

THE FUNCTION OF TERENCE HEARSAY AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT
IN A. E. HOUSMAN'S A SHROPSHIRE LAD

by

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THE UNITY OF A SHROPSHIRE LAD: A CRITICAL OVERSIGHT

A. E. Housman's A Shropshire Lad first appeared in 1896, and the general response of the reading public was one of apathy. It was more than two years before the first edition of 500 copies was sold out.¹ However, among the first reviews of the book, there were some favorable ones; one of these, by Richard Le Gallienne, in the London Star of May 11, 1896, is particularly significant to the subject of this report. Along with high praise of individual poems in the book, Mr. Le Gallienne wrote:

A Shropshire Lad . . . to be properly appreciated, must be regarded as a whole, as a piece of country autobiography. . . . A character is self-revealed and a story is told, with here and there glimpses of a comrade and his story . . . all having a certain personal bearing, all contributing to paint the picture of the "Shropshire Lad's" world and its ways²

In the twentieth century, Housman's reputation has spread considerably. He is now a general anthology figure and there is no dearth of critical studies about him. However, while scholarly studies of all of Housman's work have progressed apace, Mr. Le Gallienne's original insight has been largely disregarded. Although his comment indicates that A Shropshire Lad should be looked upon as a unified whole, modern critics of Housman have either ignored or rejected this idea. One fact which supports Mr. Le Gallienne's judgment of the book's structure is that Housman himself would not permit individual poems from A Shropshire Lad to be published in antholo-

¹Laurence Houseman, A. E. H.: Some Poems, Some Letters and a Personal Memoir by his Brother (London, 1937), p. 81. This information is corroborated by A. E. Housman in a letter to Mr. Houston Martin. The letter is printed in A. E. H., p. 203.

²Quoted in Grant Richards, Housman: 1897-1936 (New York, 1942), p.

gies.³ On the other hand, he did not forbid the reprinting of individual selections from Last Poems, the only other volume of his poetry published during his lifetime.⁴

The reason for Housman's refusal to permit the anthologizing of single poems from A Shropshire Lad could only have stemmed from the fact that he himself saw the book as a unified work. He collected no royalties from A Shropshire Lad,⁵ and therefore his decision could not have been based upon the monetary consideration that anthologizing might have harmed the sales of his book. Furthermore, he seems to have loved the fame which he received as a poet; in one of his letters we find:

Vanity, not avarice, is my ruling passion; and so long as young men write to me from America saying that they would rather part with their hair than with their copy of my book, I do not feel the need of food and drink.⁶

It is clear then, that Housman was not trying to avoid fame by his refusal to permit individual poems of A Shropshire Lad to be reprinted. Moreover, although he allowed separate selections of Last Poems to be reproduced in collections, he would not permit Last Poems and A Shropshire Lad to be bound together into a single volume.⁷ It seems logical, then, to presume that Housman looked upon his first volume of poetry as a unified and discrete work, and that he wished his audience to accept it as such.

Modern commentators on Housman do not seem to have given these factors sufficient consideration. Grant Richards, Housman's publisher (after 1897)

³ Richards, p. 53.

⁴ Loc. cit.

⁵ Richards, p. 30.

⁶ Richards, p. 54. It should be noted that the copies mentioned were probably pirated editions.

⁷ Laurence Housman, p. 196. See also p. 197.

and biographer, remarking on Housman's refusal to permit the reprinting of selections from A Shropshire Lad, merely states that "[Housman's] idea may have been that he looked on the book as a sequence of poems and in consequence disliked any one being divorced from its fellows."⁸ Norman Marlow writes:

There is admittedly a development of theme in A Shropshire Lad--sun and spring and morning give way to autumn and nightfall towards the end of the book--but the development is not readily discernible even there.⁹

Ian Scott-Kilvert comments:

The order of the poems in A Shropshire Lad . . . is by no means chronological. They are grouped in the manner of a sonnet sequence introducing and contrasting a succession of themes so balanced that none should outweigh the others. It was no doubt this desire that A Shropshire Lad should be read as a whole lyrical cycle which made him refuse to allow single poems to be reprinted.¹⁰

George L. Watson writes of "the first definite transcription of A Shropshire Lad":

The principle by which Housman selected, from the jumbled contents of his notebooks, this orderly sequence appeared to be more judicious than meaningful. . . . Housman's critical instinct happily coincided with his natural self-effacement, and now both operated not only to weed out the less perfect specimens of his work, but to impose on the remainder a formal, consistent, arbitrary design.¹¹

Maude Hawkins refers to the poems of A Shropshire Lad simply as a "collection of fragments."¹²

⁸Richards, p. 53. (The italics are Mr. Richards'.)

⁹Norman Marlow, A. E. Housman: Scholar and Poet (London, 1958), p. 159.

¹⁰A. E. Housman (London, 1955), p. 24.

¹¹A. E. Housman: A Divided Life (London, 1957), p. 158.

¹²A. E. Housman: Man behind a Mask (Chicago, 1958), p. 144.

For many critics of Housman, the only unifying strand in the author's whole poetic canon has been the supposed autobiographical nature of many of the poems. Now Housman himself wrote of A Shropshire Lad that "very little in the book is biographical."¹³ This, of course, has not dissuaded critics from attempting to view the book, or at least certain poems from it, as primarily statements by Housman about Housman. Raymond Mortimer has stated that A Shropshire Lad "is the projection of what Housman regretfully suppressed in his own life,"¹⁴ and John K. Ryan has written that Housman's poems generally "constitute an autobiography that is unequalled for the clarity and candor with which it reveals the inmost secrets of the heart. . . ."¹⁵ A few would-be followers of Freud, Jung, and Adler have seized upon Housman's poetry, not excluding A Shropshire Lad, as an ideal exercise in "psychological criticism." Ernest Moss offered one of the first of these studies in 1937,¹⁶ and the movement reached some sort of high point in Maude Hawkin's 1950 study, A. E. Housman: Man behind a Mask, where the author states:

The collection of fragments that went into A Shropshire Lad were first written because Housman could not hold them back. Many of them were founded directly or indirectly upon his passion for [Noses] Jackson. Others were put down at moments of fierce anger and revolt about certain social injustices. Some were the result of his longing for the landscape of his birth, its changing seasons, its bells and hills, its blossoms. And some few came from God knows where. The disguise of the country yokel was loosely thrown over them for purposes

¹³From a letter quoted in Marlow, p. 150. It should perhaps be specified that ensuing comments in the letter make it clear that Housman meant by this only that A Shropshire Lad was not autobiographical.

¹⁴"Housman's Relics," New Statesman and Nation, XII (Oct. 24, 1936), 631.

¹⁵"Defeatist as Poet," Catholic World, CXLII (April, 1935), 37.

¹⁶Dublin Review, CC (Jan. - June, 1937), 181-182.

of anonymity, but through the veil shone crystal lyrics--clear and salty as tears.¹⁷

Although few psychological and biographical critics can avoid the allurements of their own studies and refrain from the over-extended hypothesis, one would be uncommonly dull not to realize that they have taught us things of interest about many poets, including Housman. On the other hand, such methods as are used by these critics often have the drawback of approaching an author's work in such oblique fashion that they seem to avoid, almost carefully, certain relatively obvious points in their attempts to explicate the much more complicated question of the author's relation to his work.

Criticism of the poetry of Housman seems to be a rather spectacular case in point of this type of scholarly shortsightedness. While much has been done to reveal exactly what sort of "continuous excitement" Housman was visited with in 1895 when he composed A Shropshire Lad, and while virtually all of the poems in that little volume have been carefully analyzed to show their connection with Housman's supposed character, little has been done to explicate the unifying structure which the author so obviously intended to be present in the work.

It has been shown that Housman's critics have been in no accord over the existence of any unifying element in A Shropshire Lad; even those, like Marlow, Scott-Kilvert, and Watson, who have been willing to grant that there is some sort of structure in the book, speak of it in only the vaguest terms. Mr. Le Gallienne's point of view that the work should be regarded "as a piece of country autobiography" in which a character other than that of Housman "is self-revealed and a story is told" seems to have been com-

¹⁷Hawkins, p. 144.

pletely disregarded. This report hopes to show that Mr. Le Gallienne touched upon a truth which has since been unfortunately overlooked.

THE STRUCTURE OF A SHROPSHIRE LAD COMPARED WITH THAT OF LAST POEMS

We know that the original title Housman gave to his first volume of verse was Poems by Terence Hearsay.¹⁸ This title suggests the existence of a persona acting as both speaker and author of the poems. A. W. Pollard suggested to Housman that the title be changed to A Shropshire Lad, and the poet readily consented, stating that he himself was not overly pleased with his first choice.¹⁹ However, this change seems never to have affected Housman's intention that a persona was to be the poems' author and narrator. In a letter to a student, he wrote:

The Shropshire Lad is an imaginary figure with something of my temperament and view of life. Very little in the book is biographical.²⁰

For Housman, then, the "Shropshire Lad" was a figure; it seems reasonable to assume that the figure was the same as that of "Terence Hearsay" in the original title. The assumption is given support by the penultimate poem of A Shropshire Lad, "'Terence, this is stupid stuff." In this poem, the first stanza, enclosed in quotation marks, criticizes "Terence's" poetry. The rest of the poem, not enclosed in quotation marks, is a defence offered by Terence for his verses. Both the criticism and the defence are applicable to all the poems of A Shropshire Lad. Thus, Terence is presented as a

¹⁸Laurence Housman, p. 71. Cf. Richards, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹Hawkins, p. 145. Cf. Laurence Housman, p. 71.

²⁰Quoted in Marlow, p. 150.

poet, and, moreover, as the author of poems much like those which are contained in A Shropshire Lad. One other poem in the book, number VIII, "Farewell to barn and stack and tree," mentions Terence by name. This poem is addressed to Terence, and is, like the first stanza of "Terence, this is stupid stuff," enclosed in quotation marks. Besides number VIII, three other poems in A Shropshire Lad are entirely closed within quotation marks (XXXIV, XLVII, and LVI). If these poems are not taken to be direct statements by Terence, but only as statements "transcribed" by him (as is obviously the case with VIII), then the remaining poems could be the autobiographical statements of an individual.

In Last Poems, on the other hand, the same persona cannot be speaking in each poem. The dying grenadier of LP V, for example, cannot be the dead lancer who speaks in LP VI, and neither character can be the hanged culprit of LP XIV. Now, none of these "mutually exclusive" poems are enclosed in quotation marks in Last Poems; in that volume, quotation marks always have the functional purpose of differentiating between two speakers in the same poem. In a poem like ASL VIII, though, the only possible function one can give to the quotation marks seems to be that of indicating whether a statement is directly made by the speaker or is "transcribed" by him. If this is the case, then Housman must have had some reason for making the distinction; the logical deduction is that there is one persona who speaks in all of the poems of A Shropshire Lad, but that this persona cannot be the subject of the action described in certain of the poems.

This deduction is borne out by an analysis of the poems which are entirely enclosed in quotation marks. Terence, if he is to narrate all of the poems, cannot be the individual who speaks before his own execution in "The Carpenter's Son" (ASL XLVII). The other two "enclosed" poems show the

subject as involved with the army. In "The New Mistress" (ASL XXXIV), the subject determines to join the army, and in "The Day of Battle" (ASL LVI), both speakers are members of the army. However, the speaker of the other poems seems never to have joined the army, but only to have considered it at one point.

Housman, then, seems to have used quotation marks in A Shropshire Lad to enclose only those poems which are spoken by a subject who could not be the speaker in the other poems of the volume. He seems then, to have taken pains to provide a kernel of structure for A Shropshire Lad, though this same kernel of structure is missing from Last Poems.

Ian Scott-Kilvert has written:

The rough chronology of Housman's poetry confirms the impression that his style was formed early and that his verses at sixty or later display almost exactly the same qualities, marvellously unimpaired and yet underdeveloped, as those he was writing as a young man.²¹

In one sense, this is true. There is a similarity of thought, tone, and style which marks all of Housman's work, early as well as late. Yet, if both A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems are taken in their entirety, there are distinctions to be found between the two volumes. The verbal tone of A Shropshire Lad is generally more consistent than that of Last Poems. The poems of A Shropshire Lad are generally personal utterances. If we ignore the quoted or "transcribed" poems, there are only two, "It nods and curtsays and recovers" (XVI), and "The True Lover" (LIII), which do not contain either a first person pronoun referring to the narrator, or else a second person pronoun by which the narrator addresses a specific audience. In Last Poems, on the other hand, eight poems lack this conversational character

²¹Scott-Kilvert, p. 23.

and simply depict a scene or narration from the impersonal point of view.²² One further departure from the diction of A Shropshire Lad can be seen in the use of the "thou" form of the second person pronoun in "The sigh that heaves the grasses" (LP XXVII); while this is the only instance of the old singular form of the pronoun in either work, it seems much less striking in the relatively varied collection of Last Poems than it would if placed in the mouth of the speaker of A Shropshire Lad.

There are three direct references in the poems of A Shropshire Lad which refer to specifically "learned" matter. Two of these are pointedly gleaned by the speaker from stories he has heard. The first is a reference to Narcissus, who isn't mentioned by name, but only as

A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain, [who]
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
(ASL XV)²³

The other "gleaned" reference is to Mithridates, about whom the speaker states:

--I tell a tale that I heard told.
Mithridates, he died old.
(ASL LXII)

The fact that in each case the speaker specifies that he has only heard the references--not read them--seems significant. It should also be noted that in neither of these cases does the speaker seem to expect his audience to be

²²LP IV, VII, XV, XVI, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXXVII. This listing excludes LP XIII, a "dialogue" poem which contains an impersonal description by the narrator, as well as LP XXXVI, which contains only a verb in the imperative mood to indicate its "conversational" nature.

²³The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman (New York, 1940). All subsequent quotations from Housman's poetry are taken from this text.

acquainted with the stories he has "heard told"; he seems to feel called upon to explain the nature of the allusion. The third direct "learned" reference occurs in "The Merry Guide" (ASL XLII), where the character being described is obviously Hermes. However, the only way the audience has of identifying the individual as Hermes stems from the last two lines of the poem, where the "merry guide" is described as having

. . . feet that fly on feathers,
And serpent-circled wand.

But throughout the poem, the narrator shows a strange naïveté about this figure; he seems not to know who the guide is. In fact, he even states that he asked the guide whither he was being directed. This seems to indicate that the speaker in the poem is unaware that his guide is really Hermes, who leads all men to the underworld. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that this reference is also made without any display of classical knowledge on the part of the speaker. There are, to be sure, other classical overtones in A Shropshire Lad; these are especially noticeable in "With rue my heart is laden" (ASL LIV), and in "To an Athlete Dying Young" (ASL XIX). But in using such terms as "rose-lipt maiden," "lightfoot lad," and "strengthless dead," the speaker's allusion to classical sources is obviously unconscious. In these cases, the narrator does not seem at all aware of the classical basis for his terms, nor does he show any expectancy that his audience will relate his terms to their classical sources. The allusions are definitely there, but the speaker is unconscious of them.

In two of the selections in Last Poems, however, classical allusions are made by the speaker in a fully conscious manner; moreover, the audience cannot understand the poems if they are not aware of the classical basis of the allusions. The first of these two poems, "Epithalamium" (LP XXIV), opens

with the lines:

He is here, Urania's son
Hymen come from Helicon;
God that glads the lover's heart,
He is here to join and part.

In "Epithalamium" also occur the lines:

Happy bridegroom, day is done,
And the star from Œta's steep
Calls to bed but not to sleep.

Happy bridegroom, Heaper brings
All desired and timely things.

These "learned" references are not veiled at all, and obviously differ considerably from the allusions in A Shropshire Lad on that account. One other selection from Last Poems, "The Oracles" (LP XXV), is relatively incomprehensible without a knowledge of the classical allusions which the speaker casually makes. Furthermore, even such titles in Last Poems as "Illic Jacet," "Epithalamium," "The Oracles," and "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries," would seem strangely classical amid the titles of A Shropshire Lad.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TERENCE IN A SHROPSHIRE LAD

A Shropshire Lad opens with the beautiful and bittersweetly ironic "1887." This poem sets the scene, as it were, for all that is to follow. The optimism of England on the fiftieth anniversary of Victoria's ascent to the throne of Great Britain is stripped away, and the terrible price of empire is totalled up:

It dawns in Asia, tombstones show
And Shropshire names are read;
And the Nile spills his overflow
Beside the Severn's dead.

But if the Pollyanic cry of "God save the Queen!" is grimly mocked, there

is still great pride in the men who saved the country and in the English skies that knit them and in the English fields that bred them. The facade is stripped away, but what underlies the facade is more noble than all the frills, for it is the lives of brave men.

Thus, "1887" keys the martial sounds that echo through A Shropshire Lad. This military theme achieves such strength that Housman's first publisher suggested that he "make the whole affair . . . into a romance of enlistment." Housman, however, rejected the idea, and would not even approve a "cover representing a yokel in a smock hat with a bunch of recruiting-sergeant's ribbons in his hat."²⁴ Although the martial sounds echo through the book, it is far from a "romance of enlistment." Terence, the speaker, is not a soldier, but a member of those who

. . . pledge in peace by farm and town
The Queen they served in war,
And fire the beacons up and down
The land they perished for.

This, of course, is not to say that the glamor of the military is lost on Terence; at one point, he does decide to join the army (ASLXXXV), but his resolve does not stay firm. His admiration for soldiers is shown a number of times. But Terence is too aware of the shortness of life, of the proximity of death, to be a good spokesman for the army. Even when the flames are at their brightest, Terence is aware that the military saviors cannot watch them.

It is this awareness of death, not the love of the military, which really keynotes A Shropshire Lad.

The saviors come not home to-night;
Themselves they could not save.

²⁴Laurence Housman, p. 85.

No man can save himself, Terence realizes, and this stark reality lies behind all the sorrows and joys of life.

To those who are aware of the reality behind the glamor, a certain cynical turn of mind is inevitable. This cynicism is not that of the immature youth, but that of the young adult forced into a world he never made, a world in which nothing can be purchased without paying more for it than it is worth. Even life must be paid for with death.

Implicit in the awareness of death shown by Terence in "1887" is the theme which will recur throughout A Shropshire Lad; the theme of carpe diem. This is strongly present in the second poem, where Terence for the first time reveals something of himself.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

He is twenty years old, and is aged far beyond his years by his awareness of his own mortality, an awareness that causes fifty years more of life to seem considerably shorter to him than is natural to a youth starting his third decade. The youthful awareness of old age is recapitulated by the metaphorical use of "snow" to represent the white blossoms on the spring-time cherry trees. The carpe diem theme is explicitly present in the third stanza:

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

The third poem, "The Recruit," returns to the emotional point of the first poem. One of Terence's acquaintances has decided to join the saviors. As he leaves to join the army, Terence wishes him well and hopes for his return. But he adds the admonition:

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

. . .

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

The fact that death may await the recruit is accepted, but has little significance for Terence. Later he will quote the advice of the good soldier, whose philosophy he already accepts:

. . . the man that runs away
 Lives to die another day,
 And cowards' funerals, when they come,
 Are not wept so well at home. . . .
 (ASL LVI)

Life must be paid for with death; to delay payment is not to make it less painful. In death, there is both the sadness of "the cherry hung with snow" and the noble humanity of the saviors. This ambiguous antithesis recurs throughout the book. For each sorrow, there is the satisfaction that death ends all sorrow, but, conversely, for each joy, there is the grim knowledge that no joy lasts beyond the grave.

With "Reveille," the fourth poem, the carpe diem theme is again stressed:

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.

However, the title itself perhaps shows a touch of irony. The recruit truly heard the "drums of morning play," but the army life, which begins to emerge as a type of the noble endeavor, appears only in the title of the fourth poem. A further touch of irony is marked by the juxtaposition of "Reveille"

with the fifth poem, where the carpe diem theme is reiterated in an unsuccessful attempt at seduction. The recruit, hears the "Urums of morning" playing the carpe diem theme for which Terence speaks out in "Reveille"; but Terence takes the same theme and makes it the basis for a seduction in the manner of "To His Coy Mistress." However, the girl of ASL V remains coy and refuses Terence's argument:

--Ah, life, what is it but a flower?
 Why must true lovers sigh?
 Be kind, have pity, my own, my pretty,--
 'Good-bye, young man, good-bye.'

The comic farewell of the last line offers an interesting contrast to Terence's noble bon voyage to the recruit.

Disappointment in love is followed naturally by a mockery of it in

ASL VI:

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.

Terence leaves love then, to those lads foolish enough to love and those maids foolish enough to buy their woes. But he also has been hurt, and, in ASL VII finds solace in the one natural cure for all hurts. Going about his workaday task of plowing, he hears his own soul singing, along with all nature, the song that promises an end to all grief:

'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.'

Terence's first departure from a friend took place in the noble circumstances of the recruit's leaving for the wars. In ASL VIII, another friend departs under less happy conditions:

'Terence, look your last at me,
For I come home no more.

'The sun burns on the half-mown hill,
By now the blood has dried;
And Maurice amongst the hay lies still
And my knife is in his side.'

The fratricide, though, can't help but impress both Terence and the reader with his charitable friendship and his kind wishes for his old companion:

'I wish you strength to bring you pride,
And a love to keep you clean,
And I wish you luck, come Lammastide,
At racing on the green.'

This kindness connects the poem with ASL IX, and enables the reader to understand Terence's statement in that poem:

There sleeps in Shrewsbury jail to-night,
Or wakes, as may betide,
A better lad, if things went right,
Than most that sleep outside.

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

ASL X is entitled "March," and with spring, love once again becomes a factor. The cycle of attempted seduction, rejection, and consolation begins anew. The desire for love is expressed in ASL XI:

In farm and field through all the shire
The eye beholds the heart's desire;
Ah, let not only mine be vain,
For lovers should be loved again.

Again, Terence's attempt at seduction is based on the theme of carpe diem:

On your midnight pallet lying,
Listen, and undo the door:

. . .

In the land to which I travel,
The far dwelling, let me say--
Once, if here the couch is gravel,

In a kinder bed I lay,
 And the breast the darnel smothers
 Rested once upon another's
 When it was not clay.

Seemingly, the attempt is a failure, for, in ASL XII, we once again find Terence seeking consolation in the ultimate forgetfulness of the grave:

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.

. . .

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

But two years have passed, as we learn in ASL XIII, and with the passage of time has come an intensification of feeling. The old love is not so easily forgotten, and the feeling of loss is sustained:

'The heart out of the bosom
 Was never givin 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.

Terence continues to feel the loss in ASL XIV:

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

He then offers one more love poem, ASL XV. This could be interpreted as a last plea for his love to have pity upon him, or, perhaps, a sophistic rationalization of why it is really a good thing his love has refused him.

He compares her to Narcissus, and asks:

But why should you as well as I
 Perish? gaze not in my eyes.

Finally, he is reduced to the impersonal and nearly despairing position of

ASL XVI:

The nettle nods, the wind blows over,
 The man, he does not move,
 The lover of the grave, the lover
 That hanged himself for love.

This seems to reveal a certain ambiguity about Terence's feelings toward death. Rationally, he knows that he must die like all men; it makes little difference when one dies. On the other hand, the finality of death is awesome--and unattractive.

In ASL XVII, Terence wonders at his ability to survive the pain he feels:

Wonder 'tis how little mirth
 Keeps the bones of man from lying
 On the bed of earth.

But in ASL XVIII, Terence finds himself completely recovered:

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

In XIX, one more friend leaves Terence, but in this departure there is neither the ignominy of the execution nor the doubt of the fortunes of war. If the "athlete dying young" has gone forever, he has departed with his full share of glory. For him, as for the soldiers, Terence feels only admiration:

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

But if Terence envies the athlete, he is also aware of the fact that life offers some good, even if the good seems less than the ill. In ASL XX, he sees that envy is foolishness, no matter what one desires, it is seldom better than what he already has.

. . . in the golden-sanded brooks
 And azure mares I spy
 A silly lad that longs and looks
 And wishes he were I.

Perhaps the comparative optimism of the "silly lad" is a result of the happy idyll he is experiencing with the "Bredon Hill" girl. But the Bredon Hill girl's death destroys Terence's wedding plans, and in ASL XXII, the martial sounds ring out once again. But Terence has seen too many good people called away from him, people like the fratricide, the young athlete, and the "Bredon Hill" girl. All friendships now seem to be of but short duration, as short as the meeting of two strangers' glances. Seeing a redcoat looking at him, he says:

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;

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.

ASL XXIII in some ways recapitulates "To an Athlete Dying Young"; Terence views the "lads in their hundreds" at the Ludlow fair, and knows that among the throng are a few "that will never be old." However, in this poem Terence does not simply admire the state of those who die young, but goes on to consider the inscrutibility of fate, the impossibility of knowing when any individual will die:

But now you may stare as you like and there's
 nothing to scan;
 And brushing your elbow unguessed at and not to
 be told
 They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage
 of man,
 The lads that will die in their glory and never
 be old.

The reflection on life's inscrutibility and possible brevity naturally

leads Terence back to the carpe diem theme in ASL XXIV. But this time the poem is not, like "Reveille," simply an exhortation to "seize the day"; it is an offer of comradeship as well. The passing of many friends, coupled with the awareness of the possibility of death's proximity to both friend and self, has taught Terence that friendship is valuable--and as fleeting as life itself.

Say, lad, have you things to do?
Quick then, while your days 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. . . .

ASL XXV to XXVII deal with the same set of circumstances. In ASL XXV, Terence tells of a girl, Rose Harland, whom he lost to another man, Fred. But Fred was called to the grave, and Rose returned to Terence:

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.

In ASL XXVI, Terence walks with Rose and thinks back on his real or imagined premonitions of the "Bredon Hill" girl's death:

Along the field as we came by
A year ago, my love and I,
The aspen over stile and stone
Was talking to itself alone.
' . . .
'time shall put them both to bed,
But she shall lie with earth above,
And he beside another love.'

Now, walking under the same aspen tree, Terence hears nothing, but fears that perhaps Rose has premonitions of her own. Thus, in ASL XXVII, the macabre conversation between Terence and the ghostly Fred is laced with a double irony. While Fred is unaware of the relationship between his old

sweetheart and his old friend, Terence fears that in talking to Fred, he is really talking to his future self.

ASL XXVIII to XXXII form an interlude in which Terence takes stock of himself--and of his humanity. He feels within himself the primordial conflicts that exist in all men, the primitive impulses of guilt which the Christian calls Original Sin. In "The Welsh Marches" (ASL XXVIII), he searches for the answer and finds it in a sort of Jungian race-consciousness. He is a child of a violent union:

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

But if that which caused him to be is the cause of Terence's internal strife, then he realizes that the struggle will only end when he ceases to be:

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?

The awareness of death's necessity naturally brings Terence back to the carpe diem theme in "The Lent Lily" (ASL XXIX). Terence sees here that some opportunities are not to be repeated. If one lives carefully, he can gather primroses until May, but some opportunities, like the Lent Lily, die on Easter day. In taking stock of himself, Terence realizes that he has for too long a time put off taking any definite step. He is too sensitive to remain a Shropshire plowboy all his life; he wants to attempt something new, and yet, while the fire to undertake something new burns within him, the fear of failure also haunts him. The fire tells him to hurry, to try to bear away the daffodil that dies on Easter; but at the same time, the voice of caution, like a ghostly chill, tells him to wait and to be satisfied with the primroses which last longer and are easier to gather. Terence

experiences this struggle in ASL XXX; he is aware that all men have experienced the same strife. The only end to the struggle is death:

Agued once like me were they,
But I like them shall win my way
Lastly to the bed of mold
Where there's neither heat nor cold.

But from my grave across my brow
Plays no wind of healing now,
And fire and ice within me fight
Beneath the suffocating night.

In ASL XXXI, Terence realizes that the disease of fire and ice with which he is infected is the same infection which he attributed to a racial blight in "The Welsh Marches." The fact that Terence is the child of a violent union holds true not only for all children begotten of Saxons on slaves, but, ultimately, for all human beings:

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.

There, 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.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone;
To-day the Roman and his trouble
Are ashes under Uricon.

Since life is short and death is long, Terence forms his resolve to act. More aware than ever of the fleetingness of life and friendship, his next utterance, ASL XXXII, is again in the carpe diem theme. He knows that life is only a breath of air (an image that connects with the previous poem), and tells his friends:

Take my hand quick and tell me,
What have you in your heart.

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

In ASL XXXIII Terence applies his new "rule of finality" to love. He tells his beloved (possibly sophisticatedly):

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

But since not even love has the power to keep the heart from perishing, then all is idle, and

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

Finding all things that seem permanent threatened by death, Terence has now cut himself free from everything in his old life, and prepares to go forth to find something new. The next poem, "The New Mistress" (ASL XXXIV), is a "transcribed" poem. In it, Terence relates a conversation between a youth and his former sweetheart. The Girl tells him that he is no longer wanted, and the youth announces his intention of going where he is wanted, by joining the army. The effect of this "transcribed" poem is to strike the martial strain once again. In the next poem, ASL XXXV, Terence hears this strain and finds it irresistible:

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

Influenced by others, then, who have decided to court "The New Mistress," Terence decides to leave his native Shropshire and become a redcoat. But for Terence, joining the army is not simply an escape from the torment of a broken heart. He has already experienced this and the pain is now gone.

He has rejected love in ASL XXXIII, and his departure is a seeking for something permanent, something that a man can depend upon for at least the breath's span of his own life. But even as he leaves, he is aware that he will find nothing. Earlier, in ASL XX, he had whimsically looked into a pool of water and found the reflection a more attractive world than the one he inhabited. Now he is doing almost the same thing, and this is made clear in ASL XXXVI:

The world is round, so travellers tell,
 And straight though reach the track,
 Trudge on, trudge on, 'twill all be well,
 The way will guide one back.

But ere the circle homeward hies
 Far, far, must it remove:
 White in the moon the long road lies
 That leads me from my love.

Terence's departure, however, is not like that of Fred, nor of the young athlete, nor of the fratricide, nor, finally, even of the recruit. For, while Terence indeed leaves Shropshire in ASL XXXVII, he travels not to Nile and not to Asia, but to London. But even as he rides the train toward London, he is aware of the bonds holding him to his native area and people.

On banks of Thames they must not say
 Severn breeds worse men than they;
 And friends abroad must bear in mind
 Friends at home they leave behind
 Oh, I shall be stiff and cold
 When I forget you, hearts of gold;
 The land where I shall mind you not
 Is the land where all's forgot.

In the next three poems, Terence expresses different aspects of homesickness. He misses successively the people (ASL XXXVIII), climate (ASL XXXIX), and landscape (ASL XL) of

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

(ASL XL)

In ASL XLI, the final bitter irony of Terence's search is made manifest.

Whereas in ASL XXXVII, Terence had determined:

On banks of Thames they must not say
 Severn breeds worse men than they. . . .

in ASL XLI, while residing in London, he sees:

In many an eye that measures me
 The mortal sickness of a mind
 Too unhappy to be kind.
 Undone with misery, all they can
 Is to hate their fellow man;
 And till they drop they needs must still
 Look at you and wish you ill.

Thus does the reality of the emptiness of his search become fully manifest to Terence. Seeking to relieve the struggle of fire and ice within him by taking the positive action of moving to London has failed; therefore, he decides on the opposite course, and, in ASL XLII, gives himself up completely to the spirit that moves him, "The Happy Guide," who, identified with Hermes,²⁵ eventually leads all men to the land of the dead. But, not knowing who his guide is, or where he is being led, Terence aimlessly follows. This course of least resistance is easy, and Terence tells his audience:

Content at heart I followed
 With my delightful guide.
 (ASL XLII)

But Terence eventually becomes aware of the goal:

And midst the fluttering legion
 Of all that ever died
 I follow, and before us
 Goes the delightful guide,

²⁵See p. 10.

With lips that brim with laughter
 But never once respond,
 And feet that fly on feathers,
 And serpent-circled wand.

With this awareness, Terence gains a new understanding of the voice within him, the voice of his bones. This voice tells him that there is no place to go, no cure to seek; he carries his own mortality with him. The bones only await their chance to assert their superiority over the ever-dying flesh, when they say:

'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?'
 (ASL XLIII)

But Terence sees that the bone's superiority to the "slough of sense" and the "dust of thought" which is him, rests in the bones' ability to endure. Therefore, in striving to assert his own capability to endure--even though defeat is inevitable--he determines to remain the master of his bones as long as he can:

Therefore they shall do my will
 To-day 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 steadfast and enduring bone.

But endurance is not the only answer, Terence realizes. If the mortal soul is not strong enough to rule its mortal subordinate, the body, then endurance is not noble, but cowardly. The soul should only remain if it is able to "hale the sullen slaves along"; if the soul cannot be master of its body, then it is a traitorous soul which does not deserve to exist. Therefore, Terence can admire the suicide in ASL XLIV:

Oh soon, and better so than later
 After long disgrace and scorn,
 You shot dead the household traitor,
 The soul that should not have been born.

In ASL XLV, Terence reiterates the idea of the necessity for a person to destroy his own soul--if that soul is sick. The logic of his argument is clear: a sick organ of the body is amputated; since a sick soul cannot be amputated, the only answer is for it to be destroyed. In such cases, the noble thing is not to endure, but to end the disease quickly:

. . . play the man, stand up and end you,
 When your sickness is your soul.
 (ASL XLV)

But the permanence of death continues to haunt Terence, and this is brought out in ASL XLVI, where he finds haulm and shrivelled flax--not living flowers--the proper decorations for the grave:

--Oh, bring from hill and stream and plain
 Whatever will not flower again,
 To give him comfort: he and those
 Shall bide eternal bedfellows
 Where low upon the couch he lies
 Whence he never shall arise.

However, the next poem, "The Carpenter's Son" (ASL XLVII) turns Terence from thoughts of death--at least self-inflicted (and, therefore, welcomed) death. Christ was a Teacher who taught salvation, and Who testified to His teaching with His death, but in Terence's world, there is no hope of salvation. Endurance is the highest teaching, and this is the gospel preached by the carpenter's son in ASL XLVII:

'Make some day a decent end,
 Shrewder fellows than your friend.
 Fare you well, for ill fare I:
 Live, lads, and I will die.'

A life that "fares well" (insofar as life can do so at all) is better than death, even a noble death.

And yet, even if life is recognized as some sort of absolute good, it is not necessarily pleasant to live, nor is it necessarily understood; it is merely to be endured.

Now, and I muse for why and never find the reason,
 I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.
 Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
 Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.
 (ASL XLVIII)

This endurance, of course, parallels the teaching of the carpenter's son in the preceding poem:

'Then I might have built perhaps
 Gallows-trees for other chaps,
 Never dangled on my own,
 Had I but left ill alone.'

In ASL XLIX, Terence tries to avoid the problem by ignoring it; the tone shifts from stoicism to hedonism as he seeks distraction:

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

But Terence is too "clever" to accept such a doctrine, as attractive as it may be. Life is truly a vale of tears, and the sorrows increase throughout life. There is no escape from them. In the quiet of the Clun villages in his native Shropshire, Terence "still had sorrows to lighten"; it is no wonder that these sorrows have not disappeared in the noise of London. In the final three stanzas of ASL L, Terence makes the first direct reference to the aging process that he has undergone at the same time that his philosophical development has taken place. Once more, he finds endurance to be the stuff of life, and the only consolation is that nothing must be endured forever except death itself; but until death there is no relief:

And if as a lad grows elder
 The troubles he bears are more,
 He carries his griefs on a shoulder
 That handselled them before.

Where shall one halt to deliver
 This luggage I'd lief set down?
 Not Thames, not Teme is the river,
 Nor London nor Knighton the town:

'Tis a long way further than Knighton,
 A quieter place than Clun,
 Where doomsday may thunder and lighter
 And little 'twill matter to one.

In ASL LI, Terence at least finds some consolation in comparing his own lot to that of a Greek statue with which he holds an imaginary conversation. He imagines the statue as bearing the same burdens which he himself does, and finds his sole relief that at least he must only endure his sorrows for a relatively short time. There is, then, some consolation for Terence in the statue's exhortation:

'Courage, lad, 'tis not for long:
 Stand, quit you like a stone, be strong.'

This renews Terence's resolution of duty, and he tells his audience:

. . . I stept out in flesh and bone
 Manful like the man of stone.

The ideal of rock-like endurance has reached its absolute height.

ASL LII forms a bridge passage from the resolve expressed in ASL LI and the recollections of time past which follow. By accepting the ever-growing burden of sorrows that continues to accumulate on those who live and endure, Terence is forced to realize that he can never regain the small, forever-lost happinesses of his youth in Shropshire; endurance comes with resignation, but it does not bring back any of the lost joys or freedoms:

. . . no more remembered
 In fields where I was known,
 Here I lie down in London
 And turn to rest alone.

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

This "home thought" flows into a series of events and people which Terence recollects from his youth. ASL LIIII pictures "The True Lover," a lover different from Terence. In ASL XVI and XVII, Terence rejected the idea of dying for love; but the true lover "stopped the clock" because his beloved would not accept him. The title of the poem, perhaps, indicates that none of Terence's loves were really "true."

The next poem, ASL LIV, is one in which Terence generally considers all the people who have departed from him--the recruit, the fratricide, the young athlete, the Breden Hill girl, and, undoubtedly, many others.

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

ASL LV contrasts the lads and maidens of ASL LIV with Terence himself--or, more correctly, with another lad like he once was:

Now that other lads than I
 Strip to bathe on Severn shore,
 They, no help, for all they try,
 Tread the mill I trod before.

. . .

There, on thoughts that once were mine,
 Day looks down the eastern steep,
 And the youth at morning shine
 Makes the vow he will not keep.

In the first of the two quoted stanzas, Terence reveals the inevitability of life taking the course it has for him. One can die young, but if one lives, he shares man's grief. Perhaps some can ignore the sorrows of life, just as Terence tried to do in ASL XLIX, but for the "clever" heart, life must be recognized as the sorrowful and difficult treadmill which Terence

has found it to be; that is the way life is. The second stanza quoted from ASL LV reveals that the broken vows of youth weigh heavily on Terence. The picture of "The True Lover" was a contrast with Terence's own attitude toward youthful love and its promises; in ASL LVI, another picture is brought to mind by another broken vow. Throughout the book, the army has been an epitome of valor. In ASL XXXV, Terence had decided to reach for this goal. He thinks now, in ASL LVI, of the recruits and their hastening toward the grave. Their deaths have the glory of the lost violent souls of Shropshire, and of the lads who were not to grow old. ASL LVI is a "transcribed" poem, and it depicts a conversation between two soldiers, one young, and one a veteran. The young soldier fears the danger of battle, and the veteran answers his fears with martial philosophy. The older soldier recognizes, like Terence, that even life's best is bad. However, unlike Terence, he seeks the solution to the misery of life, not in simple endurance, but in the bold action. For him, life gains some significance if it is risked. If the risk is lost, the only consequence is the inevitable one of death. He states:

'Therefore, though the best is bad,
Stand and do the best, my lad;
Stand and fight and see your slain,
And take the bullet in your brain.'

But Terence has rejected his vow to join the army. The violent death has lost its desirability--if not its glamor--for him. The "philosophy of endurance" he has developed in his more mature years is clearly stated in

ASL LVII:

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

In the next poem, ASL LVIII, Terence finally returns to Shropshire. But his home is no longer what it was when he left. Many friends had already departed forever from Terence when he first went to London, but on returning, he finds that still more are gone:

Now Dick lies long in the churchyard,
And Ned lies long in jail,
And I come home to Ludlow
Amidst the moonlight pale.

Possibly Ned is the same man who lies dead on "The Isle of Portland" (ASL LIX); whether he is or not, Terence is again speaking of a lost friend of his youth in the poem. But the former admiration for the violent and the early-dead is no longer manifested. In ASL LVIII and LIX, there are only the statements that friends have preceded the speaker to the grave.

But from early in the book, the transient nature of friendship has been a strong theme in A Shropshire Lad; by touching on this theme again, Terence naturally leads into the final statement of the carpe diem motif, which has so often been associated with the pledge of friendship throughout the book. But Terence realizes that the best gift of comradeship is the hand given to friend one to the grave. The day to be seized is the day of death. The final statement of the carpe diem theme, then, has neither the old railing against the cruelty of life nor the tone of youthful heartiness. In ASL LX, there is only the awareness that time is fleeting and that the darkness of death, welcome to those who--like Terence--have drunk life's bitter dregs, is closing in:

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.

The following poem, "Hughley Steeple" (ASL LXI), again turns to the different ways of dying. In the Hughley graveyard, the suicides are buried on the north side of the steeple, separated from the other bodies, which lie on the south side. Terence does not romanticize in this poem about the "slayers of themselves"; he sees death now as the great equalizer. It makes little difference how one dies; death is the same for all:

To north, to south, lie parted,
 With Hughley tower above,
 The kind, the single-hearted,
 The lads I used to love.
 And, south or north, 'tis only
 A choice of friends one knows,
 And I shall ne'er be lonely
 Asleep with these or those.

After ASL LX and LXI have summed up and recapitulated the mature form of the carpe diem theme, the two final poems present a coda for the entire book. In ASL LXII, Terence's verses are criticized for their lack of joy. As a young man, Terence would probably have cynically sneered at such criticism, but now he admits:

. . . the world has still
 Much good, but much less good than ill,
 And while the sun and moon endure
 Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,
 I'd face it as a wise man would,
 And train for ill and not for good.

Terence acknowledges that his poems are not the happiest of reading, but, he says, they do have the didactic virtue of teaching one how to bear up under the slings and arrows of this outrageous life. The youthful critic of the first stanza may not be able to appreciate this fact now; he is probably too busy with his own loves, ideals, and ambitions--just as Terence once was. But the mature Terence can tell the young critic that the poems of A Shropshire Lad

. . . should do good to the heart and head
 When your soul is in my soul's stead;
 And I will friend you if I may,
 In the dark and cloudy day.

The critic then, does not resemble Terence, though Terence was once like
 the critic:

Oh I have been to Ludlow fair
 And left my necktie God knows where,
 And carried half-way home, or near,
 Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:
 Then the world seemed none so bad. . . .

The difference between the two speakers is the difference between a
 youthful and a mature outlook on life. Terence has aged considerably from
 the already old-seeming lad of twenty in ASL II.

Terence's defense of his poems rests basically on the effect they have
 of "acclimatizing" youth for the sorrows that make up every man's life.
 This marks the final proof of Terence's development. Previously, he had
 lavished praise on the violent youths who had acted, the noble lads who had
 died young. Now, though, the ideal is the ancient king of Pontus:

--I tell the tale that I heard told.
 Mithridates, he died old.

The final poem, ASL LXIII is almost an epitaph for the book. In six-
 teen lines, Terence repeats the "mithridatic" justification for his poems
 offered in longer form in ASL LXII. Terence's flowers--his poems--may have
 little to please the Pollyannic hearts of the insensitive youths who are
 not forced by their own cleverness to see life as it is; but they have
 value for those who, like Terence, know that life is only a short period of
 day preceding endless night:

I hoed and trenched and weeded,
 And took the flowers to fair;
 I brought them home unheeded;
 The hue was not the wear.

So up and down I sow them
For lads like me to find,

. . .

And luckless lads will wear them
When I am dead and gone.

The implication is, of course, that even in youth Terence differed from the majority of lads; even his early statements would not have been the wear. But this is certainly no revelation. The early maturity of Terence strikes the reader already in ASL II. While Terence participates in such youthful games as football, cricket, and seduction, and while he is prone to a youthfully romantic idealization of army and war, he is also aware that the cherry is, even in springtime, hung with snow. Terence seems to have been born old, but he grows older in A Shropshire Lad.

TERENCE: A STRUCTURAL ELEMENT IN A SHROPSHIRE LAD

It is this development of Terence which gives structure to the book. Chronologically, the reader follows the growth of Terence from the youth of twenty in ASL II ("Loveliest of trees, the cherry now") to the mature individual of indeterminate age of ASL LXII ("Terence, this is stupid stuff"). In terms of space, Terence travels from Shropshire to London and back. Psychologically, Terence's outlook develops from the youthful cynicism found in such early poems as ASL XIII ("When I was one-and twenty"), through the absolute pessimism of the "London period," best represented in such poems as ASL XLVIII ("Be still, my soul, be still"), to the final philosophical acceptance of the sadness of life found in the last four poems of A Shropshire Lad.

In outlining the structure of the book in this manner, it cannot be

denied that some of the transitions are more clear than others and that, while some of the connections are certain (the "London sequence," for instance), others are less definite. Yet, it seems clear that the ideas of the speaker do progress, and that the progression is one of gradual aging. The Terence of ASL LXII ("Terence, this is stupid stuff") is obviously the same as the Terence of ASL VIII ("Farewell to barn and stack and tree"), but his ideas have deepened with the passing years. It is this progression from old-youth to maturity that gives structure to A Shropshire Lad.

One objection to this thesis has been implicitly raised by Maude Hawkins, who, in A. E. Housman: The Man behind a Mask, raises the question (with the support of Laurence Housman) that some of the poems in A Shropshire Lad could not have been written by a country yokel.²⁶ However, this does not seem too significant. Housman had the precedent of the pastoral tradition to use if he so chose, which would certainly permit him to elevate the speech of a rustic into beautiful poetry. Few people object to the poetry of Shakespeare's plays; yet one cannot realistically hypothesize that a military man like Enocharbus could spontaneously spout lines like:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold.
(Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii.)

Further, Terence is obviously no yokel, in spite of his rural background. Attributing lines of great poetry to such a spokesman surely does not strain the imagination as much as, say, the attribution of "Lycides" to a shepherd.

One other minor point which might have a disturbing effect on the solidity of the structure of the book as it is presented in this report

²⁶Hawkins, pp. 144, 147.

might be the fact that Bredon Hill in ASL XXI is not actually in Shropshire, but rather in Worcestershire, Housman's actual home.²⁷ Housman wrote that "The poem was written before I knew the book would be a Shropshire book."²⁸ However, even here there seems to be little reason to insist on the fact that Bredon Hill is in Worcestershire; Housman simply liked the sound of the name, and did not wish to change it, so he placed it in the Shropshire of his book. Laurence Housman once made a similar charge against the author, when he discovered that Hughley Churchyard actually does not exist as it is depicted in ASL LXI, "Hughley Steeple." Of this occasion, Laurence Housman wrote:

When I reproached Alfred for his romantic falsification of local history, his explanation was that the place he really meant had an ugly name, so he substituted Hughley. "I did not apprehend," he wrote, "that the faithful would be making pilgrimages to these holy places."²⁹

If A. E. Housman would falsify local history, he certainly would have no objections to shifting minor points of local geography as well.

A Shropshire Lad, then, can be taken as a "piece of country biography"--to use Mr. Le Gallienne's words. Moreover, it seems that Housman took some pains to see that his first book was so regarded. Certainly, he used the raw materials of his own life as a basis for composition, just as all poets do. The deductions of the psychological critics on this matter may be of some help in understanding the poems, but the fact that Terence himself was a figure created especially to unify A Shropshire Lad seems much more significant for the reader than do any psychological conclusions to be drawn

²⁷L. Housman, p. 197.

²⁸Loc. Cit.

²⁹L. Housman, p. 82

about Housman himself. An understanding of Terence's function reveals the unity of A Shropshire Lad and thus lends considerably to the reader's understanding of the volume as a whole.

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THE FUNCTION OF TERENCE HEARSAY AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT
IN A. E. HOUSHMAN'S A SHROPSHIRE LAD

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A. E. Housman's A Shropshire Lad was first published in 1896. The initial response to the little volume of poetry was apathetic, but Housman's reputation has taken great strides in the twentieth century. However, in the midst of the numerous critical commentaries on Housman's work, an insight into A Shropshire Lad first stated by Richard Le Gallienne in 1896 has been overlooked. It was Mr. Le Gallienne's opinion that A Shropshire Lad should be looked upon as the autobiographical statements of a self-revealing character.

Two facets of the book's history seem to support Mr. Le Gallienne's thesis: Housman never permitted segments of A Shropshire Lad to be published individually, although he did permit single poems from his other published volume to be anthologized, and he originally titled the book Poems by Terence Hearsay.

Other critics have found elements of unity in the poems of A Shropshire Lad, but they have been in disagreement as to what kind of unity this is, and they have spoken of it only in vague and general terms.

A comparison of A Shropshire Lad with Last Poems confirms the impression that a biographical unity is contained in the former book. While development of character and unity of viewpoint are absent in Last Poems, Housman apparently made an effort to endow A Shropshire Lad with these effects. Even the tone of A Shropshire Lad is more consistent than is that of Last Poems.

The development of Terence as principal figure in the poems of A Shropshire Lad can be analyzed, and at the conclusion of the book, the reader can review this development from a twenty year old youth in ASL II to a more mature individual in ASL LXII. Moreover, the factors affecting this maturing can be understood by looking at the poems of A Shropshire Lad as

a unified whole.

It is this development of Terence which gives structure to the book. An understanding of Terence's function reveals the unity of A Shropshire Lad and thus lends considerably to the reader's understanding of the volume as a whole.