

CO YE 75

THE GRIM LAND AND OTHERS is composed of previously unpublished verse by Robert Ervin Howard, the creator of Conan, King Kull and Solomon Kane. It also includes a previously unpublished fragment of a story titled: "The Devil's Woodchopper". This latter item has been completed by Tevis Clyde Smith a friend and collaborator with Howard. It is my feeling that the verse as well as the fiction of Robert E. Howard deserves to see print. I trust you'll enjoy this selection of verse and invite you to explore the world of Robert E. Howard further.

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# INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Jonathan Bacon, and to Glenn Lord, for bringing THE GRIM LAND AND OTHERS to the admirers of Robert E. Howard. It is unfortunate that Bob, himself, is not alive to chat with those who never had the opportunity to meet him. The goose bumps would have gone up and down their spines to have heard him chant his poems, or the poems of anyone else for that matter, for he was, certainly at the very first, primarily a poet. I tried to convince him of this fact while we were in the company of another close friend who was in complete agreement with me. Our efforts were met with irritation and we moved on to another subject, but it is interesting to speculate on what would have happened if Bob had confined himself to verse, though it must be admitted that the true appreciation of poetry by a vast audience was probably all ready on the decline--and yet, people still bought all the new works of Stephen Vincent Benet, and I think that the remarkable talent of Robert E. Howard could have produced different results if he had not finally abandoned himself to prose.

I was writing both poetry and prose before I met Bob, but I took an English Literature course in the summer of 1925 while attending Daniel Baker College and the beauty of the poetry, and the ability of the teacher, Miss Helen Post, made an impact on me which is still present. The World War I poets of The United Kingdom were particularly impressive, and I introduced them to Bob, who shared my enthusiasm. What fine writers they were, and what a shame it is that so many of them lost their lives in that kinfolks war which should have never been fought.

While speaking of the course, let me mention Arthur O'Shaughnessy who, in 1874, wrote his ODE, a poem which any lover of verse will, without doubt, place among the top lyrics of all time.

Though by no means the best poem in the book, TO AN EARTHBOUND-SOUL brings back so many memories of Bob, and is about Francois Villon, like Bob so fascinating a character that I cannot help comment on it. We talked often of this father of modern French literature. I became acquainted with him while a student in Coggin Ward School when I ran on to a copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's masterpiece on Villon, A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT. Stevenson also wrote FRANCOIS VILLON, STUDENT, POET, AND HOUSEBREAKER. John Payne, in a 79 page introduction to my copy of The Modern Library edition of Villon's POEMS, most of which he translated, also gives some excellent treatment to the character and the times of this forerunner of Francois Rabelais.

Somewhere--I have always thought that it was probably in a copy of ADVENTURE issued during the mid-twenties--is a poem about Villon. I have never read the poem--of that I am certain--or it would have impressed itself on my memory, but Bob had read it, and by some odd circumstance, had forgotten the name of the author and where it was published. He did remember one paragraph, which he loved to quote:

"Let it rest with the ages' mysteries,  
And but recall the day  
I was wont to go where the cannikins clinked,  
Not caring who should pay."

Maybe someone can furnish more information to FANTASY CROSSROADS in regard to this rime.

Jonathan asked me to write a poem for this book, and as a salute to him, to Bob, and to Francois, the poem has been done in ballade style.

Bob carried THE DEVIL'S WOODCHOPPER through three pages and may have completed the story. If he did, the completion is now lost to all. My part starts with "He motioned me toward a chair, and I slumped tiredly into its depths." As to how Bob would have finished it, I can only say Quien Sabe.

Anyway, good luck to the reader.

Tevie Clyde Smith  
Brownwood Texas  
December 1975



# THE DEVIL'S WOODCHOPPER

*("The Devil's Woodchopper" is a previously unpublished fragment by Robert Ervin Howard (1906-1936). The completion of the tale is by Tevis Clyde Smith, a close friend and correspondent to the late Howard. The completion is Copyright 1976 by Tevis Clyde Smith.)*

I am sick with fear. A crawling horror has wound its grisly serpent-shape into my brain, and I will never know rest or peace again until I crawl like a wounded beast into the silence of the dust. Through the day, vague and horrific shadows lurk forever at the back of my consciousness, to rush forth into terrible and chaotic life in my dreams at night. Once sleep was a grateful thing, a cool refuge from the turmoil of day life; now it is a fear-haunted land through which I flee gibbering, with the howling of nameless obscenities in my ears and the flying tread of demonic feet forever at my back.

I am a man from whom the solid foundation of history, normal experience, and common knowledge has been cut away, and I am left suspended on a slender thread of reality over a red abyss from which echo the bellowings of nameless monsters.

A seemingly trivial occurrence ushered in the horror which now haunts me. It was the strange behavior of the young blond man on the moors. You who have traversed the wild Galloway fens will remember the savage, desolate appearance of much of the landscape. As twilight shuts down with a chill wind creeping in from the sea, the horizon seems like a curtain which encloses the moor from the rest of the world - from ordinary time and space. Strangely enough, the fens assume a peculiarly primitive look, not easy to describe, but powerfully felt. You seem suddenly transported back into a darker age, and you look to see the huge shadowy bulk of the hairy mammoth loom against the sullen red of the dying day - to see bent, man-like grotesques creep from the tall grasses, with hatchets of flint gripped in misshapen hands.

At such an hour, in such a setting, I stood, and suddenly my reveries were interrupted. Two men appeared on a narrow footpath not far from where I stood. They were coming in opposite directions, and I saw they would meet at a point some fifty or sixty yards from my stand. One, I could see in the vague light, was a tall, strongly-built young man, who hurried along, head down in a preoccupied manner. He swung his hat in his hand, and even in the gathering dusk his hair showed like a mass of gold.

He who came down the trail to meet him was a figure common enough to these parts, and one which fitted the primeval quality of the scene well. A stocky, elderly man he was, a typical moor-man, bent and gnarled from hard work. On his shambling shoulders he bore a bundle of faggots, and though I could not see him plainly in the twilight, I knew his

type. He was one of that dark, black-eyed race so often met with in the British Isles, especially in the wilds of Wales and Scotland.

Now the two men were very close to each other, and the moor-man stepped out of the trail to let the other pass. The blond man's head jerked up, and he seemed to be aware of the woodchopper's presence for the first time. He stopped short, his arms thrown out in the peculiar gesture which denotes sudden fear. For a minute the two stood as if frozen - for the moor-man had stopped dead in amazement at the other's actions - then from the lips of the blond there burst a terrible and desperate scream, as of a man who has trodden upon an unseen serpent. He lurched frantically aside, and fled across the fen, still shrieking, while the moor-man eyed him for a moment as if in bewilderment; then, with a shrug of his burdened shoulders, passed on with the stolid indifference characteristic of his kind, without looking back.

The blond man was taking a course which would pass me some yards to the right. I made no move to intercept him, but as he neared me, he saw me and halted suddenly, his eyes glaring at me wildly through the gloom. I spoke to him.

"No!" he cried out in desperation. "Stand where you are! Approach me and I'll tear out your throat with my bare hands! Are you a man? No! No, no! There's nothing but devils here!"

"You're insane!" I exclaimed. "There's nobody here but me and an old woodchopper who wouldn't hurt you. And he's gone on anyway."

He laughed wildly. "Woodchopper? Aye - he cuts wood all day - wood for the fires of Hell! You say he is gone?"

"You can see for yourself. There he is just fading away into the darkness."

"I don't want to see," he cried in a strange passion. "I can't trust my eyes."

He came close to me and stared with fierce intensity into my face.

"If it were not for your blue eyes, I'd knock out your brains," he shouted.

I started and stepped back, convinced that I was dealing with a madman.

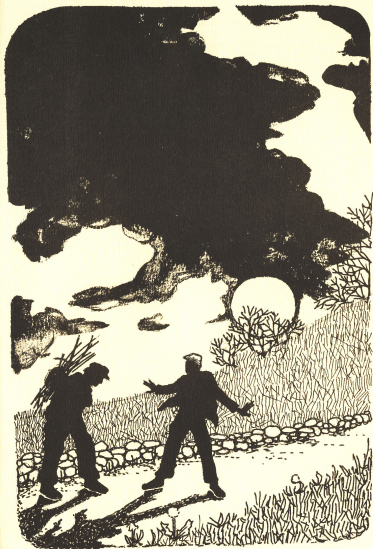
"What have my eyes to do with it?"

"They mark you as one of my own breed," he answered. "But I hate your black hair and dark skin. They are the brand the Devil has set on you."

I saw his own eyes were grey and his skin very light. The sort of a skin on which no amount of outdoor life can bring a tan. But now underlying the healthy tint was a deathly pallor.

"You think I am mad, don't you?" he said abruptly, and before I could answer, "Come, let's get out of here. The moors are no place for men such as we."

Deeply interested, I followed him, and with a long nervous stride he led the way back across the fens, increasing his speed as night gathered, until we were



almost running, and I had much ado to keep up with him, in spite of my hardened sinews. Only when the little village grew up before us, with the slow rumble of the surf beyond, did he slacken his pace, and then he glanced not to right or to left, but kept his gaze fixed on the small host of twinkling lights before us. I could have sworn a heavy sigh of relief escaped him as we entered the outskirts of the village. Not a word passed between us until we had reached the inn where my strange guide, speaking to no one, led the way upstairs.

Opening a door, he lighted a room and motioned me to enter, after which he closed the door and locked it. A casual glance showed me the room was plainly furnished, but lined with book-laden shelves. The room interested me less than the man, but at close range, there was nothing of the maniac in his manner.

He motioned me toward a chair, and I slumped tiredly into its depths. I had already taken the pack off my shoulders, and deposited my meager belongings in a corner of the room, an action which took all my strength, as I was completely worn out from my day's walk, and especially from the nerve wracking ordeal which had followed the occurrence on the fen.

"I'll rest just a moment, or two," I said, "and then I'll go down stairs and see if I can get a room for the night. You had better go with me--a few drinks will do us both good, and I suppose that you, as well as I, need something to eat."

"You are welcome to stay here with me," said the young man.

"Thanks, but I'm restless as hell, and snore a lot. I'd disturb you. Let's go downstairs, and see what we can find," I answered.

We went to the first floor, and I met the landlord, a man named MacDougall. He had one room left, a downstairs space which I was glad to get. I signed "John Herring, Natchez, Mississippi, U.S.A.," and asked about food and drink. We were still in time for both, but I had to settle for Scotch instead of Bourbon, though the lamb fries were excellent and more than satisfied the urge I had for a beefsteak in the beginning.

A couple of drams of Scotch each with the lamb fries, and some hot tea put both of us in a livelier mood, though my companion, who had identified himself as Stuart Minnus, seemed unable to completely shed his manner of concern. He was a writer, he stated, asking me if I had paid any particular attention to his library. I admitted that I had been too weary. He hinted that he had stumbled onto many dark bits of demonology and had secrets no man should have--secrets for which he knew he would pay the price.

Minnus suddenly became silent, "I had best not involve you further in this grim knowledge for which I know my life is forfeit." His matter of fact manner made cold chills climb up and down my spine. I offered him the crucifix

suspended from my neck, but he refused. "I'll not take what could be your only chance for survival," he said, in a determined manner. "Bolt your door tonight, and if the woodcutter, or anyone else, male or female, manages to get into your room tear the crucifix from your neck, and hold it in front of their face, praying God's help as you do so. Remember, do as I say! Do not forget, for I am sure that you will be confronted with powers of evil before this night is past."

Minnus insisted on paying our bill. We had several more drams of Scotch before parting for the night. At the very last, worried, I offered to spend the night in Minnus' room. Two might be able to ward off any danger, if such existed. He shook his head. "I've involved you too much already," he said, shaking hands, and turning to ascend the narrow stairway.

"I'll go up with you and get my pack," I said.

"I placed that in your room while you were eating," said MacDougall, the innkeeper. "Come on, and I'll show you to your quarters."

Upon reaching my room, I asked MacDougall to come into the room with me. I related the incidents to him. He appeared unimpressed.

"Let me explain Minnus," he said. "He reads things no man should read. He's saturated with legends and superstitions. He slips into the Kirk Graveyard at night against the request of all concerned. They keep changing the lock on the gates, but it does no good. He has been carried to Stranraer several times, and given a good dressing down by the constabulary, but it does no good. They think of him--everybody does--as needing to turn his attention to other forms of writing. And--I'm not sure, myself, but some think he is on cocaine. I hope he isn't. He has enough problems without a vice of that kind."

I thanked MacDougall. He left the room, and I not only locked and bolted the door, but also barred it by wedging a chair under the knob. I then turned my attention to the windows, lowering and locking them. I left the light on, and slipped into bed while reviewing the events of the day and night with complete uneasiness.

I could not sleep. Several hours passed. And then, out of nowhere, appeared the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She was blonde and blueeyed, her enticing frame unencumbered by clothing. She was a woman that no man could resist. She moved toward the bed as if to join me. And then Minnus' words of advice came back to me. I jumped from the other side of the bed, lifting the crucifix from my shirt as I did so, praying to God in a dry, croaking voice. I rounded the bed, walking toward her, holding the crucifix in front of her face. She disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

I slipped the crucifix from around my neck, holding it in front of me with one hand, working hurriedly to open the door with the other, for it, like the windows, was still secure. And then, crucifix in hand, held face high in front, I ran toward the lobby, somehow finding voice to scream for MacDougall, who appeared disgruntled and in his night clothes.

"It makes no difference to me how you feel," I managed



to say, "I'm convinced Minnus is in trouble, and I want you to check with me."

I raced up the stairs. The landlord followed reluctantly. Upon reaching Minnus' room, I began pounding on the door, and shouting loudly which produced no results, I demanded that the door be battered down. MacDougall, less skeptical by this time, threw his weight against the door and the door flew open. The sight before us sickened me as nothing before or since. For there, in front of the fireplace, stacked like firewood, lay the unclad and dismembered body of Stuart Minnus, while cloven hoofmarks from the victim's own blood ended at the window which, like those in my own room, was still locked from the inside.



# BALLADE OF SOME HOWARD HEROES

(To Jonathan Bacon)  
By Tevis Clyde Smith

Solomon Kane, with slash and thrust,  
Hacked his enemy through the chest  
As they fought on the fen in a wintry gust,  
Proving his art the very best  
The tyrant had met with years of jest  
Which turned at last to a pang of fear  
As his head bounced off with a frozen leer.

Bran Mak Morn, who was always just,  
Put his enemies to rest  
As they struggled and fought as swordsmen must,  
Ending each man who proved a pest,  
Ridding his kingdom in his quest,  
Finishing one who paused to jeer  
As his head bounced off with a frozen leer.

Turlough O'Brien, in battle lust,  
Put his foe to a warrior's test,  
Making his victim feel as trussed  
(Although he came for battle dressed)  
Quickly by Turlough far outguessed  
With a savage blow that cost him dear  
As his head bounced off with a frozen leer.

Prince, it is best that you stop and think,  
And lend to Conan a friendly ear  
Seating him to good food and drink,  
Instead of curling your lip to sneer,  
Remembering your ally on the brink  
As his head bounced off with a frozen leer.

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# NECTAR

When I stand at the gates of Paradise  
I will wipe my brow and say:  
"It's a long path and a dusty path  
The path I have walked today.

"It's a hot path and a dry path  
From Hell to Paradise -  
Oh Peter, my boy, have ye never now  
A bit of a bottle on ice?"

"Patrick, me lad, I've saved ye wan,  
It's thirsty ye'd be, I knew!"  
And he'll fetch me a bottle black and cold,  
Of the paradisal brew.

Oh, a bottle black and beaded cold,  
And the liquid amber and clear,  
With the sparkling foam and the right sharp tang -  
And I'll drink his health in the beer.

And when I pass through the Golden Gates  
I'll see ten thousand signs:  
"Judas & Co.," "Sargon & Cain" -  
"Liquors and Ales and Wines"!

Lined each side of the silver streets,  
Gemmed with many a star,  
With flaming moons for electric lights -  
Each building in heaven a bar!

# THE GRIM LAND

From Sonora to Del Rio is a hundred barren miles  
Where the sotol weave and shimmer in the sun -  
Like a horde of rearing serpents swaying down the bare  
    defiles  
When the scarlet, silver webs of dawn are spun.

There are little 'dobe ranchoes brooding far along the sky,  
On the sullen dreary bosoms of the hills;  
Not a wolf to break the quiet, not a desert bird to fly  
Where the silence is so utter that it thrills.

With an eery sense of vastness, with a curious sense of age,  
And the ghosts of eons gone uprear and glide  
Like a horde of drifting shadows gleaming through the wilted  
    sage -  
They are riding where of old they used to ride.

Muleteer and caballero, with their plunder and their slaves -  
Oh, the clink of ghostly stirrups in the morn!  
Oh, the soundless flying clatter of the feathered, painted  
    braves,  
Oh, the echo of the spur and hoof and horn.

Maybe, in the heat of evening, comes a wind from Mexico  
Laden with the heat of seven hells,  
And the rattler in the yucca and the buzzard dark and slow  
Hear and understand the grisly tales it tells.

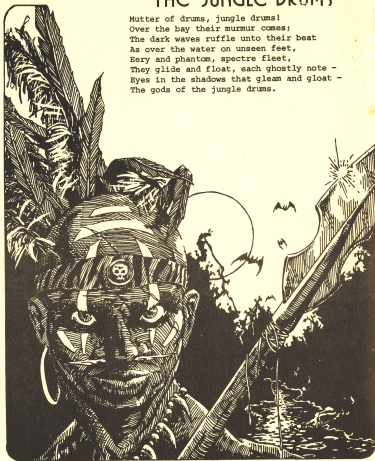
Gaunt and stark and bare and mocking rise the everlasting  
    cliffs  
Like a row of sullen giants hewn of stone,  
Till the traveller, mazed with silence, thinks to look on  
    hieroglyphs,  
Thinks to see a carved Pharaoh on his throne.

Once these sullen hills were beaches and they saw the ocean  
    flee  
In the misty ages never known of men,  
And they wait in brooding silence till the everlasting sea  
Comes foaming forth to claim her own again.



## THE GODS OF THE JUNGLE DRUMS

Mutter of drums, jungle drums!  
Over the bay their murmur comes;  
The dark waves ruffle unto their beat  
As over the water on unseen feet,  
Eery and phantom, spectre fleet,  
They glide and float, each ghostly note -  
Eyes in the shadows that gleam and gloat -  
The gods of the jungle drums.



R. SPURGIN

Spears will flash in the crimson dawn  
- Boom! boom! - say the hidden drums -  
Boats will leap from the dusky shore  
Steered by Satan's own yelling spawn.  
Then red assegai and flying oar  
And the battle yell and the war horn's roar  
Will drown the sound of the drums.

Fires will gleam in the kraal tonight -  
Boom! boom! - say the jungle drums -  
Crimson and fierce their leaping light  
Red as the spears that swept the fight.  
There will the warriors boast their might  
And shout their fame as about the flame  
They leap in a dance that fiends would shame.

For the cooking pots are brimming o'er  
And the red-stained war-spears clash no more;  
Stilled is the giant war conch's roar;  
And the drums held sway as they did before -  
The magical jungle drums.



R. SPURGIN

## DE OLE RIVER OX

De ole river-ox come over de ridge!

Whoom! Whoom!

He bellow, he roar, he fling his head,  
He tear up de reeds where de mud-flats spread!  
He low, and he plunge and he butt de bridge.  
He shake he horns at de gnat an' midge,  
An' he kick up de spray an' spume.

De ole river-ox on a big rampage!

Whoom! Whoom!

He lash his tail and he stomp his hoofs  
An' he splash de spray on de niggers' roofs.  
He roar an' he prance wid a marvelous rage  
An' he try uproot de landin' stage!  
An' he whirls de banks like a flume.

De ole river-ox come up to de seal

Whoom! Whoom!

He catch de boats in his yellow horns  
And he tromp 'em down just like he scorns.  
He stomp de ocean an' low an' roar  
An' drive de ships way up on de shore.  
An' shouts in de flyin' spume.







# THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY

(Suggested by de Mille's picture of that title.)

The dust is deep along the trail,  
Yet stars gleam on the way;  
It knows no worldly hill nor vale,  
The Road to Yesterday.

On phantom steeds, pale-starlight shod,  
Shapes of the shadows stray,  
And many a dreamer's foot has trod  
The Road to Yesterday.

He needs no whip nor spur nor goad  
To drive him on his way  
Whose feet have learned to walk the road  
That runs to Yesterday.

Dim kings ride there and planets blaze  
And shadows flit for eye  
Where gleams along the Age's haze  
The Road to Yesterday.

# THE ADVENTURER

Dusk on the sea; the fading twilight shifts'  
The night wind bears the ocean's whisper dim -  
Wind, on your bosom many a phantom drifts -  
A silver star climbs up the blue world rim.  
Wind, make the green leaves dance above me here  
And idly swing my silken hammock - so;  
Now, on that glimmering molten silver mere  
Send the long ripples wavering to and fro.  
And let your moon-white tresses touch my face  
And let me know your slim-armed, cool embrace  
While to my dreamy soul you whisper low.

Dream - aye, I've dreamed since last night left her tower  
And now again she comes on star-soled feet.  
Welcome, old friend; here in this rose-gemmed bower  
I've drowsed away your Sultan's golden heat.  
Here in my hammock, Time I've dreamed away  
For I have but to stretch a hand out, lo,  
I'm treading langurous shores of Yesterday,  
Moon-silvered deserts or the star-weird snow;  
I float o'er seas where ships are purple shells,  
I hear the tinkle of the camel bells  
That waft down Cairo's streets when dawn winds blow.

South Seas! I watch when dusky twilight comes  
Making vague gods of ancient, sea-set trees.  
The world path beckons - loud the mystic drums -  
Here at my hand the magic golden keys  
That fit the doors of Romance, Wonder, strange  
Dim gossamer adventures; seas and stars.  
Why, I have roamed the far Moon Mountain range  
When sunset minted gold in shimmering bars.  
All eager eyed I've sailed from ports of Spain  
And watched the flashing topaz of the Main  
When dawn was flinging witch fire on the spars.

I am content in dreams to roam my fill  
The vagrant, drifting sport of wind and tide,  
Slave of the greater freedom, venture's thrill;  
Here every magic ship on which I ride.  
Gold, green, blue, red, a priceless treasure trove,  
More wealth than ever pirate dared to dream.  
My hammock swings - about the world I rove.  
The sunset's dusk, the dawning's glide and gleam,  
Moon-dappled leaves are murmuring in the wind  
Which whispers tales. Lo, Tyre is just behind,  
Through seas of dawn I sail, Romance abeam.



## TO AN EARTHBOUND SOUL

Villon, Villon, your name is stone  
Carved on a windy shore;  
But you would sell your fame to Hell  
For one blood-stained moidore.

And you would give your soul to live  
And rape and starve and strive  
And drain the cup, and steal to sup,  
As when you were alive.

You'd sell your blood for Paris mud  
And wine-stained tavern benches,  
And roofs a-leak and brothel reek,  
And slattern, bold-eyed wenches.

Villon, Villon, 'twas little known,  
That hour fierce and sharp,  
That from the rope your hands would grope  
To clutch a silver harp.

They little knew, who roared at you,  
With red and mocking eyes,  
The gallows stair you mounted there  
Was steps to Paradise.

But marble skies and canopies  
Of golden cloth and silk,  
And emerald trees and sapphire seas  
Are not for Villon's ilk!

You'd sell your soul to Satan's coal  
For Paris den and dive,  
To live and roar and rob and whore  
As when you were alive.







## THE OUTCAST

Forth from the purple and feasts of the palace  
Out through the sombre, dim wilds I must fare;  
The spring of the wilderness now is my chalice,  
My viands, the spoils of the faun and the hare.

My raiment, the pelts of the wolf and the lion,  
My fareways, the paths where the green forests wave,  
My comrades, the panther, the antlered deer's scion,  
My castle, the heights of a crag-frowning cave.

Friend of my youth, though the king seek to slay me,  
Driving me ever from woodland and hill,  
Though swords smite me down, though torturers flay me,  
My love for thee, friend, shall abide with me still.

## TODAY

I dreamed of a woman straight as a spear,  
Hair like the Volsung's hoard,  
Limbs as lithe as a leaping deer,  
Eyes like a grey steel sword.

I dreamed of a woman undefamed  
By culture's cold desire -  
Fierce in her passion, never tamed,  
With a heart of steel and fire.





I dreamed of a man with a savage zest  
For life and all that it brings,  
With a laugh that roared from his hairy chest  
His scorn for all earthly kings.

I dreamed - but from that dream I rose  
And went my way with a sigh  
To a frail white thing in silken hose,  
With a bored and petulant eye.



Weakly I went, by rule and rote,  
    Apathetic, pallid of mirth,  
With needless muscles bulging the coat  
    That hampered my indolent girth.



## A PIRATE REMEMBERS

From the scarlet shadows they come to me,  
Shades of the dust-dead past,  
Like drifting fogs of the restless sea  
From the silent Nameless Vast.  
Ghostly and grey in the dying day  
Their spectral ranks are massed.

With their lank, dank hair, and their eery stare,  
Fantom and fiend and ghost -  
Skeletons limned in a haunted sky,  
Footfalls light where the dim bats fly,  
Stealthy shadows - yet none but I  
Am 'ware of the weird host.

Their light tread whispers on every hand  
When I walk through the shadows' rack  
And I hear the mumble of fleshless jaws  
In the dark behind my back.

Red shades of many a buccaneer  
Whose bones rust in the sea,  
Grisly phantoms who gape and leer  
That died on the gallows tree.  
And they haunt my brain with their dim refrain:  
"As we are, thou shalt be."



# STYGIAN ISLE PRESS

THE GRIM LAND is a limited edition  
booklet published by Stygian Isle  
Press. 450 numbered and signed  
copies have been printed, of which  
this is copy number:

66 J. Bacon

Publisher: Jonathan Bacon, Box 147,  
Lamoni, Iowa 50140.

