

Brittany Lofton- "When I Was One-and-Twenty"

**Comment [11]:** GRADE of 39/40

The poem "When I Was One-and-Twenty" by A. E. Housman is about defiance and reveals that advice given is only really accepted and learned through personal experience. In the poem, Housman's narrator, a man of twenty-two, tells readers of his experience with love and consequently, heartache. His heartache is a consequence of love solely because of his defiant, naïve behavior of a twenty-one year old. Through the story of this young man, Housman examines the human nature of stubbornness and unwillingness to listen to others. Only through individual experiences will advice be accepted and truly understood.

**Comment [12]:** Insightful theme statement!

Through style and diction, Housman portrays the defiance that humans possess. First, Housman chooses to write his poem in a ballad. Ballads are historically known as folk songs and represent feelings and experiences of the common human being. They are simple in word and understanding, and although the moral lesson is exposed, it is deep still: "'tis true, 'tis true" (15-16). Also, the fact that Housman does not identify his narrator and his rank in society, allows him to become whoever readers say; they can easily identify with the narrator and consequently symbolizes all human beings. Housman's "wise man" tells the narrator to give his "crowns and pounds and guineas, but not your heart away" (3-4); not only is this odd, in the sense of love, to readers but it is also a well used apostrophe. The repetition Housman uses of "When I was one-and-twenty" (1 and 9). It gives emphasis of the age differences throughout the poem. Housman's tone, however, could be the most important part of the narration. Although the ballad is written in a sing-song manner, there is a sense of defiance and self-righteousness in the first stanza: "But I was one-and-twenty No use to talk to me" (7-8). This defiance continues through line fourteen. When line fifteen begins, there is a tone shift. Here, the narrator expresses a sense of regret and finally realizes that the "wise man's" advice was true: "And I am two-and-twenty And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true" (15-16)

**Comment [13]:** Unnecessary REP of theme? Maybe your theme should appear at the end of the paragraph?

**Comment [14]:** Excellent explanation of how the poetic form matches the function!

**Comment [15]:** Yes, he's every man.

**Comment [16]:** Effective note of shift—but you need a conclusion.