



A Shropshire Lad & Last Poems: "I do not choose the right word, I get rid of the wrong one."

A.E. Housman

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Alfred Edward Housman was born on 26 March 1859 in a small village near Bromsgrove in Worcestershire, the eldest of seven children. His mother died when he was 12 and his father remarried. Despite a good formal education where he won prizes for his poetry and a scholarship to Oxford, Housman failed to get his degree in Classics. Various reasons have been suggested for this; over confidence, a lack of interest in philosophy or the rejection by one of his roommates who was the love of his life but heterosexual. Housman himself documented his homosexuality and love of this roommate in a letter to the British Library that he specified be opened 25 years after it was sent. Housman independently pursued studying the Greek classicists in particular and published many scholarly articles on their work which were well regarded. This resulted in his taking a position as a Professor of Latin at University College London in 1892 and later at Trinity College Cambridge. Whilst his reputation as a classical scholar grew and remains relevant to this day, his poetry took longer to be recognised. His 63 poems forming the Shropshire Lad was self published as publishers rejected the work but although it sold slowly it chimed well with Victorian and Edwardian sensibilities and became a lasting success helped by striking a chord with musicians who were inspired by his words. Housman continued to write lyrical poetry that evokes the distinct imagery of the English countryside as well as powerfully questioning our mortality and although linked to the era his poetry is still widely quoted and remains relevant as this volume clearly demonstrates. A.E. Housman as he became known died on 30th April, 1936 aged 77 and his ashes are buried in Shropshire.

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