

Introducing
A.E. Housman
(1859-1936)

Introducing A.E. Housman (1859-1936):

Preliminary Studies

By

D. Antoine Sutton

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Dedicated

To my wife Tiffany, lovelier than Helen of
Troy, the most beautiful woman in the ancient world;

and,
to all students who employ principles of lower and higher
criticism in their analyses of complex pericopae in
Greek and Latin texts and in their study
of every word inspired by the Muses

Manilius' verse enthroned Him
among learned luminaries
of men.

Hosts of them sang His praises.

He dwelt amid
stars too, which did not rejoice;
but doomed Him
to write poems of lament.

D.A.S.

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PREFACE

Sometimes people who bend their energy to the task of detailed research do not disseminate their conclusions to wider audiences, even though the findings might contribute something of substance to prevalent discussions or arranged debates. Specific lines of investigation should be exposed to general view. For this reason, the following chapters, in brief compass, give a shorter treatment of what will become a broader study, a series of literary analyses of A.E. Housman in his intellectual world. Those analyses will turn up in learned periodicals and they will be supplemented by a detailed critique of a selection of his poems. Critical writers who engaged Housman's scholarship in the past eight decades in foreign-language books, editions, and papers must be dealt with in those researches. The objective maintained below was to present sufficient introductory material, pruned of an extensive bibliographical apparatus of secondary literature, by focusing primarily on Housman's writings.

The moment for this book, however, is propitious. The book itself is the result of a probe into some of the main ideas of Housman the scholar, inquiring of his activities in the uncommon spheres of his academic life. He honed his craft at a highly scientific level, drawing inferences from texts that had survived the ravages of time but were in a state of disrepair. It seems necessary to call attention to this last point in view of the fact that his academic reputation does not rest on the success of his classroom instruction or on his public lectures, but depends first and foremost on the profundity of his critical papers and editions of texts. Additionally, an endeavor is made to redraw, on the basis of extant evidence, an image of him currently etched in the minds of literary critics. Although my disagreement with some of Housman's judgments is registered in several places, the book fundamentally is descriptive; polemic is limited to the essay in the appendix.

Assessing Housman the scholar and the poet, both with appreciation and discrimination, is a laborious task. Below are nine chapters of

methodical research. Not including chapter three, each one represents a flash of lightning, illuminating Housman as he appears to me. Hopefully the volume can serve as model for other students of text-critical scholarship, stimulating them to conduct similar critiques of formidable Hellenists and Latinists of the past like J.N. Madvig (1804-1886), C.G. Cobet (1813-1889), U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931), J.P. Postgate (1853-1926) and W.M. Lindsay (1858-1937).

Years ago I was prompted to commence this work by a genial correspondent, Fred C. Robinson (1930-2016), who was a reader-critic of many of my papers and poems. An Old English scholar at Yale, a distinguished Medievalist and text-critic himself, he encouraged me to pull together a few of the threads I had spun in past years in *The Housman Society Journal*, and in *The Quarterly Review*, rework them and publish a revised image of the scholar-poet which could compete with customary depictions of him. Quite a few of these iconic likenesses of Housman are not founded on fact. These treatises are my small offering to the deliberations.

The objective is simple, to introduce novices to the basic elements of the scholarship of A.E. Housman. An introductory manual should do this much, and do it thoroughly. But this is not all. Text-critical manuals of instruction often are published. Their value cannot be overstated. In the main, the writer's focus is on disparate texts that are (or were previously) studied for preparing a critical edition; but the study of text-critical procedures in the work of a single figure through his or her collected papers is not conventional. Promotion of this kind of research, however, is a desideratum I believe. Although this book is not a 'How To' handbook, with a bit of luck readers of distinguished scholars' *Klein Schriften*, whether of classical Greek, Latin or other, will be able to see new prospects for sharpening their faculties of judgement via painstaking researches into the analytic methods of their forbearers.

This volume, therefore, is published to bring added awareness to an educated readership regarding the work of one of Britain's foremost Latinists of the late 19th and early 20 century. Principally it is intended for advanced pupils of upper forms or grades and for undergraduates. Since it is a compendium of literary, historical and critical data, I hope, too, that graduate students of classical studies

will find much of the comparanda of use to them for detailed researches. Scholars who labor in [non]classical disciplines, that require a general acquaintance with Housman's text-criticism, should find it to be a useful resource.

Finally, it remains to be said that I am grateful to the staff of Perkins library (Hastings College) in Hastings Nebraska, for all their assistance. Moreover I wish to acknowledge the help of several scholars who are not to be held responsible for my arguments or my conclusions. I have already mentioned Fred C. Robinson. He read early versions of chapters 4-6 and also critiqued the Appendix, providing many suggestions. Georg Luck (1926-2013) offered remarks on Ovidian matters in chapter 6; John T. Ramsey inspected chapter 1: the section on Petronius, chapter 6, and chapter 7: the section on Juvenal. As usual, his criticisms were pointed and precise. George L. Huxley was kind enough to examine, and generous with his comments on, chapters 2-4, 8-9. To each of these scholars, I am indebted.

A.E. HOUSMAN: INITIAL REMARKS

I

Objective: to supply for the reader a brief, general précis of Housman in the course of his scholarly environment.

As compared with A. E. Housman, few deceased classicists displayed the same technical competence requisite to affect the ongoing efforts of critics who edit or emend ancient Latin texts. As a rule, the dead are not remembered for nondescript deeds. A lasting reputation usually is earned by meritorious achievements. This fact was illustrated by Housman, whose scholarship remains a rich and fertile field of study. His deeds earned him a conspicuous place in text-critical analysis, which he merits.

His proficiency in the finer points of classical Greek and Latin diction was valued, probably envied, in his day. And although certain defects in his reasoning were apparent, the respect with which his work once was viewed continues, however now in a slightly diminished form. The greater mass of his research dealt with precise investigations of poetic texts. His reputation now rests firmly on those labors. Aside from the critical editions he issued, his classical papers stimulated debate, advanced critical thinking, and aroused anger.

His was an intellect that he wielded forcefully in journals of classical literature. His penchant for spending undue amounts of time fixing the specific sense of a phrase was unappreciated by scholars that were distrustful of the science of textual criticism. These same scholars did display virtuosity in their own select fields of study, but the occasional praise they accorded Housman, went unreciprocated. He did not believe it to be his duty to acclaim men's deeds when such deeds were requirements of their profession.

Other scholars' claims and contentions seldom were dignified with affection or approval in his academic writings. Some of his remarks about his peers were painful and undeserved. There was no justification for the temper of some of his complaints, but he made them because he pursued scholarship with uncompromising vigor. His papers were not sated with foreign language idiom for the purpose of showing off his extensive learning. When indeed he dealt with ancient Latin obscenities, he did it in a way that was consistent with his Victorian values, but not inconsistent with his predilection for truth.

He had no desire for the articles he published in classical journals to be assembled and republished after his death. He said so in his will.¹ Fortunately for us F.R.D. Goodyear (1936-1987) and James Diggle were not compliant.² Decades later in 1972, the two of them published his collected papers in three volumes.³ Since Housman distinguished himself through his criticism of texts, by recommending decisive findings through an overwhelming weight of text-critical authority, his emendations may be analyzed afresh. Where they stand the test of examination he can be appreciated anew. His mastery of literary style, nuance, and his detection of nonsense, marked him out as a singularly gifted scholar in conjecture. This area of interest has a history.

The Higher Criticism, which evolved during the 17th century and the 18th century Enlightenment, advanced European scholarship. Their methods, first tried out on religious texts, examined source-

¹ "I expressly desire and wish my desire to be made as widely known as possible that none of my writings which have appeared in periodical publications shall be collected and reprinted in any shape or form" in *CR* (1962), Vol. 12, No. 2, 162. Cf. P. Naiditch, 'A.E. Housman's Last Will and Testament', *The Housman Society Journal* (2010), Vol. 36, 60-63.

² G.P. Goold (1922-2001) and Otto Skutsch (1906-1990) previously had attempted to convince Basil Blackwell to publish Housman's collected papers, but the publishing house declined. See Goold's biographical memoir 'Otto Skutsch', *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1994), Vol. 87, 473-489 (481).

³ I abbreviate *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman*, Vol. I: 1882-1897, Vol. II: 1897-1914 and Vol. III: 1915-1936 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), as *HCP I, II, III*. In all that follows, the compendia of material at times require the placement of page symbols [p. and pp.] for clarity.

traditions.⁴ Philosophically, interpretative techniques were driven by skepticism towards conventional ideas. Housman was not unfamiliar with how the procedures operated in the past, but he did not strictly follow any cynical rules of criticism in his researches. Richard Bentley (1662-1742) was an English critic of remarkable abilities.⁵ Housman thought highly of him⁶ and of J.J. Scaliger (1540-1609), but Housman's approach, rarer in England and radical for its times, now is deemed eclectic. Housman studied textual problems individually, independent of formal text-critical guidelines. He believed a good conjecture or accurate emendation was equal to the value of a MS reading. This too was a belief that was not original with him.

⁴ These procedures were not immune to hazards. So says Benedict Einarson (1906-1978) of the higher criticism: writers were "not above applying to others the adverbs 'verbose' and 'perverse.' These terms come easily to the source-hunter: when a passage cannot be traced to a presumed source, it looks verbose, since the author is wasting the investigator's time; and when the tracing is a delicate or disappointing operation, the passage looks perverse." See *CP* (1956), Vol. 51, No. 2, 136.

⁵ K.L. Haugen, *Richard Bentley: Poetry and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); M.L.W. Laistner, 'Richard Bentley: 1742-1942', *Studies in Philology* (Jul., 1942), Vol. 39, No. 3, 510-523; R.J. Getty, 'Bentley and Classical Scholarship in North America', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* (1962), Vol. 93, 34-50; and G.P. Goold, 'Richard Bentley: A Tercentenary Commemoration', *HSCP* (1963), Vol. 67, 285-302. For censorious views of Bentley, see H.R. Jolliffe, *The Critical Methods and Influence of Bentley's Horace* (Chicago dissertation: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Contra Jolliffe, see 'Bentley and Horace' in D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Profile of Horace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁶ Richard Jebb said that Bentley was a better critic of Greek texts than of Latin ones: see *Bentley* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), 218-219. Other opinionators were less generous in their assessments. E.g., B.L. Ullman (1882-1965) said of Bentley, "though ahead of his age, he was not great enough to develop the scientific method of the nineteenth century", *CP* (Jan. 1921), Vol. 16, No. 1, 90-92 (91).

II

The 19th century renaissance of classical scholarship in Germany effected new resources for the study of ancient texts.⁷ One overt modification was traceable to F. A. Wolf (1759-1824). His publication *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft* (1807) was a full orbéd compendium of material he believed was necessary for the study of antiquity. His scholarly project was transformative. This development further perfected itself through the rigorous efforts of scholars of eminence.⁸ Many of them were prolific.

Collections of scholarly articles depict the forward steps that were made, illustrate alterations in construing and transmitting texts, and provide reservoirs of information for a student's acquisition of knowledge. Housman did not doubt the primacy of Germany in pioneering strict principles of classical philology, notwithstanding he had misgivings about her presumed place as current holder of a superior scholarly rank to all others. Not unlike Plato, Housman conceded the debt owed to his neighbors, but he sincerely believed that what is received from others inevitably will be improved by their betters.

The pursuit of truth in his scholarship was a long, arduous process, one that he handled with aplomb and with finesse. The display of truth and fiction in his published verse, too, was managed creatively and with untiring resilience. Although several of his poems were lighthearted, clouds of despair loom overhead no matter where readers turn.

⁷ All the contributions by German academics to the study of ancient texts and language did not generate excitement. E.g., "One of the stories which inflame me as a red tag excites a bull, is that which is frequently told about the German professor of Greek who is said to have devoted himself exclusively to the study of the Greek article, and to have regretted on his deathbed that he had not restricted his investigations to the dative case of the article": see T. D. Seymour, "The Three Years College Course", *The School Review* (Dec. 1897), Vol. 5, No. 10, 709-728 (715).

⁸ So J. W. White, "Gottfried Hermann is the founder of the modern science of ancient verse", *The Verse of Greek Comedy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), xiii.

His interest in the gods of Greece and Rome is evident in his classical papers and in his poetry.⁹ Housman considered deities to be no more or less than outward reflections of insecure persons who wrote of them in order to pacify their anxieties: to be precise, Housman inferred that ancient people viewed myth as a form of inspired legend to be preserved and transmitted to succeeding generations, who later would remember even less of the truth than former ones. Such was the case when he cited scripture. His frequent applications of biblical allusion or biblical quotation in his academic writings do not detract from his allegations regarding myth, nor were their uses unusual for the times.

Scattered throughout his two hundred classical papers are numerous translations of Greek and Latin texts. To my knowledge they have not been inspected carefully. These renditions show a penetration of reason that is equal to his facility in his emendations. Every specimen has some artistic quality and is founded on the scientific analysis that is so indicative of his rare talent for phrase-conversion, and of the new perspectives he brings to the sources. At Juvenal *Sat.* 6.614ff,¹⁰ Housman emends so:

tamen hoc tolerabile, si non
semper aquam portes rimosa ad dolia, semper
<peius> onus subeas ipsis manantibus urnis,
quo rabidus nostro Phalarim de rege dedisti,
cui totam tremuli frontem Caesonia pulli
infudit.

Housman's translation:

Yet this is endurable, if one is not always carrying water to leaky jars,
always lifting that burden, worse even than the urns of the Danaids,
maddened by which you, Caligula, to whom Caesonia administered
hippomanes, displayed the character of a Phalaris instead of a Roman
monarch.

⁹ The England in which Housman was reared engaged in the "consistent downgrading of Greece", see C. Stray, 'Patriots and Professors': A Century of Roman Studies, 1910-2010, in *JRS* (2010), Vol. 100, 1-31 (6). Dr. Stray has my thanks for providing me with an electronic version of his essay.

¹⁰ *HCP II*, 'The New Fragment of Juvenal [II]', 543.

His paraphrase has substance. It is fairly literal, if not a word-for-word rendering, and it does tell readers exactly what he takes the lines to mean. All translators are not so clear.

III

In the removal of textual errors Housman sought to employ similar good sense. He was not a follower of the *Traubeschule*.¹¹ In fact he publically printed his dislike of the attention classicists gave to the use of paleography in establishing Latin texts.¹² Conjectural emendation was his forte. His contributions to classical journals did popularize text-criticism within the community of classicists in ways that exceeded the work of emendation done by any other scholar writing in English. The formation of his mind is not easy to describe. He obtained this acuity of intellect early in life. It reinforced his academic method. What he acquired from professors of his youth by way of method still is unclear. His contempt for one in particular was unconcealed: Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), was an influential Oxford don in his day. Housman, however, adjudged him a man of diminutive intelligence.¹³

¹¹ Ludwig Traube (1861-1907) was a text-critic, paleographer, and occupant of the Chair of Mediaeval Latin Philology at the University of Munich. See W.M. Lindsay, 'Professor Traube Died June, 1907' in *CR* (1907), Vol. 21, No. 6, 188-189.

¹² Conte holds a different view. He believes that Housman's métier required the use of paleographical devices: see G. B. Conte, *Ope Ingenii: Experiences of Textual Criticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 4. As an example of Housman's approach to paleography, see his orthographical remarks on *redeundo* in MSS G and L at 2.153 in *M. Manilii Astronomicum Liber Quintus* (London: Richards Press, 1930), ix.

¹³ So Gow: "The Regius Professor of Greek throughout Housman's time was Jowett, and from the single lecture of Jowett's which he attended Housman came away disgusted by the Professor's disregard of the niceties of scholarship". See A.S.F. Gow, *A.E. Housman, A Sketch, Together with a List of his Writings and Indexes to his Classical Papers* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936), 5. A dispassionate appraisal of him was issued after his death: see W.W. Goodwin, 'Benjamin Jowett', *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (May 1893-May 1894), Vol. 29, 460-462.

Neither small horizons nor small minds could shrink Housman's scholarly interests. Criticisms of the withering remarks he aimed at Fellows of other colleges remain on record. Few were pleased with him when he spoke frankly. His scholarship warrants the praise given to it, but less so for reasons often stated. Since the past appears differently to persons of later epochs, the verdicts of praise appear less expressive and in fewer number. An inexhaustible number of books now in circulation confirm that revisions of opinions prosper in all spheres of science. Classicists avow their editorial work to be scientific. Some go even further, believing that the issuance of definitive text-editions influences the direction of classical scholarship. Others believe classical scholarship may be affected through the publication of original articles. It ought to be stated clearly that writings of each class may aspire to be more or less definitive. But how many of them are, and how many, generations later, still are? Housman contributed to both genres, and his editions and papers were seminal. Now scholars of a new generation are contesting his ideas.

This current atmosphere for reappraising his work is merely another development of the discordant seeds sown during his career when he disputed the scholarly views of many of his peers. To cite one example: three of his papers on the MSS of Propertius were labeled a

“brilliant triad of articles”

by J.P. Postgate (1853-1926).¹⁴ Despite the approbation, Housman was not a little displeased with Postgate's criticism of his Propertian studies. Their back-and-forth articles on the issue remain models of analysis and testify to each one's critical skills,¹⁵ even if the one berated the other. Every critic did not engage Housman in that way. The usual deference shown to Housman's conclusions by scholars, cemented his exalted status, if not in the minds of others, it certainly did in his own mind.

¹⁴ The quotation comes from J.P. Postgate, 'On the Manuscripts of Propertius', *CR* (Apr. 1895), Vol. 9, No. 3, 178-186 (180).

¹⁵ N. Hopkinson, 'Housman and J.P. Postgate' in D.J. Butterfield and C. Stray, *A.E. Housman: Classical Scholar* (London: Duckworth, 2009), 175-191.

His arrogant temper, when freed and let loose upon foes, was brutal. Since it was manifested amid textual emendations of high standard, Housman was tolerated with all the joys someone would exhibit when playing near a den of venomous snakes. The possibility of a scurrilous reply tempered approaches to his work. This anxiety, felt by others, I think, pleased him. All that Housman did do he did well, and he effected it with inimitable excellence. Prone to efficiency, he was an iconoclast who, at the time, stood in the forefront during the storm-and-stress period of textual criticism. Quite predictably, a number of people were sad when he died in 1936; but so many others heaved a sigh of relief.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:

#1-6

Biographical Note #1

Objective: to offer a chronological and popular sketch of Housman's life and career in six parts, making substantial use of his once private but now published letters.

The writing of biography creates perils of many kinds. For one, biographers are not omniscient, and can offer only their best judgments. When a life history, however brief, is done correctly, some of the behind-the-scenes events of a subject's professional life may illumine obscure parts of what may or may not have been regarded as a formidable career. It would be impractical in these brief notes to refer to all extant material related to Housman's life. Even still, a bare-bones outline of Housman's academic life, sufficient for public notice, should be placed in view of a reading public. Although concise, the notes do contribute to annotated researches into his biography. The main facts are commonly known. A.E. Housman was born March 26 1859. He was the grandson of evangelical ministers on both sides of his parentage. Brought up in the small hamlet of Fockbury on the outskirts of Bromsgrove, whose fame now is tied partly to his memory, he was reared in those genteel comforts which were so elusive to children of parents without adequate means. The several villages of his youth, which dotted the area surrounding him, later became topographical pillars in his poetry. Housman's mother, Sarah, was the daughter of a sometime classical scholar and poet. The father's poetic aspirations found residence in his young daughter's heart. So for diversion, she also composed poems intermittently.

By fifteen years of age Housman, too, was a confirmed poet: in part, it would seem, from the influence of his mother. His award winning poem 'The Death of Socrates', published while a student at the

Bromsgrove grammar school, earned him a modicum of local eminence.¹ His early affection for Horace is apparent in his verse translation of Hor. *Od.* I 2 29. And his awareness and use of, scripture is early attested in the 1875 poem, 'St. Paul on Mars Hill'.² After the death of his mother Sarah in 1871, Housman's father Edward, a solicitor who was not the best steward of funds, married a cousin by the name of Lucy on June 26, 1873. The relationship between him and his stepmother seemed solid, and a letter to her in 1873 does not dent that impression, in which he calls her "dearest momma".³

Material regarding his younger years is not plentiful. The letters of A.E. Housman present the reader with a brief narrative of an adolescent Housman on his first trip to London in 1875: he enjoyed a short excursion around a larger urban setting, seeing Trafalgar square, the Bank & Exchange, and Joseph Hadyn's musical *By Thee with Bliss*, among other things. In an extraordinarily pedantic letter, he details to his stepmother his adventures in the city. Of all these short trips he does note that he spent a significant amount of time in the Greek and Roman section of the British Museum.⁴ Within the

¹ The poem appeared in *The Bromsgrove, Droitwich & Redditch Weekly Messenger, County Journal and General Advisor* on August 8 1874, No. 762, 3, so William White, in 'The Death of Socrates: A.E.Housman's First Published Poem', *PMLA* (Sep. 1953), Vol. 68, No. 4, 913-916.

² This point we take note of, despite the supposed loss of his religious faith in 1871 when his mother died so young. Housman had described this "loss" in a letter to Maurice Pollet. See *Etudes Anglaises* (1937), I, 403. But observe: his atheism seemed to be a private affair of the heart of which none other knew while he was young.

³ See Archie Burnett, *The Letters of A.E. Housman: Volume I: 1872-1928 and Volume II: 1929-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Henceforth I will cite them as Burnett, *Letters I*, and *II*. The quotation in the above text is from Burnett, *Letters I*, 4. Whatever the conventions of the time, anyone who has experienced the inclusion of new relations of this sort in the family understands the difficulties of utilizing such a term as 'momma' for one who is not one's birth mother.

⁴ See Burnett, *Letters I*, 5-7. In his 1911 Cambridge lecture Housman attributed his turn of mind toward Greek and Latin at the age of seventeen to the reception of a gift volume of translated verse entitled *Sabrinæ Corolla in Hortulis Regiæ Scholæ Salopiensis* (London: George bell, 1850), in John

next decade he would find this building to be valuable for research, spending many evenings there studying the texts of ancient dramatists and poets.

Alfred matriculated at St. John's College in the fall of 1877. It was an institution whose departments of instruction were in touch with classical studies.⁵ He did well in his lessons for more than two years. He was a brilliant pupil and succeeded by dint of hard work. There the rigor of classical scholarship engaged him to such degree he declared his German language studies needed to be put off for a season.⁶ He relished the minutiae of scholarship: by now he was investigating the transmission of texts of Propertius, and according to a letter by Housman to a potential publisher, he had

“formed the design of producing an edition and commentary which should meet the requirements of modern critical science...”⁷

Carter, *Confines of Criticism: The Cambridge Inaugural 1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 17.

⁵ A.S. Peake (1865-1929) traversed similar pathways. He spent some years of his youth in Bromsgrove, and he attended Ludlow Grammar School. Later, before switching to theology, he too studied classics for 2 years at St. John's College. He commented on those days. Peake claimed he first learned the principles of criticism from T.C. Snow, a tutor in classics and Housman's former teacher. These insights were learned through Snow's lectures on Homer's *Odyssey*. Of Snow, Peake added, “As a teacher he was fettered by an unfortunate stammer, and it was a pity to waste talents so brilliant on unappreciative pass men. His gentle manner and halting delivery were ill-fitted to impress undergraduates who despised learning in comparison with sport. But his Honours students, meeting him alone or in small classes, quickly came to recognize his exceptional gifts, and as they got to know him better, admiration deepened into reverence.” See L.S. Peake, *Arthur Samuel Peake: A Memoir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 71-72. T.C. Snow wrote favorably for Housman when he applied for the University of London Professorships of Greek and Latin. See P.G. Naiditch, *A.E. Housman at University College, London: The Election of 1892* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 20.

⁶ See Burnett, *Letters I*, 30. In a letter, wholly in French, to Elizabeth Wise July 8 1877, he demonstrates his mastery, by this time, of at least one of the major Romance languages of Europe.

⁷ See Burnett, *Letters I*, 58.

Housman thought Baehrens' (1848-1888) edition, *Sex. Propertii: Elegiarum Libri IV* (1880) did not sufficiently display a scientific use of the material available. Moreover while in college, he also began writing some "nonsense" verses⁸ for *Ye Rounde Table*.⁹ Each volume's popularity, stemming from its literary wit and satirical manner, was refreshing and pleased many people.¹⁰ The vim and vigor of his youth was being poured into these oddly intelligible poems.

As far as the classics curriculum went, one could have done far worse than attending St. John's. There were other colleges of repute, several of them containing scholars of eminence, but St. John's identity was well known. Richard P. Graves noted that Housman's tutor, T.H. Warren provided a list of suggested readings for him.¹¹ The list included c. 300 epigrams of Martial and several sections of F.A. Paley's *The Elegies of Propertius*, and Madvig's Cicero *De Finibus* book II. Perhaps flaws in Paley's work incited him to fix the texts.

Of more importance was the assigning of Wilhelm Wagner's (1843-1880) 1876 volume: *T. MACCI PLAVTI AVLVLARIA: with Notes Critical and Exegetical and an Introduction*.¹² This learned volume is

⁸ So he describes them in Burnett, *Letters I*, 30.

⁹ T.B. Haber, 'A.E. Housman and "Ye Rounde Table"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (October 1962), Vol. 61, No. 4, 797-809.

¹⁰ P.G. Naiditch's 'A.E. Housman's Prose Contributions to Ye Rounde Table', *The Housman Society Journal* (2011), Vol. 37, 21-46.

¹¹ R.P. Graves, *A.E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), 37. This volume is full of emotive analytical criticism. And it is difficult to check a number of his sources, so many of them are unreferenced; but even if one does not check the primary sources noted, in not a few places his arguments and speculative conclusions would appear to be correct.

¹² Wilhelm Wagner was Professor at the Johanneum in Hamburg. His volume, *T. Macci Plauti: Aulularia* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1887), a re-written 2nd edition, was already a standard in its day. I cite the reprinted volume *T. Macci Plauti: Aullularia* (New York: Arno Press, 1979).

full of useful and relevant information.¹³ Housman would have learned of:

- (1) The difficulties of reading the metre of ancient Latin comedy. Wagner's 62 page introduction (6-69) of the laws of Plautine prosody¹⁴ is a staggering achievement; even more so to the strongest of intellects who master it.
- (2) The MS variations from Plautine texts and the need for their emendation, sometimes by means of conjecture—as illustrated on 46 and 58.
- (3) The historical displays of the ancient accent and of Latin spelling; but of its modification by speakers and writers as the years passed by: see sections [E], 43-61; and [F], 61-65; and [G], 65-69.
- (4) Richard Bentley's (1662-1742) suspected acquaintance with Francois Guyet's 1657 edition *Commentarii in P. Terentii Comoedus* VI, in which Bentley is alleged to have appropriated some of Guyet's readings as his own, later publishing them in his work on Terence, while forgetting to acknowledge his indebtedness to Guyet, 8 also fn.2.
- (5) Wagner's belief that earlier and later volumes of Friedrich Ritschl (1806-1876), a noted Plautine scholar, contain too many variances on Plautine prosody to be taken as authoritative, see 9.

Throughout the volume Wagner interacts with a number of textual critics, especially F. Ritschl. Housman also could have enriched his mind and even agreed with quite a lot of the material. But he could not have concurred with Wagner's conclusion on 69:

“...we gain and learn more and arrive at more stable results by means of a critical and conservative observation of single facts than by specious but unsound emendations of seeming irregularities.”

¹³ No sound-minded scholar today disputes the gains and progression made in Plautine studies since Wagner's day. However his critical commentary and philological notes still stand as a testament to his acumen and industry.

¹⁴ Wagner offers detailed studies of the lengthening and shortening of vowels and of the quantity of the final syllable. See 43.

Biographical Note #2

In the summer of 1881 Housman failed 'Greats'.¹⁵ He subsequently returned to Oxford and in the Fall received a pass degree from the university. He scored a passing grade in the Civil Service Exam then obtained a position as a clerk in the Royal Patent Office in London. When he began his employment there he had been teaching the sixth form at Bromsgrove School. While in London working at this vocation alongside Moses Jackson, he spent his evenings mainly at the British Museum in research. He labored there, intensively studying the texts of Propertius, Horace and a few Greek tragedians. His earliest academic output (c.1882) affirms this. The dual roles of clerk and independent scholar both involved the examination of documents and original ideas. Housman's research-interests benefited in an oblique way from the professional activities which daily engaged clerks in Patent Agencies.

Over the next decade he published twenty-five papers (including two reviews) of exceptional quality.¹⁶ Each of these, littered with the type of invective unusually attributed to one with a youthful mind and zealous attitude, brought him to the attention of scholars. Housman was mightily afflicted by the two abovementioned characteristics, but the effects of the dynamic duo were benign, and brought on no major infirmity in the way of his critical sensibilities.

During the years 1884-1886 his academic pen rested. There was little noise made by him in critical journals. Undoubtedly he was at work plowing up the ground for his developing textual theories on the

¹⁵ 'Greats' was the Oxonian tradition which involved examinations of pupils in the subjects of history, philosophy, and in the composition of Greek and Latin. Cf. A. J. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don: The Rise of the Academic Profession in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) and C. Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ E.g. 'Horatiana [I]', (1882); 'Horatiana [II]', (1888); 'Horatiana [III]', (1890); 'On Certain Corruptions in the *Persae* of Aeschylus', (1888); 'Emendationes Propertianae', (1888); 'Emendationes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', (1890); 'Conjectural Emendations in the *Medea*', (1890); 'The New Fragment of Euripides', (1891); 'Adversaria Orthographica', (1891) and 'Remarks on the Vatican Glossary 3321', (1892).

manuscripts of Propertius.¹⁷ His private correspondence does fill in some gaps related to certain events of his very private and public lives. As for these quiet years, they yielded several letters to family and friends. In March of 1885 he wrote to Lucy Housman, lauding her literary talents. Illustrating a literary appreciation for scripture, he opined that,

“with the possible exception of the second of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians,”

it was the best letter he had read.¹⁸ By the summer of the same year he was writing of his brief time sitting on a coroner’s jury and of the suspected dangers attached to his job at the Patent Office.¹⁹

1887 finds only two pieces of extant correspondence in Burnett’s *Letters* (pp. 60-61). Housman addressed R.Y. Tyrrell²⁰ and W. Aldis Wright on matters related to ancient Greek language and orthography. At this time his reputation was firm. His articles and insights were of value to a host of scholarly readers.²¹ On March 7 and March 22 1891, he issued two brief notes to the editor of *The*

¹⁷ There is a December 11 1885 letter to Macmillan and Company requesting that they consider publishing his recension of the text of Propertius. Within 72 hours they declined to accede to his request on the grounds that the market for such would be too slow and they later declined to publish other volumes also proposed to them by Housman. See Burnett, *Letters I*, 58-59.

¹⁸ March 29 1885, in Burnett, *Letters I*, 55.

¹⁹ Housman thought that their offices possibly could be dynamited for political reasons. See June 10 1885 letter to Lucy Housman, Burnett, *Letters I*, 56-57.

²⁰ Tyrrell introduced himself by way of letter, and as of 1892 when he wrote a testimonial for Housman’s application for a Professorship at University College, London, he still had not met Housman face to face. See P.G. Naiditch, *A.E. Housman at University College, London: The Election of 1892* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 16.

²¹ This attestation is furthered by Housman’s Oct 28 1889 letter to his old friend Pollard who, it seems, sought his help for A.W. Pollard, ed., *Odes from the Greek Dramatists: Translated into Greek Lyric Metres by English Poets and Scholars* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1890). See Burnett’s *Letters I*, 62-63. One year later, in 1890, he offered Pollard a few appreciative and critical thoughts on the newly published volume. *Op. cit.*, 66-68.

Academy.²² In the former letter, Housman is grieved by W.G. Rutherford and Lewis Campbell's misreading of a Greek sentence, which Housman alleges

"is neither verse nor Greek."

In order to reconcile the sense of the text Housman amends the text to assist a readership of scholars and laymen. In the latter note to the editor Housman once again sets his eyes on Campbell, adjudging that Campbell and some fellow editors have wrongly accentuated a word. And Housman warns against the possibility that a word which does not exist might obtain a place in

"our fragment of Euripides."



Upon the death of Alfred Goodwin on February 7 1892, the chairs of Greek and Latin became available at University College, London. Taking advantage of the reported vacancies, as announced in several papers on March 19, A.E. Housman duly applied for either of the academic appointments.²³ His letter of application was written as follows:

To the Council of University College, London
H.M. Patent Office London
19 April 1892

I have the honour to present myself as a candidate for the vacant Professorship of Latin in University College. If however the Latin Chair should be conferred upon another I would ask to be considered as an applicant in that event for the Professorship of Greek.

I am thirty-three years of age. I entered the University of Oxford as a scholar of St. John's College in 1877; in 1879 I was placed in the first class in the Honour School of Classical Moderations. In 1881 I failed to obtain honours in the Final School of Litterae Humaniores. I have since passed the finals for the degree of B.A., and am of standing to take the degree of M.A. in the event of my appointment to a Professorship. In 1881 and 1882 I was for some time engaged in

²² See Burnett, *Letters I*, 69-71; republished in *HCP I*.

²³ The details of these events are thoroughly chronicled in Naiditch, *op. cit.*

teaching the sixth form at Bromsgrove School, and in the latter year I obtained by open competition a Higher Division Clerkship in Her Majesty's Patent Office, which I now hold.

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

If I am honoured by your choice I shall give my best endeavors to the fulfillment of my duties and to the maintenance of accurate learning in University College.

I have the honour to be,
My Lords and Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant
A.E. Housman

To this letter was attached a pamphlet of testimonials written by men whose competency was not to be doubted. Housman succeeded to the Chair of Latin. His election over the other eighteen applicants was announced in the month of June, and so began his distinguished career as a Professor in London and later in Cambridge, stretching well over four decades.

Biographical Note #3

Housman's 1892 accession to the Chair of Latin at University College, London marked a pivotal moment in his career. The appointment provided him a more suitable means for disseminating his ideas. The preceding decade saw the publications of notable Greek and Latin studies, while he also diligently fulfilled his duties at the H.M. Patent Office. With swelled pride he afterwards acknowledged the superior poetic instinct attached to some of its officers.²⁴ Now, though, his obligations involved college level teaching of principles of Latin,

²⁴ See Housman's letter to P.G.L. Webb dated June 17 1896. There he says "I think that the Patent Office, having produced W. Dickson Morgan and me, has shown itself quite worthy of being a part of the Chicago Board of Trade, where most of our English poets are to be found.", Burnett, *Letters I*, 87.

whereby he sharpened the minds of his students²⁵ and his own intellect through classroom discussion and interaction and correspondence²⁶ with professors,²⁷ who were experts in their especial fields of study. This collegial atmosphere proved to be important, as did some of the professors on staff.²⁸

Previously prepared material quickly appeared. There were two perceptive articles on the texts of Sophocles and a paper concerning the Vatican Glossary. It may be of use to remark on Housman's inaugural lecture. It begins with a long rant about Herbert Spencer on the supposed utility of science and the influence astronomy has had on the masses. One cannot help but believe that the audience sat through the first portion of the lecture less than awed, and viewed it disapprovingly. Mid-way through the lecture he set his sights on the 'partisans of the humanities.' His description of the

²⁵ One of Housman's earliest students was R.W. Chambers, who, upon applying for a post as assistant librarian at Gray's Inn Library found Housman to be an ardent advocate for him. Writing of him, Housman remarked: "I have no hesitation in saying that he possesses a knowledge of Latin that is not only adequate... but probably much in excess of any requirements which shall be made of him in that capacity. He is in fact a student of unusual accuracy. His methodical industry always struck me greatly..." See loc. cit., 87.

²⁶ Housman's letters to scholars are all in all cordial and enlightening.

²⁷ While alive, Robinson Ellis (1834-1913) was somewhat respected by Housman for his editions of Catullus (1876) and the *Ibis* of Ovid et cetera, also for his observations published in *Noctes Manilianae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891). Ellis formerly taught at UCL from 1870-1876. Remarkably, at the time of his death, an obituary notice across the ocean in New York lauded him as the 'Greatest Latin Scholar and Critic of His Period in England.' See *New York Times* death notices for October 10 1913.

²⁸ One notable, famed Egyptologist Sir W.M. Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), assumed a professorship in the same year Housman ascended. In 1892 Petrie became the first holder of the Chair of Edwards Professor of Egyptian Archaeology and Philology. Also worth mentioning is W.P. Ker (1855-1923), from 1889 the Quain Professor of English Language and Literature. He was chairman of the search committee for supplying the Greek and Latin professorships, and he favored Housman. J.P. Postgate (1853-1926), a noted classicist, held the Chair of Comparative Philology at University College, London during part of Housman's tenure.

need of rational faculties to fully appreciate classical literature, indeed, echoes in our ears 126 years after the event. A discriminatory power possessed him, and a few words from his lecture will confirm this.

Speaking of the uses of Greek and Latin classical literature Housman says,

“The special benefit which those studies are supposed, and in some cases justly supposed, to confer, is to quicken our appreciation of what is excellent and what is not. And since literature is the instrument by which this education is imparted, it is in the domain of literature that this quickened appreciation and sharpened discrimination ought first to display themselves.

If anyone wants convincing of the inestimable value of a classical education to those who are naturally qualified to profit from it, let him compare our two greatest poets, Shakespeare and Milton, and see what the classics did for one and what the lack of the classics did for the other. Milton was steeped through and through with classical literature; and he is the one English poet from whom an Englishman ignorant of Greek and Latin can learn what the great classics were like. Mark: 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.

But in the province of literature, where their influence is soonest and more powerfully exerted, they conferred on him all the benefits which their encomiasts ascribe to them. The dignity, the sanity, the unfaltering elevation of style, the just subordination of detail, the due adaptation of means to ends, the high respect of the craftsman for his craft and for himself, which ennoble Virgil and the great Greeks, are all to be found in Milton, and nowhere else in English literature are they to be found: certainly not in Shakespeare. In richness of natural endowment Shakespeare was the superior even of Milton; but he had small Latin and less Greek, and the result... ”²⁹

²⁹ *Introductory Lecture Delivered by A.E. Housman Before the Faculties of Arts and Laws and of Science in University College London October 3, 1892* (New York; Cambridge: The Macmillan Company and Cambridge University Press, 1937), 14-16. Further on in the lecture Housman reaffirms all the above,



Housman continued to write poetry in the 1890s. The notebooks left behind at his death are annotated with a variety of dates, signifying the time of a poem's composition. The dated poems are listed by Housman's brother Laurence in the back of the posthumously published volume, *More Poems*.³⁰ Over twenty poems are dated 1890-1895.³¹ The bulk of them made their way into *A Shropshire Lad* or *Last Poems*. All the while personal letters were passing to and from family members and friends. He even found time for a short trip to Constantinople in Turkey.³² His mind could not rest for thinking about his academic work. Critical research of the highest standards persisted. Housman's tireless industry and perseverance were astounding.

stating: "And while on the one hand no amount of classical learning can create a true appreciation of literature in those who lack the organs of appreciation, so on the other hand no great amount of classical learning is needed to quicken and refine the taste and judgment of those who do possess such organs. Who are the great critics of the classical literatures, the critics with real insight into the classical spirit, the critics who teach with authority and not as the scribes? They are such men as Lessing or Goethe or Matthew Arnold, scholars no doubt, but not scholars of minute or profound learning," *ibid.*, 23-24.

³⁰ Laurence Housman, ed., *More Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936).

³¹ Sept. 1890: 'Once in the Wind of Morning'; Jul. 1891: 'In Summertime on Bredon'; 1891-1892: 'Far in A Western Brookland'; Feb. 1893: 'Tis Time, I think, by Wenlock Town' and 'The Weeping Pleiads Wester'; Aug. 1894: 'Farewell to Barn and Stack and Tree'; Dec. 1894: 'The Lad Came to the Door at Night'; Jan. 1895: 'When I was one and Twenty'; 'Wake the Silver Dusk Returning'; 'Leave your Home Behind, Lad'; 'High the Vanes of Shrewsbury Gleam'; (Feb.): 'On Moonlit Heath and Lonesome Bank'; (Mar.): 'Far I Hear The Bugle Blow'; (Apr.): 'Tis Spring: Come out to Ramble'; (May): 'Oh, When I was in Love with You'; (?Jun.): 'Along the Field As We Came By'; (Jul.): 'When I Came Last to Ludlow'; (Aug.): 'Here the Hangman Stops his Cart'; (Sept.): 'Morning Up The Eastern Stair'; (Nov.): 'In My Own Shire If I Were Sad'; (Dec.): 'Yonder See The Morning Blink.'

³² Housman's letter to Lucy, dated September 1904, highlights in a vivid way the Istanbul of old times and contains significant detail and humorous data and badly transliterated Turkish names. See Burnett, *Letters I*, 162-164.