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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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THE RHETORIC OF HOUSMAN'S
A SHROPSHIRE LAD

by
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Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in English Literature

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
OTTAWA, CANADA, 1979

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am happy to acknowledge my debt to Robert Collins, Ph.D., of the Department of English, University of Ottawa, under whose supervision this thesis was prepared. His scholarship did much to make it better than it might have been and his encouragement helped to make the writing of it a pleasure.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

All quotations from Housman's poetry are taken from The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939; new edition 1967, reprinted 1974). Whenever the title, A Shropshire Lad, is used to identify poems quoted or referred to in the thesis it is abbreviated as ASL.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to define a key quality in the style of A. E. Housman's poetry and to examine its presence in his first and most important work. Housman's style, though widely admired, has received comparatively little critical investigation and the particular quality which is the subject of this study has never been dealt with in isolation. Since A Shropshire Lad first appeared, more than eighty years ago, the terseness and simplicity of its diction, the concision of its syntax and its overall austerity of form have been generally praised, yet full-length studies of the stylistic techniques which have evoked this praise are almost non-existent. Shorter studies and essays, though more numerous, have necessarily had to sacrifice comprehensiveness to brevity, illustrating their conclusions from only a few of the poems.

Recent Housman criticism has concentrated more on his life and character than on his poetry and, where it has dealt with the latter, has tended to emphasize content and philosophy rather than style. The major studies have been A. S. F. Gow's A. E. Housman: A Sketch, Lawrence Housman's My Brother, A. E. Housman, Grant Richards' A. E. Housman: 1897-1936, Nesca Robb's Four In Exile, George L. Watson's

A. E. Housman: A Divided Life, Maude M. Hawkins' A. E.

Housman: Man Behind a Mask, Norman Marlow's A. E. Housman:

Scholar and Poet and Tom Burns Haber's A. E. Housman. Of

these, Marlow deals at most length with the poetry, though his focus is more on literary sources and influences, which are given three chapters, than on poetic techniques, which receive one. Richards, Housman's publisher, is chiefly concerned with defending him against hostile critics but his book includes appended material (in particular an analysis by G. B. A. Fletcher) which casts helpful light on the style of the poetry.

The principal shorter studies--articles and essays--which have appeared over the last forty years are listed in the attached bibliography. Most of these do not deal with questions of style and those which do vary widely. They range from general appraisals, both favorable and unfavorable (W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cyril Connolly, John Crowe Ransom, John Sparrow, Ian Scott-Kilvert), through closely argued textual analyses of particular poems (Randall Jarrell, Richard Wilbur, F. R. Leavis), to the evaluation of specific features of Housman's style (R. P. Blackmur, Christopher Ricks, F. W. Bateson, T. B. Haber). Frequently the last two approaches are combined.

To the above list should be added John Henry Gottcent's unpublished dissertation, "The Poetry of A. E. Housman." This is the only full-length work devoted entirely to an examination of the techniques of the poetry. Despite

the scope of his study, however, Gottcent's purely descriptive method fails to reach the heart of Housman's style, though in his chapter on tone he approaches it.

Le style, c'est l'homme même: Buffon's dictum reminds us that style is idiosyncratic, peculiarly characteristic of its possessor, that the elements which combine to form it are highly personal. It is a group of such elements in the compound which is Housman's style that is described by the term 'rhetorical quality'. This quality is not the whole of the style; many of his poems lack it and are still unmistakably his. Nevertheless, it is his most telling stylistic feature, the one which imparts to his best poetry its characteristic power and which goes far to explain why, in the words of F. W. Bateson, "at least twenty of his poems are likely to live as long as the language."¹

While there has not so far been any extended description of the elements in Housman's poetry that give it its rhetorical quality, their presence has been noted by a number of critics. These fall into three categories: those who point to an implicitly dramatic element in the poetry, those who note its frequent reliance on epigrammatic or aphoristic expression and those who directly ascribe a rhetorical character to it. Of the first group, Marlow is the most wide-ranging in his comments. He notes how Housman's verse is unmistakably his own and how swiftly and securely it lodges in the reader's mind and, asking why this should be, answers: "Largely it is that Housman,

like Herodotus according to a modern editor, preserves unimpaired the primitive energy of words."² Housman himself had said that the chief literary influences on his poetry of which he was aware were Shakespeare's songs, the Scottish border ballads and Heine.³ For Marlow, "the influence of the Scottish border ballads is stronger and more pervasive than any other. In dramatic situation, in outlook, in language and in metre it is everywhere apparent."⁴

Housman's use of allusion, of the connotations of words and phrases, to enlarge the emotional dimensions of his poems and increase their dramatic effect is also noted by Marlow:

. . . it often seems that he is taking a commonplace saying or a Biblical phrase known to all and deliberately making use of our knowledge of it or consciously referring to the well-known setting to give an air of timelessness to his poems. At all events, the reminiscences of Biblical language do have this effect: we link the poem with the earlier passage and the absence of local detail or of temporary mannerisms enables us to see the poems as:

Tears of eternity, and sorrow,
not mine, but man's.⁵

Cleanth Brooks, in a 1959 essay, comments on the dramatic effect of Housman's use of tone: "Housman's great successes (as well as his most disastrous failures) are to be accounted for in terms of tone . . . [His] triumphs nearly always involve a brilliant handling of tone . . . in which the matter of the poem is suddenly seen in a new perspective."⁶ Housman's use of Biblical echoes to transcend temporal and spatial limitations has already been noted

and William R. Brashear describes a comparable technique when he says that "Housman was, before all else, a master of simple metaphorical extension through which he accomplishes an immediate, often disquieting leap from the local to the cosmic, bypassing . . . the intermediate stations, the levels of meaning and complexities that constitute the enriching substance for most major poets."⁷ Finally in this connection, there is the observation of Ian Scott-Kilvert that "most of his lyrics are tinged with an element of the dramatic or the rhetorical."⁸

The aphoristic and epigrammatic character of much of Housman's verse has been remarked by a number of critics. The most emphatic is Edwin Muir who sees this as Housman's characteristic mode of expression:

All his epigrams are at bottom variations on one epigram, the theme of which is separation. One might almost say that this is the sole subject of Housman's poetry and perhaps its chief inspiration: separation in its various forms. . . . For [the] sense of betrayal which comes from an apprehension of the contrast between appearance and reality, hope and fulfillment, the natural form is epigram, a brief and surprising statement of an obvious incompatibility.⁹

Similarly, Morton Dauwen Zabel expresses the view that "Housman's whole temper . . . seeks resolution in the ambiguity of epigram,"¹⁰ while, for Cleanth Brooks, "Many of Housman's poems seem to be epigrams softened in the direction of the romantic and 'poetic'."¹¹ George Orwell makes a judgment on both Housman and his audience when he says that " . . . poets who attain wide popularity, like

Housman, are as a rule definitely gnomic writers."¹²

The dramatic and epigrammatic elements which have called forth these reactions are, as has been indicated, part of a larger stylistic quality which is best described by the adjective 'rhetorical'. This quality is also marked by a certain 'public' tone which frequently accompanies Housman's poetic utterance, a distancing and impersonality in the handling of his material. The suggestion of distance and impersonality may seem at first sight to conflict with the essentially romantic spirit of Housman's poetry, but the two are not really incompatible: romantic inspiration can combine with rhetorical expression. The rhetorical tone is a technique for keeping emotion at bay even as it finds an outlet in the poetry. It is entirely consistent with a "classic concision of style and a romantic extremism of temperament" which, says Bateson, were apparently combined in Housman. Bateson adds that, "the reality that lies behind the appearance is . . . neither strictly classical nor romantic"¹³ and calls it 'emphasis', a description which will be examined in detail in chapter IV.

Other critics have remarked on Housman's rhetorical quality. Cyril Connolly, in a piece which is generally unsympathetic, says that ". . . Housman at his poetical best [is] a first-rate rhetorician."¹⁴ Stephen Spender ascribes to his poetry "an almost anonymous quality of being something rightly said rather than something said by someone. . . ."¹⁵ This would seem to be Spender's recognition

of the impression of distancing and impersonality which some of the poetry leaves.

Stuart Gerry Brown speaks of Housman's use of 'rhetorical devices'¹⁶ and C. B. Tinker says that his "manner, for all its apparent and engaging simplicity, results from a mature knowledge of the art of rhetoric. . . ." ¹⁷ The anonymity which Spender mentions is also suggested by William Empson when he writes: ". . . it seems normal to this sort of 'perfect' verse [he is speaking of the first poem in A Shropshire Lad] that, because so much has been polished away from the original feeling, it will satisfy a great variety of feelings, and because of its perfection of form will attract them." ¹⁸

The purpose of this introduction has been to indicate the importance of the rhetorical quality in Housman and the extent of the critical recognition it has received. A detailed examination of the elements that comprise it and of their action in the poetry will be the work of the next three chapters. A Shropshire Lad has been chosen as the basis for this study because it is Housman's largest and most representative work, containing more than a third of his collected poems, and because it is the one which first established and still chiefly sustains his poetic reputation. Its claim to be representative of the whole of Housman's verse is supported by the critical consensus that his poetry is remarkable for an absence of development, that, despite the interval of twenty-six years between the

publication of A Shropshire Lad (1896). and of Last Poems (1922), the latter volume is essentially the same in style and spirit as the first.¹⁹

A variety of poems will be quoted and analyzed in the course of these chapters to illustrate the separate aspects of Housman's rhetorical quality around which this thesis is structured. As a result, there will be recurring references to particular poems, and even particular passages, since only one rhetorical aspect of a given poem is dealt with at a time.

The fifth and final chapter will look at Housman in a broader context. It will examine his theory of poetry, and offer an assessment of the character and quality of his poetic achievement. This will involve consideration of the question of form versus content, a question which has been at the centre of Housman criticism for nearly half a century if we take his 1933 lecture, The Name and Nature of Poetry, as a terminus a quo. Other than this, the thesis is concerned exclusively with style and techniques. This is not as limiting as it sounds since, as Mark Schorer has pointed out, "When we speak of technique . . . we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally of evaluating it."²⁰

CHAPTER II
PUBLIC TONE

1. Audience and Theme

Rhetoric has traditionally been understood as having to do with the manipulation by an author of his audience, as a conscious attempt to control the responses he evokes. While this is formally correct, the definition can be wider than that, for by the mere fact that he writes and is published the author is declaring his interest in an audience and, thus, implicitly in their response. In this sense all writing involves an element of rhetoric. "My subject," says Wayne C. Booth in the preface to his The Rhetoric of Fiction, "is the technique of non-didactic fiction, viewed as that of communicating with readers--the rhetorical resources available to the writer . . . as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader."¹ Poets, no less than novelists, can be caught within such a net so that, using the word the way Booth does in the title of his book, we can speak of 'the rhetoric of Housman's poetry'. However, as it is used in this study, the word has no connotation of audience manipulation. Rather, it is meant to indicate a certain attitude and tone which characterize the poetry--characteristics which, though

they have associations with formal rhetoric, are basically the stylistic reflection of a quality of Housman's mind.

The sense in which the word is used here is that suggested by a contemporary handbook on rhetoric when it says: "We may describe as rhetorical any literary work which is evidently intended for the public ear, and which has the tone and manner of a man speaking to a wide audience on a subject of general importance."² Though this judgment applies to Housman, it does not mean that his rhetorical attitude was consciously adopted, that he saw himself as in any way preaching or teaching; on the contrary, his public tone is always natural and instinctive. Neither does it mean that all Housman's poems contain a rhetorical element; quite clearly, they do not. Only certain of them have it but these are of such quality, and they owe so much of their quality to it, that this element may justly be described as a key feature of his style.

The "tone and manner of a man speaking to a wide audience on some theme or subject of general importance" implies an element of distance, and thus of impersonality, in the relationship between the poet on the one hand and his audience and his material on the other. This distinction, between close and distant, between personal and impersonal, becomes clear if we examine it in particular poems. Compare, for example, poems xxxiii and xliii ("The Immortal Part") of A Shropshire Lad. This is the former:

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

Sure, sure, if stedfast meaning,
 If single thought could save,
 The world might end to-morrow,
 You should not see the grave.

This long and sure-set liking,
 This boundless will to please,
 Oh, you should live for ever
 If there were help in these.

But now, since all is idle,
 To this lost heart be kind,
 Ere to a town you journey
 Where friends are ill to find.

We see at once that the tone is personal and intimate. One person is speaking directly to another, and, moreover, speaking about something that concerns only these two; the relationship to material, as well as to audience, is private. Nor is this privacy superficial, a mere poetic convention; rather, it is rooted in the underlying emotional reality which has called the poem into being and gives it its intensity.

When we turn to "The Immortal Part" we encounter a quite different relationship of the poet to his audience and his material:

When I meet the morning beam,
 Or lay me down at night to dream,
 I hear my bones within me say,
 'Another night, another day.

'When shall this slough of sense be cast,
 This dust of thoughts be laid at last,
 The man of flesh and soul be slain
 And the man of bone remain?

The bones continue their soliloquy for seven more stanzas and then give place to their possessor, who concludes:

Therefore they shall do my will
 Today while I am master still,
 And flesh and soul, now both are strong,
 Shall hale the sullen slaves along.

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

Unlike, "If truth in hearts that perish," this is not a monologue, which implies the existence of a hearer. It is a soliloquy, a meditation, meant not so much to be heard as overheard. It is addressed to no one--and to everyone--and this impersonality is part of its public tone. Its substance is a contest which the poet recognizes within himself and which, despite the personal character it has for him, we immediately recognize as ours also. While the situation he describes is his own, it is not uniquely his; it is universal and all of us share it as part of the human condition. Because the situation is that of Everyman, it repeats at a more profound level the idea of general accessibility which is inherent in the soliloquy form and, in so doing, adds to the poem's public tone.

To have a public tone, a poem must imply not only a wide audience but a subject of general importance. That the presence of the former alone is not enough is illustrated by such a poem as the well-known, "Loveliest of trees, the cherry now" (ASL ii). Here the poet tells us that the

Easter woodland is adorned with cherry blossoms, that the Biblical span of years is all too short for him to have his fill of beauty and that, accordingly, he will not delay to seek the pleasure offered by the sight of 'the cherry hung with snow'. The lyric is a soliloquy, meditative in character and not directed to a specific hearer, yet we feel that its tone is not properly described as public. The explanation for this discrepancy between form and tone is to be found in the matter of the poem and the poet's relationship to it. When we examine this, we see that the experience presented, though emotionally valid, represents a particular rather than a general situation. We realize that the reaction described is one that any of us might duplicate in similar circumstances, but not one that all of us, irrespective of circumstances, share with the poet by virtue of the humanity we have in common with him. Compared with such a poem as "The Immortal Part," the twelve lines of "Loveliest of trees" are clearly private rather than public in tone.

Housman once described poetry as "simply a tone of voice, a particular way of saying things,"³ and his own poetry has in it elements of impersonality and detachment, of didactic utterance, which gave his way of saying things a public tone. The tone is found frequently in A Shropshire Lad. It appears, for instance, in the passage of ASL vii which gives us the blackbird's song and, three stanzas later, in the variation of the song taken up by the poet's

soul:

'Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
 What use to rise and rise?
 Rise man a thousand mornings
 Yet down at last he lies,
 And then the man is wise'.

.....
 'Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
 The sun moves always west;
 The road one treads to labour
 Will lead one home to rest,
 And that will be the best'.

The blackbird's counsel, set in the context of an episode described by the young yeoman for anyone who wishes to listen, touches a subject of general significance: the permanent rest to which each man must finally go, no matter how often he has risen from rest before. It is a message to everyone, with a didactic note that adds to its public tone.

Intimations of mortality are a staple of Housman's verse and, dealing as they do with man's destiny, they have almost by definition a public tone; the response they evoke is universal. Thus, the tone is strongly present in the description of "The lads in their hundreds [who] to Ludlow come in for the fair" (xxiii)--the youths singled out for death at the height of their strength and beauty--and it echoes unmistakably in the concluding lines: "They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man, / The lads that will die in their glory and never be old."

The note of struggle which characterizes "The Immortal Part" was mentioned earlier. Another note of interior conflict, this time raised to the pitch of warfare, is sounded in "The Welsh Marches" (xxviii). This is one of the high points of A Shropshire Lad, in both its emotional intensity and the quality of its poetry. The poem opens with two fine descriptive stanzas on Shrewsbury and then moves to its initial theme: the long ago battles there in which the Saxon conquered the Celt:

Ages since the vanquished bled
 Round my mother's marriage-bed;
 There the ravens feasted far
 About the open house of war.

But it is not a racial struggle only which is recalled; as the mention of 'my mother's marriage-bed' suggests, sexual violence is present also:

When Severn down to Buildwas ran
 Coloured with the death of man,
 Coched upon her brother's grave
 The Saxon got me on the slave.

The intensity of this is startling: even as the river runs red with blood and upon the very burial place of her brother, the defeated woman is ravished by the conqueror. All that was centuries ago but the spirit of it lives on, not in some externalized social or racial situation, but personally and intensely within the spirit of the poet:

In my heart it has not diéd,
 The war that sleeps on Severn's side:
 They ceáse not fighting, east and west,
 On the marches of my breast.

It is here that we come to the core of the poem: the age-old battle has never ended; it goes on today with new combatants and a new battlefield, and all three of these are one.

Here the truceless armies yet
 Trample, rolled in blood and sweat;
 They kill and kill and never die;
 And I think that each is I.

None will part us, none undo
 The knot that makes one flesh of two,
 Sick with hatred, sick with pain,
 Strangling - When shall we be slain?

The hopelessness and bitterness of the struggle are conveyed with telling force by the modifier 'truceless', by the elemental nouns and verbs--'blood', 'sweat', 'kill', 'die'--by the vivid 'knot' to suggest inextricability, by the choice of 'sick', twice repeated, by the profound revulsion of the penultimate line, and by the dramatic shift to a question at the end, a question asked twice more as the final verse again recalls 'the ancient wrong':

When shall I be dead and rid
 Of the wrong my father did?
 How long, how long, till spade and hearse
 Put to sleep my mother's curse?

We cannot determine the specific combatants in this sad struggle; they can only be surmised. Nesca Robb has several suggestions:

There is the fundamental strife of the insatiable energy that clutches at life and the despair that repudiates life as evil, of the Saxon and the slave, the busy flesh and the sullen bones. There may be something of remorse toward the dead. . . . But chiefly there is the suggestion of some new shattering of the spirit's integrity, the emergence of passions whether of love or of hate . . . that fill their victim with horror. Conscience stands among the rebel powers trying to subdue them to the "alien laws of God and man" but they spring up continually with dreadful vigour.⁴

This agony is the poet's, but it is not his alone; something of the warfare that he feels within himself belongs to the heart of every man, the warfare of the flesh with the spirit, of conscience against temptation. It is the note of universality thus suggested that enables us to speak of "The Welsh Marches" as having a public tone.

Interior struggle is the theme of another intensely-felt poem, "Others, I am not the first" (xxx), in which desire competes with fear 'in the breathless night' for domination of the poet's being. The first verse declares the universality of the struggle:

Others, I am not the first,
Have willed more mischief than they durst:
If in the breathless night I too
Shiver now, 'tis nothing new.

The next establishes it in the reader's consciousness through the force of its imagery:

More than I, if truth were told,
Have stood and sweated hot and cold
And through their reins in ice and fire,
Fear contended with desire.

The desired vibration is set up in the sensibility of the reader by the second and third lines, through the evocativeness of 'sweated hot and cold' and the equally concrete 'ice and fire' locked in diametrical opposition. As a result, we not only believe that "aged once like me were they," we feel that this individual age is also universal. The poem is public in tone without any loss of its value as personal expression. Its soliloquy form implies that no particular audience is addressed and, hence, that the audience can be general, and its argument repeatedly links the private 'I/me' to the public 'they'.

"On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble" (xxxii) goes with the two poems just discussed to make a triptych in which the idea of 'the gale of life' blowing man before it, of the unending struggle within his breast, finds memorable utterance. Together they reach a level of personal intensity and emotional universality which is not surpassed by anything else in A Shropshire Lad. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that these three come at almost the middle of the sixty-three poems that comprise the work. Of the three, "On Wenlock Edge" is the most obviously public in tone. It draws an explicit parallel between the reaction of the poet, as he observes the gale which 'plies the saplings double' and spreads the leaves like snow, and that of a Roman standing in the same place almost two millenia before and seeing Nature at the same task.

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
 At yonder heaving hill would stare:
 The blood that warms an English yeoman,
 The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

The wind blew then 'through holt and hanger' and so it does
 now even as the poet watches. Then,

. . . like the wind through woods in riot,
 Through him the gale of life blew high;
 The tree of man was never quiet:
 Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

There is riot in the woods but it is also, we know, in the
 heart of man. The great metaphor of the gale of life carries
 with it the shock of recognition: life is a gale whose
 varying gusts regulate our days and years. It joins with
 its companion figure, the tree of man, to create an unfor-
 gettable image of human existence in a poem whose tone is
 unequivocally public. All the elements are present: the
 meditative soliloquy (he that has ears to hear, let him
 hear), the universal subject matter and the potent imagery
 emphasizing the sombre conclusions about man's lot.

The eight lines that make up ASL xl are the concen-
 trated expression of one of Housman's most characteristic
 themes, that of lost content, vanished innocence, irrevoc-
 cable happiness.

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

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

This brief, almost momentary, reverie has the genuine ring of personal experience and yet is wholly public in its orientation and implications. It is remarkable for its compression, even in a poet famous for this quality. The quality has been noted by a critic who speaks of Housman's "power of concentration in treating of lacrimae rerum," and who goes on to add that "Witter Bynner seems to have had [this] in mind . . . when he attributed to Housman 'all the machinery of Greek purgation gathered into a dew-drop'."⁵ It is a judgment which is perhaps more fully vindicated by this short poem than by anything else in A Shropshire Lad.

A pervading hopelessness, the conviction of being in an at best indifferent and at worst actively malign universe, was Housman's basic philosophical attitude. It is an attitude implicitly or explicitly present in almost all his poetry, but nowhere does he articulate it more clearly than in "Be still, my soul, be still" (xlvi), a poem that, like the great central trio (xxviii, xxx and xxxi) already referred to, represents one of the peaks in A Shropshire Lad. Its alexandrine metre, exceptional for Housman, and the strikingly effective use of caesura which accompanies it, are more intricately, though not more carefully, wrought than the iambic tetrameter or trimeter he

brief consciousness of life and of the injustice which is its inevitable accompaniment will soon be replaced again by oblivion. The poem should be depressing, but it is not; the strength and beauty of the language, as so often in Housman, have an effect on the sensibility which counteracts the grimness of the argument. The three sets of monosyllabic noun and verb--'pace the earth', 'drink the air', 'feel the sun'--carefully separated by commas for maximum deliberateness, have the effect of an ultimate statement about human life. They actually say very little, but they are immensely suggestive, a rhetorical utterance that seems to leave no more to be said; once they have been spoken there is nothing left to do but bid the soul be still and wait. Yet, there is one thing left--a cry from the heart that will accomplish nothing but, still, cannot be checked:

All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:
Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation--

dying away to the desolation of:

Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?

Once again, the lines gain most of their power from a rhetorical device, the massing of repetitive speech elements, in this case the five nouns with their single conjunction used four times. It is a bitter catalogue, made even more bitter by the foreknowledge that all these heart-breaking thoughts are to no avail. "Be still, my soul, be still," is a poem whose tone is unmistakably public--in its

rhetorical phrasing, in the poet's soliloquizing relationship to his audience and, irrespective of its metaphysics, in the universality of its subject matter.

The several poems which have just been examined may seem to suggest that Housman's public tone is only to be found in poems of 'internal conflict and 'cosmic anguish' (the phrase is William D. Brashear's).⁶ However, this is not so; mention was made earlier of "When smoke stood up from Ludlow" (vii), a lyric which, while it lacks any explicit element of struggle, is nevertheless public rather than private in tone. It is the inherently general nature of its audience and its material, however applicable the latter may be to the poet's situation, that makes the tone of a poem public.

A poem which possesses neither emotional nor thematic tension but yet clearly has the rhetorical quality which derives from a public tone is the famous short lyric:

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

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

These two perfectly-turned verses are not so admired today as they were in the heyday of Housman's reputation, when Walter Raleigh chose them "as the nearest approach in the whole of English literature to the classical spirit."⁷ More

recent criticism has been less enthusiastic. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, has described the first line of the poem as "painful, grandiloquent, incredible to the naturalistic imagination."⁸ Ransom was condemning the artificiality of the line, the falseness of the diction. It is an artificiality and a falseness which strike at the heart of the poem and give it, despite its elegance and superficial charm, a contrived, factitious character. It is hard for a poem to convey genuine feeling to our contemporary consciousness when its eight lines are burdened with words like 'rue', 'laden', 'rose-lipt', 'lightfoot' and 'lad', with the exaggerated onomatopoeia of 'By brooks too broad for leaping', and with the over-sweetness of rose-lipt girls sleeping 'In fields where roses fade'. One feels that technique is replacing feeling rather than incarnating it. Yet, none of these drawbacks alters the fact that "With rue my heart is laden" has an authentic public tone. Artificial though it is, this terse requiem with its universal subject matter is the sort of statement that would not be out of place on a public memorial; it is the stuff of epitaphs.

2. Aphorism and Epigram

A detachment of the poet from his audience has been postulated as an essential feature of the public tone. This can result from several features of the poetry. One of them, noted above, is the soliloquy technique in which we overhear

the poet voicing to himself and the world at large the emotions and thoughts that preoccupy him. Here distancing is related to the form in which the poem is cast. But it, and the public tone which it gives, can also be a result of a critical attitude towards his material on the part of the poet. The attitude is one in which he implicitly passes judgment on the idea or situation with which the poem deals. It is an attitude which naturally expresses itself in such techniques as epigram and aphorism, in irony, paradox and didacticism. All of these have the effect of establishing the poet as a person apart, someone who sits in judgment, and so interposes a psychological space between himself and the substance of his poem.

Consideration of this aspect of Housman's rhetorical quality will focus on the two judgmental techniques which most obviously contribute to his public tone: aphorism and epigram. Both are terse, memorable utterances but, while similar in origin, they differ in scope. The aphorism is a statement of broad application, the epigram narrow and highly concentrated. The word 'aphorism', says Logan Pearsall Smith, "has come to denote any brief, sententious statement," and he adds that it "concerns itself with life and human nature, and its truths are incapable of scientific demonstration." Smith distinguishes the epigram from the aphorism by the fact that the former, "though concerned with life like the aphorism, and possessing its terse and pointed form, is lacking in general import; it is not the

statement of a general truth."⁹ Since the time of Martial poetry has been used so often and effectively for epigrammatic statement that short poems which in their entirety are terse and pointed in form and concentrated in their thought, which is often satirical, are also called epigrams.

Aphoristic statements are more common in Housman's poetry than either epigrammatic passages or completely epigrammatic poems. In A Shropshire Lad, for instance, the poems containing aphoristic elements are more than twice as numerous as those with epigrammatic ones. While this is in part an indication of the relative difficulty of the two forms, it is even more a reflection of the cast of Housman's mind, which naturally tended toward sententious and forceful expression. Bateson, for example, has pointed to emphasis as "the most prominent characteristic of Housman's personality."¹⁰ It is an attribute that marks his critical writings in the field of classical scholarship and it can be observed throughout his correspondence.¹¹ Similarly, it goes far to account for the terseness and monosyllabic vigor which are the hallmarks of his poetry. The possessor of such an emphatic character instinctively leans towards conciseness of expression.

Emphasis and concision, together with an element of didacticism, are to be found in the early poem "Reveille" (iv), the last two quatrains of which have a carpe diem theme:

Up, lad; thews that lie and cumber
 Sunlit pallets never thrive:
 Morns abed and daylight slumber
 Were not meant for man alive.

Clay lies still, but blood's a rover;
 Breath's a ware that will not keep.
 Up, lad: when the journey's over
 There'll be time enough to sleep.

The aphoristic note, hinted at in the first two lines, is sounded clearly in the third and fourth, with their judgment on the duty of 'man alive'. The perspective becomes broader and the expression more terse in the subsequent dicta about 'clay', 'blood' and 'breath'. This is Housman at his most aphoristic. Another early poem in the Shropshire Lad sequence, "When smoke stood up from Ludlow" (vii), is also marked by aphoristic expression. The poem's message is one of quiescence rather than carpe diem, but the tersely summarized judgment on life is again present, particularly in lines three and four.

'Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
 The sun moves always west;
 The road one treads to labour
 Will lead one home to rest,
 And that will be the best'.

Though Housman said he was "not a pessimist but a peyorist,"¹² his all-pervading pessimism, or peyorism, restricts his aphoristic expression to a narrow emotional range. Thus, the quietism and disillusionment voiced in "When smoke stood up from Ludlow" embodies a death wish which is also to be found in lines like these from xlv:
 "Dust's your wages, son of sorrow, / But men may come to

worse than dust." It is even more evident in xlvi: "Be still, my soul, be still; it is but for a season: / Let us endure an hour and see injustice done." The encircling gloom of all this is brightened somewhat by the tripping measure of the poem that comes immediately after it, ASL xlix:

Oh, 'tis jesting, dancing, drinking
 Spins the heavy world around.
 If young hearts were not so clever,
 Oh, they would be young for ever:
 Think no more; 'tis only thinking
 Lays lads underground.

Even here, however, the sentiment is basically sombre.

Despite the gaiety of the lively trochaic lilt and the festivity implied in 'jesting', 'dancing', 'drinking', accompanied by the counsel to 'think no more', the aphorism in the last six words casts its shadow over the whole stanza.

It is a sentiment echoed in the penultimate poem of A Shropshire Lad when Terence tells his friend: "Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink / For fellows whom it hurts to think." This observation on the value of drink as an antidote to despair is followed a few lines later by the nearest approach to optimism--though it is still far off--that Housman's philosophy admitted: the maxim that "the world has still / Much good, but much less good than ill."

The several poems just considered owe their aphoristic character to their content, the substance of what they so tersely say. There are others, however, in which the aphoristic quality derives more from the imagery than

the substance. Such a poem is ASL xii:

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

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

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

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

Here it is the sententious metaphors that give the poem its element of aphorism. This sententiousness is suggested in the image of life as a street where one lodges briefly, and it dominates the second stanza. There heat, a primordial concept, is linked with the elemental emotions of hate and lust and another such concept, house, with its host of immemorial associations, is joined to the idea of living flesh and, later, inanimate dust. Such linkages are immensely effective in their ability to create in the reader's consciousness a sense of realities that extend beyond the barriers of time and place. It is the compression of so much significance into so brief a space--twenty-seven words and twenty-eight syllables--that makes the statement aphoristic.

"When I watch the living meet" is not unique; a comparable effect can be seen in "Others, I am not the first" (xxx). Though the idea content is more concentrated than that of "When I watch the living meet," and the emotion stronger, the poem is less aphoristic. This is because the metaphors are less universal in their implications. Nevertheless, they triumphantly convey the idea of an elemental situation from which everything irrelevant has been excluded:

Others, I am not the first,
 Have willed more mischief than they durst:
 If in the breathless night I too
 Shiver now, 'tis nothing new.

More than I if truth were told,
 Have stood and sweated hot and cold,
 And through their reins in ice and fire
 Fear contended with desire.

Another poem whose aphoristic quality derives from the starkness and universality of its images is "The Immortal Part" (xljiii), in which the bones assert their ultimate dominion over flesh and mind. The second stanza has 'slough of sense' and 'dust of thoughts', both wonderfully suggestive of the evanescence of the spirit. 'Sense', in this metaphor, is a dead skin which will be cast off like that of a snake. 'Thoughts', in the next, are an insubstantial powder, at the mercy of a puff of wind. A few lines later we have "The brain that fills the skull with schemes, / And its humming hive of dreams," where 'humming hive' combines with 'dreams' in a figure that captures perfectly both the ceaseless activity of our waking mind

and the insubstantiality of its issue. The idea conveyed by 'slough of sense' recurs again when the bones speak of the flesh as 'Empty vessel, garment cast' and the metaphors of the second verse are beautifully echoed in those of the last, where 'fire of sense' and 'smoke of thought' look back to 'slough of sense' and 'dust of thoughts'.

The short lyric, "Into my heart an air that kills" (xl), deserves attention as a poem whose aphoristic quality, though pervasive, is not immediately apparent:

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

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

There are no elemental images here. Neither is there any sententiousness, any obvious statement of 'a truth of general import'. What we have instead is a momentary glimpse of the tears of things, an insight into an emotion at the heart of life. The transparently simple ideas and words of the poem form a superlative single metaphor, the image of the sweet and irrecoverable past in every life as a land of lost content, a far country to which there is no return, a happy highway which can never again be travelled.

It was noted earlier that the epigram, while similar to the aphorism in style, lacks the latter's substance. It is a comment on a particular situation rather than the

articulation of a truth of general import. However, this concentrated focus helps to give the epigram its point and contributes to the sudden turn of thought which often marks its conclusion. The detached perspective is dominant in all this, as it was in the aphorism; here again, the poet is standing apart to observe and pass judgment, a fact to be kept in mind as the epigrammatic poems of A Shropshire Lad are examined.

The cynicism that often accompanies the epigram is to be seen in ASL vi:

When the lad for longing sighs,
Mute and dull of cheer and pale,
If at death's own door he lies,
Maiden, you can heal his ail.

Lovers' ills are all to buy:
The wan look, the hollow tone,
The hung head, the sunken eye,
You can have them for your own.

Buy them, buy them: eye and morn
Lovers' ills^a are all to sell.
Then you can lie down forlorn;
But the lover will be well.

Mildly amused worldly wisdom is the prevailing attitude here, evidenced in the list of typical lovers' symptoms: sighs, silence, dullness and paleness, "the wan look, the hollow tone," and so on, for eight lines. The note of epigram sounds tentatively in the suggestion that, if she wishes, the maiden can have all these marks of love for her own, and then, firmly, in the unexpected final line: "But the lover will be well."

Perhaps the most famous epigram of A Shropshire Lad is the poem that begins, "When I was one-and-twenty" (xiii) and goes on to quote the wise man's advice: "Give pearls away and rubies / But keep your fancy free," advice which the youth, in the assurance of his twenty-one years, ignores. The advice is repeated in the second, and final, stanza:

When I was one-and-twenty
 I heard him say again,
 'The heart out of the bosom
 Was never given in vain;
 'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
 And sold for endless rue'.
 And I am two-and-twenty,
 And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

This is a deservedly famous piece of light verse--brief and perfect in form, cynical but not bitter in tone and with an ingenious conclusion which gives point to all that has gone before. The poem offers a terse message which is apparently of general importance, a fact which suggests that we are after all dealing with an aphorism, but the tone says otherwise. It is light and witty, with a rueful smile in its wake; aphorisms should be made of sterner stuff. Nevertheless, "When I was one-and-twenty," notwithstanding its light-verse character, is obviously public in tone, marked by the poet's impersonality and detachment from his audience and material. The same theme--that loving is folly--is the subject of another epigrammatic comment in these lines from xiv:

His folly has not fellow
 Beneath the blue of day
 That gives to man or woman
 His heart and soul away.

There flowers no balm to sain him
 From east of earth to west
 That's lost for everlasting.
 The heart out of his breast.

This is a similar sentiment to that of "When I was one-and-twenty" but the tone is different, bitter rather than rueful; the underlying feeling is stronger and harsher.

Brevity is of the essence in epigram and the epigrammatic poems of A Shropshire Lad are all short, like this eight-line trifle:

Oh, when I was in love with you,
 Then I was clean and brave,
 And all around the wonder grew
 How well I did behave,

 And now the fancy passes by,
 And nothing will remain,
 And miles around they'll say that I
 Am quite myself again. (xviii)

Here once more we have the poem-as-epigram rather than the epigram as a part, possibly minor, of a larger poetic context. The form is typically brief and elegant, the tone amused and cynical. Once again, the epigram derives its bite from the last two lines in which, this time, there is no suggestion of aphorism. In all respects it is a slighter poem than "When I was one-and-twenty," but it still belongs with it in the category of poems having a public tone.

Less markedly epigrammatic than the foregoing is "If it chance your eye offend you" (xlv). This is not

light verse, for its subject is suicide, yet, the harsh cynicism and the concise statement of its two verses clearly lean towards epigram. The effect is heightened by the finality of the poem's last two lines:

And if your hand or foot offend you,
 Cut it off, lad, and be whole:
 But play the man, stand up and end you,
 When your sickness is your soul.

The lines are not entirely unexpected; they are a logical end to the argument. Nevertheless, the shocking counsel they offer has a dramatic impact which parallels the more conventional ingenuity which terminates other epigrams.

Quite different in character is the last epigrammatic poem in A Shropshire Lad:

You smile upon your friend today,
 Today his ills are over;
 You hearken to the lover's say
 And happy is the lover.

'Tis late to hearken, late to smile,
 But better late than never:
 I shall have lived a little while
 Before I die for ever. (lvii)

The note of epigram is not strong here, but it is clear. The poem lacks the cutting edge which cynicism gives and there is no element of shock in its conclusion, yet it has concision and point and deals concentratedly with a single idea. The final two lines stand out from and contrast with their background by virtue of the transcendence they suggest. Like the note of epigram, the public tone, though present, is less obvious here than in some other poems. The implied

dialogue form and the use of personal pronouns suggest intimacy but the intimacy is not really close; the atmosphere is too cool for that. And the detachment, the distance of the poet from his material, which marks the public tone is evident in the second verse, with its aphoristic 'better late than never'. Similarly public in tone is this four-line epigram which forms part of ASL lxii:

Oh many a peer of England brews
 Livelier liquor than the Muse,
 And malt does more than Milton can
 To justify God's ways to man.

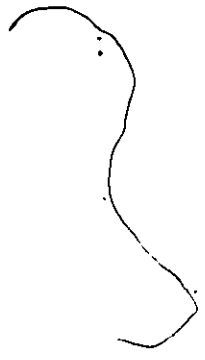
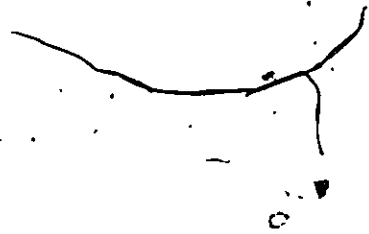
The stylistic qualities that have been noted in this examination of Housman's public tone--the terseness and concision, the detachment, the tendency to seek expression in aphorism and epigram--are qualities that we normally associate with prose rather than poetry. The distinction is more properly between prose and lyric poetry than between prose and poetry as a whole, since certain kinds of non-lyric verse, especially satire, displaying 'prose' qualities belong to an ancient tradition. In the same way, we tend to think of the attitude of mind that accompanies these qualities as essentially a 'prose' attitude. This has not gone unnoticed by students of Housman's poetry. Chauncey Tinker, for instance, refers to his vigor as a controversialist in classical scholarship and says his poetic power is related to this: "The skill behind the savage prose and the force behind the poetry is the same. . . ."13 F. W. Bateson links Housman to the tradition of satirical

verse mentioned above. He argues that A Shropshire Lad has a prose framework, that its poems have "the form if not the spirit of Martial, and the Latin epigram, with its insistence on 'point' is essentially a kind of prose."¹⁴ The tradition of verse satire, of course, extends far beyond the limits of epigram. Among the Romans, it takes in Juvenal and Horace, as well as Martial. In the seventeenth century it was a staple of poetic drama; and in the eighteenth, an age of satire, it reached its modern peak in English with the poetry of Pope.

Bateson's argument that the epigrammatic qualities of A Shropshire Lad, and of the Latin tradition of epigram, partake of the nature of prose is strengthened when one considers the vigor and terseness of Housman's own prose. His Selected Prose and his Letters overflow with illustrations of these virtues. In Bateson's opinion " . . . the author of A Shropshire Lad was already a virtuoso in English prose";¹⁵ and T. S. Eliot, reviewing Housman's "The Name and Nature of Poetry," called him "One of the few living masters of English prose," adding that " . . . on those subjects on which he chooses to exercise his talents there is no one living who can write better."¹⁶

The public tone of Housman's poetry, then, is no accident; it is not something non-essential added for stylistic effect. The elements of A Shropshire Lad that have been noted here as contributing to that tone are integral; they have their roots in Housman's character and are an

essential part of the manner in which his thoughts found utterance.



CHAPTER III
COSMIC DIMENSION

Many of the phrases and images in A Shropshire Lad have the effect of greatly expanding the actual meaning of the words used. The idea or image being presented suddenly takes on vastly wider and more profound associations, acquiring a temporal or spatial background of unlimited extent. This power of expansion is, of course, the normal function of metaphorical language, and Housman uses such language with great effect to give a cosmic dimension to many of his poems. He was, in the words of William R. Brashear quoted earlier, "a master of simple metaphorical extension through which he accomplishes an immediate, often disquieting leap from the local to the cosmic."¹ The comment is a perceptive one: through metaphorical extension Housman can suddenly give a cosmic character to an otherwise local and private poem. The dimension which his poetry thus acquires is part of its rhetorical quality. It is related to the verbal emphasis which has already been noted in connection with his use of aphorism and epigram. Underlying all these rhetorical devices appears to be an instinct for the stylistic absolute expressing itself in a technique which reduces the mechanics of the poetry to their simplest level and at the same time employs words and images

that are both widely current and rich in connotations.

The cosmic dimension is most obvious when it is introduced as part of the poem's idea content, part of the notional communication it is intended to make. We see it clearly in, for example, the first quatrain of 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.

The idea of temporal and spatial immensity conveyed here is direct and striking, and a metaphorical element in each line contributes to it. In the first, 'eve and morning', which ordinarily describes the confines of a single day, is used to call up 'the dark backward and abysm of time' out of which all eves and mornings emerge. In the second, 'twelve-winded sky', with its suggestion of the points of the compass, evokes the idea of a firmament that is both boundless and non-directional. The third and fourth lines carry with them the suggestion of an undifferentiated matter, a life substance adrift in the universe, which coalesces at the whim of the wind to form a human life. The 'twelve quarters' of the compass are called up again in the third verse and the image of human life as a creature of the cosmos is echoed by the 'endless way' of the poem's last line:

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

Less forceful in its cosmic dimension than the poem just discussed, is "On Wenlock Edge," the poem which immediately precedes it in A Shropshire Lad. In this poem the background is not the immensity of interstellar space but the span of centuries in human history. Such a span is vast compared to the time periods of which most of us are ordinarily conscious, and vastness of this kind is a product of the sort of metaphoric extension which is being considered here. Moreover, the time frame of "On Wenlock Edge" is open-ended; though the direct comparison is between the modern poet and the ancient Roman, the implicit comparison is universal; it is between any man and any other man in any time or place:

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
 At yonder heaving hill would stare:
 The blood that warms an English yeoman,
 The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

The poem derives its cosmic character largely from its argument, the basic idea that it communicates to us. However, its imagery contributes also. Thus, the two lines--
 "'Tis the old wind in the old anger; / But then it threshed
 another wood"--effectively suggest another troubled human spirit even as they specify another storm-tossed forest. The most striking image is in the melancholy reflection that "The tree of man was never quiet," a statement that

contains the essence of the poem's cosmic dimension.

Although he does not use the phrase, William R. Brashear's observations on the cosmic dimension of Housman's poetry are everywhere enlightening. He calls "On Wenlock Edge" and lyrics like it "poems of cosmic anguish."² One of these poems is only two verses long:

Now hollow fires burn out to black,
 And lights are guttering low;
 Square your shoulders, lift your pack,
 And leave your friends and go.

Oh never fear, man, nought's to dread,
 Look not left nor right:
 In all the endless road you tread
 There's nothing but the night. (lx)

Brashear comments on this as follows:

At the outset we expect much less than we get, for these poems have a remarkable coefficient of expansion. This one explodes. We find ourselves projected from the cozy, if cooling, atmosphere and company of the fireside . . . into cosmic darkness, infinity and the void. Moreover, this sudden expansion has the effect of enforcing a sense of the imminence of the ultimate. The darkness and all we try to avoid is not several times removed . . . but right out the door--waiting.³

This impressive effect is achieved almost entirely without metaphorical language; all the words except two can be interpreted literally. It is entirely from the fact, signalled by 'endless' in line seven, that the last word of the poem has a second meaning, one with cosmic implications, that the poem derives its sudden power.

The power of Housman's metaphors is commented on by Norman Marlow who claims that "the noblest . . . are those which combine utter simplicity with a Roman gravitas."⁴ He illustrates this with a comparison of:

The flag of morn in conqueror's state
Enters at the English gate:
The vanquished eve, as night prevails,
Bleeds upon the road to Wales. (xxviii)

and:

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

and concludes that the metaphors of the latter are more effective than even the former's "superb lines on Shrewsbury." He is right, and he might have added that this greater effectiveness is due to the fact that, whereas the appeal of the first poem lies in the metaphors which express the idea, the power of the second comes from the idea--an idea with cosmic overtones--which the metaphors express.

In "Be still, my soul, be still" (xlvi), the concept that "earth and high heaven are fixed of old and founded strong" has cosmic significance, especially when set against the unhappiness of the poet's soul. The later line--"I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the rain"--contributes a related quality of universality to the poem, the basic verbs combining with the elemental nouns

to suggest man's archetypal life on earth.

Less obvious, but still indicative of this aspect of Housman's rhetorical quality, is the following:

Twice a week the winter thorough
 Here stood I to keep the goal:
 Football then was fighting sorrow
 For the young man's soul.

Now in Maytime to the wicket
 Out I march with bat and pad:
 See the son of grief at cricket
 Trying to be glad.

Try I will; no harm in trying:
 Wonder 'tis how little mirth,
 Keeps the bones of man from lying
 On the bed of earth. (xvii)

With the last three lines we have passed suddenly from the innocuous sunlit setting of the sports field to the darkness of the grave--the two separated, in the poet's stark vision, only by a little mirth.

Housman's impulse towards emphasis is so strong that it can emerge in such an otherwise subdued lyric as "The street sounds to the soldiers' tread" (xxii). The content of this poem is ordinary enough--a momentary meeting and holding of glances as a file of soldiers moves through the street--but out of it spring two lines which suggest the immensity of the planet, and more:

My man, from sky to sky's so far,
 We never crossed before;
 Such leagues apart the world's ends are,
 We're like to meet no more.

Housman makes frequent use of Biblical allusions and turns of phrase to achieve effects which are related, sometimes indirectly, to the cosmic dimension of his poetry. Tom Burns Haber, who has made the most complete study of Biblical influences on the poetry, lists a total of 189 close or remote parallels with specific Scriptural passages, sixty-nine of them in A Shropshire Lad. The Bible as a literary influence has also been carefully investigated by Norman Marlow, who concludes that:

. . . the whole of the poetry is permeated by Biblical language, particularly by cadences at the ends of lines and by phrases and epithets in trenchant Anglo-Saxon. Such favourite turns as 'come again', 'son of grief', 'son of sorrow', 'see the sun', 'return again', and strong individual verbs and nouns, usually monosyllabic, that have an unmistakable flavour of the Authorized Version about them, occur in almost every poem.⁵

Obviously, the Bible is a book whose theme and spirit are inherently cosmic, and this quality in it evidently held a strong appeal for Housman. The beauty and force of its language, particularly the language of the Old Testament, had lodged deep and early in his mind, planted there in the first instance by his mother, who died when he was twelve. Haber summarizes it thus: ". . . the Bible is by far the dominating literary influence in his poetry--not only in the quantity of quoted and echoed phrases but also in the frequency of mood and thematic elements recurring to Old and New Testament origins, particularly to Job, Isaiah, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes."⁶

Reference to even a few poems will indicate how naturally Housman adapted Biblical phraseology or echoes of it to his purposes. A notable instance occurs in the first poem of A Shropshire Lad where, speaking of the soldiers of the Queen who have died in foreign lands, he says, "The saviours come not home tonight: / Themselves they could not save." This is a direct echo of the words about Christ on the Cross: "He saved others; himself he cannot save."⁷ Similarly,

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

recalls Ecclesiastes:

But if a man live many years and
 rejoice in them all, yet let him
 remember the days of darkness, for
 they shall be many.⁸

Here the strong passions in the house of flesh are remotely reminiscent of the joy in life that may fill a man's years, but the strong parallel comes when Housman's third and fourth lines restate the words of the Preacher about the multitude of 'the days of darkness'. Two lines from ASL xxxii:

The world might end tomorrow,
 You should not see the grave.

are a rephrasing of:

That he should live forever,
 And not see corruption.⁹

Again, the suggestion of everlastingness in:

And while the sun and moon endure.
Luck's a chance, but trouble's, sure. (lxii)

is to be found in the words of another Psalm:

. . . as long as the sun and moon endure . . .¹⁰

The similarity, however, is only in the words, since the Psalmist here is celebrating the reign of Solomon and his sense is far removed from that of Housman.

A brief series of parallel examples will suffice to indicate the range of Housman's borrowings from the Bible for the cosmic dimension of his poetry. Compare, for instance, these phrases from A Shropshire Lad with their sources in the Authorized Version:

trump of doomsday (iii, line 21)

with

the last trump (I. Cor. 15:52).

clay's the house he keeps (xxv:14)

with

them that dwell in houses of clay (Job 4:19).

the stuff of life (xxxii:3)

with

the breath of life (Gen. 2:7).

none that go return again (xxxv:12)

with

none that go unto her return again (Prov. 2:19).

morn is all the same as night (xliii:28)

with

the darkness and the light are both alike to thee
(Ps. 139:12).

and, finally,

Earth and high heaven are fixed of old and founded
strong (xlviii:2)

with

Of old thou hast laid the foundation of the earth
(Ps. 102:25).

Whether Housman was always conscious of his Biblical sources we do not know; he fails to mention the Bible among the literary influences on his poetry of which he was aware.¹¹ However, its language was so much a part of the furniture of his mind that he may well at times have called up its phrases quite unconsciously to meet the needs of his verse. Certainly, as these comparisons show, the similarity of tone between the phrases of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, and much of his poetry is striking. Both are studded with cosmic images: the sun and moon that mark man's days, the cycle of the seasons, the grave and man's long sojourn in it, the world's end. The effect of such images is always to some degree rhetorical and this inherent rhetoric is intensified when they

occur in a poetic context and, still more, when, in addition, they evoke the potent rhetorical associations of the Bible.

As a poet influenced by the style of the Bible, Housman is, of course, the inheritor of a long tradition. Because it is the book it is, knowledge of the Bible's spirit and message has been universal in Western culture. Along with this directly transmitted substance has gone the indirect influence of its literary quality, a quality which in the English-speaking world has been preeminently the possession of the famous "Authorized Version" of 1611. This influence grew rapidly during the seventeenth century and was widespread in the literature of the period. It permeated creative works like Paradise Lost and Pilgrim's Progress no less than the writings of divines like Jeremy Taylor and Archbishop Tillotson, and it continued long after that. "The Authorized Version," said a famous critic,

setting a seal on all, set a seal on our national style. . . . The precise man Addison cannot excel one parable in brevity or in heavenly clarity: the two parts of Johnson's antithesis come to no more than this: 'Our Lord has gone up to the sound of a trump; with the sound of a trump our Lord has gone up!' The Bible controls its enemy Gibbon as surely as it haunts the curious music of a light sentence of Thackeray's. It is in everything we see, hear, feel because it is in us, in our blood.¹²

CHAPTER IV

DORIC FORM

1. Diction

The qualities of Housman's style which have been studied in the last two chapters are qualities of tone reflecting the poet's underlying attitude towards his audience and his material. They are not the only stylistic features, however, which contribute to his rhetorical quality; there are others which are more the product of technique and only indirectly the reflection of attitude.

Distinctiveness of diction is the element of Housman's style which, perhaps more than any other, has been singled out for comment by critics. A. F. Allison, for example, refers to "the graven beauty" of his phrases and to the "lapidary skill with which they are fashioned."¹ Ian Scott-Kilvert says: "In an age of constant confusion and debasement of speech he has stood forth as one of the true heirs of the language, in whom its latent riches, the passionate simplicity of Anglo-Saxon, the splendour and eloquence of Latin, have once more found a voice."² John W. Stevenson speaks of "Housman's concern for diction," and says that it "grows out of his concept of poetry as 'more physical than intellectual'."³ In Norman Marlow's

opinion Housman's "verse is unmistakably his, and its terseness and ring make it stay in the mind . . ." ⁴ However, the critics are not unanimously favorable. A strongly dissenting opinion is that of R. P. Blackmur: "Housman's language is full of archaisms, stock phrasings, correct attitudes, metronomic meters, dulled rhymes and all the baggage of dead idiom." ⁵ And Edith Sitwell feels that his famous starkness is "due largely to a lack of vitality." ⁶

Whatever its source, Housman's diction gives an impression of lapidary strength, of chiselled permanence, an impression that contributes significantly to the oracular tone of his poetry, what is called here its rhetorical quality. This impression is chiefly the product of his poetic vocabulary--the forms, meanings and connotations of his words. The distinguishing features of this vocabulary are its simplicity, its strength, its 'age' and its associations.

The simplicity of Housman's language is synonymous with his use of short words. F. W. Bateson points out that A Shropshire Lad contains no five-syllable words and that, "Apart from the hyphenated compound words there are only seven four-syllable words in it and . . . fifty-five three-syllable words. All the remaining words [are] monosyllables or disyllables, and no less than twenty of the sixty-three poems have no words at all of more than two syllables." ⁷ The same findings are expressed in percentage terms by J. F. MacDonald who doubts that "any other English writer

uses so high a percentage of words of one syllable, slightly over 84 per cent. in A Shropshire Lad and a little over 85 1/2 in Last Poems." He continues: "Further, only 1 per cent. of the words are three syllables, about 1/7 of 1 per cent. four syllables. The disyllables are about 14 1/2 per cent."⁸ One can open A Shropshire Lad anywhere and find evidence of this primacy of the monosyllable:

And you till trump of doomsday
On lands of morn may lie. (iii)

Nothing stands that stood before. (xii)

The winds out of the west land blow (xxxviii)

Out of a stem that scored the hand
I wrung it in a weary land (lxii)

It has been suggested that Housman paid too high a price for this simplicity. Thus, one critic says: "Most of us for whom poetry is a making or creation, and not a communication, will find flaws in his work arising from the effort to communicate,"⁹ and another observes that Housman "places himself with those critics who identify the poetic process with communication rather than with expression."¹⁰ Both are right in their assessment of where his poetic priorities lie. His poems are indeed successful as communication; they are easily and widely intelligible, a rhetorical virtue which they owe in large measure to their simple diction.

The idea of strength which Housman's language conveys is more easily felt than described. The impression left is not so much one of force or power as of endurance and firmness. The diction is active rather than passive, concrete rather than abstract, suggesting basic human actions and emotions at work in familiar places among familiar things. The brevity and simplicity of his words and their long tenure in the language all make a contribution to this effect. Again, supporting passages are easily found:

Get you the sons your fathers got (i)

And naked to the hangman's noose
The morning clocks will ring
A neck God make for other use
Than strangling in a string (ix)

Send me now, and I shall go;
Call me, I shall hear you call. (xxiv)

The flag of morn in conqueror's state
Enters at the English gate. (xxviii)

And fire and ice within me fight (xxx)

These are the "strong individual verbs and nouns, usually monosyllabic that have an unmistakable flavour of the Authorized Version about them," of which Marlow speaks.¹¹

The strength of Housman's diction is related to its origin and its age. His poems are made mostly of words which we instinctively feel were coined long ago and have stood the test of time. This impression is no doubt due in part to the Biblical echoes discussed in the last

chapter and to his skillful use of archaic language with rural roots, words related to manual labour and crafts, to the changing seasons and the omnipresence of Nature and to the slow pace of country life.¹² However, it is also attributable to the fact that the living words he uses are felt to be old, as indeed they are. In the words of A. F.

Allison: "Their roots lie far back in the Germanic past. They were old when Beowulf visited the Heathobards and when Byrhtnoth took his last stand at Maldon. In Middle English they were the common stuff of folk lyric and the ballad."¹³ And Marlow says that the "sparing but effective use of folklore in the poetry of Housman serves to give it the appearance of being rooted in earth and of long popular descent."¹⁴ This reference to folklore should not make us lose sight of the fact that Housman's 'folk' quality derives much more from the archetypal associations of his language and from the implicit suggestion that he is giving voice to an ancient wisdom than from any element of actual folklore. His diction preeminently has this appearance of long popular descent, of being "fixt of old and founded strong" (xlvi:2), of being immune to transient influences and linked to the simple and enduring things it describes.

• The impression of age and lastingness is not deceptive, as a sample of the poetry will show.

To skies that knit their heartstrings right,
To fields that bred them brave. (i)

So braver notes the storm-cock sings
 To start the rusted wheel of things,
 And brutes in field and brutes in pen
 Leap that the world goes round again. (x)

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

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

The two-line excerpt from the opening poem of A Shropshire Lad contains fourteen words, including repetitions. We find, on investigation, that ten of these are Old English in origin, two Old Norse via Middle English and one (brave) Middle French. The second passage uses twenty-nine words, again including repetitions, of which twenty-three are old English, four Middle English, one Middle French and one (notes) Latin. The famous two verses of 'ASL xl ("Into my heart an air that kills") contain, in all, forty-six words; of these, thirty-seven come from Old English and nine from Middle English. Together the three passages employ a total of eighty-nine words, of which seventy, or just over seventy-eight per cent., are Old English and sixteen, or just under eighteen per cent., are Middle English in origin. That is to say, almost four-fifths of the words in this sampling have been in active use in English for something like a thousand years.

For people whose basic vocabulary was acquired before, say, 1930, the diction of A Shropshire Lad is old

in a more easily recognizable and personal way. For them, as distinct from those who learned the language after the second World War, its words are familiar--basic words which were learned in childhood and are thus the ones which have been known longest. Because of the place that they occupy in the history of the language and the life of the individual, such words are very rich in connotations. At both tribal and personal levels they have immemorial associations that add greatly to their emotional significance. Familiarity and frequent use, along with their deep roots, have surrounded them with an aura of probity and verity, of homely constancy, which subtly strengthens the rhetorical quality of the poetry, and which is in turn enhanced by that quality.

The notes by G. B. A. Fletcher appended to Grant Richards' Housman¹⁵ include a section on "Repetitions and Favourite Turns in Housman's Poetry." Ranging over all his verse for any word or turn occurring more than once, it is too diffuse to be summarized. However, even the relatively short list of words used more than three times is interesting in the present context. Fletcher found that the word 'morning' occurs twenty-eight times and 'morn' thirteen. The phrase 'for aye' and the adjective 'plain' are used eight times, and three other words--'yon', 'foundations' and 'highway(s)' six times. There are five repetitions of 'endless' (all of them in A Shropshire Lad) and of 'hue(s)' or 'hueless'. The following appear four times: 'steep', 'friend' (as verb), 'eye' (as verb),

'lief, gold, muse' (as verb), 'come(s) on', 'azure(d)' 'mind' (as verb), 'blithe and brim(ming)', 'Son of grief', 'son of sorrow', 'son of woman' and 'son of man' are each used once. These favorite words and phrases, particularly when brought together in this way, further emphasize the characteristics of Housman's diction which have just been examined.

2. Syntax

Extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous and musical is one of the grand beauties of lyric poetry. This I have always aimed at, and never could attain.

(Thomas Gray in a letter to Warburton, January 13, 1758).¹⁶

The way in which Housman puts together the words of his poetry is of a piece with the way he chooses them. The concision of his syntax is similar in character to the simplicity of his diction and contributes to the same rhetorical effect. This effect has its roots in the instinct for emphasis which has already been mentioned and about which more will be said later. It is an instinct that, as we have seen, finds expression in Housman's public tone, his cosmic dimension and his monosyllabic diction, and it is even more apparent in his direct and lucid syntax. Like these other elements, the syntax implicitly suggests that the poetry is meant as a communication rather than a private creation whose expression is an end in itself.

One of the most perceptive critics of Housman's syntax is Morton Dauwen Zabel who argues that it owes much of its character to Latin poetry. In his view the tensions which gave birth to Housman's poems found expression "in a salient feature of the Latin lyric style--its integrity of structure, its verbal and tonal unity, its delicate stasis of form."¹⁷ He goes on to suggest that this feature of Latin style provided Housman with "the interlocking balances and inversions of phrase" and "the reflexive dependence of verbs and subjects that give his stanzas their tightness and pith." Though it would be more accurate to say that the 'delicate stasis of form' is a result of these syntactical techniques rather than their cause, the distinction is a useful one and each of the techniques he mentions deserves examination.

The idea of 'interlocking balances and inversions of phrase' as a feature of Housman's syntax is sound as far as it goes, but it can be expanded with advantage to cover all balances and parallel structures within the poems. To omit consideration of his use of balanced stanzas, for instance, would be to miss a key feature of his manipulation of syntax. The importance of balanced stanzas as a syntactical means to achieve a structural end can be seen in an early poem of A Shropshire Lad, "The Recruit" (iii), where three consecutive verses show strong parallels:

Oh, come you home of Sunday
 When Ludlow streets are still
 And Ludlow bells are calling
 To farm and lane and mill,

Or come you home of Monday
 When Ludlow market hums
 And Ludlow chimes are playing
 'The conquering hero comes',

- Come you home a hero,
 Or come not home at all,
 The lads you leave will mind you
 Till Ludlow tower shall fall.

This poem clearly has the 'integrity of structure', the 'verbal and tonal unity', mentioned by Zabel. The twelve lines quoted form a single sentence of nine clauses, three to each stanza. In the first three lines of the first stanza there are sixteen words, in those of the second, fifteen. Of these thirty-one words, nine are common to both stanzas and are exactly parallel in placement and function, while in the thirteen non-common words there are two groups of four which, again, are exactly parallel in placement and function. The only breaks in the completeness of the parallelism in these six lines are the 'oh' or 'or' which introduce the two stanzas, and 'are still' at the end of line two and 'hums' at the end of line six. The integrity and unity are further reinforced by the first two lines of the third stanza, with their double repetition of the key idea, 'come . . . home'.

The succeeding two stanzas, which complete the poem, form another parallel structure in which, once again, the syntactical units are artfully balanced for maximum emphasis:

And you will list the bugle
 That blows in lands of morn,
 And make the foes of England
 Be sorry you were born.

And you till trump of doomsday
 On lands of morn may lie,
 And make the hearts of comrades
 Be heavy where you die.

These lines are not the 'pure' poetry which Housman analyzed in The Name and Nature of Poetry,¹⁸ although there are echoes of this in the bugle "that blows in lands of morn" (they are heard again four lines later), but their brilliant use of parallel clauses and phrases for rhetorical effect is undeniable.

A similar use of balanced stanzas to create structural integrity is to be found in the poem that comes next in A Shropshire Lad, "Reveille" (iv). In this poem stanzas one and two are obviously linked, as are three and five. These two stanzaic groups are in effect sub-structures within the poem. The use of parallel syntax to achieve an integrated poetic structure can be observed again in ASL xiii:

When I was one-and-twenty,
 I heard a wise man say,
 'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
 But not your heart away;
 Give pearls away and rubies
 But keep your fancy free.'
 But I was one-and-twenty,
 No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
 I heard him say again,
 'The heart out of the bosom
 Was never given in vain;
 'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
 And sold for endless rue.'
 And I am two-and-twenty,
 And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

Here the two eight-line stanzas are knit firmly together by the almost complete identity of the first and seventh lines of each, by the introduction of the wise man in each second line; by the four lines of each which repeat his counsel and by the epigrammatic balancing of the sixteenth line against the eighth.

The simplicity of Housman's syntax, marked chiefly by the dominance of the noun-verb relationship and the avoidance of ornament, carries with it an inherent limitation on the variety he can give to his clauses. The resultant risk of repetitiveness is part of the price which he pays for emphasis, a part which the abundance of parallelism in the poetry indicates he paid willingly. Parallelism, great or small, can be found almost everywhere in A Shropshire Lad. It is present in the third and fourth verses of "There pass the careless people" (xiv) and in the neat balance of "Oh, when I was in love with you" (xviii). Though subtle, it is important in the splendid second verse of xxviii:

The flag of morn in conqueror's state
 Enters at the English gate:
 The vanquished eve, as night prevails,
 Bleeds upon the road to Wales.

where the parts of speech and their order in the first and second lines are echoed by the kind and order of words in the third and fourth. The echo, strong as it is, is not perfect, but the stanza would not be so good if it were. The imperfect elements in the syntactical balances give the stanza a structural lightness to go with its strength and free it from any suggestion of patness.

Other obvious parallels, helping to give verbal and tonal unity to the poems in which they occur, can be mentioned. For instance, in "Others, I am not the first" (xxx) the first lines of the three verses are linked by the pairing in each of first person/third person comparisons. Again, the first three stanzas of "Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?" (xliv) use parallels of syntax to make, with variations, a simple comment on the suicide that inspired the poem. The adapted Biblical counsel offered in the two verses of "If it chance your eye offend you" (xlv), another poem about suicide, likewise shows a careful syntactical balance:

If it chance your eye offend you,
 pluck it out, lad, and be sound:
 'Twill hurt, but here are salves to friend you,
 And many a balsam grows on ground.

And if your hand or foot offend you,
 Cut it off, lad, and be whole;
 But play the man, stand up and end you,
 When your sickness is your soul.

Too great reliance on internal parallels and balances carries with it, as has been suggested, the danger of flatness and monotony. It also means lack of movement within the poem--Zabel's 'stasis of form'. This absence of development is characteristic of Housman, as it is of the rhetorical attitude generally. Typically, he presents different aspects of a single poetic insight, rather than successive stages of it; his perspective is fixed rather than linear. For those who, like Lawrence Leighton, see poetry as "a making or creation, and not a communication," this is a fault: "he was unable to create much interest or value by the structure of the poem. There is always little interior direction or movement; the last stanza has usually seen no advance or change from the first . . ."19

The importance of verbs and nouns in Housman's syntax will be evident from the passages of his poetry cited over the last few pages; they bear out Zabel's judgment that it is "the reflexive dependence of verbs and subjects," among other things, "that give[s] his stanzas their tightness and pith." The judgment becomes even more accurate if we expand it to include objects as well as subjects, pronouns as well as nouns. Housman clearly liked what nouns could do to add strength and definition to his images, even at the risk of some loss of poetic value. The preference is particularly obvious in such lines as:

There's men from the barn and the forge and
the mill and the fold,

and

There's chaps from the town and the field and
the till and the cart,

both from ASL xxiii. Another example is the well-known catalogue at the end of xlvi: "Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation." And reference was made earlier to the rhetorical effectiveness of the verb-and-noun groupings in another line of the same poem: "I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun."

The role which verbs, nouns and pronouns play in the poetry takes on added importance because of Housman's habitual restraint in the use of adjectives. Norman Marlow says that "There was a part of him that refused to expatiate or to be seen indulging in romantic description," and adds that "his best effects are with a simple or compound adjective into which he put all his exactness of observation."²⁰ To illustrate, Marlow quotes two verses from "The Merry Guide" (xlii):

By blowing realms of woodland
With sunstruck vanes afield
And cloud-led shadows sailing
About the windy weald,

By valley-guarded granges
And silver waters wide,
Content at heart I followed
With my delightful guide.

As an example of Housman's command of adjectives, when he wished to use them, these lines cannot be bettered. They are not typical, however; in no other poem of A Shropshire

Lad does he employ adjectives as freely as in "The Merry Guide": seven in these eight lines alone. By comparison, the thirty-two lines of "1887" contain five; "Bredon Hill"'s thirty-five lines contain eleven; "The Welsh Marches" has twelve in thirty-six lines; and there are only twelve in the forty-four lines of "The Immortal Part." Thus, when adjectives are used, they impress by their relative rarity as well as their aptness. Many other poems contain epithets which, while not as numerous as those of "The Merry Guide," are equally telling. To mention only a few, there are 'coloured counties' in "Bredon Hill"; 'ancient wrong' in "The Welsh Marches," and 'sick with hatred, sick with pain', later in the same poem; 'twelve-winded sky' in xxxii; 'idle hill of summer' in xxxv; and 'beautiful and death-struck year' in xli.

The effectiveness of these adjectives and of others like them is no accident; Housman's care in the choice of words, was legendary. In his 1933 lecture he tells how he agonized ~~over~~ the composition of the last poem of A Shropshire Lad;²¹ and Lawrence Housman, in his memoir of his brother, describes how A. E. considered and discarded eight alternatives before settling on the verb 'rive' in, "All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain" (xlvi).²² (The alternatives were: vex, plague, tear, wrench, rend, wring, break and pierce.)

Tom Burns Haber says: "Housman abhorred obscurity, intentional or not, as a mark of incapacity that no

literary virtues could atone for. He wanted his poetry to be widely read, indeed; but, above all, he wanted it understood."²³ It is a comment which goes far to explain all that has been said here about the rhetorical nature of Housman's diction and syntax.

Simplicity of diction and restraint in the use of ornament combine with the elemental syntax and the obsession with clarity to produce the conciseness which is so marked in Housman's style. Most critics, whatever their other reservations, would agree with F. W. Bateson that "A Shropshire Lad has [the] qualities of directness, concision and inevitability."²⁴ Striking in its atypicality, however, is the opinion of Jacob Bronowski who considers that Housman's poems are "as wordy and clumsy as the poems of Swinburne, because the ratio of words to thought in them is high."²⁵ Despite Bronowski's negative vote it is difficult not to be struck in reading A Shropshire Lad by the economy and firmness of syntax which Zabel calls "Integrity of structure." The epigrammatic character of the following, for instance, demands, and receives, concision:

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well I did behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again.

Even more impressively terse are the seventy-seven monosyllables and three disyllables of xxiv:

Say, lad, have you things to do?
 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'.

Housman's concision is not a quality of only certain poems; it belongs in varying degrees to all his poetry. It is conspicuous in the poems of cosmic anguish such as "The Welsh Marches," "Others, I am not the first," "On Wenlock Edge," and the fine verses that begin:

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

One can see at work in all these aspects of syntax--the balances and parallels, the closely knit verbs and nouns, the limited use of adjectives, the simple clause and sentence structure and the overall concision--the instinct for emphasis which contributes so largely to Housman's rhetorical quality. The idea of emphasis as a feature of Housman's style was developed by F. W. Bateson in his 1968 essay, "The Poetry of Emphasis."²⁶ His argument is an

important one which deserves to be summarized here.

Bateson's starting point is a recognition of the value of Housman's poems and a resultant wish to define their "special literary quality" (p. 131). He believes this quality comes "from Housman's exceptional sensitivity to both English and Latin considered simply as languages . . . his expertness in the Latin language left an indelible imprint on both his English prose style and his poetry" (p. 131). It is worth noting that Bateson's opinion was shared by the noted classical scholar, Gilbert Murray, who had written in a letter to Housman: "One can see how much you have been influenced by writing Greek and Latin verse."²⁷ This influence of Latin as a language is not to be confused with that of Latin poetry as a literary source. The influence exercised by the character of the Latin language is deeper and more pervasive. The question is one of relative linguistic densities; English as a language is verbose compared to Latin, in which verbal conciseness is inherent. However, "by utilizing a latent reserve of brevity in the Saxon basis of modern English [Housman] was able to forge a style in English that challenges the verbal economy of Horace in Latin" (p. 134).

Noting the combination in Housman of a classic style and a romantic temperament, Bateson says that "the reality that lies behind the appearance [of incompatibility] is neither strictly classical nor romantic" (pp. 134-35). He calls it 'emphasis', a quality which he finds

characteristic of Housman's personality and of his writings. The essay makes the "assumption" that "an autobiographical core . . . is a sine qua non of this poetry of emphasis" (p. 141) and uses this as the basis for a lengthy examination of aspects of Housman's early life that may have particularly influenced his later personality. To the extent that emphasis as a personality trait is the product of nature rather than nurture, the assumption seems questionable.

Returning to the poetry, Bateson argues that Housman attempted "to provide an English parallel to the Latin lyric by using the potentially emphatic elements in English for a somewhat similar purpose" (p. 142). Zabel, as noted earlier, makes a similar suggestion. Since, says Bateson, English is uninflected and lacks the grammatical features that give Latin its brevity and compactness, "Housman substituted three special characteristics of English speech--the monosyllable, a sort of internal rhyme, and the compound word" (p. 142). The character of the resultant poetry prompts Bateson to quote what Gerard Manley Hopkins said of Dryden--that "his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language"--and to add that this is "equally applicable to Housman" (p. 143).

In its concluding section the essay considers the risks which a poet runs when he "tries to emulate the Roman gravitas ('weight') by using a concentration of monosyllables to provide an English equivalent to the verbal.

density that Latin possessed ready-made in its system of inflections" (p. 144). The principal stylistic risk is that of vulgarity: "English monosyllables . . . because of their familiarity and trivial associations, tend to vulgarize and sentimentalize . . ." (p. 144). This, of course, is the negative side of the argument in favor of old and familiar words noted earlier in connection with Housman's diction. But strange and uncommon words also have their disadvantages. The resultant dilemma, says Bateson, is an occupational risk for writers; and he quotes Doctor Johnson: "Words too familiar or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet" (p. 145). Moreover, Housman, by his own choice, made the problem doubly difficult for himself: "Instead of having the whole of the English language to draw on . . . he is virtually confined, because of his obsession with emphasis, to monosyllables occasionally varied with disyllables" (p. 145).

The theory of emphasis outlined here goes further than anything else that has been written about Housman to explain his diction and syntax and define his style. Bateson concludes his essay, however, with an application of the theory which seems unwarranted. If, he argues, Housman "has finally to be dismissed as a minor poet of remarkable talent, the reason is perhaps primarily technical. The occasional cheap sentimentality and affected bitterness are effects rather than causes of the stylistic ambition to write English poems that would be mutatis mutandis more

Latin even than those written by the Latins themselves" (p. 145). This judgment invites two comments. The first is that it can just as easily be argued that the qualities which kept Housman from being a major poet are primarily other than technical, and the second is that it can even more easily be argued from the 'autobiographical core' that his sentimentality and bitterness are not effects of his stylistic ambition to write emphatic poetry. The search for emphasis may well defeat the poet's purpose, as Doctor Johnson implies, but it does not have such effects as Bateson mentions. These have another, non-stylistic, origin.

3. Metre and Music

The attitude of critics to the metres of Housman's poetry has been on the whole unfavorable. His rhythms have been judged to be inappropriate and inadequate to the matter of his poems and questions have even been raised about his competence in this aspect of the craft of poetry. Probably the gravest charge against him is that of monotony. As one writer expresses it: "tumpy-tum was Housman's besetting metrical device, for though he borrowed something of the sentiment and external texture of the Old Ballad, he took from it little of its metre."²⁸ Another makes much the same criticism: "The forms are simple, to be sure, but they are also mechanical. Four and five line stanzas are reiterated and arbitrary; the iambic and anapestic movement becomes perpetual and boring. The frequency of feminine

endings and the tight and heavy rhyme-schemes produce a monotony which makes us question the poet's extent of talent in simple verse-handling."²⁹ Cyril Connolly finds that Housman's "use of rhythm is peculiarly sentimental and artful, as in his metrically morbid experiments in the five-line stanza . . ."³⁰ In a more detailed criticism, Edith Sitwell says: "The verse is, for the most part, rhythmically dead," and a few lines later, "[his technique] is not actually incompetent, but it rarely bears the slightest relation to the subject."³¹

That Housman depended heavily on simple verse forms is clear from even a brief inspection of A Shropshire Lad. There are sixty-three poems altogether and forty-eight of these are in quatrains, five in couplets, four in octaves and three in a five-line stanza. The remaining three use six-, seven- and ten-line stanzas, respectively. Of the poems in quatrains, more than half (thirty-one out of forty-eight) use the rhyme scheme abab, the remainder being divided almost equally between aabb and abcb. One student has pointed out that "a full 58 per cent of the poems in the Housman canon conform to the abab pattern so familiar in the ballads."³² The four eight-line-stanza poems are based on the combination of two quatrains and follow regular quatrain rhyme patterns. The five-line poems rhyme abcbb or ababb.

As the quatrain predominates in the verse forms of A Shropshire Lad, so do iambs in the metre. Just over

eighty per cent. of the poems use this foot and all but two of these use iambic tetrameter or trimeter, or both in alternate lines. Nine poems are in trochaic four-foot lines and two are basically anapestic.

These uncomplicated verse forms and metres are in keeping with the simple diction and syntax which have already been noted. They are another manifestation of Housman's instinct for emphatic utterance which we have seen at work elsewhere. Such metrical plainness undoubtedly carries with it the risk of monotony, a risk comparable in its way to the risk of vulgarization which, as has been noted, accompanies the use of too common words. It carries with it also the danger that the metrical form, even though it matches the diction and syntax, may fail to reflect the subtlety of the emotions at work in the poem; if this fault is not avoided the poet is open to the charge of metrical ineptness, which charge, as we see, has been levelled at Housman. The aptness of Housman's rhythms will be considered at more length below but, for the moment, and on the positive side, it may be repeated that his metrical simplicity is one more expression of the stylistic attitude which gives his verse its rhetorical quality.

Housman's use of metre is not without defenders, and the best of these are critics who have qualified for the task by an intensive examination of the poetry. F. W. Bateson is clearly among them. So is Ian Scott-Kilvert whose short study for the British Council covers the

important features of Housman's life and work and sheds light on all of them. His comments on the metric are especially illuminating:

Housman works always to a simple and distinctly conceived idea of the form a poem should take. His verse is almost brutally explicit, and quite contradicts the ideal of pure poetry which he upholds in "The Name and Nature of Poetry," perhaps because he did not possess the gift of sustained melody. His poetry often came to him in snatches, the gaps having to be filled in by conscious effort, and to write in this way he needed a regular metrical framework. He has been censured for the monotony of his versification, and there is force in this criticism. . . . His metres are primitive and his pauses heavy, at times even mechanical. But they are appropriate for the particular tones which he wished to render, for most of his lyrics are tinged with an element of the dramatic or rhetorical.³³

The validity of Scott-Kilvert's concluding statement can be seen in, for instance, "The Recruit":

Leave your home behind, lad,
And reach your friends your hand,
And go, and luck go with you
While Ludlow tower shall stand. (iii)

This 'soldier' poem uses iambic trimeter and the basic ballad stanza, but the simple regular metre is right for the poem's ostensible setting, that of a friendly but not intimate farewell to a soldier off to the wars. True, there is a sombre undercurrent which might seem to call for something less brisk:

Come you home a hero;
Or come not home at all,
The lads you leave will mind you
Till Ludlow tower shall fall.

However, the sombre note is not allowed to intrude on the immediate relationship between the speaker and the soldier he addresses. The form keeps this underlying reality in the background, separate from the surface link between the two people involved and, as a result, adds to the poem a note of tragic irony. This is most apparent in the rhetoric of the fifth and sixth stanzas:

And you will list the bugle
That blows in lands of morn,
And make the foes of England
Be sorry you were born.

And you till trump of doomsday
On lands of morn may lie,
And make the hearts of comrades
Be heavy where you die.

The metre of "Reveille" (ASL iv) is trochaic tetrameter, a brisk measure which suits the vigorous sentiment and rhetorical tone that dominate the poem:

Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying;
Hear the drums of morning play;
Hark, the empty highways crying
'Who'll beyond the hills away?'

It is less in keeping, however, with the glowing pictorial quality of the opening verses:

Wake: the silver dusk returning
Up the beach of darkness brims,
And the ship of sunrise burning
Strands upon the eastern rims.

Wake: the vaulted shadow shatters,
Trampled to the floor it spanned,
And the tent of night in tatters
Straws the sky-pavilioned land.

And certainly the abrupt descent from what Bateson terms "these baroque grandiosities"³⁴ to the matter-of-factness of "Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying" in the ninth line is a lapse of tonal consistency which the bareness of the metre makes even more obvious. (This lapse is considered at more length in the next chapter.)

Another 'soldier' poem with a metre "appropriate for the particular tones which he wished to render" is xxii, which begins:

The street sounds to the soldiers' tread,
 And out we troop to see:
 A single redcoat turns his head,
 He turns and looks at me.

and ends:

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

The steady iambic beat of the alternate tetrameter and trimeter lines echoes the rhythmic pace of the marching men and the ballad-like metre is nicely matched to the brevity and starkness of the encounter which the poem describes.

Housman made effective use of a five-line stanza-- basically a quatrain with a fifth line rhyming with the second and fourth--to add an element of the dramatic to the famous "Bredon Hill" (xxi):

But when the snows at Christmas
 On Bredon top were strown,
 My love rose up so early
 And stole out unbeknown
 And went to church alone.

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

The effect of the rhyming fifth line in these stanzas is to 'point' all of the preceding quatrain, particularly the fourth line. They seem to be frozen momentarily while the fifth line is being sounded. Also, despite its metrical identity with the other four, this line gives the impression of being more deliberate and emphatic than its predecessors, part of its dramatic value in the poem. Norman Marlow says: "It is used to obtain the quiet falling close, to convey the deadly intention which Housman so often reserves for the end of a poem";³⁵ and he quotes the last verse of "Bredon Hill":

The bells they sound on Bredon,
 And still the steeples hum.
 'Come all to church, good people', --
 Oh, noisy bells be dumb;
 I hear you, I will come.

There are only three poems in A Shropshire Lad which employ the five-line stanza (the others are, "When smoke stood up from Ludlow" and "The Lent Lily"), but as Marlow observes, "It seems as though the whole of his poetry is full of the echoes of this cadence."

The briskness inherent in Housman's four-foot lines is well adapted to the decisive tone of:

Say, lad, have you things to do?
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. (xxiv)

A similar marriage of metre and tone characterizes "From far, from eve and morning" (xxxii), where the dominant note again is that of decision:

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

Such lines go far to validate Scott-Kilvert's judgment about the appropriateness of Housman's metres for his purposes.

The argument about the relationship between metre and meaning in Housman is by no means one-sided, as the existence of opposing critical schools indicates. The fullest investigation of this relationship has been that of Christopher Ricks, whose conclusion is that discrepancies of the sort pointed out by such critics as Edith Sitwell are not inadvertent, the result of technical incompetence, but instead are deliberate and spring from divided emotional attitudes to the matter of the poetry. Ricks finds Housman's poems "remarkable for the ways in which rhythm and style temper or mitigate or criticize what in bold paraphrase the

poem would be saying,"³⁶ and speaks of "the tug of contraries which so often makes for the profoundest of Housman."³⁷ He refers to the passage in "The Name and Nature of Poetry" where Housman, after quoting Milton's line: "Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more," goes on to ask: "Why have the mere words the physical effect of pathos when the sense of the passage is blithe and gay?"³⁸ Housman felt two conflicting emotions at work here: the blitheness and gaiety of the sense and an underlying sadness. He liked such a contrary effect "because it was tinged with conflicting emotions,"³⁹ says Ricks, adding that "contrarities and disparities of feeling fascinated Housman."⁴⁰

Ricks's conclusion appears to be supported by the fact that Housman consistently avoided the vocabulary of pathos. Admittedly, there are elements of emotional self-indulgence in such lines as

Wonder 'tis how little mirth
Keeps the bones of men from lying
On the bed of earth. (xvii)

or

When I shall sleep with clover clad
And she beside another lad. (xxvi)

or

But now, since all is idle,
To this lost heart be kind,
Ere to a town you journey
Where friends are ill to find. (xxxiii),

yet the lines do not employ words with pathetic associations. The same distinction applies to ASL ix, with its account of the poet's friend in jail on the eve of his execution. The substance of the central stanza teeters on the verge of sentimentality:

And sharp the link of life will snap,
And dead on air will stand
Heels that held up as straight a chap
As treads upon the land.

Its diction, however, is completely matter-of-fact, the climactic line, for instance, depending for its telling effect on a phrase--'the link of life'--which belongs more to rhetoric than to poetry. One can see in all this evidence of Ricks's 'tug of contraries'.

There is a definite correlation between Housman's rhetorical quality and the verbal music of his poetry. The poems of A Shropshire Lad which are most rhetorical are usually as direct and simple in their melody as they are in diction, syntax and metre. One rarely finds in Housman, and certainly not in the rhetorical poems, the sort of verbal richness characteristic of poets like Keats, Tennyson and Swinburne. The poems which have been used here to illustrate the various aspects of Housman's rhetoric do not, despite their undeniable quality as poetry, 'impress us first by their music. Their style seems inevitably right or beautifully crafted, as the case may be, and they set up in the reader's sensibility that "vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer" which Housman said it

was the object of poetry to achieve.⁴¹ However, this response is not triggered by their music, but by a combination of what in this study have been called rhetorical elements: a public tone, a cosmic dimension, a syntax of remarkable strength and a diction with deep roots. Here, for instance, is a stanza from ASL xxiv:

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

In these lines foreshadowing the stillness of the grave, it is the aptness of the adjectives, combined with the tightly-knit rhymes and the alliteration--the repetition of N in the second and fourth lines and of L in the third--that we notice. The quatrain impresses by its terseness and point, rather than by its musical quality. Nor is verbal melody the dominant quality of the following:

Here the truceless armies yet
 Trample, rolled in blood and sweat,
 They kill and kill and never die
 And I think that each is I. (xxviii)

or of:

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

We cannot fail to recognize both of these passages as poetry of great distinction but their effectiveness comes from their imagery and concision rather than their sound.

It comes from the terrible metaphor of the truceless armies locked in endless struggle in a single human heart, and from 'the wind's twelve quarters' and the 'endless way' of the second quotation.

Housman divided the music of poetry into two categories. In an essay on Swinburne he wrote: "The melody of Pope and of Swinburne have this in common . . . that they address themselves frankly and (almost) exclusively to what may be called the external ear." He considered this to be music of the second order and went on to speak of a superior music which "is addressed to the inner chamber of the sense of hearing, to the junction between the ear and the brain."⁴² The question of categories aside, many of Housman's images take on added intensity if one considers them as being addressed to 'the junction between the ear and the brain' rather than to the external ear only. Phrases such as 'truceless armies', 'the wind's twelve quarters', 'link of life', 'house of flesh', 'flag of morn', 'vanquished eve', 'gale of life', 'land of lost content', 'slough of sense' and 'ancient night' illustrate this. The junction between ear and brain is obviously a delicate area, but it is presumably in the involuntary assent they claim from the mind even as they satisfy the sense that the superior music of such phrases resides.

The music of Housman's verse, as an element separate from his metre, has received its share of criticism. Thus, Tom Burns Haber says: "It cannot be denied that many of

his pieces . . . are burdened with lines that are distressingly heavy. This unhappy effect is sometimes the result of Housman's fondness for alliteration that invariably puts an extra weight on the accented syllables.⁴³ Marlow admits that "alliteration is everywhere in the poems," though he considers that "it is never allowed to become a conscious artifice."⁴⁴ On the other hand, F. R. Leavis speaks of "The stamp of the movement, hobnailed with alliteration"⁴⁵ in the second stanza of ASL iv:

Wake: the silver dusk returning
 Up the beach of darkness brims,
 And the ship of sunrise burning
 Strands upon the eastern rims.

Edith Sitwell is almost as hard on Housman's use of caesura as is Leavis on his alliteration. His caesuras, she says, "are not a natural speech pause, but are more in the nature of a crack or fissure in the fabric of the work."⁴⁶ Again on this subject, she speaks of lines in A Shropshire Lad "which end with a violent and perfectly meaningless pause,"⁴⁷ and, to illustrate, quotes the opening of ASL iii:

Leave your home behind, lad,
 And reach your friends your hand,
 And go, and-luck go with you,
 While Ludlow tower shall stand.

It is hard to find support in the poetry for Sitwell's unqualified charge that Housman's internal pauses are unnatural and represent a break in the fabric of the poem.

Indeed, another critic expresses a quite opposite opinion when he speaks of "the almost uncanny felicity with which the stresses of the metrical pattern coincide with the normal accents of the sentence."⁴⁸ Similarly, while it is true that some of his line endings are 'violent'--itself a relative term--her sweeping claim that his terminal pauses are meaningless is not supported by the poems, not even by the four lines she cites as evidence.

For reasons that have been indicated, the verbal music of poetry is alien to the rhetorical style which has been the focus of the present study. Nevertheless, this emphasis on rhetoric should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Housman often produced exquisite verbal melody. His musical passages are numerous in A Shropshire Lad. In the following stanza,

Oh, past the plunge of plummet,
 In seas I cannot sound,
 My heart and soul and senses,
 World without end, are drowned. (iv)

the heavy alliteration of the first two lines irresistibly suggests a swiftly sinking object. In the first verse of "Bredon Hill,"

In summertime on Bredon
 The bells they sound so clear;
 Round both the shires they ring them
 In steeples far and near,
 A happy noise to hear.

the cheerful discord of the bells is captured in the varied consonants which dominate the last two lines and whose

'happy noise' contrasts with the gentler bell music suggested first. One of Housman's most famous uses of onomatopoeia occurs in ASL xxxv:

On the idle hill of summer,
 Sleepy with the sound of streams,
 Far I hear the distant drummer
 Drumming like a noise in dreams.

The recurrent S sound of the first lines, and the Ds of the last ones are perfectly joined to what the lines say. The final verse of this poem is equally effective in its matching of sound with sense:

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

Here the onomatopoeic effect results chiefly from the assonance, to which every line contributes: a flourish of A, O and U at the start, a wonderfully suggestive I sound for the fife in the second line which echoes in the third and fourth, and the succession of Fs for the soldiers marching in file.

Further examples come easily to hand. For instance, the effect of the wind is magically captured in:

Their voices dying as they fly,
 Loose on the wind are sown
 The names of men blow soundless by,
 My fellows and my own. (xxxviii)

Again, there is the sketch of rural flora inserted in ASL

xli:

Whether in the woodland brown
 I heard the beechnut rustle down,
 And saw the purple crocus pale
 Flower about the autumn dale;
 Or littering far the fields of May
 Lady-smocks a-bleaching lay,
 And like a skylit water stood
 The bluebells in the azured wood.

This is a catalogue not unworthy to be compared with
 Perdita's in The Winter's Tale. And nowhere in A Shropshire
 Lad is Housman's music more delicately perfect than in a
 lyric prompted by the remembrance of things past. Here are
 its first two stanzas and the last:

Far in a western brookland
 That bred me long ago
 The poplars stand and tremble
 By pools I used to know.

There, in the windless night-time,
 The wanderer, marvelling why,
 Halts on the bridge to hearken
 How soft the poplars sigh.

.....

There, by the starlit fences,
 The wanderer halts and hears
 My soul that lingers sighing
 About the glimmering weirs. (lii).

Softness is the leit motif and everything in the poem con-
 tributes to it, but particularly the two poplar references,
 the 'windless' night-time and the shimmering hush of the
 final two lines.

Of Housman's mastery of verbal music there can be
 no doubt. It is a mastery that owes something to his sense
 of form, something to his unerring instinct for the mot
juste and something to the rhetorical attitude that was so

strong in him. It is a mastery also that reflects the importance of words among his sources of aesthetic pleasure.

We have his own testimony to this importance in "The Name and Nature of Poetry," where he refers at length to the moving power of poetry and mentions particular passages which stirred him deeply.⁴⁹

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: HOUSMAN IN PERSPECTIVE

Housman's rhetorical quality was described at the outset of this study as a key feature of his poetic style and attention has been concentrated on this stylistic feature in subsequent chapters. However, this should not be taken as suggesting that it is omnipresent, that all his poems are rhetorical. As was mentioned earlier, many of them lack it and are still unmistakably his. Speaking generally, it can be said that the poems of A Shropshire Lad which deal most explicitly with such favorite Housman themes as death in its various forms, country friendships and courtships and the transience of youth and beauty are not rhetorical in tone. These are the "Shropshire lad" poems, the ones in which the persona adopted by the poet is most in evidence. They are the ones in which Terence speaks to and about his country companions and about the life he shared with them. It is these poems which have established the popular image of Housman as a recorder of rustic passion, a chronicler of rural murders and hangings and of the deaths of soldiers in far-away places. (It should be remembered that he first meant to call his book "Poems by Terence Hearsay," and that the change to "A Shropshire Lad" was made at the suggestion of a friend.)¹

These poems, constituting rather more than half of the work, have neither a public tone nor a cosmic dimension. They are, of course, marked by Housman's habitual force of diction and conciseness of syntax, but, while these reinforce the rhetorical quality when it is present, they are not themselves primarily rhetorical.

All the poems with significant rhetorical elements have been considered in varying detail in the previous chapters, along with a number of others which illustrate related features of Housman's style. Together, the poems which are marked by their rhetorical quality total about twenty-five of the sixty-three lyrics that comprise A Shropshire Lad.² And it has been the argument of this study that the poems in which the rhetorical quality is predominant constitute the most effective utterance in the book. Here, where a larger vision and more general tone than those which characterize the "Shropshire lad" lyrics are combined with the notable strengths of Housman's language, lies the claim to greatness of A Shropshire Lad.

1. Poetic Theory

It was stated earlier that the rhetorical element in Housman is not a superficial quality, added for stylistic effect but, rather, an integral part of his manner of poetic expression, with its roots embedded in his character. The way in which the quality functions in the poems which have been analyzed here serves to illustrate this judgment.

While the nature of style is never completely explainable, this study has suggested that the rhetorical quality in Housman is closely related to the emphatic nature of his personality. Fortunately, we are not dependent solely on the poems for evidence relating to this subject. Housman has given us his own views on the nature of poetry and on the process of poetic creation in his one contribution to the literature of criticism, the 1933 lecture at Cambridge on "The Name and Nature of Poetry." It is a document of great interest, both for what it tells us about Housman's conception of his craft and for its effect on his reputation as an artist, and as such deserves examination on both counts.

As its title suggests, the lecture is divided into two parts, one of which sets out to define poetry and the other to identify the essentially poetic element in poetry, to isolate the quality which makes poetry what it is. Housman begins by pointing out that "the first impediment in the way is the inherent vagueness of the name, and the number of its legitimate senses."³ He then proceeds, by way of example, to separate poetry from verse and reaches the conclusion that "the peculiar function of poetry" is "to transfuse emotion--not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer" (p. 172). He notes that "there was a whole age of English in which the place of poetry was usurped by something very different which possessed the

proper and specific name of wit: wit not in its modern sense, but as defined by Johnson, 'a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike' (p. 173). And he adds that "simile and metaphor, things inessential to poetry, were [the] great and engrossing preoccupation" (p. 173) of the writers of that age.

Moving from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth, Housman describes the latter as an age of "sham poetry," which he sees as dominating "the period between Samson Agonistes in 1671 and the Lyrical Ballads in 1798" (p. 175). He devotes more than half of the first part of the lecture to a recital of the ways in which the eighteenth century and its 'poetic diction' sinned against the light before he turns to his second theme, the nature of poetry. He arrives at this object by distinguishing between the 'poetry' of a poem and its 'meaning'. "Poetry," he says, "is not the thing said but a way of saying it," and he goes on to ask: "Can it then be isolated and studied by itself? for the combination of language with its intellectual content, its meaning, is as close as can well be imagined" (p. 187). Even as he asks the question he suggests the answer: the 'poetry' of a poem is a recognizable entity but it cannot be separated, other than conceptually, from the words of which the poem is composed. Moreover, Housman sees this entity, and the creative process out of which it emerges, as functioning at bottom on a non-rational level. Consider

the following:

Meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not. (p. 187)

. . . the intellect is not the fount of poetry . . .
it may actually hinder its production . . . (p. 188)

[Poetry finds its] way to something in man which is
obscure and latent, something older than the present
organization of his nature . . . (p. 193)

In short I think that the production of poetry, in its
first stage, is less an active than a passive and
involuntary process; and if I were obliged, not to
define poetry, but to name the class of things to which
it belongs, I should call it a secretion, like turpen-
tine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl
in the oyster. I think that my own case; though I may
not deal with the material so cleverly as the oyster
does, is the latter; because I have seldom written
poetry unless I was rather out of health. (p. 194)

This is first-hand evidence, the testimony of a practitioner
who had set himself the task of penetrating to the heart of
poetry, while fully aware that in practice 'poetry' and
'meaning' are almost inextricable. The opinion of T. S.
Eliot does not differ too much from that of Housman:

It is a question of how much of the meaning in a poem
is conveyed directly to the intelligence and how much
is conveyed indirectly by the musical impression upon
the sensibility--always remembering that the use of
the word 'musical' and of musical analogies, in dis-
cussing poetry, has its dangers if we do not constantly
check its limitations: for the music of verse is
inseparable from the meanings and associations of
words.⁴

And William Empson points to the role of the unconscious in
the creative process when he speaks of "grounds for the
belief that the artist often does not know what he is doing,"

and adds that the "main function" of the critic "must be to mediate between the unconsciousness of the artist and the unconsciousness of the public he works for."⁵

"The Name and Nature of Poetry" created a good deal of stir in critical circles, nearly all of it unfavorable to Housman and damaging to his reputation. In the most recent study of Housman (1978), B. J. Leggett writes:

He had the misfortune to advance an anti-intellectual conception of poetry at a moment when scientific and intellectual theories were just reaching an ascendancy they were to maintain for the entire time that Housman himself was to be appraised as a poet. If he had deliberately chosen to alienate the critics most responsible for twentieth-century tastes . . . he could not have secured a better opportunity. He was, in fact, so successful in articulating his opposition to the very foundation of modern criticism--the application of intellect, method, and established criteria to the literary text--that his reputation as a serious artist has never recovered.⁶

The doyen of the New Critics, I. A. Richards, is supposed to have remarked after the lecture: "This has put us back ten years."⁷ Ezra Pound, reviewing it when it appeared in print, was scathing in his criticism. He says at one point that "the suavity of Housman's writing is not co-partner with precision of thought,"⁸ and at another that "Mr. Housman descends to bathos, slop, ambiguity, word-twisting and is like to finish off the respect one had been feeling for him."⁹ Housman's views were also attacked by Jacob Bronowski who considered the comparison between Blake and Shakespeare in "The Name and Nature of Poetry" the reductio ad absurdum of Housman's theory. Housman had said:

I call him [Blake] more poetical than Shakespeare, even though Shakespeare has so much more poetry, because poetry in him preponderates more than in Shakespeare over everything else, and instead of being confounded in a great river can be drunk pure from a slender channel of its own.¹⁰

Bronowski is categorical about this passage. It can have, he says, only two meanings: "Either Blake is the best poet or he is not the best poet,"¹¹ and he decides: "There is only one way out of this. We must take the sentences to mean that Blake is the best poet. We must deny that Shakespeare and others are better poets . . . Blake is a good poet. But if we define poetry so that we prove him the best poet, we prove something which is absurd; and we must go back to change our definition."¹² Clearly, Bronowski has decided that Housman's use of 'most poetical' is synonymous with 'best', a reading which the context does not support. Housman is saying that there is more of the essence of poetry, of the poetic sine qua non, in Shakespeare than in Blake, but that in Blake it is unadulterated, and by implication that, therefore, Blake is more useful for the purpose of the particular inquiry upon which Housman is engaged.¹³ One is tempted to apply to Bronowski the comment of F. W. Bateson on a criticism of Eliot's poetry by I. A. Richards: "And if one asks how so intelligent a man can have made so silly a mistake, the answer, I suppose, must be that he has allowed his ingenuity to get the better of his common sense."¹⁴

Reference was made earlier to Lawrence Leighton's judgment that Housman's poetry is flawed for "most of us for whom poetry is a making or creation, and not a communication."¹⁵ Similarly, the generation of poets and critics for whom Leighton was speaking found Housman's poetic theory flawed. A new theory had replaced the traditional Romantic one which he represented and articulated. Poetry, as communication, as expression, had been supplanted by a conception which looked back beyond the Romantics and the Augustans to the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. What they found there, and what they valued in contemporary verse, was fresh imagery, the ingenious use of metaphor--in a word, wit; what Johnson had defined as "a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."¹⁶ To such a generation Housman's Cambridge lecture could not fail to be irrelevant and disappointing. The case for the new poetry and against the conception put forward by Housman is persuasively argued in Modern Poetry and the Tradition by Cleanth Brooks, whom Leggett, in his present-day defence of Housman, chooses as "a spokesman for the moderns . . . representative of a point of view which has dominated criticism for a good part of the twentieth century."¹⁷ Brooks quotes Housman's statement about simile and metaphor being 'things inessential to poetry', used only 'for ornament', and says, "It is this view of the function of metaphorical language which causes the difficulty"¹⁸ in

accepting the sort of comparisons used in modern poetry. He deals at length with the contemporary importance of metaphor and links this to its importance for the Metaphysical poets:

The significant relationship between the modern poets and the seventeenth-century poets of wit lies here-- in their common conception of the use of metaphor. . . . The significant relationship is indicated by the fact that the metaphysical poets and the modernists stand opposed to both the neo-classic and Romantic poets on the issue of metaphor.¹⁹

Brooks's argument concentrates on, "the essentially functional character of all metaphor. . . . The comparison is the poem in a structural sense," and concludes that a "fundamental fallacy . . . underlies the Romantic and neo-classical account of the function of figurative language. . . . Housman, as we have seen, gives the show away by frankly regarding metaphor and simile as 'accessories'."²⁰

That Housman, in "The Name and Nature of Poetry," spoke in the Romantic tradition there is no doubt. That he was as naive as his critics have made him out to be is questionable. Admittedly, for him "the peculiar function of poetry" was "to transfuse emotion" from the poet to his reader and all the other elements in a poem, however necessary they might be for its total effect, were secondary, 'inessential'. This was not to say that other things did not belong: "Poems very seldom consist of poetry and nothing else; and pleasure can be derived also from their other ingredients."²¹ Rather, it was to emphasize that

these other ingredients were not of the essence; the metaphor might indeed be the poem but if it did not involve an emotional transfer the poem was not 'poetry'.

A useful perspective on Housman's poetical theory is provided in the comments of two judicious critics. One is Ian Scott-Kilvert:

[Housman] is also tacitly following the modern tendency to pass over architectonic qualities in poetry and to regard the lyric as somehow intrinsically more poetical than dramatic or narrative poetry . . . it is plain that the process he describes [in "The Name and Nature of Poetry"] could apply only to the composition of lyrics and not to the major literary forms, in which construction, balance, and sustained creative energy have an important part to play.²²

The other is T. S. Eliot who, in reviewing "The Name and Nature of Poetry" at the time of its appearance, had this to say:

We must not . . . judge a lecture on Poetry as if it was a book on Aesthetics . . . if [the lecturer] is to say anything at all in the time it is difficult for him, if not impossible, not to make assertions which, if pressed . . . by an unfriendly critic, will not yield a concentrated drop of heresy.²³

And later in the same review he adds that a good many of the things that are said about "one kind of poetry or another . . . might not have been said if their authors had not been under the impression that they were talking about all Poetry, when they were only talking about the kind of poetry they liked."²⁴

2. Poetic Achievement

When we turn from Housman's theory of poetry to his practice as a poet we are again in an area of disagreement. As John Sparrow says, "Housman's work is particularly liable to provoke . . . disputations because he inspires very strong feelings, of admiration and the reverse."²⁵ It is the purpose of these concluding pages to extract the essential Housman from this controversial background and to summarize the nature of his poetic achievement.

Housman's poetry has been out of fashion for the last half century, as has just been noted, and criticism of it has been generally unfavorable. The Times Literary Supplement, in a review of the posthumous More Poems, managed, in criticizing one of them, to catalogue "all that Housman's critics rightly reprehend--the unabashed sentimentalism, the melodrama, the meretricious metrical effect, the diction at once colloquial and stilted . . . the metallic ring--the ring of an epigram, not of a song--to the music of his verse."²⁶ These charges are familiar, particularly the allied ones of sentimentalism and melodrama. The former quality can be seen in some of the rhetorical poems quoted in previous chapters, though both it and melodrama are more characteristic of the lyrics of the "Shropshire lad" genre. So percipient an observer as W. B. Yeats considered that, on balance, Housman's first volume had managed to evade the threat posed by its sentimentality: "A Shropshire Lad is worthy of its fame, but a mile further and all had been

marsh."²⁷ The other objects of criticism in the Times review--metre, diction and music--have been considered at length earlier in this study and their attendant dangers remarked: monotony in metre and vulgarity in diction. As to the question of epigram versus music, this is ultimately a question of taste. There is room in verse for both and, as we have seen, there is a good deal of both in A Shropshire Lad.

A more serious accusation has been made by F. R. Leavis who points out that on occasion Housman is guilty of offering "emotion for its own sake without a justifying situation,"²⁸ an artistic fault that is related to sentimentality, though distinct from it. Leavis uses "Reveille" (ASL iv) to illustrate his charge:

Wake: the silver dusk returning
Up the beach of darkness brims,
And the ship of sunrise burning
Strands upon the eastern rims.

Wake: the vaulted shadow shatters,
Trampled to the floor it spanned,
And the tent of night in tatters
Straws the sky-pavilioned land.

The comments which Leavis makes on these lines are vigorous, detailed and so closely reasoned that it is difficult to do them justice through excerpted quotation. Speaking of the first stanza, he says in part:

... we might be inclined to say that the decorated effect there was the main purpose. Certainly there is a sense in which the metaphorical imagery is offered for its own sake and (apart from being beautiful and striking) not for anything it does; it demands

immediate approval in its own right as something self-sufficient and satisfying. . . . The function of the imagery, here, in short, is to hold the attention from dwelling in a realizing way on the alleged sanction--the actuality ostensibly invoked.²⁹

And of the second:

. . . even an ardent admirer would, after the second stanza, find it difficult to declaim the poem convincingly, so embarrassing is the patent inadequacy of the substance to the assertive importance of movement and tone, the would-be intense emotional rhetoric.³⁰

These criticisms are all the more telling when the third verse is compared to its predecessors:

Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying:
Hear the drums of morning play;
Hark, the empty highways crying,
'Who'll beyond the hills away?

The let-down is obvious. F. W. Bateson, who has also dealt with this passage, makes the following comment: "The indecorum of the transition results in a rather cheap over-emphasis. (The abrupter the descent from magnificence the more the reader sits up, but the descent must also justify itself aesthetically--as Housman's indecorousness often fails to do.)"³¹ The criticism is illuminated by a comparison of these verses of "Reveille" with the corresponding verses of "The Welsh Marches" (ASL xxviii) where there is also a descent from magnificence, but one which fully justifies itself aesthetically.

The Leavis criticism is important because of the light it throws on a significant Housman weakness. Apparently,

no critic has attempted to rebut Leavis. Christopher Ricks has reacted, but rather mildly: ". . . Dr. Leavis's extremely forceful remarks on 'Wake: the silver dusk re-turning' depend on our being quite certain that Housman has simply blundered into 'insensitive falsity' and is not using it."³²

One can see in this artistic flaw another manifestation of Housman's characteristic tendency towards emphasis. One can see it also in a related fault noted by William R. Brashear. Speaking of poems 'not among his greatest' in A Shropshire Lad which deal with man's 'trouble', Brashear says: "While some of these poems possess a high degree of coherence, they lack congruence; the tonal or attitudinal emphasis often goes beyond acceptable bounds. There is relatively too much to do about a too little or common complaint."³³

The most serious accusations against Housman's poetry have centred on the personal attitude and philosophy that his poems reveal. These charges are grouped by Robert W. Stallman in his Housman bibliography as "The Problem of the Personal Element"³⁴ and "The Problem of Belief."³⁵ Under the former rubric can be found the following typical comments: "Beneath an attempted stoicism, most of his poems are packed with self-pity . . ." (Raymond Mortimer); "Too often his pity is felt to be merely self-pity, his anger that of impotence at his own frustrations and disappointments" (A. F. Allison); "Perfect understanding of his poems depends upon knowledge of his personal plight . . ." (John Peale

Bishop); "Housman's poetry tends to lend itself to confusion between the personality of the poet and the poetry" (Lawrence Leighton). The "Problem of Belief" section contains such judgments as: "It is only the graver mood of some of the later poems, where a note is struck that is at once ironic and moving, that restores my faith in the poetic soundness of his philosophy". (Louis Kronenberger); "It is not the absolute, or objective, validity of a belief that vindicates the poetry; it is a gross over-simplification to maintain that a right belief makes a good poem and a wrong belief makes a poem bad" (Louis MacNeice); "Every standard is called on, now in this poem, now in that. Every poem is at odds with every other. For every poem has a standard and makes a judgment of living: but Housman has no standard" (J. Bronowski); "His beliefs come in the way of our appreciation of the poetry" (Stallman's summation of Lawrence Leighton's view); ". . . but it is not the meaning that matters so much; it is the voice it is uttered in" (Bonamy Dobrée).

What do all these comments indicate? For one thing, they illustrate the statement at the beginning of this study that criticism of Housman's poetry has tended to concentrate on content and philosophy rather than style. For another, they suggest that Housman's achievement as a poet is a triumph of style over substance, a conclusion which is entirely consistent with the findings of this investigation of his rhetorical quality. ("The difference," says Mark

Schorer, "between content or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.")³⁶

The result of the poetic achievement which is here attributed to his style has been to secure for Housman a permanent place among the minor English poets. This is not damning with faint praise: the history of literature declares that only a few poets in a century are great. W. H. Auden puts the achievement in proper perspective: "A minor poet, certainly, which, of course, does not mean that his poems are inferior in artistic merit to those of a major poet, only that the range of theme and emotion is narrow, and that the poems show no development over the years."³⁷ However, the dissenting opinion of R. P. Blackmur should also be recorded: "[Housman] was not a great minor poet in terms of his conceiving imagination."³⁸ But Blackmur, unlike Auden, qualifies 'minor poet' with 'great'.

The satisfactions which Housman's poetry offers are not intellectual; they are aesthetic and are appreciated intuitively rather than rationally, though we should not forget his own remark that the best poetic music "is addressed to the inner chamber of the sense of hearing, to the junction between the ear and the brain."³⁹ To this extent his poetic practice is consistent with the theory he outlined in "The Name and Nature of Poetry." While the limitations of his philosophy have been frequently criticized, and with reason, these do not annul his artistic achievement. Stephen Spender summarizes this situation acutely:

It is, of course, on account of its emotional adolescence that Housman's work is dismissed by most critics today. Certainly these critics are right if they maintain that immaturity prevents Housman from being a great poet. Yet it is not his stature which is in dispute. Housman's work is an Elgin marble presented to us proportioned with a justice that measures itself against other things; minor and immature in comparison to the great, but perfect in relation to that which is inferior. It is, in fact, an admirable quality of his that he knows his range. . . . Where one must really argue back at his detractors is when they assume that the adolescence disqualifies him from being taken seriously as a poet at all. . . . It is possible--on the contrary--to argue that in a poet of limited aims, strong ideals, and a perfectionist technique, adolescence--according to Housman's way of interpreting it--is an admirable theme.⁴⁰

Spender's comment that Housman knows his range and benefits thereby is illuminating. It suggests that the stylistic simplicity of his poetry, and the rhetorical quality which often accompanies it, may be the product of his creative limitations, that they occur because of rather than in spite of these. Housman himself, with his usual instinct for aphorism, once quoted a remark of Swift's that applies here: "No man ever made an ill figure who understood his own talents, nor a good one who mistook them."⁴¹

Whatever their source, Housman's gifts as a poet cannot be denied. It has been a major finding of this study, as it is the consensus of students of Housman, that these gifts centre in his use of language. His claim to greatness lies in his ability to illuminate and fix in memorable words certain aspects of universal experience. In the end, says Ian Scott-Kilvert,

There remain his superb powers of expression, the capacity to write verses of great poetry, if not to be a great poet . . . at his best he possesses the indefinable poetic faculty of conferring on words a new life, so that one turns eagerly to any new Housman fragment not so much for a fresh poetic experience as for some sudden felicity of language. Much was sacrificed for these ideals, but he possesses them securely; the command of words and the proud integrity with which he practiced it are his greatest gifts.⁴²

And, after the critics have spoken, the subject of their comments deserves to have the final word. It is to be found in a conclusion which Housman reached about the merits of another poet and which may appropriately be applied to his own, in the knowledge that it errs on the side of moderation: "To things so novel and original it suffices that they should be good; you cannot demand that they should be the best."⁴³

NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹F. W. Bateson, "The Poetry of Emphasis," in A. E. Housman: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., Christopher Ricks (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 131. (The Bateson article, hereafter called "Emphasis," first appeared in this book, hereafter called Ricks Collection.)

²Norman Marlow, A. E. Housman: Scholar and Poet (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 136. (Hereafter called Marlow.)

³A. E. Housman in reply to a question from Maurice Pollet, quoted in Grant Richards, A. E. Housman: 1897-1936 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 270. (The Richards book is hereafter called Richards.)

⁴Marlow, p. 69.

⁵Ibid., p. 114.

⁶Cleanth Brooks, "Alfred Edward Housman," Ricks Collection, pp. 69-70.

⁷William R. Brashear, "The Trouble With Housman,"
Victorian Poetry 7 (1969), 85.

⁸Ian Scott-Kilvert, A. E. Housman (London: Longmans, Green & Co. for the British Council and the National Book League, 1965), p. 33. (Hereafter called Scott-Kilvert.)

⁹Edwin Muir, "A. E. Housman," London Mercury 35 (1936), 63.

¹⁰Morton Dauwen Zabel, "The Whole of Housman," The Nation, June 1, 1940; rpt. in Ricks Collection, p. 125.

¹¹Cleanth Brooks, "Alfred Edward Housman," Kenyon Review 3 (1941), 108.

¹²George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," in Inside the Whale and Other Essays (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 24.

¹³Bateson, "Emphasis," in Ricks Collection, pp. 134-35.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵Stephen Spender, quoted by Robert W. Stallman in "Annotated Bibliography of A. E. Housman: A Critical Study," PMLA 60 (1945), 482.

¹⁶Stuart Gerry Brown, "The Poetry of A. E. Housman," Sewanee Review 48 (1940), 405.

¹⁷Chauncey Brewster Tinker, Essays in Retrospect (1948, rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969), p. 93.

¹⁸William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Books, n.d.), p. 58.

¹⁹See, for instance, W. H. Auden, Forewords and Afterwords (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 332 and the following in Ricks Collection: John Wain, p. 27; Cleanth Brooks, p. 66 and F. W. Bateson, p. 132.

²⁰Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," The World We Imagine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), p. 3.

CHAPTER II

¹The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, 8th imp., 1968), first page of preface.

²Peter Dixon, Rhetoric (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 2.

³A. E. Housman, "Swinburne" (lecture delivered at University College, London, prior to 1911) rpt. London: Cornhill Magazine, 177 (1968-1969), p. 395.

⁴Nesca Robb, Four In Exile: Critical Essays on Leopardi, Hans Christian Andersen, A. E. Housman and

• Christina Rossetti (1948, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1968), p. 27.

⁵ Clyde K. Hyder, review of The Letters of A. E. Housman, ed., Henry Maas, Victorian Poetry 10 (1972), 192.

⁶ Brashear, "The Trouble with Housman," Victorian Poetry 7 (1969), 85.

⁷ Cited by Robert W. Stallman in "Annotated Bibliography," PMLA 60 (1945), 469. The words are Stallman's.

⁸ Ransom, "Honey and Gall," The Southern Review 6 (1940), 7.

⁹ Logan Pearsall Smith, ed., A Treasury of English Aphorisms (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1947), p. 4.

¹⁰ Bateson, "Emphasis," Ricks Collection, p. 135.

¹¹ See The Letters of A. E. Housman, ed., Henry Maas (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971)..

¹² In a letter to Maurice Poflet, quoted in Richards, p. 271.

¹³ Tinker, Essays in Retrospect, p. 95.

¹⁴ Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language (1934; New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 128.

¹⁵ Bateson, "Emphasis," Ricks Collection, p. 132.

¹⁶ Eliot, The Criterion 13 (1933), 152.

CHAPTER III

¹ Brashear, Victorian Poetry 7 (1969), 85.

² Ibid., p. 85.

³ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴ Marlow, p. 147.

⁵ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶ Tom Burns Haber, A. E. Housman (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1967), p. 120.

⁷ Matthew 27:42 (Authorized Version).

⁸ Eccles. 11:8 (A.V.).

⁹ Psalm 59:9 (A.V.).

¹⁰ Psalm 72:5 (A.V.).

¹¹ Richards, p. 270.

¹² Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Cambridge Lectures (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., Everyman Edition, 1943), p. 68.

CHAPTER IV

¹Allison, "The Poetry of A. E. Housman," Review of English Studies 19 (1943), 283.

²Scott-Kilvert, p. 37.

³Stevenson, "The Ceremony of Housman's Style," Victorian Poetry 10 (1972), 49.

⁴Marlow, p. 136.

⁵Blackmur, "The Composition in Nine Poets," The Expense of Greatness (New York: Arrow Editions, 1940), p. 204.

⁶Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, Trio (London: MacMillan and Co., 1938), p. 104.

⁷Bateson, "Emphasis," Ricks Collection, p. 142.

⁸MacDonald, "The Poetry of A. E. Housman," Queen's Quarterly 31 (1923), 130.

⁹Lawrence Leighton, "One View of Housman," Poetry 52 (1938), 95.

¹⁰Scott-Kilvert, p. 35.

¹¹Marlow, p. 116.

¹²Gottcent, "The Poetry of A. E. Housman," Diss., Wisconsin, 1971, pp. 14-16, also makes this point.

¹³Allison, Review of English Studies 19 (1943), 281.

¹⁴Marlow, p. 95.

¹⁵Richards, pp. 399-435.

¹⁶Quoted by A. E. Housman in "Swinburne," Cornhill Magazine 177 (1968-69), 399.

¹⁷Zabel, "The Whole of Housman," Ricks Collection, p. 125.

¹⁸A. E. Housman, Selected Prose, ed. John Carter (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 185-93. (Hereafter called Selected Prose.)

¹⁹Leighton, Poetry 52 (1938), 97.

²⁰Marlow, p. 143.

²¹Selected Prose, p. 195.

²²Lawrence Housman, My Brother, A. E. Housman: Personal Recollections Together with Thirty Hitherto Unpublished Poems (1937, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1969), p. 253.

²³Haber, A. E. Housman, p. 77.

²⁴Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language, p. 119.

²⁵Quoted in Gottcent, Diss. Wisconsin, 1971,

p. 116.

²⁶Bateson's essay was written for the Ricks Collection.

Of the critical writings on Housman, it comes closest to the subject of this thesis. (Subsequent page references to "Emphasis" in this section of chapter IV are indicated in the text as they occur.)

²⁷Quoted by Maude M. Hawkins in A. E. Housman: Man

Behind a Mask (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958),

p. 203.

²⁸Herbert Palmer, Post-Victorian Poetry (London:

J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1938), p. 40.

²⁹Lawrence Leighton, Poetry 52 (1938), 97.

³⁰Cyril Connolly, "A. E. Housman: A Controversy"

(with replies by F. L. Lucas et al.), May-June, 1936; rpt. in Ricks Collection, p. 37.

³¹Sitwell, Trio, pp. 104-106.

³²Gottcent, Diss., pp. 35-36.

³³Scott-Kilvert, p. 33.

³⁴Bateson, "Emphasis," Ricks Collection, p. 137.

³⁵Marlow, p. 149.

³⁶Ricks, "The Nature of Housman's Poetry," Essays in Criticism 14 (1964), rpt. in Ricks Collection, p. 106.

³⁷Ibid., p. 109.

³⁸Ibid., p. 115.

³⁹Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 118.

⁴¹Selected Prose, p. 172.

⁴²A. E. Housman, "Swinburne," Cornhill Magazine 177 (1968-69), 387-88.

⁴³Haber, A. E. Housman, p. 73.

⁴⁴Marlow, p. 146.

⁴⁵Leavis, "Imagery and Movement: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry," Scrutiny 13 (1945), 133.

⁴⁶Sitwell, Trio, p. 108.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁸J. F. MacDonald, Queen's Quarterly 31 (1923), 125.

⁴⁹Selected Prose, pp. 186-87, 192-93.

CHAPTER V

¹George L. Watson, A. E. Housman: A Divided Life (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 159.

²Rhetorical elements can be observed in the following: i, iii, iv, vi, vii, xii, xiii, xiv, xvii, xviii, xxii, xxiii, xxviii, xxx, xxxi, xxxii, xl, xliii, xliv, xlvi, xlix, liv, lvii, lx, lxii.

³"The Name and Nature of Poetry," Selected Prose, p. 170. (The next nine references to Selected Prose are indicated in the text as they occur.)

⁴T. S. Eliot, ed., A Choice of Kipling's Verse: With An Essay on Rudyard Kipling (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1941), p. 18.

⁵William Empson, "Rhythm and Imagery in English Poetry," British Journal of Aesthetics 2 (1962), 36.

⁶Leggett, The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman: Theory and Practice (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 6.

⁷Richard Aldington, A. E. Housman and W. B. Yeats (The Peacock Press, 1955), p. 11.

⁸Pound, "Mr. Housman at Little Bethel," The Criterion 13 (1934), 219.

⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁰ Selected Prose, p. 189.

¹¹ "Alfred Edward Housman," The Poet's Defence
(London: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p. 217.

¹² Ibid., pp. 217-18.

¹³ Leggett uses substantially the same argument in answering Bronowski. Cf. The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman, pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ Bateson, English Poetry: A Critical Introduction
(London: Longmans Green & Co. Ltd., 2nd ed., 1966), p. 178.

¹⁵ Leighton, Poetry 52 (1938), 95.

¹⁶ Selected Prose, p. 173.

¹⁷ Leggett, The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman, p. 13.

¹⁸ Modern Poetry and the Tradition (London: Editions Poetry London Ltd., 1948), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

²¹ Selected Prose, p. 185.

²² Scott-Kilvert, p. 35.

²³ Eliot, The Criterion 13 (1933), 152.

²⁴Ibid., p. 153.

²⁵Sparrow, "A Shropshire Lad at Fifty," Independent Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 128.

²⁶Times Literary Supplement, October 24, 1936, pp. 845-46. Quoted in Stallman, "Annotated Bibliography of A. E. Housman," PMLA 60 (1945), 477.

²⁷Quoted in Introduction to Ricks Collection, p. 1.

²⁸F. R. Leavis, "'Thought' and Emotional Quality: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry," Scrutiny 13 (1945), 59.

²⁹Leavis, "Imagery and Movement: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry," Scrutiny 13 (1945), 132.

³⁰Ibid., p. 133.

³¹Bateson, "Emphasis," Ricks Collection, p. 137.

³²Ricks, "The Nature of Housman's Poetry," Ricks Collection, p. 120.

³³Brashear, "The Trouble With Housman," Victorian Poetry 7 (1969), 84.

³⁴Stallman, "Annotated Bibliography of A. E. Housman," PMLA 60 (1945), 482-85.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 485-90.

³⁶Schorer, "Technique As Discovery," The World We Imagine, p. 3.

³⁷Auden, Forewords and Afterwords (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 331-32.

³⁸Blackmur, "The Composition in Nine Poets," The Expense of Greatness, p. 204.

³⁹A. E. Housman, "Swinburne," Cornhill Magazine 177 (1968-69), 387-88.

⁴⁰Spender, "The Essential Housman," The Making of a Poem (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1955, rpt., 1973), pp. 162-63.

⁴¹A. E. Housman, The Confines of Criticism: The Cambridge Inaugural 1911, ed. John Carter (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 25.

⁴²Scott-Kilvert, p. 37.

⁴³"Swinburne," Cornhill Magazine 177 (1968-69), 400.

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ABSTRACT

The object of the thesis is to identify a key quality in the style of A. E. Housman's poetry and to examine its presence in the poems of his first and most important work. The Introduction begins with a survey of Housman criticism, particularly of comments on those aspects of his style which show rhetorical elements.

The importance of tone is then examined. A detached attitude on the part of the poet towards his audience and his material is considered as giving Housman's poetry a tonal quality which contributes to its rhetorical effect and this attitude is analyzed in the poems of A Shropshire Lad. The Poet's attitude also contributes greatly to the rhetorical effect through another quality of tone, in this case a cosmic dimension which Housman imparts to some of his poetry.

The argument moves next to a consideration of certain poetic techniques. The diction, syntax and metre of A Shropshire Lad are analyzed at length to show how they contribute to Housman's rhetoric, especially when their contribution coincides with the tonal qualities already mentioned.

In the Conclusion the rhetorical poems of A Shropshire Lad are considered briefly in relation to the work as a whole. This is followed by an attempt to place Housman's poetry, on a particular aspect of which the thesis has concentrated, in historical perspective and to assess his achievement as a poet.