A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

10 The Merry Guide (A Shropshire Lad, 42)

By hanging woods and hamlets

Once in the wind of morning	
I ranged the thymy wold;	
The world-wide air was azure	
And all the brooks ran gold.	
There through the dews beside me	5
Behold a youth that trod,	
With feathered cap on forehead,	
And poised a golden rod.	
With mien to match the morning	
And gay delightful guise	10
And friendly brows and laughter	10
He looked me in the eyes.	
The looked life in the eyes.	
Oh whence, I asked, and whither?	
He smiled and would not say,	
And looked at me and beckoned	15
And laughed and led the way.	
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And with kind looks and laughter	
And nought to say beside	
We two went on together,	
I and my happy guide.	20
Across the glittering pastures	
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And empty upland still	
And solitude of shepherds	
High in the folded hill,	

That gaze through orchards do	wn
On many a windmill turning	
And far-discovered town,	

With gay regards of promise And sure unslackened stride And smiles and nothing spoken Led on my merry guide.	30
By blowing realms of woodland With sunstruck vanes afield And cloud-led shadows sailing About the windy weald,	35
By valley-guarded granges And silver waters wide, Content at heart I followed With my delightful guide.	40
And like the cloudy shadows Across the country blown We two fare on for ever, But not we two alone.	
With the great gale we journey That breathes from gardens thinned, Borne in the drift of blossoms Whose petals throng the wind;	45
Buoyed on the heaven-heard whisper Of dancing leaflets whirled From all the woods that autumn Bereaves in all the world.	50
And midst the fluttering legion Of all that ever died I follow, and before us	55

Goes the delightful guide,

With lips that brim with laughter
But never once respond,
And feet that fly on feathers,
And serpent-circled wand.

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1896

(From A Shropshire Lad. London: E. Grant Richards, 1907)