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tions, with *Biographical Notes*. Letchworth, Garden City Press, 1916. Second edition. "John Masfield" pencilled on the title-page. Quinn 6146.

Ronald Peacock. *The Poet in the Theatre*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co. [1946]. First American edition. Discusses the poetic element in Synge's drama on pages 106-116. Not in Quinn.

John Butler Yeats. *Essays Irish and American, with an Appreciation by A. E.* Dublin, The Talbot Press; London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1918. First edition. Discusses Irish character and Synge's interpretation of it. Quinn 11334.



### A. E. HOUSMAN'S COMMENTS ON MORRIS, MASEFIELD, WILDE, DOUGLAS AND SAINTSBURY

By FRASER BRAGG DREW<sup>1</sup> and WILLIAM VINCENT SIELLER<sup>2</sup>

A. E. HOUSMAN was both classical scholar and lyric poet, and his reputation as both is secure. His critical faculty, his passion for correctness, his acid wit, and his love for the exact word, that *curiosa felicitas* which Petronius once found in Horace, are all obvious to the student of Housman. The marginal comments which he made habitually in the books he read reveal these gifts repeatedly and afford further evidence of Housman's prejudices, his learning, and his accuracy of observation.

We have recently examined, in the collection of H. B. Collamore of West Hartford, Conn., several books from the library of Housman, and have selected from them a number of marginal comments in the poet's hand which shed light on his attitudes toward William Morris, John

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Masefield, Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, and George Saintsbury.

### I: WILLIAM MORRIS

Grant Richards, who refers frequently to Housman's opinions of other writers, makes no mention of the poet's attitude toward Morris. Laurence Housman quotes one letter written to him by his brother after the appearance of Laurence's lecture on pre-Raphaelitism; in this letter A. E. H. writes:

I think you make too much of Morris, and that the manner of *The Defense of Guenevere* is just one of his falsettos. He dropped it like a hot copper when he found it did not pay.<sup>1</sup>

Several marginalia in Housman's copy of the third volume of Saintsbury's *A History of English Prosody* indicate quite clearly Housman's opinion of Morris. When Saintsbury begins his discussion of Morris, A. E. H. writes in the margin: "Here follow 19 pages on this little poet and poor metrist."<sup>2</sup> A few pages later, after a commentary on the "splendid metre of *Sigurd the Volsung*," Saintsbury writes (page 329):

The exact process by which he hit upon it is to me, even after my almost diabolic wandering up and down the earth of English prosody, and going to and fro in it, uncertain.

Housman underlines the words, "he hit upon it," and writes in the margin, "He didn't. He took it from Tennyson." This may be more an attack upon Saintsbury than upon Morris, for during his reading of most of the book Housman seems to have been interested chiefly in contradicting the critic. When Saintsbury writes (page 330) that "internal rhyme is carefully kept out of the blend, because

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Housman, *My Brother, A. E. Housman* (New York, 1938), p. 187. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>2</sup> George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody* (London, 1911), III, 316.

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that would introduce a second internal pause," Housman writes in the margin, "No: Morris had not skill enough to bring it in." And beside a sixteen-line quotation from *The House of the Wolfings* in a footnote (page 331), he pencils: "If I had written it I would not have published it."

### II: JOHN MASEFIELD

Grant Richards recalls a dinner at which his guests included A. E. Housman and John Masefield. This is the meeting to which Masefield probably alludes in a note to Cyril Clemens when he writes, "I first met . . . Housman many years ago, over thirty years I think . . . I had a very great admiration for his poems."<sup>3</sup> After that dinner Housman wrote to Richards, "I liked Masefield very much."<sup>4</sup> Housman was less favorable in his criticism of Masefield's work, although he did not dismiss him so summarily as was often his custom with other writers. He wrote to Richards several months after the dinner:

I also have to thank you for Masefield's two novels, of which I have read *Captain Margaret*. Quite readable and containing a number of interesting details; but bad.

Later in the same year he wrote:

Also I must thank you for Masefield's plays, which are well worth reading and contain a lot that is very good; only he has got the Elizabethan notion that in order to have tragedy you must have villains, and villains of disgusting wickedness or vileness.

In Housman's copy of the *English Review* of February 1913, there appear two pencilled marginal notes beside lines of Masefield's *The Daffodil Fields*. The first, to which Prof. William White has called attention,<sup>5</sup> is apparently

<sup>3</sup> *Mark Twain Quarterly*, I, 2 (1936), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Richards, *Housman, 1897-1936* (New York, 1942), p. 88. Quoted by permission of the publishers, Oxford University Press. The two further quotations that follow are from pages 93 and 94 of this book.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. William White has published three articles on Housman marginalia (*Notes and Queries*, 181:301; *PMLA*, 58:584-587; *Rev. of Engl. Studies*, 24:240-241).

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a criticism of Masefield's allegedly imperfect knowledge of the flowers of the English countryside. Beside the line, "And blue dog violets come, and glistening celandine," in which he underlines the first five words, he writes (page 338), "they don't." Later Housman objects to the elevated tone of the vocabulary attributed to Masefield's farmer in his deathbed comment upon life. Beside the line, "It is ablaze with sign and countersign," he writes (page 340), "quo' the farmer!" Housman's keen interest in native English flowers and trees and his extensive knowledge of them may be noted in his writing and in the commentaries which various people close to the poet have made. From this it is fairly evident that the first criticism may be legitimate. The second expresses a criticism often levelled at Masefield, that he sometimes speaks through his characters lines appropriate in thought and language to the poet, but not to the character. A much later appraisal of Masefield was written in 1930 by Housman to his brother:

No, I was not given the chance of being Laureate. I thought Masefield the right choice, as all the other good poets are obviously unsuited for the official duties.<sup>6</sup>

### III: OSCAR WILDE AND LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS

Grant Richards comments (page 297) in his biography of Housman that

in the notorious instance of Oscar Wilde both the Housman brothers made no secret of their compassion for a stricken man in the disgrace and agony that he brought on himself; and it should be taken for granted that A. E. Housman's unbounded abhorrence for the working of 'the laws of God and the laws of man' would lead him to be very tolerant towards all unhappy men who became entangled in the meshes of sin and crime.

A 1928 letter to Seymour Adelman, quoted (page 200) by Laurence Housman, contains a commentary on A. E. Hous-

<sup>6</sup> L. Housman, p. 183: see also Percy Withers, *A Buried Life* (London, 1940), p. 59.

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man's attitude toward Wilde and Douglas. The poet wrote in answer to Adelman's queries about Wilde and *A Shropshire Lad*:

*A Shropshire Lad* was published while Mr. Wilde was in prison, and when he came out I sent him a copy myself. Robert Ross told me that when he visited his friend in jail he learnt some of the poems by heart and recited them to him. . . . Parts of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* are above Wilde's average, but I suspect they were written by Lord Alfred Douglas.

Apparently Housman had not too much respect for Wilde's ability as a poet. A marginal comment in Housman's copy of Douglas' book, *Oscar Wilde and Myself*, would indicate that Housman had little respect for Lord Alfred as a person. The book ends (page 312) with the statement:

It seems to me a great deal more than probable that the present volume will rouse a considerable deal of what is called controversy. . . . I shall only beg that those reviewers whose duty and business it will be to deal with this book may remember that I am entitled to exactly as much justice in this world as Wilde and Wilde's friends. The forces against me are undoubtedly numerous and powerful. On the other hand, it is very certain that I shall not run away from them.

Housman underlines the last twelve words and writes underneath: "Boulogne-sur-mer, France." The preface to Douglas' work is signed "Boulogne-sur-mer, France," and Housman had obviously noted this fact. It might be assumed that he meant to suggest that Lord Alfred *had* run away and had even penned this last statement from the vantage point of France. If this interpretation is correct, Housman's comment is a withering dismissal of Douglas' sincerity.

The only other marginal comment in this book shows nothing beyond the care with which Housman read and his passion for accuracy. When Douglas writes:

I went off at once to see Mr. — now Sir George — Alexander and Mr.

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Lewis Waller, at whose theatres Wilde's plays were running, and asked them to offer bail.

Housman writes in the margin of page 110: "Waller had no theatre."

### IV: GEORGE SAINTSBURY

Grant Richards refers several times to Professor George Saintsbury, but each time he appears as a respected connoisseur of wines and not as a literary critic. Richards even writes (pages 174-175):

What Housman thought of George Saintsbury as a critic of literature I do not know, but he had some respect for him as a judge of wine. . . . 'Poor, poor George Saintsbury!' Housman said when he heard that the critic was living in retirement at Bath and had been cut off all wine by his medical advisers.

If Richards had seen Housman's copy of the third volume of *A History of English Prosody*, he would have known what A. E. H. thought of Saintsbury as a critic of literature. A careful study of all the marginalia in the volume would exceed the scope of this article,<sup>7</sup> but a selection of comments will reflect Housman's frequent opposition to Saintsbury and annoyance with him. In the following instances Housman takes issue with Saintsbury over a technical point in prosody:

- Page 12: "You ignore the difficulty"
- " 66: "It is not one but two. See page 79."
- " 74: "Shallow and dishonest"
- " 75: "No. Nobody said it did"
- " 85: "No. The poem is paeonic"
- " 101: "How so? What has that to do with prosody?"
- " 129: "What business has a fragment of narrative in a treasury of lyrical poetry?"
- " 130: "Why write such stuff?"
- " 163: "But would you give examples?"

<sup>7</sup> William Vincent Sieller discusses the Saintsbury material in detail in an unpublished M.A. thesis, *New Light on Housman*, Canisius College, Buffalo, N. Y., June 1952, pp. 31ff.

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- Page 174: "What has that to do in a history of Prosody?"  
" 189: "Don't you know who eked it?"  
" 201: "You cannot even read"  
" 224: "How bad!"  
" 235: "He doesn't: he simply writes a different metre, imitated from Milton's Nativity ode, actually copied from Keble"  
" 236: "It is damned bad"  
" 248: "He does"  
" 249: "He didn't"  
" 250: "You silly ass"  
" 251: "It isn't"  
" 338: "It was written earlier" and "Lord help you"  
" 348: "Comic, and false rhyme"  
" 398: "That is an impossibility"  
" 399: "You don't know that it always is"  
" 401: "No"  
" 413: "On p. 411, note 2, you said that he did"  
" 414: "Nonsense" and "You don't mean that"  
" 415: "You rave"  
" 426: "You don't. The double hiss exists in Italian but not in English except in compounds."  
" 427: "I deny that the former is a dactyl"  
" 494: "You are gabbling"  
" 495: "It has a place at the beginning of every bar in music"  
" 501: "You are merely rambling"  
" 515: "No: you were taught Greek and Latin prosody, and you forced it on English verse"  
" 521: "No, it is not; unless 'long' does not mean long"  
" 523: "What can you mean? Do you think a tribrach has no accent?"  
" 525: "You heedless creature"  
" 526: "Good Lord!"  
" 530: "You know not what you say"

Although quotation of the text which brought forth these marginal comments would be necessary for their complete understanding, the general tone of Housman's remarks is quite clear. To be fair, however, it must be recorded that on at least six occasions Professor Housman agreed with Professor Saintsbury. These brief corroborations



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tive statements are considerably less enthusiastic than Housman's expressions of disapproval:

Page 105: "Quite"    Page 251: "True"    Page 420: "Yes indeed"  
" 167: "Good"    " 295: "Right"    " 495: "So it is"



PAUL AKERS OF MAINE\*

By WILLIAM B. MILLER

ONE hundred years ago Benjamin Paul Akers presented to the world the marble bust of John Milton which is now in the Reference Room of the Colby College Library. Unsigned and uninscribed, the bust shows the English poet nude, looking straight forward. The face is framed by locks of hair depicted in the manner worn by the poet. The bust is conceived in terms of a strict symmetry. The expression on the face is serious but not stern, calm and still, without aloofness on the one hand and without a hint of animation on the other. In terms of the ideals of one hundred years ago, we confront the classic image of a classic poet.

Paul Akers was active during the first flourishing period of American sculpture. During this period the Neo-Classical style ran its course. Imported from Europe, Neo-Classicism lingered in the United States longer than in Europe. As a sculptor and a sojourner in Italy, Akers received a double dose of Neo-Classicism.

Born in 1825 in what is now Westbrook, Maine, Benjamin Akers was the oldest of eleven children. As a child he assumed the name Paul. He was sent to Connecticut for schooling, and in Norwich (it is alleged) he saw a piece

\* This is an abbreviated version of an address delivered on April 2, 1957, to the Colby Library Associates by Professor Miller of the Department of Art at Colby. The editor regrets his lack of space for printing the address in full.