

is a transition figure, standing between those who, like Arnold, hoped for some pleasure, or catharsis of the Aristotelian type, from poetry, and those more recent artists who stroke pain and nihilism across every line or page, much as Van Gogh wielded his palette knife in preference to a brush, late in his career. Form and content coalesce in A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems (the posthumous collections are riddled with inferior work) to convey what Leggett terms the "Mithridatic theme." Contemplating Housman's poetry in overview, we realize that these poems were created to inure us gradually to the pain in our surroundings. Youthful illusions, akin to those experienced by the rustic persona in the first half of ASL, fade, not always without shock responses, and such implications are apparent in Housman's famed simplicity in form, which rather glosses the dire content beneath. Although Leggett does not mention the possibility, I wonder if these appealing or, more precisely, enchanting, surfaces looming above themes of the wasteland may betray a debt to Swinburne. Any page of the older poet's verse could have presented to Housman the hypnotic melodies that shield us from the full impact in the fearful undercurrents of meaning.

The lilt typifying most Housman poems bears out another principle of his art: the effort to make as pleasant as possible what is in reality most grim, in order that we accept it. Leggett selects "'Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff'" to demonstrate how comedy often mitigates our perceptions of life's painful realities, emphasizing the ephemeral pleasures to be had in physical gratifications, symbolized in the food-drink motifs unifying the poem. A similar suggestion resides in many others. Explications of individual pieces give fresh interpretations of illuminating, readable dimensions. The familiar favorites by Housman pass under Leggett's critical apparatus, with all coming out as more appealing at the end of the occurrence. Nobody interested in English poetry of the last century can afford to bypass The Poetic Art of A. E. Housman. Myths dissolve, certainties grow, and, more important, Housman the conscious consistent poet-critic appears in a clearer light.

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This is one of a series of "text-fiche" titles published in a new format by the University of Chicago Press. It comprises a printed catalogue containing an introduction with notes, and a package of three "fiche" cards which reproduce the drawings. As each of two hundred