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Titles From the Poetry of A.E. Housman

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election two months earlier, Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote out this same passage in longhand, placing it in a sealed envelope addressed “to a certain naval person.” This he gave to Mr. Willkie to take to England and deliver to Winston Churchill, who was, of course, the “certain naval person” referred to. Roosevelt knew that no one would appreciate the reference to “the Ship of State” more than the former Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. He also realized how much this would appeal to a seafaring people like the British. In his note to Churchill he added that this quotation “applies to you people as it does to us.” Churchill relayed this message in a broadcast, and almost immediately the five lines about “the Ship of State” were printed in large type in newspapers and on pictures, on cards and on calendars, both in England and in America. In response to the general interest at that time, Longfellow’s original manuscript of this passage was loaned to the Library of Congress in Washington and placed on exhibition where it attracted great attention throughout the war.

Now, on the hundredth anniversary of the publication of this poem, it has been possible to trace here the gradual evolution of these lines—lines which created such a deep impression when they were first published and which were later to be quoted by at least two Presidents of the United States during great crises, national and international.

TITLES FROM THE POETRY OF
A. E. HOUSMAN

By Tom Burns Haber

ONE minor quantitative index of a poet’s greatness is the number of times other writers draw on him for titles. The practice of keeping literary christenings within the family has of late been occurring with perhaps more than normal frequency, for one rarely scans the list of a
week’s “new” titles without having his memory stirred with echoes of Donne, Keats, or another of our English poets. Shakespeare is of course the inexhaustible spring. Over the centuries he has furnished more book names than any other single writer. It could safely be said that there is not a scene in his plays that does not contain a line or two capable of decking out the cover of a book; and there is no telling when Macbeth’s much-parcelled-out speech in Act V, scene 5, will spawn yet another title.

I wonder if it is generally known how often the poetry of A. E. Housman has been levied on. Housman’s first volume was published in 1896; his death occurred only thirteen years ago. Still, no less than fourteen novels, plays, and short stories have gone out to English and American readers under a phrase from A Shropshire Lad, Last Poems, or More Poems. Can any other poet so near our own day—or for that matter, can many dating back three centuries—offer a comparison?

Here is the list:

5. “With the One Coin for Fee” (MP XXIII) in Experiment; Four Short Novels by Helen Rose Hull, 1940.
7. *Drums of Morning* (ASL IV) by Philip Van Doren Stern, 1942.
216 Colby Library Quarterly

11. Angry Dust (LP IX) by Dorothy Stockbridge, 1946.
12. The Taken Town (LP VIII) by Dudley Carew, 1947.

I would be grateful for additions to this list, if other readers would kindly send them to me at the Ohio State University, Columbus 10, Ohio.

THREE MORE JEWETT LETTERS

Received too late for inclusion among the Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett which we printed shortly after the centenary of her birth are three which we here transcribe, in order to continue our sharing of these letters with the many admirers of Miss Jewett's work who have made themselves known to us since the first mention of her name in one Colby publication or another. The little volume of Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett Now in the Colby College Library contained the text of thirty-three letters. Six more were included in the issue of this quarterly for November, 1949. The three here transcribed bring the Colby total to forty-two letters.

Letter No. 40

South Berwick Maine

Dana Estes, Esquire
301 Washington St.
Boston

My dear Mr Estes,

Will you give my best thanks to your committee and say that I regret very much that I cannot accept their po-

1 Dana Estes (1840-1909) was born in Gorham, Maine. At the age of nineteen he went to Boston, entered the book business, and after being associated with various bookselling and publishing houses, he went into partnership with Charles E. Lauriat. Estes & Lauriat pub-