation of which he could not give. We never caught him out'.[5] But the engagement with Lucretius in his own poetry is sharply distinct from Arnold's. The latter takes up Lucretius in his development from a poet of the unhappy modern consciousness to the critic of that consciousness and its culture in the Preface to his 1853 *Poems* and in his Oxford inaugural lecture of 1857, 'On the Modern Element in Literature'. The inaugural takes – or, rather, caricatures – Lucretius as an example of modern feeling. *Empedocles on Etna* filters Lucretian teaching through an assortment of Stoic positions, ancient and modern, in line with Arnold's own dictum: 'Epicureanism is Stoical, and there is no theory of life but is.'[6] Housman writes to Robert Bridges on 31 December 1927: 'I am occupied with your rival Lucretius, on whom I am to lecture next term; which I do in the spirit of the true pedant, ignoring philosophy as much as possible and poetry altogether.'[7] The Lucretius pieces in his *Collected Classical Papers* bear this out, and his poetry does not engage at all with the arguments of the *DRN*. But that does not mean he cannot engage with its vision, and I shall claim he does so more richly than Arnold. I shall also claim that a key element in that engagement is a response to something Arnold himself registers and responds to, the Lucretian vision of what he calls in the inaugural 'the elementary reality, the naked framework of the world'.

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3. 'Some Reminiscences', in *Alfred Edward Housman* (Bromsgrove, 1936), p. 30.
4. See the comments on Arnold in *A. E. Housman: Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, edited by Christopher Ricks (London, 1988), p. 269; cf. pp. 275-6.
5. Quoted in Burnett, p.lviii.
6. Quoted in Allott, p.171.
7. *The Letters of A. E. Housman*, edited by Archie Burnett, 2 vols (Oxford, 2007; hereafter '*Letters*'), Vol. II, p. 48.

We can find potential connections between Lucretian vision and pastoral *otium* - or at least between it and the cognate tradition of the *locus amoenus* (a tradition that comes down from Plato's *Phaedrus* and beyond)[8] - without going further than the proem of *DRN* Book II:

> cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli
> propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae
> non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,
> praesertim cum tempestas adridet et anni
> tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas
> (29-33)

> (They spread themselves in groups on the soft grass beside a stream of water under the boughs of a high tree and at no great cost pleasantly refresh their bodies, above all when the weather smiles and the seasons of the year besprinkle the green grass with flowers)

Of the two genres, pastoral and georgic, in which the idyllic mode has classically expressed itself, a Lucretian vision is more at home in georgic, from Virgil onwards, than it is in pastoral. When the pastoral moment just quoted is re-encountered in *DRN* V.1392-6, it comes in a georgic episode within Book V's mythic history of human development. 'More at home' and 'episode' must be stressed. This episode is preceded by the nightmare passage (1297-1349) on the use of beasts in war, and it is followed by a return to the internecine violence of desire that calls for Epicurean therapy (1412-35).[9] The idyllic mode is grounded in the vision or the desire of a radical harmony between man and nature. In pastoral, that vision or desire aligns itself with a soft primitivism; in georgic, with hard. In pastoral the radical harmony is, within the genre's foregrounded fictivity, given. In georgic, within its generic span from handbook exposition through political

8. See E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated by W. R. Trask (London, 1979), pp. 185-200.

9. For a lucid account, drawing on earlier studies, of the spiralling interaction of vulnerability and violence in this mythic history of human development, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 264-73.

celebration to fable and mythic inset, the radical harmony is to be won at the cost of an educative and exacting toil. But any such grounded and radical harmony Lucretius denies:

> nequaquam nobis divinitus esse paratam
> naturam rerum: tanta stat praedita culpa
> (V.198-9; cf. II.180-1)

> (the nature of things has by no means been made for us by divine power: so great are the defects with which it is encumbered).

But this denial is itself an element in the poem's Epicurean gospel of deliverance. The georgic that the *DRN* offers is, in Bacon's phrase, a georgic of the mind;[10] or, to adopt Martha Nussbaum's title, a therapy of human desire in a world not designed for human fulfilment. Or at least, a world not apt for the fulfilment of some primary human desires in their primal forms.

Such a georgic of the mind is what Arnold gives in the declamatory hymn of Empedocles to Pausanias in the second scene of *Empedocles on Etna*. One matrix for that whole poem, published as the title-piece of Arnold's second volume of verse in 1852, is the tragedy on Lucretius which he seems to have kept on the stocks from the mid-1840s to the mid-1860s. And the *DRN* itself is a presence that spans his life as a poet. Allott claims that the schoolboy Latin composition 'Iuvat ire iugis' 'thematically suggests an interestingly early date [1837] for his familiarity with Lucretius';[11] and Arnold's last substantial poem "Obermann Once More*"*, which closes his 1867 volume, uses the same key passage from the end of *DRN* III which had figured in the Oxford inaugural ten years earlier. On the evidence of his notebooks Arnold was reading, or re-reading, Lucretius from 1845 on. In the working poetic notebook now known as the Yale MS, "the list of work for 1849 which reminds Arnold to finish 'Empedocles' is headed 'Chew Lucretius.'"[12] In a letter of 29 December 1855 to his friend Wyndham

10. *Advancement of Learning*, The Second Book, XX.3; *The Advancement of Learning and New Atlantis*, edited by Arthur Johnson (Oxford, 1974), p. 147.
11. Allott, p. 714.
12. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Mathew Arnold: A Commentary*

Slade he writes: 'I am full of a tragedy of the time of the end of the Roman Republic—one of the most colossal times of the world, I think.'[13] On 17 March 1866 he wrote, with some chagrin, to his mother:

> I am rather troubled to find that Tennyson is at work on a subject, the story of the Latin poet Lucretius, which I have been occupied with for some 20 years; I was going to make a tragedy out of it; and the worst of it is that every one except the few friends who have known that I had it in hand will think I borrowed the subject from him. So far from this, I suspect the subject was put into his head by Palgrave, who knew I was busy with it. I shall probably go on, however, but it is annoying; the more so as I cannot possibly go on at present, so as to be ready this year, but must wait till next.[14]

In practice, much of this Lucretius material seems to have been absorbed by *Empedocles on Etna*. To that central Arnold text the *DRN* supplies material for the hymn to Pausanias in II.2, which is broadly Lucretian in its endeavour to educate Pausanias – the average spiritual man of an age in which traditional beliefs are crumbling, avid and credulous of miracles, looking to a guru - out of superstition.

Tinker and Lowry in their *Commentary* claim that

> most of the important themes of Empedocles' instruction to Pausanias are stressed at great length in *De Rerum Natura*: the vanity of luxuries and the contrast with the simple joys of outdoor life; the reiteration that the gods have not

(Oxford, 1940), p. 292.

13. *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (Charlottesville, 1996-2001; hereafter '*Letters*'), I, 327.

14. *Letters*, III, 20. The extant fragments of the piece, with a detailed chronology of Arnold's engagement with it, are published in Allott, pp. 647-51. The reconstruction given by Dwight Culler in *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven, 1966), pp. 217-21, suggests it would have been the kind of pastiche Shakespeare text that Arnold's own 1853 Preface castigates.

> arranged the world for man's benefit; the working of nature without respect even to the gods; the conviction that lust and inordinate desire—not the gods—tear man to pieces; the necessity for enjoying the simple pleasures of *this* life; the power of right reason to overcome our ills; and the conception of 'mind as the master part of us.' The image of the soul as a mirror suspended in the wind could well have been inspired by several passages in Lucretius, notably that in the fourth book (ll. 98-326) which is a long and detailed discussion of the laws of images and their reflection.[15]

The clearest instance of a Lucretian educating into the right response – self-adjusting, self-transcending – towards a nature *nequaquam nobis divinitus paratam* comes in lines 247-56:

> Like us, the lightning-fires
> Love to have scope and play;
> The stream, like us, desires
> An unimpeded way;
> Like us, the Libyan wind delights to roam at large.
>
> Streams will not curb their pride
> The just man not to entomb,
> Nor lightnings go aside
> To give his virtues room;
> Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good man's barge.

Allott glosses this from *DRN* II.1103-4:

> saeviat exercens telum quod saepe nocentes
> praeterit exanimatque indignos inque merentes
>
> (to spend his rage in practising his bolt which often passes

15. Tinker and Lowry, pp. 295-6. The *DRN* references given by Tinker and Lowry are, respectively: II.20ff.; II.167ff. and V.155ff.; II.1090ff; III.978ff. and 1053ff.; III.931ff; III.319ff; III.396ff.

the guilty by and strikes dead the innocent and unoffending).

In another passage, what for Lucretius (*DRN* III.273-5) is a statement in philosophical psychology:

> nam penitus prorsum latet haec natura subestque,
> nec magis hac infra quicquam est in corpore nostro,
> atque anima est animae proporro totius ipsae
>
> (For this nature lurks secreted in its inmost depths, and nothing in our body is farther beneath all ken than it, and more than this it is the very soul of the whole soul)

is relocated by Arnold into a jejunely phrased Stoic version of the burden of self-consciousness and the quest for the true, buried self which runs through his early poetry and the letters to Clough:

> And we feel, day and night,
> The burden of ourselves -
> Well, then, the wiser wight
> In his own bosom delves,
> And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he can.
>
> (I.ii.126-31)

This bears on Arnold's dictum, already quoted, that 'Epicureanism is Stoical, and there is no theory of life but is.' Stoicism and Epicureanism divide fundamentally on the Stoic belief in the immanent divine rationality of the cosmos. But they concur in the need for the human soul to be educated into *ataraxia*. The Lucretian elements in the hymn are correspondingly refracted through Stoic formulations, ancient and modern: for this passage itself Allott cites Marcus Aurelius and Carlyle in *Past and Present*, elsewhere in the hymn he references Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, Epictetus, Spinoza, and Senancour's *Obermann*. A passage from Sainte-Beuve's 1832 essay on the last of these which Allott also cites suggests how Lucretius' exemplary Epicurean spectator, detached and elevated, might mutate into a Stoic version of the isolated modern consciousness as Arnold presents it in this

poem:

> à cette fermeté voluptueuse que préconise l'individu en harmonie avec le monde, on croirait par moments entendre un disciple d'Épictète et de Marc-Aurèle; mais néanmoins Épicure, l'Épicure de Lucrèce et de Gassendi … est le grand précédent qui règne. Dans son pèlerinage à la Dent du Midi, assis sur le plateau de granit, au-dessus de la région des sapins, au niveau des neiges éternelles … Oberman me figure exactement ce sage de Lucrèce qui habite
>
> *Edita doctrina sapientum templa serena*;
>
> temple, en effet, tout serein et glacé … S'il s'élançait, s'il disparaissait alors, ce serait presque en Dieu, comme Empédocle à l'Etna.[16]

Any such serenity is what Arnold denies for Lucretius as an example of modern feeling in the Oxford inaugural:

> The predominance of thought, of reflection, in modern epochs is not without its penalties; in the unsound, in the over-tasked, in the over-sensitive … it has produced a state of feeling unknown to less enlightened but perhaps healthier epochs—the feeling of depression, the feeling of *ennui*. Depression and *ennui*; these are the characteristics stamped on how many of the representative works of modern times! they are also the characteristics stamped on the poem of Lucretius … one of the most powerful, the most solemn passages in the literature of the whole world, is the well-known conclusion of the third book. With masterly touches he exhibits the lassitude, the incurable tedium which pursue men in their amusements; with indignant irony he upbraids them for the cowardice with which they cling to a life which for most is miserable; to a life which contains, for the most fortunate, nothing but the old dull

16. Sainte-Beuve, 'Sénancour', in *Portraits Contemporains* (Paris, 1891), Vol. 1, pp. 164-5.

round of the same unsatisfying objects for ever presented.[17]

Arnold in this lecture is deploying and extending the Vico-inspired concept of the modern advanced by his father.[18] Lucretius, as an exemplary figure of modern feeling, is identified with what he satirizes, and made over – to a high, to an almost laughable degree – into the image of the unhappy modern consciousness as Arnold experiences and critiques it. It is, as he virtually grants, a cultural-historical version of the intermittently maddened Lucretius of the Jerome legend. And such a Lucretius comes under the judgement of that chilling Arnoldian criterion of the 'adequate':

> Yes, Lucretius is modern; but is he adequate? And how can a man adequately interpret the activity of his age when he is not in sympathy with it? Think of the varied, the abundant, the wide spectacle of the Roman life of his day; think of its fullness of occupation, its energy of effort. From these Lucretius withdraws himself … but there is no peace, no cheerfulness for him either in the world from which he comes, or in the solitude to which he goes. With stern effort, with gloomy despair, he seems to rivet his eyes on the elementary reality, the naked framework of the world, because the world in its fullness and movement is too exciting a spectacle for his discomposed brain. He seems to feel the spectacle of it at once terrifying and alluring; and to deliver himself from it he has to keep perpetually

17. 'On the Modern Element in Literature', in *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Vol. 1: *On the Classical Tradition*, edited by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 32; compare the use of the same *DRN* passage in 'Obermann Once More', 82-104.

18. See Appendix I to Vol. 1 of Thomas Arnold's edition of Thucydides, third edition (Oxford: 1847), e.g.: 'there is in fact an ancient and a modern period in the history of every people: the ancient differing, and the modern in many essential points agreeing with that in which we now live' (p. 522). Arnold salutes the *Scienza Nuova* as 'a work ... in its substance so profound and so striking, that the little celebrity which it has obtained out of Italy is one of the most remarkable facts in literary history' (p. 504).

repeating his formula of disenchantment and annihilation.[19]

This recalls not only the opening of the lecture ('that impatient irritation of mind which we feel in presence of an immense, moving, confused spectacle which, while it perpetually excites our curiosity, perpetually baffles our comprehension')[20] but the censure of Keats and Browning in an early letter to Clough: 'They will not be patient—neither understand that they must begin with an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness.'[21]

The requirement that a poet should adequately interpret his age points forward to the flagship piece 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' in *Essays in Criticism*, *First Series* of 1865. Lucretius as victim of ennui points forward to another victim of the modern consciousness in that carefully patterned collection, Eugénie de Guérin, in whom Arnold finds

> a struggle, an impatience, an inquietude, an ennui, which endures to the end, and which leaves one, when one finally closes her journal, with an impression of profound melancholy …
>
> Mdlle. de Guérin's admirers have compared her to Pascal, and in some respects the comparison is just. But she cannot exactly be classed with Pascal, any more than with Saint François de Sales. Pascal is a man, and the inexhaustible power and activity of his mind leave him no leisure for ennui … Eugénie de Guérin is a woman, and longs for a state of firm happiness, for an affection in which she may repose ... denied this, she cannot rest satisfied with the triumphs of self-abasement, with the sombre joy of trampling the pride of life and of reason underfoot, of reducing all human hope and joy to insignificance; she repeats the magnificent words of Bossuet, words which both Catholicism and Protestantism have uttered with

19. *On the Classical Tradition*, pp. 33-4.
20. *On the Classical Tradition*, p. 20.
21. Arnold, *Letters*, I, 128.

> indefatigable iteration: 'On trouve au fond de tout le vide et le néant – *at the bottom of everything one finds emptiness and nothingness*,' but she feels, as every one but the true mystic must ever feel, their incurable sterility.[22]

If Eugénie de Guérin reaches out to George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea, she also stands as a milestone on the road that leads from Arnold through Pater to Decadence. On the other side, elements in the hymn to Pausanias point towards those features – a denial of final causes, a cheerful, self-sufficient Stoicism – which Arnold in the essay on Spinoza salutes as tonic – if incomplete – in the latter's philosophy.[23] And finally, the 'elementary reality, the naked framework of the world' reaches out to the disenchanted universe of *Dover Beach*.[24]

After this survey, Arnold, one might say, can make use of Lucretius more than he can creatively assimilate him in his own work. (The hymn for Pausanias is, in its arid declamation, the major failure of *Empedocles on Etna* as a poem.) The use of Lucretius both as an example of the unhappy modern consciousness and as, at one level, providing a therapy for it, goes with Arnold's historical position, on the far side of the mid-Victorian enlisting of the *DRN* in controversies over a materialistic naturalism.[25] Housman's response to Lucretius takes such a naturalism for granted, and it undergirds, as we shall see, his most potent use of the *DRN*, in *ASL* XXXII and related poems. The Lucretian emphasis on the universe *nequaquam nobis divinitus paratam* darkens into an insistence in Housman that 'high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation' (*ASL* XLVIII, 'Be still, my soul, be still, the arms you bear are brittle'). Such an insistence aligns him,

22. Arnold, *Complete Prose*, Vol. 3: *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, edited by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 88-9.
23. *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, pp. 175-7.
24. See Mary W Schneider, 'The Lucretian Background of "Dover Beach"', *Victorian Poetry*, 19 (1981), 190-5.
25. For those controversies see e.g. Frank M. Turner, 'Lucretius among the Victorians', *Victorian Studies*, 16 (1972-3), 329-48, and Martin Priestman, 'Lucretius in Romantic and Victorian Britain', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, edited by Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge, 2007), pp.289-305.

over against Arnold, with Hardy and other post-Christian pessimists of the later nineteenth century:

> The toil of all that be
> Helps not the primal fault;
> It rains into sea
> And still the sea is salt.
> (*MP* VII, 'Stars, I have seen them fall')

Housman's responses to this vary. In a letter to Gilbert Murray he shifts the Johnsonian bleakness of 'Human life is every where a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed'[26] down a gear into the mordant:'It looks to me as if the state of mankind always had been and always would be a state of just tolerable discomfort.'[27] Equally a plangent alienation can combine with a level-voiced blasphemy, as in the lines:

> And how am I to face the odds
> Of man's bedevilment and God's?
> I, a stranger and afraid
> In a world I never made

on which *LP* XII ('The laws of God, the laws of man') pivots from its opening protest to its final bleak submission.

Concordantly, Housman's echoes of Lucretius come principally from two areas of the *DRN*: the treatment of death, not being, and the mortality of the material soul in Book III, and the cataclysmic collapse of the cosmos as evoked at the end of Book II (1144-74) and argued for in Book V (91-379). The Lucretius of *lucida tela diei*, the phrase which opens the encomium of Bentley in his Preface to Manilius Book 1 (where it is followed, incidentally, by a line on Goethe from Arnold's 'Memorial Verses' '*thou ailest here, and here'*)[28] figures only in 'Revolution' (*LP* XXXVI):

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26. *Rasselas*, Ch. XI.
27. Housman, *Letters*, Vol I, pp. 120-1.
28. Ricks, (n.4) p. 373.

West and away the wheels of darkness roll,
Day's beamy banner up the east is borne,
Spectres and fears, the nightmare and her foal,
Drown in the golden deluge of the morn.

Behind this lies Munro's translation of *DRN* V.700, 'dum veniat radiatum insigne diei', as 'ere the beamy badge of day arrive', which Housman has pointed and made exultant. But the presence of that Lucretius is still only a glancing one, as the poem's cosmic (and parabolic) pageant wheels towards a monitory darkness. Still less is there any presence in Housman of the satiric and exhortatory Lucretius. The nineteenth-century canalizing of the Romantic lyric would, of necessity, have excluded explicit satire; and the satiric energies and aggressions so strong in Housman are channelled, variously, into his prose and into his nonsense verse; but Lucretius can feed into his varied practice of a lyric poetry of subversion.

We see this in one of the pieces that draws on Lucretius for what one might call a dismissive apocalypse. '*Parta Quies*' (*MP* XLVIII) uncouples its title phrase from the original Virgilian context (*Aeneid* III.493-7) of domesticity, calling, and quest. Its second stanza -

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

- subversively marries biblical apocalypse at its most absolute ('And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them')[29] with a Lucretian apocalypse (*DRN* III.840-2) whose context is the oblivion of death:

scilicet haud nobis quicquam, qui non erimus tum,
accidere omnino poterit sensumque movere,

29. Revelation 20: 11.

non si terra mari miscebitur et mare caelo

(to us, you may be sure, who then shall be no more, nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth shall be mingled with sea and sea with heaven).

Housman's closing lines in this poem may remember (and concentrate) the soothing nihilism that eloquently closes up the Prologue to *Tristram of Lyonesse*, which Housman felt was Swinburne's 'only considerable narrative poem':[30]

They have the night, who had like us the day;
We, whom day binds, shall have the night as they.
We, from the fetters of the light unbound,
Healed of our wound of living, shall sleep sound.

As a response to death conceived as annihilation, those lines, and the traditional image they rhetorically invoke, are no less a consolatory fiction than is, on this view of death, belief in an afterlife. The image is not less of a fiction in Housman; but its use to subordinate the Christian vision to the Lucretian sharpens provocatively the consolation.

The *DRN* in this area makes available to Housman an apocalyptic register which, in opposition to Christian apocalypse, is purely naturalistic, subdued into the unending change of the poem's atomic cosmology.[31] At the same time it is an apocalyptic register which, in opposition to that aeonian dying of the cosmos which haunts some later nineteeth-century imaginations (Conrad, Wells), is violently dramatic. Housman can marry it with the biblical, as in '*Parta Quies*', or with the mythological, as in 'Epitaph on Army of Mercenaries' (*LP* XXXVII), which jostles the *summa rerum* against the mundane with a calculated off-handedness:

30. Ricks, p. 282.

31. Tom B. Haber, *A. E. Housman* (Boston, 1967), p. 164, remarks this within a rather broad-brush discussion of Housman's affinity with Lucretius, pp. 155-65. The same affinity is the subject of Haber's 'Housman and Lucretius', *Classical Journal*, 58 (1963), 173-82.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
    They stood, and earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended,
    And saved the sum of things for pay.

The opening of *MP* XLIII relocates cataclysm in subjective and mundane experience:

I wake from dreams and turning
    My vision on the height
I scan the beacons burning
    About the fields of night.

Each in its steadfast station
    Inflaming heaven they flare;
They sign with conflagration
    The empty moors of air.

The signal-fires of warning
    They blaze, but none regard;
And on through night to morning
    The world runs ruinward.

Burnett, drawing on Haber's 1959 centennial edition, gives a Lucretian analogue (*DRN* IV.395-6) for 'station'. That line plays against the menace latent in 'Inflaming heaven' (sharpened from the draft versions 'Enhancing heaven' and 'Inflaming night'). 'Inflaming heaven', in turn, reaches back to 'beacons burning' and forward to 'They sign with conflagration', as 'the fields of night' yield to 'The empty moors of air'. And then into this elaboration cut the last two lines which concentrate the clangorous evocations of *DRN* II.1144-5:

sic igitur magni quoque circum moenia mundi
expugnata dabunt labem putrisque ruinas

(In this way then the walls too of the great world around

shall be stormed and fall to decay and crumbling ruin)

and V.95-6:

una dies dabit exitio, multosque per annos
sustentata ruet moles et machina mundi

(a single day shall give over to destruction; and the mass and fabric of the world upheld for many years shall tumble to ruin)

into 'The world runs ruinwards' – a cataclysm now fully telescoped into the mundane world of night and day and waking from which the poem began.

Such verbal concentration is one direction in which Housman can take Lucretian material. He can, equally, detach a phrase, image, or concept and expand it independently of its original setting. In 'The Merry Guide' (*ASL* XLII), *per loca pastorum deserta atque otia dia* of *DRN* V.1387 ('though the unfrequented haunts of shepherds and abodes of unearthly calm') radiates out magically:

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

The 'glittering pastures' may pick up the radiance implicit in *dia*; the *loca deserta pastorum* are made simultaneously more abstract and more active in 'And solitude of shepherds'; and the open-ended sweep of the Lucretian line, allowed for in the stanza's beginning, is curved back upon itself at the end, only to be opened up again in the stanzas that follow. And one finds oneself asking whether Munro's translating of *otia dia* as 'abodes of unearthly calm' may not have fed into the ambivalence of the psychopomp as this accumulates in the unfolding of Housman's poem.

ASL XLVIII, though using very different material, again sets it reverberating free of the Lucretian context:

Be still, my soul, be still; the arms you bear are brittle,

Earth and high heaven are fixt of old and founded strong.
Think rather,—call to thought, if now you grieve a little,
The days when we had rest, O soul, for they were long.

Men loved unkindness then, but lightless in the quarry
I slept and saw not; tears fell down, I did not mourn;
Sweat ran and blood sprang out and I was never sorry:
Then it was well with me, in days ere I was born.

Burnett cites *DRN* III.972-3:

> respice item quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas
> temporis aeterni fuerit, quam nascimur ante
>
> (Think too how the bygone antiquity of everlasting time before our birth was nothing to us)

and *DRN* V.174-80:

> quidve mali fuerat nobis non esse creatis? …
> natus enim debet quicumque est velle manere
> in vita, donec retinebit blanda voluptas.
> qui numquam vero vitae gustavit amorem
> nec fuit in numero, quid obest non esse creatum?
>
> (or what evil had it been for us never to have been born? whoever has been born must want to continue in life, so long as fond pleasure shall keep him; but for him who has never tasted the love, never been on the lists, of life, what harm not to have been born?)

In the Housman the argumentative thrust of the *DRN* passages (why should we fear our coming non-existence when we consider our non-existence in the past?) has been reversed: the gaze is wholly fixed on present misery and the miseries of others in the past. Lucretius' cross-weaving acknowledgment of a 'fond pleasure' in life, and of the love of life once tasted, have disappeared.

His rhetoric of argument has been displaced into a declamatory rhetoric of lament that risks a very nineteenth-century kind of cosmological self-pity, wholly alien to Lucretius.

Such declamatory lyric stands at one end of Housman's stylistic spectrum. At the other is a singing finality, whether voiced through ballad pastiche ('Is my team ploughing?') or through a slant precision akin to Emily Dickinson ('Into my heart an air that kills', 'When the bells justle in the tower').[32] Such a finality characterizes, in varying degrees, a group of lyrics – all of them precisely indebted to Lucretius – which require discussion in a final section here. They are 'From far, from eve and morning' (*ASL* XXXII), 'The Immortal Part' (*ASL* XLIII), and the opening piece of *Last Poems* ('The West').

All of these draw on Lucretian imaging of the soul's mortality; Burnett gives a cluster of Lucretian sources and analogues, including *DRN* III.434-7:

> quoniam quassatis undique vasis
> diffluere umorem et laticem discedere cernis,
> et nebula ac fumus quoniam discedit in auras,
> crede animam quoque diffundi
>
> (since you see on the vessels being shattered the water flow away on all sides, and since mist and smoke pass away into air, believe that the soul too is shed abroad)

Burnett suggests also *DRN* III.539 *dilaniata foras dispargitur, interit ergo* ('it is torn in pieces, and scattered abroad, and therefore dies') and III.544 *pereat dispersa per auras* ('perish dispersed in air'). Housman's 'The Immortal Part' skews – it does not simply reverse – the traditional Christian conceptualizing of body and soul:

> The immortal bones obey control
> Of dying flesh and dying soul.

32. Christopher Ricks, in his contribution to the *Twentieth Century Views* volume on Housman (ed. Ricks, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), makes the connection with Emily Dickinson apropos of 'When the bells justle' (p. 119).

The satirical energy of this recruits its own version of a traditional *memento mori*:

> Wanderers eastward, wanderers west,
> Know you why you cannot rest?
> 'Tis that every mother's son
> Travails with a skeleton.

But those energies of the grotesque are increasingly infused with a glamour of the incantatory in which flickers the threnody from *Cymbeline* ('Fear the heat o' the sun no more') until the final images, adapted from Lucretius, of the soul as material, disperse, in their elemental directness, those elaborations in order to make way for a starker glamour:

> Before this fire of sense decay,
> This smoke of thought blow clean away,
> And leave with ancient night alone
> The steadfast and enduring bone.

Here the basic Lucretian images have been adapted. In the final stanza of *LP* I they are crystallized out in monosyllabic metaphor:

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

The poem lets the finality of 'spilt on air' play against the local plangency of 'Long we shall be strangers there' as well as against the long-range plangencies of its romantic west. But these lines also touch off the impossibility of imagining our own annihilation, and the incisive Lucretian image of annihilation, detached from argument and proof to be set vibrating in a lyric context, is crucial to that effect. The same impossibility is wonderfully, buoyantly handled in *ASL* XXXII:

From far, from eve and morning
And yon twelve-winded sky,
The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither: here am I.

Now—for a breath I tary
Nor yet disperse apart—
Take my hand quick and tell me,
What have you in your heart.

Speak now, and I will answer;
How shall I help you, say;
Ere to the wind's twelve quarters
I take my endless way.

We can approach the achievement of this – one of Housman's triumphs – by way of *ASL* XXIV, 'Say, lad, have you things to do?', which reads, in this context, as if it were a preliminary draft for XXXII:

Quick, then, while your day's at prime.
Quick, and if 'tis work for two,
Here am I, man: now's your time.

Send me now, and I shall go;
Call me, I shall hear you call;
Use me ere they lay me low
Where a man's no use at all;

Ere the wholesome flesh decay,
And the willing nerve be numb,
And the lips lack breath to say,
"No, my lad, I cannot come."

This is within whispering distance of the Kingsmill parody ('What, still alive at twenty-two, / A clean upstanding chap like you?'); it lacks the exhilarating alienation of the human that holds taut the human urgency in

the central stanza of XXXII. That alienation is carried by the Lucretian image of the mortal soul as smoke, as dispersed at death into the air and onto the winds. 'Disperse' in Housman's line 6 can be pinned to both. How it elaborates and intensifies the Lucretius is brought out in John Bayley's comment:

> the idea of an urgency is heightened into mysteriousness, contradicted by the syntax of the interpolation—'for a breath I tarry / Nor yet disperse apart'— which suggests that the speaker has paused to get his breath back before asking the question on which the momentary meaning of life seems to hang. In the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius the spirit 'pereat dispersa per auras'—'perishes dispersed through the air'. With a hint in it of the soldierly 'Dismiss!', the English verb 'disperse' suggests an unavoidable military context, a request for orders, which in this poem never arrive.[33]

That last comment may be fanciful, but the rest holds. The whole second stanza keeps itself in poise against the opening stanza's displacing of the human in 'The stuff of life to knit me / Blew hither.' 'Knit' is not, I think, a Lucretian image, as weaving would certainly be. Housman uses it of the dead soldiers in *ASL* I: 'To skies that knit their heartstrings right', where Burnett correctly proposes the phrasing is biblical.[34] In Housman's Cambridge inaugural tribute to Munro, the same connotations of the close and the enduring are in focus:

> It will be a long time before England or the world beholds again the same powers in the same harmony, so much sterling stuff knit together so well, such a union of solidity and accuracy, keenness and sobriety, manly taste,

33. John Bayley, *Housman's Poems* (Oxford, 1992), p. 34

34. To his examples from 1 Chronicles 12: 17 and the Prayer Book Psalm 86: 11 we could add I Samuel 18: 1, where Jonathan's soul was 'knit' to David; in *ASL* I the biblical phrasing has been displaced and paganized.

exhilarating humour, and engaging pugnacity.[35]

But in *ASL* XXXII, 'knit' is exhilaratingly impersonal as applied to human existence and agency in a Lucretian universe of matter endlessly, unrestingly in process. When that process resumes in the third stanza, the terms of the first are reversed. Instead of the gathering of multiplicity under a single concept in the 'twelve-winded sky' we have the dispersal to 'the wind's twelve quarters', but the speaker is now the agent – 'I take my endless way' – in an utterance that is both a feigning of continuing human identity and a statement of the cosmic process in which human agency is forever lost. Displacement returns in this stanza, and is yielded to, but now with a potent accent of bare exultation: 'to the wind's twelve-quarters / I take my endless way'. This images annihilation in a union of acceptance and fiction more apt than the imaging of death as sleep, in part because of its tacit equation of soul-life and air.

Such purifying concentrations of experience as this poem gives are one of the recognized powers of lyric at its most intense. But kindred powers can be exercised by pastoral, which as A. D. Nuttall observes_

> is the most 'tough-minded' of genres, far tougher than tragedy. It achieves its strength by the paradoxical strategy of conceding, at the outset, the falsehood of its myth. The palpably artificial style of pastoral is a necessary element in the genre. Tragedy really pretends that death ennobles and suffering refines. Pastoral, by proclaiming itself a dream, rises above pretence. It says to us: learn the beauty, and hence the pathos, of this delusion ... When pastoral drops its ostentatious artifice we find a poetry in which the highest lyric power is united with a kind of factual bleakness.[36]

The factual bleakness grounding Housman's pastoral in the poems considered above is that of Lucretian materialism. In studying Arnold's and

35. *Housman Collected* (n. 4), p. 300.

36. A. D. Nuttall, 'Two Unassimilable Men', in *The Stoic in Love* (London, 1989), p. 20.

Housman's responses to the *DRN* one is principally conscious of difference. Arnold plots his in terms of cultural history and the adequacy, or otherwise, of Lucretius as a *magister vitae*.[37] Housman mines particular images and stances. And those differences can be aligned with larger shifts in response to Lucretius, at least among Anglophone poets, as we move from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. But as I have already proposed, both Arnold and Housman respond, if in different ways and with very different resources, to that radical focus on 'the elementary reality, the naked framework of the world' which is one source of the *DRN*'s continuing power.[38]

37. The role of poetry as a *magister vitae* is a central focus for Arnold from a letter to Clough of 28 October 1852 (*Letters*, I, 245-6) through to 'The Study of Poetry', which heads the posthumously published *Essays in Criticism*, *Second Series*.

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Orwell, Andrew Gow and A. E. Housman

Jeffrey Meyers

The indolent, cocky and rather bolshy Eric Blair (who later became George Orwell) inevitably clashed with the more overbearing and uncongenial masters during his years at Eton, 1917-21. The most significant figure in Eric's academic life was his tutor Andrew Gow, who supervised his studies and taught him classics. Gow (1886-1978), the son of the headmaster at Westminster School, epitomized the prim classics tutor. Educated at Rugby and at Trinity College, Cambridge, he taught at Eton from 1914 to 1925 and then became a Fellow at Trinity. He edited many scholarly volumes on Greek literature and in 1936 published a memoir of his friend A. E. Housman. Eric had memorized many poems in *A Shropshire Lad* and probably discussed them with Gow.

Eric found "Granny" Gow – or "Wog" (his name derisively spelt backwards) –fussy and old-maidish. Unresponsive to Gow's precise and probing teaching, he was bored by the long hours spent on Latin and Greek translation and composition. In a crude but heartfelt poetic squib, his pupil satirized Gow's adoration of Homer as sentimental and his aesthete's appreciation of Italian pictures as "escapist posing." He also took a crack at another master, the bald, bespectacled John Crace, who tended to be "overfond" of pretty boys:

> Then up waddled Wog and he squeaked in Greek:
> "I've grown another hair on my cheek."
> Crace replied in Latin with his toadlike smile:
> "And I hope you've grown a lovely new pile.
> With a loud deep fart from the bottom of my heart!
> How d'you like Venetian art?"[1]

Gow may also have inspired Orwell's ambivalent portrait in *Coming Up for Air* (1939) of the scholarly schoolmaster Porteous. He's one of those

1. George Orwell, *Works*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 10.52.

"cultivated Oxford blokes [who] stroll up and down studies full of books, quoting Latin tags and smoking good tobacco out of jars with coats of arms on them" – and are completely out of touch with the real world.[2]

Gow, who disliked Eric and resented his laziness, could never get him to use his brains and fulfill his promise. He remembered Eric as "always a bit of a slacker and a dodger", as a cheeky boy who "made himself as big a nuisance as he could" and "was very unattractive".[3] But Steven Runciman (Orwell's classmate and, later on, Gow's colleague at Trinity) thought "Granny" Gow aloof and arrogant. Gow was, he felt, a good but not remarkable scholar, a competent but not stimulating teacher, who prodded Eric out of his comfortable indolence and made him work hard. "He disliked little boys," Runciman said. "He didn't understand them at all. I disliked Gow very much at that time. ... Eric was everything Gow couldn't understand. My sympathy is entirely for Eric"[4] – who was desperate to break out of school and start doing something significant.

In the years between 1927 and 1933, shortly after Eric left Eton, "57% of the students went on to Oxford and Cambridge, 20% to the army, 16% straight into business."[5] Of the fourteen boys in his election who left Eton in 1921, eleven went on to Oxford and Cambridge, two entered family businesses. Eric joined the Burma Police. What made him veer so wildly off the traditional track? I asked Andrew Gow this question, and on January 1, 1969 he replied:

> Some time before G. O. left Eton his father came to see me to talk about his future. He said that O. could not go to a University unless he got a scholarship, and I said, as was obviously true, that there was not the faintest hope of his getting one and that it would be a waste of time to try. I do not remember whether I added, though I certainly thought,

2. Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, *Works*, 7.167.
3. Andrew Gow, in Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 42.
4. Steven Runciman, "Eton Days with Eric Blair," in Yasuharu Okuyama, *George Orwell* (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 1983), p. 12.
5. Tim Card, *Eton Renewed: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: John Murray, 1994), p. 161.

> that he had shown so little taste or aptitude for academic subjects that I doubted whether in any case a University would be worth while for him...
>
> Mr. Blair spoke of the Burmese Police and said that he had made, or would make, enquiries into the service... It is highly unlikely that Mr. Blair consulted anybody else at Eton on this subject.[6]

In 1975 I published this apparently authoritative letter, which has often been quoted. In retrospect, considering Gow's character and relations with Eric, his letter now seems dubious and self-serving. Eric *could* have gone to university without a scholarship; and it was not "obviously true", except to Gow, that there was no hope of getting one. Eric, who eventually learned seven languages, was good at exams. His taste and aptitude for academic subjects had got him into Eton College, far more difficult than entry to Oxbridge, and would later get him into the Burmese Police. In any case, the value of a university education could not be measured by academic studies alone.

Eric's contemporaries had a very different view of his academic prospects. Cyril Connolly asserted that it was very easy for Eton scholars to gain admission to Cambridge: "Most Collegers went on to King's, where there were safe scholarships for them and a reprieve for several more years from expulsion from the womb."[7] His statement was confirmed by Michael Meredith, a master and librarian at Eton, who told me, "Eric could have walked into Oxbridge from Eton. All the boys got in."[8] Though it would not have been a waste of time for *Eric* to try for a scholarship, Gow did not want to waste his *own* time on a pupil he considered lazy and unambitious. Runciman thought Gow preferred solid scholars, whom he could teach and nourish. The universities, by contrast, looked for promising, unusual characters, and made enlightened choices. Eric, with all his eccentricities, would have been their man.

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6. Letter from A.S.F. Gow to Jeffrey Meyers, January 1, 1969, in Meyers, *Orwell*, p. 43.
7. Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (1938; New York: Anchor, 1960), p. 238.
8. Jeffrey Meyers, Interview with Michael Meredith, Eton College, December 2, 1998.

After he returned from the East, Blair rather surprisingly sought advice about his literary career from the man who'd been instrumental in propelling him into the police force. As he told a classmate, "I went & stayed at Cambridge with Gow when I came back from Burma at the end of '27, but though he was very kind it seemed to me I had moved out of his orbit & he out of mine."[9] As an adult with five years of tough experience in the world, he felt more remote than ever from Gow and his cloistered college. He sat Blair next to Housman at High Table in Trinity, but Housman was always rather withdrawn and there's no record of questioning Blair about his extraordinary colonial experiences: shooting an elephant and witnessing a hanging. Though he'd received precious little understanding from his old teacher, Blair still wanted to please him. As late as April 1946, after *Animal Farm* had become his first great literary success, Orwell modestly wrote Gow, "I'd be happy to send you a copy. It is very short and might amuse you."[10]

Gow's *Letters from Cambridge, 1939-1944* (1945), addressed to his former students, gives only a selected picture of his feelings and beliefs. But in 2012 the controversial art critic and television personality Brian Sewell, the pupil and defender of Anthony Blunt, made a sensational but unsubstantiated allegation. In *Outsider II: Always Almost, Never Quite: An Autobiography*, he claimed that Gow might have been the Cambridge spymaster and "Fifth Man," the mentor and "controller" of Blunt. In his *Journals* (1995) the novelist Anthony Powell, Orwell's contemporary and friend at Eton, noted and dismissed the possibility:

> I think Gow saw something of Orwell after he left school, possibly even helped him financially when things were difficult. That would have been during Orwell's most revolutionary period. It would have been almost inconceivable afterwards when George and I were seeing quite a lot of each other and Orwell was very anti-Communist, that he would not have said at one moment or another something like: 'You'd never guess it, but Granny

9. Orwell, letter of June 9, 1936, *Works*, 10.485.
10. Orwell, letter of April 13, 1946, *Works*, 18.243.

> Gow had Marxist leanings.' I could well imagine George saying that, had there been the least reason to suppose Gow was at all oriented to the Left... But one cannot imagine anything less probable than that this Jamesian personality should have been a Russian agent.

However, if Gow had (most improbably) been a Communist and spy, Orwell – the Left-wing anti-Communist – would have hated his politics and his treason.[11]

Orwell remained attached to Housman as well as to Gow. In his essay "Inside the Whale" (1940) he defined his own place in contemporary literature by means of a sympathetic contrast to Henry Miller and to the main literary traditions of the 1920s and 1930s. In the second part Orwell explained Miller's escape from the prevailing literary engagement by discussing the "message" of major English writers since the Great War. Orwell also devoted three perceptive but buried and little known pages to Housman. He recalled that in "the years during and immediately after the war, the writer who had the deepest hold upon the thinking young was almost certainly Housman... In 1920, when I was about seventeen, I probably knew the whole of *A Shropshire Lad* by heart... These are the poems that I and my contemporaries used to recite to ourselves, over and over, in a kind of ecstasy" and quoted two quatrains from "With rue my heart is laden". He then asked, "What was there in them that appealed so deeply to a single generation, the generation born about 1900?"

Orwell observed that "Housman is a 'country' poet. His poems are full of the charm of buried villages, the nostalgia of place-names... thatched roofs and the jingle of smithies, the wild jonquils in the pastures, the 'blue, remembered hills'... Most of the poems have a quasi-human subject, a kind of idealised rustic... All his themes are adolescent – murder, suicide, unhappy love, early death. They deal with the simple, intelligible disasters that give you the feeling of being up against the 'bedrock facts' of life." He also noted that "the unvarying sexual pessimism (the girl always dies or marries somebody else) seemed like wisdom to boys who were herded together in public schools and were half-inclined to think of women as something

11. Anthony Powell, *Journals, 1982-1986* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 284.

unattainable." Housman's blasphemous, cynical strain also appealed to the youthful Orwell: "He stood for a kind of bitter, defiant paganism, a conviction that life is short and the gods are against you, which exactly fitted the prevailing mood of the young; and all in charming fragile verse that was composed almost entirely of words of one syllable." He concluded that "the spirit behind Housman's poems is not tragic, merely querulous; it is hedonism disappointed."[12] But Orwell did not mention the homosexual subtext that would also have appealed to many public-school boys.

Though Orwell outgrew Housman after the Great War – when his work became more popular than ever – the poet had a notable influence on his work. Housman's cynical strain and bitter hedonism, his sexual revolt and personal grievance against God, reappear in the quatrains of the imitative and parodic poem that Gordon Comstock tries to compose throughout *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, published in 1936, the year of Housman's death:

> Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over
> The bending poplars, newly bare,
> And the dark ribbons of the chimneys
> Veer downward, flicked by whips of air.[13]

In the last paragraph of *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) Orwell describes his mood as he returned from the Spanish Civil War. He employs the pathetic fallacy ("meditates," "bosoms") to express a Housman-like nostalgia for the vanishing and soon-to-be-destroyed countryside in the south of England: "Down here it was still the England I had known in my childhood: the railway-cuttings smothered in wild flowers, the deep meadows where the great shining horses browse and meditate, the slow-moving streams bordered by willows, the green bosoms of the elms, the larkspurs in the cottage gardens."[14] The frequently mentioned "Chestnut Tree Café, the haunt of painters and musicians," which provides a temporary but illusory refuge for Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), alludes to Housman's "The Chestnut Casts His Flambeaux":

12. Orwell, "Inside the Whale," *Works*, 12.93-95.
13. Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Works*, 4.19.
14. Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, *Works*, 6.187.

We for a certainty are not the first
Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed
Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.[15]

Winston is crushed by Big Brother; Housman's heroes are destroyed by malign fate. Housman's tragic pessimism left an indelible mark from Orwell's schooldays until his final book.

15. A. E. Housman, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 106.

Quiller-Couch and Housman

Sir Brian Young

Two years ago I asked readers of Housman (particularly of his classical reviews) if they could help me to find a mildly satirical piece in which Housman criticised the language of translators and gave an absurd version of what 'Sigh no more ladies' would look like if a translator had worked on it. This I was confident I had read in about 1950 at the Bodleian Library. Several friends knew 'a man who would be able to say', but nothing resulted. Recently I applied to the Head of the Classical Faculty at Cambridge: he, after consulting a Jesus College friend, produced the exact chapter and verse (reproduced below), but it was part of the works of Quiller-Couch. I accepted this full text gratefully but now I find myself thinking more and more that the originator was Housman, and that 'Q' was quoting.

The piece of course is little more than a small joke with no important '*sub specie aeternitatis*'. But it does concern matters of style, which are of basic interest to the literary world.

1. Housman's style is abrupt and individual (though not in his verse). Might one call it a croak, satirical and antithetic, mixing humour with mock solemnity. Those who knew his witty parody, *Fragment of Greek Tragedy*, are very conscious of it. The late Robert Runcie would have been of their number, since he once joined me in performing the whole piece by memory on a Greek cruise. Phrases such as 'treading the ocean and the mainland with alternate feet' raise an echo.

2. Others must write of Q's style. I have only a distant impression of it and it may be quite false. It seems to me amiable and easily readable, sometimes wry, sometimes a bit wordy. As different as could be from Housman's type of academic joke.

3. But surely Q is not claiming to have originated these words. He finds in Housman's *jeu d'esprit* something written by a fine classical scholar which was in an obscure paper, and it fits his present theme. His Cambridge

neighbour will certainly not assail him for ‘a failure to acknowledge’.

4. The confirmation given by Q of Paley as the topic – and Euripides too – do hint that his piece had a different parentage. Moreover this narrower field might help to establish whether or not Housman wrote the original piece.

But, although a student of English Literature be ignorant of Greek and Latin as languages, may he not have Greek and Latin literature widely opened to him by intelligent translations? The question has often been asked, but I ask it again. May not some translations open a door to him by which he can see them through an atmosphere, and in that atmosphere the authentic ancient gods walking: so that returning upon English literature he may recognise them there, too, walking and talking in a garden of values? The highest poetical speech of any one language defies, in my belief, translation into any other. But Herodotus loses little, and North is every whit as good as Plutarch.

Sigh no more, ladies; ladies, sigh no more!
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never

Suppose that rendered thus:

I enjoin upon the adult female population (γυναῖκες), not once but twice, that there be from this time forward, a total cessation of sighing. The male is, and has been, constantly addicted to inconstancy, treading the ocean and the mainland respectively with alternate feet.

That, more or less, is what Paley did upon Euripides, and how would you like it if a modern Greek did it upon Shakespeare? None the less I remember that my own first awed surmise of what Greek might mean came from a translated story of Herodotus—the story of Cleobis and Biton—at the tail of an old grammar-book, before I had learnt the Greek alphabet; and I am sure that the instinct of the old translators was sound; that somehow (as

Wordsworth says somewhere) the present must be balanced on the wings of the past and the future, and that as you stretch out the one you stretch out the other to strength.

The Lad Came to the Door at Night

Andrew Breeze

'The True Lover', *A Shropshire Lad* LIII, has nine stanzas in ballad metre, and is a miniature ballad in its narrative.

> The lad came to the door at night,
> When lovers crown their vows,
> And whistled soft and out of sight
> In shadow of the boughs.

He tells the girl that he will vex her no more, with that very night seeing their final embrace:

> "When I from hence away am past
> I shall not find a bride,
> And you shall be the first and last
> I ever lay beside."

She goes out, and dialogue follows to its conclusion. Although 'Her heart to his she laid', she finds no response from it.

> "Oh do you breathe, lad, that your breast
> Seems not to rise and fall,
> And here upon my bosom prest
> There beats no heart at all?"

His reply is grim.

> "Oh loud, my girl, it once would knock,
> You should have felt it then;
> But since for you I stopped the clock
> It never goes again."

Worse follows.

> "Oh lad, what is it, lad, that drips
> Wet from your neck on mine?
> What is it falling on my lips,
> My lad, that tastes of brine?"

The answer is the expected one.

> "Oh like enough 'tis blood, my dear,
> For when the knife has slit
> The throat across from ear to ear
> 'Twill bleed because of it."

This love-encounter by night ends with ironic pessimism.

> Under the stars the air was light
> But dark below the boughs,
> The still air of the speechless night,
> When lovers crown their vows.

This, amongst Housman's darker lyrics, displays his familiar obsessions with frustrated passion and suicide, and is thus thoroughly characteristic of him. At the same time it has a debt to traditional forms, not only in its ballad metre and narrative, but in its specific genre, to which we can give a name. It is a serenade, in which the lover comes to the beloved's house by night and from outside speaks to her. The serenade can be traced back to Classical Greek and Latin and (in its medieval guise) English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Welsh, and other languages. A survey of the material thus helps place Housman's poem, even if (as elsewhere) he subverts the motif in his own macabre way, so that it might be termed an anti-serenade rather than a serenade: a grotesque foil to the conventional form.

Greek paraclausithyra and their Latin imitations in part distinguish 'The True Lover' from other genres which Housman put into modern dress. When he wrote pastourelles, reverdies, and the like, he consciously imitated medieval genres (as shown in recent issues of this journal). Yet the serenade

predates these, the most famous ancient instance being Horace, *Odes* III.10. Nevertheless, the medieval versions (particularly in Old French) soon reveal that 'The True Lover' is closer to them and their descendants in ballad and folksong than to anything in Greek or Latin. The *Shropshire Lad* lyric is, then, another instance of Housman's use of medieval models, which here survived in the poetry of the people.

The essential year for understanding of the medieval serenade is 1889, with the first publication of Jeanroy's massive *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France*. Like a good Frenchman, Jeanroy provided a definition. A *sérénade* consists invariably of a *visite nocturne* made by lover to beloved (usually of him to her, but sometimes the reverse). The lover, *sous la fenêtre de sa belle*, often complains of cold and rain *tandis qu'elle-même repose doucement dans son lit*, and asks her to let him in. Sometimes she does. But usually, reflecting on virtue, prudence, or the presence of sleeping father and mother, *elle prie l'amant de prendre patience ou elle lui donne rendezvous pour un autre moment*.[1] Published six years before *A Shropshire Lad*, Jeanroy's study may have influenced the neo-medievalism of some its poems. Housman perhaps knew the book at first hand. At the very least, it prompted scholars throughout Europe (and even Wales) to look more closely at the themes of their national poetry.

The effects of this book in French can be seen from three other books, respectively in English, Welsh, and Irish. The first, with an essay often citing Jeanroy (though not on the serenade), publishes (after Böddeker's edition of 1878) a dialogue from the collection of English lyrics in London, British Library, MS Harley 2253, now accepted as written about 1340 in Ludlow (a poet's town long before A.E.H.). It begins 'My deth I love, my lyf ich hate' and resembles the form as defined by Jeanroy. Love has made the lover miserable. Yet his beloved might with a word remove his sorrow and care. Her answer is brusque. He is a fool. She will never love him. If he were found in her bower or bedroom, disaster would result. Better to go on foot like an honest man than ride an evil horse.

Yef thou in my boure art take,
Shame thee may bityde.

1. A. Jeanroy, *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1904), 150, 197-8.

Thee is bettere on fote gon
  Then wycked hors to ryde.

But he continues his pleas, danger notwithstanding. She warns him that her father and mother are on the look-out for him. If he were caught, they would kill him.

Be thou in mi bour ytake,
  Lete they for no synne
Me to holde, and thee to slou,
  The deth so thou maht wynne.

He replies by reminding her of earlier pleasures.

In a wyndou, ther we stod,
  We custe us fyfty sythe.

In the end, she relents.

Fader, moder, and al my kun
  Ne shal me holde so stille,
That I nam thyn, and thou art myn,
  To don al thi wille.[2]

The lines show that the two have had assignations at her window, and that she will at first, for fear of mother and father (who are close at hand and already suspicious), give him no more than kisses. The implication is, therefore, of a meeting at her house and surely by night.

We now move to books in Welsh and Irish. In the first, Dafydd ap Gwilym's admired 'Under the Eaves' (to which we shall return) corresponds exactly to the form as defined by Jeanroy, even if the Welsh bard is worse off than any trouvère or troubadour. They are merely out in the rain, but Dafydd is in falling snow.[3] As for Ireland, a monograph on the survival of medieval

2. E. K. Chambers and Frank Sidgwick (edd.), *Early English Lyrics* (London, 1907), 12-14.

3. Ifor Williams and Thomas Roberts (edd.), *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a'i*

literary genres (including the *chanson de la malmariée*, *débat*, *aubade*, *reverdie*, and *carole*) in its modern folk-poetry provides handy quotations of serenades in French, Italian, English, and even Manx. After French folksongs of the nineteenth century comes one of the sixteenth, where the lover says:

> la belle,
> Je croz que vous dormez,
> Ouvrez moy la fenestre....

She replies:

> Las, je suis toute nue,
> Et si courte tenue
> Qui ne vous puis ayder.

In a fourteenth-century manuscript is an Italian poem quoted from Jeanroy. Here the beloved is a married woman, who replies with vigour.

> Se me donassi Trapano,
> Palermo con Messina,
> La mia porta non t'apriro
> Se me fessi regina!

In English are the folksongs 'The Cottage near a Wood', 'O Who is it that Raps at my Window?', 'One Night as I Lay on my Bed', and a Shirburn ballad of the sixteenth century.

> At midnight comes a Swaine
> To the window of his love.
> He whispered once or twise
> Before his love did wake:
> At last with good advise,
> She softly to him spoke:
> "I know thy sute," quoth shee.
> "Then, prethee! ope the gate."

Gyfoeswyr (Bangor, 1914), xxxix.

"Nay fye! Nay fye! Nay fye!
Sweet love, 'tis too too late!"

With instances from Irish popular poetry is an ultimate rarity, a text in Manx, where the lass gives the lover an answer understandable in any tongue.

Ghow roish waish yn vinnag,
Ghow roid vesh esh ghraa,
Ghow roid waish yn vinnag,
Ta fys aym er ny share.[4]

"Get you from the window,
Get you gone," she said,
"Get you from the window,
I know a man better than you."

All these may be compared with Dafydd's poem, working at a self-mocking and more sophisticated level.

Locked was the door of the house;
I am ill, my dear, hear me.
Come into view, fair figure,
For God's sake, make yourself seen.
Why should a liar triumph?
By Mary, it drives one mad.
Love-confounded, I pounded
Three strong strokes that broke the locked
Latch: it was quite a noise, no?
Did you hear? A bell's clangour.
Morfudd, my chaste-minded love,
Nurse of deceit's dominion,
I lie a wall's breadth away,
From you: I must shout, dearest.
Have pity on sleepless pain,
Dark the night, love-deceiver.

4. Seán ó Tuama, *An Grá in Amhráin na nDaoine* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1960), 61-6.

Notice my sad condition:
O God, what weather tonight!
Often the eaves spill water,
On my means of love, my flesh;
No more rain, love-pained am I,
Than snow, and me below it.
Uncosy is this quaking;
Never had man's flesh more pain
Than I have had from longing:
By God, there's no viler bed.
There never in Caernarvon
Was a jail worse than this road.
I'd not be nightlong out here,
I would not groan, but for you;
Nor come to suffer, be sure,
Nightly, unless I loved you;
Nor stay under snow and rain,
Except for you, one minute;
Nor renounce, mine the anguish,
All the world, were there no you.
Here I am, in cold weather;
Lucky you, you're in the house.
My pure soul is within there,
And here outside is my ghost.
A listener would be doubtful
That I, my treasure, will live.
My thoughts are not of leaving,
It was madness drove me here.
I entered an agreement:
I am here – and where are you?[5]

Similar, if simpler, is a Middle English fragment discovered in Berlin-Dahlem, Preussische Staatsbibliothek, MS theol. lat. fol. 249, a sermon collection of about 1275.

5. J. P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (London, 1965), 36-7.

So longe ich have, lavedy,
  Y-hovèd [waited] at thy gate,
That my fot is y-frore [frozen], faire lavedy,
  For thy love faste to the stake [gate-post].[6]

As evidence for a popular or semi-popular tradition, it goes with comments on the Harley lyric 'De Clerico et Puella' as a serenade or lyric of the "night visit", where "the meeting place is at the maiden's window" (so that Germans call them *Fensterlieder*), later instances including the ballads 'Willie and Lady Maisry' and 'Clerk Saunders'. The latter is tragic. In the Harley lyric, the maiden speaks of father and mother murdering her lover and thinking it no sin; in 'Clerk Saunders', the suitor really does meet a brutal end. It contrasts with most other instances, with conclude happily with the union of hearts, especially in folk tradition, where "neither wooer nor maiden is cynically conceived", thereby differing from those of many pastourelles.[7]

For the sake of completeness we cite a Provençal poem by Guiraut Riquier (d. after 1292). It is a *serena* or serenade, and so the reverse of an *alba* or *aubade*, a song of dawn, when (like Romeo and Juliet in act III of the play) lovers must part too soon, because daylight has dangers. Guiraut turns this inside-out. Beginning *Ad un fin aman* 'To a true lover', whose lady has promised him an assignation that evening, his poem conveys the fretting at the *loncx espers* 'long wait' until then, the speaker fearing how he may be dead from pure sorrow by the time that darkness comes.[8] But this is quite unlike our other poems. There is no dialogue by night, no conversation at the window, no drama on whether the tryst will or will not end in gladness.

In the 1980s the serenade by Dafydd ap Gwilym was variously discussed. Professor Dafydd Johnston claims that "examples of serenades in medieval literature" before the fourteenth century, when Dafydd wrote, "are surprisingly difficult to find", the "only Middle English example" known to him being the snatch from the thirteenth-century Berlin manuscript quoted above. He makes no reference to 'De Clerico et Puella' in MS Harley 2253,

6. Celia and Kenneth Sisam (edd.), *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse* (Oxford, 1970), 550.
7. Rosemary Woolf, 'Later Poetry: The Popular Tradition', in W. F. Bolton (ed.), *The Middle Ages* (London, 1970), 263-311.
8. Martín de Riquer, *Los trovadores* (Barcelona, 1975), 1613-14.

compiled in about 1340 on the borders of Wales. He does, however, quote the passage on the lover's sorrows from the part of *Le Roman de la Rose* written in about 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris, which he thinks "may well have influenced" Dafydd's serenades. This despite the differences, for the French lover regards the beloved's house as a shrine approached with reverence, does not wish to enter, and simply wants her to know that he is there, so that she will "realise his devotion".[9]

Rachel Bromwich at first declared Dafydd's poem to have "unquestionable affinities with the *sérénade*, as this poetic genre developed during the thirteenth century in the literatures of Italy and Portugal."[10] Later, however, she wondered whether the incident behind the poem might simply "have arisen spontaneously from the poet's predicament, whether this was real or imaginary, and without any external influence."[11] Professor Fulton remarks on the poem's supposed links with the Continental *sérénade* that, if they are genuine, the verses are "clearly a parody rather than an imitation".[12]

Again for comparison, we quote the passage from *Le Roman de la Rose* as translated by an Englishman contemporary with Chaucer.

> Al prively than shalt thou gone,
> What weder it be, thyselfe alone,
> For reyne or hayle, for snowe, for slete,
> Thyder she dwelleth that is so swete –
> The whiche may fall aslepe be,
> And thynketh but lytel upon the.
> Than shalt thou go ful foule aferde;
> Loke if the gate be unsperde [unbarred],
> And wayte without in wo and payne,
> Ful yvel acolde, in wynde and rayne.

9. David Johnston, 'The Serenade and the Image of the House in the Poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 5 (1983), 1-19.
10. Dafydd ap Gwilym, *A Selection of Poems*, tr. Rachel Bromwich (Harmondsworth, 1985), 160.
11. Rachel Bromwich, *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cardiff, 1986), 97.
12. Helen Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context* (Cardiff, 1989), 202, 250.

Than shalt thou go the dore before;
If thou mayste fynde any score [crack],
Or hole, or refte, whatever it were,
Than shalte thou stoupe and lay to eere,
If they within aslepe be –
I mene al save thy lady free,
Whom wakyng if thou mayst aspye,
Go put thyselfe in jupardye [risk]
To aske grace, and the bymene [compain],
That she may wete [know], without wene [doubt],
That thou anyght no rest hast had,
So sore for her thou were bestad.
Women wel ought pyte to take
Of hem that sorowen for her sake.
And loke, for love of that relyke [relic, treasure],
That thou thynke none other lyke,
For whom thou haste so great annoy [vexation],
Shal kysse the er [thee before] thou go awey;
And holde that in ful great deynte [as a privilege],
And, for that no man shal the se
Before the house, ne in the way,
Loke thou be gon agayne er day.[13]

The French writer sets out the delightful torments of love, prompting the suitor to go out on a sleepless night (snow or sleet notwithstanding) for the sake of one kiss. But there is no dialogue or dispute. We are at a remove from the Harley lyric, Dafydd's poem, and Housman's.

For the ancient serenade we reproduce a translation of Horace's ode, a poem unnoticed by commentators on the medieval instances.

> Wert thou wont to drink of Tanais' distant stream, O Lyce.
> wedded to some stern husband, yet wouldst thou be loth
> to expose me, stretched out before thy cruel portals, to the
> blasts of thy native North. Hearest thou how creaks the door,

13. J. H. Fisher (ed.), *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York, 1989), 746.

> how the trees planted within thy fair abode are moaning in the gale; how in cloudless majesty Jupiter is glazing the falling snow? Banish thy disdain, to Venus hateful, lest the rope run back as the wheel revolves! No Penelope are thou, unyielding to thy suitors, nor of Tuscan parents born. Though neither gifts nor prayers move thee, nor thy lovers' pallor tinged with saffron, nor thy husband's passion for a Thassalian mistress, yet spare thy suppliants, thou less pliant than the unbending oak, and in heart no gentler than Moorish serpents! Not for ever will my body endure thy threshold or the rain of heaven.[14]

Fortunately the text now has the fullest of analyses, and a summary. It is addressed to Lyce, a courtesan whose name means 'she-wolf'. Even if she were a harsh Scythian, she would weep to see Horace lying on her doorstep and exposed to the blasts. Trees groan in the wind, the snow is freezing. She should abandon straining Horace's patience by her haughtiness. Her father was Etruscan: she is no Penelope. She is hard as oak, cruel as a snake; Horace will soon have had enough of her. This serenade or paraclausithyron belonged to a form well-known in antiquity, as shown by the work of Alcaeus, Aristophanes, Plautus, Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid.[15]

Celticists and others may judge whether Dafydd is closer to Horace than to Guillaume de Lorris, or to Ovid, whose *Amores* (I.6) give the complaint of a lover against the door blocking the way to the object of desire.[16] As for Housman's poem, there is another question of judgement. 'The True Lover' has been published with Heine's 'Waldgespräch', claimed as a source or parallel for it and translated thus.

> "It's getting late, it soon will freeze,
> What is your journey through these trees?
> The wood goes on, you are alone,
> You beauteous bride! I'll see you home."

14. Horace, *The Odes and Epodes*, tr. C. E. Bennett (Cambridge, Mass., 1914), 215.
15. R. G. M. Nisbet and Niall Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book III* (Oxford, 2004), 141-8.
16. Ovid, *Les Amours*, ed. Henri Bornecque (Paris, 1930), 19-21.

"With fraud and craft men always start,
With woe I have a broken heart.
The hunting horn strays far and nigh;
O fly! You know not who am I."

"Such finery for horse and maid,
Bewitching form so fair displayed,
I know you now – may God stand by!
You are the witch, the Lorelei."

"You know me now. That peak is mine;
My castle overlooks the Rhine.
It's getting late, it soon will freeze;
You nevermore will leave these trees!"[17]

Whatever the resemblances between the lyrics of Heine and A.E.H., the latter is closer to the serenades in French and other languages than it is to the German poem. Heine's encounter is not at a window, and its speakers have never met before. So we can be sure that 'The True Lover' is best related to the medieval serenades and their aftercomers in English folksong or balladry and their equivalents, with their characteristics (dialogue by night, secret love) described by Rosemary Woolf and others. 'The True Lover' stands in the line of modern and medieval serenade; even if the Housmanian motif of suicide gives it a nightmarish twist of its own.

17. Gaston Hall, 'Selections from Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo* and Other Poems', in Jeremy Bourne (ed.), *Housman and Heine* (Bromsgrove, 2011), 11-103.

Housman and Murray: A Syncrisis

Malcolm Davies

'That electors to Professorships *never* elect the best man is a truth which all the best men (i.e. all the candidates save the Professor, in his blindness) clearly recognise. And that the best man is *sometimes* not elected even disinterested persons are often driven to allow. Fear and Favour, ancient and discreditable powers, sometimes dominate the academic mind, and things go wrong.' These bracing generalisations occur, as can no doubt be deduced merely from their language, in a document over a hundred years old, though the truth they convey is as fresh and sparkling today as it ever was. The document in question is an editorial[1] in the *Oxford Magazine* for January 26, 1911, and its occasion was the appointment of A.E. Housman to the chair of Latin at Cambridge University. 'That an Oxford man should go to a Cambridge Professorship is an uncommon event', the editorial

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Abbreviations :

Fowler: R.L. Fowler in C*lassical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (1991) s.v. 'Gilbert Murray'

GM: J. Smith and A. Toynbee (edd.), *Gilbert Murray: An Unfinished Autobiography with Contributions from his Friends* (London 1960)

Gow: A.S.F. Gow, *A.E. Housman: A Sketch* (Cambridge 1936)

HSJ: *Housman Society Journal*

Letters: *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, ed. A. Burnett, 2 vols. Oxford 2007

Naiditch. Problems: P.G. Naiditch, *Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E. Housman* (Beverley Hills 1995)

Selected Prose: *A.E. Housman: Selected Prose*, J. Carter (ed.) (Cambridge 1964)

Wilson: Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM 1866-1957* (Oxford 1987)

1. P.150f. Reprinted in Grant Richards, *A.E. Housman 1897-1936* (Oxford 1941) p.99f and in this volume at p.101. Housman himself confirmed the plausibility of these generalisations when he replied to his brother Laurence's congratulations on his appointment (30 Jan.): 'It is not by any means certain that I could have secured the Oxford chair by waiting for it' (*Letters* I.262). Cf. Richards p.98.

claimed. It has become less rare since for Oxford men – and women – to manage this transition. Housman himself, his first biographer[2] tells us, made it his 'whim ... to address Oxonians in Cambridge as "Fellow-exiles" and to threaten suicide if the Cambridge successes in the boat race drew level in number with those of Oxford'– another reminder of the changes time brings about. 'We wonder what it is', the *Oxford Magazine* proceeded, 'or was in St John's College that sends to Professorships men like Mr Gilbert Murray and Mr Housman'.

This easy remark in fact leads to difficult considerations. Having been rejected by Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Housman gained a scholarship at St John's partly on the strength of an essay responding to the request to 'Compare Horace and Juvenal as writers of Satire'. Modern-day applicants may or may not draw consolation from the fact that the author of the remarkable essay had as yet read not a single satire of Horace's.[3] The above mentioned biographer, A.S.F. Gow, Housman's colleague at Trinity College, Cambridge, observes[4] that he never heard him speak of his college tutors, and concludes that 'the tuition provided by St John's College seems to have been uninspiring, or at any rate it failed to inspire him with interest in [his] curriculum'. He therefore chose to spend his time working on the text of the Roman poet Propertius – an author not on the 'Greats' syllabus, then confined to ancient history and philosophy – with the inevitable and notorious consequence that he failed 'Greats'. When he successfully applied for the position of Professor at University College, London in 1892 he was able to state with perfect truth – what no other applicant for a chair in Classics has ever been able to claim – that 'in 1881 I failed to obtain

2. Gow p.5.

3. Gow, *Oxford Magazine* 56 (11 Nov., 1937) p. 151 = *HSJ* 2 (1975) p.23 n.2.

4. Gow p.5. Note the even more severe verdict by a St John's student contemporary with Housman (Canon E.W. Watson) as reported by Gow in *Oxford Magazine* 56 (11 Nov., 1937) p. 151 = *HSJ* 2 (1975) 23: 'the tuition at St John's was thoroughly bad, though that did not debar keen men in the seventies, especially Lord Chancellor Cave [see n.72 below], from being in the first class. But that was in spite of the teaching.' Reviewing Gow's *Sketch* of Housman in the *Oxford Magazine* 56 (21 Oct., 1937) p.69, H.M. Last was obliged to confess that in Housman's student days 'the vigour of the intellectual life of the college certainly threw no unsupportable strain on those who were called upon to endure it'.

honours in the Final School of Litterae Humaniores'. To his application he appended references from fourteen distinguished classical scholars around the world and from one of his tutors, T.C. Snow, 'a fine example of the Oxford eccentric', who went about 'with collar occasionally fastened by string',[5] but who on this occasion perceptively identified 'brilliancy, learning, and sound common sense' as the combination which set Housman apart. 'In some respects ... the most remarkable of all the candidates ... . He is at present a Clerk in the Patent Office' the Appointing Committee reported, with perfect accuracy in either statement.[6]

Murray's relationship with the college where he was an undergraduate allows more positive reflections. Born in Sydney, Australia, the son of a prosperous stock farmer who later fell upon hard times and died before his son came to England, Murray went to Merchant Taylors' School which was linked to St John's with scholarships 'which,' a biography[7] tells us, 'eased a financial burden his mother could hardly have borne'. The college was too poor to afford a fellowship for this unusually distinguished young academic – another reminder that time does bring about changes.[8] As for his relations with his teachers, when Murray was elected to the Chair of Greek at Glasgow before he was twenty four years old, one of them, the aforementioned T.C. Snow, Murray's tutor as well as Housman's, was

5. Wilson, p. 18. For a guide to obituaries and other notices of Snow see the book mentioned in the next note p.239f. n.78 – 1, especially the observation of H.M. Last there mentioned that Snow was the 'only serious classical scholar among the fellows of St John's in 1877' (*Oxford Magazine* 56 (8 Dec. 1937) p. 189).

6. See P.G. Naiditch, *A.E. Housman at University College, London: The Election of 1892* (Leiden 1988) p. 11. For Snow's reference see p.20.

7. Stray (n.38 below). Cf. Wilson, p.17. Compare *GM*, 'Autobiographical Fragment' p.84: 'the higher education was not in the 1880's such an exclusively upper class thing as the present fashion wants to make us believe. I had from home no money at all, but I got three scholarships', the first of which was a 'Merchant Taylors' School scholarship to St John's college'. On this relationship between the college and Merchant Taylors' School see further Tanis Hinchcliffe, *North Oxford* (New Haven and London 1992) p.8f.

8. See Wilson p.31 (the college 'was almost bankrupt, and cutting down on scholarship money as well as on dons' salaries (Murray was strongly against any collective protest by the scholars))'. For further heart-wrenching details and for the causes of the financial crisis see Hinchcliffe (as above, n.7) pp.74ff.

ready to surrender his college fellowship and go to work as unpaid assistant to his former pupil, sign, surely, of a warm friendship, as well as of the extraordinary devotion Murray was already able to inspire at the early age of twenty three.[9]

Scholarly analysis of Murray's battels[10] accrued while he was an undergraduate at St John's College seems to prove that he led an abstemious existence, which perhaps prepared him for his new life. An 'Autobiographical Fragment'[11] records how he 'thoroughly liked the Scottish atmosphere: the early hours, first lecture at 8 a.m., leading to breakfast at 9.15, or else, as we eventually preferred, at 7.15.' But there were genuine strains over and above press hostility to his appointment ('even this outrageous job,' thundered the radical politician and journalist Labouchère,[12] 'is surpassed by the appointment of an utterly unknown young man to the Chair held by Jebb' – in those days politicians did take seriously appointments to Chairs of Greek). Murray's students could be difficult to control ('I have given the inaugural,' he reports to his wife on Nov. 6, 1889: 'one brute whistled nearly all through the last part')[13] and one may deduce the lasting effects of some of the stress from the story he himself told[14] of how, on a train from Glasgow to London, he suddenly sat bolt upright in his sleeping–berth and shouted 'I must have absolute silence!' He perfects the anecdote by adding that he 'woke to hear a startled clergyman in the upper berth quavering: "I beg your pardon, sir, I have been told I snore"'; but one should not underestimate the heartache or the effect on Murray's health of ten years' overwork. In 1899 a fatal disease was – erroneously, as it transpired – diagnosed and he retired with a pension.[15]

It will have been guessed by now, if not known already, that the two college alumni whose careers as classical scholars we are considering

9. See, e.g., Wilson p.35.
10. See Wilson p. 17. St John's reputation as a college associated with the consumption of much food and drink survived well past Murray's time and into World War I, as we have recently been reminded by Th. Blackburn, 'H.R. Butler's letters from Oxford 1913-1915', *The American Oxonian* 9 (2004) 38ff.
11. *GM,* 'Autobiographical Fragment' p.95.
12. *GM,* 'Autobiographical Fragment' p.94.
13. *GM* p.130.
14. *GM* p.131.
15. See, e.g., Wilson pp.64ff.

were remarkable individuals. Of the two, the reputation of Murray has declined very considerably since he died,[16] for a variety of reasons, some of which I shall consider below. That of Housman, by contrast, has in many quarters continued to soar, sometimes for reasons that seem to defy logical analysis. The *Housman Society Journal* itself is eloquent proof of this, with its interest in such apparent trivialities as the name of Housman's landlady before he moved from London to Cambridge; or its strict insistence that Housman was not appointed to the Kennedy Professorship of Latin as so named in 1911; or its fascination in that list – now in St John's college library, for it is in Housman's hand – from a visit to Paris made when he was in his sixty third year, as part of an effort to uncover whether the second column, following on the days of the week, represents prices, or indicators of quantity or quality; and whether the third column, with its mentions of 'boxeur', 'danseur', 'marin', 'nègre' and the like indicates trysts with male prostitutes ('10 in 15 days' comments Housman in the right hand margin).[17] An entire book[18] has been written on the topic of Housman's election to the chair of Latin at University College, London in 1892. Imagine a book being written about any appointment made to a chair these days – though I grant that some recent appointments could have done with a few pages of print to explain them – indeed, one or two would require a whole library of volumes, and even then one might end up unconvinced. What has been termed[19] 'the English cult of Housman' is not always in Housman's own

16. Or even within his own lifetime. Cf. Isobel Henderson in *GM* p.125: 'in his ninety-one years Murray saw his own writings fall steeply from fashion and influence'. Recent years have seen something of a revival of interest in Murray, however. On 6-8 July 2005, a conference held in London considered the multifarious facets of his career. The proceedings were published in C.A. Stray (ed.), *Reassessing Gilbert Murray* (Oxford 2007) to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

17. For a survey of the various interpretations advanced in connection with this document see Naiditch, *HSJ* 12 (1986) 55ff. = *Problems* pp.48ff., as well as more recent issues of this journal. For the other controversies here mentioned see the same author, *American Notes & Queries* 21 (1983) 13 = *Problems* p.l8f. (Landlady) and *HSJ* 9 (1983) 51f. = *Problems* p.27f. (Kennedy Chair).

18. See, e.g., Wilson pp.64ff.

19. See, for instance, J.P. Sullivan's essay on Housman, 'The leading Classic of his generation', *Arion* 1 (1962) 105ff. = *A.E. Housman: A Collection of Critical Essays (Twentieth century Views* (ed. C. Ricks)) pp.146ff. For European views see

interest.

This piece is entitled 'Housman and Murray: a syncrisis', the ancient Greek word *syncrisis* meaning a comparison,[20] specifically a comparison of the careers of two individuals who share common aspects. We may begin with a comparison which should greet most fellows of St John's practically every day of their lives: both men were the subject of portraits by the same artist, Francis Dodd, portraits which now hang in St John's SCR: Housman[21] at the age of 67, Murray at the age of 71. So the comparison begins to Housman's advantage: it is not merely that his portrait's background is livelier, with indications of bookshelf, a table piled high with papers, and, most distinctively, the celestial globe which Housman used in his study of ancient writers on astrology and astronomy; while Murray, for whatever reason, sits against a blank background. It is that Dodd seems to have found Housman a more congenial subject and captures a wiry alertness and flexed tension in the man; the treatment of Murray is by comparison disappointingly conventional and uninteresting.

Another consideration which links the two is that – rather surprisingly for classics professors – both have been the heroes of dramas written in the twentieth century, respectively near that century's beginning

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A. Momigliano, *Athenaeum* 52 (1974) 368ff. = *Sesto Contributo alla Storia degli Studi Classici* pp.745ff., S. Timpanaro, *La Genesi del Metodo del Lachmann* (Turin 2003) p.103 n.38.

20. See recently, for instance, H. Beck, 'Interne *Synkrisis* bei Plutarch', *Hermes* 130 (2002) 467ff.

21. After the portrait, commissioned by St John's, was completed, F.W. Hall, then President, sent on more than one occasion (see *Letters* I.622, 625 and 629) photographs to Housman, honorary fellow of the college. On the first occasion Housman replied (21 September, 1926) 'many thanks for the photographs. I much prefer Dodd to Rothenstein [English Painter (1872-1945) and personal friend of Housman] who never gets a likeness of anyone, being presumably too great an artist' (*Letters* II.625). Housman had actually gone out of his way to commission a second portrait of himself by Rothenstein in order to consign to the fire the first: see Robert Speaight's biography of the artist (London 1962) p.369 and (in greater detail) Percy Withers, *A Buried Life: Personal Recollections of A.E. Housman* (London 1940) pp.118-20: 'ill as he was, and under obvious physical duress, his wonted fire of despite flared up while he recounted ... the satisfaction he had found in destroying a portrait of himself that had hung ... in the Combination Room at Trinity' etc.

and end. The latter is Sir Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love,* whose central figure is Housman.[22] The play conveys with remarkable success the intellectual passions which determined Housman's career as classical scholar, and also seeks to cast light on passions of a different kind regarding Moses Jackson, another graduate of the college and a contemporary of Housman. In their fourth and final year at St John's, the two, together with a third, shared accommodation together – in a building long since demolished – in St Giles', across the road from the college. Housman, it has gradually been understood in the course of time, in some sense fell in love with the hearty science undergraduate who rowed in the St John's College Eight.[23]

As for Murray, he was not so directly the subject–matter of his play and does not feature in it under his own name. By way of compensation, as it were, the play was at least composed and performed during his own lifetime, and he did have the opportunity to pour suggestions towards its shaping and improvement into the ears of the friend who was its author. That author was, of course, Bernard Shaw, and the play, produced in 1905, *Major Barbara*.[24] Its titular heroine is betrothed to Adolphus Cusins, professor of Greek, whom Shaw in some respects modelled upon Murray.

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22. See the evaluation by A.D. Nuttall in his book *Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination* (Yale 2003) pp.171ff.

23. For biographical information on Moses Jackson see Naiditch, *HSJ* 12 (1986) 93ff.= *Problems* pp.132ff. That Jackson was in some measure responsible for Housman's failing 'Greats' may be asserted quite independently of the thesis (cf. Naiditch p.105 n.20 = p.137 n.4) that Housman was in love with him: see their St John's contemporary A.W. Pollard as quoted by Gow, *Oxford Magazine* 56 (11 Nov., 1937) p.151 = *HSJ* 2 (1975) 23 to the effect that 'it was unlucky that Housman's great friend M.J. Jackson ... shared their lodgings in St Giles', since Jackson's First in Science was so secure that he could afford to be idle and Housman enjoyed idling with him'.

24. See in general Michael Holroyd's biography of Shaw, volume II *The Pursuit of Power* (London 1989) pp.96ff. Shaw's letters to Murray in connection with the play are edited by Dan H. Laurence ([vol. ii] London 1972). As part of the *Selected Correspondence of Bernard Shaw*, his numerous epistolary exchanges with Murray (171 letters) have been edited by C. A. Carpenter (2014). For a recent analysis of *Major Barbara* see F. Berg's contribution to C. Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to G.B. Shaw* (1998) pp.153ff. (with bibliography p.161).

According to Shaw's biographer [25] 'the passionate thinking Shaw put into *Major Barbara* was partly the result of [his] association with Murray'. Barbara is not only a major in the Salvation Army, and thus the closest twentieth century equivalent to an ancient Greek Bacchant or female worshipper of Dionysus; she is also the daughter of Andrew Undershaft, an arms manufacturer, who in the course of the play enunciates the following provocation, rather implausibly prefaced by the statement 'Plato says ...' What Plato supposedly says is that 'society cannot be saved until either the Professors of Greek take to making gunpowder, or else the makers of gunpowder become Professors of Greek'. The ambivalence with which both the character of Undershaft and the main themes of the play are presented is remarkable – the work's last scene has been termed 'perhaps the most complex and ambiguous Shaw ever wrote'[26] – and since the play constantly cross–refers to the world of Dionysiac religion (with Cusins referring to Undershaft as Dionysus and Undershaft addressing Cusins as Euripides) it does not seem fanciful to suggest that the ambivalence derives from the ambivalent presentation of Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* – or rather from what Murray taught Shaw about that god's paradoxical presentation therein as 'capable of creation and destruction'[27]. First recognition of that central paradox, so crucial for twentieth century understanding of Greek religion, is more usually assigned[28] to E.R. Dodds, Murray's pupil and successor in the chair of Greek at Oxford, and to his ground-breaking commentary on Euripides' *Bacchae;* but Dodds himself in the Preface to that book[29]

25. Holroyd p.112.

26. Holroyd p.109.

27. Holroyd p. 110. See further for such contradictions Berg (above, n.24) p.155f. on Undershaft as 'the merchant of death and destruction, the ... voice of reason and progress'. For examples of this ambivalence see from Act I the statement that Undershaft 'preached immorality while he practiced morality', or from Act III the claim that 'he never does a proper thing without giving an improper reason for it'. Note too his *credo* in Act I: 'my sort of blood cleanses: my sort of fire purifies.' His words to Cusins in the final Act 'turn your oughts into shalls, man' are the primal cry of Dionysus.

28. See, for instance, Albert Henrichs, 'Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: the modern view of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 88 (1984) 224ff., esp.227f.

29. The preface to the first edition of Dodds' commentary (which was published in 1944) closed (p.vii) with a reference to Murray 'to whose lectures on

acknowledges Murray's indispensable influence.

To return to the practice of *syncrisis,* it has a venerable history, stretching back to antiquity. Kenneth Clark even went so far as to claim – á propos of Bach and Handel; Haydn and Mozart – that 'great men have a curious way of appearing in complementary pairs. This has happened so often in history', he continues, 'that I don't think it can have been invented by symmetrically-minded historians, but must represent some need to keep human faculties in balance'[30]. This is surely too fanciful; but that contrasting contemporary pairs do occur is undeniable. And the technique of *syncrisis* probably works best when applied to near contemporaries operating in the same sphere – as witness the once famous *Punch* cartoon (by Sir Edward Tenniel) of Gladstone and Disraeli each perusing an instance of the other's recent literary production (the date is 14 May, 1870). The late Robert Blake[31] recently reminded us that the two politicians 'were unique figures', soon to be replaced by a new Respectability which ensured that, politically speaking, 'the pirates and the buccaneers could no longer get away with it'. Generally, he says, unless 'the convulsions of war' are operating, 'it is the Baldwins and the Chamberlains who win the day. Would the young Disraeli get the nomination today for even a shaky Conservative seat? I doubt it.' I do think one can apply this aperçu to the cases of Housman and Murray (without wishing to identify them as pirates or buccaneers). I also think that neither of them was 'respectable' in the stultifying sense of the academic equivalents of 'the Baldwins and the Chamberlains'.

Housman himself was certainly attracted by the potentialities of this particular *syncrisis.* Writing to Max Beerbohm, cartoonist and author of *Zuleika Dobson,* on 16 May 1933, in reply to compliments on his recently delivered Leslie Stephen lecture on *The Name and Nature of Poetry,* Housman, surely tongue–in–cheek, suggested two possible cartoons of Gladstone and Disraeli in heaven and Gladstone and Disraeli in hell.[32] The verbal sketch of the latter begins 'Disraeli and the devil are warming

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the *Bacchae* I ... owe my first real understanding of the play's greatness and of its religious background. All of this book is ultimately his: a part of it he made; the rest grew from seed he planted thirty years ago.'

30. *Civilisation* (London 1969) p.229.
31. In his contribution to *Gladstone* (ed. P.J. Jagger, London 1998) p.63f.
32. *Letters* II.346.

themselves before a furnace full of the damned, and absorbed in mutually agreeable conversation; so much absorbed that the devil has negligently let fall the end of a red-hot poker on Gladstone's toe'. This shows with which of the pair Housman was more in sympathy. An editor of Housman's letters has solemnly observed that 'Max Beerhohm made none of the drawings suggested by Housman'.[33] Murray, incidentally, and here is another point of contrast with Housman, was very significantly moulded by the imprint of Gladstonian Liberalism.[34]

Some classicists may be surprised to learn that the above mentioned *Punch* cartoon was actually used by one of Housman's adversaries to contrast him with another scholar – though not, in fact, Gilbert Murray. The adversary was W.M. Lindsay[35] professor of Latin at a Scottish university. Lindsay wished to defend his own field of palaeography (the study of scribal 'hands' and of manuscripts) against what he took to be Housman's contempt or indifference. This assumption is misleading and an oversimplification, though certain remarks of Housman might be taken to support it, e.g. his allusion[36] to 'gentlemen who use MSS as drunkards use lamp-posts, not to light their way, but to dissimulate their instability'. What he was more concerned to convey was his central conviction that 'no amount of palaeography will teach a man one scrap of textual criticism'. Whatever one makes of Housman's position on this matter, Lindsay chose to picture, in emulation of *Punch's* cartoon, 'the Cambridge Professor reading *The Descent of Manuscripts* [by A.C. Clark, Corpus Professor of Latin] and his Oxford colleague reading, let us say, the edition of Juvenal *editorum in*

33. H. Maas, *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (London 1971) p.334 n.4.

34. See Wilson, Index s.v. 'Liberalism' (p.464).

35. In a review of Clark's book published in the *Oxford Magazine* 36 (7 June, 1918) p.314. For details and an account of Lindsay's hostility to Housman see P.G. Naiditich, *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 14 (1989) 29ff. = *Problems* pp.75ff. The antipathy was finally shattered when Lindsay commented (on a postcard to a friend) 'Housman has at last made good. His *Lucan* is A1' (Bowra, below n.45, p.253). For the fullest and most authoritative account of these two scholars' contrasting aims see now D.J. Butterfield, 'Housman and W. M. Lindsay' in D.J. Butterfield and C.A. Stray (eds.), *A.E. Housman, Classical Scholar* (London 2009) pp.193ff.

36. See especially 'The application of Thought to Textual Criticism', *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 18 (1922) 67ff. = *Classical Papers* 3. 1058ff. = *Selected Prose* pp.131ff.

usum. "Ha, prosy!", "Hm, flippant!" But in this case the prosy book will outlive the flippant,' Lindsay concluded, with a singularly inept prophecy.

Before we leave the antithesis between Gladstone and Disraeli as parallel to that between Housman and Murray, we may note an interesting complication. Two books have in fact been published with the identical title: *The Two Mr Gladstones*[37] – a useful reminder that pointed contrasts can be identified not only *between* two separate individuals but within one and the same person. That reminder is highly relevant to this investigation, for divided loyalties have been detected in the case both of Housman – for whom the rather glib antithesis 'scholar and poet' has been devised – and of Murray, whose *ODNB* entry begins with the encapsulation 'Classical scholar and Internationalist'.[38]

To return to Housman, Murray, and *syncrisis,* there are rather more serious aspects. Of the two it has been said,[39] with reference to the '20s and '30s of the last century, that 'to younger men, two opposing principles seemed to be personified' in the two figures. Housman himself was clearly aware that this contrast could be drawn, and, one feels, played up to it. Writing to Murray (12 October 1909) to accept an offer of hospitality for the night when he was visiting Oxford to read a paper to its Philological Society, he added 'I have chosen a dry subject... as I have no doubt that scholarship at Oxford is taking on an excessively literary tinge under the influence of' Murray his host.[40]

There is also a difference in character to contend with. Housman, according to Christopher Ricks,[41] 'was not only a haunting poet ... but also a haunting figure. Proud and cruelly witty, he was a man whose reticence, arrogance, and will-power are fascinating and unforgettable.' Of Murray, by contrast, it has been said[42] that the immediate impression made by [his] 'personality was one of gentleness, serenity, effortless control and perfect

37. See Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898* (London 1999) p.643.
38. Christopher Stray in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* s.v. (39.912).
39. Isobel Henderson in *GM* p.142.
40. *Letters* I.241.
41. In *A.E. Housman: A Collection of Critical Essays (Twentieth Century Views)* p.6.
42. E.R. Dodds, *Gnomon* 33 (1957) 67 = *GM* p.17.

balance'. Or, to quote a different source, 'he was a stranger to academic pettiness; he was the kind of person humanistic scholarship ought to produce but so rarely does in spite of its fine talk.'[43]

Again Housman seems to have been acutely aware of the differences, and brings them to the surface in a letter[44] he sent Murray on 23 April, 1900, thanking him for a copy of *Andromache,* Murray's imitation of Greek tragedy: 'I rather doubt if man really has much to gain by substituting peace for strife, as you and Jesus Christ recommend .... When man gets rid of a great trouble he is easier for a little while, but not for long: Nature instantly sets to work to weaken his power of sustaining trouble, and very soon seven pounds is as heavy as fourteen pounds used to be. Last Easter Monday a young woman threw herself into the Lea because her dress looked so shabby amongst the holiday crowd: in other times and countries women have been ravished by half-a-dozen dragoons and taken it less to heart. It looks to me as if the state of mankind always had been and always would be a state of just tolerable discomfort'. Equally characteristically, the letter ends, after a brief paragraph on purely classical topics, with the question 'When are we going to the music-hall?', a locale to which Housman's letters frequently seek to inveigle Murray, from motives which some[45] have deemed sinister.

One cannot indefinitely engage in *syncrisis* of Housman and Murray without posing the question of what classical scholarship should be. One mode of 'placing' Housman and Murray would be by invoking Wilamowitz, generally regarded as the greatest German scholar in the field of ancient Greek, and an older contemporary of Housman and Murray.

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43. Fowler p.32. Housman was characteristically alert to the more obvious reverse of the coin in his University College, London Introductory Lecture (*Selected Prose,* p.10): 'the classics cannot be said to have succeeded altogether in transforming and beautifying Milton's inner nature. They did not sweeten his naturally disagreeable temper; they did not enable him to conduct controversy with urbanity or even with decency'. Cf. *ib.* p.15: 'it appears then that upon the majority of mankind the classics can hardly be said to exert the transforming influence which is claimed for them'.

44. *Letters* I.120f.

45. See Maas (above n.33), *Letters,* General Index s.v. 'Murray, Gilbert ... invited to music hall'. C.M. Bowra, *Memories* (London 1966) p.221: 'his motive was quite probably a malicious hope that Murray would be shocked, as he almost certainly would have been.'

In the course of one of two lectures he gave in Oxford in the summer of 1908, Wilamowitz, as translated into English by Murray himself,[46] offered the following metaphor for Greek scholars as intermediaries between the modern and the ancient worlds: 'we all know that ghosts will not speak' – he is thinking of Odysseus' visit to the Underworld in Homer's epic – 'until they have drunk blood: and we must give them the blood of our hearts'.

'Blood for the ghosts', incidentally, is a metaphor that was movingly reused in the FBA obituary of Sir Richard Southern, former President of St John's, concerning Southern's devoted work in his last years of life.[47] But, as uttered by Wilamowitz in 1908, the uncompromising declaration of devotion must have taken aback many of the Oxford dons in the audience, and it is characteristic of Murray that a year later, when he delivered his own inaugural lecture as Professor of Greek, he should have quoted Wilamowitz and then produced a more urbane and acceptable version of the metaphor: 'we must give them the blood of our hearts. To do this is the great sacrifice and the great privilege of a scholar's life. It is for this that we are content to become what we are, a somewhat bloodless company, sensitive, low-spirited, lacking in spring; in business ill at ease, in social life thin and embarrassed, objects of solicitude to kind hostesses'.[48]

This is witty enough; but it does not quite match Housman's more famous adaptation of a dictum by Wilamowitz. In a summary of achievements in English classical studies, the great German scholar referred, again using passionate language, to the closing of the golden age of English scholarship 'with the unhappy year 1825, when Peter Dobree sank into the grave which had hardly closed over Peter Elmsley.'[49] In Housman's reworking a third English scholar is added, contrary to strict chronology, so that this becomes a reference to 'the successive strokes of doom which consigned Dobree and

46. Wilamowitz's two talks were entitled *Greek Historical Writing* and *Apollo.*

47. See Alexander Murray, grandson of Gilbert, in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 120 (2003) p.438, quoting Southern as saying of the writing of history 'it tears your guts out.'

48. Murray's inaugural lecture *The Interpretation of Greek Literature* (Oxford 1909) p.19f.

49. *Einleitung in der gr. Trag.* (= *Euripides Herakles* I (1889)) p.228: 'der unseligen Jahre 1823, wo Peter Dobree in das Grab sank, das sich kaum über Peter Elmsley geschlossen hatte.'

Elmsley to the grave, and Blomfield to the bishopric of Chester.'[50]

We cannot say absolutely nothing about the issue which this quotation leads us to next. A professor of Latin at Oxford[51] once referred to Housman's 'extraordinary style of debate' which 'caused lasting offence', especially on the continent, and constituted 'a reversion to the manners of previous centuries'. He concluded that it was due 'not just to a love of truth', but that rather 'the explanation must surely lie in an underlying unhappiness that found a more creditable outlet in his poetry.' One wonders. A.S.F. Gow, the Greek scholar and fellow of Trinity already mentioned, who knew Housman personally, refers more simply (and convincingly) to the 'artistic pleasure' we may assume Housman to have taken 'in plying a weapon which he wielded with extreme address'.[52] The alleged 'reversion to the manners of previous centuries' alludes principally to two earlier Greek scholars of Cambridge, Richard Bentley and Richard Porson.

Richard Bentley (1662-1742) president of Trinity College, Cambridge, contemporary of and correspondent with Sir Isaac Newton, regarded (and in a sense rediscovered) by Housman as the greatest classical scholar ever, had, rather like his contemporary and belittler Jonathan Swift, a surprisingly and agreeably demotic written style of which the following polemic may serve as specimen: 'here are your workmen to mend an author, as bungling Tinkers do old kettles; there was but one hole in the text before they meddled with it, but they leave it with two.' And from Porson (1759-1808), Regius Professor of Greek and fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, here is a more urbane instance: 'at this point up stands a grave and reverent gentleman and says with a serious face that it is not noon at mid-day. And this trash we are expected to refute or the mumpsimus brigade will boast hereafter that we have left their leader unvanquished.' Or more briefly: 'one ray of light, however, pierced the Egyptian darkness of your mind.'[53]

50. *Manilius* I p.xliii = *Selected Prose* p.41.

51. R.G.M. Nisbet, 'On Housman's *Juvenal', Illinois Classical Studies* 14 (1989) 300 = *Collected Papers on Latin Literature* p.290. This paper was printed in a revised form in Butterfield and Stray (as n.35) p.45ff.

52. Gow p.25.

53. The quotations are respectively from Bentley's *Dissertation upon the Letters of Phalaris* and Porson's *Letters to Travis.* On Housman's invective see further Naiditch in *Aspects of Nineteenth Century British Classical Scholarship* (ed. Jocelyn 1996) pp.137ff. = *Additional Problems in the Life and Writings of A.E.*

It would be wrong though to leave the impression that Housman's style was merely a matter of antiquarianism. D.R. Shackleton Bailey rightly compared it with that of Murray's contemporary and friend G.B. Shaw.[54] This is the more easily observable now that the early music criticism of Shaw has been reprinted in three splendid volumes.

What is in many ways the best brief attempt to convey the effect of a Housman preface and edition was given by Wilamowitz's pupil Eduard Fraenkel (later to be Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford University) in his (German) review of Housman's *Lucan.* To quote an English translation of part of this:[55] 'the editor tickles and teases his reader with a vengeance; at times it looks as if his very object were to make [the reader] lose patience.' But 'beneath the mummery of an often madcap wantonness, an astonishing achievement of scholarly criticism' can be witnessed. The reviewer, as he read, felt himself, he says, 'being put through a very severe course of intellectual gymnastics by a masterly trainer.' One recalls what Sir Joshua Reynolds said of Dr Johnson's 'faculty of teaching inferior minds the art of thinking ... he qualified my mind to think justly'.[56] Housman's editions and

Housman pp.52ff.

54. Shackleton Bailey, *The Listener* 17 May (1959) 795f. = N. Page, *A.E. Housman a Critical Biography* (New York 1983) p.175. The periodical music criticism Shaw wrote in the late nineteenth century has been re-edited by Dan H. Laurence in three volumes (*Shaw's Music* The Bodley Head Shaw, London 1981). Of the similarities I give but one example: here is Shaw in *The World* 18 July 1894 = 3.273 on certain German opera singers: 'their sincerity, their affectionate intimacy with the works, their complete absorption in their parts, enable them to achieve most interesting and satisfactory performances, and to elicit demonstrations of respect and enthusiasm from the audience, which, nevertheless, if it has any ears, must know perfectly well that the singing has been at best second-rate, and at worst quite outside the category of music.' Connoisseurs of Housman's Prefaces may recognise an affinity to his judicious balancing of good and ill within a scholar's output.

55. *Classical Review* 40 (1926) p.146. Fraenkel's original review was in *Gnomon* 2 (1926) pp.497ff. = *Kleine Beiträge* 2.267ff.

56. Cf. John Wain, *Samuel Johnson a Biography* (London 1974) pp.195 and 246, especially the gloss on the latter: as Reynolds said, 'the point was ... that the habit of rigorous thinking, as inculcated by Johnson, was transferable to any subject.' Friedrich Nietzsche was to call his unfinished work *The Will to Power* 'a book for thinking'. For *stylistic* indebtedness to Johnson on Housman's part see R. Renehan, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 88 (1984) pp.241ff.

the various prefaces thereto are also 'books for thinking', which transcend the boundaries of the edited authors' subject matter. They are, for instance, particularly helpful when one is confronted by the manifold idiocies of a university's administrative staff. Take this exposure of a fallacy from his *Juvenal*:[57] 'Three minutes' thought would suffice to find this out. But thought is irksome, and three minutes is a long time'. Bear that in mind when you are next dealing with, let us say, Oxford University's Humanities Division.

The English classical periodical which reported Fraenkel's critique observed that 'it may be many years ... since a classical work by an Englishman received from a German so handsome a tribute of praise', while noting that Fraenkel had also disputed some of the editor's decisions 'without any mincing of words', and suggesting that 'der streitfohle Herausgeber' ('the polemical editor') may have something to say in reply. Housman in fact had little directly to say in reply.[58] Indeed, it is evidence of his magnanimity that when, about ten years later, Fraenkel left Germany because of the rise to power of the National Socialist Party, Housman was instrumental in ensuring his election to the Corpus Professorship at Oxford by writing a very positive reference, though one couched in quintessentially Housmannian terms: 'I cannot say sincerely that I wish Dr Fraenkel to obtain the Corpus Professorship as I would rather that he should be my successor in Cambridge.'[59] Of course such dry irony would be lethal in a modern–day reference. One pictures the humourless dead-heads of the relevant appointing committee of today furrowing their brows and scratching their skulls in a vain attempt to grasp the point.

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57. P.xi. = *Selected Prose* p.56.

58. In a reprint of his edition of Lucan (1927: *Corrigenda* p.338) Housman mentions only Fraenkel's repunctuation of 9.491, and Fraenkel's criticisms of Housman's individual interpretations are not always sound (for just one example see L. Håkanson, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 25 (1979) p.37). D.R. Shackleton Bailey (*Profile of Horace* (London 1982) p.82) used dissent by Fraenkel from 'a juvenile paper' of Housman's to draw a distinction between 'critic' and 'scholar' reminiscent of Housman on Fraenkel's teacher Friedrich Leo (see Housman's *Juvenal*^{2} (1931) p.xxxviii).

59. Letters, II.448. For Housman's role in Fraenkel's appointment see further my article 'A. E. Housman and the 1934 Election to the Corpus Chair of Latin' in *HSJ* 35 (2009) 57 ff.

When Murray was appointed to the Chair of Greek in Oxford, Housman wrote[60] to congratulate him (17 October, 1908): 'I think you are now well on your way to take that place in the public eye which used to be occupied by Jowett and then by Jebb; and as you are a much better scholar than the one [Jowett], and a much better man of letters than the other [Jebb], the public will be a gainer without knowing it.' One observes the recurrent popularity of the technique of *syncrisis*. Housman, incidentally, re-used this type of joke three years later in a speech of farewell to University College, London, when he observed of the university to which he was transferring that it had seen 'Wordsworth drunk and Porson sober', adding the modest claim that he himself was 'a greater scholar than Wordsworth and a greater poet than Porson'.[61]

Housman's congratulations might have seemed less generous to Murray had the latter known that, some three months earlier, Housman had written (27 June, 1908)[62] to his publisher Grant Richards: 'Bywater is resigning the Greek chair at Oxford, and Herbert Richards ought to succeed him. Whether he will is quite another question. It is a Regius professorship, and the king [in this case Edward VII] generally asks the advice of one or two persons whom he supposes to be good judges. He has not applied to me: possibly because we have not been introduced.'

Who, one asks oneself, was Herbert Richards – apart from being, as the name suggests, uncle of Housman's addressee, his publisher Grant Richards? Since this familial link seemed to me inadequate recommendation, I made enquiries at Wadham College, where Herbert Richards passed the whole of his life after being appointed to a fellowship there[63] fresh from Balliol at the age of 22. If my enquiries failed to answer satisfactorily the question why Housman should have thought his publisher's uncle a suitable professor of Greek, they did reveal one interesting document to which I now proceed. It is from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow, and takes the form of a letter from Herbert Richards (dated 18 April, 1871)

60. *Letters* I.226f.

61. See Naiditch (above, n.6) p.155.

62. *Letters* I.223f.

63. I am grateful to my namesake the College archivist at Wadham for help in obtaining the following information. I have explored the reasons for Housman's admiration of Richards' scholarship in Stray (ed.) (as n.16) p.167ff.

newly arrived at Wadham, addressed to no less a personage than Karl Marx (then aged 52). Though an obituary note[64] identifies Richards as being, at the end of his life, 'a strong Conservative', he was in his idealistic youth Secretary of the Oxford Republican Club, and it was in this capacity that he wrote to Karl Marx asking 'for any information you can conveniently give as to the objects of the International Working Men's Association. If, as I do not doubt, they are such as the Club also has in view, I will endeavour to co-operate with you and other bodies in effecting them.' As a note in the *Wadham College Gazette* (Michaelmas Term 1979, p.32) observes, 'unfortunately there is no record of Marx's reply'. As an earlier note in the same periodical concludes (Michaelmas Term 1975, p.33), 'either [Richards] had misunderstood the purpose of the I.W.M.A. or, as so often, his politics changed.' But Richards' position seems more meritorious than that of President Bellamy of St John's, Oxford (Vice-Chancellor 1886-90) who founded a society to fight reform throughout the University. That Richards' youthful entanglement with Marxism counted in his failure to be appointed Professor of Greek seems unlikely. At any rate, Housman's endorsement may perhaps be seen as a reminder that Professors of Latin are not necessarily the best people to consult over the appointment of Professors of Greek. But since Herbert Richards was one of the examiners who failed Housman in 'Greats', the letter is a further example of the latter's magnanimity. At the end of Murray's tenure, another, more famous, fellow of Wadham was to be passed over for the position of his successor.[65]

The Prime Minister involved in Murray's appointment in 1908 was Herbert Asquith. The Richards family preserved a tradition[66] that Asquith, who had been Herbert Richards' contemporary at Balliol, wrote to him apologising for any disappointment and explaining that Murray 'had done so much to popularise the study of Greek, then rather under a cloud'. One hopes this is true, if only because it is a reminder of the continuing resilience of a subject that has been 'under a cloud' for almost a century. At any rate, I now use Asquith as a mode of transition to my next

64. *Oxford Magazine* (25 Feb., 1916) p.14 = *Wadham College Gazette* 56 (Hilary Term, 1916) 397.

65. C.M. Bowra. See his account (above, n.45) pp.268ff., Wilson pp.326ff., etc.

66. See Grant Richards as cited above n.1, p.83.

topic, Housman's greatest scholarly achievement, his edition of the Latin didactic poet Manilius. This writer, in the first century A.D., composed an hexameter work in five books on astronomy and astrology. The reaction of most people to this work would, I imagine, be the same as that of the young Goethe, who recorded in his diary, at the age of twenty one:[67] 'I began to read Manilius' *Astronomica* and soon had to put it down: no matter how much this philosophical poet festoons his work with lofty thoughts, he cannot reduce the barrenness of his subject ... One has to debit the poet's account with the ill consequences of a subject. After all, he is the one who chose it.' Housman himself is reliably reported to have summed up Manilius as 'a facile and frivolous poet, the brightest facet of whose genius was an eminent aptitude for doing sums in verse.'[68] When, in 1926, the former Prime Minister, recently ennobled as 'the earl of Oxford and Asquith', was asked to deliver his Presidential Address to the Scottish Classical Association at Edinburgh, he chose as his topic the man whom he called 'the greatest scholar of the 16th century', Joseph Justus Scaliger, the first important classicist to occupy himself with Manilius. Being duly and reasonably puzzled as to 'why such a writer as Manilius could offer so many attractions to great scholars', Asquith put the question 'to my friend Gilbert Murray', as he called him, and quoted the response.[69] This response began by agreeing that 'Manilius does fascinate people, for instance, Robinson Ellis and Housman and Garrod' [professional classicists will imagine Housman's reaction to being placed in the middle of that particular trinity]... There are beautiful phrases and passages in Manilius – perhaps nothing quite so good as the introductory elegiacs by Housman in the first volume of his edition –... but I think scholars are largely attracted to him by his difficulties.'

Perhaps Asquith should also have consulted Housman beforehand. When sent a copy of the Address after its delivery, Housman replied (on 22

67. 'Ephemerides' Jan.-March 1770 (Frankfurt *Sämtliche Werke* Vol.28 *(Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche)* p. 198): 'Ich fing des Manilius Astronomikon zu lesen an, und musste es bald aus der Hand legen; so sehr dieser Philosophische Dichter sein Werk mit grosen Gedanken verziert, vermag er doch der Unfruchtbarkeit seines Sujets nicht abzuhelfen'. I quote from the translation offered by Goold in his introduction to the Loeb Manilius p.xv.

68. Gow p.13.

69. *The Presidential Address ...* March 20 1926 p.11.

April 1926),[70] beginning with ominous politeness: 'Dear Lord Oxford, I am much obliged by your kindness in sending me your address on Scaliger', and continued: 'One statement which both you and Sandys have made in reliance on Mark Pattison, that Scaliger in the *Manilius* of 1579 passed from textual criticism to chronology, is not true. There is hardly a word about chronology in the book, which is in fact his greatest work in textual criticism ... Pattison had never read the book: he was a spectator of all time and all existence, and the contemplation of that repulsive scene is fatal to accurate learning.' I cannot refrain from observing that in one sentence here (the first) Housman succeeds in correcting and patronising a former Prime Minister and then Peer of the realm; a former Rector of Exeter College, Oxford; and a former Public Orator of the University of Cambridge.

Asquith had just in fact suffered even greater humiliation at the hands of a St John's man. He was, in the words of A.J.P. Taylor,[71] 'rejected as Chancellor of Oxford University in favour of Cave, a man otherwise unknown'. In the slightly more detailed account by a successful candidate on a later occasion for the same position, Roy Jenkins,[72] Viscount Cave was 'at once a friend of Asquith's, the least distinguished occupant of the Woolsack of the first thirty years of this century, and an Oxonian of no great university fame'. An honorary fellow of St John's, like Housman, his portrait hangs on the wall above the stairs leading up from the main entrance to the College's SCR.

I have allowed attention to be distracted from the issue of why Housman should have devoted twenty five years of his life to editing a poet he himself described as 'facile' and 'frivolous'. A large part of the answer must be that, as Gow rightly intuited, the task gave him the 'opportunity ... of displaying his special gift' of healing a textually corrupt author by emendation, 'and more hope of approximating finality in the solution of the problems presented.'[73] That is, 'more hope' than with infinitely greater poets such as Aeschylus or Sophocles, for instance, on the Greek side; and more to do than with infinitely greater poets such as Vergil or Horace whose texts are relatively less corrupt. Facing an audience of non-specialists, I

70. *Letters* I.615.
71. *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford 1963) p.3 n.2.
72. In his biography of Asquith (London 1986) p.511.
73. Gow p. 13.

found it hard to convey Housman's 'special gift' just referred to, at least as regards classical authors, but thought just a glimmer might be given with an example from an English poet, an example which some of the audience might not be familiar with. In the Preface to his edition of the fifth and final book of Manilius,[74] Housman recorded how he had once encountered for the first time in a newspaper review the following stanzas by Walter de la Mare:

Oh, when this my dust surrenders
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again,
May these loved and loving faces
Please other men!

May the rustling harvest hedgerow
Still the Traveller's Joy entwine,
And as happy children gather
Posies once mine.

Housman on one occasion pictured, in connection with the text of Manilius, his great hero the eighteenth-century classical scholar Richard Bentley, placing his finger on an unintelligible – because textually corrupt – passage of Latin poetry and saying – Housman here echoes a poem of Matthew Arnold's on Goethe and his diagnosis of the malaise of nineteenth century civilisation – 'thou ailest here and here'.[75] I did not ask my audience to recreate the most awe–inspiring achievements of textual criticism, just something relatively simple. 'I knew in a moment that Mr de la Mare had not written *rustling*,' Housman proceeds, 'and in another moment I had found the true word.' And he goes on, in a typical provocation, and with a cunningly placed clue, to envisage what would have happened had he published his emendation and had we lacked the independent evidence which we have and which shows it to be correct: 'I should have been told that *rustling* was exquisitely apt and poetical, because hedgerows do rustle, especially in autumn, when the leaves are dry ... and I should have been recommended to quit my dusty (or musty) books and make a belated acquaintance with the sights and sounds of the English countryside.' I

74. *Manilius* V p.xxxvf. = *Selected Prose* p.52.
75. *Manilius* I p.xvi = *Selected Prose* p.27.

appealed especially to the scientists in the audience to set aside any perfectly reasonable irritation at what might be called 'the infuriating superiority of the rhetoric'[76] and to recover Housman's emendation, and with it the original text of the poem. It is striking that G.P. Goold, the editor of the Loeb text and translation of the poem, which is by far the most painless way of making its acquaintance, is of the opinion that 'Housman's exposition of Manilius' astrology, largely free from the ill temper which obtrudes so much into his textual criticism, constitutes the most admirable feature of his work.'[77] But this part of Housman's achievement was even harder to convey to non-specialists, though I did show one or two pages from his *Manilius,* diagrams and star charts, which I think rather frightened them.

Housman himself claimed, in the course of an obituary to which we shall return later, that 'a scholar who means to build himself a monument must spend much of his time in acquiring knowledge which for its own sake is not worth having and in reading books which do not in themselves deserve to be read.'[78] A distinguished classicist has said, with the contrast between Housman and Murray very much in mind, that 'a good edition of Manilius will retain much of its value fifty years later; a book like [Murray's] *Five Stages of Greek Religion* will be largely out of date.'[79] But he did at once add that Murray's approach to the ancient world was still more than valid.

Shortly after Housman's death it was reported in the *Times* how the great Wilamowitz had stated[80] that 'although we Germans know Housman to be a rabid Germanophobe, we, nevertheless, pronounce him

76. H. Lloyd-Jones in *Sophoclea* (by himself and N.G. Wilson, Oxford 1990) p.225, discussing an earlier conjecture by Housman in the text of *Oedipus at Colonus.*

77. Loeb Manilius, Introduction p.ix. Cf. Goold's evaluation of Housman's *Manilius* in *A.E. Housman, A Reassessment* (edd. Holden and Birch) (London 2000) pp.138ff. and E. Courtney's 'Housman's Manilius' in Butterfield and Stray (edd.) (as n.35) pp.29ff.

78. *Nine Essays* by Arthur Platt, with a preface by A. E. Housman (Cambridge 1926) p.xi = *Classical Papers* 3.1272 = *Selected Prose* p.159.

79. Lloyd-Jones, *Greek Studies in Modern Oxford* (Inaugural Lecture 1961) p.23 = *Blood for the Ghosts* p.28.

80. Mrs. T.W. Pym, Letter to *The Times* 5 May 1936 = Grant Richards as cited above n.1, p.83. n.1. For some bibliography on Wilamowitz's attitude to Housman and Housman's attitude to Wilamowitz see R. Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer his Life and Work* (Cambridge 1987) p.327 n.13.

to be the greatest living authority in both Latin and Greek in the English-speaking world.' Wilamowitz did indeed correspond by letter with Murray, but had no such high opinion of him, and others too have often found Murray wanting by contrast with Housman in sheer professionalism. It is significant that Murray's successor as professor of Greek, E.R. Dodds, at the end of an obituary to which I shall later come back,[81] should have said, rather defensively: 'whether he is to be ranked with the greatest of scholars depends on one's definition of scholarship.' The language here used by Dodds reflects a recurrent, nagging doubt concerning Murray's scholarly credentials. The most frequently adduced charge is of a kind of amateur or dilettante attitude. 'Well-read though he was in the works of Wilamowitz and other German scholars,' says one classicist,[82] 'and much as he drew inspiration from them, Murray never learned the secret of their professionalism and his previous training left him poorly qualified for the technical aspects of editing a classical text.' Euripides was edited by Murray quite early in his life. The deficiencies of his Oxford text of Aeschylus have attained virtually iconic status in the world of classical scholarship. Those who, like myself, have seen the proofs of the first edition as annotated by Fraenkel, will appreciate the urbane understatement of Murray: 'Fraenkel treats me with much severity'. Nor did it help that, well aware of these deficiencies, Murray, when charged with producing a second edition, resorted to the help of a team of – admittedly distinguished – scholars. As a Cambridge classicist has cruelly but justifiably observed, 'hence perhaps the nature of its poetic text. As a distinguished Oxford man (Mr [later Sir] Alec Issigonis) has reminded us, a camel is a horse designed by a committee.'[83] That Murray was some 70 years old at the time he published the first edition, and nearly 90 by the time of the second, may be counted as some mitigation.

Collation of manuscripts means comparison of their different readings. James Diggle, who edited the Oxford Text of Euripides which finally replaced Murray's, praises his judgement in choice of readings and

81. Dodds as cited above n.42.

82. Fowler p.324.

83. R.D. Dawe, *The Collation and Investigation of Manuscripts of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1964) p.7 n.*. For Murray's own 'Fraenkel treats me' etc. see Wilson p.321.

conjectures but notes his failure to do much first-hand collation.[84] It was in fact only in 1903 that the improved state of Murray's health allowed him to travel to work at the Laurentian library in Florence, designed by Michelangelo and containing the most famous medieval manuscript of (some) of the plays of Euripides. And yet comparison here with the practice of Housman may enable us to get a sense of perspective (especially, perhaps, historical perspective). For Housman too, in spite of his far greater professionalism, was deficient here. As a former Corpus Professor of Latin has said regarding his edition of Juvenal: 'His gastronomic tours of France did not lead him to the Pithoeanus at Montpellier ... he acknowledges particular indebtedness to the collations of Mr Hosius, though he is ready enough to insult him elsewhere.'[85] In this abstention from collating, Housman was defended by the distinguished classical scholar D.R. Shackleton Bailey (described by one colleague as 'the least unlike Housman of modern Latinists'): 'collation is a job for clerks or electronic machines, and a scholar who happens to possess a brain capable of more delicate operations is right to let others do it for him whenever he fairly can.'[86] The advent of microfiche, digital images and online publication of manuscripts has revolutionised the opportunities for scholars to engage in collation.

It must in all honesty be further stressed that what Murray was aiming at in his conception of scholarship was something very different from Housman's. One cannot imagine Housman writing to a colleague, as Murray did shortly before his appointment to the Oxford chair of Greek, 'a prophet is a good deal wanted in Oxford to teach that there are really life and poetry and things to move one in ancient literature.'[87] By this time Murray had certainly triumphed in one aspect of this programme. Murray's translations of Greek tragedy enjoyed enormous success when produced on

84. See *Euripidis Fabulae* I p.x: *sobrio plerumque usus iudicio quidquid sibi utile esse videbatur a prioribus accepit, interdum de suo nonnulla attulit. sed codicum notitiam nunc ab hoc nunc ab illo plurimam partem decerpsit et est ubi multo ampliorem praesertim in triade desideres. verborum autem recensioni non satis acutam vel accuratam considerationem navavit.*

85. Nisbet as cited above n.51, p.287 = p.274 = p.47..

86. Shackleton Bailey as cited above n.54, p.796 = p.176. For 'the least unlike' etc., see Lloyd-Jones, *Times Literary Supplement* 8 Feb. 1973 p.345 = *Blood for the Ghosts* p.182.

87. *GM* p.127.

stage at the Royal Court Theatre. The reaction of the poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt is representative: 'at the end of Murray's translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus,* he confided to his diary , 'we were all moved to tears, and I got up and did what I never did before in a theatre, shouted for the author, whether for Euripides or Gilbert Murray, I hardly knew which.'[88] On 13 October, 1903, Housman wrote to Murray:[89] 'I have been reading your translations from Euripides. With your command of language and metre you are really a noble example of ἐγκράτεια in that you don't produce volumes of original poetry.' This may serve as a point of transition to our next section. When Wilamowitz in his autobiography wrote of Murray that 'the poet is stronger in him than the philologist',[90] he was expressing the rather uneasy attitude he had always had towards Murray. But he meant well.[91] Bernard Shaw, indeed, said of Murray's translations, they 'came into our dramatic literature with all the impulsive power of original works'; and informed Murray in 1940 that 'though I have lived in the thick of a revolutionary burst of playwriting activity in London, the only plays that seem to me likely to survive are the old Greek ones in your translation.'[92]

By contrast, in a piece entitled 'Euripides and Professor Murray'

88. *My Diaries: Being A Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914* vol. II p.104.

89. *Letters* I.157. On Murray's translations see now E. Hall and F. Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660-1914* (Oxford 2005) pp.488ff.

90. *Erinnerungen 1848-1914* (Leipzig 1920) p.258 = *My Recollections 1848-1914* p.273.

91. For a full treatment of their relationship see A. Bierl, W.M. Calder III and R.L. Fowler (edd.), *The Prussian and the Poet: the Letters of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff to Gilbert Murray 1894–1930* (Hildesheim 1991). Gow p.15f. rightly says that some of Housman's published articles on Greek tragedy attain a very high standard. The best treatment of Housman's achievements as critic on the text of Greek literature, especially tragedy, is to be found in James Diggle's 'Housman's Greek' in P.J. Finglass, C. Collard and N.J. Richardson (edd.), *Hesperos: Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M.L. West on his Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford 2007) p.145ff.

92. *Collected Letters* ([iv] 1926-1950) p.585. Cf. *The Nation* 19 March 1910 = *Shaw's Music* (above, n.54) 3.606: 'Thanks to [Murray] we know the poem [Euripides' *Electra*] as if it were an English one.' Not only Shaw, perhaps dismissible as a non-expert, was of this opinion. For 'the effect of an original' see further Wilamowitz *(Gr. Tragödien* 4. 156f): 'sic ganz wie ein original gewirkt.'

(first published in 1918), T.S. Eliot famously denounced Murray for having 'interposed between Euripides and ourselves a barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language', referring to Murray's translation of *Medea,* which 'almost habitually use[s] two words where the Greek language requires one, and where the English language will provide him with one', thus 'stretch[ing] the Greek brevity to fit the loose frame of William Morris, and blur[ring] the Greek lyric to the fluid haze of Swinburne.'[93] This review is regularly regarded as a piece of demolition pure and simple, the moment when Murray encountered Modernism and came away crushed; and given that it ends with the memorable statement 'it is because Professor Murray has no creative instinct that he leaves Euripides quite dead', these negative impressions are hardly surprising.

In fact, closer examination reveals a more complex attitude to Murray on Eliot's part and a more positive position. But because the more positive position is expressed allusively and with irony, the negative verdict tends to linger more tenaciously in the mind. Thus Eliot certainly says 'as a poet, Mr Murray is merely a very insignificant follower of the pre-Raphaelite movement'. But this verdict is actually the first half of an antithesis, the second half of which follows immediately: 'as a Hellenist, he is very much of the present day, and a very important figure in the day. This day', he continues, 'began, in a sense, with Tylor and a few German anthropologists,' and he goes on to specify Jane Harrison[94] in particular, when he rightly identifies Murray as her 'friend and inspirer'.

Eliot – writing, remember, near the end of the First World War – observes that 'the Greek is no longer the awe-inspiring Belvedere of Winckelmann, Goethe and Schopenhauer, the figure of which Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde offered us a slightly debased re-edition.' And he goes on,

93. Oscar Wilde had already used this style. Cf. Richard Ellmann's biography (London 1987) p.30: 'He found an analogy in the way that Euripides "was criticised by the conservatives of his own day much as Swinburne is by the Philistines of ours", as he was to write. Perhaps for this reason, in 1876 he translated a Euripidean chorus into Swinburne's rhythm and vocabulary.' His Swinburnian rendering of the parodos of Aristophanes' *Clouds* was deemed 'not at all bad' by Housman (*Letters* I.67). See J. Bristow in K. Powell and P. Raby (edd.), *Oscar Wilde in Context* (Cambridge 2013) p.73.

94. On this figure see, for instance, M. Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (London 2000).

allusively, as I have said, to sketch a suggestive outline of the new attitude to the ancient world by saying: 'if Pindar bores us, we admit it; we are not certain that Sappho was *very* much greater than Catullus.' In other words, Eliot is here signalling the obsolescence of the nineteenth-century attitude – indebted to the Romantic movement, indeed, originating with it – and he concedes that 'it is to be hoped that we may be grateful to Professor Murray and his friends for what they have done' in demolishing that view. Eliot's remarks, then, do not constitute a wholesale condemnation of Murray. What Eliot regrets is that a man who, as a scholar, has brought the Greeks into the twentieth century[95] could not do the same as a translator; and that his poetical allegiances (unlike his scholarly ones) remained fixed[96] in the nineteenth century.

The movement away from the nineteenth century's idealising view of the Greeks is more often attributed – if one is looking for a single name – to Friedrich Nietzsche and his *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), though, in fact, Walter Pater of Oxford University (1839-1894) can be shown to have anticipated Nietzsche, as Eliot hints.[97] But it is impressive that Eliot sees Murray's role in the process. Indeed, in one significant respect, Murray can be seen as more modern (and modernist) than Nietzsche. Immediately on the heels of the remark quoted above about the 'barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language', Eliot says 'We do not reproach [Murray] for preferring, apparently, Euripides to Aeschylus.' Any such preference was decidedly modern on Murray's part, since awarding pre-eminence to Aeschylus among the Greek tragedians was very much a nineteenth century Romantic attitude, one which in its turn replaced an eighteenth century admiration for the 'classical' and 'perfectly balanced' Sophocles, who seemed aptly to reflect eighteenth century tastes. The difficult, rugged, sublime Aeschylus likewise seemed to give Romantic sensibilities what they were looking for. But, however irrationally, this led to the denigration of Euripides, memorably dismissed by Swinburne, in one of his numerous

95. 'This democratic act of making Greek Tragedy available to the middle class ... aroused the ire of the litterati, the George circle and T.S. Eliot' (Fowler [as above, n. 91] p.2).

96. On Murray's literary tastes see, for instance, *GM* p.136f., Wilson pp.195ff.

97. See, for instance, K. Hext, *Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy* (Edinburgh 2013).

intemperate moments, as 'a mutilated monkey ... troubled with a dysentery of poeticising and a diarrhoea of rhetorical sophistry'. And this denigration was carried over by Nietzsche into the *Birth of Tragedy,* a book which, in so many other respects, marked a decisive break with past attitudes to the ancient Greeks and a move towards twentieth century views. For schematic and other reasons, however, Euripides still has to feature negatively in Nietzsche's picture as – and this is an oversimplification[98] deriving from the ancient world itself – the dramatist responsible for 'the death of tragedy'. That Murray should have broken so decisively with so engrained a prejudice was a remarkable achievement, which has justifiably led to his being credited with having 'almost single-handedly resuscitated Euripides' fortunes in England'.[99] That the same individual should have been unable also to divest himself of nineteenth-century literary tastes (he was born, we recall in 1866, as opposed to Eliot's 1888) is regrettable but by no means unparalleled. The name of William Morris was evoked by Eliot to 'place' Murray's style of translation, and one may compare F.R. Leavis' detection[100] of a similar disjunction in the case of that genius: 'who would guess from his poetry that William Morris was one of the most versatile, energetic and original men of his time, a force that impinged decisively in the world of practice? He reserved poetry for his daydreams.'

'A force that impinged decisively in the world of practice.' Of how many professors of Greek could that be said? Yet it was also true of Murray. As we saw above, the opening sentence of his *ODNB* entry sums him up as 'Classical scholar and internationalist'. This split, if such it be, created complications for him. In 1923, for instance, the then Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, another classical scholar, L.R. Farnell, wrote to him asking whether he saw any difficulty in combining his position as professor of Greek at Oxford with his occupancy of the 'Chairmanship and Presidency of the League of Nations'.[101] One notices that the Vice-Chancellor, with

98. See, for instance, the article by me cited in the next note.

99. Fowler (as in n.91) p.321. On Euripides' reputation as restored in England by Murray see Mrs Easterling, *Colby Quarterly* 33 (1997) p.119. On the more general restoration of his reputation as a 'modernist' at the start of the twentieth century see W.M. Calder III, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986) pp.425ff. and my remarks in *Prometheus* 25 (1999) pp.119f. and n.13.

100. See *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London 1932) p.21.

101. See above n.38.

that care and attention to detail which has likewise characterised most of his successors, confused the League of Nations with the rather more local League of Nations Union, which is what Murray was President of.[102] Since, as a consequence of Farnell's intervention, Murray surrendered part of his stipend to fund a readership to which Edgar Lobel was appointed, it was a bargain well made.

Perhaps the most impressive act – or, at any rate the action that impresses me most – took place in roughly mid-May 1916 and concerned Conscientious Objectors to World War One.[103] The military, it was feared, planned to ship a number of these to France, there to deal with them under a harsher rule than obtained in their own country, to wit martial law. On the ninth or tenth of May, Murray was contacted by, among others, the parents of one such objector, claiming he was under sentence of death in France at that very moment. Murray hurried to the House of Commons and by pulling strings with the Chief Liberal Whip, who just happened to be his brother-in-law,[104] was able to consult, in the lobby of the House of Commons first of all Lord Derby, Under Secretary for War. The interview with the aristocrat of whom General Haig said 'like the feather pillow, [he] bears the mark of the last person who has sat upon him' did not go well. Derby, either speaking sincerely, or relishing the opportunity to scarify a refined Oxford academic, declared that 'the men were condemned to be shot, and would be shot, and quite right too.' Only one option remained. Murray returned to the Chief Whip and asked to see his friend the Prime Minister. This (brief) meeting went better. As Murray later reported, 'the matter was settled in five minutes. I was greatly struck by his rapidity both in decision and action,' qualities not normally associated with Asquith. 'The Prime Minister dictated an instruction to the military: "no sentences on COs to be carried out without the consent of Cabinet".' One pictures the encounter: the harassed Prime Minister, the last Liberal holder of that office, presiding

102. See, for instance, Wilson pp.302ff.

103. For what follows see in particular Wilson pp.237ff.

104. Note Shaw's observations in a letter to Arthur W. Pinero dated 29 November, 1909 (*Collected Letters* [II] p.885) on 'the social influence [Murray] has through his marriage with ... a daughter of the Earl of Carlisle', and his status as 'one of those very rare men who combine the genuine artistic anarchic character and sympathies with academic distinction and political and social attachments in the big outside world.'

over a precarious coalition government, already watching his back against Lloyd George, his former Chancellor of the Exchequer, who would, indeed, unseat and replace him within six months; the anxious Professor whom he had appointed, still true to the values of Gladstonian Liberalism and the protection of the individual. It has been suggested that 'the worst fears of Murray and many COs were possibly illusory'.[105] Perhaps; and, as we have seen, perhaps Derby was bluffing. But nevertheless, and especially by contrast with a more recent graduate of this college's association with a possibly illegal war, I feel St John's may take pride in its connection with an academic who behaved in this way. One can now return to that verdict passed on Murray by his successor in the Oxford chair of Greek, E.R. Dodds, and complete it by adding the end of the sentence: 'whether he is to be ranked with the greatest scholars depends on one's conception of scholarship; but that he was a truly great man no one who knew him could doubt.'[106]

That Housman had no talent for anything other than vituperation is amply disproved by the Introduction he wrote for the posthumously published *Nine Essays* of his friend Arthur Platt, who, as Professor of Greek, had been his colleague at University College, London, and remained his friend throughout their lives. The end of this brief account of Platt's life and works is the most poignant and moving piece of prose Housman ever wrote. I begin quotation a few lines earlier to bring out the contrast and the change of tone from badinage to deep emotion:[107]

> In conclusion it is proper to mention his vices. He was addicted to tobacco and indifferent to wine, and he would squander long summer days on watching the game of cricket.
>
> His happy and useful life is over, and now begins the steady encroachment of oblivion, as those who remember him are in their turn summoned away. This record will not preserve, perhaps none could preserve, more than an indistinct and lifeless image of the friend who is

105. Wilson p.240. 'The fears were rational enough,' he at once concedes.
106. See above, n.42.
107. See above n.78.

> lost to us: good, kind, bright, unselfish, and as honest as the day; versatile without shallowness, accomplished without ostentation, a treasury of hidden knowledge which only accident brought to light, but which accident brought to light perpetually, and which astonished us so often that astonishment lost its nature and we should have wondered more if wonders had failed. Yet what most eludes description is not the excellence of his gifts but the singularity of his essential being, his utter unlikeness to any other creature in the world.

Housman himself died some ten years after penning those words. He struggled against illness – specifically heart disease – to the end, coming in to the University from the Evelyn Nursing Home to lecture on the text of Horace *Satires* 1, a poignant reminder here of that essay for the St John's scholarship sixty years before. As one of the audience recalled decades later,[108] 'it was a moving experience. The material was as austere as ever, but the barrier of impersonality had gone. He gave us biographical sidelights on the scholars whose names cropped up, and paused from time to time to ask us if we had understood him, appealing for encouragement. He was dying, and well aware of it; yet he wrote to a member of his family that he had never lectured better.' But the Nursing Home beckoned more and more frequently, and his last written communication, a postcard to his sister Katharine Symons (25 April, 1936), reads simply[109] 'Back to Evelyn nursing home today (Saturday). Ugh.'

As he lay in the Evelyn Nursing Home on what was in fact his death-bed, the normally aloof and uncommunicative Housman held his doctor's hand and talked to him for half an hour.[110] 'You have been a good friend to me', he said, 'I know you have brought me here so that I may not commit suicide, and I know that you may not help me to it more than the law allows. But I do ask you not to let me have any more unnecessary suffering than you can help.' The doctor duly gave him an injection. To ease the tension created by the confidence between two normally reserved

108. L.P. Wilkinson, *HSJ* 1 (1974) p.33.
109. *Letters* II.533.
110. See Naiditch, *Problems* p.32f.

men, the doctor did what any uptight Anglo-Saxon male would do in the circumstances: he told his patient an indecent story, probably the one about the Hollywood actor who spent half the time lying on the sand looking up at the stars and the other half lying on the stars looking down at the sand. 'Yes,' said Housman, and these were his last recorded words before he drifted off into unconsciousness, 'that's a good one. And tomorrow I shall be telling it again on the Golden Floor.' Somehow one cannot imagine those being Gilbert Murray's last reaction or last words.

Murray himself actually survived until 1957, dying at the age of 91. That he preserved his sense of humour intact is indicated by a letter to a friend written shortly after the outbreak of World War Two (9 Feb 1940) when Murray was well into his seventies: 'I think it might be a good thing to intern, perhaps decapitate, a few of the Young Fellows of All Souls and certain other colleagues. What do you feel?'[111] He continued his multifarious activities until the end and was only prevented from addressing the Edinburgh Festival for 1956 by the onset of his last illness. A letter to his successor E.R. Dodds, dating from 1955, two years before his death, and now in my possession, eloquently illustrates the diversity of his interests. Almost emblematically, one side shows Murray still engaged with the problems of war and peace and the United Nations as the successor to the League of Nations which he had done so much to promote; the other shows him struggling with the consequences of the publication of a papyrus fragment apparently showing that *The Suppliant Women* was not the earliest Aeschylean tragedy we possess.

It must by now be clear that the two individuals whom we have been considering were, at the very least, remarkable human beings, able, as the Roman historian Tacitus has put it, still to win the occasional triumph over that blind hostility to merit which poisons all states alike. Whether they would thrive quite so spectacularly were they to be living under academic life as at present constituted one may take leave to doubt. Nevertheless, as we move through the years and decades that separate us from the five hundredth anniversary of St John's College, Oxford, and as we face the various problems that modern academic life and its managers present us

111. See Wilson p.403.

with, we should take comfort and courage from the intelligence of Housman and the humanity of Murray. Many a classical scholar has lived a burden to the earth and his fellow men. Housman and Murray have told their own tale, and by that they shall live.[112]

112. I have revised and brought up to date the above text deriving from a lecture originally delivered in 2005 to celebrate the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of St John's College, Oxford. For a comparison of Housman and Murray from a slightly different angle see chapter 8 contributed by me to the book mentioned at the end of n.16 above.

The Oxford Magazine

on Housman's Election the Cambridge Chair of Latin[1]

That electors to Professorships *never* elect the best man is a truth which all the best men (i.e. all the candidates save the Professor, in his blindness) clearly recognise. And that the best man is *sometimes* not elected even disinterested persons are often driven to allow. Fear and Favour, ancient and discreditable powers, sometimes dominate the academic mind, and things go wrong. But nothing went wrong at Cambridge last week, when the Electors to the Chair of Latin elected Mr. A. E. Housman. Mr. Housman is the greatest living critic of Latin poetry; and it is fitting that such a man should fill the Chair of Munro. That an Oxford man should go to a Cambridge Professorship is an uncommon event. Yet we in Oxford have perhaps not over-much cause for self-felicitation. If we bred a great man, yet it took us a long time to find it out. We have as little reason to be proud of ourselves as had the seven cities which contended for the birth of Homer. Perhaps, indeed, Mr. Housman did not always give us a fair chance. His mordant wit sometimes played among us to wound: and we may be forgiven if we sometimes forgot that behind his unmeasured speech there was also unmeasured learning, and behind the learning – genius. We have heard it said by many persons during the last week that Cambridge has done an adventurous thing. That is a shallow judgement. Cambridge has invested in genius; and that, after all, is of all investments the safest. We wish Mr. Housman luck; and we trust that he will still sometimes be seen among us. We wonder what it is, or was, in St. John's College that sends to Professorships men like Mr. Gilbert Murray and Mr. Housman. A banquet seems clearly indicated, with much Samian wine and Ludlow beer – a banquet to which we trust that a generous Foundation will invite both the Editor of the *Magazine* and the writer of this note.

1. Anon. ('Notes and News') in *The Oxford Magazine* Jan 26. 1911, 150 col. 2 – 151 col. 1.

Housman's Elegiacs to Moses Jackson

Colin Sydenham

SODALI MEO
M. I. JACKSON
HARUM LITTERARUM CONTEMPTORI

Signa pruinosae uariantia luce cauernas
noctis et extincto lumina nata die
solo rure uagi lateque tacentibus aruis
surgere nos una uidimus oceano.
uidimus: illa prius, cum luce carebat uterque,
uiderat in Latium prona poeta mare,
seque memor terra mortalem matre creatum
intulit aeternis carmina sideribus,
clara nimis post se genitis exempla daturus
ne quis forte deis fidere uellet homo.
nam supero sacrata polo complexaque mundum
sunt tamen indignam carmina passa luem,
et licet ad nostras enarint naufraga terras
scriptoris nomen uix tenuere sui.
non ego mortalem uexantia sidera sortem
aeternosue tuli sollicitare deos,
sed cito casurae tactus uirtutis amore
humana uolui quaerere nomen ope,
uirque uirum legi fortemque breuemque sodalem
qui titulus libro uellet inesse meo.
O uicture meis dicam periturene chartis,
nomine sed certe uiuere digne tuo,
haec tibi ad auroram surgentia signa secuto
Hesperia trado munera missa plaga,
en cape: nos populo uenit inlatura perempto
ossa solo quae det dissoluenda dies
fataque sortitas non inmortalia mentes
et non aeterni uincla sodalicii.

Here is a new translation, which attempts to respect Housman's own practice of avoiding whenever possible any word of Latin origin.[1]

TO MY COMRADE
M. I. JACKSON
WHO SCORNS THESE STUDIES

Roaming in wide and silent fields we watched
Rising from ocean points of light,
Which as day died away cast fitful beams,
Fretting the frosty vault of night.
And long before our time a poet watched
Them setting in the Latin sea,
And mindful of his earthborn fate he wrought
In deathless stars his poetry,
And thus became a warning for all time
That none to gods his trust should pay,
For though it ranged the holy heavens' breadth
His work met ill-deserved decay,
And though its wreckage beached upon our strand
It scarce could tell the writer's name.
Upon the troubling stars and deathless gods
Myself I scorned to make a claim,
But, spurred by love of fleeting manhood, sought
To make a name by human aid,
And man for man chose for my title page
A stalwart but a brief comrade.
My friend, who in my words may live or die,
But whose own worth will stead you best,
Who followed to the east those rising lights,
This gift I pass you from the west.
Take it; a day is coming, which our bones
To the lost throng below will send,
The bane of hearts not deathless born, and bonds
Of comradeship foredoomed to end.

1. This translation first appeared in the article 'Translating Housman and Housman translating', *Arion* 16 (2008) 47-51.

An Evening with A. E. Housman

Cyril Clemens[1]

Introduction

If we should ever have to go to the poor-house (and such a fate might overtake anyone these uncertain days) we shall demand the first seat at table and when the superintendent asks the reason why, answer proudly,

"We have had the great honor of dining with Housman at Trinity's High Table, of walking and talking with him beside the Cam, and of joking and drinking whiskey and soda with him in his rooms overlooking Whewell's Court."

And we can hear the superintendent answering,

"The place is yours by every right and you shall be served your pudding before all, even before myself."

There was sadness in the hearts of many last May when the papers stated that a poet had died on April 30th, 1936 in a Cambridge Nursing Home. Our last letter from him had been written in March of this year when he had felt obliged to decline the Mark Twain Medal. How modestly his letter expresses his feelings:

> "I am deeply sensible of the honor which your Society does me by the offer of its Silver Medal, and I shall always remember it with gratitude. Nevertheless I beg you to allow me to decline it, as in pursuance of an early resolve, I have in the course of my life already declined a considerable number of honors, even when offered me by my own two Universities and by the King of England with the same excess of kindness and over-estimate of desert."

1. This text is reproduced from the pamphlet of the same title published by the International Mark Twain Society in 1937 (*Historical Series* 6). The brief forword by Padraic Colum has been omitted. The text gives an interesting perspective of an American admirer of Housman's poetry. Further interest stems from the author's claim that the text was carefully vetted by Housman. If the original of the letter cited in n.9 can be traced, it would prove to be an interesting document.

Alfred Edward Housman was born at Catshill,[2] Worcestershire, March 26th, 1859, and attended Bromsgrove School from 1870 to 1877, and St. John's College, Oxford, from 1877 to 1881, but did not receive his B. A. nor M. A. degrees until 1892, as he failed in the Second Public Examination, due to his lack of interest in Greek philosophy. After a year of reading at home, he entered the Civil Service and became a Higher Division Clerk at the Patent Office from 1882 to 1892, when he resigned to become Professor of Latin at University College, London. In 1911 he was made Kennedy professor of Latin, and Fellow of Trinity College, in Cambridge University. This post he held with great distinction until his death, April 30th, 1936. Although he edited the texts of such Latin authors as Juvenal, Lucan, and Manilius, and became perhaps the most celebrated Latinist of his day, he will always best be remembered for his poetry, which in the words of Benjamin De Casseres, "has the accent of Eternity in every line." Like Charles Dickens said of Thomas Gray, Housman goes down to posterity with a very small book under his arm, for if his three volumes of verse, A **Shropshire Lad,** 1896, **Last Poems,** 1922, and the posthumous **More Poems,** 1936, including his lecture, **The Name and Nature of Poetry,** 1933, were all published between the covers of one book, it would equal in bulk scarcely half the size of the usual 'Collected Poems.'

Among many others, Gerald Bullett is of the opinion that "Housman's place in English literature is assured. The best of his lyrics are inimitable and imperishable." Regretting that he did not know him better, James M. Barrie writes us of his "huge admiration for Housman the man and his poetry." The historian George Macaulay Trevelyan has this to say, "Although I only came to know Housman when I was made Professor of History at Cambridge in 1928, he was always very kind to me and I delighted in talk with him."

But the poet could never make himself talk if the spirit did not move him. "I met Housman only once," writes the novelist Henry W. Nevinson, "at a literary dinner, when he sat silent without speaking a word to me or to anyone else, though he was a famous conversationalist."

Channing Pollock so happily says: —

"In my opinion Kipling's death left Housman the foremost

2. So given on his passport.

poet in England, no two poets were ever more different but if Kipling had the greater inspiration, Housman certainly sang the lovelier songs."

This book gives an account of a visit to Cambridge and a conversation that took place there in the summer of 1930. The entire book was read over and corrected by Housman himself so that every statement made had his approval. For the sake of vividness the author leaves this account in the first person. Certain corrections which may be of interest to the reader have been indicated in the footnotes.

One morning, as I sat down to my oatmeal and coffee at the Garden House Hotel, I found at my place the following letter in the poet's distinctive hand-writing:

1 August, 1930.

Dear Mr. Clemens,

As you seem to be making a stay in Cambridge perhaps you and your friend[3] would give me the pleasure of being my guests at dinner in Hall on the Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday of next week, coming to my rooms about 7:50 p. m. We do not dress.

Yours sincerely,

A. E. Housman

On my reaching his chambers overlooking Whewell's Court a few minutes late, he was awaiting me with a perceptible degree of impatience, and dressed in cap and gown.

In appearance Housman was a striking man – one who would stand out in any crowd – five feet, nine inches tall,[4] with hair turning grey at the

3. Count George Von Arnim.

4. I had simply said "tall" and Housman wrote in the margin "5 feet 9 inches." That is the height given in his last passport, issued in 1929, which his brother Laurence has most kindly presented to the Mark Twain Museum.

temples; a fine Roman nose; keen, piercing, kindly, grey eyes; and seventy-one years of age. His smile was of rare sweetness, and the twinkle in his eye gave evidence of a keen sense of humor. I shall always remember the stately manner in which he walked across the quadrangle to the dining hall.

Reaching a beautifully mellowed, ivy-covered building, we entered a little hallway, the walls of which were decorated with steel engravings of Trinity's illustrious men. Housman led the way up a small winding stairway that opened into a magnificent dining hall with high windows, and a vaulted ceiling supported by beams. The dining-table was on a dais. As soon as we had taken places, Housman on my left and the Master of Trinity on my right, two servitors placed a high silver bowl before the latter while grace was being said. Then it was removed and a huge tureen of steaming broth put in its place. Thereafter the dinner proceeded right merrily.

Aeroplanes was the first topic mentioned. After saying that he often traveled by plane and enjoyed it, Housman recalled the fact that in **Tom Sawyer Abroad**, Mark Twain has Tom cross the ocean in a sort of half-aeroplane, half-dirigible, more than fifty years ago; and that Jules Verne, a favorite of boyhood, described an even earlier crossing of the ocean by air.

While we were speaking, a dish of meat appeared "too good for any but anglers, or very honest men" to use the words of dear Isaak Walton. I described on old man, a hundred and fifteen years old, who upon reaching America, told a reporter that he attributed his long life to the fact that he had always lived in Turkey where drinking was prohibited.

"He was complimentary to America and not true to Turkey," commented Housman as he held a glass of rare white wine up to the light, "for there are a great many Turks who do enjoy wine."

By the time we had gotten to the apple-dumplings and hard sauce, Housman was telling me his opinion of American literature:

"I do not care for such manifestations of your literature as Stockton's **The Lady or the Tiger**. However I do enjoy authors like Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser; the latter has sent me several of his books. I got more enjoyment from Edna Saint Vincent Millay than from either Robinson or Frost. Edith Wharton is another American whom I admire. Her description of New York in the Seventies stands in the memory and her novels **Ethan Frome** and **House of Mirth**[5] especially appealed to me."

5. By mistake, I had written, "Heatbreak House" and Housman corrected me in

When the Master of Trinity reminded Housman of the "funny author whom you had us all reading a while back," Housman continued:

"Oh, yes, an American whom I may claim to have introduced into England is Anita Loos. I read **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes**, and told all my Cambridge friends about it, and before I knew it everyone in the University was reading it, and thereafter the delightful work became popular throughout England. You see even a staid and sedate professor of Latin knows how to enjoy the lighter things of literature." And with a whimsical smile, "Many years spent with Manilius, Lucan, and Juvenal have perhaps quickened my English sense of humor."

When I said that Mrs. Wharton had deserted America for Europe like her contemporary Henry James, Housman remarked:

"I have known her for a number of years, I saw her the last time I went to France, where she lives in one of the suburbs of Paris. She owns an old-fashioned house surrounded by the prettiest garden I have ever beheld outside of England. Although the place is practically in the center of the suburban town, once inside the garden wall, you are in the country for all intents and purposes. Although Mrs. Wharton has been writing a long time and is now no longer young, I still consider her one of the leading American authors."

The poet went on to say that another American he read was Edgar Allan Poe. Whereupon I mentioned that Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes firmly believed, despite what all his biographers say to the contrary, that Poe visited Paris because he described the locale and atmosphere of the French city so graphically in his **The Murders in the Rue Morgue**.

"I do not think that you have to visit a city in order to describe it vividly," returned Housman. "There was one author, whose name I have forgotten, who wrote about a city without having been there, and when he finally did visit the place, he found he had nothing to change!"

Neither Housman nor the Master of Trinity had ever been to the United States. The poet mentioned a cousin[6] who had passed most of his life in Quebec and when I expressed the hope that he would follow his cousin's example to the extent of at least visiting America, he answered,

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the marg[a]in: "I thought this was a play by Bernard Shaw."

6. I had written "a favorite uncle." He wrote "no" after favorite and first put "great uncle" but then scratched it out and substituted "first cousin once removed."

"I fear that I never shall – the distance across the ocean is too immense. And even when crossed, the trouble is just beginning for all of your cities are separated by such tremendous distances. We are used to rather long journeys in this country, but they are not to be compared to yours."

Like many Englishmen whom I have known, such as W. W. Jacobs, Arnold Bennett, and Anthony Hope Hawkins, Housman could never get used to the idea of the vast area and long journeys of the New World that Americans so nonchalantly take for granted.

Dinner over, we adjourned upstairs to an apartment furnished and decorated in Elizabethan style, the low[7] ceiling ornamented with scrolls and traceries, and the Tudor fireplace nearly as large as the one in the dining hall. Ranging along the walls between the finely shaped windows were oil paintings of college worthies in their wigs and ruffles. All of the center of the room was taken up by a mahogany table whose top was so brightly polished that one could see the beautiful ceiling reflected. Although the summer light still lingered, the room was made brighter by candled brass along the walls. Here the dons repaired each evening after dinner for wine, nuts, raisins, - and talk. Noticing my admiration of the apartment, Housman smilingly said:

"This part of the building, I must confess, is the result of our war profiteering. The college had some stock in a steel company that only became valuable during the conflict. We sold at a judicious moment and with the proceeds we were able to renovate this chamber. It does not often happen that a war aids a college, even thus remotely!"[8]

Pouring myself a glass of wine from one of the beautifully wrought decanters, that went the rounds of the table, I mentioned that dining with Chesterton a week or two before, someone at the table had asked him what book he would choose to take to a desert island, and that the author of **Orthodoxy** had replied, "If I were a politician who wanted to impress his constituents, I would take Plato or Aristotle, but if I did not want to show

7. Housman substituted this for my "high" - just an indication of how meticulously he corrected the paper.

8. I remembered Housman as saying, "The late war has affected everything human. The world can be thought of as a sponge that was dipped into the pool of war, and not the minut[u]est spot but has sucked in its share of the moisture," but Housman wrote in the margin, "I cannot have said that."

off, I would take Thomas' **Guide to Practical Shipbuilding** so that I could get away from the island as quickly as possible."

"Alison's **History of Europe**, a work I was very fond of as a boy, would be my choice," said the poet, "if I could take only one book to a desert island. Sir Archibald Alison's book deals with the period from the outbreak of the French Revolution to the restoration of the Bourbons, and extends to some ten volumes. It was abominably written history, extremely prosy and diffuse, and was deservedly and effectively parodied by Lord Beaconsfield in **Coningsby** where the author appears as Mr. Wordy who wrote a history to prove that Providence was on the side of the Tories. Like so many inferior books, however, it had a charm and fascination all its own, especially during the unhurried days of my childhood. Even today when I am obliged to go on a long railway journey, I always take one of Alison's volumes with me. I know that I shall never finish the one, much less the other nine."

When the talk turned again to humor, Housman expressed admiration for the work of Artemus Ward, Josh Billings,[9] Mark Twain, and continued:

"Old friends have told me about Ward's visit to London. It seems that, when the humorist's audience in the Egyptian Hall did not catch an American joke, he waited until they did, no matter how long it took: the response invariably came, sooner or later!"

"What do you think is the most humorous thing in Mark Twain, Mr. Housman," I asked?

"Unlike many people," said he slowly, handing me a decanter of

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9. Apropos of Josh Billings I quote the following:

Trinity College
Cambridge, England
March 26, 1933.

Dear Mr. Clemens:

Thank you very much for sending me your delightful **Josh Billings, Yankee Humorist** which I found interesting reading. I had heard of, and enjoyed, the inimitable humor of Artemus Ward, but Josh Billings was new to me, and I am indebted to you for making such a robust and characteristic Yankee known to me. I have always been interested in American humor.

Yours very truly,

A. E. Housman.

maderia vintage, "I don't enjoy the humor of the **Jumping Frog** at all which always falls flat with me. Of course I am exceedingly fond of Twain's masterpiece, **Huckleberry Finn**. The inimitable ode to Stephen Dowling Bots is one of the poems I know by heart. You remember the concluding stanza which comes after young Bots has been drowned in the well:

'They got him out and emptied him;
Alas it was too late;
His spirit was gone for to sport aloft
In the realms of the good and great.'

"But to my mind the most deliciously humorous thing in the whole of Mark Twain, is the account of the Ascent of the Rigi-Kulm. Whenever I feel unduly depressed I turn to that. Another passage from **A Tramp Abroad** that I can read over and over again with the keenest relish is The Great French Duel. The Count is so characteristic of the French who, however, I have no doubt, do not fully appreciate the story."

The fact was brought out that the most distinguishing trait of a nation is its humor or lack of it. When I stated that I had not found much humor in the French, Housman took issue:

"I cannot agree with that. Take some of the plays of Moliere, for instance. They certainly contain humor, if any of the world's dramas do. And among the moderns there is Maurois, whose **Silences of Colonel Bramble**, and the **Discourses of Doctor O'Grady** are uproariously funny. I have read each book several times. We are given the adventures that befell an Irish surgeon and an English officer in the trenches of France. The works show considerable knowledge of English character – a knowledge possessed by few French writers at any time, but more particularly at the present time."

We then discussed which people showed the greatest lack of humor.

"Well," responded Housman, "it certainly is not the French, and probably not the Germans either, for although I have never been to Germany, they are doubtlessly gifted with considerable humor."

"What about Spanish literature?" the Master asked.

"We can never say of any literature possessing **Don Quixote**," Housman answered immediately, "that it lacks humor. Considering everything, however, I feel that the Italians, perhaps, have the smallest

sense of humor, at least as we English speaking people understand humor."

Suddenly everyone arose as if by a preconcerted signal (there were about a dozen Dons and Fellows at the table) and going downstairs we found ourselves in a compact little reading room.

"I want to show you the ancient bowling-green of the college," said my host as we stepped outside.

We were now standing on a magnificent green sward sloping down to the river Cam and surrounded on three sides by ivy covered stone walls with here and there a window all but hidden on account of the thick vines. The softness to the feet of the centuries-old sod was most soothing. Here, Housman explained, would come the college men to bowl in the days of "the merry monarch, scandalous and poor," Charles the Second.

A few steps brought us to the end of the wall which is separated from the crystal-clear waters of the Cam by an ancient stone mall. The water slipped by almost imperceptibly at our feet, preparing itself for a waterfall beneath a stone arched bridge a few yards further along the stream. On the opposite bank the grass and bushes hugged the streamlet's bank and even the trees seemed to bend so that they might kiss the sparkling surface of the water. In these surroundings of blessed peacefulness our talk was of the different cathedrals of England and of the Continent. When I mentioned having lately visited Cologne Cathedral, Housman regretted that he had never been East of the Rhine. He told me how much he loved the cathedrals of England and France, and that many of his vacations were spent in studying, and mediating in, those ancient and magnificent piles. He expressed an especial fondness for Chartres Cathedral in France, and Lincoln in England.

Slowly we retraced our steps to the door of Housman's rooms, but before I could bid my host goodbye, he said with true English hospitality:

"You must come in first, and get a whiskey and soda."

As the poet went in search of the whiskey and soda, I noticed that what had originally been a large room, appeared small by having all the available wall space taken up with bookcases, literally bulging with books. Light for the room came from a large bay window overlooking Whewell's Court. At one side of the window stood the desk, covered with manuscripts and letters. Nearby was the fireplace with its stone mantel on which appeared the books that their owner used more frequently.

A Morning with the Royal Family

*A. E. H**sm*n*[1]

Chapter I

'Pigs on the front lawn again,' said the king; 'Give me a cannon, somebody.' No one gave him a cannon, so seizing a teaspoon from the breakfast table he rushed from the apartment.

Pigs on the front lawn were an old nuisance at the palace. The reason probably was that the Royal drive was so much wider and finer than the road into which it opened that all the pig drivers mistook it for the road, and drove up it accordingly. The king had long ago determined to stop this, but his efforts had not been successful. He had first written with his own hands and fastened upon the drive gate a placard bearing these words: 'I'll cut off your head if you do.' This notice, however, no one seemed to understand, though many had their heads cut off — not that they understood it any better after that — and the king therefore resolved to compose a notice about which there could be no possibility of mistake. He composed the following: 'This is to give notice, that any person, or, indeed, any nurserymaid, found trespassing on these premises in company with pigs, cows, peacocks, antelopes, serpents, perambulators, or any other kind of poultry whatever, will be taken to the lock-up and put to death, or

1. For 'Christmas 1955' this work was privately printed by Jonathan Cape in London. The following 'prefatory note' was provided by Laurence Housman: 'Seventy-three years [=1882] ago 'A Morning with the Royal Family' was published in our School Magazine, *The Bromsgrovian*, without the author's permission. It had been written five years previously, for the amusement of a large family (seven in number), by one of its members. And whenever, in later years, any one wrote to my brother A. E. Housman asking for permission to reprint it, he always replied 'I am sure the author will have no objection provided that you do not ascribe its authorship to me.' To my mind and conscience that embargo still holds good.

The text follows here the form in which it first appeared in *The Bromsgrovian*, issues of 15 February and 29 March, 1882.'

Sixty years later, for Christmas 2015, this early example of Housman's prose style (aged eighteen?) may interest *HSJ* readers.

otherwise executed.' Even this catalogue of live stock, however, was not found sufficient, and the king took down this notice and put up a number of others in succession. The one which was up at the present time was the simple announcement, 'Trespassers will be vaccinated,' which had hitherto worked very well; but it had failed at last. His Majesty, therefore, as I said, seized a teaspoon, which was a thing he always did seize when the thing he wanted was not at hand; in fact, it was only that very morning that he had brushed his hair with a teaspoon, having previously thrown his hairbrush out of the window at a partridge; he seized a teaspoon and rushed out of doors. He had just reached the foot of the doorsteps when a cedar tree blew down on him, in the fifty-third year of his age and the twenty-eighth of his reign. He was munificent, affable, and loquacious; and was succeeded by his son, Henry X.

Chapter II

The Royal family seated at breakfast when the king ran out after the pigs, consisted of the queen, princess Amelia (the eldest of the family), prince Henry (the heir apparent), and the baby. The moment her father left the room, princess Amelia drove her tea cup into the marmalade, extracted a large scoop, and swallowed it.

'Well I never!' said the queen, 'Amelia!'

'Oh, God helps those who help themselves, mamma,' replied the princess, wiping her mouth with her pinafore.

The queen opened her mouth to rebuke this remark, but a bluebottle flying into it distracted her attention; and scarcely had she finished drowning the bluebottle in the slop basin when a terrific crash resounded through the palace.

'What an extraordinary noise,' exclaimed the queen; 'it sounded exactly like a cedar tree blowing down on a constitutional monarch. Henry, I wonder if anything has happened to your papa.'

'If it has,' said prince Henry, leaning back in his chair, 'I hereby give a free pardon to all murderers and felons, and I lower the price of bread one penny per loaf, and I will have a damson pudding for lunch. I should like to commence my reign auspiciously, you know, mamma,' said he, in a

meditative way. He then took a slice of bread and jam in one hand, and his teacup in the other, and went out to see what had become of the king.

Chapter III

An incautious reader of the end of my first chapter might perhaps suppose that he found the king dead on the doorstep. But I did not say that the king was killed by the cedar tree; I merely said that he was succeeded by his son Henry X; and so he was, when he died, which was fifteen years afterwards. He was not hurt by the cedar tree at all, he was only rather frightened and exceedingly angry, as it had killed the pigs, which he wanted to have the killing of to himself. He was therefore lying on the gravel and addressing the cedar tree in language which perhaps is best described by the poet Laureate in his beautiful poem on the occasion, beginning:

> As I came over the windy lea
> The king was cursing the cedar tree,
> And the way his Majesty curse and swore,
> I never had heard such oaths before.

Prince Henry returned to the breakfast table, and sank there and then into his chair, murmuring several times, 'No damson pudding; no damson pudding.' In answer to the questions of the queen and princess, he explained, 'Papa is rebuking the cedar tree, and I came away because I thought it would be bad for my morals: some more tea please.' And at this moment the king returned, looking none the worse for his accident, except that he had the door-scraper entangled in his necktie.

Chapter IV

The queen took up the teapot to pour out some more tea for the prince; it would not pour. She shook it violently, and as this had no effect, handed it to the baby who was a tremendous Shaker. His shaking resulted in a shrill and melancholy hoot, issuing from the spout of the teapot. 'The ghost has

got into the tea again,' exclaimed prince Henry, snatching off the lid and pulling out what looked like a besom done up in towels, which broke from his hands, fell off the table, and hid itself under the hearth-rug. This ghost was a great pest to the Royal family, as it was always making remarks in an indistinct voice, and when asked what it said, would only hoot; moreover, its loose ends were always catching in cruet-stands, breakable ornaments, and things of that kind. The Royal family now armed themselves with the fire-irons, and stealthily approached the hearth-rug, but when the king snatched it off, and everyone brought their weapons down on the floor with a bang, it was discovered that the ghost had bitten a hole in the carpet, under which it was now rushing about like a ripple all over the room. The queen instantly stood upon a chair for fear it should catch hold of her ankles, the baby was put upon the mantlepiece out of harm's way, and the king, prince, and princess ran all about the room, endeavouring to stamp on the ghost, which kept on saying something which sounded like 'millions of gallons of ginger beer'. At length it emerged from the hole in the carpet and darted out of the room, catching in the bellrope as it did so. The queen then laughed distinctly four times, made an attempt to say the Lord's Prayer backwards, and fell into the coal-box. She was a nervous lady, was the queen, and even the ghost was enough to upset her sometimes.

Chapter V

The queen having been brought to, they sat down again to their interrupted breakfast, and the Princess Amelia remarked, 'After breakfast, papa, I am going with you to open the new lunatic asylum.'

'No indeed, Amelia, that you're not,' replied the king, 'I had enough of taking you with me at the last opening of parliament.' It is very likely that he had. The last opening of parliament had been a great affair. It was the first parliament the king had ever opened, as he much objected to doing so; and on all previous occasions, however fine the weather might be, had excused himself on account of the reign, and when asked what rain, replied his own reign. A new parliament was elected once every three years, and every three years the country sent up a larger majority against the ministry. But the course the ministry pursued was this: immediately parliament opened

they always brought forward a motion 'That it is not advisable to guillotine his majesty in cold weather'; and, as this motion was always carried by triumphant majorities, they interpreted it as a vote of confidence, and dismissed the parliament for the next three years. But at the last election the only member who had been returned on the ministerial side was the prime minister himself, and the opposition had at last determined to negative the motion about guillotining the king. The king had therefore gone down to open parliament, and overawe the opposition, and the princess had gone with him, to sit in the strangers' gallery. The house was a sight to see: on the right hand side of the speaker's chair the prime minister was lying at all his length along the front bench; and not another soul on that side of the house. On the left side the opposition were sitting three deep on one another's laps. The king entered in his royal robes with a great train of attendants, and the Princess Amelia, leaning over the railing, exclaimed 'Welcome, papa, welcome! take a seat: make yourself at home: ask that gentleman to let you have the arm chair!' The king looked up and replied in a stern voice, 'Amelia, you shall have no pudding to day,' and the opposition giggled. The king looked at them with much majesty, and exclaimed in a loud and angry voice, 'I'll see your nose above your chin.'

The whole Opposition screamed and fainted away, and were removed in a senseless condition, and the king remarked that they had been in that condition ever since he could remember. He then dissolved the Parliament, ordered the leaders of the Opposition to be guillotined in cold weather, and started home. But he had scarcely issued from the door of the House, when the Princess Amelia flung herself in front of him, and attempted to head the procession, exclaiming, 'Ladies before gentlemen.' The king was taken aback, and stood for some minutes with his mouth open; but, recovering himself, he exclaimed, 'Pearls before swine,' which was the only thing he could think of at the moment, and flung the princess into the arms of one of his attendants, by whom she was with great difficulty carried home. The king therefore, on the morning of which I am writing, refused to take the princess with him to the opening of the lunatic asylum.

Princess Amelia on hearing this, put a large slice of bread and jam into her pocket, drank off her tea, pushed back her chair, stood up and broke into a howl. The king knew it was no use trying to get a word in edgeways while she was howling, but when she stopped for want of breath, he told

her to go upstairs. She did so: her shrieks growing fainter and fainter as she went, till at last silence reigned; which was broken by what seemed to be a silvery peal of bells from the upper part of the palace. A servant was sent up, and returned with the news that the Princess Amelia was wringing her hands. The king said, 'Then tell her, if she does, I'll wring her neck;' so the princess left off, and proceeded to wring her handkerchief out of the window, the result being that within the next quarter of an hour eleven fire-engines arrived on the spot and began playing on the palace, having mistaken it for an alarm bell.

Chapter VI

Breakfast was over at length, and the queen carefully collected all the egg-shells. They never wasted egg-shells at the palace, nor candle-ends: they always had them made into soup for the poor. The king then prepared to set off to open the lunatic asylum. As it was a cold and cloudy morning, he thought it as well to provide against bad weather. He therefore opened the weather-glass, moved the hand round to set-fair, and fastened it there with a piece of cobbler's wax; he then boiled the thermometer till it stood at fever-heat, and set out. He opened the lunatic asylum, and made a speech to the people, in which he said it was a good thing always to have a lunatic asylum handy, as you never knew when you might want it, and the people said 'Hear, hear,' with great fervour.

Chapter VII

When Prince Henry left the breakfast table, the first thing he saw on entering the hall was the ghost hanging up on the hat-stand. This was one of the ghost's most inconvenient habits, and on one occasion the king, in starting off in a hurry, had tied it round his neck in mistake for a scarf. There it was, and seemed to be saying to itself in a low voice, 'Twittering robins all over the back-door.' It then fell down among the walking-sticks, and then began clambering up the banisters. Prince Henry, having nothing better to do, followed it upstairs, when it entered the store-room, and was heard

clinking about among the jam pots. Prince Henry, overjoyed at finding the door unlocked, boldly entered after it, leaving behind him a widow and two young children.

Chapter VIII

The widow was the housekeeper: she was not his widow, she was somebody else's; the two young children were his brother and sister, who were trying to get in after him. The house-keeper instantly darted in after him, and brought him out with one hand and the ghost with the other. She threw the ghost over the banisters, where it floated in the air; and she told Prince Henry that it was time for him to take his lessons to his tutor, and the Princess Amelia that she must go to her governess in the schoolroom. The Princess Amelia, therefore, went to her governess, who taught her music, which consisted in learning to play the barrel-organ; and the use of the globes, which consisted in rolling them about the floor. Prince Henry went to his tutor, Sir Julius Hopkins, where we shall presently rejoin him. The baby was put to bed, along with a guinea-pig and a canary, as he would never go to sleep without them; he had to be put to bed all day, except meal times, as he was never happy unless he was eating or sleeping, and always howled when he was not happy.

Chapter IX

The first thing which met the king's eye on coming home was the archbishop standing at the front door, in a state of great excitement, and holding in his hand a sheet of paper. As he drew near, the archbishop began to address him.

'Lend me your ears,' said the archbishop, 'lend me your ears, your nose, your front teeth!' At this point his excitement became so great that he was unable to say any more, and the king took the sheet of paper from his hand. It was an ode by the poet laureate on a ball which had recently taken place, and at which the queen had been present. The archbishop had underlined the following lines, describing the queen's entrance into the apartment:

The drums went rattle, the guns went boom,
Head over heels she came into the room;
The trumpets rent the air with squeals,
In came her majesty, head over heels.

On perusing these lines the king ground his teeth. He made a dreadful noise in doing so: so much so that the inhabitants of the capital rushed out of doors in millions, exclaiming, 'Stop that threshing-machine.' The king then ordered the poet laureate to be sent for, and meanwhile went indoors to ask the queen whether she really *had* gone into the room head over heels. The queen couldn't remember whether she had or not, but all the ladies in waiting declared that her majesty had entered the room with her usual majesty: and while they were saying so, the poet laureate arrived. He had a laurel crown on his head and a harp hanging round his neck, and a pen behind his ear and an ink bottle in his pocket. The king was surrounded by a vast number of lords and ladies in waiting, and asked the poet laureate in thunder-tones what he meant by saying the queen came into the room head over heels.

The poet laureate was writing verses on his cuffs when this question was put, and when he had got to the end of a stanza he looked up and said, 'Eh? what did you say?' The king repeated his question, handing the ode to its author at the same time. The poet laureate read it out aloud, with great enthusiasm, from beginning to end, and then asked what was the matter with it.

'What do you mean,' shrieked the king, 'by saying that your most gracious queen came into the room head over heels?'

'Oh, well, you know,' said the poet laureate, 'if you like I can alter it, and say she came into it heels over head. It wouldn't be true; but still, if you want me to, I'll say it.'

There was a long pause, during which the king looked as if he was doing a difficult sum. He then put on an appearance of great unconcern, looked out of the window, and said in an agreeable tone, 'A fine day, and seasonable weather for the bullocks.' 'Seasonable weather for the – the turnips, your majesty means,' a courtier ventured to remark. 'Yes,' said the king, graciously, 'I do mean turnips.' He then walked slowly out of the

room. The brilliant assembly broke up, and the poet laureate went away home, writing on his cuffs.

Chapter X

The king went into the dining-room, and saw that the fire wanted making up. He therefore took the tongs, opened the coal-box, and put on the fire what he supposed to be a lump of coal, but turned out to be the ghost, which had gone to sleep in the coal-box. It instantly woke up, turned round rapidly several times, sending a shower of red-hot coals on to the hearth-rug, and began climbing up the chimney, hooting painfully as it went, and dislodging vast quantities of soot. Its voice was heard getting fainter and fainter till it reached the top, and for the next half-hour anyone in the garden might have seen it dangling in a fainting condition from the chimney pots. At the end of that time a blackbird flew away with it and made it into a nest, and the hen blackbird promptly laid several eggs in it. Later in the day the ghost came to itself, hooted, and fell out of the tree, breaking the eggs, and getting smeared all over with the fragments. It then came back into the palace late at night, and slept on the drawing-room mantel-piece, which it made in a great mess. The king, after shovelling up the hot coals off the hearth-rug, said to himself that he would go and see how Henry was getting on with his lessons.

Chapter XI

A few minutes before the king entered the study, Sir Julius Hopkins upset the inkstand with his elbow. ‘There, Sir Julius,’ said Prince Henry, ‘that comes of not paying attention to the laws of nature. You know, if you push the top end of a thing too far one way it disturbs the centre of gravity, and disturbing a centre of gravity is dreadful: worse than disturbing a baby.’

‘Teach your grandmother to suck eggs,’ said Sir Julius, crossly, getting up the ink with some blotting paper.

‘People are always asking me to do that,’ said Henry, ‘and I can’t think why they should want me to. In the first place, I very much doubt if

grandmamma could learn it if she tried, as she is rather a stupid old lady: and even if she did, it would be a most useless accomplishment for a person in her position. And how could I spare the time?'

At this moment the king entered the room. 'Well,' Sir Julius, said he, 'how does Henry get on?'

'Well,' said Sir Julius, 'your majesty, I am afraid his royal highness's progress is not altogether satisfactory. For instance, his Euclid. He has just done me a Euclid paper this morning. In it he defines a straight line as being length without crookedness, and a circle as a thing which you can trundle; and when I ask him to describe an equilateral triangle, he replies that an equilateral triangle is simply indescribable.'

'Ah, well; yes,' said the king, 'very sad; but I don't understand about Euclid. What I want to know is, can the boy read?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Sir Julius, 'he can read very well. Here is one of his reading books, a volume of the poet laureate's.'

'Well, Henry, read me something,' said the king. Henry took the book and began —

'When I was young and able,
I sat upon the table;
The table broke and I fell down,
When I was young and able.'

'Surely,' said the king, 'I have heard that before, in Shakespeare or somewhere.'

'Oh, yes,' said Henry, 'it's the second verse in the poet laureate's:

'When I was old and feeble,
  I sat upon a needle;
The people said "How high you jump,"
  Although so old and feeble.'

'Yes,' said the king, 'you read very nicely: let us have some more.'

'Well, there's this one,' said Henry—

‘The shades of night were falling fast,
  And the rain was falling faster,
When through an Alpine village passed,
  An Alpine village pastor.
A youth, who bore ‘mid snow and ice
  A bird that wouldn’t chirrup,
And a banner with the strange device —
  “Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup”.’

‘Oh, don’t read that,’ said the king; ‘I hate the thing.’

‘Oh, do you, papa?’ said Henry; ‘I think it is so pretty. This verse, you know—

‘Oh, stay, the maiden said, and rest,
  For the wind blows from the norward,
With thy weary head upon this breast:
  And please don’t think I’m forward.
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
  And he gladly would have tarried;
But still he answered, with a sigh,
  “Unhappily, I’m married.”

And this one, too —

“Try not the pass,” the old man said,
  “My bold, my desperate fellow;
Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
  And you’ll want an umb(e)rella;
And the roaring torrent is deep and wide:
  You can hear how loud it washes;”
But loud that clarion voice replied —
  “I’ve got my old goloshes.”‘

‘Yes; but I’ve heard it before: I want something new,’ said king. ‘Well,’ said Henry, ‘there’s this–

‘As I was a-walking
  Among the grassy hay,
Oh, there I met an old man
  Whose nerves had given way:
His heels were in an ant’s nest,
  His head was in a tree,
And his arms went round and round and round,
  And he squealed repeatedly.

‘I waited very kindly,
  And attended to his wants;
For I put his heels into the tree,
  And his head among the ants:
I tied his hands with a boot-lace,
  And I filled his mouth with hay,
And I said, “Goodbye; fine morning:
  Many happy returns of the day!”

‘He could not speak distinctly,
  And his arms would not go round;
Yet he did not leave off making
  A discontented sound.
I gazed at him a little while,
  As I walked among the trees,
And I said, “When old men’s nerves give way,
  How hard they are to please!” ‘

‘Very nicely read,’ said the king. ‘Now another: I never knew how fond I was of poetry before.’

At this point Sir Julius Hopkins dropped down in a fit, but the king said, ‘Never mind, go on; next page.’ Henry proceeded —

‘As I was walking backwards,
  And never looked behind,
I trod upon a lady
  Who’d gone out of her mind.

She did not show the least surprise,
  She did not howl or hoot,
She only softly and silently
  Began chewing my left boot.

'In the greatest haste I took it off,
  And she chewed it up to rags;
She swallowed all the elastics down,
  And the hob-nails and the tags.
And I'll never, never, put my foot
  In a lady's mouth again,
Unless I'm perfectly certain
  She has not gone insane.'

At this moment the clock struck twelve, and the morning with the royal family was consequently at an end. It is therefore quite impossible for me to go on any further; but by way of finishing up, I will put in a dirge, written by the poet laureate on the death of a friend of his, a dancing dervish:

Let us play on the pianner in a melancholy manner,
  Drinking ipecacuanha while you listen to my songs;
Let us play the bag-pipes mellow, and the flute and violoncello,
  And the tea-tray and the bellows, and the poker and the tongs.

His dancing made me giddy, and I said, 'Oh, do be steady,
  Or your wife will be a widdy, and the tears will fill my eyes':
But in spite of all my cautions, he continued his contortions,
  Till he broke himself in portions of an unimportant size.

Oh, goodbye! goodbye for ever! you were truly, truly clever
  Though you never, never, never did appreciate my songs;
But it didn't make me jealous, and I'll dig your grave most zealous,
  With the pick-axe and the bellows, and the poker and tongs.

THE END

Book review: R. Gaskin, *Horace and Housman* (The New Antiquity). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013. xi, 266pp.

Although Horace and Housman share fame primarily for their lyric poetry, they have rarely been discussed as a pair. In some senses this is understandable: leaving aside the temporal, cultural and linguistic gulfs that stand between them, the Roman has typically been read as a jovial and candid figure, far removed from the morose and reserved persona of the Englishman. This ambitious study aims 'to bring out unnoticed or underestimated similarities between the two' (p.[ix]), a synthetic task that is rendered more feasible by restricting Horace's poetry to his *Odes*; as for Housman, both collections published in his lifetime – *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and *Last Poems* (1922) – form part of the analysis, alongside his various posthumous works (*More Poems, Additional Poems*).

Despite its specific focus on two poets, this book is the first product of the series 'The New Antiquity'. Given the very broad scope that such studies of the classical tradition and comparative literature necessarily cover, it is difficult to categorise this book with precision (and indeed its envisaged readership): fundamentally Gaskin provides a work of literary criticism rather than a study of Horatian reception or the lyric tradition; furthermore, a recurrent aim of the author is the correction of perceived faults of theory and practice in modern literary scholarship.

Following a preface that offers ample proof of Gaskin's passion for poetry, the introduction (pp.1-16) outlines the book's ambitions and interests: reconstructing a poem's biographical context and a positivist belief in its 'real meaning', one fixed at the time of composition and accessible to its contemporary readership (Augustan or Victorian-Edwardian). Although Gaskin acknowledges a number of previous works that have highlighted classical echoes and themes in Housman's poems, he seeks to do more: '[w]e need to graduate from stamp-collecting to physics: we are in search of the spirit, not (merely) the letter' (p.15). This lofty aim is occasionally realised but the 'spirits' of these two figures remain predominantly more distinct than alike; the common traits that are found in the two poets are usually to be found also across a much broader range of ancient and modern writers.

The subsequent nine chapters are thematic: four treat both poets

together (2: Pessimism and Pejorism; 3: Spring and Death; 7: Questions of Integrity and Consistency; 8: Form and Content), two Horace specifically (4: Horace's Attitude to Religion; 6: Horace and Politics), and three Housman specifically (5: Religion and Politics in Housman; 9: Housman, Literary Criticism and the Classics; 10: Housman's Criticism of Horace). The author-specific chapters tend to be the most rewarding, since the theoretically attractive unification of the two authors in a single discussion proves practically difficult: although Gaskin's introductory chapter emphasises the importance of reading each poetic collection as a whole, the book tends to proceed via close readings of individual poems.

In Chapter 2 (pp.17-41) Gaskin demonstrates that melancholy lurks within the traditionally jocund lyrics of Horace, commonly conveyed through natural imagery, which aligns him somewhat with the more obviously 'pejoristic' verse of Housman, a term that is given careful analysis. Chapter 3 (pp.43-61) tackles a similar strain of poetic expression, the themes of springtime and death, in which *Odes* 4.7 (including Housman's emotional response to it) and 1.4 are especially well handled.[1] Chapter 5 (pp.63-76) is devoted to religion and politics in Housman: although relatively brief, this is one of the most successful sections of the book, in which Housman's use of what Ricks has termed an 'anti-pun' is studied as a tool for encoding further nuances and ambiguity into his lyric poetry, gently prompting in the reader other (often darker or subversive) thoughts.

Chapter 7 (pp.117-45) turns to address the broader issue of poetic integrity in the two poets. Gaskin claims for Horace political, but not moral, sincerity: that may be, but the claim (on *Odes* 2.7, at pp.121-8) that Horace both had to mention his Republican past and do so in a jocular tone fails to convince. Housman is treated in the latter half of the chapter, where Gaskin successfully makes the case that the poet's use of the pathetic fallacy can escape the charge of artistic 'dishonesty' and that the 'anti-intellectual' account of poetry given in his 1933 Leslie Stephen lecture can

1 The scope of the two Horace-specific chapters is as follows: chapter 4 (pp.63-75) makes a convincing case for doubting the sincerity of Horace's religious devotion, deflating in particular the theological importance that has often been attributed to his 'first hymn to Mercury' (1.10); chapter 6 (pp.91-115) seeks to treat Horace's politics, although the binary account of the 'personal' and 'political' (pp.99-100) is laboured and Horace's self-presentation is not set alongside other 'Augustans'; nevertheless, Gaskin plausibly suggests (pp.101-5) that the last poem of Horace's *Odes* (4.15) displays 'double irony' and a 'deliberate inconsistency'.

be consistent with the literary postures he often chose to adopt. Chapter 8 (pp.147-72) argues that poetic form and content should not be seen as in conflict in either poet: here Gaskin is much stronger when treating the verbal arrangement of Horatian lyric rather than its metrical form and inheritance; in the case of Housman he argues, after surveying the various settings of Housman's poems in the twentieth century, that 'style and message are entirely in harmony with one another' (p.156): few readers of this journal could challenge that claim. The chapter ends with the syncretic analysis of Housman's translation of Horatian lyric (*Odes* IV.13), although the focus is more on verbal specifics rather than form (since Housman's translation for his lecture notes was in prose).

The closing section of the book, again focused upon Housman, is the least successful. In Chapter 9 (pp.173-97), which tackles his literary criticism, Gaskin is vexed by his (in)famous separation of textual criticism from this field. Housman did indeed profess that true literary critics were vanishingly rare (and that he could not be one), yet Gaskin prefers to suppose not that Housman's conception of 'literary criticism' was much more specific and rarefied than the modern term denotes but that he 'has not thought' (p.177) and is 'stupid or dishonest' (p.189). A close reading of almost any of Housman's textual notes reveals that literary criticism (in its usual sense) went hand-in-hand with textual criticism for him as for any competent critic. Chapter 10 (pp.199-222) directly addresses Housman's treatment of Horace, for which Gaskin has studied the wealth of material preserved in his lecture notes (held in Cambridge University Library). However, the disparaging conclusions drawn remain puzzling: few careful readers of Housman's scholarship could assert that he 'was less interested in educating his readers than in crushing them' (p.203), 'refuse[d] to have anything to do with literary criticism' and favoured the much-maligned 'palaeographical method' (p.207). Closer inspection of Housman's published scholarship would show the falsity of all three claims.

Gaskin clearly has valuable contributions to make to understanding both Horatian and Housmannian lyric, and his close readings are lively if dogmatic. One wonders, however, whether a more suitable vehicle for his studies could have been found. The book is elegantly presented, although it is regretted that the endnotes could not have been positioned as footnotes.

David Butterfield

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 Mary of the Celts* (Leominster, 2008) and *The Origins of the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi'* (Leominster, 2009), as well as over seven hundred academic papers and reviews.

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Donald Mackenzie is the author of T*he Metaphysical Poets* (1990). He has edited Kipling's *Puck* books (1993) and co-edited Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth* (1999) . He has published articles on various authors and topics. including borderlands of tragedy in the *Bacchae* and *Othello*, Bunyan, eighteenth century biblical translation and paraphrase, Stevenson, Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence and co-authored with Stuart Gillespie "Lucretius and the Moderns" in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*.

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Colin Sydenham is a former classical scholar of Eton and King's Cambridge, who practised at the Chancery Bar from 1964-2003. He maintained his classical connection through the Horatian Society, of which he was Secretary from 1980-2001 and Chairman from 2002-10. His first address to that Society (in 1978) was on the subject of *Horace and Housman*. Of those two poets he says: 'Housman fascinates me, and I admire him for his scholarship as well as for his writing (and not only his poetry). But Horace I have loved from my schooldays; it is his special gift to inspire love.'

Sir Brian Young was a master at Eton frm 1947 to 1952, after war service and two years at Cambridge; he subsequently became Headmaster of Charterhouse (1952-64), Director of the Nuffield Foundation (1964-70), and Director-General of the IBA (1970-82).

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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