

**American Conservatory Theater**

*presents*

# **Words on Plays**

*an educational guide to*

## **The Invention of Love**

By Tom Stoppard

Directed by Carey Perloff

January 6–February 13, 2000  
Geary Theater



***Words on Plays*** prepared by  
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## Cast & Synopsis of *The Invention of Love*

### The Cast

<i>AEH, A. E. Housman aged 77</i>	James Cromwell
<i>Charon</i>	Steven Anthony Jones
<i>Young Housman, A. E. Housman aged 18–26</i>	Jason Butler Harner
<i>Alfred William Pollard</i>	Gord Rand
<i>Moses John Jackson</i>	Garret Dillahunt
<i>The Voice of the Vice Chancellor of Oxford University</i>	Charles Dean
<i>Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln College</i>	Charles Dean
<i>Walter Pater</i>	Michael Santo
<i>A Balliol Student</i>	Matthew Boston
<i>John Ruskin</i>	Ken Ruta
<i>Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College</i>	W. Francis Walters
<i>Robinson Ellis</i>	Brian Keith Russell
<i>Katharine Housman, AEH's sister</i>	Lorri Holt
<i>Bunthorne</i>	Marco Barricelli
<i>Henry Labouchère, Radical Member of Parliament</i>	Ken Ruta
<i>W. T. Stead, editor and journalist</i>	Michael Santo
<i>Frank Harris, journalist</i>	Charles Dean
<i>Chamberlain</i>	Matthew Boston
<i>Chairman of Selection Committee</i>	W. Francis Walters
<i>Member of Selection Committee</i>	Steven Anthony Jones
<i>John Percival Postgate</i>	Brian Keith Russell
<i>Jerome K. Jerome, author</i>	Brian Keith Russell
<i>Oscar Wilde</i>	Marco Barricelli



### Synopsis

#### Act I

**Stygian Darkness.** AEH—the poet and scholar A. E. Housman (1859–1936)—stands alone on a wharf on the river Styx. The ferryman Charon poles a boat toward him. AEH boards the boat, and they begin to make their way across the river. While they chat about AEH's past life and the underworld, another boat, with three young men in it, passes them. AEH recognizes his beloved friend Moses Jackson at the oars. Jackson appears as he did when he and Housman were students together at Oxford University. AEH calls out to his friend, but Jackson does not hear him and the boat disappears from view. AEH now realizes that he may not be dead, but only dreaming.

**Oxford Matriculation, 1877.** The dream shifts back in time, to Housman's first term at Oxford. The three men from the boat—Young Housman, Jackson, and Alfred Pollard—are leaving the university matriculation ceremony. They introduce themselves. It turns out that Jackson has a science scholarship, and both Young Housman and Pollard have classics scholarships. Jackson talks sports; Young Housman and Pollard impress

each other with their knowledge of Latin. Then Jackson leaves, and Pollard and Young Housman are confronted by Mark Pattison, a fellow at Lincoln College, who is playing croquet. He tells them that they should not worry too much about learning anything worthwhile at Oxford, because the only thing that counts is the results of their examinations.

**Oxford Dons.** Walter Pater, a fellow at Brasenose College, strolls by, flirting with a young Balliol student. Benjamin Jowett, master of Balliol College, observes them. When Pater and the student are gone, John Ruskin and Jowett disparage the excessive admiration of male beauty and the social movement of Aestheticism.

**Boys in a Boat on the River Cherwell.** Young Housman, Jackson, and Pollard are again seen rowing, this time on the river Cherwell (a branch of the Thames that runs through Oxford). They talk about the poems of Catullus and kissing. Jackson wonders whether the poem his two classicist friends are discussing would be suitable for him to send to Miss Alice Liddell, the daughter of the dean of Christ Church. Pollard suggests that the love poem, as we know it today, was invented by Roman poets in the first century B.C.E.

**Croquet at Oxford.** Several Oxford dons play a kind of dream croquet all around AEH and Charon in their boat (which is invisible to the dons). As they play, Pattison, Ruskin, and Pater lament the encroachment of industrialization on the serene beauty of Oxford. Jowett disagrees and praises modernization. Ruskin discusses one particularly eccentric undergraduate: Oscar Wilde is seen in plum-colored breeches, lying on a hillside.

**Young Housman and Pollard Watch Jackson in a Race.** Young Housman and Pollard stand atop the same hillside and watch Jackson competing in a crew race. Pollard repeats clever remarks attributed to Wilde. Young Housman is completely absorbed in watching Jackson in the race.

**The Croquet Game Continues.** While the dons continue their game of croquet: Jowett discusses the reforms he led at Oxford during the 1850s. Pattison insists that those reforms have rendered Oxford nothing more than a cramming shop for examinations. Ruskin defends the medieval Gothic. Pater delivers a paean to the Italian Renaissance.

**Jackson Joins Young Housman and Pollard after the Race.** Still out of breath from rowing, Jackson tells Young Housman and Pollard about talking with Wilde at the river. He wonders whether Wilde is one of those “Aesthetes” he’s heard people talk about.

**A Badminton Game.** Pater remains, talking about the Renaissance and the ecstasy of living each moment for the moment’s sake. Jackson appears, preparing to run a race.

**Jackson and Young Housman Talk.** Jackson finishes his run while Young Housman times him. Young Housman gets the time wrong because he is distracted by the sight of Jackson running. Jackson teases him about it and leaves.

**A Discussion in Jowett’s Rooms at Balliol.** Jowett reprimands Pater for certain letters written to a Balliol undergraduate known as “the Balliol bugger.” They discuss Plato and boy-love in ancient Greece. Young Housman appears and Jowett initially mistakes him for Wilde. Pater leaves. Young Housman and Jowett discuss a poem by the Roman love poet Catullus and the value of the translation of ancient literature. Robinson Ellis, a Latin scholar, rides by on a bicycle. Jowett and Ellis debate the dating of the poems of Catullus.

**Charon and AEH Reappear.** Charon poles AEH back into view. They discuss a lost play of Aeschylus called the *Myrmidones*, of which Charon claims to have memorized some of the lines. AEH is beside himself with excitement to encounter someone from the afterlife who might actually have direct knowledge of ancient classics

lost to the living, until it becomes apparent that Charon only remembers the one line AEH already knows, because it survives in a fragment. This experience confirms for AEH that he is not dead, only dreaming. He guesses that he is asleep in the Evelyn Nursing Home in Cambridge.

**In Elysium.** Charon poles the boat up to the “riverbank”; AEH steps off the boat, and Charon poles away. AEH and Young Housman introduce themselves. They discuss the study of classics, the Latin poet Propertius, and the shoddy work of many classical scholars. AEH encourages Young Housman to pursue textual criticism of ancient literature as though it were a science—for the sake of knowledge only, not for its moral value or as a question of taste. They discuss the beauty of the love of comrades for each other, in their own time and in ancient Greece. AEH admits to Young Housman that he failed his examination in Greats and became a clerk living in Bayswater.

**Young Housman Rejoins His Friends.** Jackson and Pollard row by, looking for Young Housman. He joins them in the boat and declares that he will be a scientist, like Jackson, but of textual criticism.

**AEH Delivers a Lecture.** AEH talks to the audience about the Roman poet Horace and translating his *Ode* iv 1, “*Intermissa, Venus.*” Jackson is seen behind running behind AEH, as AEH describes the despairing love of Horace for Ligurinus, whom he describes running across the Field of Mars.

## Act II

**Young Housman and Kate on a Hillside, 1881.** Young Housman (now 22) and his sister Kate (19) stand on the summit of a hill they call “Mount Pisgah,” near their childhood home. They talk about Young Housman’s failure at Oxford, his plans to take the Civil Service exam, and his loss of faith in God.

**Young Housman and Jackson after a Night at the Theatre, 1883.** A character named Bunthorne, based on Oscar Wilde, appears and sings a song from *Patience*, a comic opera by Gilbert and Sullivan. Young Housman and Jackson wait for a train at the station, discussing the play and its depiction of Aestheticism. They also talk about their work in the Patent Office. Young Housman shows Jackson his first published article, on Horace, in the *Journal of Philology*. They discuss the humanities versus the sciences, and Wilde.

**A Club in London, 1885.** The journalists Henry Labouchère, Frank Harris, and W. T. Stead sit in a club discussing their roles in Wilde’s rise to prominence and notoriety, the Criminal Law Amendment passed by Parliament. They compare notes on the political questions of the day and on the question of sodomy. Harris describes his visit to the excavation of the battlefield at Chaeronea in Greece, where an army made up of men who were lovers met their deaths.

**A Race, 1885.** Young Housman (now 26) and Chamberlain (a fellow clerk from the Patent Office) watch Jackson running a race. Chamberlain cautions Young Housman about his obvious love for Jackson, saying that it can only lead to suffering. Pollard and Jackson join them. After the others leave, Housman and Pollard remain, talking about their Oxford days and their respective careers, as well as the Humanist tradition and the purpose of classical scholarship.

**Young Housman and Jackson in Their Apartment, 1885.** Young Housman and Jackson lounge in their apartment in Bayswater. Jackson asks Young Housman to help him pick a poem to send to a girl. Jackson says that his girlfriend, Rosa, thinks that Housman is sweet on him. Housman responds by talking about the chivalric ideal of virtue in the ancient world, then asks Jackson if it would be all right for Young Housman to live somewhere else, but close by—and in doing so, he confesses his love for Jackson.

They reach to shake hands, and Young Housman is left alone.

**University College, London, Selection Committee, 1892.** AEH faces a Selection Committee, whose members read various testimonials on his behalf and discuss whether to hire him as a professor of Latin at University College, London, while AEH interjects biting criticism of the incompetence of other scholars. Young Housman receives the appointment and their congratulations. One scholar, John Percival Postgate, remains after the others leave, to dispute a point of scholarship with Young Housman. Young Housman shows him the newspaper announcing Wilde's arrest.

**A Club in London, 1895.** Labouchère, Harris, and Stead, again at their club, discuss Wilde's trial and imprisonment under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. AEH appears and recites a poem he wrote, inspired by Wilde's experience, about a man persecuted for the color of his hair.

**Three Men in a Boat, 1896.** Chamberlain, the author Jerome K. Jerome, and Harris row a boat on the river Thames. They discuss Wilde's arrest and Housman's book of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*, published that year.

**Queen's Jubilee Night, 1897.** Bonfires and stars. AEH recites a poem about how he was ready when trouble came. Chamberlain joins him on the hilltop. Chamberlain (mis)quotes Housman's poems, much to Housman's chagrin. Chamberlain asks AEH what happened to Jackson; AEH tells him that Jackson died of cancer in British Columbia. Kate appears, and they look back on their lives.

**Coast of France, 1897.** AEH joins Wilde (41 years old) in Dieppe just after Wilde's celebration of the queen's jubilee. Wilde and AEH discuss the poetic imagination, the inevitability of love, and "the choice...between renunciation and folly" forced on them by the prejudiced attitudes of their time. They compare their very different lives and philosophies of living and loving until Charon arrives to take Wilde away.

**Nearing Hades.** AEH turns to find Young Housman again, who is now in his final year at Oxford and about to take his Finals. They talk about Roman love elegists, until Jackson and Pollard row up and take Young Housman away with them. AEH calls to Jackson as they row away.

**The Further Shore.** AEH talks directly to the audience, reflecting about his life, love, death, and the Golden Age at Oxford. Young Housman and Jackson appear. Young Housman expresses his love for Jackson by quoting a Greek poem, implying that Jackson will live on in Housman's own poetry, "a song sung unto posterity." Wilde, quoting his own aphorisms, is seen being poled across the Styx by Charon, and AEH realizes it's time to go. "How lucky to find myself standing on this empty shore," he says, "with the indifferent waters at my feet."

**Fade Out.**

## An Interview with Carey Perloff on *The Invention of Love*

by Elizabeth Brodersen

(November 5, 1999)

*The first play to grace the stage of the Geary Theater in the year 2000 will be Tom Stoppard's latest masterpiece, The Invention of Love, which receives its American premiere at A.C.T. in January. Based on events real and imagined from the life of the late-19th-century poet and classicist A. E. Housman, The Invention of Love is, in truly Stoppardian fashion, a moving and witty meditation on life, love, and the pursuit of personal happiness, as well as an intellectually dazzling lesson in classical scholarship and Victorian politics.*

*Perhaps best known as the author of the slim volume of poetry A Shropshire Lad, Housman led a life of suppressed private passion and acclaimed intellectual achievement. Stoppard introduces us to the elder Housman (or AEH, as he calls him), in the final moments of his life, as he prepares to ferry across the river Styx to the land of the dead. Before he can make that final journey, AEH is confronted by a tantalizing kaleidoscope of scenes from his previous existence: early years at Oxford, where he encountered the two loves of his life—Oxford classmate and (heterosexual) athlete Moses Jackson, and the translation of classical texts—years of obscurity toiling as a Patent Office clerk by day and Latin scholar by night; late career as a distinguished Cambridge professor; and an imaginary encounter with his contemporary and fellow Oxford alum Oscar Wilde. Escorting us through the dreamscape of his life, Housman comes to terms with the love he never dared to claim and the regrets of a life lived caught between the dictates of the mind and the desires of the heart.*

*First produced at London's Royal National Theatre in 1997, The Invention of Love won high critical praise as well as the Evening Standard Award for best play and a 1998 Olivier Award nomination. Inspired by A.C.T. Artistic Director Carey Perloff's sold-out American premiere production of Indian Ink at A.C.T. last season, Stoppard tapped Perloff—herself a classical scholar and a former Fulbright Fellow at Oxford—to introduce to American audiences the “most emotionally powerful and enthralling” (Evening Standard) play of his long and distinguished career. Perloff spoke with us just before beginning rehearsals of one of the most ambitious projects of her own professional life.*

**Elizabeth Brodersen:** *I know Stoppard's connection with A.C.T. dates back to the late 1960s, and that your relationship with him evolved while you were directing Arcadia here in 1995 and Indian Ink last season. How did he come to ask you to direct The Invention of Love?*

**Carey Perloff:** I remember I had a meeting with Stoppard at the National Theatre in London while he was working on *The Invention of Love*. We sat at the bar and had a long talk about translating the poetry of Catullus. He didn't think the play would come to anything then, as he never seems to think any of his plays will amount to anything while he's writing them.

Later, we met again, just after Tom had finished *Invention*. He handed me the typescript and said, “Well, my darling, you're the only American I can think of who would possibly have anything to do with *this* play.” I took it back to the hotel room to read it, and I just adored it. We hadn't even gone down the road with *Indian Ink* yet, but

this play was personally important to me right away, because of its setting and subject matter. And then he came to A.C.T.—he appeared out of the blue on his way back to London after he won the Golden Globe Award. I think it was our second week of rehearsal for *Indian Ink*.

*It might have been even earlier, in the first week. I remember the actors were terrified.*

I got this phone call from Heather saying, “Tom is in town, and wants to come to rehearsal tomorrow,” and he did. We walked up together to the Geary Theater, which he found incredibly moving, because he hadn’t been there in many years and he hadn’t seen it renovated. He stood on the corner of Mason and Geary and said, really without having seen anything of *Indian Ink*, “It would be such a thrill to me if you wanted to work on *Invention of Love* here.” I said, “There’s no question to me that I want to do this play. If you will give it to us, of course we’ll do it, but I think you should see whether you feel good about *Indian Ink* [at A.C.T.], and about me.” Then he came and experienced the technical rehearsal and preview and opening process of *Indian Ink* with us and was interested in continuing the collaboration.

*Stoppard said at the press conference announcing the American premiere of Invention at A.C.T. that he felt he had found a true “home” here as a playwright.*

We had a very good time working together. In some real way I understood what he was after and could help realize it. He is actually a very romantic playwright whose emotional impulses are clothed in complex language, which sometimes leads people to believe that that’s all there is to his work. I think in America we are less fearful of emotional display on some level, and more willing to explore the emotional cast within the language while at the same time honoring it. Perhaps that’s why *Indian Ink* was more romantic and sexually open here than it could have been in London, where the veil is much more tightly drawn.

*He said that what a playwright really wants is a place where somebody says to him, “Whatever it is you write, we want to do it,” and he felt he had found that here.*

I think you have to say that to a playwright. You have to understand who it is you have a real dialogue with. It’s the same with directing a classical play. All you can do as a director is try to understand what was the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical impulse that produced a particular play, and figure out how to get inside that impulse and realize it onstage. Just as with any intimate relationship, there are certain people with whom you can have that kind of dialogue, and certain people you can’t. There are plays I admire but would never want to direct, because I don’t feel I have that kind of relationship with the playwright.

*How do you think your production will differ from the London production of Invention of Love?*

I should first say that I admired the London production very much. Of course, it was conceived for a very different space and a different audience. It was done in the round in the Cottesloe [one of the three venues of the Royal National Theatre]. The audience was looking down on the floor, so the design had a very particular spareness. It was done largely with projections and was very simple. The Geary Theater, however, is a proscenium theater, which creates a kind of moving painting for the audience. You have to look *at* it, so the play requires a different set of images.

Physically, the production will have much more color here; it’ll be lush. And I’m trying to foreground AEH [James Cromwell] as much as possible, so that it’s clear that everything that takes place in the play is *his* dream, the distortion of what he sees through his own lens. I want to keep Jamie present much more fluidly, traveling through his own dream (much like *Arcadia*), so that we know all the time that we’re seeing the images unfold through his eyes...so sometimes just the pain in his face can tell us that



what otherwise appears to be a very happy scene between two young men is a very painful thing for him to recall. I also want AEH to talk directly to the audience, addressing us as if we were all his captive (and sometimes terrified!) students. Lecturing was, after all, Housman's most comfortable mode of self-expression.

*How did Cromwell occur to you for the role?*

I'm an enormous fan of Jamie; I'd seen a lot of his work onstage before his film work. What I love about him is that he's infinitely transformable. He can go from that sweet, earnest guy in *Babe* to the Machiavellian Irishman of *L.A. Confidential* on the turn of a dime. That ability indicates to me an actor of great imagination. He's also very linguistically dexterous; he has a great ear and a great sense of dialect. Jamie is also very passionate and emotionally committed. For example, he is very involved with Native Americans and in many other causes that he takes terribly seriously. That kind of passionate morality—in the sense of what is right and what is beautiful—is very much a part of the world of this play.

I cast Jamie three months ago, and I've never seen an actor work so hard—he's learned the entire text already, he's done unbelievable research, he's been studying with a classicist in L.A., he's been working on the Greek and Latin, he's read everything he could get his hands on. There aren't many actors about whom one could say that. This is a real journey for him, as it is for Jason [Butler Harner, who plays Young Housman]. When that happens, directing is such a joy. They've been e-mailing each other, and the older and younger selves are finally going to meet in New York. I can't wait to see that happen.

My first meeting with Jamie was hilarious: He was sitting at a table in a coffee shop near the Burbank airport, and I came and sat with him, and we had a wonderful talk about *The Invention of Love* that went on for hours. At the end he said, "I have two questions: How are you going to do the boats?" I said, "Well, that's a million-dollar question," and I told him what we were working on scenically. Then he said, "And who on earth could you ever cast across from me?" and he stood up. I had forgotten—because he's long-legged, he's not so long-waisted, so when you sit across from him you can look him in the eyes and he doesn't seem so tall—that when he stands up, he goes on and on and on and on, and you realize, he's six-foot-seven! I couldn't even see his face! I had to stand on the chair of this restaurant to really look at him. And I thought, How *am* I ever going to cast this? Then I went home and called Jason, because I thought, Well, Jason is six-four, at least they're close. So the entire set is designed around the moment when the two Housmans meet, because I had to figure out a landscape upon which Jason could stand so that Jamie could stand on the deck and they could look across at each other eye to eye, without the audience realizing they aren't exactly the same height. The entire set ended up being designed around that particular issue, if you can imagine. That's what theater comes down to [laughing]: the tactical and the practical. But thank god we had met Jason, because physically they are absolutely each other. They're both these beanpole men with soulful faces, so they actually match very nicely. Later it turned out most of the cast is made up of enormous men like Marco [Barricelli] and Ken Ruta.

*How are you going to do the boats?*

Well, they're on tracks. But I wanted a skewed landscape—the stage has quite a steep rake—because I didn't want flat tracks on a flat surface that would make them look like toy boats. I wanted them to be able to moor against something. The bank of the river is a big, undulating shape that tracks across the stage, and the boats come across it in opposite directions. The stage is burnished copper, so it's very reflective. It's not quite clear where the water ends and where the landscape begins. Sometimes the actors step off the boat onto that water, so the deck is also...I'm not saying there's actually "a river" or "water"; I didn't want to be so literal. At the beginning of the play, there's a beautiful

painted scrim, with Charon's boat (with AEH in it) downstage, and Mo's boat upstage. The two boats cross with the scrim between them, so AEH and Mo can almost reach out and touch each other across this divide. The boats will often cross each other like that, with scrim in between, so one of the boats is in AEH's memory, and the other is in present time.

*Stoppard said that he admired the fact that you directed Indian Ink as if it were a "populated poem." That description also seems to apply to your approach to Invention, which is so much about poetry and the poetical experience of a dying man's dreams.*

Well, it is a dream play. So, for example, we're not going to try to represent Oxford literally onstage. I find it very moving that this play was written by a playwright who never went to university, for whom Oxford is, as it is for many people, a magical, mysterious Elysium, an unbelievably beautiful place. It is an unbelievably beautiful place. When you actually go there, there are things about it that aren't so wonderful, but from a distance it is a place of beautiful men communing about great issues of the mind on deep green grass, surrounded by buttery gothic architecture, and falling perpetually in love. Men among men. Even though there are women at Oxford now, it still feels like that kind of Platonic place where men find each other. That feeling can't be realized in any literal way scenically, because Stoppard's Oxford isn't a "real" place in that sense. So the design for this production is very fluid and very spare, very Magritte-like, without any particularly realistic architecture or landscape.

I think AEH is standing in that liminal place between life and death, probably lying in his bed at the Evelyn Nursing Home—

*He keeps talking to the nurse.*

Yes, "Wakey, wakey," and all that—drifting in and out of dreamscapes from his past and daring to revisit them again and again until he resolves the emotional conflict they represent. So images keep coming around in circular ways. There is a kind of wonderful feedback loop to the play: One of the great scenes is when Young Housman meets his older self. It's easy to understand why communing with his younger self would change the way the older AEH feels about himself, but the dialogue with AEH also changes Young Housman's direction in life, even though one might say the encounter never happened. He walks out of that conversation understanding the beauty of textual criticism from his older self in a way that he never would have discovered on his own. There's always in Stoppard's work that sense of time running backwards, as in *Arcadia*. You can't run time only one way, and you can't run this play only one way.

*Like much of Stoppard's work, The Invention of Love is populated with real figures from Victorian history and includes high-minded discussions of complex political and literary issues. Sometimes I feel as though I need an advanced interdisciplinary degree to understand a Stoppard play.*

You don't have to have a Ph.D. to see this play—although it would probably help! If we do it well, it's actually quite surprising and romantic. It's important to remember that, as real as they may have been, those historical figures are all primarily characters in Housman's dream. Knowing the specific historical details is not as important as understanding what Housman is going through as an individual and the roles those characters play in Housman's personal emotional drama.

Watching the dream of his life unfold is as unfamiliar as watching the memories of anybody else's life would be. If you stood on the brink of your own precipice and forced yourself to go back and touch those wounds you felt were in need of healing before you could come to some kind of acceptance of your life, the characters in that drama would be *your* characters, with whom the rest of us would have no relationship. That's the truth of this play. Stoppard has chosen very particular people from Housman's life. He could have chosen many other people who had an impact on Housman. It's

interesting that he doesn't start Housman that young, even though his family had a huge impact on him: his brother Laurence, who was gay, and Basil, and their alcoholic father; the mother who dies of breast cancer; or the stepmother who was the father's cousin. These people were not the wounding things in his life, so Stoppard chose not to put them in. He's chosen other people. I think if we worry too much about everything we know or don't know historically about Ruskin, for example, we've missed the point.

I do think it's important to be aware that this play is about a culture sitting on the cusp of two centuries. In that sense it is in fact quite millennial. That's what's interesting about looking at Housman next to Oscar Wilde. Here are two men who spanned the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup>, one of whom was so firmly rooted in the past century that he could not look ahead and celebrate the freedoms of the coming one, and another so bent on blazing a trail to the future that he crashed and burned in his own lifetime. This play is also about two very individual men and their different approaches to love, which evokes our own changing attitudes toward love. So, of course, the context of Victorian England is important, insofar as you understand that Oxford in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a place obsessed with the past and very nervous about the future.

*There's something very moving about the fascination those repressed Victorian men had for passionate love poetry written by Romans more than two thousand years ago.*

I think the Oxonian obsession with Latin love poetry represents a late-Victorian fascination with the period in which individual human emotion was being expressed, as such, in western literature for the first time, in very erotic and personal ways. That period was followed by generations of repression, and generations of Renaissance art that could only express the erotic in the image of the Madonna's breast or the naked Christ in the service of a religious experience. Even during the Enlightenment there was a dislocation between emotion and the body. Finally in late Victorian England the questions of the body and sexuality and individual human expression came to the fore again. So of course these men went back to ancient Greece and Rome, in their own version of classicism, which was very different from the classicism of other periods.

These lonely British boys and impotent old men found in translating classical poetry a means to express their own desire in a way they never could have done themselves. If you are dealing with a repressed culture in which the expression of emotion is mediated through irony or some kind of mask because individuals are too terrified to express it directly, of course a poetry which does express powerful desire directly and nakedly in an ancient (and respectable) foreign language is enormously seductive. As you move towards Wilde—who was after all a classicist who became comfortable with uninhibited self-expression—then the need for translation becomes much less great. He found a way to express himself directly—which is the story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*I actually don't really understand the Oxonian obsession with the classical past, especially when they ignored so much of it—including the widespread acceptance of homosexuality in ancient Greek society.*

I think it has to do with a lot of things. If you read Pater, for instance, or Ruskin, one of the seminal things that happened to these men when they were young is that they gave up God. The same thing happened to Housman. In the play he goes home and says, "I've decided there is no God," or something like that, and his sister says, "Oh, that's just Oxford." This is a period of profound questioning in England among intellectuals about religion. And the question of whether there is a spiritual core at the nature of existence that isn't dictated by Christianity led to an interest in paganism and the Gothic and the Pre-Raphaelites. That all goes together, the notion that beauty is morality, and that the beautiful is the good, which is what we consider the philosophy of Aestheticism, which

later became debased as “art for art’s sake” with the dislocation of art from its social context. But it was an incredible thing for Pater to say, “To burn with a hard, gemlike flame is the true essence of existence,” and for Ruskin to say, “The beautiful is the good,” that a perfect artistic statement is in a sense religious. That is what the Greeks believed: that beauty is embodied in the human form, not in some divine and distant god to whom we should aspire, that art is created around the human form, and that love is the aesthetic and intellectual meeting of the male mind, of one man for another. That is what is beautiful and good and therefore what is divine.

If you rebel against the Christian God, who is a god of punishment and asceticism and alienation, and you look for a celebration of life’s pleasures, of living life to the fullest in the moment, rather than living only to earn a good afterlife, then it is easy to become interested in the Greeks, who after all had very little relationship to the afterworld. Elysium was a loose concept of a place where you hung out until your soul got allocated, but the Greeks didn’t believe that your behavior in the world while you’re alive has any particular impact on your soul’s destiny. If you were high born, or a great poet or athlete or soldier, you went to Elysium; otherwise you went to a kind of netherworld. It was never a good thing to be dead. There wasn’t a heaven; there wasn’t particularly a hell.

*There was no reward system?*

No. Therefore the idea was that you live your life now as a good and moral person, and your reward was in the present moment, not in any future judgment. It was much more Jewish in that sense, which is why I’ve always loved the Greeks. So this idea Pater had, of squeezing every ounce of juice out of what life offers you today, must have been very potent in Housman’s time. Particularly to a group of young men brought up in the Anglican church, who were always told that there was a system of rewards and punishments that would grant them something later rather than now. And *particularly* to these impotent, middle-aged professors who had no sex lives, but huge fantasy lives.

*Yes, they seem to be obsessed with the idea of living life to the fullest, and yet none of them could actually do it.*

Yes, it’s all a fantasy...naturally. And then you have Oscar Wilde. These were Wilde’s teachers, which is quite important, that he had tea with Ruskin and dinner with Pater, or whatever Stoppard says. He took their philosophy and actually lived it. He grabbed every moment of life. He went to America, he gave fabulous speeches, he wrote incredible plays and poetry, he was passionately in love with a man who was not worthy of his attentions, and he crashed and burned for it. But the question that Stoppard asks is, Which is the successful life? You can say that Wilde died dissipated and pathetic and overblown and fat and alone, but he had an incredibly successful life if you define success as living life in the moment. Whereas Housman, who was utterly repressed and made the choice never to give in to his impulses, had a full-page obituary in the *London Times*. He was considered a very successful human being, although he was in fact a shell of a man, whose life we would now consider profoundly unfulfilled. Now, he is in considered a minor Victorian poet. Whereas Wilde changed the way we think. He says in the play: “I discovered the New Woman, the New Journalism, the New Poetry, the New Theater, the new everything. What did you do? Where were you? You did go to parties, didn’t you? Didn’t you have any friends?” Stoppard is asking questions about the radical choices we make life. What *is* a successful life? We’re still asking that question.

*And the pain of the answer is what makes us weep at the end of the play.*

Yes.

*Last night I read some of the Roman poetry Stoppard quotes in The Invention of Love. What I find so powerful is the notion of the inevitability of love, that you can’t choose whom you love, no matter how much pain that love might cause you. That theme*

*runs through The Invention of Love; it's what Catullus wrote about Lesbia, Propertius about Cynthia, and Housman about Mo.*

The wonderful thing about unrequited love is that it is so often the occasion for great art. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century romantic notion of romantic suffering leading you toward a perfect artistic expression, which is a very different idea from the practicality of Victorian England, was very attractive and shocking. I love the notion Stoppard expresses in this play that love poetry had to be invented, where he says [she reads from the script]: “Real people in real love bearing their souls in poetry that made their mistresses immortal, and it all happened in such a short span, as if all the poetry til then had to pass through a bottleneck where a handful of poets were waiting to see what could be done with it. And then it was over, the love poem complete, love as it really is. Oh yes, there'd been songs, Valentines, mostly in Greek, often charming, but the self-advertisement of farce and folly, love as abject slavery and all-out war, madness, disease, the whole catastrophe owned up to and written in the meter, no that was new.”

Because we're so self-absorbed and so interested in our own personal experience, it doesn't occur to us that there really wasn't a western literature for that individual expression of emotion, except in the classical period, and it had to be rediscovered. Wilde rediscovered it. Housman rediscovered it, too, in a very veiled way, because he could never live it in his life.

*Reading about the lives of those Latin poets made me want to go back to that period in Rome and meet those people. I want to have a conversation with Clodia [Lesbia's real name]. She must have been an amazing character.*

Well, you know, Lesbia and Cynthia and the mistresses those poets wrote about were probably concoctions. The poetry is mostly about the experience of being in love. That speech Wilde gives is very important, and I think it expresses the theme of the play: “The betrayal of one's friends is a bagatelle in the stakes of love, but the betrayal of one's self is lifelong regret.” That's what Housman has to learn. [She reads Wilde's speech:] “Bosie is what became of me. He is spoiled, vindictive, utterly selfish, and not very talented, but these are merely the facts. The truth is he was Hyacinth when Apollo loved him, he is ivory and gold from his red, roseleaf lips comes music that fills me with joy, and he is the only one who understands me. Bosie is my creation, my poem. In the mirror of invention, love discovered itself.”

That's a very 20<sup>th</sup>-century way to look at love, which is that it isn't absolute, it is a thing that we need to discover, and it feeds back on itself. I think that notion of love as a mirror explains why all those guys turn up at the beginning of the play. They are all in AEH's mirror; he chooses to look, finally, into his own mirror at the end of his life, and they are what he sees. That's why we need to see everything through his eyes, his experience.

This is a very emotionally exposed dream for Housman, which is finally very cathartic, and enables him to stand on the shore and look across the river and be willing to let go of his life.

*What was it like for you at Oxford?*

It is a spectacular and terrifying place, because it is based on a myth. If you don't know the mythology, and you're an outsider—that is, if you're a working-class English person who hasn't gone to the right public schools, or if you're a foreigner—Oxford life is like a coded chess game in which everybody else seems to know the rules and you don't. The day I arrived, I found this message in my box—in my “pigeonhole,” they call it—saying, “You are to matriculate in sub fusc at the Sheldonian Theatre.” I had no idea what sub fusc was, or why some people had black gowns that had long sleeves and some people had black gowns that had short sleeves, or how you behaved when you walked

into another college to go to a tutorial, or even what a tutorial was, or what to do when they gave you sherry at nine in the morning. The system was utterly mysterious to me. My time at Oxford was a very daunting, very beautiful, very intimidating, very uplifting experience in many ways. To walk into the Bodleian Library, which is one of the two great copyright libraries in the world, and to see knowledge rising up hundreds of feet, was so like *Alice in Wonderland* that I thought, No wonder Charles Dodgson [Lewis Carroll], who was the dean of Christ Church College, wrote that for Alice Liddell, who is referred to in this play.

I remember going punting on the river, on those lazy days, and doing plays in the gardens of the colleges and watching these beautiful students at Merton College, which is the most beautiful college, on the lawn. There were also things about Oxford I thought were ridiculous and pretentious and totally wrongheaded from an American point of view.

It was highly theatrical, and I completely understood why most British theater directors came out of that system. There was theater everywhere: on the lawns, in the basements, in the churches, in the dining halls. Just watching the dons eat at high table, in a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic dining hall with stained-glass windows, was a theatrical experience. It's difficult to get one's mind around that as an American, to understand the continuity of that kind of education.

Oxford changed my life—profoundly—at the same time that I found that it was...it rained, it was freezing. I was very lonely for much of the time. It was a very hard place to be a woman, and yet it was like living in a profoundly mythological place. Oxford had a huge impact on the empire, and this is so much a play about that. You have to remember that at the time this play takes place, Oxford classicists were being trained to run the empire. The entire British empire was populated by Balliol men with a sense of mission. One of the reasons Oxford is so peculiar now is that, in the wake of the loss of the empire, its education isn't modern any more. It feels very antiquated.

*To me it seems antiquated even for that time. I don't understand why they thought studying the languages, literature, art, and history of ancient cultures would prepare these men to do anything at all practical, much less serve as administrators of a global empire.*

That's the central issue of the debate over education for education's sake, as opposed to education for a practical purpose. What is education for? Is its goal to make you see Platonic human goodness and to understand humanity philosophically, or to equip you to actually do something in the world? An Oxford education equipped you to do nothing, and yet it was your entrée into everything. Proponents of Oxford and Cambridge despised practical education. They still do. They're incredibly arrogant about anything that might have any tinge of practical application.

I think that's why many people in England now avoid that approach, and are going to other universities, because the Oxford system just seems so out of touch. It was particularly disastrous in the sciences; Cambridge eventually realized that and is much better scientifically now. But smart British graduate students tend to go to the United States to study science, whereas those who want to study PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) or the classics go to Oxford. Because I have always loved rarefied education and knowledge for its own sake, I always thought the Oxford approach was wonderful, but I never did any education that was practically useful anyway.

In this production, I want to evoke the things that struck me when I arrived at Oxford—like walking into the Bodleian Library and seeing those beautiful books rise to the sky—in a very dreamlike way. So the set has these massive bookshelves that are completely out of proportion, 30 feet high, which express my feeling about knowledge at Oxford, and it has this movable piece of luminous green landscape that slides into place

so our boys can lie on the “lawn.”

*So this is your memory play as well as Housman's.*

It is my memory play, yes, of what it felt like to be at Oxford.

*What actually drew you to studying the classics?*

Well, I always loved Latin. I started Latin very young...I think it's very hard to explain what it is that makes you fall in love with a culture. I fell in love with the Greeks when I was in second grade, and I still remember that year. I had an incredible teacher. When I think back on it now I just can't believe it—we studied archaeology in second grade! We each picked an archaeologist, and we learned about Greek culture and mythology and excavating Greek sites. To me, it was the greatest culture that ever was. I think that's because it always put the human form and human experience at its center. I'm not Christian and I never was particularly interested in or understood Christian art or religion, in the sense that everything was always distanced onto an unknown god. I loved that Greek culture celebrated humanity in every sense. And it was the beginning of western drama, and poetry, and of perspective in art.

I loved Latin, because I loved problem solving of that kind. I thought it was such an elegant language. I had never studied an inflected language, and I thought it was such a great idea that, because of inflected word endings, you could move a word anywhere to put it where it fit best in a poem.

I had a very romantic notion of archaeology, so when I went to university that's what I did, and I studied a lot of Latin and Greek. Greek is very difficult; I never really mastered Greek, because I became interested in other things and let it drift away. That's when I became interested in theater. I did work with Helene Foley and Jack Winkler on Horace. I did a semester on Horace and the *Odes*, and I did a lot of work on Catullus. I didn't do Propertius, but I did quite a bit of Virgil. What amazed me about Catullus was that reading his poetry was like reading Frank O'Hara's work. It was flip, and irreverent, and absolutely personal. It had nothing to do with anything we think of as classical. It wasn't metaphoric; it used short lines with clear directives and feelings and beautiful imagery. It was not at all arcane.

*It's very earthy.*

And very direct. I felt as though I were cutting across two thousand years. The poetry was filled with longing and desire. There was nothing heroic about it. It was nothing like Virgil. That is a shocking experience, to cross two thousand years of history and hear a voice that is completely direct. I remember translating this Catullus poem [she reads]: “Lesbia, live with me and love me, so we'll laugh at all the sour-faced strictures of the wise. This sun, once set, will rise again when our sun sets, follows night in an endless sleep. Kiss me now a thousand times and now a hundred more and then a hundred and a thousand more again, til with so many hundred thousand kisses you and I shall both lose count, nor any can from envy of so much kissing put his finger on the number of sweet kisses you of me and I of you, darling, have had.” It could have been written today. It's kind of shocking and wonderful.

*The more I read about Housman, the more I want to weep for him.*

If A. E. Housman hadn't existed, Tom Stoppard would have invented him, because he has always been interested in the collision between classicism and romanticism, one's intellect and one's heart, the mask and the interior, language and the inarticulate. Housman epitomizes that conflict: a man who was so emotionally fragile that he could read that beautiful Horace poem [“*Diffugere nives*”] and almost cry in front of all of his students. And yet people at Cambridge thought he was the most melancholic, misanthropic human being. It's very painful to realize how profoundly lonely and yet deeply loving he really was. And when you read his later poems, which become much

more emotionally exposed...

*Like Stoppard's later plays—*

Yes, very much like that—you realize how he was trying to come to terms with his love affair with Mo Jackson. Housman's later poems are full of his awareness that he was never needed by the person he loved most. Take this one, for example, which is in the play [she reads]: "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." He was clear at the end of his life that his love for this man had truncated his life.

*Despite the power of his intellect, he could not control his heart.*

AEH eventually has to accept the fact that it was his destiny to love Mo. He realizes that love isn't chosen, it chooses you. Rather than repress that love and pretend it didn't exist, he is finally able to celebrate it at the end of his life. He comes to understand that he had the perfect love and that his poetry is the monument he leaves behind to honor that love.

*Do we know much about his actual parting with Mo?*

No.

*Stoppard invented that scene?*

Yes, although we do know they had some kind of falling out. That is clear. He wasn't invited to the wedding of Rosa and Mo; Mo went off, without saying good-bye, to British Columbia. They corresponded throughout, but something happened and the closeness ended. That great scene in which Mo says, "Rosa thinks you're sweet on me," was definitely invented. That very painful moment is, as far as we know, conjecture, although probably something like that happened when ultimately it became clear that the relationship was more than a friendship to Housman and it had to end.

*Which is everybody's nightmare...*

It is everyone's nightmare.

*To have feelings for somebody you're afraid doesn't return them. Or can't return them.*

It's just as much Mo's nightmare. What I realized in auditioning actors for this production, which I think most of the actors missed, is that that scene is almost more painful for Mo than it is for Housman. He needs Housman so much—Housman is his best friend, and he adores him, and he loses him. Inevitably he loses the person to whom he is closest and is therefore in that scene completely betrayed. That's why it was difficult to cast Mo.

*You remind me of the relationship between Louis and Pryor, the role Garret Dillahunt [Mo] played, in Angels in America. Louis simply can't be there for Pryor when he needs him most, and Pryor calls him on it.*

It is that.

*It's about not being able to love enough, or in the way that one is required.*

Or not *daring* to love in the way that one is required. The tricky thing about Mo is that he has to be complex and wonderful and beautiful enough to merit Housman's love and attention, without being emotionally neurotic. He has to be the healthy beacon of light in this sort of morass of emotional repression.

*And somewhat oblivious.*

He is quite oblivious. Yet it's not a play about homophobia. Homosexuality just doesn't even occur to him. I think we have to be very careful in this play not to make it a 20<sup>th</sup>-century world. Questions of homosexuality and love were very different in a culture in which even the term "homosexuality" had not yet been invented, in which men did love each other without necessarily being labeled sexual, because it was such a male world. They could love each other quite freely—it was the labeling of the experience that began to criminalize it. So it's quite a different world from our own. That's going to be



very interesting and tricky to realize onstage.

*Stoppard has said that at first he didn't realize Housman was homosexual, and that he felt very alarmed when he realized it was a gay love affair. But he said he simply chose to ignore the gender, that it was irrelevant—the play is simply a love story, and it didn't matter with whom Housman fell in love.*

Yes, in some ways. And yet in fact Housman's sexuality completely shaped the play. Because his was not only an unrequited love, it was a love that during that period was deemed illegal. The gender of his beloved takes on an even greater weight.

*Self-expression becomes even more dangerous. Publicly dangerous.*

Right. And therefore it has to be more veiled, or you have to be much braver to realize it. So that discovery did radically reshape the play. It gave Housman a secret, which always makes for more interesting theater. Although Oxford was filled with strange, hidden, unrequited love. You know, Charles Dodgson was really in love with Alice Liddell, to whom he dedicated *Alice in Wonderland*, and took strange and what we would consider highly inappropriate photographs of this beautiful little girl, naked on the banks of the Cherwell. It was a time of exploration but also of very peculiar, extreme emotional attachments. You get the sense that there was a great need for love in a loveless, newly industrializing world, a world that was changing more rapidly than they could keep up with. That's what the beginning of the play is about, trying to control change.

*Housman is probably best known for the poems in A Shropshire Lad, most of which are quite sad. I was surprised to discover how much humor there was in Housman when I started reading his nonsense verse.*

The nonsense verse is great, as is his invective about other classical scholars. In *The Invention of Love*, AEH will say something like, "This emendation is enough to fright a baby in its bed," and you realize Housman actually said that. The invective in the play sounds as though Stoppard invented it, but that's all Housman. You can't believe the stuff he wrote about other scholars. Pollard says, "Its so disrespectful," but it's fabulous! It's what you always wanted to say and never dared to. And AEH doesn't care what other people think about him. He is concerned only with the truth, as he sees it. I think that's why he's such a great character—he's not in any way a victim. It's shocking to discover the depths of his emotional life, because he's so vindictive in his professional life.

As heartbreaking as this play is, it is nevertheless utterly Stoppardian, and filled with his best jokes. I think we just need to relax about not knowing certain things, and take it as a dream that is very strange, very moving, and very, very funny.

## Perloff on Oxford

by Carey Perloff

I was 21 when I first saw Oxford. It was 1980, almost one hundred years after A. E. Housman arrived to study classics at St. John's College. I arrived on a Bank Holiday weekend pouring with rain, and all the shops were closed. I remember wandering the streets looking for a flat to rent, feeling the damp seep into my bones and wondering when the "dreaming spires" I had read so much about were going to reveal themselves in all their glory.

Oxford is the consummate "insiders'" university; for an outsider it is mysterious, impenetrable, sometimes magical, and often infuriating. I was told to "matriculate in sub fusc at the Sheldonian Theatre" which, translated, meant that I was to appear in a black shirt, white blouse, black shoes, and black academic gown at a Georgian building in the center of Oxford to be told in Latin that I was now officially a part of this ancient university. Because I was a Fulbright fellow I was meant to wear a gown with two dark bands around its sleeves to distinguish me from a "commoner" (don't ask), but as I had no gown at all, let alone one with a double-banded sleeve, I stood very close to a newly found companion, put my right arm through one sleeve while she put her left through the other, and matriculated accordingly.

Students are assigned to particular colleges at Oxford; the university itself is something of a mirage. My college was St. Anne's, but as it was drama I was interested in, and St. Anne's College disapproved of drama, I gravitated towards Balliol College, a beautiful, centrally located pile of Gothic architecture famous for turning out classicists, actors, and diplomats. In the basement of Balliol College I staged my first play at Oxford, a scandalous production of Petronius' *Satyricon* which I had adapted myself from the Latin novel. It seemed fitting to advertise this production with an erotic vase painting of the period, an idea that landed me in the office of a stern and ancient college porter who told me in no uncertain terms that he "refused to send such filth through the pigeon post" (the intercollege mail delivery system). He thus immediately generated huge interest in my production, augmented when word got out that food and drink were being served during "Trimalchio's Feast," the scene which concluded the performance. I quickly discovered that the way to attract an audience at Oxford was free drink and the promise of something naughty.

There are no classes per se at Oxford; one goes to private "tutorials" with a professor who sets an essay for you to write every week; the tutorial consists of sitting in a usually freezing Gothic room occasionally drinking sherry and reading aloud one's essay, or, on those many occasions in which one had failed to write the assigned essay, holding a blank piece of paper in front of one's eyes and improvising an essay on the spot in front of a credulous tutor. This is why Oxford graduates are so verbally dexterous: they have learned to discourse for 20 minutes on a given subject without any real knowledge whatsoever. My tutor was a lascivious middle-aged man who preferred to hold tutorials over oysters in his private rooms at 10 p.m. After two of these sessions, I was rescued by the inimitable Richard Ellmann, a great American scholar and critic who appeared to be as lonely and bewildered by Oxford as I was and immediately offered to teach me himself. Ellmann was at the time writing his definitive biography of Oscar Wilde, so I spent the next six months reading everything Wilde had ever written, including the "Ballad of Reading Gaol"—written while Wilde was in prison for acts of "gross indecency." Ellmann often gave marvelous lectures on 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature for the

benefit of the university at large, but since students weren't required to attend lectures at Oxford, few did; his eloquence was often showered on five or six lucky individuals.

Nothing that one does in three or four years of study at Oxford counts toward a final grade; the only thing that matters is a set of examinations held at the end of one's time there, in which one spends three days spewing forth everything one has learned—while dressed, of course, in the appropriate sub fusc. Needless to say, these exams caused fantastic anxiety, for out of them one is ranked for life: one graduates with a “first” (the top degree), “second,” “third,” or “pass,” and these grades are published in the national newspapers. A. E. Housman, brilliant as he was, was considered an “absolutely safe first.” Mysteriously, however, he failed his exams entirely. This mystery is in part the subject of Stoppard's play.

When the rain finally stopped after that first miserable weekend and I had found a room in which to live, I began to experience some of the wonder of Oxford: the stone gateways opening on to courtyards of deepest green on which casually brilliant undergrads lay discussing philosophy and sex, the river Cherwell with its lazy flow covered on Sundays with students punting and old men ogling from the banks, the endless towers of ancient books ascending to vaulted ceilings in the Bodleian Library (one was required to roll a slip of paper into a tube, drop it down a chute, and wait patiently for an aged librarian to retrieve it from the depths and procure the desired book), the deer park at Magdalen College where Oscar Wilde wandered in his velvet knickerbockers, and the bicycles jostling on glistening cobblestone streets as students streaked from one assignation to another through magical gates through which only the elite might pass. These images inevitably became part of the visual world of this production.

There was drama everywhere at Oxford, not the emotional kind we Americans associate with undergraduate life, but the real stuff, scripted and stunningly performed: a magical *Pericles* at midnight in the gardens of University College, a David Edgar play in a college dining room during dinner, a *Murder in the Cathedral* in New College Chapel. I met my future husband in the aptly named Useless Rooms at Balliol, auditioning for Mayakovsky's *Bed Bug*. Romance was necessary at Oxford in part because of the lack of central heating; it was the only consistent way to stay warm at night.

The really brilliant people at Oxford studied classics. I had done Greek and Latin as an undergraduate at Stanford, but I didn't dare continue with classics at Oxford—those that did were part of the rich tradition that Housman epitomized and helped to carry on. Latin and Greek were the acme at Oxford because the past was the present and the present a mere triviality. Twentieth-century literature was considered an idle pastime: I once asked for Gertrude Stein's work at the English Faculty Library, only to be told, “We don't get much call for that.” The future was a minor blip on a long and distinguished horizon of tradition that Oxford guarded fiercely. Encoded in that tradition was a set of behaviors and expectations that no naïve, long-haired, hippie undergraduate from a California university could ever hope to fully comprehend.

By the end of my year at Oxford I could perform like a native. I knew not to rise from the table until the dons at High Table had finished their port; I knew that Michaelmas term included Christmas and that Eights Week involved a lot of rowing; and I understood that the plays I directed were always staged with the action in the corners because that's where the radiators were. But the mystery at the core of Oxford, its essential greatness, always remained slightly veiled to me. Perhaps that is part of Oxford's power, that its mythology always exists apart from its reality. In that mythology, the discourse is sparkling and brilliant, the lawn painfully green, the stones buttery yellow, the students unspeakably beautiful, and Alice plays in her Wonderland in the gardens of Christ Church College, beneath the clock whose hands never advance.

## From *The Oxford Book of Oxford*

To call a man an Oxford man is to pay him the highest compliment that can be paid to a human being.

—W. E. Gladstone

I was a modest, good-humoured boy. It is Oxford that has made me insufferable.

—[theatrical producer] Max Beerbohm, 1899



It is characteristic of the authorities at Oxford that they should consider a month too little for the preparation of a boat-race, and grudge three weeks to the rehearsals of one of Shakespeare's plays.

—George Bernard Shaw, 1898



You can't get reason out of young men, so you might as well get rhyme.

I have a general prejudice against all persons who do not succeed in the world.

Never retreat. Never explain. Get it done and let them howl.

—Benjamin Jowett

*Jowett, on being read a new poem by the Poet Laureate:* I think I wouldn't publish that, if I were you, Tennyson.

*Tennyson:* Well, if it comes to that, Master, the sherry you gave us at luncheon was beastly.



Amidst all the coarseness and roughness of Oxford there runs a wholesome and manly dislike of everything that is sickly, mean, and effeminate, and there is also a tendency to associate effeminacy with other failings. The suspicion is on the whole not unfounded, and young men who are fond of feathers, fans, and crockery had perhaps better seek some other place than an Oxford college for the gratification of their peculiar tastes.

—James Pycroft, *Oxford Memories*, 1886

I was almost shocked with the spectacle of men in boating costume, indeed I may say in very scanty costume, in the High Street. Such a thing would have been impossible in my time....I remember contemporaries—young men at Christ Church—who, when they were not hunting, made a point of promenading the High Street in the most careful attire. And some of them kept a supply of breeches which they only wore for that purpose, and *in which they never sat down lest any creases should appear*: I confess I think the undergraduates now seem to have passed to the other extreme.

—W. E. Gladstone, 1890

If I am to look back upon the education at Oxford as it was, it taught the love of truth, it provided men with those principles of honour which were nowhere perhaps so much required as amid the temptations of political controversy. It inculcated a reverence for what is ancient and free and great...Perhaps it was my own fault, but I must admit that I did not learn, when at Oxford, that which I have learned since, viz., to set a due value on the imperishable and the inestimable principles of human liberty.

—W. E. Gladstone



“What is the essential Balliol?” Michael demanded....

“Well, take a man connected with the legislative class, directly by birth and indirectly by opportunities, give him at least enough taste not to be ashamed of poetry, give him also enough energy not to be ashamed of football or cricket, and add a profound satisfaction with Oxford in general and Balliol in particular, and there you are.”

—Compton Mackenzie, *Sinister Street*, 1914



We repaired in turn to a series of gardens and spent long hours sitting in their greenest places. They struck us as the fairest things in England and the ripest and sweetest fruit of the English system. Locked in their antique verdure, guarded, as in the case of New College, by gentle battlements of silver-grey, outshouldering the matted leafage of undiscoverable plants, filled with nightingales and memories, a sort of chorus of tradition; with vaguely-generous youth sprawling bookishly on the turf as if to spare it the injury of their boot-heels, and with the great conservative college countenance appealing gravely from the restless outer world, they seem places to lie down on the grass in for ever, in the happy faith that life is all an endless summer afternoon. This charmed seclusion was especially grateful for my friend, and while we sat in fascinated *flanerie* over against the sturdy back of Saint John's...“Isn't it all a delightful lie?” he wanted to know. “Mightn't one fancy this the very centre point of the world's heart, where all the echoes of the general life arrive but to falter and die? Doesn't one feel the air just thick with arrested voices? It's well there should be such places, shaped in the interest of factitious need, invented to minister to the book-begotten longing for a medium in which one may dream unawakened and believe unconfuted; to foster the sweet illusion that all's smooth and fair in this sphere of the rough and ragged, the pitiful unachieved especially, and the dreadful uncommenced. The world's made—work's over. Now for leisure! England's safe—now for Theocritus and Horace, for lawn and sky! What a sense it all gives of the composite life of the country and of the essential furniture of its luckier minds!”

—Henry James, *A Passionate Pilgrim*, 1875

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*From The Oxford Book of Oxford, edited by Jan Morris © Oxford University Press, 1978*

## Stoppard's *Invention*

by Elizabeth Brodersen

Tom Stoppard says the subject of *The Invention of Love* came to him quite soon after *Arcadia* opened in London in 1993. "I knew instantly that I wanted to write about Housman, without knowing what the play was," Stoppard says. "Before I knew anything about him—other than that he wrote *A Shropshire Lad* and was a Latin scholar. The combination of romantic poet and classical scholar appealed to me—I just realized there was something really dramatic in the man who was two men."

Stoppard immersed himself in researching his subject's life and work, devouring Housman's wittily acerbic books of textual criticism "as if they were a three-volume novel" and relearning his schoolboy Latin. Overwhelmed by the vast amount of material he had collected, Stoppard felt he was "fumbling towards, stubbing my toes" writing a straightforward memory play, until he discovered that Housman's life overlapped with Oscar Wilde's. "There's usually a moment when you realize you haven't been wasting your time, and that you actually have a play," he says. "That happened when I realized I was heading to a scene between Housman and Wilde. Wilde's last year at Oxford was Housman's first year. And I found Housman's first trip abroad was the same year as Wilde went abroad after leaving jail. Furthermore, Housman went to Naples. I thought, Thank you, God—they were in Naples at the same time! In fact, they missed each other by a week, and they never met. But I was not to be thwarted by a mere detail like that." Stoppard eventually set their encounter in Dieppe. "One of the great things about fiction is that you don't have to justify the facts."

As in *Arcadia*, the dramatic juxtaposition of Wilde's expressive romanticism with Housman's repressive classicism became a central theme. "I suppose if I were looking for a justification for writing the play at all it would be something like this: in some sense, Housman, who died venerated (he turned down the Order of Merit, a decoration that is very difficult to get), the author of an immensely popular book of poems, with a service at Trinity and a leading editorial in the *Times*. He was a public success, yet he failed in life—emotionally, if not intellectually. Wilde—who died in 1900 a disgraced, pathetic, maladjusted, poverty-stricken wreck—crashed in flames. Yet from our perspective now, we can see that Wilde was a heroic figure, one of the primary sources of our contemporary sensibility of art and sexuality, while Housman was self-deprived and unhappy. And how can one say that an unhappy life is successful?"

As for Housman's personal life, Stoppard had hoped to find that he had a cruel mistress, like Propertius, who had his Cynthia, and whom Housman credited with having invented love in the first century before Christ's birth. "I thought I was safe in writing a glib play," says Stoppard. Then he discovered the truth about Housman's sexuality. "I know it sounds unbelievable, but I didn't know Housman was gay at first. To me, it's an unrequited love story. That's all it has to be. I don't think gender affects the way I wrote it."

Stoppard found the key to Housman's heart—and his play—while reading Housman's private papers. "He never really kept a personal diary, except to record things like what flowers were out on his daily walk. But after Moses Jackson, the man he loved, got married and went off to India, suddenly the diary breaks into these deeply suppressed, painful sentences in which Mo is only mentioned as 'he,' never by name. There are little scraps that say, 'His ship arrives, Bombay, 9:50.' And that would be the only thing on that page. One got such waves of love and grief."

Like his protagonist, Stoppard found himself inspired by the ancient classics, particularly a collection of lost fragments by Greek tragedians. “There was this little fragment from Sophocles which compared love to a piece of ice which children hold in their fist. Love is like a piece of ice, I thought. That’s good. The more you grip it, the quicker it melts. So I took that to mean, The tighter you hold it, the quicker it melts, it’s gone. Which seemed to accord with my experience, as far as I can judge!”

But the right meaning, as he discovered after *Invention*’s opening night, “was even more wonderful. It’s to do with the fact that ice, as it freezes, sticks to the skin, and it hurts when you pull it away. So, when I got to the bottom of this quotation, it turned out to mean, It’s like love because it hurts to hold it as it freezes, and it hurts when you try to get rid of it—which accords even more sharply with one’s experience, I would say.”

In *Invention of Love*, observers once critical of the “brilliant heartlessness” of Stoppard’s early work have detected a continuation of a warming trend evident in recent years. “You can’t all be wrong,” he says. “And it’s not difficult to work out. I’m a very shy, private person and I camouflaged myself by display rather than by reticence. I became a repressed exhibitionist. I found emotional self-exposure embarrassing—and now I don’t, or less so. The older I get, the less I care about self-concealment. But none of it is policy. At any given moment you write what you are.”

As for his next project, Stoppard is still looking. “I don’t know whether what I’m working on now will work out,” he says. “I’m actually reading 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russians. I haven’t really found a play, but it’s an interesting area. I’m enjoying myself failing to find the play.”

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*Material for this article was drawn from remarks made by Tom Stoppard at a press conference held at A.C.T. on March 18, 1999, and excerpts from interviews previously published in the London Telegraph, Times, Spectator, and Financial Times.*

## Alfred Edward Housman: A Very Private Lad

by Michael Glover

In *The Invention of Love*, Tom Stoppard shines an intense spotlight on the public and private lives of a poet for whom the very idea of being subject to such intrusive public scrutiny would have left him spitting with rage.

The poet is A. E. Housman, author of *A Shropshire Lad*, a collection of lyrics first published at Housman's own expense in 1896 that became enormously popular by the early years of this century and remained so for at least 20 years.

Housman's reputation as a poet has been torn and restored in the past 100 years. To the modernists, Ezra Pound in particular, he was, in part, a figure of fun, but lately the simplicities and technical strength of his verse have found new favor.

The life of Housman might sound arcane and archaic matter for a play. Not so. In scrutinizing him, Stoppard embraces themes that are as timely as they could possibly be: the hypocrisies and strange instances of double-think that were practiced in Oxford during that so-called "Golden Age" of the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the era of Ruskin, Jowett, and Pater, when the ideal of a classical education seemed to many university academics the most fitting and noble way to equip young men for the travails and challenges of later life—as long as the importance of buggery to the ancient Greeks was kept out of the official picture; and the human predicament of the Divided Self that was Housman himself: a shy and essentially solitary closet gay who lived an entirely divided life, one part of him the vulnerable and intensely private lyric poet, the other the brilliant professor of classics who was most reluctant to discuss his poetry in public.

In the 1970s, W. H. Auden hazarded a bold, if not reckless, guess at Housman's sexual tastes in the course of reviewing a selection of his letters: "I am pretty sure that he was an anal passive," he wrote with a marvelous assurance. But evidence suggests that, after Housman's rejection by Moses Jackson, the fellow Oxford undergraduate whom he loved all his life, the greater part of his energies were poured into his editions of the classic authors, with their many venomous and witty criticisms leveled at fellow textual scholars.

Did he *admire* the works of the authors he edited? Not necessarily. His greatest labor of love was the five-volume edition of Manilius, an author known only to the most devoted Latin scholar. "Was he worth studying?" asked his friend, the poet laureate Robert Bridges. Housman gave him a perfectly frank answer: "I adjure you not to waste your time on Manilius. He writes on astronomy and astrology without knowing either. My interest in him is entirely technical."

It is quite difficult for us now to enter into the ways of thinking of the textual scholar for whom such matters were seemingly life or death struggles. Here is a quite awe-inspiring dry-as-dust snatch from one of the letters: "With *optandum* you require something like *quicquam*, which Estaco obtained by writing *dicere quid*. With *optandum* of course you can supply *vitam* from *vita*; but yet the MS reading is *optandus*. Because Catullus once elides *que* at the end of a verse it cannot be safely inferred that he would elide anything else. I have seen nothing better than Munro's *magis aeuom optandum hac uila*, though it is not all the heart could desire."

The most extraordinary fact about Housman's life is the absolute division that seemed to exist between the scholar, a man of such ferocious scrupulousness, and the seemingly accessible poet of enormous popular appeal. How did the poems get written at all?

Housman left Oxford without taking a degree, and went to live in Highgate, north



London, from where he commuted to the Patent Office every day. The assessment and registration of patents, as the play makes clear, could be comical and congenial work (could the emblem of a giraffe be used to trademark both neckties and sore-throat lozenges?) which left him time enough to work on his abiding passion: editions of the classic authors, and articles on textual cruces which he contributed to the likes of the *Journal of Philology*. And then, in the middle 1890s, he began to write poetry of his own. Some of the poems that went to make up *A Shropshire Lad* were written in 1894; the majority appeared, willy-nilly, during a period of ill health in the first few months of 1895. A friend later asked him whether he knew, at the time of writing, that they were good. Yes, replied Housman, because they were so unlike anything else that had ever come to him. An exactingly scrupulous lack of humility, you might say. They were published by a reputable publishing house, Kegan Paul, but Housman was obliged to pay for their publication.

Housman himself was born in Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. Two poems are set in the adjacent county of Shropshire, as Housman once explained in a letter: “Shropshire was our western horizon, which made me romantic about it. I do not know the county well, except in parts, and some of my details are wrong and imaginary.” He was later taken to task for these errors: that church, for example, which he described, quite erroneously, as having a steeple...The whole thing, to a man of such a persnickety disposition, must have been quite an embarrassment. But this is not quite the point. Not all of the point anyway.

The Shropshire evoked in *A Shropshire Lad* is not a place that actually existed at all, not quite. It was a country of the mind, whose existence was willed into being by Housman himself. And the poems themselves belong to the pastoral traditions of both English and classical poetries. The strong-thewed lads and lasses, occasionally blithe, more often melancholic, are products of the imagination at that. The common soldiery who die in these poems are sexually alluring. Is there any evidence to suggest that Housman, who spent the last quarter-century of his life as a professor of classics at Cambridge, found sexual satisfaction in arms other than those of Moses Jackson during these years? According to his biographers, Housman, like E. M. Forester and other buttoned-up English writers of this class and generation, only let rip when abroad—in Italy, in particular. In fact, there was said to be one very special Venetian gondolier, though the details remain hazy, and Stoppard does not refer to their meeting. In fact, Stoppard, in the scenes between Housman and Moses Jackson, seems to have a touchingly old-fashioned belief that Jackson may have been the one and only.

There is certainly evidence that Housman never fell out of love with the man. In 1922, for example, Housman sent a volume of his *Last Poems* to Jackson, who was seriously ill in British Columbia, together with a letter which spoke of the book’s having been sent by “a fellow who thinks more of you than anything in the world,” and then a warm, though sardonic, twist: “you are largely responsible for my writing poetry and you ought to take the consequences.” Jackson died in 1923. Housman outlived him by 13 years.

The poems, though written right at the century’s end, are in mood and metrics very much a product of the late-Victorian era, and, by 1911, Ezra Pound, that fervent propagandist for all things modern, had written a famously dismissive parody of Housman’s cast of mind, one that was to be followed by many others because Housman’s metrics and vocabulary were ripe for parody.

#### **Mr. Housman’s Message**

*O woe, woe,  
People are born and die,*

*We also shall be dead pretty soon  
Therefore let us act as if we were dead already.*

And so it goes. In some respects, this parody hits the mark—Housman’s yearning for easeful death as a painless alternative to the miseries of man’s earthly lot is an ever-present in the poems. On the other hand, Housman would have expressed nothing but contempt for Pound’s technical slovenliness, and quite rightly so.

George Orwell, too, had little time for Housman. Writing in the 1940s, Orwell spoke of the “tinkling” quality of Housman’s poetry, and of how Housman, in common with many other poets of his era, had shared a common snobbery about a countryside in which rustics, imagined to be more earthily passionate than the townsfolk who were reading them, come unstuck in the end after all that heroic and lifelong addiction to beer-swilling, cockfighting, and skittles. Hard cheese, old chaps! says Orwell. It’s all the stuff of adolescence.

Orwell has an interesting point here, and it has to do with Housman’s development as a poet, technically and emotionally. The technical shape of the early poems does not differ much from the technical shape of the later work. Nor does the subject matter. It is as if Housman became frozen into his vision of life as a poet very early on and never, for whatever reason, allowed it to age. In part, this must be to do with the freeze that the times imposed upon his sexual life. He was not permitted—or he did not permit himself—to grow into a fully realized emotional being. There was a serious disjunction between head and heart.

And so it is with the other Oxford intellectual grandees who put in their appearances in the first act of Stoppard’s play; though intellectually acute and always verbally dazzling, the likes of Jowett, Ruskin, and Pater are emotional pygmies who strut, preen, talk a great deal of fantastical nonsense, and, at heart, know much less than they think they know.

Later poets have often been kinder to Housman than Orwell; there is much to learn from the technical mastery of Housman’s verses, said W. H. Auden, and the beat of his poems has a power to move us by the sheer, adroit manipulation of simple words fastidiously ordered.

That is certainly true of the best of them. And simplicity was a virtue that the great modernists ignored to their detriment.

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In a copy of T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Housman wrote “This is me” alongside a passage which begins:

*I was very conscious of the bundled powers and entities within me; it was their character which hid. There was my craving to be liked—so strong and nervous that never could I open myself friendly to another. The terror of failure in an effort so important made me shrink from trying; besides, there was the standard; for intimacy seemed shameful unless the other could make the perfect reply, in the same language, after the same method, for the same reasons.*

## Poems by A. E. Housman

### From *More Poems*

#### VI

I to my perils  
Of cheat and charmer  
Come clad in armour  
By stars benign.  
Hope lies to mortals  
And most believe her,  
But man's deceiver  
Was never mine.

The thoughts of others  
Were light and fleeting,  
Of lovers' meeting  
Or luck or fame.  
Mine were of trouble,  
And mine were steady,  
So I was ready  
When trouble came.

#### VII

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.

#### XII

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

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

#### XXII

Ho, everyone that thirsteth  
And hath the price to give,  
Come to the stolen waters,  
Drink and your soul shall live.

Come to the stolen waters,  
And leap the guarded pale,  
And pull the flower in season  
Before desire should fail.

It shall not last for ever,  
No more than earth and skies;  
But he that drinks in season  
Shall live before he dies.

June suns, you cannot store them  
To warm the winter's cold,  
The lad that hopes for heaven  
Shall fill his mouth with mould.

### **XXIII**

Crossing alone the nighted ferry  
    With the one coin for fee,  
Whom, on the wharf of Lethe waiting,  
    Count you to find? Not me.

The brisk fond lackey to fetch and carry,  
    The true, sick-hearted slave,  
Expect him not in the just city  
    And free land of the grave.

### **XXX**

Shake hands, we shall never be friends, all's over;  
    I only vex you the more I try.  
All's wrong that ever I've done or said,  
And nought to help it in this dull head:  
    Shake hands, here's luck, good-bye.

But if you come to a road where danger  
    Or guilt or anguish or shame's to share,  
Be good to the lad that loves you true  
And the soul that was born to die for you,  
    And whistle and I'll be there.

### **XXXI**

Because I liked you better  
    Than suits a man to say,  
It irked you, and I promised  
    To throw the thought away.

To put the world between us  
    We parted, stiff and dry;  
"Good-bye," said you, "forget me."  
    "I will, no fear," said I.

If here, where clover whitens  
    The dead man's knoll, you pass,  
And no tall flower to meet you  
    Starts in the trefoiled grass,

Halt by the headstone naming  
    The heart no longer stirred,  
And say the lad that loved you  
    Was one that kept his word.

**From *Additional Poems***

**II**

Oh were he and I together,  
Shipmates on the fleeted main,  
Sailing through the summer weather  
To the spoil of France of Spain.

Oh were he and I together,  
Locking hands and taking leave,  
Low upon the trampled heather  
In the battle lost at eve.

Now are he and I asunder  
And asunder to remain;  
Kingdoms are for others' plunder,  
And content for other slain.

**XVIII**

Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?  
And what has he been after that they groan and shake their fists?  
And wherefore is he wearing such a conscience-stricken air?  
Oh they're taking him to prison for the colour of his hair.

'Tis a shame to human nature, such a head of hair as his;  
In the good old time 'twas hanging for the colour that it is;  
Though hanging isn't bad enough and flaying would be fair  
For the nameless and abominable colour of his hair.

Oh a deal of pains he's taken and a pretty price he's paid  
To hide his poll or dye it of a mentionable shade;  
But they've pulled the beggar's hat off for the world to see and stare,  
And they're haling him to justice for the color of his hair.

Now 'tis oakum for his fingers and the treadmill for his feet,  
And the quarry-gang on Portland in the cold and in the heat,  
And between his spells of labour in the time he has to spare  
He can curse the God that made him for the colour of his hair.

**From *Last Poems***

**XXVI**

The half-moon westers low, my love,  
    And the wind brings up the rain;  
And wide apart lie we, my love,  
    And seas between the twain.

I know not if it rains, my love,  
    In the land where you do lie;  
And oh, so sound you sleep, my love,  
    You know no more than I.

**From *A Shropshire Lad***

**XLIV**

Shot? so quick, so clean an ending?  
Oh that was right, lad, that was brave:  
Yours was not an ill for mending,  
'Twas best to take it to the grave.

Oh you had forethought, you could reason,  
And saw your road and where it led,  
And early wise and brave in season  
Put the pistol to your head.

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.

Right you guessed the rising morrow  
And scorned to tread the mire you must:  
Dust's your wages, son of sorrow,  
But men may come to worse than dust.

Souls undone, undoing others,—  
Long time since the tale began.  
You would not live to wrong your brothers:  
Oh lad, you died as fits a man.

Now to your grave shall friend and stranger  
With ruth and some with envy come:  
Undishonoured, clear of danger,  
Clean of guilt, pass hence and home.

Turn safe to rest, no dreams, no waking;  
And here, man, here's the wreath I've made:  
'Tis not a gift that's worth the taking,  
But wear it and it will not fade.

## The Classics

*Below is a brief overview of some of the classical writers quoted, translated, and discussed in The Invention of Love.*

### Greek Poets and Playwrights

**Sappho**, who lived in the seventh century B.C.E., was one of the great Greek lyricists and few known female poets of the ancient world. She was wealthy, and she chose to spend her life studying the arts on the isle of Lesbos. Sappho was called a *lyrist* because she wrote her poems to be performed with the accompaniment of a lyre. Sappho composed her own music and refined the prevailing lyric meter into a form now known as “sapphic meter.” She revolutionized lyric poetry in technique and style, becoming part of a new wave of Greek lyricists who moved from writing poetry from the point of view of gods and muses to the personal perspective of the individual. Sappho was one of the first poets to describe love and loss as they affected her personally. Her style was sensual and melodic, expressed primarily in songs of love, yearning, and reflection. Most often the target of her affections was female.

**Theognis** (fifth century B.C.E.) was a Greek elegiac poet from Megara. His lively poems are addressed to a boy, Cynus (or Kurnus), with whom Theognis was in love. His poems were often concerned with good breeding and are important for their portrayal of an aristocratic society in a changing world. The poems ascribed to Theognis, many of them doubtfully, provide more than half the surviving body of classical Greek elegiac poetry.

The Greek dramatist **Aeschylus (525?–456 B.C.E.)** is the earliest of the great tragic poets of Athens whose work survives. As the predecessor of Sophocles and Euripides, he is called the father of Greek tragedy. Aeschylus’ plays were the first to include two actors in addition to the chorus, making true dialogue and dramatic action possible. Only seven of his 90 dramas survive, including the *Oresteia*. His language is elaborate and grand, and his plays explore themes of morality and guilt.

**Sophocles (496?–406? B.C.E.)** was also one of the great Greek tragedians. At an early age, he decided to make the writing of tragedies his life’s work. He is credited with three major innovations in classical Greek drama: introducing a third actor, the painting of scenery, and the enlargement of the chorus from 12 to 15. His themes concentrate on the individual’s confrontation with and acceptance of suffering. Sophocles’ characters epitomize the depths of sorrow, the extremes of folly, and the bitter pangs of regret.

**Euripides (485–406 B.C.E.)** was the last of the three great Athenian tragedians. His plays depart from his predecessors, emphasizing unconventional and nontraditional themes. Aristotle characterized Euripides as portraying people as they are. He was attracted to stories of bizarre and violent passions and his work was considered the most tragic of the Greek poets.

**Aristophanes (450?–388? B.C.E.)**, was the greatest of Athens’s comedic dramatists, and the one whose works survive in the greatest quantity. He is the only extant representative of “Old Comedy,” the phase of comic playwriting in which chorus, mime, and burlesque played a large part and which was characterized by fantasy, merciless invective, outrageous satire, licentious humor, and freedom of political criticism. Although he is thought to have written about 40 plays, only 11 survive intact; most of the themes of his work were inspired by the Peloponnesian War. His plays are admired for their witty dialogue, good-humored (although sometimes scathing) satire, brilliant parody, and ingenious comic scenes.

## Roman Poets

**Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.)**, the greatest Roman poet, is best known for his epic the *Aeneid*. Although his life was quiet, Virgil's poetry reflects the general turbulence in Italy during an extended period of civil war and the trend toward stability that followed the rise of Octavian (later Emperor Augustus) to power in 31–30 B.C.E. His major works also included the *Eclogues*, 10 pastoral poems prophesying local tranquility and world peace, and the *Georgics*, which pointed toward a Golden Age in civil government. The 12 books of the *Aeneid* he completed before his death celebrated the legendary founding of Rome by Aeneas of Troy and the Roman unification of the world by Augustus as divinely ordained, glorious achievements.

**Horace (65–8 B.C.E.)** wrote lyric poetry and satires that demonstrate perfection of form and detailed self-portraiture. The general theme of his work is moderation. He fought on the losing side in the civil war (against Marc Antony) following Caesar's murder and was stripped of his family property. Poverty drove him to poetry, but he ended his life the favored poet of Augustus.

Horace's *Satires*, two books of discourses written in the 30s B.C.E., draw on Greek roots, expressing Horace's rejection of public life and aiming at the achievement of wisdom through serenity. The first book presents Horace's own personality through his opinions on various topics. The second book is written in dialogue form. The *Satires* are genial in tone and are written in hexameter which conveys a colloquial but urbane Latin.

Horace is perhaps most famous for his *Odes*, four books of lyric poems on a variety of subjects, public and private, including love, friendship, philosophy, and the art of poetry. Full of wit and charm and cleverness, the *Odes* show Horace's keen sense of situation and his sharp observation of the human comedy. He symbolizes the brevity of human life by extolling its ephemeral pleasures, like the countryside and wine. "*Diffugere nives*" is part of one of the *Odes*.

**Varius** (first century B.C.E.) was a friend of both Horace and Virgil, and he was considered the leading epic poet of the day. None of his work survives, including his *Thyestes*, a tragedy about the gruesome revenge of Atreus against his brother, reportedly considered to be the equal of any Greek tragedy.

**Catullus (84–54 B.C.E.)** looked to the Greeks—the learned, polished Hellenistic poets as well as lyric poets like Sappho—rather than to the Romans for inspiration. He took over the elegiac couplet of hexameter and pentameter, breaking with tradition by filling elegy with personal emotion. Catullus is best known for his 25 love poems to Lesbia, a married woman (whose real name was Clodia) with whom he fell in love. Catullus' passionate description in these poems of the delight and despair of love was very influential on his successors. Although the focus of the poems is on Lesbia, many of them express self-doubt, self-criticism, and self-pity. Clodia was a real person, possibly a patrician, one of three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, who according to Plutarch were frequently involved in scandal; she was probably the one who married the aristocratic governor of Gaul, Metellus Celer. Many scholars believe, however, that Catullus took poetic license with the facts of their affair for art's sake. Whatever the truth of the affair may be, critics generally agree that the Lesbia poems rank among the most intense and effective expressions of passion in Roman literature.

**Manilius** (early first century C.E.) the last of the Roman didactic poets, was the author of *Astronomica*, an unfinished poem on astronomy and astrology probably written between 14 and 27 C.E. Following the style and philosophy of Lucretius, Virgil, and Ovid, Manilius stressed the providential government of the world and the operation of divine reason. The five surviving books, consisting of 4,000 hexameters, are rarely read completely.



The **Roman love elegists**, writing in the first century B.C.E., “took Alexandrian metrical perfectionism and scholarly treatment of Greek mythology and contributed an immediacy and depth of personal feeling which were their own” (W. G. Shepherd). By adopting the Greek elegiac couplet as their form, and the love affair as their subject, they developed the genre of the Roman love elegy (technically defined as alternating hexameters and pentameters). These poets included Cornelius Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid. (Catullus, who preceded them, is not properly considered a Roman love elegist because he experimented in a variety of Greek meters as well, using an elegiac couplet only for his longer poems.)

Only one pentameter line of **Cornelius Gallus (69–26 B.C.E.)**’s four books of love elegies to his mistress “Lycoris” (actually the actress Cytheris, who was also loved by Marc Antony) survives. Gallus originated the genre of the love elegy. A friend of Octavian and Virgil, he fought in the civil war on Octavian’s side and was made the first prefect of Egypt in 30 B.C.E. There, however, his imprudent conduct led to his disgrace and suicide. Gallus was celebrated by Virgil, and Parthenius dedicated his book on unhappy love affairs to him.

Although his father wanted him to study rhetoric and practice law, **Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.)** was devoted to poetry. He was linguistically and metrically gifted, and his poems have strong, memorable plots. Ovid refined even more strictly the rules of poetic composition. He was married three times; the first two marriages were short-lived, but his third wife remained constant to him until his death. Ovid’s friends included Horace and Propertius.

Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* (*The Art of Love*), is a three-volume mock-didactic poem on the art of seduction. Ovid imagines a cultivated and pleasure-loving society where love is a game to be played with style and good humor. Books 1 and 2 are for men, and book 3 is for women. Ovid said he was exiled for a “poem” and a “slip,” which some have interpreted to mean he was exiled (to Tomis in 8 C.E.) because his *Ars amatoria* was in conflict with the emperor’s moralistic legislation—and because Ovid was perhaps involved in adultery with Augustus’ granddaughter Julia, who was banished at the same time.

**Propertius (50?–15? B.C.E.)** was born in Assisi. After studying law in Rome, he devoted himself to the writing of elegies, primarily on sensual love. The source of his inspiration was his mistress Hostia, whom he referred to in his poems as Cynthia. Propertius composed four books of elegies. The first, published about 25 B.C.E., deals almost entirely with his love for Cynthia and brought the author instant recognition. Of the remaining three books, two are devoted to love lyrics, and the last is diversified in subject matter. The self-absorption, striking imagery, and bold and difficult language of Propertius’ poems marked the emergence of a new spirit in Latin literature. Propertius acknowledged himself, in the tradition of Catullus, to be a servant to love, and his verses are an impassioned account of the vicissitudes of love.

**Tibullus (55–19 B.C.E.)** wrote two books of elegies: the first, mostly love elegies (five for Delia or Plania and three for a boy called Marathus); the second, love poems for a girl called Nemesis. His favorite themes are romantic love and country life.

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*These summaries are excerpted from the Wilma Theater’s Dramaturgical Glossary to The Invention of Love, compiled by Carrie Ryan and Emily Viscardi Shooltz, to be found at [www.wilma theater.org/inventionoflove](http://www.wilma theater.org/inventionoflove) (© 1999 Wilma Theater), augmented by material from Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature (© 1995 Merriam Webster, Incorporated), and Encyclopaedia Britannica’s Web site, [Britannica.com](http://Britannica.com) (© 1999 Britannica.com Inc.) The Wilma Theater presents the East Coast premiere of The Invention of Love, directed by Blanka Zizka, in Philadelphia February 9–March 12, 2000.*

## Classical Poems

### *Diffugere nives*

by Horace

(Odes IV 7, translated by A. E. Housman, in More Poems)

The snows are fled away, leaves on the shaws  
    And grasses in the mead renew their birth,  
The river to the river-bed withdraws,  
    And altered is the fashion of the earth.

The Nymphs and Graces three put off their fear  
    And unapparelled in the woodland play.  
The swift hour and the brief prime of the year  
    Say to the soul, *Thou wast not born for aye.*

Thaw follows frost; hard on the heel of spring  
    Treads summer sure to die, for hard on hers  
Comes autumn, with his apples scattering;  
    Then back to wintertide, when nothing stirs.

But oh, whate'er the sky-led seasons mar,  
    Moon upon moon rebuilds it with her beams:  
Come *we* where Tullus and where Ancus are,  
    And good Aeneas, we are dust and dreams.

Torquatus, if the gods in heaven shall add  
    The morrow to the day, what tongue has told?  
Feast then thy heart, for what thy heart has had  
    The fingers of no heir ever hold.

When thou descendest once the shades among,  
    The stern assize and equal judgment o'er,  
Not thy long lineage nor thy golden tongue,  
    No, nor thy righteousness, shall friend thee more.

Night holds Hippolytus the pure of stain,  
    Diana steads him nothing, he must stay;  
And Theseus leaves Pirithöus in the chain  
    The love of comrades cannot take away.

### *Intermissa, Venus*

by Horace

(Odes iv 1, translated by David Ferry)

Venus, it seems that now  
    Your wars are starting again.  
Spare me, spare me, I pray.  
    I am not what I was

When tender Cynara ruled me.  
Spare me, O pitiless mother  
Of all the amorini,  
For I am almost fifty.

...  
Now neither boys nor girls  
Delight me anymore,  
Nor credulous hopes of love,  
Nor drinking bouts nor garlands  
Woven of new spring flowers.  
But why, Ligurinus, why,  
Every once in a while  
Do my eyes fill up with tears?  
Why sometimes when I'm talking  
Do I suddenly fall silent?  
I hold you fast, sometimes,  
Sometimes, at night, in a dream,  
Or I follow you as you flee  
Across the Campus Martius,  
O hard of heart, Ligurinus,  
Or as you are lost among  
The bewildering waves of the river.

### **Lesbia**

#### **Live with Me & Love Me**

*by Catullus*

*(translated by Peter Whigham)*

### **5**

Lesbia

live with me  
& love me so  
we'll laugh at all  
the sour-faced strict-  
ures of the wise.  
This sun once set  
will rise again,  
when our sun sets  
follows night &  
an endless sleep.  
Kiss me now a  
thousand times &  
now a hundred  
more & then a  
hundred & a  
thousand more again  
till with so many  
hundred thousand  
kisses you & I  
shall both lose count

nor any can  
from envy of  
so much of kissing  
put his finger  
on the number  
of sweet kisses  
you of me &  
I of you,  
darling, have had.

**It Is Not Death He Fears**

*by Propertius*

(Book I)

**19**

It's not that I'm scared, my Cynthia, of the Underworld  
Or mind fate's debt to the final pyre,  
But the fear that when dead I may lose your love  
Is worse than the funeral itself.  
Not so lightly has the Boy clung to our eyes  
That with love forgotten my dust could rest.

There, in the unseen world, Phylácides the hero  
Could not forget his lovely wife,  
But eager to clutch delight with disappointed hands  
Came as a ghost to his old home Thessaly.  
There, whatever I am, I shall ever be called your shadow;  
Great love can cross even the shores of fate.

There let them come in troops, the beautiful heroines  
Picked by Argives from the spoils of Troy,  
No beauty of theirs for me could match yours, Cynthia—  
Indeed (may Mother Earth in justice grant it)  
Though fate remand you to a long old age,  
Yet to my tears will your bones be dear.

If only the living you could feel this for my ashes,  
Then death, wherever, for me would have no sting.  
Ah Cynthia, how I fear that love's iniquity  
Scorning the tomb may drag you from my dust  
And force you, though loth, to dry the falling tears;  
A faithful girl can be bent by constant threats.

So while we may let us delight in loving;  
No love is ever long enough.

## A Problem in Greek Ethics

by John Addington Symonds

*John Addington Symonds (1840–93), a poet, historian, essayist, and sexologist, was also one of the most fashionable doctors of his time. Educated at Oxford’s Balliol College and elected a fellow of Magdalen, he was also a favored student, friend, and collaborator of Benjamin Jowett. Best known in his day for his seven-volume Histories of the Renaissance, Symonds also wrote studies on Greek and Latin poets, English pre-Shakespearean dramatists, Whitman, and Dante, as well as several studies of “sexual inversion.” He was also an activist against the Labouchère Amendment, working behind the scenes to modify English laws against homosexual acts.*

*First published in 1883 in an edition of just 10 copies, A Problem in Greek Ethics is a comprehensive argument, controversial in its time, on behalf of male homosexual love through a systematic review of the art and literature of ancient Greece.*

For the student of sexual inversion, ancient Greece offers a wide field for observation and reflection. Its importance has hitherto been underrated by medical and legal writers on the subject, who do not seem to be aware that here alone in history have we the example of a great and highly developed race not only tolerating homosexual passions, but deeming them of spiritual value, and attempting to utilize them for the benefit of society. Here, also, through the copious stores of literature at our disposal, we can arrive at something definite regarding the various forms assumed by these passions, when allowed free scope for development in the midst of a refined and intellectual civilization. What the Greeks called *paidierastia*, or boy-love, was a phenomenon of one of the most brilliant periods of human culture, in one of the most highly organized and nobly active nations. It is the feature by which Greek social life is most sharply distinguished from that of any other people approaching the Hellenes in moral or mental distinction. To trace the history of so remarkable a custom in their several communities, and to ascertain, so far as this is possible, the ethical feeling of the Greeks upon this subject must be of service to the scientific psychologist. It enables him to approach the subject from another point of view than that usually adopted by modern jurists, psychiatrists, [and] writers on forensic medicine.



The ideal of character in Homer was what the Greeks called heroic; what we should call chivalrous. Young men studied the *Iliad* as our ancestors studied the Arthurian romances, finding there a pattern of conduct raised almost too high above the realities of common life for imitation, yet stimulative of enthusiasm and exciting to the fancy. Foremost among the paragons of heroic virtue stood Achilles, the splendour of whose achievements in the Trojan war was only equaled by the pathos of his friendship [with Patroclus]....[The Greeks] not unnaturally selected the friendship of Achilles for their ideal of manly love. It was a powerful and masculine emotion, in which effeminacy had no part, and which by no means excluded ordinary sexual feelings. Companionship in battle and the chase, and in public and in private affairs of life, was the communion proposed by Achilleian friends—not luxury or the delights which feminine attractions offered. The tie was both more spiritual and more energetic than that which bound man to woman...Even Aeschines...lays stress upon the mutual loyalty of Achilles and Patroclus as the strongest bond of their affection: “regarding, I suppose, their loyalty and

mutual goodwill as the most touching feature of their love.”



[W]e find two separate forms of masculine passion clearly marked in early Hellas—a noble and a base, a spiritual and a sensual....[T]he language of philosophers, historians, poets, and orators is unmistakable. All testify alike to the discrimination between vulgar and heroic love in the Greek mind...[A] quotation from one of the most eloquent of the later rhetoricians [Maximus Tyrius] will sufficiently set forth the contrast, which the Greek race never wholly forgot:—

*The one love is mad for pleasure; the other loves beauty. The one is an involuntary sickness; the other is a sought enthusiasm. The one tends to the good of the beloved, the other to the ruin of both. . . . The one is virile, the other effeminate. The one is firm and constant the other light and variable. The man who loves the one love is a friend of God, a friend of law, fulfilled of modesty, and free of speech. He dares to court his friend in daylight, and rejoices in his love. He wrestles with him in the playground and runs with him in the race, goes afield with him to the hunt, and in battle fights for glory at his side. In his misfortune he suffers, and at his death he dies with him. He needs no gloom of night, no desert place, for this society. The other lover transgresses law. Cowardly, despairing, shameless, haunting the dusk, lurking in desert places and secret dens, he would fain be never seen consorting with his friend, but shuns the light of day, and follows after night and darkness, which the shepherd hates, but the thief loves.*



There are three distinct things, Plato argues, which, owing to the inadequacy of language to represent states of thought, have been confounded. These are friendship, desire, and a third, mixed species. Friendship is further described as the virtuous affection of equals in taste, age, and station. Desire is always founded on a sense of contrast. While friendship is “gentle and mutual through life,” desire is “fierce and wild.” The true friend seeks to live chastely with the chaste object of his attachment, whose soul he loves. The lustful lover longs to enjoy the flower of his youth and cares only for the body. The third sort is mixed of these; and a lover of this composite kind is torn asunder by two impulses, “the one commanding him to enjoy the youth’s person, the other forbidding him to do so.” The description of the lover of the third species so exactly suits the *paidērast* of nobler quality in Greece, as I conceive him to have actually existed, that I shall give it a full quotation of this passage [translated by Jowett]:

*As to the mixed sort, which is made up of them both, there is, first of all, a difficulty in determining what he who is possessed by this third love desires; moreover, he is drawn different ways, and is in doubt between the two principles, the one exhorting him to enjoy the beauty of the youth, and the other forbidding him; for the one is a lover of the body and hungers after beauty like ripe fruit, and would fain satisfy himself without any regard to the character of the beloved; the other holds the desire of the body to be a secondary matter, and, looking rather than loving with his soul, and desiring the soul of the other in a becoming*

*manner, regards the satisfaction of the bodily love as wantonness; he reverences and respects temperance and courage and magnanimity and wisdom, and wishes to live chastely with the chaste object of his affection.*



It is well known that Theognis and his friend Kurnus were members of the aristocracy of Megara. The personal elegies [written by Theognis to Kurnus]...reveal the very heart of a Greek lover at his early period. . . . The bitter-sweet of love is well described in the following couplets:—

*Harsh and sweet, alluring and repellent, until it be crowned with completion, is love for young men. If one brings it to perfection, then it is sweet; but if a man pursues and does not love, then it is of all things the most painful.*

A couplet, which is...attributed to Solon, shows that *paidierastia* at this time in Greece was associated with manly sports and pleasures:—

*Blest is the man who loves brave steeds of war,  
Fair boys, and hounds, and stranger guests from far*

Nor must the following be omitted:—

*Blest is the man who loves, and after play,  
Whereby his limbs are supple made and strong,  
Retiring to his home, 'twixt sleep and song,  
Sports with a fair boy on his breast all day.*



The morality of the Greeks...was aesthetic. They regarded humanity as a part of a good and beautiful universe, nor did they shrink from any of their normal instincts. To find the law of human energy, the measure of man's natural desires, the right moment for indulgence and for self-restraint, the balance which results in health, the proper limit for each several function which secures the personal code of conduct ended in "modest self-restraint:" not abstention, but selection and subordination ruled their practice. They were satisfied with controlling much that more ascetic natures unconditionally repress. Consequently, to the Greeks there was nothing at first sight criminal in *paidierastia*. To forbid it as a hateful and unclean thing did not occur to them. Finding it within their hearts, they chose to regulate it, rather than to root it out. It was only after the inconveniences and scandals to which *paidierastia* gave rise had been forced upon their notice, that they felt the visitings of conscience and wavered in their fearless attitude.

In like manner the religion of the Greeks was aesthetic. They analysed the world of objects and the soul of man, unconsciously perhaps, but effectively, and called their generalizations by the names of gods and goddesses. That these were beautiful and filled with human energy was enough to arouse in them the sentiments of worship. The notion of a single Deity who ruled the human race by punishment and favour, hating certain acts while he tolerated others—in other words, a God who idealized one part of man's nature to the exclusion of the rest—had never passed into the sphere of Greek conceptions.

When, therefore, *paidēraistia* became a fact of their consciousness, they reasoned thus: If man loves boys, God loves boys also. Homer and Hesiod forgot to tell us about Ganymede and Hyacinth and Hylas. Let these lads be added to the list of Danaë and Semele and Io. Homer told us that, because Ganymede was beautiful, Zeus made him the serving-boy of the immortals. We understand the meaning of that tale. Zeus loved him. The reason why he did not leave him here on earth like Danaë was that he could not beget sons upon his body and people the earth with heroes. Do not our wives stay at home and breed our children? “Our favourite youths” are always at our side.

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*From A Problem in Greek Ethics, by John Addington Symonds © 1983 by Pagan Press.*



## **Who Was Who in *The Invention of Love***

*Below is a guide to some of the figures from late-19<sup>th</sup>-century British history who populate Tom Stoppard's *Invention of Love*.*

### **Oxford Cohorts**

During his first year at Oxford, Alfred Housman shared a staircase in the Canterbury Quad of St. John's College with a boy from London named **Alfred William Pollard (1859–1944)**. Like Housman, Pollard read classics and admired the poetry of Matthew Arnold, Tennyson, Rossetti, and the other English romantic poets. In 1880, Pollard, Housman, and their friend Moses Jackson took rooms together in a house on St. Giles Street, opposite the college. In 1881, Pollard received a first on his final examinations. He was hired by the department of printed books at the British Museum in 1883.

Pollard's friendship with Housman became strained over the years. Pollard later remarked: "I got it in my head that the sight of me reminded Housman of his troubles and was unwilling to thrust myself on him more than he might welcome." When in 1895 Housman was looking for a publisher of his poems, however, he turned to his old friend for advice. Pollard suggested the title, *A Shropshire Lad*, and the publishing firm, Kegan Paul. Still, Pollard and Housman saw each other only infrequently after that. They met last at a lunch at King's College, Cambridge, in 1934.

Housman's other close friend at Oxford was **Moses John Jackson (1858–1922)**. After receiving a first in 1881 in science—and many awards for his athletic achievements—Jackson was hired as Examiner of Electrical Specifications at the Patent Office. He moved into an apartment in Bayswater, in west London, with his younger brother Adalbert. Housman lived with them for three years before moving out (after an unexplained argument) in 1885.

In 1887, Jackson fell in love with a young widow, Mrs. Rosa Chambers. The same year, he accepted an appointment as principal of Sind College in Karachi. Jackson and Rosa became engaged, and he wrote to her frequently from abroad. Two years later Jackson returned to England, married Rosa, and took her back to India. In 1911, the couple moved with their family to British Columbia, where they bought a plot of land and took up farming.

The continuing depth of Housman's feelings for Jackson is suggested by Housman's diaries. The Jackson entries are poignant proof of Housman's hidden grief—none more so than his only entry for 1898, which he wrote into the 1891 diary in the space for Friday, May 22. Jackson was on home leave from India. In its entirety, Housman's note states: "Sunday 1898, 10.45pm, said goodbye."

Jackson died of stomach cancer in a hospital in Vancouver. His last letter to Housman began: "Dear old Hous." Housman, having traced over the lightly penciled letters with black ink, kept the letter with him for the rest of his life.

**Robinson Ellis** was a fellow in Latin at Trinity College when Housman was a student at Oxford.

### **Domineering Dons**

**Mark Pattison (1813–84)**, son of a Yorkshire clergyman, became a fellow at Lincoln College in 1839 and eventually earned a reputation as the most learned man at Oxford.

Pattison had a troubled marriage and was known to be a cuckolded celibate (he was reputedly the model for the gloomy unsuccessful scholar Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*). Yet near the end of his life, beginning in 1881, he enjoyed a romance of

the mind in a lively three-year correspondence with Miss Mertie Bradley, a woman 30 years younger.

In Pattison's diary for May 5, 1878, he describes a visit to one of his croquet-playing colleagues: "To Pater's to tea where Oscar Browning...conversed in one corner with 4 feminine looking youths, while the Miss Pater and I sat looking on in another corner. Presently Walter Pater, who I had been told was 'upstairs' appeared, attended by 2 more youths of similar appearance."

**Benjamin Jowett (1818–93)** was elected master of Oxford's Balliol College in 1870. He published many translations of Plato, as well as critical works on classical literature.

As a young fellow at Balliol in the 1850s, Jowett led a reform movement to strengthen the academic life of the university. Raising through his efforts the reputations of "Balliol men," he became a legendary master. A jingle, written in 1881, still has currency today:

*First come I, my name is J-W-TT.  
There's no knowledge but I know it.  
I am Master of this College.  
What I don't know isn't knowledge.*

A bachelor and a Platonist, Jowett remained celibate throughout his life (although he, too, carried on an epistolary romance, with Florence Nightingale). He made excuses for Plato's love of men, on the grounds that it was easily transposable by modern readers into love of women. "Had [Plato] lived in our own times," wrote Jowett, "he would have made the transition himself."

**John Ruskin (1819–1900)**'s undergraduate career was generally undistinguished—perhaps hampered by the fact that his mother came to live in Oxford to keep him company. Largely on the basis of two books published during the 1840s, however, he established himself as the leading art critic in Britain by the age of 27, and was elected the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Christ Church College in 1869.

An outspoken opponent of the Aesthetic movement that emerged in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ruskin emphasized the importance of morality in art, arguing that artists could best display their morality by fidelity to nature and by eschewing self-indulgent sensuality. His art criticism extolled the faith and Gothic style of the medieval period and condemned the decadence of the Renaissance.

Known for the dramatic eccentricity of his educational techniques, Ruskin was known to "dance and recite, with the strangest flappings of his M.A. gown, and the oddest look on his excited face" while lecturing. Once, in an attempt to dignify the idea of manual labor, he organized a voluntary project to restore the natural beauty of the Oxford countryside. The work became a national joke, and it was a popular afternoon amusement to stroll out to the "Hinksey Diggings" and laugh at the student recruits.

**Walter Pater (1839–94)** in 1864 was made probationary fellow at Brasenose College, which became his academic home for the rest of his life. In 1873, he published his most famous work, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which celebrated the flowering of humanism in Italy in the 15th century. In these essays (which tend to glorify male friendship and beauty), Pater argued passionately for the cultivation of each moment of life, "seeking not the fruit of experience but experience itself." Once Ruskin's disciple, he came to be known as the most unapologetic proponent of the Aestheticism his former master despised.

One scandal did attach itself to Pater. In 1876, Jowett, then master of Balliol, discovered that a young undergraduate named William Hardinge (known in college

circles as “the Balliol bugger”) had written a number of “indecent” sonnets to Pater, who had replied with letters signed “Yours lovingly.” Deeply shocked, Jowett broke off relations with his friend Pater, who promptly ended his epistolary relationship with Hardinge.

Despite the extravagance of his imagination, Pater remained reticent in practice; Edmund Wilson described him as “one of those semi-monastic types...that the English universities breed.”

### **Political Contemporaries**

In 1885 **W. T. Stead (1849–1912)**, then editor of the *Pall-Mall Gazette*, wrote a sensational series of articles exposing the prostitution of young girls in London and the exportation of girls to foreign countries for immoral purposes. The furor ignited by Stead’s “Maiden Tribute Campaign” inspired the House of Commons to pass the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which, among other effects, raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16. Stead went down with the *Titanic* on its maiden voyage.

While the Criminal Law Amendment Bill was under consideration, Radical Member of Parliament **Henry Labouchère (1831–1912)** persuaded the House of Commons to add a clause—the “Labouchère Amendment”—criminalizing “any act of gross indecency” between male persons and punishing such acts with two years imprisonment with hard labor.

Later in life, Labouchère gave contradictory and muddled explanations for his infamous legislative legacy. Many historians believe that he intended the act to punish what he considered the scourge of homosexual activity. His friend Frank Harris, however, argued that Labouchère introduced the clause to make the entire bill seem ridiculous, hoping thereby to doom its chances of becoming law.

Certainly in his own life, Labouchère demonstrated a great deal of sexual license (the actress Henrietta Hodson was one of his many mistresses before she became his wife.) And he spoke out against the provision of the bill intended to raise the age of consent.

Whatever Labouchère’s motives, his amendment played a significant role in institutionalizing the suppression of homosexuality (a term that first entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 1897) at the end of the 19th century. Oscar Wilde became the law’s most famous victim in 1895; its provisions remained the primary legal instrument imposed in England against homosexual acts until 1967. (Ironically, W. T. Stead was one of the very few British journalists to write sympathetically about Wilde’s tragic conviction and imprisonment.)

An adventurer, journalist, and incorrigible liar, **Frank Harris (1856–1931)** became editor of the *Evening News* in 1885 and of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1886. Over the course of his life, he wrote many books, among them *My Life and Loves*, all of which are filled with invented escapades of all kinds.

### **Soul Mate**

**Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854–1900)** studied at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, then Trinity College, Dublin, and finally Magdalen College, Oxford. At Oxford he came under the influence of Ruskin, and especially Pater, who exalted beauty above all else. Wilde soon gained a reputation for his wit and style, wearing unusual costumes and filling his rooms with blue china and paintings by Rossetti and Burne-Jones. He distinguished himself academically as well, winning the Newdigate Prize for English verse and receiving a First in Greats.

After Wilde went down from Oxford in 1878 (at the end of Housman’s first year at St. John’s College), he moved to London and quickly established himself as the

“Apostle of Aestheticism.” By 1881, his notoriety was already such that a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera, *Patience*, satirized Aestheticism in the form of a character named Bunthorne, based on Wilde. In 1884 he married Constance Mary, daughter of a distinguished Irish barrister, with whom he had two boys.

Wilde wrote successful poems, plays, short stories, and essays. His only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, published in 1891, generated a torrent of criticism directed at its protagonist and its author. That same year Wilde wrote *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, which launched his career as a dramatist, followed in quick succession by *Salomé* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1892), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), all of which were wildly popular with London audiences.

Amidst this success, Wilde fell in love with a young poet named Lord Alfred Douglas, whom Wilde affectionately called “Bosie.” In the spring of 1895, Bosie’s father, the marquis of Queensberry, left a card at Wilde’s club in London accusing Wilde of being a “sodomite.” Encouraged by Bosie, Wilde brought a libel action against the marquis. The trial was a disaster for Wilde: the marquis was acquitted, Wilde was arrested, and in May Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor under the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885. He composed one last poem, the “Ballad of Reading Gaol,” about his experiences in prison.

After his release in 1897, Wilde moved to France, where he lived in penury and public disfavor during his remaining years. He visited Naples with Bosie in August 1897, arriving a few days after Housman had left for home. Wilde died in Paris from an illness caused by injuries he received in prison.

### **Influential Others**

**John Percival Postgate** was a scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge University, where Housman became a fellow in 1911. He wrote books on the classics as well as primers on the pronunciation of Latin and Greek. Postgate proposed Housman for membership in the Cambridge Philological Society in 1892 and in 1895 argued with Housman about manuscripts of Propertius.

In 1889, at the age of 30, **Jerome K. Jerome (1859–1927)** published *Three Men in a Boat (to Say Nothing of the Dog)*, a comic novel about the misadventures of four travelers as they make their way from London to Oxford on the River Thames. The book was a huge commercial success. Jerome went on to found *The Idler*, a humorous magazine that published pieces by Bret Hart, Mark Twain, and W. W. Jacobs, among others.

**Katharine Housman (1862–1945)** was a cheerful girl, but she hated lessons and was therefore considered something of a dunce by her family. She maintained a lively correspondence with her older brother Alfred while he was at Oxford, but when he returned home after failing his final examinations in 1881, she was at something of a loss.

Commenting on Housman’s poems in *A Shropshire Lad*, Kate confessed that she preferred the verse to the sentiments, which seemed to her to be taken from the book of Ecclesiastes.

In Greek mythology, **Charon** poles the disembodied spirits of the dead across the river Acheron or the river Styx. Charon will only ferry those who have been properly buried; others must wait 100 years before entering the realm of Hades. Tradition also has it that the dead must pay Charon for the ferry ride; hence a coin, in Greek *obolos*, is placed in the deceased’s mouth before burial to provide the fare.

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*This guide was prepared by Assistant Director Tom Clyde, augmented by information that appeared in the program of the Royal National Theatre’s 1997 premiere production of The Invention Love.*

## Wilde Observations

God knows; I won't be an Oxford don, anyhow. I'll be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous, I'll be notorious.

■

The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring: I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder: I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet, at the same time that I widened its range and enriched its characterization: drama, novel, poem in rhyme, poem in prose, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction: I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me: I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram.

—*De Profundis*

■

Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others.

■

Self-denial is simply a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a survival of the mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world, and which even now makes its victims day by day, and has its altars in the land.

■

To be Greek one should have no clothes: to be mediaeval one should have no body: to be modern one should have no soul.

The only spirit which is entirely removed from us is the mediaeval; the Greek spirit is essentially modern.

■

### **The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885**

The amendment reads: "Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and, being convicted thereof, shall be liable, at the discretion of the Court, to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour." When it was pointed out to Queen Victoria that women were not mentioned, she is reported to have said, "No woman would do that."

—*Oscar Wilde*, by Richard Ellmann

## **A Guide to Some of the People, Locations, and Quotations Mentioned in *The Invention of Love***

### **Act I**

#### **AEH, aged seventy-seven and getting no older...**

A. E. Housman was 77 years old when he died at the Evelyn Nursing Home in Cambridge in the early morning of April 30, 1936. He suffered from heart trouble and stayed at the home a number of times during the last three years of his life.

#### **Stygian gloom**

“Stygian” is the Latinized, adjectival form of the Greek word “Stux,” or Styx. It connotes impenetrable darkness.

#### **Belay the painter there, sir!**

A nautical expression. “Belay” means to secure a rope by winding it on a cleat or pin. “Painter” refers to a rope attached to the front end of a boat. So “Belay the painter!” means: Secure on a cleat the rope attached to the bow of the boat.

#### **The tongues of men and of angels!**

From the King James Bible, I Corinthians 13:1: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

#### **Trinity College**

Housman held the post of Benjamin Kennedy Hall Professor of Latin at Trinity College, Cambridge University, from 1911 until his death in 1936.

Colleges at Cambridge and Oxford in Housman’s day were independent and autonomous institutions. They catered to a range of subjects, and their buildings formed mini-campuses that generally included a dining hall, a chapel, a library, common rooms, and gardens. Residential accommodation for students was usually arranged vertically around staircases.

#### **Shropshire**

A region in western England. Housman’s first book of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*, published in 1896, featured poems set in this region. As a boy he often looked west onto the distant Shropshire hills from the top of a hill near his house in Worcestershire.

#### ***Sabrinae Corolla***

In this volume, Benjamin Hall Kennedy translated a number of poems about English life into Latin. (The Sabrina is a river in England, and *corolla* is a little crown, or a gift.) Housman received a copy of Kennedy’s translation when he was 17. It was “what first turned my mind to those studies and implanted in me a genuine liking for Greek and Latin.”

#### **Balliol men**

Founded in 1263, Balliol is one of the oldest colleges at Oxford. The mid 19<sup>th</sup> century at Balliol was characterized by an increasing liberalism among the fellows. Under Jowett, who was master of Balliol from 1870 to 1893, academic brilliance was encouraged along

with originality, and there was a heavy emphasis on character, leadership, duty, and public service. Informal and even close relations between teachers and students became a vital component of the Balliol ethos. Several fellows, like Jowett, were prominent in the debates of 1850–70 on university reform. Balliol men of this generation cultivated an appearance of “effortless superiority.”

Under Jowett’s guidance, Balliol acquired a reputation for academic rigor that distinguished its students from those of other colleges. By the end of the 19th century, graduates of Balliol filled many positions in the British Civil Service and Foreign Office, as well as in Parliament.

***akribos***

Greek for “exact” or “precise.”

**a three-headed dog**

From Greek mythology. This is a reference to Cerberus, the monstrous three-headed dog, sometimes described as having a mane of snakes, who guards the entrance to Hades.

**Yea, we have been forsaken in the wilderness to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles!**

From the King James Bible, Matthew 7:15–16: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” In his *Classical Papers*, Housman writes of scholars whose work is flawed but whose “appeals to the reader’s superstitions” would nevertheless “persuade him to hope without reason and against likelihood that he will gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles.”

**Iffley**

A town neighboring Oxford. Pollard, Jackson, and Housman are rowing on a tributary of the Thames that flows through Iffley as well as Oxford.

**uninflected dog**

Latin is an inflected language, which means that words have different endings that indicate their grammatical function, allowing them to appear in a sentence in any order. If a word is uninflected, it is unclear what its grammatical function is in a sentence—which is why a sentence in English doesn’t make any sense if the words are put in a different order.

**Elysian Fields**

From Greek mythology. Located in Hades, the Elysian Fields are where the dead who were most honored during their lifetimes are allowed to reside for eternity instead of dying. There is a long tradition in Western literature of speculation as to who will meet with whom in the Elysian Fields. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante writes of visiting the Elysian Fields (*The Inferno*, Canto 4, trans. Lawrence Grant White):

*Now we went onward from the meadow’s edge  
To a high open place suffused with light,  
From where the company could all be seen.  
And there upon that green-enameled sward  
Were shown to me the spirits of the great—  
Whom to have seen was glory in itself.*

*I saw Electra, with a throng of souls  
Among whom Hector and Aeneas were;  
Caesar, in armor, with his falcon eye;  
I saw Camilla, and Penthesilea...  
Plato was there, and Socrates as well...  
Euclid the measurer, and Ptolemy...*

**I had only to stretch out my hand—*ripae ulterioris amore!***

Housman is paraphrasing a line from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI. When Aeneas visits the realm of Hades, he arrives first on the bank of the river Styx. He stands among a crowd of spirits, the ghosts of improperly buried people waiting 100 years to be ferried across the Styx by Charon. Virgil writes (trans. Robert Fitzgerald): "There all stood begging to be first across / And reached out longing hands to the far shore."

***Nec Lethaea valet Theseus abrumpere caro vincula Pirithoo***

This line, the last in Horace's "*Diffugere nives*," is translated by AEH as "Theseus leaves Pirithous in the chain / The love of comrades cannot take away." Young Housman instead translates it, more accurately, as "And Theseus has not the strength to break the Lethean bonds of his beloved Pirithous."

After reciting this poem once in a lecture, Housman commented to his students: "That, I regard as the most beautiful poem in ancient literature."

**Theseus**

From Greek mythology. Like Achilles and Patroclus, Orestes and Pylades, Theseus and Pirithous had one of the most famous male friendships in classical mythology. Theseus, heroic slayer of the Minotaur, husband of Phaedra and father of Hippolytus, was king of Athens. In one of his many adventures, Theseus descended to the realm of Hades with Pirithous to carry away Persephone, the consort of Hades, lord of the underworld. As punishment, Hades bound the two men to a rock with invisible chains. When Hercules later rescued Theseus, he was unable to free Pirithous, who remained fastened to his seat in the underworld for eternity. The two friends were forced to say goodbye forever, despite the "love of comrades" described by Horace in "*Diffugere nives*."

**receives a book from him**

When students came up to Oxford in Housman's day, the vice-chancellor presented each student with a violet-bound copy of the university statutes during a matriculation ceremony. This book advised students in Latin against such disreputable activities as trundling a hoop, wearing a coat that is not black, and carrying firearms.

***trochum...neque volvere...***

Latin for "no trundling a hoop." During the late 19th century and well into the 20th (as well as in ancient Greece and Rome), children commonly played with hoops of wood or metal, rolling them along flat surfaces and sometimes striking them with a stick to keep them going.

**rugby football to Association rules**

In Britain, soccer is often called "association football," and it is played according to Association rules. Rugby was born from football when, in 1823, a player picked up the ball and ran with it. The first official rugby game was played in 1871, so at this time it was still a relatively new variant of association football.



***Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano***

From Juvenal's 10<sup>th</sup> *Satire*: "There will be a sound mind in a sound body."

***ludere doctior seu Graeco iubeas trocho***

From Horace's *Odes* iii 24: "But he knows very well how to play at Grecian hoops."

**Torpids**

Rowing at Oxford University takes place on the Isis, as the river Thames is known locally. The main rowing events are the Torpids, held during the sixth week of Hilary Term (February), and Eights Week, held during the fifth week of Trinity Term (May).

**Bromsgrove...Worcestershire**

Housman attended King Edward's School in Bromsgrove, or the Bromsgrove School, as a "day-boy" (not a boarding student) for seven years. During Housman's first year at the Bromsgrove School his mother, Sarah Jane Williams, became very ill with breast cancer; Housman became so solemn and quiet that the other boys nicknamed him "Mouse."

***Ars. Am.***

Abbreviation for *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's *Book of Love*.

**Mods and Finals**

In Housman's day, every Oxford undergraduate faced two sets of exams: Moderations and Finals. Students sat for "Mods" at the end of their second year. If a student succeeded at Mods, he received close attention from his tutors. If he failed, he could be sent down, or generally ignored. For Housman, Mods consisted of translations from and into Greek and Latin. Finals tested students on their full four years of study. Housman's Finals tested his knowledge of philosophy, logic, and other subjects as well as Greek and Latin. A student's results on Finals at Oxford or Cambridge determined to a great extent his or her position in the British ruling class.

**came up to Oxford**

When a student enters the university, he or she is said to have "come up" to Oxford. When expelled, s/he is "sent down." After graduation, s/he "goes down."

**Aesthete**

The Aesthetic movement in England began in the early 1850s and flourished in the 1870s and 1880s. The movement began as a rebellion against the mass production and mass education of the industrial age and against the strict moral standards of Victorianism. Where Victorians valued self-restraint and industry, Aesthetes preferred the free expression of personality and pleasure seeking. Aesthetes sought to experience art in their lives as "art for art's sake." Indeed, this phrase became the Aesthetic slogan. It meant that art should have no aim other than the creation of beauty, and above all no moral purpose. Oscar Wilde was the poster child of the movement, which also included the likes of Pater, James Whistler, and Aubrey Beardsley.

Largely through Wilde's notoriety, Aestheticism did a great deal to break the psychological and cultural shackles of Victorian society and usher in a new age. Because Aesthetes were willing to defy convention, the term also came to refer to men who loved other men.

**John the Baptist was locusts and wild honey. . . first the wilderness and then head on a platter**

Reference to the Biblical story of the prophet John the Baptist (patron saint of St. John's College, where Housman studied at Oxford) in Matthew 3:1–4: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, / And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. / For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. / And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

The story became the subject of one of Oscar Wilde's most infamous plays, *Salomé*, which in 1892 was denied a license for production in London because of its controversial subject matter and overtly sensual nature. While imprisoned by King Herod, John denounced Salomé, the king's niece, as an incestuous harlot. Enchanted by Salomé's dancing at a feast, Herod offered to grant her any reward, and she demanded John's head on a silver platter.

### **new pronunciation**

In England, the pronunciation of Latin has been subject to outside influence. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was so far removed from its classical origins that it was virtually unintelligible elsewhere. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oxford and Cambridge approved a new pronunciation that had been recommended for years, reconstructing the way the language sounded in classical days. One of the most notable shifts was that the letter "v" came to be pronounced as "w."

### ***Veni, vidi, vici***

Latin for "I came, I saw, I conquered," the simple dispatch Julius Caesar sent to the Roman Senate to report his victory over Pharnaces II, King of Pontus, at Zela (now in northwestern Turkey) in 47 B.C.E.

### **venereal pursuits**

Derived from the Latin word "Venus," the word "venereal" refers to love, but it has a connotation of lust as well.

### ***Da mi basia mille, deinde centum***

From Catullus 5 ("Lesbia, Live with Me & Love Me"): "Give me a thousand kisses, and then a hundred more."

### **Miss Liddell**

Alice Liddell was the young girl for whom Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) wrote *Alice in Wonderland*. As the daughter of the dean of Christ Church College, Miss Liddell would be very unlikely, under any circumstances, to "go dum-di-di" in the sense that Jackson hears it. And Jackson would be unlikely to seek such an end, without first proposing marriage to her.

### **Christ Church**

Christ Church College at Oxford was traditionally understood to be the place where the aristocracy sent its sons.

### **She has to scan with Lesbia.**

Whereas in English verse the meter of a poem is determined by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line, Greek and Latin verse uses quantitative meter in which stress plays no part. Meter is determined by the number of syllables in a line and whether they are long or short.

For a name to “scan with Lesbia” (or to metrically match Lesbia, therefore fitting into a poem in its place), it would have to be a dactyl; that is, one long and two short syllables (“Dum-di-di”). In other words, “Lesbia,” the name of Catullus’ beloved, has three syllables, with the emphasis on the first syllable. If Jackson wants to replace Lesbia’s name with Miss Liddell’s in the poem, then her first name must also have three syllables, with the same long-short-short pattern.

**Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus...**

From Catullus 5: “Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love.”

***Nox est perpetua.***

Latin for “Night is perpetual.”

***Basium / osculum***

*Basium* was a new word for “kiss” coined by Catullus. *Osculum* is the earlier form of “kiss”; it literally means “little mouth.”

**Mind the gap.**

Often heard in modern-day London in a prerecorded message on the London underground.

**navvy**

A manual laborer.

**It’ll be a pity if inversion is all he is known for.**

Wilde’s humor did rely to a great extent on the witty inversion of words in well-known or otherwise straightforward expressions. Of course Wilde would be known for more than inversion: today he is remembered for his plays, his poems, his stories, his trial in 1895, and his love for Lord Alfred Douglas. “Sexual inversion” was also a common term for homosexuality in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**He went to the Morrell’s ball in a Prince Regent costume.**

The Morrell family was an old established clan in Oxford who ran a brewing company in St. Thomas Street from 1782 until 1953. Richard Ellmann, an Oscar Wilde biographer, notes that “on May 1, 1878, [Wilde] dazzled an all-night fancy-dress ball, given by Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Morrell at Heddington Hill Hall for three hundred guests, by wearing a Prince Rupert costume with plum-colored breeches and silk stockings. This finery pleased him so well that he bought it from the hiring firm and wore it playfully in his rooms.”

**in the High**

High Street is the main thoroughfare in the town of Oxford.

**1835, and Oxford was an utter disgrace**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Oxford was a disorganized sprawl of colleges, and its academic standards were low: clergymen taught students without any agreed-upon understanding of what constituted a proper education.

**great reform of the fifties**

Known as the University Reform Act of 1854; Jowett proved quite influential in its passage. A Royal Commission investigated accusations of a restricted curriculum, high

cost, incompetent fellows, bad teaching, and the exclusion of non-Anglicans and the poor. The resulting act of Parliament introduced a new constitution, changes in the fellowship system, and the acceptance of non-Anglicans as undergraduates. Thereafter, university conservatives struggled to maintain the clerical and classical character of the university by insisting on religious tests and compulsory Greek. Ultimately, a second reform was instituted in 1877, leading to the promotion of research, the contribution of money from richer colleges to a common fund, and the removal of religious restrictions for fellows.

### **Medieval Gothic**

Gothic architecture flourished from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The term “Gothic” was coined in the Renaissance by artists looking to classical models. They derogatorily associated the Gothic style with the Goths who had invaded Rome during the fifth century. Gothic architecture is characterized by columns, high vaults, flying buttresses, and stained-glass windows.

### **cathedral at Chartres**

The cathedral at Chartres, in north-central France, is considered a masterpiece of Gothic architecture. It features beautiful stained-glass windows and hundreds of religious sculptures. Its two bell towers are more than 350 feet tall.

### **paintings of Giotto**

Giotto (1276–1337) was the most important Italian painter of the 14th century, whose conception of the human figure in broad, rounded terms—rather than in the flat, two-dimensional terms of Gothic and Byzantine styles—indicated a concern for naturalism that was a milestone in the development of western art.

### **poetry of Dante**

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), an Italian poet and one of the supreme figures of world literature, was admired for the depth of his spiritual vision and for the range of his intellectual accomplishment. Dante’s first important literary work, *La vita nuova*, was written not long after the death of his beloved, Beatrice. The work narrates the course of Dante’s love for Beatrice and his ultimate resolve to write a work that would be a worthy monument to her memory. Dante’s work is a shining example of contemporary Florentine vernacular poetry. His masterpiece is *The Divine Comedy*, which also celebrates Beatrice.

### **young Raphael**

Raphael (1483–1520) was one of the most influential painters of the Italian Renaissance. He worked for both Pope Julius II and Pope Leo X and created many noted paintings of the Madonna and child. His work is known for its grace, perspective, and perfect composition. The masterpiece of his youth is *Marriage of the Virgin* (1504), in which Mary receives a ring from an ideally handsome Joseph. Raphael painted a series of frescoes in the pope’s private quarters at the Vatican, and he directed the building of St. Peter’s Basilica from 1514 until his death.

### **sonnets of Michelangelo**

Michelangelo (1475–1564), one of the greatest artists in history and a leader of the Italian Renaissance, was a sculptor, painter, architect, and poet. Although he is best known for the energy and emotion of his sculptures of the human body, as in his *David*, and his frescoed ceilings in the Sistine Chapel, during the last period of his life he concentrated

on architecture and poetry. His sonnets chronicle his spiritual autobiography, and today they are lauded by the gay community. An excerpt: “And if the vulgar and malignant crowd / Misunderstand the love with which we’re blessed, / its worth is not affected in the least, / our faith and honest love can still feel proud.”

### **Correggio’s lily-bearer in the cathedral at Parma**

Antonio Allegri from Correggio, near Parma, was born in 1489. The “lily-bearer” in this painting is an attractive boy. Correggio’s work is characterized by a harmonious intimacy between the figures and a strong light.

### **honeyed mouth and lissome thighs of Ganymede**

From Greek mythology. The young Trojan prince Ganymede was as a boy so beautiful that Zeus, in the guise of an eagle, carried him away to Mount Olympus, where he served as cupbearer to the gods and lover to Zeus. The word “catamite” (the companion to “sodomite”) is derived from the Latin version of his name, “Catamitus,” and in the Middle Ages he typified homosexual love.

In *Male Love: A Problem in Greek Ethics*, Oxford scholar John Addington Symonds quotes a couplet attributed by Plutarch to the Greek poet Solon: “In the charming season of the flower-time of youth thou shalt love boys, yearning for their thighs and honeyed mouth.”

### **the Balliol bugger**

In British slang, a “bugger” is a man who engages in sodomy. The scandal of William Hardinge, known as “the Balliol bugger,” was widely reported in the London newspapers.

### **Platonic enthusiasm**

Invoking spiritual, rather than physical, love.

### ***Phaedrus***

A Platonic dialogue in which Socrates and Phaedrus discuss the true nature of love. Phaedrus argues that it is better for a boy to take as a lover a man who is not truly in love with him than to accept one who is. Socrates compares the soul to a charioteer controlling two horses—man’s sensual and spiritual appetites. He argues that true lovers can overcome the sensual appetites and pursue goodness together. At the end of the dialogue, they abruptly leave love behind to compare their rhetorical techniques.

### ***paederastia***

Greek for “love of boys,” often thought of as sodomy of boys.

### **Munro’s *Catullus***

*Criticisms and Emendations of Catullus*, by H. A. J. Munro, was published in 1878, Housman’s second year at Oxford. Munro was the Regius Professor of Latin at Cambridge University while Housman was an undergraduate at Oxford. Housman held his work in high regard.

### **Blackwell’s**

Blackwell’s Books is a famous and very old bookstore on Broad Street in Oxford.

### **“The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis”**

Catullus 64, a long poem based on Greek mythology. Thetis, a sea goddess and shapeshifter, lived in a grotto by the sea. Peleus tied her down while she was sleeping and continued to hold her tight as she assumed shape after shape. He finally had his way with her; their son was Achilles.

### **Lord Leighton**

Frederick Leighton (1830–96) was the leader of the Victorian classical school of painting. He painted subjects from classical mythology.

*emersere feri [freti] candenti e gurgite vultus aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes*

From Catullus 64. The poem reads in part (trans. Peter Whigham):

*As the moving waves took the keel  
the water, chopped with oars, grew white  
and from the runnels of foam faces peered  
of Nereids, wondering. Then  
and not since  
men with their own eyes  
saw the bare bodies of nymphs  
in broad daylight  
caught in the marbled runnels of foam  
so far down as the nipples...*

### **Verona Codex of Catullus**

A codex is an early form of book, consisting of bound sheaves of handwritten pages. The *Verona Codex* is the only text of Catullus' work that survived into the 14th century; it was copied then and soon thereafter lost.

### **Codex Oxoniensis**

The *Codex of Oxford*, the version of Catullus which was copied from the *Verona Codex*. It was found by Robinson Ellis in the Bodleian Library around 1860.

### **Baehrens**

Emil Baehrens was a German scholar who published an edition of Catullus in 1876 based on the *Codex Oxoniensis* and an edition of Propertius in 1880.

### **Monobiblos, Propertius Book One**

Propertius' first book of poems, consisting almost entirely of elegant and witty love poems to “Cynthia,” a pseudonym for Hostia. The work of Propertius poses a particular challenge for critics since the poems are not in their original order, *Monobiblos* was not Propertius' own title, and the first book did not originally circulate separately from Propertius' other four volumes.

### **Aristophanes, *The Frogs***

The western tradition's earliest extended instance of literary criticism occurs in *The Frogs* (405 B.C.E.), a comedy by Athenian playwright Aristophanes. *The Frogs* pokes fun at the contrasting styles of Greek dramatists Aeschylus and Euripides. In the play, Dionysus, the patron god of tragedy, is ferried by Charon to Hades to bring his favorite dramatist, Euripides, back to Athens. Once there, he is enlisted to judge whether

Aeschylus or Euripides should possess the throne of tragedy (Sophocles has already conceded). They debate: Is the writer's first commitment to uphold and promote morality or to represent reality? Is the task of drama and other forms of literature primarily to improve (Aeschylus' view) or primarily to inform (Euripides' view) the audience? Dionysus ultimately chooses Aeschylus. The play won Aristophanes first prize and a crown of sacred olives at Lenaea in 405 B.C.E.

### **Dionysus**

In Greek mythology, the god of wine and of ecstasy. Born out of Zeus's thigh, he was persecuted by those who did not recognize his divinity, most notably by Pentheus, the subject of Euripides' *Bacchae*. He showed mortals how to cultivate grapevines and make wine. Unlike the other gods, he is a giver of joy and a soother of cares, experienced by the worshipper through intoxication. Dionysus also inspired ecstatic, orgiastic, often excessive worship, known as Dionysiac possession.

### ***Myrmidones***

A lost play of Aeschylus, in which he suggests that Achilles and Patroclus were not just comrades but lovers.

### **Sisyphus**

From Greek mythology. Sisyphus was the most cunning of men, perhaps the father of Odysseus. After he repeatedly escaped death, the gods of the underworld devised a famous punishment for Sisyphus when he finally died of old age: he had to roll up to the top of a hill a rock which always rolled down again just as it was about to reach the summit.

### **Achilles**

The son of Peleus and Thetis, Achilles is the chief Greek hero of the Trojan War. When his comrade (and, many believe, lover) Patroclus is killed by the Trojan hero Hector, Achilles kills Hector and drags his dead body behind his chariot. He sacrificed many Trojan prisoners at Patroclus' funeral. His passion and anger are portrayed (especially in Homer's *Iliad*) as more savage than that of most Greeks, but they stem from his devotion to Patroclus.

### **Patroclus**

In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles' lover, Patroclus, is slain by Hector during the Trojan War. Achilles avenges his death by killing Hector. The friendship of Achilles and Patroclus was a frequent subject of Greek literature and is considered among the greatest gay love stories of all time.

### **Where is thy sting?**

From the King James Bible, I Corinthians 15:54–55: "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

### **Greats**

A course of study at Oxford that, in Housman's day, consisted of papers in ancient history, logic, and moral and political philosophy, reinforced by Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plutarch, Cicero, Sallust, and Tacitus. Housman, Pollard, and Wilde all read for this degree at Oxford. Pollard and Wilde received firsts; Housman failed.

### **sweet city of dreaming spires**

A description of Oxford by the poet Matthew Arnold (1822–88), one of Housman's favorite poets.

### **from the plains of Moab to the top of Mount Pisgah like Moses when the Lord showed him all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea**

From the King James Bible, Deuteronomy 34:1–2: “And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over Jericho.” Housman called a hill near his home Mount Pisgah because it looked over the hills and hamlets of Shropshire, which appeared to him to be the Promised Land.

### **Alfred burning the cakes**

From a story familiar to English schoolchildren. King Alfred the Great (849–99 C.E.), king of the west Saxons, protected himself from attacking Danes by posing as a cook in his kitchen. He burned the cakes in the oven.

### ***Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis***

From Propertius' *Book One* I: “Cynthia who first took poor me captive with her eyes.”

### **Bodleian Library**

The central library of Oxford University, the Bodleian opened in 1602 with approximately two thousand books assembled by Thomas Bodley, a diplomat and fellow of Merton College. By agreement with the Stationer's Company in London, Bodley arranged in 1610 that every book entered at Stationer's Hall should go to this library. In 1911, the Copyright Act empowered the Bodleian Library to demand one copy of every book published in the United Kingdom; today it holds more than 4 million books.

### **Paley**

An editor of Propertius' poems.

### ***ut / et / aut***

Latin for “as,” “and,” and “or.”

### **Newdigate**

The Oxford University competition for English verse composition on a set subject. It was established in 1806 by Sir Roger Newdigate of University College. The professor of poetry and a panel of judges judge the competition, and the winning entry is read by the author at the commencement ceremony each spring. Housman entered his poem “Iona” in 1879 (“Find ye the truth, if so divine it seems, But we will live our lives & die in dreams”), but did not win. Oscar Wilde won the Newdigate Prize for his poem “Ravenna” in the 1875.

### **A monument more lasting than bronze...**

A reference to the first line of Horace's *Ode* iii 30 (trans. David Ferry):

*Today I have finished a work outlasting bronze  
And the pyramids of ancient royal kings.  
The North Wind raging cannot scatter it  
Nor can the rain obliterate this work,  
Nor can the years, nor can the ages passing.  
Some part of me will live and not be given*



*Over into the hands of the death goddess.  
I will go on and on, kept ever young  
By the praise in times to come for what I have done.*

**fallen like a flower at the field's edge where the plough touched it and passed on by**

A reference to a line from Catullus 11 (trans. Peter Whigham):

*...blind to the love that I had for you,  
once, and that you, tart, wantonly crushed  
as the passing plough-blade slashes the flower  
at the field's edge.*

**Thou ailest here, and here.**

From a poem by Matthew Arnold (*Memorial Verses* st. 3) about the German scholar and poet Goethe:

*...Physician of the Iron Age,  
Goethe has done his pilgrimage.  
He took the suffering human race,  
He read each wound, each weakness clear;  
And struck his finger on the place,  
And said: "Thou ailest here, and here!"*

**Opis**

A variant of "Ops," originally a Latin goddess of fertility. When the Romans adopted Greek mythology, she also became the mother of Jupiter, the Roman name for the Greek god Zeus.

**Richard Bentley**

An early and highly esteemed classical scholar at Cambridge University 1700–42.

**Achilles would get his Blue**

Oxford University's color is blue. When a student is selected to play on a university team, he is said to "get his Blue."

**Field of Mars**

Mars is the Roman name for the god of war. The Field of Mars, or *Campus Martius*, was a field in ancient Rome used for games, military exercises, and public meetings.

**vester for tuus**

Both are Latin for "yours." "Vester" is the formal expression, "tuus" the more intimate.

**In Homer, Achilles and Patroclus were comrades.**

In the *Iliad*, Homer makes no suggestion that Achilles and Patroclus are anything more than devoted comrades.

**Aeschylus brought in Eros.**

Eros is the Greek god of love and of physical desire. He likely figures in Aeschylus' lost *Myrmidones*, with its suggestion that Achilles was the lover of Patroclus.

***The Loves of Achilles***

A lost play by Sophocles, only one line of which survives.

***Pirithous***

A lost play by Euripides, presumed to be about Theseus and Pirithous.

**Horace in his dreams ran after Ligurinus across the Field of Mars.**

This is an image from Horace's *Odes* iv 1 (trans. David Ferry):

*Or I follow you as you flee  
Across the Campus Martius,  
O hard of heart, Ligurinus.*

**Sacred Band of Theban Youths**

A regiment of the Boetian army made up of 150 pairs of lovers. Because they guarded the citadel, the state provided all things necessary for exercise; hence, they were called the city band. The Sacred Band joined lovers and their beloveds, under the thinking that an army cemented by friendship grounded upon love would never be broken, and would therefore be invincible: lovers, ashamed to be brought down in sight of their beloveds, and the beloveds before their lovers, would willingly rush into danger to protect one another.

The Sacred Band went undefeated until the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C.E., when they were all killed by the army of Philip II of Macedonia in his resounding defeat of the Athenian and Theban forces as they made a last desperate stand for independence. According to the Greek philosopher and biographer Plutarch (46–120 C.E.), each man fought so determinedly at the side of his beloved that when Philip saw the fallen lovers, “he shed tears, and said, ‘Perish any man who suspects that these men either did or suffered anything that was base.’” The battle was a turning point in Greek history and marked the beginning of the decline of Greek civilization. (Philip [359–36 B.C.E.] was the father of Alexander the Great.)

**To dream of taking the sword in the breast, the bullet in the brain.**

A paraphrase of a line from “The Day of Battle” in *A Shropshire Lad*:

*...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.*

Many of Housman's poems glorify the heroic theme of laying down one's life for a friend.

***abrumper***

Latin for “to break away,” or “tear away.”

***Intermissa, Venus, diu / Rursus bella moves? Parce precor, precor!***

The opening stanza of Horace, *Odes* iv 1, the poem in which Ligurinus is featured: “Venus, it seems that now / Your wars are starting again. / Spare me, spare me, I pray.”

**Matthew, Chapter 19**

This chapter of the New Testament discusses at length the self-denial necessary to enter the kingdom of God in the Christian faith.

—but why, Ligurinus, alas why this unaccustomed tear trickling down my cheek?

The final lines of Act I are a translation of the final lines of Horace's *Odes* iv 1 (*"Intermissa, Venus"*).

## Act II

**All the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea, but not including Wales which I give to the Methodists.**

From the King James Bible, Deuteronomy 34:1–2. "And the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea." Many Welsh are Methodists. The joke here is that Housman is quoting God giving all of Judah to Dan, but here God amends his offer to exempt Wales.

### **But what happened, Alfred?**

What happened was Housman failed his Finals and did not receive a degree from Oxford University when he went down in 1881 after four years of study there. Both of his closest friends, Pollard and Jackson, received firsts, in Greats and science, respectively. Housman did retake the examinations for Greats a year later, in June 1882, and therefore received his degree, with only a pass. Later when he had established himself as a classical scholar and a poet, Housman was named an honorary fellow at Oxford. There are many theories about why Housman failed, ranging from the serious illness of his father in the early months of 1881 to the distraction of his love for Jackson, but no one knows for certain what happened.

### **Clemence**

Housman's sister Clemence Annie (1861–1955) was two years younger than Alfred. Clemence was deeply religious as an adult, which prevented Housman from being very close to her in later years.

### **Mr. Millington**

Herbert Millington was the headmaster of the Bromsgrove School when Housman was a student there. He was very encouraging to students who excelled.

### **Sixth Form**

The final year of secondary school in England. Students in the sixth form are usually 17 or 18.

### **Basil**

Housman's brother Basil was born in 1864. They were very close as adults. Basil worked as a doctor and lived in London, and when Housman visited they often laughed together.

### **Laurence**

Laurence Housman (1865–1959) was Alfred's youngest brother. He wrote poetry and plays and was openly homosexual.

### **Civil Service Exam**

An 1870 order mandated that the recruitment of civil servants be done by open, competitive examination as opposed to the patronage appointment system of the past.

The Civil Service Commission, established to oversee the administration of examinations, developed its exam along the lines of the classical curriculum of the public schools and of Oxford and Cambridge. The thinking was that intelligent individuals who had received the best “all-around” or general education would make the best civil servants. Consequently, men of high intellectual caliber but little or no training in particular areas of policy began to enter civil service careers. The exam favored those candidates who were products of a middle- to upper-class education, and the administrative class consequently became dominated by former students of Oxford and Cambridge, especially Oxford.

### **Reading Room of the British Museum**

This famous public library in the British Museum in London served many great historical figures in their studies (Karl Marx wrote much of *Das Kapital* there). Housman came here often to read the classics after he had finished his day’s work at the Patent Office.

### **Clee—our Promised Land**

The Clee hills to the west were a vision of paradise to Housman when he was growing up.

### **Mamma / our real mother**

In 1869, when Housman was ten, his mother, Sarah Jane Williams, was found to have cancer in both breasts. Her health deteriorated, and she died two years later, at the age of 43, on Housman’s 12th birthday (March 26, 1871). In 1873, Housman’s father, Edward Housman, married in 1873 his cousin Lucy Housman. Lucy was welcomed by the children almost immediately. On her first night with them she and the children decided they would call her “Mamma.” After they had grown, they called her “Mater.” Lucy died in 1907.

### **Gilbert and Sullivan / *Patience***

W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan’s comic operas were wildly popular in their day. *Patience* featured a character named Bunthorne based on Oscar Wilde.

### **Underground-Overground Steam Railway**

The London subway system in Housman’s day. Housman and Jackson are taking the train back to their lodgings in Bayswater.

### ***Journal of Philology***

This journal of classical scholarship published Housman’s first article, “Horatiana,” on Horace’s poetry, in 1882.

### **D’Oyly Carte has made the theatre modern.**

Theatrical producer Richard D’Oyly Carte (1844–1901) introduced London and New York to the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. From 1881 to 1896, he produced their operettas at the Savoy Theatre, which was built especially for that purpose and was the first theater to be lighted by electricity. D’Oyly Carte is credited with having improved standards of performance and production.

### **Savoy / gas-lit St. James / Haymarket / Adelphi**

The major theaters in London at the end of the 19th century.

### **an electric corset**

Dr. Scott's Electric Corset really did cross Housman's desk—or at least the registration documents for it did.

### **Trade Marks**

This refers to the Trade Marks Registry, where Housman worked. His job was to investigate claims of new works as compared to those already registered.

### **Is the registered giraffe Platonic?**

In *The Republic*, Plato distinguishes between the universals, or ideas, of things (e.g., the idea of a chair) and their contingent forms (i.e., chairs actually in the world). So the question Housman asks is playful: If the registered giraffe is Platonic, then the trademark for the use of its image in an advertisement would broadly apply to all the giraffes that appear in the world, regardless of the form they take. If, on the other hand, the registered giraffe is not Platonic, then the trademark on the use of its image would apply only to the one giraffe that happens to be registered.

### ***in esse et in posse***

Latin for “in existence and in possibility,” a common phrase in 19th century philosophical writings. *In esse et in posse* refers to all items of a given set that exist now or will exist in the future.

### **cartoons in *Punch***

In the pretelevision era, cartoons played an important role as social commentary. The publication of a new book of poems by Housman, under the title *Last Poems*, occasioned a cartoon in *Punch* in 1922. The cartoon showed Housman playing a pipe and dancing at the temple of the muse. The muse reaches out to him and says: “Oh, Alfred, we have missed you! My lad! My Shropshire Lad!”

### **We floated him.... Then we kited the stock.**

To “kite stock” is to encourage the purchase of a worthless stock.

### **The *Gazette***

A reference to W. T. Stead's *Pall-Mall Gazette*.

### ***Truth***

A reference to Frank Harris's newspaper. Harris interviewed Housman in 1910 for his newspaper—by all accounts a very awkward lunch.

### **bought a 13-year-old virgin for £5 to prove a point**

W. T. Stead published a series of articles on vice and prostitution in the *Pall-Mall Gazette* in July 1885. By way of research, he ordered five virgins to be procured for him.

### ***Evening News***

Harris became editor of the *Evening News* in 1885.

### **electors of Darlington**

W. T. Stead served as editor of the *Northern Echo*, in the town of Darlington. Largely through Stead's influence, Darlington was the first town in England to hold a public meeting to express indignation at the British government's pro-Turkish position.

### **Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria**

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgaria had been under Turkish control for five centuries. Bulgaria began fighting for self-determination, and Turkey responded with increased despotism, including the rape of Bulgarian girls.

### **General Gordon**

In 1880 Britain sent General Gordon (1833–85), a distinguished British soldier, to Sudan to help the Egyptian ruler put down a revolt. Gordon defended Khartoum against the Muslim leader Muhammad Ahmed, holding the city for 317 days. He was killed during the fall of Khartoum in 1885, two days before a British relief party came to his rescue.

**General Skobelev at the Battle of Plevna:** When Turkey effectively quashed the Bulgarian April Uprising of 1876, Russia declared war on Turkey. Russia sent General Skobelev to lead troops into Plevna, a military stronghold, and he led the Russians to victory. In the resulting treaty, Bulgaria gained its independence, but Disraeli ensured that Russia's power in the restructured Europe was kept to a minimum.

### **Brighton College**

Harris was a French tutor at Brighton College before becoming a journalist.

### **despatches out by balloon**

At the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, French government troops lay siege to the city of Paris, against which protesting communards put up a desperate defense. During the siege of the city, Labouchère sent articles out by balloon.

### **pitchforking amendments in...pig's breakfast**

"Pitchforking amendments in" refers to the practice of introducing many amendments to proposed legislation to get it voted down. "Pig's breakfast" is slang for slop.

### **German archeologist...Schliemann**

German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann (1822–90) excavated the grave at Chaeronea and discovered the famous ruins of Troy.

### **Ealing**

A town on the outskirts of London.

### **Northwest Passage**

The Northwest Passage was believed to be a waterway leading from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Northwest Passage became the "holy grail" for generations of explorers, as its discovery would have dramatically shortened the time necessary to travel from one ocean to another.

### ***victor ludorum***

Latin for "the winner of the games."

### **Scaliger**

Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) was a French classical scholar. He established rules of criticism for studying texts and the classics and published editions of numerous Latin authors, including Catullus, Propertius, and Manilius. Housman admired his work.

### **professor at UCL**

Housman was appointed Professor of Latin at University College, London (UCL), in 1892.

### **“Diffugere nives” goes through me like a spear.**

As noted above, Housman considered Horace’s “*Diffugere nives*” the most beautiful poem in ancient literature. Housman borrowed the expression “goes through me like a spear” from Keats, who wrote in one of his last letters of his love for Fanny Brawne: “Everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear.” Housman quoted this letter in a lecture on poetry at Cambridge. His turn of phrase also recalls the legend of Achilles and Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, who fought for the Trojans against Achilles and the Greeks. After a long battle with her, Achilles speared her through the heart. At the moment of her death, they caught eyes. Achilles fell madly in love with her just as she took her last breath. Their love was ended before it began.

### **Humanism**

A cultural and intellectual movement born in the Italian Renaissance following the rediscovery of the literature, art, and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. Humanism is characterized by an interest in the capabilities of human beings and a belief in progress.

### **Erasmus**

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) was a Dutch theologian, scholar, humanist, and traveler. He is considered the father of modern classical philology. He felt that the proper basis for the interpretation of the New Testament was the original Greek text and not the Latin Vulgate of Jerome. He wrote pure classical Latin and worked vigilantly to restore manuscripts.

### **Ovid's *Medea***

A famous lost tragedy. Ovid used Euripides as the source of this tragedy about his favorite mythological figure.

### **Aeschylus’ trilogy of the Trojan War**

Aeschylus wrote a trilogy about the Trojan War. *Myrmidones* was one of the included plays. All three are lost.

### **Blest as one of the gods is he**

A line from a poem by Sappho.

### **Where’s the one again where I’m carving her name on trees?**

A reference to Propertius 18. The poem reads in part: “If trees can know love, they shall be witnesses— / Beech and pine that’s friend to Arcadia’s God. / Ah, in their tender shade how often my word’s echo.”

### ***Quinque tibi potui servire fidelitur annos***

Latin for “five years your faithful slave.”

### **gather your rosebuds while you may**

A line from “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” by Robert Herrick (1591–1674):

*Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,  
Old Time is a flying:*

*And this same flower that smiles today,  
To morrow will be dying.*

**the grave's a fine and private place but none I think do there embrace**  
From "To His Coy Mistress," by Andrew Marvell (1621–78):

*The Grave's a fine and private place,  
But none I think do there embrace.  
Now therefore, while the youthful hew  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing Soul transpires  
At every pore with instant Fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may.*

**If that's the price for kisses due, it's the last kiss I steal from you.**  
From Catullus 99.

**I'm all hobnails.**

"Hobnails" is British slang for a countryman, a boor.

**chivalric ideal of virtue in the ancient world**

In ancient Greece and Rome the highest accomplishment possible was to perform an heroic act for one's comrades and fellow citizens.

**lost dog loves young man – dog young lost man loves, loves lost young man dog... the endings tell you which loves what**

In Latin, unlike English, the ending of a word tells the listener or reader the function of that word in the sentence, whether for example it is the subject or the object, regardless of its order. This provides an advantage to poets writing in Latin because they can rearrange the words more easily to find a rhyme or create emphasis.

The final variant may be a description of Housman in love. In *Last Poems* XXXV, Housman wrote:

*When first my way to fair I took  
Few pence in purse had I,  
And long I used to stand and look  
At things I could not buy.*

*Now times have altered: if I care  
To buy a thing, I can;  
The pence are here and here's the fair,  
But where's the lost young man?*

**200 corpses**

A reference to the battle of Chaeronea.

**apparatus criticus / Breiter's apparatus to Manilius**

An *apparatus* is the critical commentary that accompanies a translation.

**Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?**



Wilde is quoting from a poem Housman wrote following Wilde's conviction in 1895. Housman never published this poem in his lifetime; it eventually appeared as *Additional Poems* XVIII.

**Now 'tis oakum for his fingers**

Again Wilde is quoting from Housman's poem.

**If you're not shot, hanged or stabbed, you kill yourself. Life's a curse, love's a blight, God's a blaggard, cherry blossom is quite nice.**

Chamberlain here refers to images from a number of Housman's poems. In "The True Lover" (*A Shropshire Lad* LIII), a lover kills himself after he makes a vow of eternal devotion:

*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.*

In another poem (*A Shropshire Lad* II), Housman writes of the beauty of a cherry blossom:

*Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough...  
About the woodlands I will go  
To see the cherry hung with snow.*

**Uranian persuasion**

British slang for homosexuality.

**Diamond Jubilee**

The Diamond Jubilee consisted of a series of celebrations in June and July 1897, commemorating the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. The Diamond Jubilee also became a celebration of the British empire, which had just concluded two decades of frenzied growth. Public thanksgiving services were held throughout Britain on Sunday, June 20, with Queen Victoria attending a simple service at St. George's Chapel. She was 78 years old, the longest reigning monarch in British history. The main event of the Diamond Jubilee was a procession held in London on June 22, the exact date of her accession to the throne 60 years earlier.

**I wouldn't have put a tanner on it.**

A "tanner" is a sixpence coin and the price of sending a telegram in 1896.

**So it's an ill wind from yon far country blows through holt and hanger.**

As Housman points out, this mangles a line from *A Shropshire Lad* (XXXI):

*'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger  
When Uricon the city stood:  
'Tis the old wind in the old anger,  
But then it threshed another wood.*

**early though the laurel grows, it withers quicker than the rose**

From "To an Athlete Dying Young" (*A Shropshire Lad* XIX):

*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.*

**Cumber. Thews.**

A reference to "Reveille" (*A Shropshire Lad* IV):

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

**beginning of '95**

Housman wrote most of the poems later published in *A Shropshire Lad* during the early months of 1895.

**ploughboys and village lads... didn't take the queen's shilling and get shot in foreign parts**

These images fill Housman's poems.

**"Because I liked you better than suits a man to say..."**

From Housman's *More Poems* XXXI. This poem was not published during his lifetime.

**From Clee to Heaven the beacon burns!**

The first line of "1887," the first poem in Housman's first book of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*, published in 1896. The poem describes Jubilee night:

*From Clee to heaven the beacon burns,  
The shires have seen it plain,  
From north and south the sign returns  
And beacons burn again.*

*Look left, look right, the hills are bright,  
The dales are light between,  
Because 'tis fifty years tonight  
That God has saved the Queen.*

**Hughley church steeple, graveyard**

A reference to "Hughley Steeple" (*A Shropshire Lad* LXI):

*The vane on Hughley steeple  
Veers bright, a far-known sign,  
And there lie Hughley people,  
And there lie friends of mine.*

Kate is right that Hughley's church does not have a steeple. Housman had never set foot in Hughley; he simply liked the name and took it for the poem.

### **a sore throat**

In February 1895, Housman came down with a sore throat; during the following five months he wrote many of the poems that he later published in *A Shropshire Lad*, *Last Poems*, and other posthumous books of poetry. When a woman later asked Housman when he would write more poems, he responded: “When I next have a relaxed throat.” (In the Hindu tradition, the throat is the fifth chakra and represents the energy center for communication and creativity.)

### **you became a sort of footnote**

*The Invention of Love*'s Chamberlain is based on John Maycock, a colleague of Housman in the Patent Office. When Housman applied for the professor of Latin chair at UCL in 1892, Maycock wrote a letter of support; Housman kept this letter (with the letter from Jackson) with him until he died.

Tom Stoppard has said that he always puts a character named Chamberlain in his plays because his secretary's name was once Chamberlain, and he wants to make sure she stays awake while typing his manuscripts. He has also kept production dramaturgs, theater scholars, and interviewers busy researching (and footnoting) the identities of the real-life Chamberlains who inspire their Stoppardian namesakes.

### **Robbie**

Robert Ross, Robbie to his friends, was an astute art critic, a gifted essayist, and a frequent contributor to some of the most prestigious journals of his time. It is as a close personal friend of Oscar Wilde and as his literary executor that Ross is principally remembered. They met when Wilde was 32 and Ross 17; it has been conjectured that Ross first introduced Wilde to homosexual relationships. Though he was for a time supplanted by Lord Alfred Douglas in Wilde's affection, Ross remained Wilde's most enduring friend, staying close to him throughout his imprisonment and illness in Paris.

### **The report of the inquest in the *Evening Standard*...Woolwich cadet...blew his brains out**

In 1895, a young navel candidate shot himself because he did not want to live with the “evil” impulses caused by his homosexuality. Housman wrote the poem “Shot? So clean, so quick an ending?” (*A Shropshire Lad* XLIV) after reading about the suicide.

### **Shakespeare's Dark Lady of the sonnets probably had bad breath**

Shakespeare acknowledged as much when he wrote Sonnet CXXX:

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;*

*And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks...*

### **sincerity is the enemy of art**

In “Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young,” published in the *Chameleon* in 1894, Wilde wrote, “In all unimportant matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity is the essential.” Many have followed his example. In an interview late in his life, novelist Vladimir Nabokov remarked: “‘Art is simple, art is sincere.’ Someday I must trace this vulgar absurdity to its source. A schoolmarm in Ohio? A progressive ass in New York? Because, of course, art at its greatest is fantastically deceitful and complex.”

### **Housman and Wilde once had poems in the same magazine.**

Their poems appeared in the March 1881 issue of *Waifs and Strays*, an Oxford literary magazine.

### **mercury cure**

Through the early 1900s, mercury was believed to be a successful cure for syphilis. It could be administered by injection, vapor, ointment, or tablet. The mercury cure caused Oscar Wilde’s slightly protruding teeth to turn black, so that thereafter he usually covered his mouth with his hand while talking.

### **Vive Monsieur Melmoth!**

French for “Long live Monsieur Melmoth!” Wilde renamed himself Sebastian Melmoth while he lived in France.

### **Bernard Shaw**

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was a noted playwright, a popular critic, and a Fabian socialist. His criticisms were marked by levity, social perspective, and digressions. “Everybody in London knows Shaw,” remarked a journalist in 1891, “Fabian socialist, art and music critic, vegetarian, ascetic, humorist, artist to the tips of his fingers, man of the people to the tips of his boots. The most original and inspiring of men—fiercely uncompromising, full of ideas, irrepressibly brilliant—an Irishman.”

### **Beardsley**

Aubrey Beardsley (1872–98), plagued by tuberculosis from childhood, had a creative life of only six years. He excelled in line drawing and book and magazine illustrations, a path he chose fearing that life would not grant him the time to develop skills as a painter. In his brief career he acquired notoriety for his suggestive and often outright erotic style. Beardsley ended his life in a desperate and depressed grasp at Catholicism, pleading in his last days that all of his “obscene drawings” be destroyed.

### **Whistler**

Painter James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, and from the mid 1850s lived in London and Paris. The unusual color scheme and compositions of his paintings along with his habit of using musical terms to title his paintings led people to consider him eccentric, and eventually Whistler drew the scorn of John Ruskin. In the 1878 libel case *Whistler v. Ruskin*, the artist explained to the British public his philosophy of art for art’s sake and questioned the critic’s privilege.

### **Henry Irving**

Henry Irving (1838–1905) was the most distinctive English actor of the day, thanks to his unconventional performances, including his famed Hamlet in 1874. He opened the Lyceum Theatre in 1878 and ran the theater extravagantly for over 20 years. Irving maintained a high ideal of his profession, and in 1895 he was the first actor to be knighted. His health failing, Irving was forced to sell the theater on unfavorable financial terms, and after a life of innovation and success, ultimately died penniless in 1905.

### **Lily Langtry**

Lily Langtry (1853–1929) was the first “society woman” to go on the London stage. Unlike her contemporaries Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt, she was not trained as an actress, but still won the support of audiences in England and America. Headstrong and independent, Langtry had a love affair with the prince of Wales. Oscar Wilde allegedly wrote *Lady Windermere’s Fan* for her.

### **the betrayal of oneself is a lifelong regret**

An echo of Wilde’s famous comment: “To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.”

### **Hyacinth when Apollo loved him**

From Greek mythology. Hyacinthus was a Greek divinity loved by both Apollo and Zephyrus. He returned the love of Apollo, but not of Zephyrus. When Hyacinthus and Apollo were throwing the discus together, Zephyrus blew Apollo’s discus off its course. It struck the head of Hyacinthus and killed him. Apollo caused a flower, the hyacinth, to spring up from his blood.

### **Manilius**

Housman published his edition of *Book One* of the Roman poet Manilius in 1903. Eventually he published translations and commentaries on all five books of Manilius, the last in 1930, which were the major achievement of Housman’s academic career. He dedicated all five volumes to “M. J. J.,” Moses John Jackson.

### **nameless, luckless love**

Lord Alfred Douglas wrote in a poem of “the love that dare not speak its name.” Housman wrote of his love as “unlucky” (*More Poems*, XII): “But this unlucky love should last / When answered passions thin to air.”

### **those who willfully live in sadness—sullen in the sweet air**

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante describes these souls as submerged in a swamp. Making holes in the water, they gargle a song (*The Inferno*, Canto 7, trans. John Ciardi):

*Sullen were we in the air made sweet by the Sun;  
in the glory of his shining our hearts poured  
a bitter smoke. Sullen were we begun;  
sullen lie we forever in this ditch.*

### **Pure of stain!**

Wilde quotes Housman’s translation of “*Diffugere nives*”: “Night holds Hippolytus the pure of stain.”

### **the artist is the secret criminal in our midst**

As far back as Plato, artists were seen as subversive elements in the public sphere. George Bernard Shaw observed: "Creative men are notoriously self-willed, refusing to be bound by any rules, a trait they share with criminals. The difference between them is that the artist sublimates his rebellion into creativity."

### **I dipped my staff into the comb of wild honey. I tasted forbidden sweetness and drank the stolen waters.**

Housman wrote of drinking "stolen waters" in *More Poems* XXII: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth / And hath the price to give, / Come to the stolen waters, / Drink and your soul shall live." Thinking of this poem, E. M. Forster wrote of Housman:

*He enjoyed a glass of port. That is something. One wishes he could have enjoyed the happy highways which he resigned in the body but possessed so painfully in the imagination. Perhaps he had a better time than the outsider supposes. Did he ever drink the stolen waters which he recommends so ardently to others? I hope so.*

### **New Drama, the New Novel, New Journalism, New Hedonism, New Paganism, even the New Woman**

In the 1890s, a barrage of "New such-and-suches" were bandied about. These movements included the "New Fiction," which made realism and naturalism the dominant techniques in British fiction. Writers began to explore hitherto taboo subjects, depicting the lives of the lower classes with graphic directness. They attempted to record without moral commentary life as it appeared around them. The "New Hedonism" was derived from the controversial conclusion to Pater's *Renaissance*. As Oscar Wilde put it, the goal of the New Hedonism was "to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment." The phrase "New Woman" signified a recognition that women had emotional and physical needs unfulfilled by the traditional roles assigned to them. Anti-feminists were alarmed by the New Woman's pursuit of self-fulfillment instead of time-honored self-renunciation. New women strove to be equal to men, not dependent.

### **self-advertisement of farce and folly**

The idea of love as folly was firmly entrenched by Shakespeare's time. In *As You Like It* (Act II, scene iv), Touchstone remarks: "We that are true lovers run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly." Housman wrote in *A Shropshire Lad* XIV:

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

### **you couldn't do better with a Kodak**

Housman was particularly attuned to advertising after his years working at the Trade Marks Registry. Kodak developed this slogan many years after Housman died, so Housman's reference to it reminds us that the Aristotelian unities of the play (see below) are collapsing as he nears the timeless state of death. Linear time is beginning to loop.

**unities out the window**

Housman here refers to the “Aristotelian unities” of time, place, and action, popularized by Castelvetro in his 1570 edition of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. During this speech, the illusions of the play are beginning to break down. Housman and the audience are simultaneously recognizing that they are participating in a shared act of the imagination; accordingly the time frame of the play is beginning to expand rapidly to include the present day. Thus the actor playing Housman comments on the structure of the play within which he acts.

**cravings of an unnatural disease**

Homosexuality began to be discussed as an illness or disease for the first time in the early part of the 20th century.

**Furies, Harpies, Gorgons, the snake-haired Medusa, to say nothing of the Dog**

From Greek mythology. Here Housman gives a shorthand account of the realm of Hades. Furies are the female spirits of revenge. In Aeschylus’ *Orestia*, for example, the Furies pursue Orestes after he murders his mother, Clytemnestra. Harpies are supernatural winged creatures. According to legend, they swoop down and carry people away. The Gorgons are three sisters who were transformed into monsters; Medusa is the most feared of the Gorgons. Poseidon fell in love with Medusa, and he took her to a temple of Athena to enjoy her. Angry at this indecorous use of her temple, Athena transformed Medusa into a monster with hair of snakes. Medusa was reputed to be so hideous that looking at her turned a man to stone. The Dog is a reference to Cerberus, as well as to the subtitle of Jerome K. Jerome’s book *Three Men in a Boat, to Say Nothing of the Dog*.

**standing on this empty shore, with the indifferent waters at my feet**

The “empty shore” may be, at last, the shore of the underworld, where Housman now stands. The “indifferent waters” may also refer to the waters of the river Lethe, the river of forgetfulness or oblivion.

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*This guide was prepared by Assistant Director Tom Clyde, augmented by excerpts from the Wilma Theater’s Dramaturgical Glossary to The Invention of Love, compiled by Carrie Ryan and Emily Viscardi Shooltz, to be found at [www.wilmatheater.org/inventionoflove](http://www.wilmatheater.org/inventionoflove) (© 1999 Wilma Theater).*

## Study Questions

1. Is AEH dead or dreaming in this play? What makes you think so (consider what you see onstage and what you hear the characters say)? If AEH is dreaming, is he “lucid” dreaming—that is, is he aware that he is asleep and controlling what happens in his dream? Or is the dream controlling him? Whether dreaming or not, does AEH know that he is in a theater? To whom is he speaking when he talks directly to the audience?
2. How is the Greek idea of the underworld different from the Judeo-Christian idea of heaven and hell? Where is Charon taking AEH?
3. What lines and images repeat themselves in the play? Why does AEH keep returning to these moments? What conflict is he trying to resolve in the play? What has he resolved by the end of Act I? By the end of the play?
4. When do you think Housman falls in love with Moses Jackson? How do you think Mo feels about Housman? Is there any explanation for the experience of falling in love? Does it need explanation? Is Housman’s experience of falling in love mental or physical or both? Do you think everyone falls in love at some point during his or her life? Can the experience of falling in love be avoided? Should it be avoided?
5. Do you think it is possible to make yourself fall out of love? What should Housman have done when he realized that the man he loved was not homosexual and there was no way to have an intimate relationship with him? Did Housman give up too early, or did he hang on too long?
6. When Moses Jackson comes to understand that Housman is “sweet on” him, does he handle his surprise well? Why does Jackson become angry with Housman? How does the open acknowledgment of Housman’s feelings change their relationship?
7. Why do you think Housman cares so much about translation? Why did so many Oxford students study Latin and Greek in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? What did they gain from learning these languages and reading classical literature? Are these subjects as worthwhile as the study of science?
8. Are the experiences and writing of people who lived 2000 years (or more) ago relevant to our lives today? How? Do you think translators of ancient poetry should change the original texts to make them easier for us to understand today? What is gained by such change, and what is lost?
9. How was homosexuality viewed in ancient Greek and Roman society? How was it viewed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? How is it viewed today? Why do you think that view has changed over time? Why is sexual behavior so often strictly regulated by society? How is a person’s private sexual life linked to his or her public life? Do you think it should be?
10. What does the title of the play mean? What does Pollard mean when he says that the love poem was invented in the first century B.C.? Do you think people fell in love before the invention of the love poem? Did the invention of the love poem affect the



experience of falling in love as we now know it?

11. Why does John Ruskin praise the art and culture of the medieval Gothic period, and why does Walter Pater praise the Italian Renaissance? What do these historical periods represent for these men? Is it really possible to experience each moment for that moment's sake, as Pater recommends? What are the consequences of living one's life according to Ruskin's philosophy? Pater's? What are the consequences (both positive and negative) of seeking pleasure in one's life?
12. How does the conversation between AEH and Young Housman affect each of them? What is AEH trying to tell Young Housman? Is he trying to warn his younger self of the heartbreak that is to come? Is he steering him towards a career in textual criticism or writing poetry? What does Young Housman teach AEH in their conversation?
13. Why do you think Housman failed his final examinations at Oxford? Is it possible to know why? What does Oscar Wilde mean when he says "biography is the mesh through which our real life escapes"?
14. Why did Housman live such a solitary life? Does he have a heart? Too much heart?
15. What purpose do the characters of Harris, Stead, and Labouchère serve in the play? Are they intended to be powerful, or are they pathetic?
16. Why was the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which criminalized homosexual acts between men, adopted? How did it change Housman and other gay men's understanding and experience of their sexual desires?
17. In Act II, Wilde criticizes Housman's poem about a Woolwich military cadet who shot himself ("Shot? So quick, so clean an ending?"). Why does Wilde criticize this poem? Do you think Housman really intends to praise the act of suicide in this poem? How is the sentiment expressed in this poem manifested in Housman's life?
18. Wilde says that facts are unimportant and have little to do with truth. Is truth more evident in scientific knowledge—results that can be tested—or in beauty and the imagination? Are there different kinds of truths for different people? How do Housman and Wilde agree about the nature of truth? How do they differ?
19. How does the meeting between Wilde and AEH affect each of them? What does AEH decide about himself and his life as a result of this meeting? How do you define a "successful" life? Whose life do you think was more successful, Wilde's or Housman's?
20. In the final speech of the play, who do you think is actually speaking to the audience: AEH the character, or the actor playing AEH? Where do you think that character will go after the curtain comes down?

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