Chapter- 4

Theme of Love

Housman's concept of love is very different from that, to cite a single example, which Shakespeare presents in his sonnet CXVI ("Let Me Not To The Marriage of True Minds"). According to Shakespeare, love is not true if it undergoes a change because of a change in the attitude of the beloved. He compares love to the northern star which remains fixed in the sky at one place. True love is never influenced by the tricks which time plays upon it. Ultimately Shakespeare says that if his own love for his friend is proved to be inconstant, then he would be compelled to admit that whatever he has written in his life should be treated as unwritten, and that no man has ever loved anybody truly:

> Admit impediments, love is not love,
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> .....
> Love's not Time's fool,.....
> If this be error and upon me proved,
> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.
>
> (ll.2-5,9,13-14)

We can compare this sonnet with one of the finest lyrics of Housman— *ASL* XXVII ("Is my team ploughing"). In this poem Housman uses love as a symbol of change. It deals with two kinds of love— the love of a friend and the love of a sweetheart. But neither of the two is fixed and unchanging. Love, like life, is characterized by an inconstancy and brevity. Housman regards love as a relationship between men and women which is perhaps governed by a psychological necessity. The relationship ends, as usual in his love poems, in death. Stephen Spender makes an interesting comparison between the love poems of Donne and Housman. He is also of the view that Housman's verse is devoid of the "honesty and audacity" of Hopkins. As regards the treatment of the theme of love in the poetry of Housman, it does not have, in an adequate measure, the qualities of wit, ratiocination and imagery which characterize Donne's love poetry.

The heart (in *ASL* XIII) differs from pearls and crowns because it cannot be given away. The imagery of buying and selling makes it clear that love is of a different nature from "crowns and pounds and guineas." The "wise man" knows that pearls and rubies may be given away but not the heart. It is impossible to give, for something is always gotten in return. The heart is always sold, and the price is "endless rue." The ideal love

of "one-and-twenty" characterized by a sense of permanence is replaced by the disillusionment of "two-and-twenty":

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.

Michael Macklem has noted Housman's frequent use of love as a traditional symbol of the intensity and brevity of happiness.[1] Stevenson has spoken of Housman's lover as one who is "aware of the inevitabity of death and decay, aware of the ambiguity of honor and love, accepts the moment of fulfillment as the only reality."[2] Yet, as Stevenson further states, the lover in Housman's poetry soon discovers the transitory nature of love, and his commitment ends in frustration. That is why love frequently functions as a basis for the treatment of human transience in Housman's poetry.

Lovers in Housman's poems, like his soldiers, are always dying and being replaced by other lovers. By his constant

identification of love and death, Housman establishes a close correlation between love and the theme of impermanence of human existence. The idea of dying for one's fellow men is, in fact, the secret route by which Housman's homosexuality finds expression. Emphasizing the interconnection of the two experiences, Tom Burns Heber states: "When Housman mentions the sex-embrace he usually casts the odor of death around it."[3] So even after a cursory glance of the work, a reader get the impression that death is somehow central to the theme and mood of *A Shropshire Lad.* Stephen Spender commented long ago that, despite this prevalence, there is so little feeling for the dead, or curiosity about death. Three successive lyrics XXV, XXVI and XXVII from *ASL,* illustrate the poet's fusion of love and death. All three poems deal with a triangle of lovers in which one is now in the grave. *ASL* XXVII depicts the inconsistency of love with the unrealistic situation of a dead lover speaking from the grave. It is a poem in the form of a dialogue between a dead man and his friend. The dead man enquires whether life goes on the same without him:

"Is my team ploughing,
  That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
  When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
  The harness jingles now;

No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough
(II. 1—8)

The first four stanzas emphasize the changelessness of the scene the dead man has left. The cycle of life has continued unaltered. The friend tells him that his horses still plough, the men still play football and his girl is indeed happy: "No change though you lie under/The land you used to plough." In the last four stanzas the dead man shifts his attention to his sweetheart and his friend. He wants to know about the state of the surviving lover and asks:

"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"
(II. 17—20)

The living friend replies:

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep
(ll.21-24)

But the dead ploughman is not satisfied, and he continues his innocent queries leading to the revelation of the final stanzas:

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

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.
(II. 25—32)

The last stanza emphasizes the irony that is inherent in the poem. His friend acknowledges the transitory nature of man's existence on earth when he asserts the permanence of life that the dead man has left behind. Housman uses love as a symbol of change. He talks of two kinds of love in his poetry— the love of a friend and the love of a sweetheart. Neither of the two is permanent and unchanging. The dead youth asks if his sweetheart has "tired of weeping," as if physical tiredness were the only force which could end her grief. The last stanza of the poem destroys the dead youth's notion of love's permanence as an illusion. Love, like life, is characterized by an inconstancy and transience which is emphasized further by the juxtaposition of the lover and the grave. The poem states the deplorable fact that just as the sweetheart does not mourn her dead lover ("She lies not down to weep"), the dead man's friend is also not hesitant about cheering her up because he, by doing so, expects to win her affections.

ASL XXV depicts the same situation from a different point of view – that of a lover who steals a dead man's sweetheart:

> The better man she walks with still,
> Though now 'tis not with Fred:
> At lad that lives and has his will
> Is worth a dozen dead.
>
> Fred keeps the house all kinds of weather,
> And clay's the house he keeps;

When Rose and I walk out together
Stock-still lies Fred and sleeps.
(II. 9—16)

ASL XXVI completes the triangle by projecting the affair from the third point of view— that of the lover who accepts a new sweetheart after the death of the old one:

Along the fields as we came by
A year ago, my love and I,
The aspen over stile and stone
Was talking to itself alone.
"Oh, who are these that kiss and pass?
A country lover and his lass;
Two lovers looking to be wed;
And time shall put them both to bed,
But she shall lie with earth above,
And he beside another love."
(II. 1—10)

The last stanza of the poem reveals that the forecast of the aspen tree, a traditional symbol of prophecy,[4] has indeed been fulfilled: "And sure enough beneath the tree / There walks another love with me" (II. 11-12). This poem also highlights the true pathos of love and its inconstancy by suggesting that the memory of love is short. A lover who dies is quickly forgotten and betrayed by the surviving partner. Like many other, says Bayley, "the poem is frank about enjoying its own sad tale and its unillusioned acceptance of the way thing go."[5] The aspen is whispering to the young man that he "shall sleep with clover clad" and "his girl beside another lad":

And overhead the aspen heaves
Its rainy-sounding silver leaves;

And I spell nothing in their stir,
But now perhaps they speak to her,
And plain for her to understand
They talk about a time at hand
When I shall sleep with clover clad,
And she beside another lad.

(ll.13–20)

These three poems describe the same theme from different viewpoints. "Each is concerned with the destructive power of time, and each develops its theme by concentrating on the ephemeral nature of those feeling and emotions which are traditionally regarded as the most enduring – love and the memory of the dead."[6]

'Bredon Hill', *ASL* XXI is a poem in which an inherently melodramatic situation is presented. It opens with a wonderful description of the ringing of the church bells in the neighbouring shires. The speaker, who is accompanied by his sweetheart on Bredon Hill, is not able to attend the Sunday service because he is engaged in wooing her.

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.

Here of a Sunday morning
  My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
  And hear the larks so high
  About us in the sky.

(II. 1–10)

The two young lovers dismiss the summons of the church bells. In their own happiness they reinterpret it as a symbol of the fulfillment of their love:

> The bells would ring to call her
> In valleys miles away:
> "Come all to church, good people;
> Good people, come and pray."
> But here my love would stay.
>
> And I would turn and answer
> Among the springing thyme,
> "Oh, Peal upon our wedding,
> And we will hear the chime,
> And come to church in time."
> (II. 11–20)

Naturally enough, he wants the bells to peal on the occasion of their wedding. But in the course of the poem, the sweetheart dies and a single church bell tolls her burial while there is no groom around. The early hope of youth is extinguished by death, and there is a transition from summer to winter.

> 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.
> (II. 21–30)

Housman himself was not satisfied with the concluding stanza. He made many attempts to get it correct. But he could not make it precisely right. The poem discusses two deaths, but there is

only one line- "The mourners followed after". Cleanth Brooks, resenting the line, says: "not because it is not true – presumably there were mourners – but because it is unnecessary – we do not need to be told in so many words that the girl died. Moreover, the direct reference to her death works against the indirect presentation of it through the poem's basic metaphor – which treats the funeral as if it were a marriage, in which the lover in betrayed by his sweetheart who jilts him and steals away to church to be wed to another."[7]

But in stanza 6 the bells have become funeral bells. The bells whose sound was once a happy noise to hear, and a symbol of promise, have become a needless noise, a call to death – a call which the youth now realizes he too must answer:

> 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.
> (II. 31–35)

The third line of the above stanza, which is repeated in stanza 3 of the poem, is an invitation to prayer extended to "good people" by ringing the church bells. Their sound seems to have lost its association with piety in the poet's mind in as much as one of these bells will ultimately toll his death as it did his sweetheart's. It seems clear that the speaker intends to obey the summons of

the bells in the same way that his lover did. On another level, says Keith Jebb, "it says something about the atheist Housman's attitude to organized religion: that no matter how much you avoid it in life, it always gets you in the end."[8]

"The True Lover" (*ASL* LIII) is again based on the inconstancy of love. The poem is concerned with the suicide of a young lover. A man visits the woman he loves. With an apparent simplicity, the poem deals with a lover who wishes to see his sweetheart (who has probably rejected him) once more before he departs for some unknown destination:

> The lad came to the door at night,
> When lovers crown their vows,
> And whistled soft and out of sight
> In shadow of the boughs.
>
> "I shall not vex you with my face
> Henceforth, my love, for aye:
> So take me in your arms a space
> Before the east is grey
>
> "When I from hence away am past
> I shall not find a bride,
> And you shall be the first and last
> I ever lay beside."
>
> (II. 1—12)

The poem has caused problems for commentators because of its cryptic style. Critics like Brooks, Purser, and Warren point out the "symbolic force' of the poem and its ability to project "something beyond itself."[9] Maude M. Hawkins also says that the suicide "may be entirely symbolic."[10] The strength of the

poem lies in its effective use of the ballad form. Everything is concealed except the most significant details. The true nature of the situation is not clearly mentioned but is revealed step by step. That is why, it is not until the last line of the poem that one is able to understand the ambiguous title and the phrase that is repeated in the poem: 'When the lovers crown their vows."

It is in stanza 5 that the readers discover the true nature of the lad's journey through the sweetheart's questions:

> "Oh do you breathe, lad, that your breast
> Seems not to rise and fall,
> And here upon my bosom prest
> There beats no heart at all?
> .....
>
> "Oh lad, what is it, lad, that drips
> Wet from your neck on mine?
> What is it falling on my lips,
> My lad, that tastes of brine?"
> (II. 17–20, 25–28)

The lad's answers make it clear that his is a journey of death because his heart has stopped and "'never goes again' " and his throat has been cut. One may wonder at Housman's purpose in depicting such an unrealistic situation, although the death of the young lover is crucial to the theme of the poem. The true lover is one whose love never ceases, but the inconstancy of love brings with it the suggestion that the lover must eventually break his vow. Therefore, the lover in this poem "remains true by adopting the desperately logical expedient of suicide at the

consummating moment of love."[11] The real theme of the poem is that human nature is not capable of any lasting passion. Housman himself had realized the limit to which love is "speechless", the key word in the poem:

> Under the stars the air was light
> But dark below the boughs,
> The still air of the speechless night,
> When lovers crown their vows.
> (II. 33–36)

Probably the poem fails to use the melodrama to set up a deeper, more ironical and emotional atmosphere. But when the ghost comes out with the sarcastic remark about the knife slitting the throat across from "ear to ear" we are made aware of the ridiculousness of the situation. The dialogue follows its own course, with the girl wondering why her lips and neck are wet:

> "Oh like enough 'tis blood, my dear,
> For when the knife has slit
> The throat across from ear to ear
> 'Twill bleed because of it."
> (II. 29–32)

So the line which is repeated in the poem, "when lovers crown their vows," assumes new meaning through Housman's redefinition. When it appears as the last line of the poem, it refers to the act of suicide as the true crowning of the vows of love. In the opening stanza it may suggest the lovers' promise to consummate the act of love. So "the true lover" of the poem's title is now a dead lover.

All of Housman's love lyrics are not as serious in tone as the preceding analyses might suggest. Yet all of them have the same emphasis on inconstancy. In *ASL* V, the young lover, who is walking among the flowers with his girl, emphasizes the illusiveness of time as he tries to seduce her. The dominant sense of time is further suggested by the flower imagery. In the first stanza the dandelions "tell the hours/that never are told again" (II. 3—4). In stanza 2 the youth links the flower image to his argument: "What flowers to-day may flower to-morrow, /but never as good as new." (II. 13—14). Finally, in stanza 4 he sighs. "Ah, life, what is it but a flower?" (1. 29). The poem is set in springtime, with its promise of fulfillment:

> Ah, spring was sent for lass and lad,
> 'Tis now the blood runs gold,
> And man and maid had best be glad
> Before the world is old.
> (II. 9—12)

Yet this promise of youth is shattered with the discovery that all things, even human affection, are transient. In the last two lines of each stanza of the poem, the flatteries of the youth become increasingly more urgent and the replies of the young girl increasingly more skeptical. Stanza 1 ends with "— 'Twill do no harm to take my arm. / 'You may, young man, you may' "; stanza 2 "— Suppose I wound my arm right round—/ ' 'Tis true, young man, 'tis true' "; stanza 3, "My love is true and all for you.

/ 'Perhaps, young man, perhaps' "; and stanza 4 culminates in, "Be kind, have pity, my own, my pretty. —/ 'Good-bye, young man, good-bye' ".

ASL VI deals with unrequited love which causes different kinds of "ills" to human beings. It is only after one's death that the ills of unrequited love are over but someone else is victimized by it. According to Housman, this cycle of victimization goes on eternally in human life. It treats love as an illness with the lover "Mute and dull of cheer and pale", lying "at death's own door". The maiden can "heal his ail," but at the risk of infecting herself. It again emphasizes the transitory nature of love because if the lover's desires are fulfilled, his love is over, and the maiden must "lie down forlorn":

> Buy them, buy them eve and morn
> Lovers' ills are all to sell.
> Then you can lie down forlorn;
> But the lover will be well.
> (II. 9—12)

The imagery of buying and selling recurs here with the same implication of *ASL* XIII – love can never be given freely but is always sold. The maiden must get something in return, in this case, the "wan look, the hollow tone, / The hung head, the sunken eye" (II. 6—7). It is now she who is ill, for in transferring the ills of love, her lover has recovered. He is a ruthless lover

who wants from the girl what will transfer to her the pains of love and leave him free of pain.

ASL XI is a short poem "that brings together the themes of unsatisfied love, departure, and death in a distant spot."[12] The young man asks his lover to take pity on him before he leaves for a distant land where death awaits him. However, we are not sure whether the envisaged journey is real or metaphorical: "the Shakespearean 'darnel' suggests as English rather than a foreign grave."[13] It is nothing but a plea for the requiting of love before separation:

> Night should ease a lover's sorrow;
> Therefore, since I go to-morrow,
> Pity me before.
>
> In the land to which I travel,
> The far dwelling, let me say—
> Once, if here the couch gravel,
> In a kinder bed I lay,
> And the breast and darnel smothers
> (II. 5—12)

The last stanza of *ASL* XII depicts two lovers in death:

> Lovers lying two and two
> Ask not whom they sleep beside,
> And the bridegroom all night through
> Never turns him to the bride.
> (II. 13—16)

It is only in death that lovers stay together, when they cannot know it. Their state can never be altered by time. Death is thus regarded as superior to life, "the house of flesh" characterized by

"the heats of hate and lust". Death has caught the lovers at the highest point of their love and made the time stand still.

The lover of *ASL* XVIII is almost flippant in his attitude towards the inconstancy of love. The poem is light in tone and avoids the Housman's usual association of love with death or suicide. The lover is quite himself again because of his discovery of the transience of all human emotions. The poem very clearly states Housman's theme that "nothing will remain":

> Oh, when I was in love with you,
> Then I was clean and brave,
> And miles around the wonder grew
> How well did I behave.
>
> And now the fancy passes by,
> And nothing will remain,
> And miles around they'll say that I
> Am quite myself again.

There is some evidence that Housman arranged the contents of *A Shropshire Lad* to form a series: T. B. Haber notes that at the top of XIII in the printer's copy of his manuscript he wrote "Another Series".[14] *ASL* XIII serves as the introduction to a whole group of poems which depict the transiency of love. The five poems that follow deal in a more detailed manner with the various stages of the misery of the lad who fails to heed the wise man's advice and gives his heart away. In *ASL* XIV the lover's despair is so deep-rooted that probably it can never be removed:

> There flowers no balm to sain him
> From east of earth to west

That's lost for everlasting
The heart out of his breast.

Here by the labouring highway
With empty hands I stroll:
Sea-deep, till doomsday morning,
Lie lost my heart and soul.
(II. 13–20)

Some of the poems of Housman seem to have been occasioned either by his separation from his closest friend, Moses Jackson, who left for India in 1887 to take over as Principal of the Sind College, Karachi, or by some other emotional experience which Housman wanted to hide from his readers. They are naturally characterized by a strong element of ambiguity. This emotional element of Housman's poetry reminds us of what Tennyson said in *In Memoriam* v. 5–6: 'for the unquiet heart and brain, / A use in measured language lies'. In the same context (v. 1–4) Tennyson, measuring his language, confessed:

I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.

It was his poetry that offered Housman the medium to 'half reveal / And half conceal the Soul within". Housman wrote from an urgent personal need to find expression for the inexpressible. They are not for the most part 'biographical' in any straightforward sense. But they have a personal element that

cannot be ignored. Housman's unrequited love for Moses Jackson lay at the heart of his emotional life and about which it was impossible to silent remain silent. In fact Housman's poems have an instinct both for revelation and for concealment. "There is a Housman uncertainty principle: it sets up a set of circumstances that strongly suggest a certain conclusion, but denies you anything like proof."[15] The following epigram is a very clear example of this aspect of his verse:

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

These lines undoubtedly refer to Housman's strong and single love for Moses Jackson. They have pathos of their own, which it seems inseparable from what we know of Housman's actual life, no matter how much we may like to read it otherwise. Experience in the above lines has been presented in literal terms "Without the intervention of a symbol-making or mythologizing process".[16] However, the absence of the element of specificity impedes its true appreciation. We recall that Housman's vestigial diary also used the pronoun 'he' without an explicit referent. Yvor Winters points out a similar kind of lacuna in Hopkins' *No Worst there is none.*[17] There is no explicit reference even in the

posthumous poems which are relatively outspoken: 'Because I liked you better/ Than suits a man to say', and the protest poem about the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde ('Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?'). And in so many other posthumous poems, the exact nature of 'unlucky love' (*MP* XII.5), the reason why the speaker can only spend the night alone striking his fist upon the stone (*MP* XIX. 11-12), or the identity of the person to whom it is said 'Shake hands, we shall never be friends ....I only vex you the more I try' (*MP* XXX. 1-2), are all undisclosed. But the tone of a poem can at once disclose and conceal:

> Ask me no more, for fear I should reply;
> Others have held their tongues, and so can I;
> Hundreds have died, and told no tale before:
> Ask me no more, for fear I should reply –
>
> How one was true and one was clean of stain
> And one was braver than the heavens are high,
> And one was fond of me: and all are slain.
> Ask me no more, for fear I should reply.
>
> (*AP* VI)

The poem's implicitness prompts questions – ask what? Reply what? Held their tongues about what? Told no late about what? The poem is as much about not saying what cannot be said as it is about saying what can be said. The second verse does give something of a reply, but the reply remains a veiled one.

At the time of Jackson's wedding Housman had composed, or had begun to compose, an "Epithalamium", which was

completed in 1922 and published that year in *Last poems*. In his biography of the poet, Norman Page suggested that Housman consented to collect and publish *Last Poems* as an offering to his friend, whom he knew by then, to be seriously ill. This seems quite possible. It is also reported that Housman told his friend at the time, 'you are largely responsible for my writing poetry'.[18]

In his memoir, Laurence Housman opined that "Ask me no more' had been set aside by Housman 'because he had used a refrain made familiar in one of Tennyson's lyrics'. Laurence Housman was no doubt right in thinking that his brother had no wish to see the poem in print. 'Ask me no more' echoes not only Thomas Carew's idealistic tribute to a lover,[19] but a passage in Tennyson that links death with the overwhelming power of love:[20]

Ask me no more: the moon may draw the sea:
The cloud may stoop from heaven and tale the shape
With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape;
But o too fond, when have I answered thee?
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more; what answer should I give?
I love not hollow cheek or faded eye;
Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!
Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee liver;
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more; thy fate and mine are sealed:
I strove against the stream and all in vain:
Let the great river take me to the main:
No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield;
Ask me no more.

Housman must have felt and enjoyed in his own way the inner drama of love and reluctance Tennyson had put into it. *'Thy fate and mine are sealed' - that was certainly what he felt* about himself and Moses Jackson. There must have been an added poignancy in the speaker of the poem growing more tender with each refusal she gives, 'No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield'. It is not difficult to think how much that would have effected the poet who took up the Tennysonian refrain which haunted him, and to whom the words 'fond' and 'friend' meant so much.[21]

Jackson might well have said, 'But o too fond, when have I answered thee?', if young man of the 1980's had been in the habit of saying such things in affectionate friendship. His friendliness to Housman seems to have been of the kind that would not have him die. On the contrary, it did its best to maintain a close relation while they lived the same house and worked at the same office. Jackson eventually left London for India, but he never broke off the friendship, Housman's love none the less had to remain unspoken and poetry had to remain its from of speech.[22]

The first great love poem of *A Shropshire Lad* "Bredon Hill" was written in 1885. It was set in South Worcestershire but later

included with the Shropshire poems because it has the nostalgic and lovelorn themes of the others. It is filled with the irony of chances missed and happiness that has fled away – like this little poem from *ASL.*

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 field where roses fade.

(*ASL.* LIV)

It is not difficult to speculate about this incident. The circumstances seem to hint that Alfred had come to the point of making some kind of a declaration of love to Moses. The latter had told him that this was not reciprocated and could not go on. We can only guess at the truth. Two years later Moses Jackson left London for India. It was the parting of the ways:

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.

(*ASL* XVIII)

ASL XVII suggests the end of a transient affair. But perhaps XII from *More Poems* came closer to the truth:

I promise nothing: friends will part;
  All things may end, for all began;
And truth and singleness of heart
  Are mortal even as in man.

But this unlucky love should last
  When answered passions thin to air;
Eternal fate so deep has cast
  Its sure foundation of despair.
(*MP* XII)

This is closely related to:

If death and time are stronger,
  A love may yet be strong;
The world will last for longer,
  But this will last for long.
(*AP*, IX)

In 1889, Moses returned to England to get married, but he and his brother Adalbert resolved not to tell Housman about it. However, Alfred only learnt the news by letter after Moses and his new wife had returned to Karachi. But Housman continued to correspond with Moses until the latter's death thirty-four year later, in 1923, so he certainly forgave him.

The tragedy of unrequited love, a symbol perhaps of his own passionate friendship for Moses Jackson, haunts Housman. In many of his poems, the poet treats the theme of a heartless mistress who relents too late. Earlier group of Shropshire poems depict the varied faces of love: the misery of being unloved at the time of loving, the folly of loving that produces only misery, the lover's suicide, the exchange of innocence for experience, faithlessness, etc. A comparatively tragic view of love is depicted

in later Shropshire poems. For instance, the theme of *ASL* XXI ("Bredon Hill") is the impossibility of permanent love in a world where death is inevitable. The final series of love poems in the Shropshire group (Nos. XXV, XXVI, XXVII) deals with the true pathos of love, for all three poems reveal love's inconstancy by suggesting an endless cycle of lovers forgotten in death and betrayed by the surviving lovers.

Lyric XXXVII ("As Through the Wild Green Hills of Wyre") establishes the shift in setting from Shropshire to London. The theme of estrangement is established in the first four poems of the exile group, for these four poems, more than any other in *A Shropshire Lad* establish the contrast between the pastoral existence of Shropshire and the exile in London. The poems now look back westward from London to Shropshire, something living in the memory but beyond recovery.

Notes and references:

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2. John W. Stevenson, "The Martyr as Innocent: Housman's Lonely Lad", *South Atlantic Quarterly,* LVII (1958), p. 81.
3. Tom Burns Haber, "A.E. Housman's Downwards Eye", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* LIII (1954), p. 312.
4. B.J.Leggett, Housman's *Land of Lost Content:* A Critical Study of *'A Shropshire Lad'* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970) p. 33.
5 John Bayley, *Housman's Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) p.145.
6. Leggett,op.cit.,p. 34.
7. Cleanth Brooks, 'Alfred Edward Housman', in *A.E. Housman: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Christopher Ricks (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968) p. 72.
8. Keith Jebb, *A.E. Housman* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1992) pp. 103-4.
9. Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren, *An Approach to Literature* (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1952) pp. 296-97.

10. Maude M. Hawkins, "Housman's 'The True Lover'," *Explicator*, VIII (1949-50)
11. *Ibid.*, Item 23.
12. Norman Page. *AE. Housman: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1983) p. 190.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
14. Tom Burns Haber, *The manuscript Poems of A.E. Housman* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1955) p. 123.
15. Keith Jebb, op. cit., p. 69.
16. Norman Page, op. cit., p. 184.
17. Yvor Winters, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins' in *Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman, 1980 (Indian Reprint), p .41.
18. John Bayley, op. cit., p. 23.
19. *'Ask me no more where love bestowes': The Poems of Thomas Carew,* ed. Rhodes and Dunlap (Oxford: OUP, 1949, corrected reprint, 1970) pp. 102-3. Noted in Norman Marlow, *A.E. Housman: Scholar and Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) p. 123. The poem is marked in pencil on p. 297 of Housman's copy of *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1900,* ed. A.T. Quiller-Couch (Oxford: Clarendon

Press, 1900), which is now at Bryn Mawr Colleger, Pennsylvania.

20. Stanzas 2 and 3 of 'Ask me no more', added to *The Princess* in 1850: *The Poems of Tennyson,* ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 1969) p. 829. Laurence Housman notes the parallel: *A.E.H.* (1937) p. 121.
21. John Bayley, op.cit., p.24.
22. *Ibid.*